POLITICS & POWER IN THE CONSTITUTION STATE

A LOOK INSIDE LAW-MAKING IN THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BY STUDENTS OF THE TRINITY COLLEGE LEGISLATIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

EDITED BY NHAT-DANG DO,
CARL SCHIESSL,
& ERIN BARBAKOFF



POLITICS AND POWER IN THE 'CONSTITUTION STATE'

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Trinity College | Political Science

Written by the Students of the Trinity College Legislative Internship Program

Edited by Nhat-Dang Do, Carl Schiessl, and Erin K. Barbakoff

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Next, I want to thank all the legislators and their staff who served as mentors in the program and gave my students their invaluable time, knowledge, and openness as they worked on this project. The knowledge my students gleaned from them is at the heart of this book. Special thanks are due to the leadership of both the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Connecticut General Assembly for their support of the Legislative Internship Program and this project.

Combining the writing and research of two cohorts of students for this book was no easy task. Professor Carl Schiessl, a Trinity College alumnus,

former Legislative Intern, and former legislator, has been an extraordinary partner in this work. His editorial guidance, institutional knowledge, and thoughtful direction greatly strengthened the book. I am also immensely proud of Erin Barbakoff ’26, who volunteered to serve as the student editor for the entire volume while also pursuing, independently and under my supervision, her own chapter on “Home Rule.” The quality of our book reflects her work and tireless dedication.

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Sincerely,
Nhat-Dang Do, PhD
Assistant Professor of Political Science
Director of Trinity College’s Legislative Internship Program

A Short Note About the Project

By Professor Nhat-Dang Do, Trinity College & Director of the Trinity College Legislative Internship Program

TO THE READERS OF THIS BOOK,

The contents of this open educational resource (OER) book project were wholly researched and written by students of the Trinity College Legislative Internship Program, under my supervision. Professor Carl Schiessl, who generously wrote the introduction, one of my students, Erin Barbakoff, and I took their writing and worked to edit their chapters, check the accuracy of their claims, and strengthen the book's cohesiveness. Apart from these activities, the work comes directly from the student authors. As part of their learning process, the students spent several months interviewing legislators and members of the Capitol community, reading primary sources, and using available news sources to give their take on the history and nature of Connecticut state politics. We have worked hard to create a reliable resource that members of the public, students at other colleges, and students in Connecticut's public schools can use to better understand the evolution of the Connecticut General Assembly and the process through which laws are made.

I envision this book as a living project that will be updated each year, with each new class of Trinity College Legislative Interns contributing to

and expanding its chapters. As the book itself shows, Connecticut is constantly evolving, and each legislative session brings new questions and challenges. My hope is that future editions will reflect these changes and continue to grow alongside the state's politics.

With that in mind, this OER book should be understood as a perennial work in progress. I ask readers to approach it with generosity and patience, especially if any mistakes have slipped through our research and editorial process. We will continue to correct, revise, and update the book in future editions. Please remember that this work was produced by students who brought their available knowledge, research, interviews, and perspectives to the study of Connecticut politics.

Thank you for taking the time to read our work. We hope you will also look forward to the next edition.

Introduction

By Professor Carl Schiessl, University of Connecticut School of Law and former member of the Connecticut General Assembly

THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW.

We all feel this way from time to time, usually in response to something that happened to us or something we saw happen to someone else. It's not fair. The feeling can be so strong that it must be expressed, sometimes as an assertion made to anyone within earshot and sometimes said when you are alone, more as an eruption of empathy, or perhaps a prayer.

There ought to be a law.

Most times, that's the end of it. The agitation abates as the words fade. Your mind is on to the next thought. But sometimes the feeling remains. Your attention remains focused on the event. This happens most often when the event is personal to you. That's natural. But sometimes it is something that happened to someone else that stays with you.

Your mind races. What will those people do now? How will they fare in the aftermath of this injustice? It can get personal. What if something like that happened to me, or to someone I love? What would I do? What can I do to make sure this doesn't happen again? Is there anything I can do to help?

These questions evoke considerations ranging from empathy, sympathy, concern and compassion to selfishness, anxiety, fear and worry, and can

call to mind more lofty concepts of fairness, equity, and justice. If you conclude that what happened is not fair, equitable, or just, you may wonder whether others agree with you. You may have already received affirmation if anyone agreed with your assertion that there ought to be a law. If not, you may be motivated to share your feelings about the event the old-fashioned way, by engaging in conversation with the people in your lives. Did you hear what happened? What do you think? Do you agree with me that something must be done?

You may turn to social media platforms to share your thoughts and feelings. There you may find that there is already a buzz online about your issue. Learning that this injustice is not unique to your experience and that others have been suffering as well may inspire you to take further action. But what can you do?

One option is to engage in social media advocacy. You can tell your story on the Web and see if there are other people on the Internet who share your concern. If you find people with related experiences, how are their experiences similar to yours? How are they different? Are there enough people out there with the same concerns that you begin to feel a consensus building? If so, you may feel the need to do more than post on social media.

You can engage in social media advocacy by creating hashtags, establishing dedicated groups, building contact lists, posting online petitions, joining trending conversations, and creating additional content by sharing others' stories. Another thing you can do is keep talking with your friends, family, neighbors, fellow students, and co-workers to get their impressions of both the issue itself and your take on the issue.

Persistent social media interaction may affirm, alter, or contradict your thoughts about the issue. As you learn more about particular causes and effects relating to your issue, you may find yourself and your fellow concerned citizens focusing on one or more measures to prevent recurrence of the issue or address the consequences for people who experience loss or adversity as a result. There may be one idea that rises to the fore. This idea may blossom into a solution that you believe should be put into action. This solution may prevent the injustice from happening or ensure justice if it happens again. But how to implement your solution? What do you do next?

You may decide that implementing your solution will require some form

of action by the government. Such action may be necessary to provide the structural framework for regulating behavior. You may determine that government action is the only way to ensure fairness and equity. Sometimes, the type of government action required to implement a just solution is legislative action.

There ought to be a law.

How do you get a law passed? Where do you begin? What is the process? What challenges and obstacles will you encounter along the way? If you live in Connecticut, the information presented in this open resource textbook will answer these and other questions about lawmaking in Connecticut. And while the insights shared in this book are specific to the State of Connecticut and its General Assembly, many are readily transferable to other states.

In every state, the legislative branch is where ideas become laws that influence people's behavior and move us closer to a harmonious and equitable society. Connecticut's General Assembly operates in two buildings in Hartford known as the State Capitol and the Legislative Office Building. It is a part-time "citizen legislature" where 187 members view their service as a civic duty rather than their full-time job. Legislative sessions are limited in duration and compensation is modest, reflecting the part-time nature of the job.

The General Assembly is diverse, with members representing the broad array of communities comprising Connecticut. Legislators convene early each year to pass bills and resolutions, enact or adjust the state's two-year budget, and bring Connecticut's version of representative Democracy to life.

The legislators themselves do not possess any special education or training. They must simply be a registered voter over the age of eighteen and live in the districts they represent. The only other requirement for a legislator is to have received at least one more vote than any of their opponents in the election.

A hallmark of Connecticut's citizen legislature is close ties between members and the neighborhoods they represent. Each legislator brings their own daily real-world experiences to the Capitol. It is a place where your friends and neighbors are among those trusted to make good decisions on behalf of the people they represent.

The General Assembly is the most accountable branch of state government in that lawmakers must answer for their actions to the people living in their communities in an election held every two years.

This book is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in lawmaking in Connecticut. Each chapter addresses aspects of the legislative process that will inform and educate the reader, whether they are a legislator, governor, other Constitutional officer, legislative partisan staff, nonpartisan staff, journalist, agency official, lobbyist, advocate, aspiring candidate, citizen, or student of government.

The first chapter provides a crash course in Connecticut's legislative process, tracking each step from developing an idea into proposed legislation to the enactment of a bill into state law. It demonstrates how a bill becomes a law, focusing on legislative rules and procedures, and assessing how legislative traditions, modern political culture, and human behavior impact the process. The second chapter offers a perspective on modern-day Connecticut, focusing on the state's makeup and population. The chapter ends with an analysis of the intersectionality between demographic patterns, geography, and economic life, exposing the modern reality of "two Connecticuts."

Chapter 3 focuses on the historical role of political parties in the General Assembly, charting the state's eventual emergence as a stronghold of progressive politics in the United States following the reapportionment of the legislature in 1965. It addresses the threat posed by extremist behavior on both sides of the political spectrum to the longstanding traditions of civility, bipartisanship, and sound legislative process that have been the hallmark of the General Assembly.

Chapter 4 examines the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) and its powers relative to the executive and judicial branches, tracing how these relationships have evolved over time. Beyond formal institutional dynamics, the chapter highlights the often-overlooked actors who play critical roles in shaping policy outcomes, such as committee clerks and Office of Legislative Research (OLR) staff. The chapter, overall, addresses two central questions: What is the balance of power and tension between the CGA and the other branches of government, and how has it shifted over time? And who are the pivotal players in policymaking across the legislative, executive, and judicial arenas?

Chapter 5 presents Erin's independent project, which explores the origins and consequences of "Home Rule" in Connecticut as a defining feature of the state's political system. While Home Rule has long been valued for preserving local autonomy and self-determination, the chapter argues that this deference to local control has also produced unintended consequences. In particular, it has fostered a political culture that prioritizes local interests at the expense of addressing pressing statewide challenges. Erin contends that Home Rule contributes to fragmentation among Connecticut residents and reinforces inequality, with the state's ongoing housing crisis and the difficulty of passing comprehensive reform serving as a central example.

In an era marked by unrestrained social media interaction, increasing social activism, and more frequent and virulent public protests against government action or inaction, there must be ways to harness the enthusiasm of individuals and channel it toward something tangible, something more than expending energy, something that can lead to change. The best way to promote change is through human interaction and advocacy, and the best way for citizens to change the law is through the legislative process. This book provides valuable information on the rules and procedures governing lawmaking, along with important historical background and cultural context essential for anyone interested in engaging in the legislative process in the State of Connecticut.

Prof. Carl Schiessl
Windsor Locks, Connecticut

CHAPTER 1

Policy Making in the Connecticut Legislature

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1.1 Introduction

THE LEGISLATIVE ARM OF THE CONNECTICUT state government, known as the General Assembly, sits in session in the State Capitol, an imposing white marble building overlooking the city of Hartford. This multi-spired structure is flanked by the broad fronts of etched marble; its facades display statuary of state leaders. *The New York Times* noted, upon the building's completion in 1879, that "[t]he structure, exteriorly, is sufficiently individual in character […] and in the dazzling sunshine of a New England Summer noon sparkles like a fairy palace of frost-work."[1]

As the seat of state government, the Capitol houses the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as the offices of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Secretary of the State. In effect, the gold-domed edifice constitutes the physical operating system of the legislature. However, much of the legislature's work unfolds in a building adjacent to the Capitol known as the Legislative Office Building, or LOB. The LOB contains offices for the legislators, committee rooms, and several nonpartisan legislative offices that support the General Assembly. Every law enacted by the Connecticut legislature assumes its final form in the grand chambers of the Capitol and the offices of the LOB, but the arduous task of lawmaking often occurs



Image 1.1: A street view of the Capitol Building in Hartford.[2]

elsewhere: In neighborhood homes where residents mail constituent surveys to their elected representative; in town hall meeting rooms where local issues of concern are debated; in middle school gymnasiums where legislators watch their kids' basketball games after work; or at the downtown plazas where constituents rally to protest on issues they care about, making their voices heard from Hartford to Washington, D.C.

The LOB, pictured in Image 1.2, supports much of the legislature's committee work and its members' offices. The five-story building is connected to the Capitol by a tree-lined exterior marble overpass that spans the Interstate Route 84 ramp and by an interior underground concourse, equipped with a moving walkway and a bronze war memorial, paying homage to the brave residents who sacrificed their lives for the American war effort.[3] The interior of the LOB opens into a spacious sky-lit atrium, featuring four stories of pentagonal galleries. The first and second floors include hearing rooms and committee offices as well as a cafeteria, a small gift shop, and offices for the Connecticut Network (CT-N), which broadcasts many legislative sessions and public hearings throughout the year; the third floor houses the Senate Offices of both parties, along with select committee offices; the fourth floor hosts most of the House members of both parties and their staff; and, the uppermost floor supports several more House member offices, and the General Assembly's nonpartisan offices.



Image 1.2: A street view of the LOB from the I-84 highway.[4]

The processes and procedures of lawmaking in state legislatures are long and complex, with formal rules, informal customs and traditions, and shifting obstacles complicating the Odyssean journey a bill must endure on its pathway to passage. Connecticut is no exception. Nevertheless, the Connecticut legislature has emerged as a leader among other states. Drawing on its unique political construction, Connecticut has pushed legislative reforms by exporting state policies nationwide. Namely, the CGA has pushed for education reforms as the first state legislature to establish state-backed funding for trade schools, passing the Trade School Act of 1909; advocating for greater consumer protection as the first state legislature to approve recompense to car buyers for "lemons" or bad defective vehicles, passing the Lemon Law of 1982; and, most recently, championing the civil rights of undocumented residents by passing the TRUST Act of 2013, which limited state law enforcement cooperation with federal immigration authorities, helping to marshal state-led efforts to reform federal immigration policy.

