

State Constitutions II

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Second in a Series

Since the 13 colonies became the original 13 states of the United States of America, more than 200 state constitutional conventions have been held and 135 state constitutions have been adopted.

Twelve of the 50 constitutions now in force have been adopted in the 20th century, four of them as new states entered the union. A new constitution has been written for Michigan. If approved by the voters, it will replace a document adopted in 1909.

Periodic submission of the question of a constitutional convention is required in ¹⁰~~eight~~ states: Every seven years in New Hampshire; every 10 years in ^{Hawaii,}~~Iowa~~ and Alaska; every 16 years in Michigan, and every 20 years in Maryland, Missouri, New York, Ohio and Oklahoma.

Missouri voters will be given the question at the 1962 general election, Maryland's at the 1970 general election.

While it was rearranged in 1919, the Massachusetts constitution dates back to 1780. New Hampshire's has been in force since 1784, but was extensively amended, rearranged and clarified in 1793. Vermont's is dated 1793. Youngest of the constitutions are those of Hawaii and Alaska, in effect since 1959.

State constitutions vary in length from Vermont's 5,700-word document to the giant-size Louisiana constitution--217,000 words.

New Hampshire's constitution originally contained only 600 words. But it has grown, through addition of amendments, to more than 8,000. Virginia's first constitution had only 1,500 words. Today the document has 23,101. In 1776, Pennsylvania started out with a constitution unusually long for that period, 4,000 words. Today the Keystone state's constitution has over 15,000 words.

Louisiana's constitution, dated 1921, is the most amended--407 times. California's is second with more than 335. The constitution of New Mexico, adopted in 1911, has been amended 51 times, bringing the total wordage to 22,400. Adopted a few months later, Arizona's constitution, with 42 amendments, now has 15,000 words.

(more)

First add

Tennessee's constitution went unamended from the date of adoption in 1870 until 1953 when eight changes were made.

More than 3,600 amendments help to make up the 50 state constitutions now in effect. The total number proposed is unknown, but two political science professors at ^{Arizona} State University have determined that a total of 1,584 were proposed in the then 48 states between 1946 and 1956. The Professors, Dr. Bruce B. Mason and Dr. Heinz R. Hink, determined that of these 1,584 proposals, 1,172 amendments were adopted.

Odds against a proposal being approved appear to be greatest in Vermont where only 44 amendments have survived 193 suggestions. The rejection rate is also high in Oregon--110 approved out of 249 suggested, and Mississippi where 35 amendments have been adopted out of 104 proposed. The adoption rate is high in Maryland, 107 adopted out of 137 proposed and New York, 133 out of 174. Washington's constitution, dated 1889, has been amended 35 times. Data on the number of ~~proposed~~ amendments ~~was~~ proposed was not available.

Ratification of proposed constitutional amendments is by consent of the people, at special or general elections, in every state except Delaware. There amendments approved by the elected lawmakers do not require popular ratification.

Fourteen states have held only one constitutional convention. New Hampshire, where the convention method is the only means of initiating amendments, has held 14 conventions since 1778. Seven constitutions now in force date from before 1850, and 31 from between 1850 and 1899.

(including Washington's)
Many state constitutions/provide that the legislature may initiate a convention for considering a new constitution by referring the question to the people in the form of a referendum. ^{Two thirds of Washington's legislature must} agree.

Should a new constitutional convention be called in either Idaho or Wyoming, the number of delegates would total not less than double the most numerous branch of the state legislature.

In California, the delegation would not exceed the membership of the entire legislature. Missouri's convention would consist of 15 delegates at large and two from each of the state's 34 state senate districts. In Nebraska, the number, to be set by the legislature, would not exceed 100.