

Module 10: State and Local Government

Topic 1 Content: State Government

Introduction





Demi Tracy: Welcome to another edition of WUSG News. I'm Demi Tracy, here with my cohost, Glover Mint. On today's episode, Glover will be discussing the structure of Virginia's state government.

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Virginia State Government



- Outlined in a Constitution
- Limited government
- Separation of powers
- Checks and balances

Glover Mint: That's right, Demi. Like the other forty-nine states, Virginia's government is outlined in a state constitution. In many ways, the Virginia Constitution mirrors the U.S. Constitution; principles like limited government, the separation of powers, and checks and balances can be found in both documents. Let's take a look at the three branches of Virginia state government.

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Governor

Governor [Next](#)

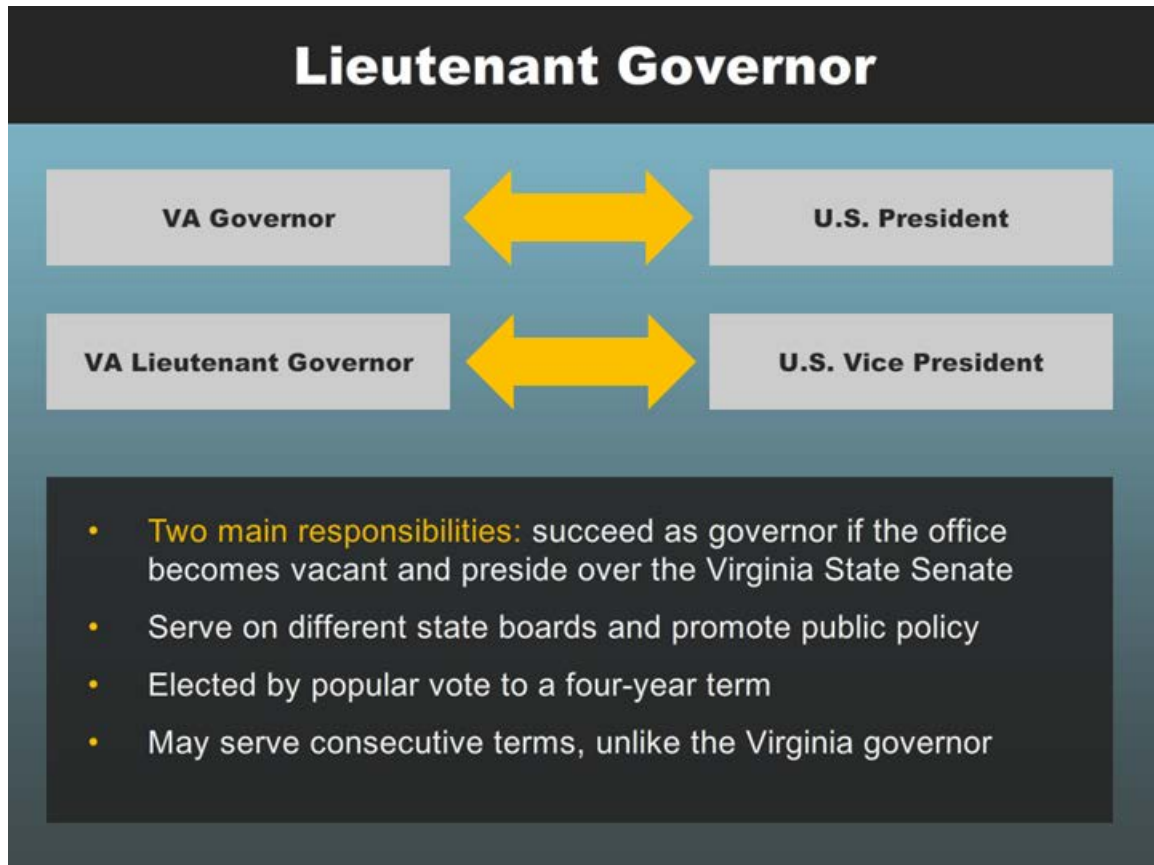
 Gerald L. Baliles VA Governor from 1/1986 - 1/1990	 Douglas Wilder VA Governor from 1/1990 - 1/1994	 George Allen VA Governor from 1/1994 - 1/1998	 Jim Gilmore VA Governor from 1/1998 - 1/2002
 Mark Warner VA Governor from 1/2002 - 1/2006	 Tim Kaine VA Governor from 1/2006 - 1/2010	 Bob McDonnell VA Governor from 1/2010 - 1/2014	 Terry McAuliffe Began term as VA Governor in 1/2014

