

# THE CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE

## TEXT SUMMARY

California has a bicameral legislature with two houses. The Senate, the upper house, has 40 members, while the lower Assembly has 80. In California, legislators must be 18, qualified to vote, have been a citizen of the United States and have lived in California for at least three years, and have been a resident of their district for at least one year. In practice, the requirements to win election are more extensive. Legislators are elected in November of even years. Both houses have term limits.

The California legislature can pass any law that does not conflict with Federal law or the state constitution. Among the most important of the California legislature's powers is the **police power**, which is the power to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens.

The Assembly elects, from among its members, a Speaker to be its leader. The Senate elects a president pro tempore as its day-to-day leader. These leaders appoint the members of the legislative committees, who do most of the work on drafting, revising, and arguing over proposed laws. This process is similar to that used by the U.S. Congress.

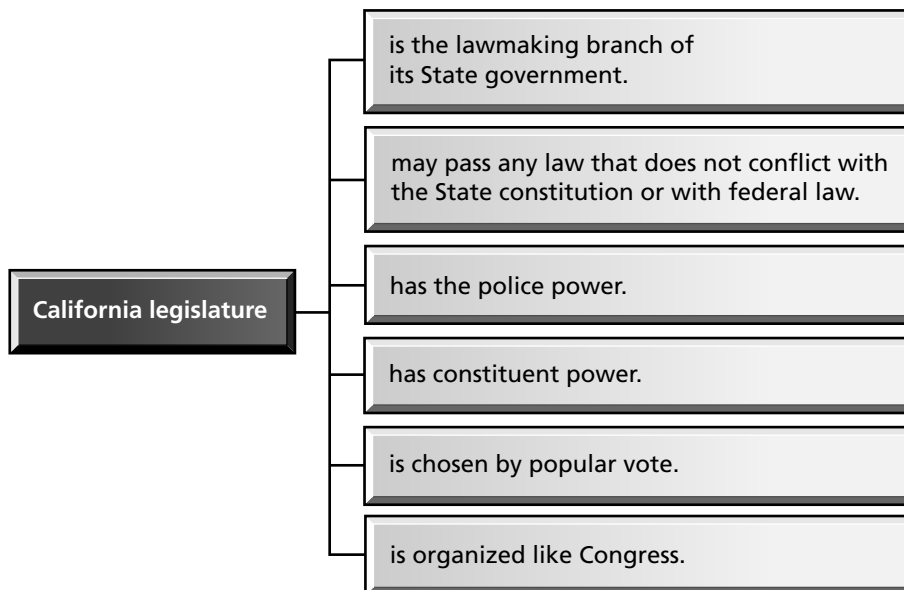
California has two other methods for creating laws: the ballot initiative and the **referendum**.

Under the initiative process, voters can propose legislation by signing a petition to have it placed on the ballot at the next election. Under a referendum, proposed laws are referred by the legislature to the voters for their ultimate approval.

## THE BIG IDEA

**The California legislature, the law-making body of California, is popularly elected and organized like Congress.**

## GRAPHIC SUMMARY: State Legislatures



Each State constitution defines the qualifications for its State legislature.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

- How are State legislators chosen?
- Diagram Skills** How are State legislatures limited in the kind of laws they can pass?