

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

What is the government of Tennessee?

The state government in Tennessee, and every state, is defined by its ***constitution***. The constitution is a written document that lists the rights of the people and describes our state government works. It also includes rules on how to change the constitution.

The Tennessee state government a ***representative democracy***. A representative takes the place of citizens -- you and me -- in our state government, and makes decisions on our behalf. Citizens elect representatives, or run for election themselves to serve as representatives.

The Tennessee state government is made up of three branches.

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

Legislative Branch

The **legislative** branch makes laws. To "legislate" means to "make laws".

In Tennessee, the legislature (law-making body) is called the General Assembly. It proposes bills, passes laws, and decides on the budget for the government. The General Assembly is made of two parts called the Senate and House of Representatives.

As citizens, we elect a senator and a representative from their areas to decide on our behalf about state laws and taxes.

Who represents you in the Tennessee state government?

Go to <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/Apps/fmlv3/lookup.aspx> to find out.

What bills are under consideration now?

Go to <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/subjectindex/default.aspx> and see what bills may become laws.

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

Executive Branch

The **executive** branch makes sure the law is carried out. To "execute" means to "do", "make", or "perform".

The head of the executive branch is the governor. He or she is in charge of enforcing laws passed by the legislative branch and interpreted by the judicial branch. The governor is elected by the citizens of the Tennessee.

The governor has other powers:

- Recommend laws
- Veto a bill (preventing it from becoming a law)
- Lead the state militia (when authorized by the General Assembly)
- Appoint judges, commissioners, and other officials
- Grant clemency and pardons
- Represent people of Tennessee in national matters
- Make rules and regulations

Who is the governor of Tennessee?

Find out at <https://www.tn.gov/governor/>.

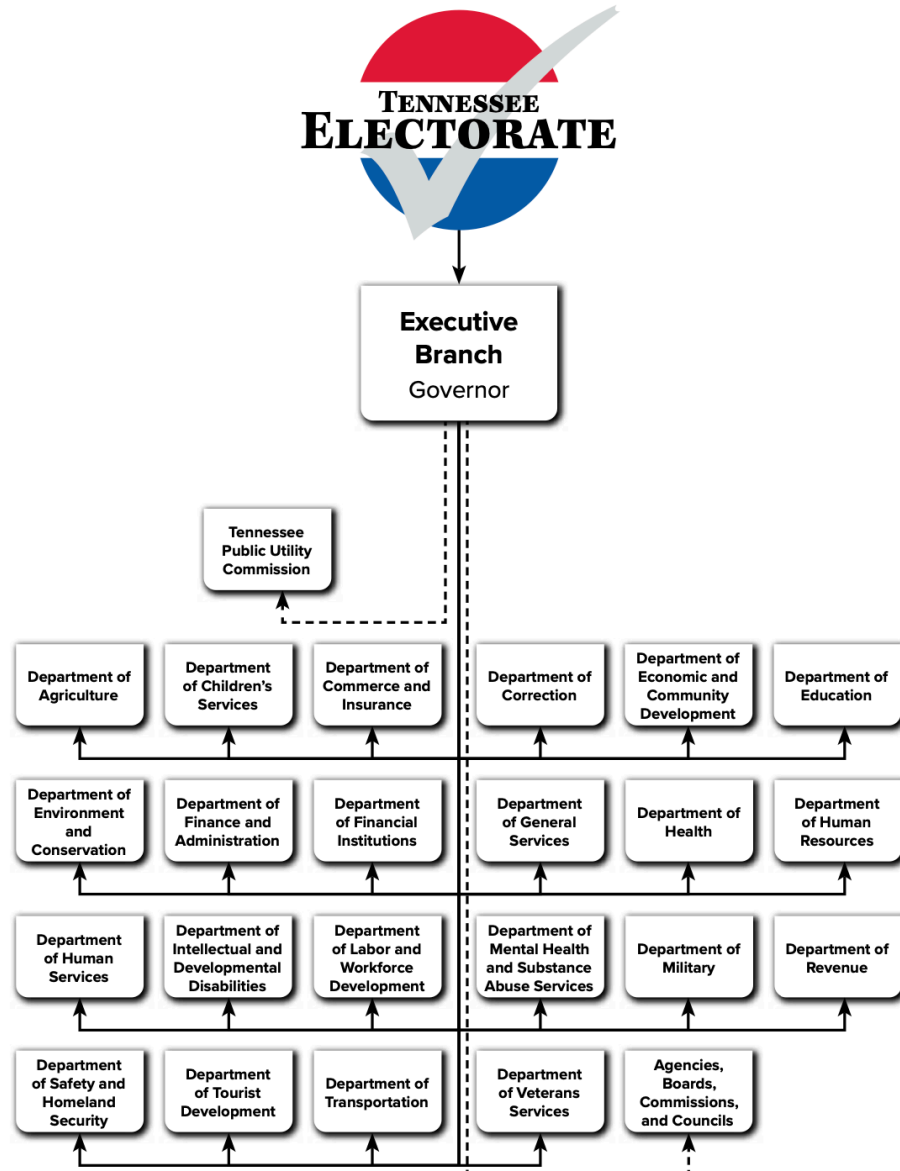
How does the executive branch affect you and your family?

