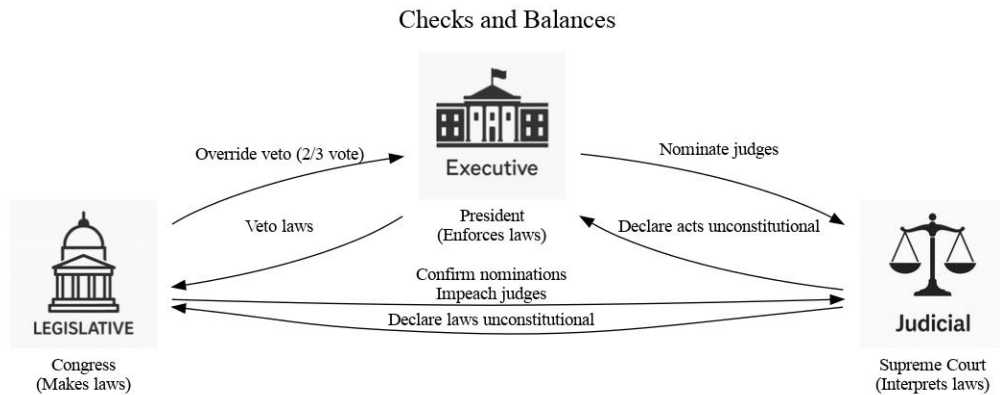


# The Constitution of The United States of America

*Using Simplified Text and Graphics*  
*Concise “Plain-Language” Edition*



# ARTICLE I

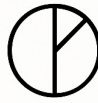
## THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH



CONGRESS



MAKE  
LAWS



HOUSE &  
SENATE



POWER OF  
THE PURSE

### § 1 Congress

- Federal law-making power is held by a bicameral Congress: Senate + House of Representatives.

### § 2 The House of Representatives

- Members elected every 2 years by each state's voters.
- Requirements: 25 yrs old, 7-year U.S. citizen, resident of the state.
- Seats (and direct taxes) divided by population; census every 10 yrs.
- Every state gets at least one Representative.
- State governor calls elections to fill vacancies.
- House elects its Speaker & officers; has sole power to impeach.

### § 3 The Senate

- Two Senators per state, six-year terms; one vote each.
- Staggered classes so 1/3 chosen every 2 years (temporary governor appointments allowed during recesses).
- Requirements: 30 yrs old, 9-year U.S. citizen, resident of state.
- Vice-President presides and votes only to break ties; Senate chooses other officers and a president pro tempore.
- Sole power to try impeachments; conviction requires 2/3 vote; penalty limited to removal and disqualification.

### § 4 Elections & Meetings

- State legislatures set rules for congressional elections, but Congress may override (except Senate-site choice).
- Congress must meet at least once a year.

## **§ 5 Internal Rules**

- Each House judges its members, sets its rules, punishes or expels (2/3 vote) members, keeps a journal, and cannot adjourn > 3 days without the other's consent.

## **§ 6 Pay, Privileges, Incompatibility**

- Members paid by U.S. Treasury; immune from arrest (except serious crimes) during sessions and travel; speech-and-debate immunity.
- Cannot hold other federal office while serving, nor take a newly created or salary-raised federal job for which they voted.

## **§ 7 Making Laws**

- Revenue bills start in the House; Senate may amend.
- Bills become law when signed by the President, or after 10 days if unsigned and Congress is in session. Vetoes may be overridden by 2/3 of both Houses.
- Joint resolutions needing both Houses also require presidential approval or override.

## **§ 8 Powers of Congress**

- Tax & spend for defense/general welfare (uniform duties).
- Borrow money; regulate interstate/foreign/tribal commerce.
- Naturalization & bankruptcy laws; coin money; weights/measures; punish counterfeiting.
- Post offices/roads; copyrights & patents; create lower courts.
- Punish piracy; declare war; issue letters of marque; regulate captures.
- Raise armies (funding max 2 yrs); maintain navy; govern forces.
- Call, organize, arm, and govern militia; states keep officers & training when militia in U.S. service.
- Exclusive rule over D.C. and federal enclaves.
- "Necessary and Proper" clause to carry out all powers.

## **§ 9 Limits on Congress**

- Slave trade not banned until 1808 (import tax \$10/person).
- Habeas corpus may be suspended only for rebellion or invasion.
- No bills of attainder, ex post facto laws, or unequal direct taxes (rule later changed by 16th Amendment).

- No export taxes; no port preferences; Treasury money spent only by law with published accounts; no titles of nobility or foreign gifts without consent.

## **§ 10 Limits on the States**

- States may not make treaties, coin money, pass ex post facto laws, impair contracts, etc.
- Without Congress's consent they may not tax imports/exports (except minimal inspection fees), lay tonnage duties, keep troops or warships in peacetime, make interstate/foreign compacts, or go to war unless invaded or in imminent danger.