The Ethos of the Connecticut General Assembly

Core to Connecticut's legislative process are the people working in the General Assembly: the part-time lawmakers responsible for balancing their legislative duties with their primary jobs; the registered lobbyists, advocates, and citizens congregating in the LOB cafeteria, trolling the hallways and filling the galleries of both the House and Senate on session days; the non-partisan and partisan staffers who support the legislative process; and, members of the media who report on legislature activities. In a 2025 interview with an intern from Trinity College's Legislative Internship Program, Representative Cristin McCarthy Vahey (D-133) affirmed the tenets of collaborative professionalism that underpin the operation of the General Assembly. "[R]elationships are the core of the work of the legislature," she remarked, reflecting further that rapport between legislators, staffers, and others facilitates the "bipartisanship spirit which has historically existed in the CGA."[5]

Irrespective of the tide of partisanship and polarization sweeping across the nation, the CGA has remained a distinctly collaborative institution, in part, because of the propinquity of its political arena and the relative

political homogeneity of its constituency. The General Assembly also relies on a series of Joint Rules, Senate Rules, and House Rules that are adopted at the start of each two-year term. These rules are intended to establish clear and transparent processes to govern the legislative process in Connecticut. They guarantee an impartial process that relies on input from all members of the legislature during the committee process and floor debate. Perhaps the most important attribute of these rules is the requirement of a public hearing on each bill. This guarantees that the public's voice is heard by legislators during the legislative process.

The Connecticut citizenry plays a significant role in creating this environment of collaborative policymaking by engaging lawmakers, regardless of party, in a common pursuit. By participating in the legislative process (via tracking bills, attending hearings, submitting testimony, communicating with legislators, and more), Connecticut residents exert influence on the course of their state government. To enjoy a fully equitable and representative state, however, citizens must first understand the "structure and mechanics of that government and the underlying political system," including that of the legislature.[6]

This chapter will address how a bill becomes a law in Connecticut. In providing a comprehensive overview of the key stages, procedures, and strategies involved in the legislative process, as well as the partisan and personal dynamics at play in the CGA, this chapter will examine the concurrent influence of the rules and canons of the General Assembly on legislative politics in Connecticut. Through illustrative examples of both successful and unsuccessful bills, this chapter will catalog the many hurdles that bills must leap through and the "many forces that [they] must withstand" in order to become law.[7]

1.2 Procedural Organization of the Connecticut General Assembly

The Connecticut State Constitution establishes the commencement and adjournment days of the legislative session, confining lawmaking to prescribed periods. The legislature meets in the odd-numbered years from January to June and in the even-numbered years from February to May. Though the lawmaking process appears chaotic at times, a comprehensive

set of rules governs the parliamentary practices of the CGA. These rules are intended to ensure that lawmaking in Connecticut is conducted consistently and transparently, and to guarantee fairness and transparency in the enactment of state laws.

The Joint Rules govern a wide range of matters relating to the protocol of the CGA's bicameral conduct, including the convening of joint conventions between the Senate and House, the number and composition of joint legislative committees, deadlines for reporting bills, the limited scope of legislation to be considered during even-year sessions. The Joint Rules outline all relevant deadlines during the sessions, "so legislative business is conducted with as little friction as possible," including deadlines for filing bills, reporting on bills by committees, and many other procedures.[8] The House and Senate also adopt their own separate rules which govern matters specific to the internal operation of each chamber.

While these rules govern legislative processes, they do not fully capture how the legislature operates, as they do not describe exactly how legislators behave within the parameters set by the rules. Rather, the legislative process reflects the patterned behavior of the CGA, as the rules channel the dynamics of law-making decisions.

Joint Committee System

Like all other states, the Connecticut General Assembly operates through a committee system. Legislative committees are established when the Senate and House adopt the Joint Rules at the start of each two-year term. The Connecticut legislature operates as a joint committee system, meaning that the membership of all standing, select, and statutory committees is bicameral, or consisting of both senators and representatives. Alongside Maine and Massachusetts, Connecticut operates exclusively with joint committees for all legislation. While 17 other states operate with at least one joint committee (mostly fiscal committees) that reports legislation, Connecticut's committee system is unique compared with those of other states and Congress. Instead, a more typical model of a legislative committee system consists of each chamber having committees for specific policy areas, separated by the lower and upper chambers. The CGA's internal construction merges the otherwise bifurcated committee process,

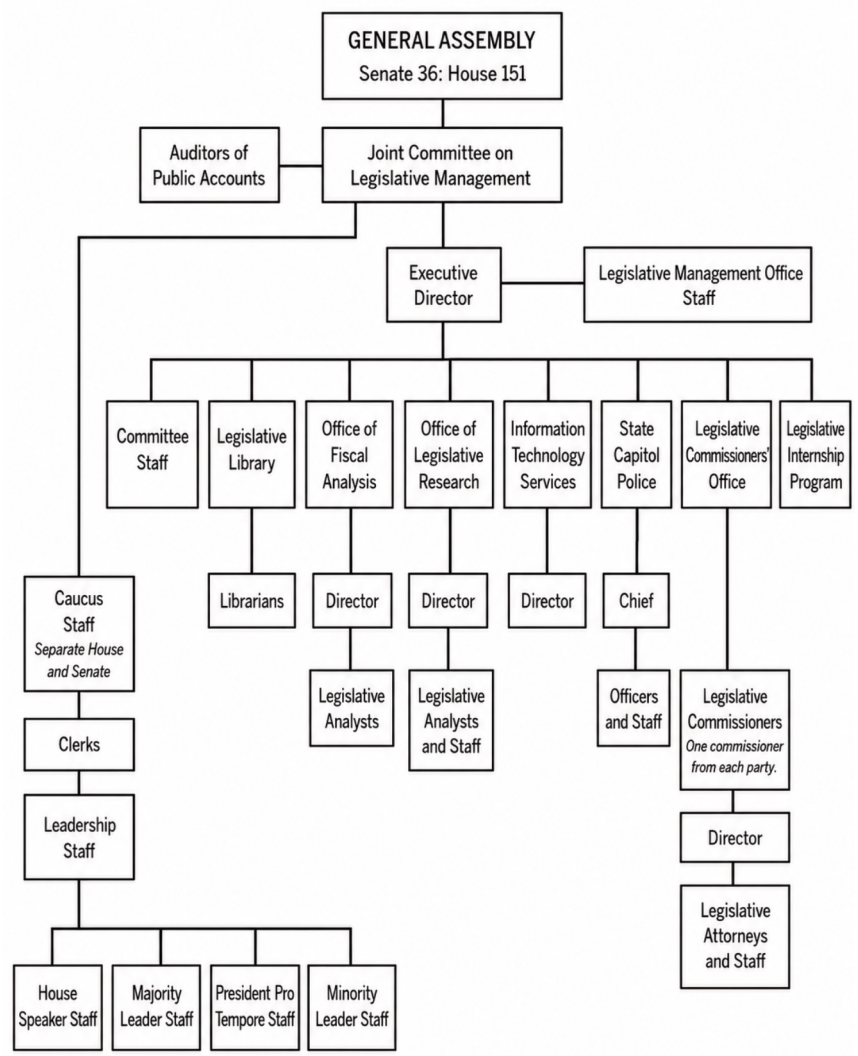


Figure 1.1: Map of the Internal Organization of the General Assembly.

allowing each of the legislature's chambers to work towards consensus before a bill reaches the floor. The joint committee system therefore saves both time and expense and spares the public from having to appear at separate public hearings on the same legislation.

There is a great deal of continuity from session to session with respect to most legislative committees. There are three types of legislative committees. In 2025, the Joint Rules established 23 standing committees to handle bills and other legislative matters within defined areas of

cognizance.[9] Most joint standing committees consist of no more than 9 senators and 35 representatives, including two committee chairs appointed from the majority party, one by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and one by the Speaker of the House, and two ranking members appointed by the minority party, one by the Senate Minority Leader and one by the House Minority Leader. Joint standing committees consist of designated senators and representatives with authority to raise and consider legislative proposals within a specific area of cognizance. The Joint Rules separate standing committees into two groups for scheduling purposes. Group A committees, which meet on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and Group B committees meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Specific committees, including Appropriations, Finance, Revenue and Bonding, Public Health, and Education, have different numbers of members, often exceeding 50, compared to the smallest committee, Veterans Affairs, which has only 8 members. In most cases, committee members represent each political party in relative proportion to its number in each chamber. Senators and representatives typically serve on several committees. Some committees use subcommittees to handle the volume and complexity of their work.

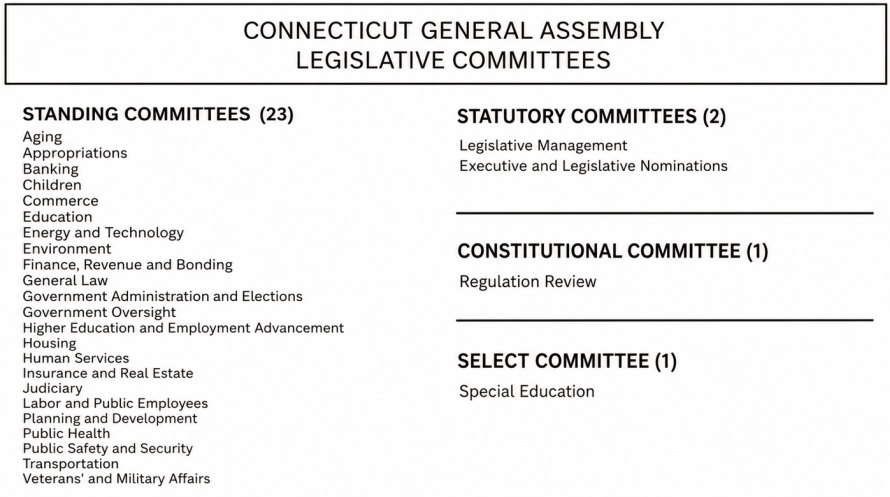


Figure 1.2: List of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committees, 2025 Legislative Session

Statutory committees are joint committees created by state statute, rather than by the Joint Rules, and are charged with specific tasks and responsibilities. There are four such committees in the CGA: the Joint Committee on Legislative Management, the Regulation Review Committee, and the Committee for Legislative Internships.

Select committees are temporary committees created in response to specific issues. Like standing committees, select committees conduct public hearings, issue reports, and originate bills. However, they do not have the authority to report bills directly to the Senate or House. Rather than being reported to the entire legislature, bills that are reported favorably by select committees are referred to the appropriate standing committee. Select committees are created in response to salient policy issues facing the state; thus, they are authorized pursuant to the Joint Rules to function for a set number of years before expiring by lapse of time. In 2025, the Select Committee on Special Education was the only active select committee.

Connecticut's legislature is unique in the joint construction of its committees. In its standing, statutory, and select committees, Senate and House co-chairs typically alternate in presiding over committee meetings and public hearings. There is no rule requiring such an arrangement. It is simply a customary practice followed by co-chairs. Two or more committees can conduct joint public hearings on specific bills, further enhancing cohesion among committees and legislative chambers. Since there is virtually always one bill pertaining to a particular issue in a legislative committee, there is less chance of the House and Senate considering two different bills addressing the same issue, encouraging cohesion and concurrence rather than divergence on different bill proposals.

The Regulation Review Committee (RRC), however, stands as an exception to the CGA's typical joint-committee makeup. Adopted as a November 1982 amendment to the state's Constitution, the RRC codified and formalized the CGA's authority to approve or disapprove administrative regulations, first established as an unenforceable power in 1945. Tasked with reviewing regulations proposed by state agencies prior to their implementation, the RRC was created as a safety measure to ensure that regulations do not contravene legislative intent, conflict with current state

or federal laws, or the state constitutions. This joint bipartisan committee is composed of up to 14 members: 6 senators and 8 representatives, divided equally by party. In keeping with the bipartisan nature of the committee, the chairmanship of the committee changes every two years, pairing either a Senate Democrat and a House Republican or a Senate Republican and a House Democrat as co-chairs. The Regulation Review Committee is an important "check and balance" on the power of the Executive Branch of state government.

The Joint Rules provide for the mandatory referral of certain bills or resolutions to one of the four committees described below. Two of these are the Appropriations Committee and the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee. These committees are often referred to colloquially as the "money committees" because together they control the state's power to tax and spend, deciding how money will be raised and how it will be spent. First, the Appropriations Committee is responsible for crafting the state budget, based on the budget proposed by the Governor or of the committee's own creation. The committee develops and then recommends a state budget for enactment by the General Assembly. Once passed, the budget moves on to the Governor for his or her consideration. Once signed into law, it is the responsibility of the Executive Branch to implement the state budget, allocate state funds, and pay state agencies. This committee essentially answers an important question of governance: "Where is the money *going*?"