The executive branch includes many departments that help run the government. Inspect the chart below to see what areas affect your family.

How do you and your family affect the executive branch?

Hint: look who is at the top of the chart!

Democracy 2: Find out about state government



Democracy 2: Find out about state government

Judicial Branch

The ***judicial*** branch decides what the law means if there are questions. This comes from the same word as "judge" or "decide".

The judiciary in Tennessee is made of a Supreme Court and many kinds of mid-level and lower courts. They rule on the constitutionality of a law or executive regulation. They also decide criminal cases and disputes between people.

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

Why three branches?

The government is divided in three branches to make sure that power is shared, so no part has too much power. This idea is called the ***separation of powers***.

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

Group Activity: Discuss a recent issue in the Tennessee state government

Suggested for Daisies, Brownies, Juniors, Cadettes

For those attending a live discussion, we will discuss a current issue in Tennessee state government. See the Democracy Supplement.

We need one volunteer to take notes and write up a summary of the discussion for our newsletter.

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

Individual Activities

If you can't make the group meeting, no worries! Just pick one activity from the list below. Ask your troop volunteer for assistance getting started.

Our activities will appear in a newsletter. Please write complete sentences and pay attention to grammar and spelling. Original artwork is also welcome!

Individual Activity: Write to your governor.

Suggested for Daisies, Brownies, Juniors, Cadettes

A governor is kind of like the president of your state. Like the president, a governor is chosen by people who vote in elections. Have an adult help you find out who your governor is and what kinds of things they do. Then have them help you write a letter to your governor. You can tell the governor something you'd like to change or ask about the things they do to help kids in your state.

Individual Activity: Write to your state senator or representative

Suggested for Juniors, Cadettes

Find a bill in the Tennessee General Assembly that interests you. Figure out who your senator and representative are and write them a letter asking why you support or do not support the bill.

Individual Activity: Find out about the state constitution

Suggested for Juniors, Cadettes

The Tennessee state constitution is quite old and has gone through many changes. Create timeline with 5-10 important events in the history of the state constitution.

The constitution is an important document: in fact, it had a parade in its honor to move to its new home (<https://www.sos.tn.gov/news/tennessee's-state-constitutions-transferred-new-home>). So please also answer this question: Why is a constitution so important?

Individual Activity: Find out about the state flag

Suggested for Daisies, Brownies, Juniors, Cadettes

Research the history of the Tennessee state flag and write the who, what, when, where, and why to include in our troop newsletter. Who designed it? Why are there three stars? What do the stars represent? Why are they important?

Democracy 2: Find out about state government

References

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