## ARTICLE II

### THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH



PRESIDENT



ELECTED



OATH



COMMANDER-  
IN-CHIEF

### § 1 Presidency

- Executive power in President (4-yr term) with Vice-President.
- Each state appoints Electors equalling its Senators+Representatives; federal office-holders can't be Electors.
- Electors vote (procedure later revised by 12th Amendment).
- Congress sets uniform election dates.
- Requirements: natural-born citizen, 35 yrs old, 14 yrs U.S. resident.
- VP succeeds President upon removal, death, resignation, or inability; Congress may set further succession.
- President's salary fixed; no other emoluments; must take oath to "pre-serve, protect, and defend" the Constitution.

### § 2 Powers

- Commander-in-Chief of armed forces and state militias in U.S. service.
- May require written cabinet opinions; grant reprieves/pardons (except impeachment).
- Makes treaties (2/3 Senate consent); appoints ambassadors, judges, and other officers with Senate consent; may fill vacancies during Senate recess.

### § 3 Duties

- Gives State-of-the-Union; may recommend measures.
- May convene or adjourn Congress in special cases.
- Receives ambassadors; ensures laws are faithfully executed; commissions all officers.

### § 4 Impeachment

- President, VP, and civil officers removable on impeachment and conviction for treason, bribery, or other high crimes/misdemeanors.

## ARTICLE III

### THE JUDICIAL BRANCH



SUPREME  
COURT



JUDICIAL  
POWER



INTERPRET  
LAWS



DEFINED BY  
CONSTITUTION,  
PUNISHED BY  
CONGRESS

### § 1 Courts & Judges

- Judicial power in one Supreme Court and lower courts created by Congress. Judges serve during good behaviour; salary cannot be cut.

### § 2 Jurisdiction & Trials

- Covers cases under Constitution, U.S. laws, treaties; ambassadors; admiralty; U.S. as a party; state disputes; diversity suits; etc.
- Supreme Court: original jurisdiction for ambassador/state cases; appellate otherwise (as Congress regulates).
- Federal crimes tried by jury in the state of the crime; if elsewhere, place set by Congress.

### § 3 Treason

- Defined as waging war on U.S. or aiding enemies.
- Conviction needs confession in court or two witnesses to the same overt act.
- Congress sets punishment; no corruption of blood or forfeiture beyond the traitor's life.



## § 1 Full Faith & Credit

- States must honor other states' public acts, records, and judgments; Congress may set rules.

## § 2 Privileges, Extradition

- Citizens share basic privileges across states.
- Fugitives returned on governor's demand.
- Fugitive-slave return clause (obsolete after 13th Amendment).

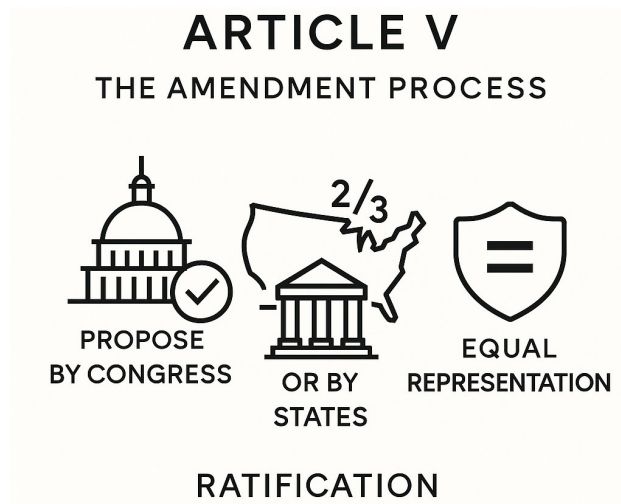
## § 3 New States & Territories

- Congress admits new states; cannot form one inside another or merge states without all affected legislatures' and Congress's consent.
- Congress governs territories and federal property.

## § 4 Republican Guarantee

- U.S. guarantees each state a republican government and protection against invasion and (on request) domestic violence.

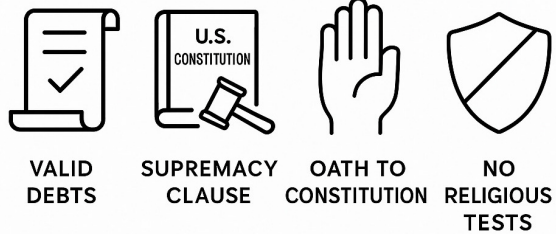




- Amendments proposed by 2/3 of Congress or by a convention called on application of 2/3 of state legislatures.
- Ratified by 3/4 of state legislatures or state conventions, as Congress chooses.
- Two limits: (i) no amendment on slave-trade/Capitation clauses before 1808; (ii) no state may lose equal Senate suffrage without consent.