The Joint Rules afford the Appropriations Committee cognizance over "all matters relating to appropriations," including matters relating to the salaries and benefits of state employees, teachers' retirement and veterans' pensions, and collective bargaining agreements and arbitration awards for all state employees. The current committee also includes task forces ranging from Higher Education Financial Sustainability to Nursing Home and Assisted Living, to Juvenile Justice Policy to Paraeducator Healthcare. Any bill or resolution containing an appropriation or a state mandate to local governments favorably reported by another committee shall be referred to the Appropriations Committee, unless such reference is dispensed with by a two-thirds vote of each chamber, and provided that the committee's consideration shall be limited to the appropriation.[10]

The Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee determines how the

state raises revenue. Its jurisdiction, outlined in the Joint Rules, includes state finance, revenue, capital bonding, taxation, and state borrowing. Its area of cognizance also extends to "all bills on such matters favorably reported by any other committee, including bills on employer contributions for unemployment compensation purposes, and all matters relating to the Department of Revenue Services."[11] The committee also includes a powerful Bonding Subcommittee which plays a crucial role in the state's bonding process, authorizing bond bills and allocating funds for state projects. The Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee's consideration of legislation is limited to the financial provisions and does not extend to other substantive provisions or purposes, except to the extent that those provisions relate to the financial provisions. In effect, the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee is tasked with answering the question: "Where is the money *coming from*?" Any bill or resolution favorably reported by another committee relating to finance, revenue, capital bonding, taxation, employer contributions for unemployment compensation, matters relating to the Department of Revenue Services, and revenue aspects of legalized gaming, shall be referred to the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, provided the committee's consideration shall be limited to such matters.[12]

Together, the Appropriations Committee and the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee form the core of Connecticut's legislative fiscal decision-making. No major bill that requires funding or influences revenue flows can become law without passing through either of these two committees. They have the final say on the fiscal feasibility of legislation at the committee level, often shaping or blocking proposals based on budgetary constraints.

The Judiciary Committee is another of the most powerful committees in the General Assembly, having cognizance over the Judicial Department, including courts, judicial procedures, criminal law, probate matters, probation, parole, wills, estates, adoption, divorce, bankruptcy, escheats, law libraries, deeds, mortgage, and conveyancing, preservation of land records and other documents, the law of business organizations, uniform laws, claims against the state, authorizations to sue and appeal, and judicial nominations.[13] Any bill favorably reported by another committee that carries a civil penalty amounting to $5,000 in the aggregate or a

criminal penalty other than an infraction shall be referred to the Judiciary Committee. In such event the committee's consideration shall be limited to the penalty provision.

Finally, the Committee on Government Administration and Elections (GAE) has cognizance of all matters relating to the Department of Administrative Services, including purchases and collections, the administrative functions of several specified state offices, state government organization and reorganization, structures and procedures, leasing, construction, maintenance, purchase, and sale of state facilities, interstate compacts, constitutional amendments, and elections. Any resolution reported by another committee that proposes a constitutional amendment shall be referred to the GAE Committee.[14]

The unique design of Connecticut's joint committee system streamlines the legislative process by reducing redundancy and helps shape legislation by fostering greater communication and compromise. By combining members of both the House and Senate into a single committee, the Connecticut legislature avoids the need for separate, sequential consideration of bills in each chamber. Also of note, however, is that the joint committee design may invite unintended consequences, equally unique to the Connecticut legislature. For example, by signaling consensus between the two chambers earlier in the legislative process, the CGA's joint committee system may provide fewer avenues for striking a compromise. Similarly, the joint committees' structure limits the scope of debate, allowing only a single point of failure or passage, meaning that controversial bills must be raised and heard only in their committee of cognizance, though there may be exceptions from time to time.

The power to appoint the chairs and ranking members of legislative committees vests substantial authority in each of the four caucus leaders. Caucus leaders and committee leaders will typically confer to develop legislative priorities for their caucuses before each session and work collaboratively throughout the session to advance those priorities. The joint committee system brings Senators and Representatives together early in the legislative process, often fostering cooperation and collaboration between the caucuses and the chambers to identify bills where there is consensus or disagreement.

In those instances where there is no consensus or agreement on a course

of legislative action, or when more information is required in order to make a decision, the General Assembly will often create a working group, task force, or study committee to obtain such information and, on occasion, craft a legislative solution. At the start of the 2025 legislative session, there were 146 active task forces and working groups, and 49 proposed bills seeking to create new ones.[15]

During this same year, the committees with the most task forces and working groups were Public Health (18), Judiciary (16), and Human Services (14). Of the 29 legislative committees, only 4 had no task forces or working groups: Executive and Legislative Nominations, Government, Oversight, Reapportionment, and Regulation Review. Some legislators argue that the complexity of the issues, coupled with the need for stakeholder input and the time limitations of the legislative process, require a mechanism for additional study. Others argue that creating a task force or working group is a way to delay action on a legislative issue or a technique, or to promote the notion that the General Assembly should become a full-time occupation, so that those legislators who are retired or have no full-time job have something to do all year. The truth may lie somewhere in between.

Chamber and Caucus Leadership

After the election, the first order of business for the Democratic and Republican Senate and House caucuses is the election of caucus leaders. Caucus leaders, once confirmed, appoint committee chairs, ranking members, and rank-and-file committee members. The Speaker is the presiding officer of the House of Representatives. The Speaker is typically endorsed by a majority vote of the caucus held shortly after the election. The entire House membership elects the Speaker by a vote taken at the beginning of the new legislative term. The Speaker's chief responsibilities include presiding over the House chamber on session days, chairing the caucus, appointing chairs, vice chairs, and members to legislative committees, putting all questions on the floor to a vote, deciding questions of order, and referring bills to committees. Additionally, the Speaker is responsible for marshaling, or quarterbacking, the majority party caucus to secure the votes necessary to advance party priorities.[16] In the absence of the Speaker, there is one or more Deputy Speakers appointed by the

Speaker who presides over the House in the Speaker's absence.

The Lieutenant Governor is the presiding officer of the Senate. She is also responsible for casting the tie-breaking vote on a bill or resolution if required. The Senate President Pro Tempore is the chief caucus leadership position in the Senate. Like the Speaker, the President Pro Tempore is nominated by majority party in a post-election caucus and is then formally elected by the entire Senate membership at the first Senate session. Beyond presiding over the Senate in the absence of the Lieutenant Governor, the President Pro Tempore is responsible for appointing chairs, vice chairs, and members of the Senate to committees not otherwise appointed by resolution.

The majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate serve key caucus leadership roles in support of the legislative process. These leaders, each elected by members of their respective caucuses, serve as their caucuses' leading spokesperson in floor debate and also chair their respective caucuses. The Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore work collaboratively with their, majority leaders to set the legislative agendas for their chambers. In each chamber, majority and minority leaders and their staffs work closely to manage the flow of legislation in each chamber. The Joint Rules also dictate that majority and minority leaders of the Senate and the House, along with the President Pro Tempore and the Speaker of the House, are ex-officio members of all committees, with the right to be present at all meetings and to take part in deliberations but without the right to vote, except as to those committees to which they are appointed members.

The Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tempore work with their respective majority leaders to appoint committee chairs and rank-and-file members. The minority leaders also appoint ranking members and rank-and-file members. When selecting committee assignments, caucus leaders consider a range of factors, including seniority, experience, expertise, professional background, and interest in or passion for certain subject areas. Caucus leaders also take into account geography and demographics, ensuring that different regions of the state, as well as urban, suburban, and rural areas, are represented.

Each legislative committee has one Senate Chair and one House Chair. Committee Chairs hold significant power in scheduling committee meetings,

public hearings, setting agendas, and exercising influence over which bills advance. “Compared with the committee appointment process, fewer rules control the nomination of committee chairs.” These seats, however, are typically reserved for majority party members.[17] Additionally, each committee has at least one Senate and one House vice-chair from the majority party, responsible for assisting the committee chair and performing duties in the chair’s absence, and one Senate and one House ranking member from the minority party, all appointed by their respective caucus leadership.

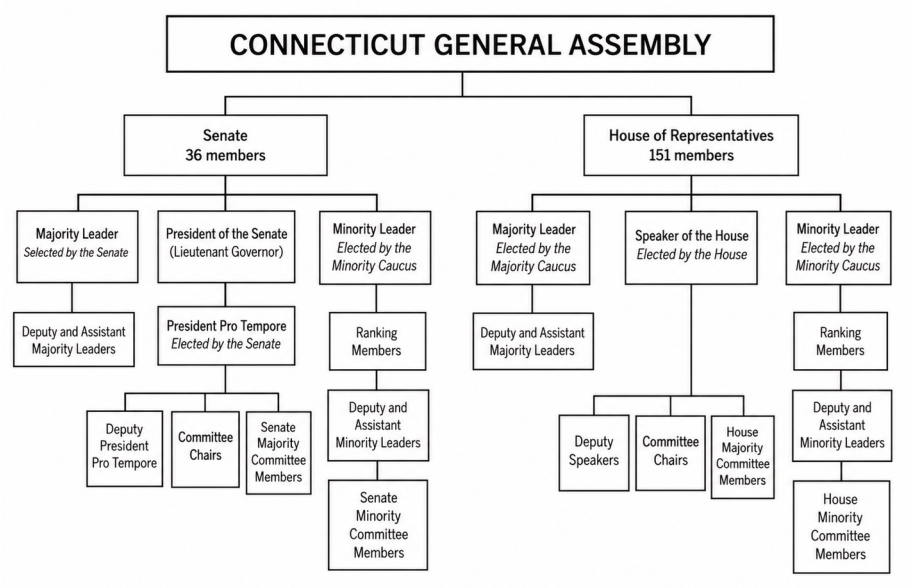


Figure 1.3: The Structure of the Elected Body of the General Assembly.

In every legislature, however, the power that caucus leaders enjoy ultimately depends on their receiving support from the majority of their caucus members.[18] Thus, leaders often find success in their ability to amalgamate their own policy preferences with those of the members who put them in power and build consensus within their party. In 2005, for example, the Speaker opposed civil unions for same-sex couples.[19] However, despite his personal opposition, he allowed the measure to come to a vote in the face of a majority of legislators in the House who strongly favored the bill. He was among 33 House Democrats who voted for an

amendment defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman[20]. Thus, despite the formal aspects of leadership authority that prescribed the Speaker and President Pro Tempore greater influence over the legislature's agenda, the leaders in the General Assembly occasionally elect to champion the agenda of their caucus rather than solely promoting their personal policy agenda.

Legislative Staff & Non-Partisan Offices

The General Assembly has a robust system of support underpinning its legislative capabilities. The Joint Committee on Legislative Management, the legislative committee that oversees the administration of the General Assembly, is a 22-member legislative committee co-chaired by the Speaker of the House and the Senate President Pro Tempore. The committee oversees the Office of Legislative Management (OLM), the nonpartisan agency that manages the internal operations of the legislature, including administering the General Assembly's budget, and oversees non-elected employees, such as partisan and non-partisan, seasonal and permanent staff. Additionally, the Joint Committee on Legislative Management is responsible for raising and reporting on bills and resolutions affecting laws governing the legislative branch. One example of managing legislative operations is the employment of a full-time clerk for both the Senate and the House, who is responsible for administrative and procedural duties, including maintaining records of session proceedings. Senate and House Clerks are also charged with the publication of the Senate and House Journals and Calendars, Legislative Bulletins, Bill Indices, and other documents of the General Assembly.

There are several nonpartisan offices under the purview of the Legislative Management Committee that support the entire General Assembly. These nonpartisan offices, "crucial to [the] efficient functioning of the legislature," include the Legislative Commissioner's Office (LCO), Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA), Office of Legislative Research (OLR), and, as mentioned above, the Office of Legislative Management (OLM).[21]

The Legislative Commissioners' Office (LCO) serves as legal counsel to the members of the General Assembly. It is headed by two commissioners,

one appointed by the leaders of the Senate and House Democratic caucuses and one appointed by the leaders of the Senate and House Republican caucuses. Legislative leadership also hires a nonpartisan director to oversee attorney and staff hiring and day-to-day operations. LCO is staffed by twenty attorneys and twelve staff members who are assigned to one or more legislative committees. LCO attorneys collaborate with caucus leaders, committee chairs, ranking members, and rank-and-file legislators. LCO attorneys draft all legislative documents, including but not limited to bills, amendments, Special Acts, Public Acts, and resolutions. Having a single office staffed with attorneys trained to handle all legislative drafting ensures statutory consistency.[22]

The Office of Legislative Research (OLR) is the research arm of the General Assembly, tasked with providing nonpartisan, objective research for legislators. In addition to legislative research, OLR drafts bill analyses, or plain-language summaries, of all bills favorably reported by legislative committees and "places them on the legislators' desks, and make them available virtually, before their bills come up for a vote," providing them with the means to become familiar with the merits via a plain language summary in addition to reading the actual language of the bill before debate begins.[23] OLR also drafts bill analyses, public act summaries, and policy reports on a wide range of topics at the request of legislators. An OLR analyst is assigned to each committee, except the "money committees", and is responsible for attending all committee meetings and public hearings.