Glover Mint: The chief executive officer of a state government is known as a governor. As the head of the executive branch, this position has responsibilities similar to those of the U.S. president, only at a regional level. For example, the governor of Virginia is tasked with executing the laws passed by Virginia's legislative body. He or she serves as the administrator of the state bureaucracy, and has the power to appoint cabinet secretaries, agency heads, and other important positions in the state government. The governor also has the power of executive clemency, the power to veto legislation, the ability to propose his or her own legislation, and the responsibility of preparing the biennial budget for the state. Virginia governors are elected to four-year terms, and may serve multiple terms as governor, but the law prohibits these terms from being consecutive.

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Lieutenant Governor

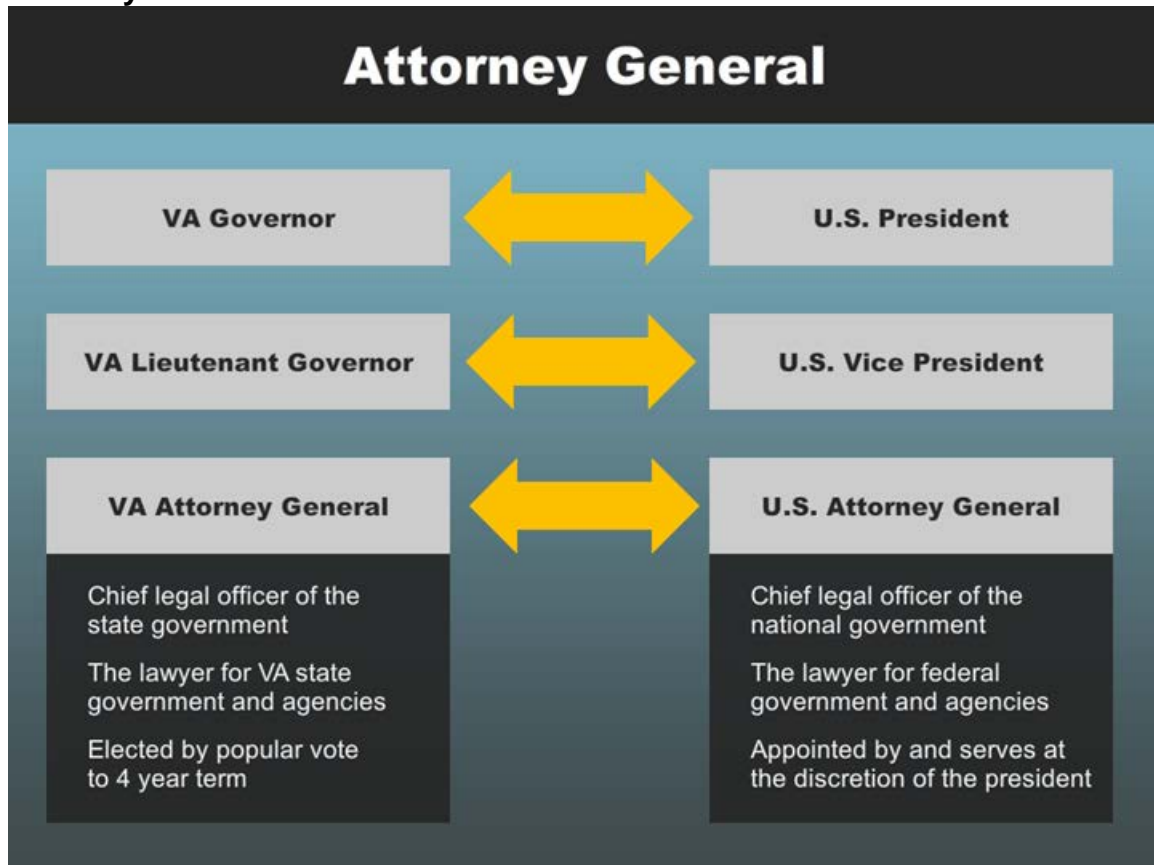


Glover Mint: If you compare the executive branch of Virginia state government to the executive branch of the national government, you can see how the positions of governor and president are similar in certain ways. The same can be said about the positions of lieutenant governor and vice president. The two main responsibilities of the lieutenant governor are to succeed as governor if the office becomes vacant, and to preside over the Virginia State Senate. Lieutenant governors also serve on different state boards and promote public policy to the citizens of Virginia. The lieutenant governor is elected by popular vote and serves a four-year term, but unlike the governor, there are no restrictions on serving consecutive terms or the number of terms that may be served.

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Attorney General



