

OUR GOVERNMENT and your role in it

We the People are governed at the Federal, State, and Local/City level. This means three systems, similar but different. Each system has “checks and balances” that keep any one part from getting too powerful. YOU help to control these systems through your vote. Here is how each system works and your role in each one.

The United States Government is divided into three parts, or branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. Each branch has a different duty, but all three branches must work together.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The **PRESIDENT*** is the head of the Executive branch and the country and is elected every 4 years. She or he is responsible for signing and enforcing laws passed by Congress. This branch also includes the vice president and the president’s group of advisors, known as the Cabinet. The powers of the president include:

- Makes treaties (that must be approved by the Senate)
- Appoints judges and ambassadors (who must be approved by the Senate)
- Enforces laws
- Vetoes bills or Supports legislation
- Issues executive orders, rules that don’t need Congress’s approval

*You vote them into office

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Legislative branch makes laws. Congress has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. There are currently 100 **SENATORS*** who serve 6 year terms, and 435 **REPRESENTATIVES***, who serve 2 year terms. Their powers include:

- Creates bills that can be voted into laws
- Overrides the president’s vetoes with a two-thirds majority
- Confirms or rejects the president’s appointments
- Confirms or rejects the president’s treaties
- Declares war
- Impeaches the president

*You vote them into office

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The court system in the United States is known as the judicial branch. The Supreme Court is the highest court in this system. Their powers include:

- Decides if the laws passed by Congress or executive orders signed by the president are constitutional and legal
- Declares acts from the president and Congress “unconstitutional”
- Hears cases whose rulings in lower courts have been challenged

*Judges are placed for life by the President. Your vote matters!

New York State Government is also divided into three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch. Each branch has a different duty, but all three branches must work together.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

New York is led by the **GOVERNOR*** who, along with a Lieutenant Governor, is elected every 4 years. The governor plays a large role setting and controlling the state budget. She or he can also enforces the laws created by the New York Legislature. This office does not have term limits.

A **COMPTROLLER*** is elected separately from the governor, and protects taxpayer’s from fraud and abuse and manages the states money. They are elected every 4 years and may be from a different political party than the governor.

*You vote them into office

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Legislature is made up of two parts: the **SENATE*** and the **ASSEMBLY***. This branch makes the laws that apply to the people of New York State, raises or lowers taxes, and works with the governor to create the state budget.

There are currently 63 member in the Senate and 150 members in the Assembly. The members of both bodies represent districts throughout the State. They are elected every two years, and have no term limits.

*You vote them into office

JUDICIAL BRANCH

New York has a 3 level court system. **MEMBERS OF THE LOWER COURTS*** are elected by their districts for 4-14 year terms.

The next higher court is the Court of Appeals. The members are appointed by the governor and approved by the State Senate for 14-year terms. This court interprets laws to ensure fair trials.

The New York Supreme Court is New York’s highest trial court. There are 62 Supreme courts, one for each county. **JUSTICES*** are elected by the voters in their district for 14-year terms.

*You vote them into office

New York City government is a multi-leveled system of government that works to ensure that everyone is fairly represented and has access to the many services available within the City.

The **MAYOR*** is the Chief Executive Officer of all 5 boroughs and is elected every 4 years. She or he sets the agenda for the city, works on the city budget, and appoints Deputy Mayors and heads of agencies to carry out the policies. These positions include School Chancellor, Police Commissioner, and Commissioner of Health. Criminal, Family, Civil, and Housing Court Justices are also selected by the mayor.

The **PUBLIC ADVOCATE*** is elected every 4 years. She or he represents the residents of New York with complaints against City services. The office also ensures that agencies are responsive to the public, recommends improvements, and advocates for individuals in need of services.

The **COMPTROLLER*** is the City’s Chief Financial Officer. She or he advises on the City budget, and makes recommendations about programs, operations, and fiscal policies and transactions. This position is elected every 4 years.

The City Council is the legislative, or law-making, branch of New York City’s government. There are 51 **COUNCIL MEMBERS*** who represent each district and serve 4 year terms. Members vote on bills, negotiate and approve the City’s budget, monitor city agencies. The Council is an equal partner with the Mayor in the governing of New York City.

The **BOROUGH PRESIDENT*** is elected every 4 years and represents the people of that borough to the mayor and City Council. She or he advises the mayor on issues relating to

their boroughs, advocates for the boroughs’ needs in the annual municipal budget process, appoints community boards, chairs the boroughs’ boards, and serves as semi-official members of various boards and committees.

Community Boards are local representative bodies. There are 59 community boards in the City. The members are nominated by their City Council members and selected and appointed by the Borough Presidents. Community Board members do not receive a salary, and live, work, or are actively involved in their communities.

*You vote them into Office

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