The Legislative Library is organizationally part of OLR. Legislative librarians, provide "legislative, legal and general research services, including legislative histories, journal and article searches, and historical research."[24] Library staff is also responsible for collecting and maintaining the CGA's collection of documents and databases, such as board appointments and mandated reports.

The Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA) is the fiscal research and analysis office for the General Assembly. OFA was created in 1973 to provide the Legislative Branch with independent fiscal information and analysis. OFA also serves as support staff for the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee and the Appropriations Committee by analyzing the fiscal impact of all bills and amendments that contain costs or raise revenue,

regardless of their committee of origin. A fiscal note describing the fiscal impact is appended to the file copy of each bill or amendment. OFA also tracks state revenue and the performance of state departments and agencies in implementing the state budget.

1.3 Schematics of the General Assembly's Legislative Process

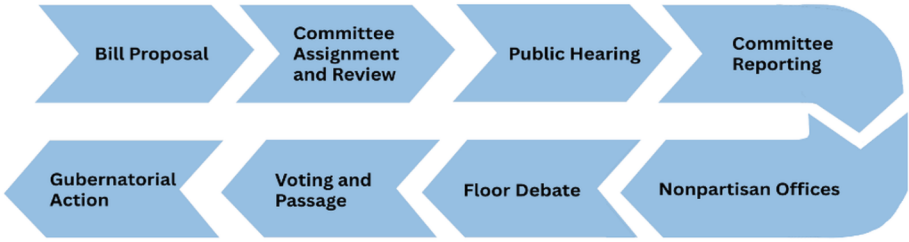


Figure 1.4: Process Map: How a Bill Becomes a Law in Connecticut

First, the Connecticut General Assembly alternates between long sessions in odd-numbered years and short sessions in even-numbered years. In odd-numbered years, the legislature meets from early January until early June, giving lawmakers more time to introduce, debate, and act on a broad range of bills. These long sessions are especially important because they are when the General Assembly adopts the state's two-year budget. In even-numbered years, when legislative seats are up for election, the legislature meets for a shorter session, from early February until early May. These short sessions are more limited in scope. Under the state constitution and legislative rules, lawmakers generally focus on adjusting the second year of the biennial budget and on legislation related to budgetary, revenue, or financial matters, as well as committee-raised bills and bills certified as emergencies. As a result, odd-year sessions tend to be more frenetic with new bill proposals, while even-year sessions are more constrained, and often shaped by both fiscal priorities and the upcoming election cycle.

Connecticut's legislative process consists of several key stages, including the introduction and referral of bills and resolutions,[25] committee consideration, public hearings, debate on the House and Senate floor, voting and passage, and gubernatorial action. Figure 1.4 outlines these

steps. This overview of bill passage reflects a process that appears invariant and impersonal. However, the process is seldom, if ever, either. The legislative process described herein will apply to both resolutions and bills. In short, the journey of any bill or resolution is arduous and involves various dynamics, stakeholders, and complex interacting factors.

In Connecticut, there are two ways for a bill to become law: the first uses a standard process, and the second uses an emergency certification process. Traditionally, the passage process follows the sequential steps shown in Figure 1.4. Bills begin as committee proposals and proceed through the committee approval process to the House and Senate chambers, where they are subject to debate and voting on the floor and, if passed by both chambers, move on to the Governor's desk. Alternatively, emergency-certified bills, or "eCerts," follow a non-traditional procedure in which the Speaker and President Pro Tempore jointly propose a bill and send it directly to the House or Senate floor for action without any committee referrals or public hearings. This process is the legislative equivalent of an express train—it bypasses typical vetting mechanisms and public input and is therefore reserved for urgent matters requiring immediate action. ECerts, however, are sometimes used by the majority party as an unorthodox lawmaking practice to sidestep political gridlock.

In 2025, for example, the legislature passed two omnibus bills via emergency certification. House Bill 7066 and House Bill 7067 together addressed a range of policy issues, including veterans' tax exemptions, special education funding for local school districts, regulations for federal immigration enforcement agencies, and compensation for collegiate athletes. Both bills drew attention for their unorthodox passage, as Republican legislators objected to what the Democratic majority construed as an emergency. The minority alleged that the bulk of House Bill 7066, in particular, operated as an exercise of partisanship rather than policymaking. In the House, HB 7066 passed by a 94–49 vote, with every Republican and two Democrats opposed; in the Senate, it passed after a heated debate by a 25–9 vote, with every Republican in opposition except Senator Tony Hwang (R-Fairfield). Senate President Pro Tempore Martin M. Looney (D-New Haven) maintained that the time-sensitive nature of the bill constituted an emergency, remarking that the threats facing "the groups that are itemized in this bill qualify as something that is necessary and justifiable for emergency certification."[26]

Traditional Process

The legislative process begins with a perceived gap in state law, or a "need for an improvement in the state," which may be remedied through legislative action.[27] Ideas for policy change are numerous, and the sources from which they come are legion: some are born in the mind of a constituent or a group of like-minded citizens, some from Governors, Constitutional Officers, or legislators themselves, some from the political agendas of a state party, some from the lobbying efforts of corporations, institutions, local government, or special interest or advocacy groups; some from the myriad of task forces and study commissions that are created in prior legislative sessions, and some from other states. At this nascent stage, these ideas inspire Governors or legislators to develop and submit a legislative proposal as a bill.

A bill may assume several different forms, depending on its status in the legislative process:

- A *proposed bill* is a preliminary draft introduced by an individual legislator at the beginning of a session that sets forth the intent of the proposal in informal, non-statutory language. In a 5-month session, held in odd-numbered years, proposed bills may relate to any topic, while in a 3-month session, held in even-numbered years, proposed bills are limited to budgetary and fiscal matters.
- A *committee bill* means a bill drafted in formal statutory language that incorporates the principles expressed in one or more proposed bills.[28]
- A *raised bill* is an original bill drafted in formal statutory language raised by a committee without reference to a proposed bill or proposed bill.[29]
- An *emergency certified bill*, as discussed above, is a bill drafted in formal statutory language that is certified by the Senate President Pro Tempore and Speaker of the House to be of an emergency nature, pursuant to Joint Rule 9(c).[30]
- A *Governor's bill* is a bill drafted in formal statutory language that accompanies the Governor's budget or other message.[31]
- A *conveyance bill* means any committee bill, raised bill, emergency certified bill or Governor's bill drafted in formal language that

requires a state agency to sell, transfer or otherwise dispose of any real property or interest in real property that is under the custody or control of such agency to any person or entity other than another state agency.[32]

- A *substitute bill* is a bill that has been redrafted as a result of changes to the bill's language adopted by a committee; the substitute bill shall be accompanied by a joint favorable report that summarizes the changes.[33]

In addition, there are other informal terms used to describe different types of bills. A vehicle or a work in progress is a bill or resolution intended to be amended later in the session to accomplish an additional purpose, often amended to include more controversial measures than those in the original bill. A vehicle that attracts several additional provisions or amendments is often called an omnibus bill or an aircraft carrier bill. A dummy bill is a vague or even an empty bill that has been raised or reported out by a committee in order to meet the committee's deadline for action as specified in the Joint Rules. A dummy bill may be amended on the Senate or House floor with substantive language.

Bill Introduction

Early in each session, individual legislators may introduce *proposed bills*. Once introduced, the Legislative Commissioner's Office shall make a notation as to the suggested committee reference for each proposed bill based on its subject matter. The clerk of the appropriate chamber shall make a tentative reference for the Senate President Pro Tempore or the Speaker of the House. Alternatively, if a committee decides to develop a concept into legislation, LCO will draft it as a *committee bill*. A committee may vote to raise a bill prepared by LCO, at which time the bill becomes known as a *raised bill*. Bills submitted by state senators, or Senate Bills, are numbered from 1 to 5000, and those submitted by state representatives, called House Bills, are numbered from 5001 to 9999, and beyond.[34]

Committee Assignment and Initial Action

On occasion, though not typical, a bill may be proposed by the Chairs for direct referral to another legislative committee. If a majority of committee members approve such action, it is known as a straight change of reference. Since each legislative committee has a defined area of cognizance, meaning, primary subject area, they are responsible for the bulk of the vetting procedures that bills face in the General Assembly. Committees act as the "gatekeepers" of the legislative process, with the power to advance, significantly alter, or effectively kill any bill that falls within their cognizance.

For those bills remaining in committee, a vetting and review process known as *screening* begins. This initial screening is a largely informal process typically conducted by the committee chairs and ranking members during which committee members and nonpartisan staffers discuss the merits of each bill. Committee chairs will then decide which bills to include on a meeting agenda. At the committee meeting, the chairs will ask members to vote on scheduling these bills for a public hearing.

Public Hearings

Public hearings are an opportunity for members of the public, legislators, and representatives of state agencies to "testify to a legislative committee on bills, resolutions, or issues before the committee."[35] They are "a form of participatory democracy in that citizens get the opportunity to have a direct influence on their decisions at the Capitol."[36] Public hearings can help committees better understand the impact of a legislative proposal and gauge public sentiment on specific bills. Public hearings can also influence a committee member's position on a bill. For certain high-profile bills, legislators and supporters or opponents will encourage their constituents to testify at a public hearing to build support or opposition.

Typically, committees schedule public hearings on several bills and resolutions, often grouped by subject, so that related bills and resolutions may be heard at the same hearing. Scheduling requirements and conduct guidelines for public hearings are further outlined in the Joint Rules, which instruct that hearing notices be published in the Bulletin and online in an

official Schedule of Events and require that "all public hearings shall be broadcast contemporaneously."[37] Testimony may be provided in writing and/or in person or virtually. The first hour of testimony is reserved for "legislators who are not members of the committee, representatives of state agencies, municipal chief elected officials," and officials testifying in their official capacity, including the Governor and Constitutional Officers.[38] The Joint Rules stipulate that these officials testify "during, but not beyond, the first hour of a public hearing," so that "the public portion of the hearing [is] uninterrupted."[39] The hearing is then open to the public to offer testimony. Each speaker is given up to three minutes for oral testimony; committee members may then ask questions or offer responses beyond this limit. Written testimony may also be submitted to supplement oral remarks. Typically, there is no limit on the number of speakers or the duration of a public hearing, as it a longstanding tradition in the Connecticut General Assembly that each speaker has an opportunity to be heard.

Public hearings facilitate public engagement in the General Assembly's deliberative lawmaking process, serving the dual functions of promoting transparency in legislative proceedings and giving voice to constituents' perspectives and lived experiences. Public hearings are designed to allow individuals to support, oppose, or suggest changes to bills.

The Committee Bill Screening Process

After the public hearing, committee chairs will reconvene in private to determine which bills should be included on an agenda for final action, which bills need to be changed, and which bills will die in committee. Ranking members will also screen the bills to determine their positions on them. In some committees, the chairs and ranking members meet to screen bills. In other committees, the co-chairs screen separately from ranking members. Bill screening is an iterative process that happens throughout a bill's journey in the General Assembly; however, this stage of consideration functions as a watershed for proposed bills.

During these screening meetings, members debate the merits of these bills. They consider the consequences of enactment, including potential unintended consequences, costs, or savings, as well as any legal

considerations, such as statutory consistency or constitutionality, as noted by the Legislative Commissioner's Office, and relevant reports from the Office of Legislative Research, and, at times, the strategic priorities of the partisan caucuses. The Joint Rules provide specific deadlines for committee action on bills. These impending deadlines stimulate prompt review of bills by committee leaders. Early on, committees scrutinize bills carefully yet often grant sponsors leeway to further develop their bills. Yet, as the deadline approaches, these considerations become a more stringent process as deficient bills are thrown wayside and contested bills are debated more intensely.

Committee Review and Reporting

A committee may take final action on bills and resolutions up to the committee's joint favorable (JF) deadline. A committee's options for final action on a bill include the following:

- A committee can vote to advance a bill out of committee, issuing a joint favorable (JF) report.
- A committee can amend the bill and vote to advance the amended bill out of committee, issuing a joint favorable substitute (JFS).
- A committee can vote to reject a bill by issuing a joint unfavorable report indicating that a majority of the committee opposes it and recommends its rejection.
- A committee can refuse to take action on a bill, or "box" the bill, allowing it to die in committee.
- A committee may also decide to refer the bill to another committee, referred to as a "change of reference," especially if such a bill covers multiple policy areas that require expertise from other legislative committees of cognizance. Sometimes the committee referral process is used to kill a bill, especially if the committee that receives the referral has already passed its deadline for action, or if the co-chairs of the receiving committee do not wish to take action on the bill.