# ARTICLE VI

## FEDERAL SUPREMACY AND OATHS



- U.S. assumes Confederation debts.
- Constitution, federal laws, and treaties are supreme law; judges in every state bound by them.
- Federal & state officers must swear to support the Constitution.
- No religious test for public office.

# ARTICLE VII

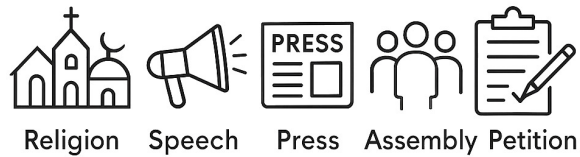
## RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION



- Constitution effective after 9 of the 13 states ratify it.

## AMENDMENTS (I – XXVII)

### The First Amendment: Five Freedoms



I Free religion, speech, press, assembly, petition.

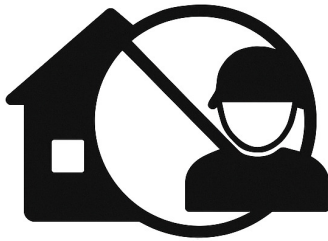
### THE SECOND AMENDMENT

RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS



II Right to keep and bear arms for a well-regulated militia.

## THE THIRD AMENDMENT



No Quartering  
without Consent

**III** No quartering of soldiers without consent.

## The Fourth Amendment: Protection Against Unreasonable Searches



**IV** No unreasonable searches/seizures; warrant rules.

## THE FIFTH AMENDMENT: RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED



Grand Jury



Self-  
Incrimination



Due Process



Double Jeopardy



Takings Clause

**V** Grand jury, no double jeopardy, no self-incrimination, due process, just compensation for takings.

## THE SIXTH AMENDMENT

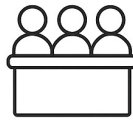
### RIGHTS IN CRIMINAL TRIALS



SPEEDY  
TRIAL



PUBLIC  
TRIAL



IMPARTIAL  
JURY



NOTICE OF  
ACCUSATION



CONFRONT  
WITNESSES



COUNSEL

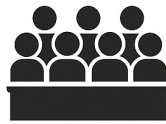
**VI** Speedy, public, local criminal trial; impartial jury; notice of charges; confront & compel witnesses; counsel.

## THE SEVENTH AMENDMENT

Jury Trial in Civil Cases



Civil Trial



Jury Trial



Final Verdicts

**VII** Jury trial preserved in civil suits > \$20; facts respected.

## The Eighth Amendment

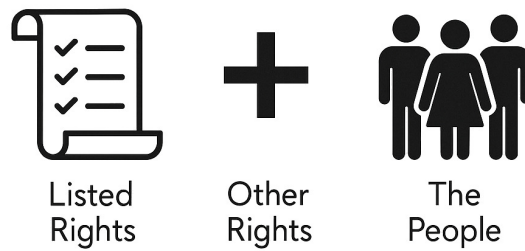
### Limits on Punishment



**VIII** No excessive bail or fines; no cruel and unusual punishment.

## THE NINTH AMENDMENT

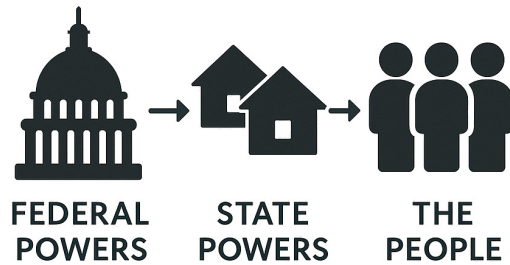
Protection of Unenumerated Rights



**IX** Rights not listed are retained by the people.

## THE TENTH AMENDMENT

Powers Reserved to the States  
and the People



**X** Powers not given to U.S. nor barred to states are reserved to states or people.

## THE ELEVENTH AMENDMENT

SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY OF STATES

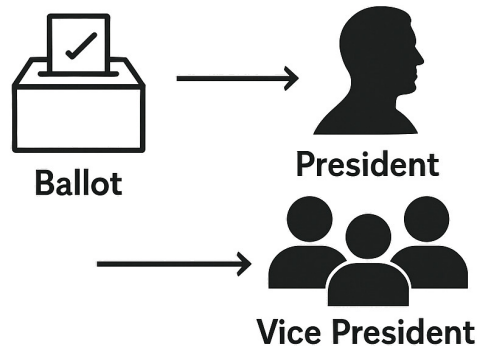


**XI** Federal courts barred from suits against a state by outsiders.



## THE TWELFTH AMENDMENT

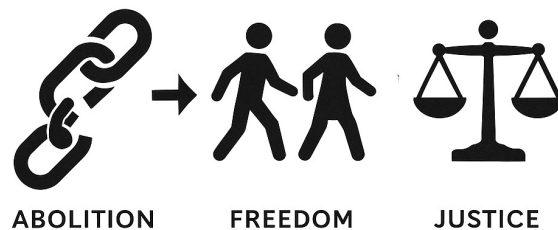
Electoral Process for President and Vice President