Glover Mint: The attorney general of Virginia is the chief legal officer in the state government. Essentially, the state attorney general serves as the lawyer for Virginia, representing the state government and its agencies in both criminal and civil cases. The state attorney general also offers non-binding legal advice, known as an opinion, to the General Assembly and other state and local government officials. The attorney general for the national government is appointed to his or her position, but in Virginia government, the attorney general is elected by popular vote. A state attorney general in Virginia serves a four-year term and has no limits on the number of terms he or she may serve.

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General Assembly

General Assembly

- Bicameral body composed of the House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia
- Oldest continuously operating legislative body in the Americas, with roots traced to the House of Burgesses
- Develops Virginia state law in a process similar to Congress



Glover Mint: The legislative branch of Virginia state government is a bicameral body known as the General Assembly. The two houses of this law-making body are known as the House of Delegates and the Senate of Virginia. This institution is actually the oldest continuously operating legislative body in the Americas, with a history that can be traced back to the House of Burgesses in Jamestown.

The General Assembly is responsible for developing Virginia state law. Bills are passed through a process that is similar to the way they are passed in the national government. In addition to creating public policy, the General Assembly confirms appointments by the governor, selects judges to serve on the state's courts, passes the state budget, and funds the state budget by levying taxes.

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The House of Delegates and the Virginia State Senate