For bills that advance out of committee *without* major changes, the committee clerk issues a Joint Favorable (JF) report that summarizes the

committee's process and includes key information, such as the bill's sponsors, a summary of its purpose, and highlights from public hearing testimony. For bills approved *with* changes to the original language, the committee will issue a Joint Favorable Substitute (JFS) report on a new or amended version of the bill. These changes often reflect input from public hearing testimony.

When a bill is voted out of committee, receiving either a JF or JFS Report, it is referred to either the House or Senate floor for further consideration, depending upon whether the bill originated in the Senate or House. For a bill to pass, it must receive a majority of the votes cast by members of the chamber; if it does, it is sent to the other chamber for a similar process. When and if a bill passes both chambers, it is sent to the Governor for further consideration.

Each of the four Senate and House Majority and Minority caucuses has a separate screening committee. Once a bill appears on a chamber's calendar, it is reviewed by each of two separate and informal screening committees. These committees are directed by the Majority Leader and Minority Leader, respectively, and include Deputy and Assistant Majority and Minority Leaders, other legislators, caucus legal counsel, and policy staff. These caucus screening committees read each bill, committee report, record, and other available information, and assess whether the bill, based on its subject matter, needs to be referred to another committee or is ready to be presented to the full caucus in order to determine whether the bill should be amended and whether there are sufficient votes to pass the bill. Caucus screening committees will also consult with the chair and ranking member of the committee that originated a bill to receive their guidance, expertise, and recommendations as to the bill's fate. This step is important because the committee chair and ranking member will typically lead the floor debate on a particular bill.

A bill must be "read on the calendar" on three occasions before it may be taken up for action. The majority caucus screening committees in each chamber will work with their Majority Leader to develop a "GO List" in advance of each session, indicating the bills that may be acted upon during the session. The Majority Leader will share, review, and discuss their GO List with the Minority Leader before finalizing the list for a particular session. Prior to the session, and on occasion during long session days, the Majority Leader

will circulate a "GO List" that includes a variety of markings indicating (a) that a bill is ready for action, marked "GO", and (b) if it is expected that no action will be taken but the bill will retain its place on the calendar, marked "PASS RETAIN." Bills may also be sent back to their originating committee, marked "RC" for recommit, or placed on the foot of the calendar, meaning the bill will remain on the calendar, but no action will be taken, marked "FOOT."

Floor Debate: Process and Rules

Floor debate is a critical phase in the legislative process, allowing legislators to advocate for or against bills and propose amendments, in an attempt to persuade their colleagues. Session rules are intended to ensure orderly debate, equal participation, and a clear process for introducing motions, debating bills, and voting. In theory, they establish a neutral framework for decision-making, where procedure guides outcomes. But in practice, particularly in high-stakes or controversial legislation, political strategy, caucus cohesion, and behind-the-scenes negotiation often take precedence in shaping a bill's outcome. The Speaker of the House presides over debates in the House of Representatives, with several Deputy Speakers to preside in their absence. The Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate, with the President Pro Tempore presiding in their absence, along with several other deputy majority leaders

The Senate and House Majority and Minority Leaders play a crucial role in managing floor debates. They determine the legislative agenda and use strategic messaging to secure votes. Leadership also plays a key role in whipping votes, thus persuading or pressuring members of their party to support or oppose specific legislation. While floor debates in the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) are intended to inform and influence action, what happens behind the scenes often shapes a bill's outcome more than the debate itself. Majority Caucus leadership decides which bills make it to the floor and may, on occasion, endeavor to exercise influence over how members vote in cases where a partisan caucus has adopted a "caucus position" on a bill. This does not happen on every bill; rather, it frequently happens on contentious issues. For example, even if a bill had bipartisan support in committee, leadership might delay or block a floor vote if it does not align with the caucus's agenda or if the timing for such action is deemed

to be politically sensitive. Lawmakers also rely on internal caucus negotiations, inter-caucus discussions, and simple vote counts to gauge support and adjust strategy. Counting votes in advance of calling a bill is the fundamental business of a Majority Leader. In short, if a bill does not have sufficient votes to pass, then the Majority Leader will not call the bill for debate, since such action would waste the chamber's time and run the risk of having other bills dies on the calendar due to lack of time.

There is a longstanding tradition in both legislative chambers of free, open, and unlimited debate. Debate time is unlimited, allowing discussions on particular contentious bills to last for hours. Because floor debates take place in public and are also broadcast and recorded, legislators will use debate to communicate their positions to their constituents and the media. On rare occasions, a legislator may attempt to filibuster a bill as a tactic to delay or alter legislation. With finite time in the legislative session, unlimited debate often results in protracted debate or filibustering that kills bills more regularly than an outright vote. As the days and hours left in a session shrink, the power of the minority grows. Some bills will be called regardless of opposition threats to filibuster. But, as time constraints of session deadlines create increased competition for floor time in the closing weeks of a legislative session, bill sponsors are pushed to "consider revisions that either would neutralize opposition—or at least coax them to forgo lengthy debates."[40]

Another technique to move bills through the Senate or House by use of "consent calendars. The Rules of each chamber provide for the creation of a consent calendar that will include bills and resolutions designated by the majority and minority leaders. All bills and resolutions included on a consent calendar shall be passed on motion without discussion, unless at any time before voting has commenced, a member requests removal of a bill or resolution from the consent calendar, in which case the bill or resolution shall be so removed. Consent calendars have been used more often in the Senate than in the House. One reason may be that it is a more formidable numerical challenge to get 151 House members to all agree to place a bill on a consent calendar than the 36-member Senate.

Amendments: Purpose and Impact

Legislators may propose amendments to any bill or resolution during floor debates to modify or clarify language. Amendments serve several strategic purposes in shaping legislation by improving clarity, building support, and influencing the bill's trajectory. Some amendments are known as *technical amendments*, which focus on clarification and refinement, addressing technical and legal errors or including more detailed language. Other amendments change the substantive terms of a bill to garner support from other legislators and increase its chances of passage. These amendments are called *saving amendments* and propose to modify a bill to make it more palatable to otherwise skeptical legislators, ensuring its adoption rather than rejection. On the other hand, a *"killer amendment"* may be introduced strategically to create divisions among supporters or weaken a bill to the point of failure. In essence, if amended by a *killer amendment*, the bill will lose sufficient votes to fail to pass. Amendments can significantly impact the legislative process, determining whether a bill gains traction or is derailed. The amendment process is sometimes used as a political tool. Some legislators introduce amendments they know will not pass merely to put their colleagues on record regarding controversial issues. This tactic creates campaign material or exerts pressure on political opponents.

There is no legislative rule in Connecticut requiring that the subject matter of an amendment have a public hearing before adoption. This fact is often cited by legislators during floor debate who oppose an amendment that includes a provision not heard by a committee. The absence of direct public input on an idea that may become law is anathema to most legislators. It runs contrary to the principles of public participation that sustain the legislative process in our citizen legislature.

Floor debates and the amendment process are essential components of the legislative process. While structured by formal rules, they are significantly influenced by political strategies, leadership decisions, and institutional frameworks. Amendments, whether used to improve bills, force difficult votes, or shift legislative priorities, play a crucial role in shaping the outcome of proposed legislation. Understanding the interplay between procedural rules and political strategy provides deeper insight into how laws are crafted and enacted in the General Assembly.

Reconciliation: Committees Of Conference

When one chamber rejects an amendment adopted by the other chamber, the bill or resolution will be returned to the other chamber for further action. If that chamber readopts the rejected amendment, the readoption constitutes a matter for a committee of conference to resolve this conflict. The Speaker and President Pro Tempore will appoint three members from each chamber. If the vote has not been unanimous, there shall be at least one member of the committee who was not on the prevailing side in such member's chamber, except that in all cases, at least one member in each chamber shall be a member of the minority party.

The committee may propose any changes within the scope of the bill or resolution, but any action taken by the committee shall be by a majority vote of the members of the committee of conference. The committee report shall be presented to both chambers simultaneously. Any new amendment shall be prepared by LCO and shall be attached to and made part of the report. Each chamber shall vote to accept or reject the report, and that vote shall constitute the final action by that chamber on the bill or resolution. If both chambers vote to accept the report, then the bill is passed, or the resolution is adopted. If either chamber rejects the report, the bill or resolution is defeated, and the second chamber is not required to consider the report. The report of the committee of conference may be accepted or rejected, but it not be amended.[41]

Reconsideration

On rare occasions, a legislator may move to reconsider a vote on a particular bill. Such a motion must be made by a member who voted with the majority the first time. House Rules require that the House may reconsider a bill only at its next regular session.[42] Senate rules allow reconsideration on the same day as the original vote or on the next day.[43] An item can be reconsidered only once in a session. Except for the last three days of the session, unless the rules are suspended, a bill must be held by the clerks until the end of the following session day for possible reconsideration. No resolution or motion to recall a bill, resolution, or other matter from the other chamber shall be allowed for the purpose of

reconsideration or amendment after the time has elapsed for the reconsideration of any vote thereon, except when there has clearly been a mistake in such a vote or an error in the language of the bill, resolution, or other matter.[44]

1.4 The Role of the Governor in Enacting Legislation

Once a bill successfully passes through both chambers of the General Assembly, it is sent to the Governor for final action. When a bill comes to their desk, the Governor has three choices. First, the Governor can sign the legislation into law. Second, the Governor can veto the bill, rejecting the legislation in its entirety and sending it back to the chamber of origin with an explanation of the reasons for the veto. Additionally, the Governor holds a unique veto power over bills that include appropriations of state revenues, known as a "line-item veto," which provides the Governor with a strategic mechanism to influence spending and state appropriations. However, the legislature can still override a veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both the House and Senate.[45] If the Governor neither signs nor vetoes the bill within five days (excluding Sundays) while the General Assembly is in session, the bill automatically becomes law without the Governor's signature.[46] If the General Assembly has adjourned, the Governor has fifteen days to act before the bill automatically becomes law.[47]

The power to veto a bill is an Executive Branch check on the power of the Legislative Branch of state government. On the other hand, as in the U.S. Congress, the power to override a gubernatorial veto is a check by the Legislative Branch on the Executive Branch. Veto override is a crucial check on executive power, ensuring that the legislature can enact laws despite gubernatorial opposition. In practice, veto overrides are rare in Connecticut. During the 2018 legislative session, Governor Lamont vetoed only seven of the 207 bills that reached his desk. Of these, only one attempt at a veto override was made; it passed in the House but failed in the Senate.[48] This demonstrates the Governor's significant influence over the legislative process through their veto authority.

The Line-Item Veto

In Connecticut, governors hold line-item veto power for appropriations bills. This is a critical tool that allows them to selectively reject specific budgetary provisions without discarding an entire bill. Since the Governor both proposes a biennial state budget to the General Assembly for their consideration and is responsible as the leader of the Executive Branch to implement the provisions of the biennial budget, it seems appropriate that the Governor should be empowered to shape budgetary decisions more precisely through a line-item veto, changing a provision of the budget while permitting necessary funding measures to become law. The line-item veto is particularly useful during budget implementation. It allows governors to modify appropriations without rejecting an entire fiscal package. This can lead to strategic negotiations between the executive and legislative branches, ensuring that key gubernatorial priorities are maintained while addressing legislative concerns.

1.5 The Influence of Advocacy Groups and Registered Lobbyists in the General Assembly

The legislature reflects the state's diverse regions and interests. The chess playing of different political actors, such as the Caucus leaders and the Governor, plays an equally important role in the proceedings of the General Assembly. Advocacy by external stakeholders—from church councils to PTAs to social clubs to volunteer groups—also influences the legislative priorities of the Assembly. Individual citizens and organized interest groups engage in political advocacy to promote a specific cause or set of causes, often through grassroots mobilization, media campaigns, coalition-building, and direct lobbying efforts. Individual advocates and interest groups can influence various stages of the legislative process, often serving as a mechanism through which citizens, as well as private and corporate interests, can participate in the state's political process.

Legislators often rely on interest groups to identify legislative priorities and provide area-specific expertise. Interest groups vary in the scope of their advocacy and who primarily benefits from their work; yet, they all serve the legislature in two distinct ways: first, they offer citizens an avenue

to proactively participate in the political process, and, second, they allow legislators access to a broad base of specialized knowledge in the field. Interest groups promote only one side of an issue, often advocating either for or against a bill; it is thus the practice of the legislature to consult multiple voices and perspectives on the issues at hand.

Interest groups have become particularly important to lawmaking in the General Assembly. Interest groups in Connecticut can be categorized as *special interest groups*, which represent a specific industry, group, or cause. In addition to special interest groups, a range of *public interest groups* contribute to advocacy work at the General Assembly. Public interest groups represent a broader public interest, rather than a specific group or industry.

