

### TEXT SUMMARY

Many **informal amendments** to the Constitution have been made since 1787. Unlike formal amendments, these have not changed the Constitution's actual words. These changes have come from five sources.

1. Congress has made changes to the Constitution through two kinds of basic legislation. First, it has passed laws that fill in details about the specific ways the government operates. Second, it has passed thousands of laws that explain certain parts of the Constitution.

2. The way Presidents have used their powers has produced some informal amendments. For example, a President may choose to make an **executive agreement**, or pact, with the head of another country instead of a **treaty**, or a formal agreement between two sovereign countries that requires congressional approval.

3. The courts, especially the U.S. Supreme Court, have informally changed the Constitution by explaining parts of it when ruling on cases. They also decide if government actions are constitutional.

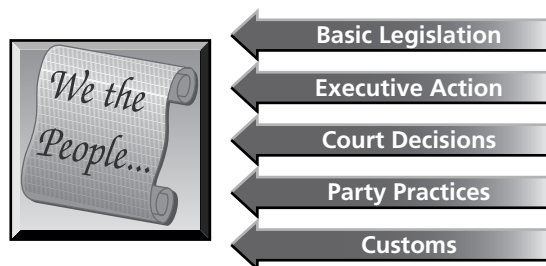
4. Political parties have informally shaped what the government does. For example, the parties have decreased the importance of the **electoral college**, the group that formally selects the nation's President.

5. Customs are the usual ways people do things. Many customs have developed in American government that are not mentioned in the Constitution. For example, the President's **Cabinet**, or advisory body, is customarily made up of the heads of executive departments and other officers. **Senatorial courtesy** is a custom in which the Senate will not approve a presidential appointment to serve in a State if the appointment is opposed by a senator from the President's party.

#### THE BIG IDEA

Many changes to the Constitution have been made by informal amendment.

### GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Sources of Informal Amendment to the Constitution



The Constitution has been changed many times by informal amendments.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is an informal amendment to the Constitution?
2. **Diagram Skills** Name two governmental bodies that may make informal amendments.