

# HOW IT WORKS

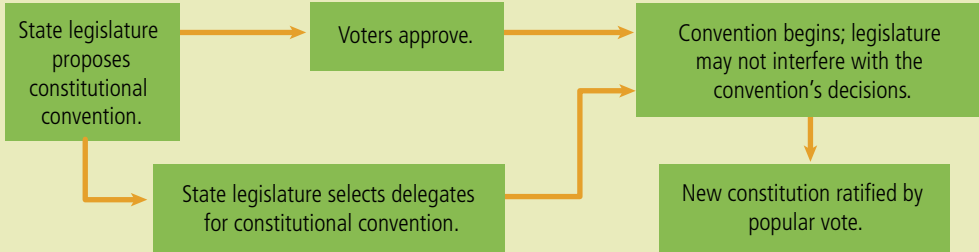
## Alabama's State Constitution: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Since 1819, Alabama has adopted six different constitutions. The most recent was ratified in 1901 and consists of more than 360,000 words (that's about 45 times longer than the U.S. Constitution). The bulk of this comes from the 835 (and counting) amendments that make it the world's longest operating constitution. It was the product of a constitutional delegation comprising 155 white males who, like convention president John Knox, were mostly large planters. They wished to hold back the industrialization that had left Alabama in great debt. Knox, however, described the constitution's primary purpose as "secur[ing] white supremacy." African American voters were stripped of voting rights, and interracial marriage was forbidden (as recently as 2012 the state's legislature was still working to strip racist language from the constitution). Civil rights advocate Booker T. Washington, among others, condemned the document.

Many of its original provisions are now defunct or have been retracted, but that doesn't mean there are not still big problems with the constitution. Some provisions allow the continuing disfranchisement of many citizens, delay of economic development, and denial of governing powers to localities. Critics have accused the constitution of encouraging unproductive government action; the state legislature spends more than half of its time debating issues that have only local relevance, and two thirds of the constitutional amendments address issues specific to one town or county.

There have been numerous efforts to change Alabama's constitution—six different governors have tried to change the existing 1901 document. In each case, they were met with resistance from the legislature, the state supreme court, or powerful planters and industrialists. The latest attempt at reform involves a constitutional revision commission created in 2011 by the legislature. The job of this 16-member commission is to comb through the constitution and recommend changes. These are recommendations, though, not mandates. Recommendations by the commission can be rejected by the legislature and must be approved by voters before taking effect. So while Alabama's constitution is likely not set in stone forever, the prospects of a start-from-scratch do-over still seem slim.

### Constitutional Convention



### Article-by-Article Amendments