Lobbying

To exert influence over the state lawmaking process, most interest groups hire lobbyists, though it is not always the case. As outlined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, people have the right to petition their government for "redress of grievances." This basic right to be heard by the government lays the foundation for the interest group lobbying system in the United States. Professional lobbyists are important purveyors of policy-specific information in the legislative process. Before, during and after legislative sessions, lobbyists work to educate legislators on select policy areas and build support for their clients' interests. In Connecticut, a lobbyist is defined as someone who (1) is registered with the Office of State Ethics (OSE) as communicating directly or soliciting others to communicate with any official legislator or staffer "for the purpose of influencing any legislative or administrative action," and (2) spends or is paid at least $3,000 a year to influence legislation. The OSE further requires lobbyists to wear a "distinguishing badge" displaying their names and the organizations they represent.

There are two forms of registered lobbyists in Connecticut. A *client lobbyist* is an individual who is employed by a non-lobbyist organization to lobby on its behalf. The client lobbyist is the designated lobbyist of their client organization. They are essentially an " in-house" lobbyist, as they lobby exclusively on behalf of their client organization. A *contract lobbyist*, or communicator lobbyist, is an individual who is contracted to lobby on behalf of several client organizations. Often, lobbying firms provide

lobbying services to clients on a contractual basis.

Lobbying in Connecticut has become a more professional and significantly more robust enterprise in recent decades. The number of registered lobbyists in the state has grown dramatically, and the industry has become significantly more lucrative. In 2025, over 1,100 registered lobbyists were active in Connecticut, representing a wide range of industries and causes. In the first quarter of 2025 alone, more than $28.4 million was spent on statehouse lobbying. OSE publishes data relating to top lobbying activities. In 2024, OSE reported the top five issue areas lobbied in the General Assembly as (1) Government; (2) Health and health care systems; (3) Human Services; (4) Environment; and (5) Economic and Community Development.[49]

A Lobbyist's Perspective

written by Professor Carl Schiessl

Some qualities that can distinguish an effective registered lobbyist from others include the following. It is perhaps most important for any lobbyist or advocate to be honest and truthful at all times during their advocacy. It is often said that the only tool that a lobbyist has is their "word" so a successful lobbyist must be honest in their efforts to advocate for legislative action or inaction. Another essential skill for a lobbyist is the ability to articulate the arguments both for and against a particular bill in a professional and dispassionate way.

Lobbyists must also understand that their primary responsibility is to inform the legislative process, so the ability to articulate all aspects of a proposed legislative change is an important and valuable skill. In addition, a registered lobbyist, whether representing a client or working in a trade association, typically works for a number of years on behalf of their clients or members. An effective lobbyist also understands that it can take several years to develop an idea into a viable law, so lobbyists tend to demonstrate patience in their advocacy, engaging in something legislators call "long game." Finally, while an effective lobbyist or advocate will demonstrate passion for

the idea that they are communicating to legislators, they must always remember that it is the legislators who will make the final decision on a bill. Acting at all times with appreciation and consideration for the difficult job of a legislator and demonstrating respect for legislators and the legislative process are among the essential elements for success as a lobbyist and any advocate. External forces, including citizens, interest groups, lobbying firms, and grassroots activists, can exert significant influence over the legislative process. While some bills gain traction through strong leadership support and bipartisan coalitions, others stall due to competing priorities or political divides. Transparency and public engagement remain among the keys to ensuring that lawmaking reflects the needs and interests of Connecticut's citizens.

Grassroots Organizations

Grassroots organizations can also demonstrate public support for bills and pressure legislators. Grassroots organizations, like most other political advocacy organizations in the state, often hire registered lobbyists on behalf of their cause. Advocates of all types use the similar tactics to persuade members of the General Assembly. By engaging lawmakers, mobilizing public support, and raising awareness through the media or educational campaigns, advocacy groups can build political will in the legislature to support their cause.

Groups, like the SIEU pictured in Image 1.3, can gather to speak with their representatives to advocate on issues and to express their interests. Testimony during committee hearings, in particular, is a powerful venue for these groups to be heard. Legislators are required to hear from the public on bills under consideration, and lines of people from various organizations that pack a committee room can be a powerful signal to policymakers. Similar to professional lobbyists, these grassroots groups can provide important technical or political information to legislators.



Image 1.3: Service Employees International Union (SEIU) advocates marching outside of the Capitol during the 2025 legislative session. (Erin Barbakoff, March 2025).

1.6 Conclusion

State legislatures are all principally alike. Nationwide, they follow "basically the same procedures: bills are introduced by legislators, assigned to committees, aired in public hearings, reported out by committees, debated on House and Senate floors, and voted on by members of each chamber. Legislative leaders and governors attempt to control the process, and lobbyists to influence it." And yet, while their processes are analogous, each legislative body is distinctive. According to Judge Robert Satter, "The Connecticut General Assembly has its own Nutmeg flavor, a flavor dating all the way back to the Fundamental Orders of 1639, which gave it the epithet 'Constitution State' displayed proudly on the state's license plates.[50] "Beneath the apparent chaos on the floor of the House and Senate," he writes, "there is a pattern of procedure established by the rules governing each chamber and a pattern of behavior that shapes the journey a bill must take to passage."[51]

Endnotes

1 New York Times. June 29, 1879. "Hartford's New Capitol — The Building in Bushnell Park." *The New York Times*.

2 Photo Credit: Erin Barbakoff, taken on October 1, 2025.

3 Connecticut General Assembly. "Legislative Office Building (LOB)." https://www.cga.ct.gov/cop/cap-lob.asp (Accessed December 4, 2025); The Office of the House Clerk. "State Buildings." https://www.cga.ct.gov/hco/his-bldgs.asp (Accessed December 4, 2025)

4 Photo Credit: Erin Barbakoff, taken on October 1, 2025

5 Cristin McCarthy Vahey, April 18, 2025. Hartford, Connecticut.

6 Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider's Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

7 Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider's Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: Author House.

8 "Resolution Concerning The Joint Rules For The June Special Session, 2024" (HJ00301).

9 However, while the Legislative Regulation Review Committee has been in existence since 1972, it was a November 24, 1982, amendment to the State's Constitution that provided the authority for the General Assembly to adopt the current structure of the committee. This committee was established by Constitutional mandate.

10 Joint Rule 3(b)(1) 2025.

11 "Resolution Concerning The Joint Rules For The June Special Session, 2024" (HJ00301).

12 Joint Rule 3(b)(4) 2025.

13 Joint Rule 3(b)(7) 2025.

14 Joint Rule 3(b)(6) 2025.

15 "49 bills propose adding to CT legislature's 146 task forces, working groups," by David Krechevsky, *Hartford Business Journal*, 1/22/25.

16 In an interview with a Trinity College intern from the 2025 cohort, minority leader Vincent Candelora (R-North Branford) described the role of caucus leaders as being the quarterback of a football team, responsible for "calling plays for the team."

17 Squire, Peverill and Gary Moncrief. 2015. *State Legislatures Today: Politics Under the Domes*. Faculty & Staff Authored Books.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Yardley, William. April 14, 2005. "Connecticut House Backs Gay Civil Unions." *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/14/nyregion/connecticut-house-backs-gay-civil-unions.html (accessed December 4, 2025).

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Interview with Patrick Deegan, April 18, 2025. Hartford, Connecticut.

[22] In an interview with a Trinity College intern during the 2025 session, LCO attorney Patrick Deegan explained, "We [the LCO] are nonpartisan, so we're not really trying to influence the policy; we just help turn ideas into bill language that could eventually become law."

[23] Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider's Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: Author House.

[24] Connecticut General Assembly Legislative Library. n.d. "About the Library." Accessed June 29, 2026. https://wp.cga.ct.gov/lib/about-the-library

[25] There is a difference between a bill and a resolution. A bill is a proposed law that, if enacted, will have the force of law. Most resolutions do not have the force of law. They are expressions of legislative intent and may be used for internal housekeeping purposes or to commemorate events or individual achievement, among other purposes.

[26] Pazniokas, Mark. 2025. "'Emergency' CT bill tackles immigration policy, UConn athlete pay." Connecticut Mirror. https://ctmirror.org/2025/02/25/ct-trump-immigration-policy-uconn-athlete-pay (accessed December 4, 2025).

[27] Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider's Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: Author House.

[28] Joint Rule 7(a)(3), 2025.

[29] Joint Rule 7(a)(5), 2025.

[30] Joint Rule 7(a)(7) and Joint Rule 9(c), 2025.

[31] Joint Rule 7(a)(8), 2025

[32] Joint Rule 7(a)(9), 2025.

[33] Joint Rule 10, 2025.

[34] Joint Rule 7(c), 2025.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider's Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

[37] "Resolution Concerning The Joint Rules For The June Special Session, 2024" (HJ00301).

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider's Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

[41] Joint Rule 22 (2025).

[42] House Rule 30 (2025).

[43] Senate Rule 26 (2025).

[44] Joint Rule 21 (2025).

[45] Legislative Commissioners, Office. 2024. “Rules and Precedents of the General Assembly of Connecticut.”

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Connecticut Office of State Ethics. Lobbyist Filing Report.

[50] Satter, Robert. 2009. *Under the Gold Dome: An Insider’s Look at the Connecticut Legislature*. 2nd ed. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

[51] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

A Tale of Two Connecticuts

Written by

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2.1 Introduction

A STEREOTYPICAL ACCOUNT OF CONNECTICUT ENVISIONS "Nutmeggers" as the wealthier, WASPier, and preppier cousin of Massachusetts: all mansions, prep schools, country clubs, filled with Yale University graduates, outfitted in boat shoes and pastel shorts. Another image is of the idyllic suburbs of New York City and Boston. Whatever truths that may be gleaned from these postcard images are far from inclusive. These images mask the vibrant diversity of Connecticut residents and the decades-old divides that define life in the state. Consequences of economic inequality, for example, metastasize in Connecticut's cities. Residents in the state's racial minority are disproportionately represented in its three largest cities, where more than a third of the population is Black, Latino, and Asian.[1] In these communities, residents face unequal access to well-paying jobs, quality education, affordable housing, and healthcare. In truth, one may see two very versions of Connecticut. To help capture a more complete picture, this chapter charts the realities of the two Connecticuts by first examining the state's demographic makeup. We will then consider the state's socioeconomic composition (age, race, income, education, and employment) and conclude by analyzing the intersection of these demographic patterns with geography and economic life.

In the early 2010s, Connecticut was still grappling with the fallout from the Great Recession. Then-Governor Dannel Malloy responded with significant hikes in taxes in an attempt to stabilize a state budget that state officials describe as being in a "permanent state of fiscal crisis."[2] Local media stories abound, raising alarm about residents fleeing to other states and corporations threatening to do the same.[3] Headlines reported slow job growth, rising poverty rates, and a widening achievement gap in schools. One article by the *Connecticut Mirror* (2023) reflects, "It was hard to find an aspect of the state that wasn't described as 'struggling.'" Yet, since then, the state has undergone substantial and consequential change—financially, demographically, and politically. Racial diversity, living affordability, migration in and out of the state, public education, educational attainment, and job industries have all shifted in Connecticut over the last decade or so."[4] By tracking these changes through three key demographic dimensions of age, wealth, and race, we will present a clearer picture of who lives in

Connecticut today and how they influence and otherwise interact with the state government.

2.2 The Demographic Landscape of Connecticut

Connecticut is the third-smallest state in the United States, covering just over 5,000 square miles; yet it contains striking contrasts: it is simultaneously one of the wealthiest and most unequal states in the country. The demographic composition of Connecticut is deeply intertwined with how that inequality is distributed through the state.

The Geography of Connecticut Demographics

Connecticut's population is approximately 3.6 million people, distributed across 169 municipalities.[5] Connecticut has five primary cities, which serve as the state's principal urban centers: Bridgeport, Stamford, New Haven, Hartford, and Waterbury. Approximately 15 percent of Connecticut residents live in these five cities, while the remaining population is dispersed across the rest of the state, spread between towns, each with a population just under one-tenth the size of these cities.[6] In Connecticut, communities of color are heavily concentrated in these five cities. The residents of these cities make up 18 percent of the state's total population but 47 percent of its Black population and 39 percent of its Hispanic or Latino population. Beyond these demographic differences, economic strain is more prevalent in Connecticut's cities than in their wealthier, racially homogeneous suburban counterparts.