**XII** Separate electoral ballots for President & Vice-President.

## THE THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT

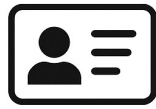
ABOLITION OF SLAVERY



**XIII** Slavery abolished (except as criminal punishment).

# THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

CITIZENSHIP, DUE PROCESS, AND  
EQUAL PROTECTION



CITIZENSHIP



DUE  
PROCESS

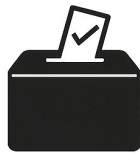


EQUAL  
PROTECTION

**XIV** Citizenship, due process, equal protection; representation & rebellion clauses; public debt validity; enforcement power.

# THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT

Voting Rights for All Citizens



Voting  
Rights



All  
Citizens

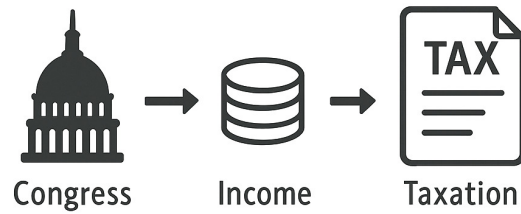


No  
Discrimination

**XV** Voting rights cannot be denied by race, color, or former servitude.

## THE SIXTEENTH AMENDMENT

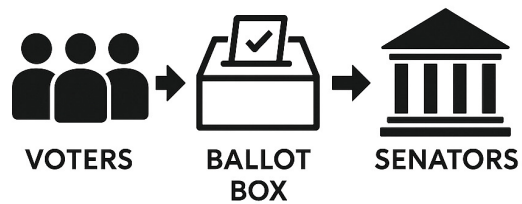
FEDERAL POWER TO COLLECT INCOME TAXES



**XVI** Congress may levy income tax without apportionment.

## THE SEVENTEENTH AMENDMENT

DIRECT ELECTION OF SENATORS



**XVII** Senators elected directly by the people; vacancy procedures.

# THE EIGHTEENTH AMENDMENT

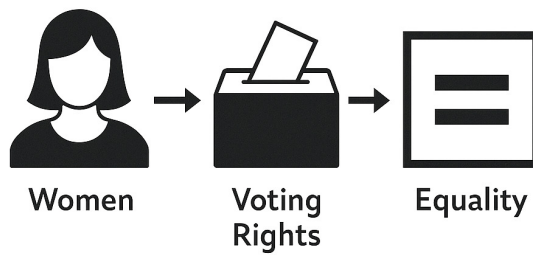
Prohibition of Alcohol



**XVIII** Prohibition of alcohol (repealed by XXI).

# THE NINETEENTH AMENDMENT

Women's Right to Vote



**XIX** Voting rights cannot be denied by sex.

## THE TWENTIETH AMENDMENT

INAUGURATION AND  
CONGRESSIONAL TERMS



PRESIDENT



CONGRESS



TERM

**XX** Terms start Jan 20 (President) / Jan 3 (Congress); succession details.

## THE TWENTY-FIRST AMENDMENT: REPEAL OF PROHIBITION



ALCOHOL



REPEAL



STATE  
CONTROL

**XXI** Repeals Prohibition; states may control liquor importation.

## THE TWENTY-SECOND AMENDMENT

### PRESIDENTIAL TERM LIMITS



PRESIDENT



TIME



NO 3 TERM

**XXII** Two-term limit for President; 10-year maximum service.

## THE TWENTY-THIRD AMENDMENT

### PRESIDENTIAL VOTING IN D.C.



WASHINGTON,  
D.C.



ELECTORS



PRESIDENTIAL  
VOTE

**XXIII** D.C. receives presidential electors (no more than least-populous state).

## THE TWENTY-FOURTH AMENDMENT

ABOLITION OF THE POLL TAX



BALLOT



TAX



PROHIBITION

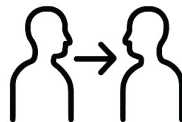
**XXIV** Poll tax barred in federal elections.

## The Twenty-Fifth Amendment

Presidential Succession and Disability



PRESIDENTIAL



SUCCESSION



DISABILITY

**XXV** Presidential succession & disability procedures.

## THE TWENTY-SIXTH AMENDMENT

RIGHT TO VOTE  
AT AGE 18



YOUTH



AGE 18



VOTING

**XXVI** Voting age set to 18 nationwide.

## THE TWENTY-SEVENTH AMENDMENT

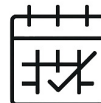
CONGRESSIONAL  
PAY CHANGES



CONGRESS



PAY



NEXT  
ELECTION

**XXVII** Congressional pay changes take effect only after next House election.