

Changing the Charter

Trace how Article V joins national and state power.

12.G1f "The Constitution includes a clearly defined and intentionally rigorous process for amendment. This process requires state and federal participation, and allows the Constitution to evolve and change."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Mark proposal steps with 1 and ratification steps with 2. Underline federal roles and circle state roles.

A Deliberate Path to Change

- ① Article V makes constitutional amendment harder than ordinary legislation. Congress may propose an amendment with two-thirds approval in each house. Alternatively, applications from two-thirds of state legislatures require Congress to call a convention for proposing amendments. With 50 states, that application threshold is 34. All amendments adopted so far were proposed by Congress. A proposal alone does not change the Constitution, and the president does not sign or veto amendments.
- ② Congress chooses ratification by state legislatures or by state conventions. Either route requires approval from three-fourths of the states: 38 of 50. States therefore decide whether a proposal becomes part of the Constitution. The Twenty-First Amendment used state conventions; the others used legislatures. An adopted amendment has constitutional force, but a later amendment can change or repeal it. This demanding process combines national and state participation without a national popular referendum.
- ③ The Twenty-Sixth Amendment illustrates how broad agreement can produce rapid change. Debate focused partly on young people old enough for military service but unable to vote in many elections. Congress proposed the amendment in March 1971, and the required states ratified it by July 1. It prohibited denying or abridging voting rights on account of age for citizens eighteen or older. Speed did not bypass the thresholds. Supporters assembled the necessary agreement. The process allows change while preventing a narrow temporary majority from rewriting the Constitution on its own.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What are the two ways an amendment can be proposed under Article V?

2 After an amendment is proposed, what choice does Congress make, and what state approval threshold is required?

3 How does the amendment process require both federal and state participation?

4 Why did the rapid ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment not make the process less rigorous?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose a possible constitutional change. In four sentences, trace one proposal route and one ratification route, include their thresholds, and explain why broad agreement matters.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Mark proposal steps with 1 and ratification steps with 2. Underline federal roles and circle state roles. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What are the two ways an amendment can be proposed under Article V?	Two-thirds of both houses of Congress may propose it, or Congress must call a proposing convention after applications from two-thirds of state legislatures.
2	After an amendment is proposed, what choice does Congress make, and what state approval threshold is required?	Congress chooses ratification by state legislatures or state conventions. Three-fourths of the states, currently 38, must approve.
3	How does the amendment process require both federal and state participation?	Federal institutions propose amendments or organize the process and choose the ratification method. States provide the required three-fourths approval for ratification.
4	Why did the rapid ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment not make the process less rigorous?	Its swift approval resulted from unusually broad national agreement, and it still met every required constitutional step and threshold.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Suppose an amendment would require periodic public reports on federal emergency powers. Two-thirds of each house of Congress could propose its text. If Congress chose state legislatures as the ratification method, 38 of the 50 would need to approve. These thresholds would require support beyond a narrow majority before changing the Constitution.

Accept equivalent descriptions of the two proposal routes and the two ratification methods, as long as students identify the two-thirds and three-fourths thresholds correctly. For the open response, accept any plausible proposed amendment that accurately traces federal proposal, state ratification, and the purpose of broad agreement.