County Government System

The elimination of county government in 1960 exacerbated the stark, disparate realities of these two Connecticuts. In 1666, the Connecticut Colony established four counties: Fairfield, Hartford, New Haven, and New London. By 1785, Windham, Litchfield, Middlesex, and Tolland had completed the state's eight-county system. According to Rosaline Levenson in *County Government in Connecticut: Its History and Demise*, the General Corte, later known as the General Assembly, believed subdividing the state

would help by shortening distances people had to travel to conduct business with the colony and by allowing jails and courts to operate with greater efficiency.[7] Meeting twice a year, the county governments operated jails and courts (which handled probate and minor civil suits and criminal cases only; the state court handled more complicated and serious cases), issued liquor licenses, and addressed highway and boundary disputes between towns. County courts were abolished by 1855, and the state assumed all legal duties. Thereafter, the county was only responsible for providing space for the state courts to operate. Henry J. Faeth, in *The Connecticut County*, notes that in the early 1880s, counties also became responsible for the care and protection of neglected or abused children. The counties were authorized to levy taxes to fund their operations.[8] At the turn of the 20th century, the power of the county government system was at its peak, according to Levenson. By the mid-20th century, however, the state had taken over most official functions, leaving little need for county government. In 1959, the General Assembly passed Public Act 152, which abolished county government in Connecticut as of October 1, 1960. This left all essential government functions either to the state or to the 169 municipalities whose power was derived solely from state statutes.Connecticut Explored[9]

The abandonment of counties left Connecticut without a middle level of government, a level that might otherwise have become an incubator for regional approaches to addressing the rapidly growing disparities between Connecticut's poorer cities and wealthier suburbs. In many states, county governments typically provide a broad array of services, often serving areas outside incorporated cities and towns, a feature Connecticut lacks. Typical county services include maintaining roads, bridges, and public buildings, law enforcement, corrections, courthouse security, maintaining public records, such as deeds, marriage licenses and birth and death certificates, administering elections, including voter registration and operating polling sites, public health services, encompassing immunizations, clinics, disease prevention and environmental health, and social services, and social services, such as child welfare, adult protective services, and assistance programs. In the absence of a county government system in Connecticut, these political challenges were left primarily to the governors and the General Assembly to address. The differences between the quality of urban versus suburban life are central to understanding Connecticut's identity

and politics and define the landscape of much of the political debate and policymaking in the General Assembly.

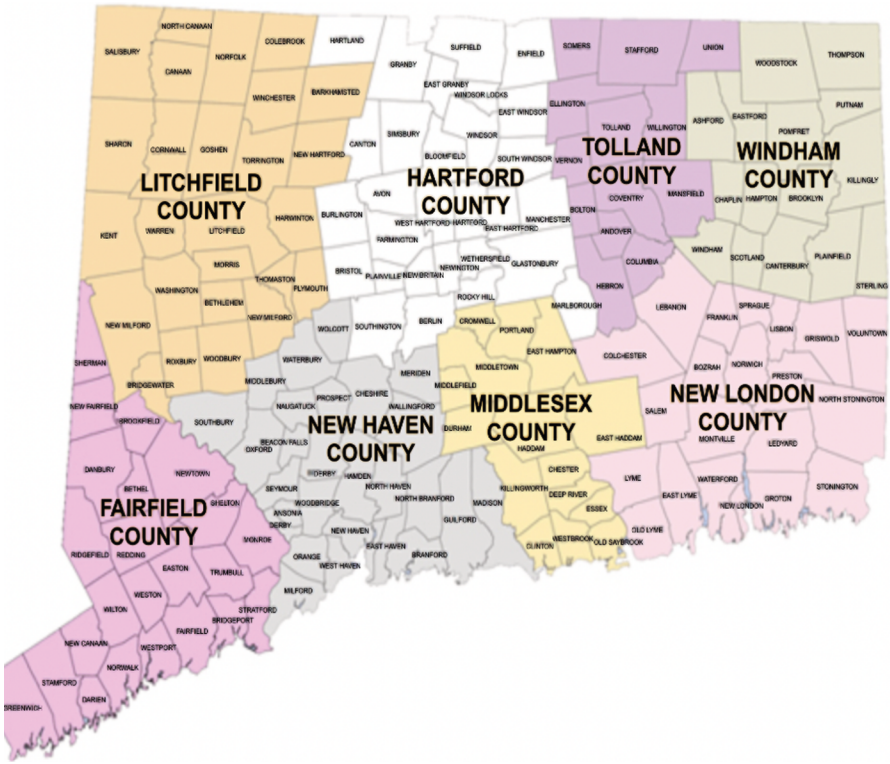


Figure 2.1: Map of Connecticut Counties and Towns retrieved in 2026 from the Secretary of State's Office.

Population Growth

Connecticut has an estimated population of about 3.6 million, making it the twenty-ninth most densely populated state in the nation. It is one of only seven states experiencing a modest population decline, losing residents at a fraction of a percent (roughly 0.11%) annually since 2016. The state's population has grown substantially since the nineteenth century; however, beginning in the 1970s, growth slowed, and birth rates declined (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3). Cities bore the brunt of these declines: Between 1960 and 2000, Hartford lost approximately 25 percent of its population;

Bridgeport lost 11 percent; and New Haven was 19 percent smaller. This decline has had lasting economic consequences for each community, as the deindustrialization of the early 1990s left these cities suffering an economic malaise that, to that point, had been unknown in the state.

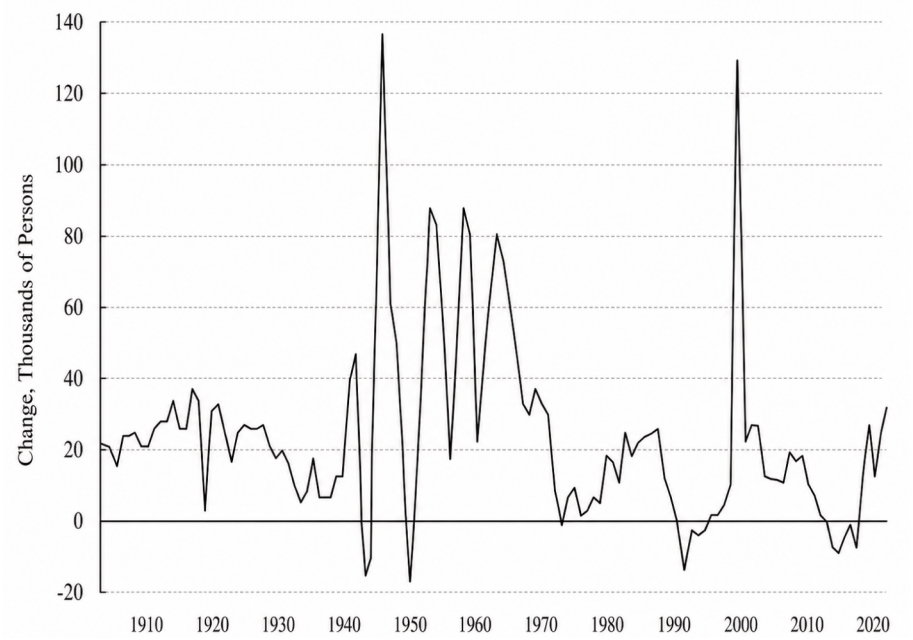


Figure 2.2: Percent Change of Resident Population in Connecticut, 1900–2024.

Connecticut has experienced significant stratification associated with the growth of suburban and rural areas. Throughout the twentieth century, Connecticut's suburban communities grew as residents abandoned central-city neighborhoods. Population growth is concentrated in the southwestern corner of the state (i.e., Fairfield County) and along its central corridor (i.e., the Hartford and South-Central regions). As a result, many towns have become residential enclaves where people live, but with little industrial or commercial development. To live in these towns is to work somewhere else. Many of the wealthy communities of Fairfield County, such as New Canaan, Greenwich, and Westport, are exclusive commuter enclaves for professionals who work in New York City or elsewhere in the state.

In- and Outbound Migration

Tucked neatly between the borders of New York and Massachusetts, Connecticut is a beacon of the Northeast. Historically, southwestern Connecticut has served as a 'bedroom community' for New York City, offering suburban residential options within commuting distance of the metropolitan labor market. In 2022, Connecticut experienced a net influx of approximately 57,000 residents through domestic migration, a temporary improvement in what has otherwise been a mixed or negative net migration trend in recent decades.[10] Between 2011 and 2020, New York accounted for roughly one-third of all inbound movers to Connecticut (over 183,000 individuals), making it the largest single source of new residents. Massachusetts and Florida followed, contributing more than 60,000 and 51,000 inbound migrants, respectively, during the same period.

Outmigration patterns reveal a reciprocal dynamic. From 2011 to 2020, Florida was the leading destination for former Connecticut residents, attracting approximately 17 percent of all outbound movers (over 122,000 individuals). New York and Massachusetts were also major destinations, receiving more than 114,000 and 71,000 former Connecticut residents, respectively. These bidirectional patterns underscore the state's deep economic and demographic ties to the broader Northeast region.

A substantial share of Connecticut's outbound migration consists of residents aged 55 and older, many of whom cite lower taxes and reduced living costs as motivating factors. This pattern reflects the "snowbird" phenomenon, in which retirees either split their time between Connecticut (or, otherwise, permanently relocate to) and a Southern state (most commonly Florida) to enjoy a warmer climate and the benefits of a more favorable tax climate and lower housing costs. By contrast, inbound migration is often driven by working-age adults and families seeking employment opportunities, educational institutions, and suburban living environments, particularly those relocating from higher-cost urban areas in New York and Massachusetts.

Although the ratio of inbound to outbound domestic migration has improved modestly in recent years (see Figure 2.3), Connecticut has historically experienced net domestic migration losses, particularly among older cohorts. However, consistent international immigration, averaging approximately 15,000 individuals annually, has helped offset these domestic losses, fueling the state's overall economic growth and contributing to its ongoing demographic and cultural transformation.[11] These migration patterns carry clear political implications, particularly for the state legislature.

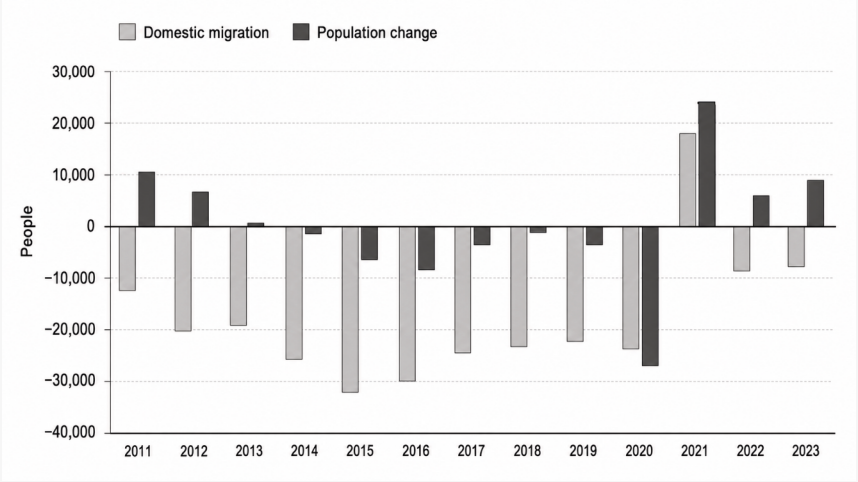


Figure 2.3: Population Change in Connecticut. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024

Connecticut's Aging Population

Connecticut ranks among the oldest states in the nation. In 2000, the state's largest age cohort was between 35 and 44 years old; by the mid-2020s, however, the largest share of residents (14 percent) was aged 55 to 64 years old, and nearly one-quarter of the state's population is aged 60 and older.[12] Most residents aged 65 and older identify as White (84.8 percent), while smaller shares identify as Latino (6.7 percent), African American (6.7 percent), or Asian (2.6 percent).[13] Connecticut cities stand in contrast to these broader aging trends. In Hartford, for example, a majority of residents

are aged 25 to 34. Likewise, New Haven, Hartford, Windham, New Britain, and New London all have median ages ranging from the low to mid-30s. Yet, despite having fewer elderly residents, people of color living in cities experience worse age-related health outcomes, including cognitive and cardiovascular diseases and mental health disorders. Racial health disparities in Connecticut's elderly populations reflect broader inequities in access to adequate housing, quality health care, and healthy neighborhood environments.

2.3 Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Connecticut

Connecticut has a moderately diverse racial and ethnic composition—more so, at least, than its reputation and history might suggest. Nationally, it ranks twenty-ninth in measures of racial and ethnic diversity, with approximately two-thirds of residents (about 66 percent) identifying as White. In recent decades, the state has grown increasingly diverse, driven in part by a significant growth in its Hispanic and Latino population. Today, roughly 17 percent of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, roughly 10 percent as Black or African American, and approximately 5 percent as Asian.[14] Altogether, residents who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) constitute more than one-third of the state's population.

These shifts in racial demographics are most evident in urban communities and some inner-ring suburbs. Population patterns in Hartford, for example, reflect many of the state's twenty-first-century demographic changes. In 2024, the capital city was approximately 44.5 percent Hispanic or Latino, 35.8 percent Black, 24.2 percent White, and 2.5 percent Asian, making it one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in New England.[15] Racially and ethnically diverse communities in Connecticut are concentrated largely in urban areas (see Figure 2.4). This pattern mirrors the geographic distribution of economic inequality discussed later in this chapter. Thus, despite its longstanding image of socioeconomic homogeneity, Connecticut today is defined by substantial diversity, expressed across racial, ethnic, and generational lines, which shapes its sociopolitical landscape.

