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Unlocking the Constitution: How Amendments Are Made



The United States Constitution is the supreme law of the land, but it is not set in stone. Throughout its history, the Constitution has been amended to reflect the changing needs and values of the nation. In this passage, we will explore how the Constitution can be amended and who has the authority to make these changes.

The Constitution: A Living Document

The Constitution of the United States, adopted in 1787, is one of the world's oldest written national constitutions. However, its framers were aware that society would evolve, and they provided a mechanism for the Constitution to adapt to the times.

Article V: The Amendment Process

The process of amending the Constitution is outlined in Article V. This article explains two methods for proposing amendments and two methods for ratifying them. Here's how it works:

- **Proposing Amendments**

Amendments can be proposed in two ways:

- **By Congress:** The most common method is for Congress to propose amendments. This requires a two-thirds majority vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Once approved, the proposed amendment is sent to the states for ratification.
- **By a Constitutional Convention:** An alternative method is for a constitutional convention to be called by Congress at the request of two-thirds of the state legislatures. This method has never been used to propose an amendment to the Constitution.

- **Ratifying Amendments**

Once an amendment is proposed, it must be ratified by the states. This can be done in two ways:

- **By State Legislatures:** State legislatures can ratify an amendment by a three-fourths majority vote. This is the most common method of ratification.

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- **By State Conventions:** Alternatively, states can call special conventions to ratify an amendment. If three-fourths of these conventions approve the amendment, it becomes part of the Constitution.

The Role of Congress

Congress plays a central role in the amendment process. Not only can Congress propose amendments, but it also determines the method of ratification. Typically, Congress chooses ratification by state legislatures.

Amendment Proposals and Ratifications

Throughout American history, there have been numerous proposals for amendments, but only 27 have been ratified and added to the Constitution. Some amendments, like the Bill of Rights, protect individual freedoms, while others address issues such as voting rights, prohibition, and presidential term limits.

The Authority to Amend

The authority to amend the Constitution is vested in the American people, expressed through their elected representatives in Congress or state legislatures. This reflects the principle that the Constitution derives its power from the consent of the governed.

The Constitution of the United States is a dynamic document that can be amended to reflect the evolving needs and values of the nation. The amendment process outlined in Article V ensures that any changes to the Constitution are deliberate and require broad consensus among the states. It is a testament to the flexibility and enduring relevance of the Constitution that has guided the nation for centuries.