General Assembly

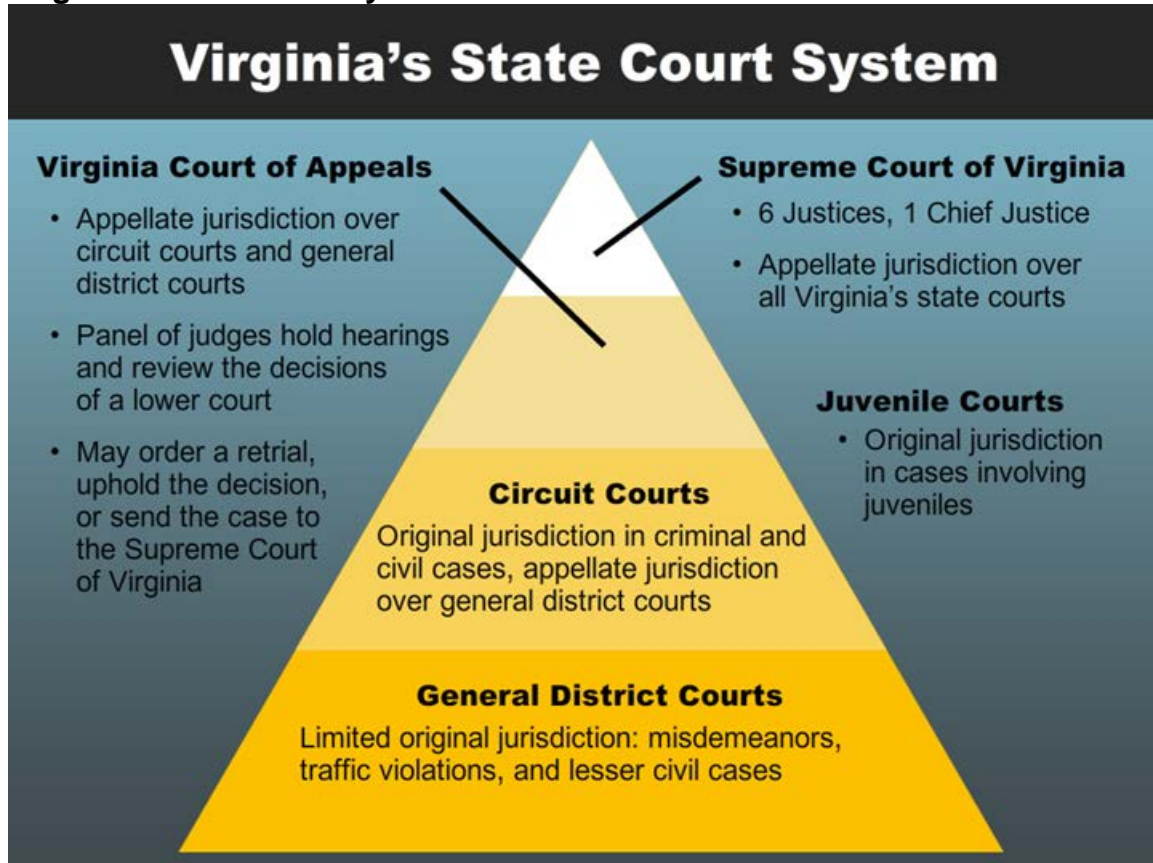
Senate of Virginia	House of Delegates
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upper house• 40 seats• Seats distributed among 40 districts based on the population size• Senators elected to 4 year terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Representatives serve 2 year terms• Lower house• 100 seats• Seats distributed among 100 districts based on the population size

Glover Mint: The Senate of Virginia is the upper house of the General Assembly. There are 40 seats in the Senate, which are distributed among 40 districts based on population size. Virginia state senators are elected to four-year terms, as opposed to members of the House of Delegates, who serve two-year terms. The House of Delegates is the lower house of the General Assembly, and has 100 members. Each of these members represents one single-member district. These 100 districts are decided based on population as well.

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Virginia's State Court System



Glover Mint: The judicial branch of Virginia is divided into four tiers. The general district courts are on the bottom tier, and have limited original jurisdiction. Misdemeanors, traffic violations, and lesser civil cases are all heard in the general district courts

Above the general district courts are the circuit courts. These are the only trial courts in the state. The circuit courts have original jurisdiction in both criminal and civil cases. They also have appellate jurisdiction over the general district courts.

The next tier is the Virginia Court of Appeals. Before an appeal makes it to the Supreme Court of Virginia, it will typically be heard in this court. The Virginia Court of Appeals does not try cases; instead, it selects at least three judges to hold a hearing and review the decision of a lower court. Based on this hearing, the panel of judges can order a retrial, uphold the lower court's decision, or send the case to the Supreme Court of Virginia.

The Supreme Court of Virginia is at the top, and is composed of six Justices and one Chief Justice. This court has appellate jurisdiction over the lower state courts.

Additionally, there are special juvenile and domestic relations courts that have original jurisdiction in any case that involves juveniles.

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Selecting Judges

Virginia's State Court System

Virginia state judges are elected by the General Assembly for a certain period of time.

Virginia Supreme Court	Virginia Court of Appeals	General District Courts
12 years	8 years	6 years

 Next

Glover Mint: Virginia state judges are elected by the General Assembly for a certain period of time. This period of time varies, depending on which court the judge is elected to. Justices of the Supreme Court of Virginia serve twelve-year terms. The Virginia Court of Appeals has eleven judges, each of whom serves for eight years. Judges who preside over the general district courts serve for six years.

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Ending of Episode



Demi Tracy: Thank you, Glover. As you can see, Virginia's state government mirrors the national government in many ways, but there are some important differences between the two. Thanks for watching. We'll see you next time.