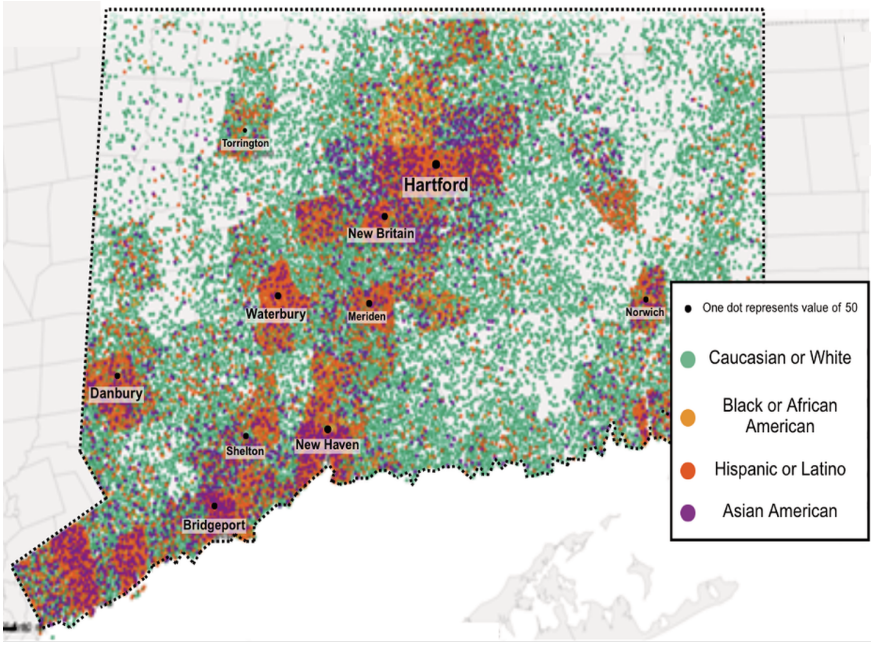


Figure 2.4: Spatial Distribution of Racial and Ethnic Populations Across Connecticut.[16]

International Immigration

Connecticut has historically benefited from periods of international immigration, often in line with broader national trends and local economic opportunities. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Connecticut experienced waves of Southern and Eastern European immigrants who contributed to various trades in local economies and established cultural organizations, helping the state grow and prosper during its industrial era. Connecticut would continue to operate as a hub for immigrant communities throughout the twentieth century. For example, immigrants primarily from the West Indies came to Tobacco Valley in north-central Connecticut to work on farms growing Connecticut's acclaimed broadleaf tobacco used for cigar wrappers. Many of these people eventually settled in the north end of Hartford, where they established a thriving West Indian community.

By the twenty-first century, Connecticut's demographics reflected a significant increase in Latino populations, particularly Puerto Ricans (45%),

Dominicans (10.6%), Mexicans (9.4%), Colombians (5.3%), and Ecuadorian (5.1%), as well as an increase in Asian populations;[17] and, as of 2024, immigrants constitute about 15.7 percent of the state's population, actively contributing to sectors such as construction, hospitality, and manufacturing. Despite contemporary immigration issues federally involving both legal and undocumented residents in Connecticut, "this rich tapestry of immigrant experiences continues to shape Connecticut's cultural landscape and economic framework."[18]

Hartford boasts one of the largest Jamaican and West Indian populations in the United States. Concentrated in areas such as Albany Avenue, Blue Hills Avenue, and Main Street, Hartford's Jamaican community is deeply rooted, with a strong presence of Jamaican-owned restaurants, businesses, and social clubs, particularly the West Indian Social Club of Hartford, which acts as a cultural hub. According to Trinity College Professor Garth Myers,

> [In] Hartford … the Jamaican community [is] about ten percent of the population of the city. And a neighborhood like Blue Hills has the highest rate of homeownership in the city of Hartford. It's not an exceedingly wealthy part of Hartford, though it is wealthier than many other parts of [the city]. The neighborhood is predominantly black, and much of that population is Jamaican. And so, you have Jamaican businesses in the North End, you have Jamaican investment in home ownership in the North End, and Jamaican connectivity back to Jamaica as well. Hartford Bound, [a website developed by the University of Connecticut, illustrates] the connections between Jamaica and Hartford. … We could do the same thing with Peruvians, with Bosnians, probably in an earlier generation with Italians, Ukrainians, French immigrants, who have continually made Hartford stronger and better."

Latino and Puerto Rican Communities in Connecticut

Over the past decade, Connecticut's Latino population has grown by approximately 30 percent, outpacing national growth and making it the state's largest racial or ethnic minority group and one of its fastest-growing demographic constituencies. Today, Latinos comprise approximately 18 percent of the state's total population. Puerto Ricans represent the largest Latino group in Connecticut. Representing over 40 percent of the state's entire Latino population, they constitute the largest Latino minority group in 124 Connecticut municipalities. Residents of Mexican origin form the second-largest subgroup, representing roughly 10 percent of the state's Latino population. Latino and, in particular, Puerto Rican communities are central to Connecticut's contemporary social and political identity. Their influence is institutionalized in the Connecticut Black and Puerto Rican Caucus (BPRC), a group of legislators within the state General Assembly that advocates for policies affecting Black and Latino residents.

In Hartford, these demographic patterns are especially visible. Puerto Ricans account for approximately three-quarters of the city's Latino population and roughly one-third of Hartford's total population.[19] This cultural presence is visible in public life throughout the city, in storefront murals and community celebrations such as the Puerto Rican Day Parade and the Festival del Coquí. The Hartford Puerto Rican Day Parade is one of the largest Puerto Rican celebrations in New England. Established in 1964 and held annually, the parade draws thousands of participants and spectators who line the streets of Hartford, waving flags, dancing to plena and salsa, and honoring the island's heritage and deep ties to the city.[20]

Such events serve not only as expressions of cultural pride but also as a statement of belonging and resilience. The Puerto Rican Day parade, for example, brings together generations of families, local businesses, and community leaders. Often, state and local elected leaders attend and participate in Hartford's Puerto Rican Day Parade — both as a show of community and as a way of engaging with and appealing to the rising electorate.[21] From municipal councils to the state legislature, Latino leaders have become increasingly prominent voices in shaping public policy.[22]

The Early History of Racial Justice in Connecticut

By the mid-eighteenth century, Connecticut was the single largest slave-holding colony in New England. According to the Dartmouth and Slavery Project, although the scale of slavery in Connecticut was far smaller than in the plantation South, the concentration of wealth in Connecticut led to low unemployment levels, which shifted the burden of agricultural, industrial, and domestic labor onto enslaved people.[23] Connecticut did not abolish slavery until 1848, as the last state in New England to fully abolish slavery.[24] Despite being a member state of the Union during the Civil War, which contributed thousands of troops to the anti-slavery cause, Connecticut's complicity in slavery contributed to the marginalization of Black Americans.

Free Black communities emerged in Connecticut during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in cities such as Hartford, Middletown, and New London. These communities became the center of abolitionist organizing, mutual aid, religious life, and education, laying the foundation for a long tradition of Black political activism in the state. For instance, Hartford's Talcott Street Congregational Church, founded in 1819, operated as a hub for antislavery meetings, schooling, and community building. Its leaders played a central role in establishing early Black political and social institutions in Connecticut.

A striking example of early educational resistance came from Prudence Crandall, a White Quaker teacher in Canterbury who, in 1833, opened the first school for Black girls in New England. Crandall's efforts provoked intense opposition from local White residents, later prompting the General Assembly to pass the "Black Law of 1833," which prohibited the education of out-of-state Black students without local permission. Crandall was arrested under the statute, and although her school ultimately closed, her case exposed the state's failure to uphold the tenets of liberty that it professed to uphold, memorializing the legislature's attempt to preserve racial segregation under the guise of public order. Crandall's fight became

a defining moment in the state's progress towards equal civil rights. Today, her statue, alongside one of her Black students, stands proudly in the state capitol.

During the antebellum period, Connecticut's cities became the stage for the nation's most powerful abolitionist voices. Frederick Douglass delivered multiple speeches in Hartford, including one in 1843 at Talcott Street Church, in which the renowned activist called for the immediate abolition of slavery, drawing mixed audiences and galvanizing local activism;[25] and, abolitionists like Simeon Jocelyn and Lewis Tappan formed the Amistad Committee in the Hartford Old State House in an effort to defend the 53 Mende people who seized control of the Spanish schooner *La Amistad*, on which they were being illegally transported as slaves, off the New London coast in 1839. Moreover, Connecticut served as a stop on the Underground Railroad for freedom seekers en route to Canada, with key stations in Farmington, New Britain, and Middletown.[26]

During the twentieth century, the Great Migration brought thousands of Black families from the American South to Connecticut's industrial centers in search of economic opportunity.[27] Many of these families, settling in cities such as Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven, found employment in factories, munitions plants, and shipyards. Yet, often, they faced discrimination, sanctioned via housing segregation, redlining practices, and employment barriers, which confined Black families to particular neighborhoods and limited opportunities for wealth accumulation.

Despite these barriers, Black residents built strong civic, religious, and social institutions. Churches, fraternal organizations, and local chapters of national organizations, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), became vital centers of political leadership and advocacy during the twentieth-century civil rights movement. Collectively, these developments reinforced Connecticut's contradictory identity as a state shaped by both racial oppression and a forge for early Black political resistance.

Black Communities and Political Representation in Connecticut

The growth in political representation among Connecticut's Latino population parallels that of the state's Black communities. As another historically marginalized group, Black communities in Connecticut also have deep and enduring roots in the state's history, which trace back to the seventeenth century, when enslaved Africans were brought to the Connecticut colony. Today, Black residents constitute approximately 11 percent of Connecticut's population, with the largest Black communities in Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven. These urban centers have become hubs of Black political leadership, electing mayors, state legislators, and local officials who have helped shape state politics. Hartford, for example, has consistently elected Black representatives to the General Assembly, who have played significant roles in shaping housing and healthcare policy, education reforms, and criminal justice initiatives.

The formation of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus (BPRC) in the Connecticut General Assembly in 1976 formalized and amplified this growing influence. The caucus serves as a unified voice for Black and Latino legislators, advocating for equity in education and health care access, economic opportunity, and criminal justice reform. The BPRC reflects the overlapping challenges that faced Black and Latino communities, while also demonstrating how coalition-building among marginalized groups has reshaped Connecticut's political landscape.[28] Today, Black legislators, community leaders, and voters continue to expand their political presence, ensuring that the state's policymaking institutions more fully reflect Connecticut's demographic diversity and its enduring struggles over equality and representation.

Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities in Connecticut

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities have a long history and deep, though often overlooked, roots in Connecticut. Some of the earliest AAPI connections to the state date back to the nineteenth century, including Native Hawaiian and Polynesian crewmen who worked on New England whaling ships and Chinese students who came to Connecticut for education. For example, Yung Wing became the first Chinese student to

graduate from an American university when he earned his degree from Yale in 1854. He later helped establish the Chinese Educational Mission in Hartford, bringing young Chinese students to the United States in the 1870s, and made Connecticut an important site of early transnational Asian American history.

The anti-Asian sentiments of the 19th century, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, drastically prevented Asian migration into the United States. Although this exclusionary law was not repealed until 1943, and anti-Asian sentiment still persisted, Asian Americans meaningfully contributed to the state's growth. Over time, Asian immigration to Connecticut grew through multiple pathways, including education, professional employment, refugee resettlement, family reunification, and the growth of universities. The need for a larger workforce in the health care, technology, and financial industries led to both immigration and migration of Asians to the state. After the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed many earlier restrictions on Asian immigration, Connecticut's AAPI population became larger and more diverse.[29] This growth included Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Pakistani, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, Japanese, Thai, Tibetan, and Pacific Islander communities.

By the 1990s, the state saw the growth of important community organizations and institutional spaces, including the establishment of the Asian American studies programs at the University of Connecticut. Today, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are one of Connecticut's fastest-growing communities. The Asian-only population now makes up about 5.5 percent of the state's population, and the community's growth reflects both Connecticut's changing immigrant population and the expanding political, cultural, and economic contributions of AAPI residents across the state.[30]

AAPI growth has also translated into more visible forms of civic and political engagement. One important example is "Make Us Visible Connecticut," a grassroots organization formed in 2021 in response to rising anti-Asian hate and violence. Led largely by parents, students, teachers, and community advocates, the organization pushed for the inclusion of Asian American and Pacific Islander history in Connecticut's public school curriculum through letter-writing, calls to lawmakers, public

advocacy, and coalition-building.[31] These efforts led to funding and instruction in Asian American and Pacific Islander history, with Governor Ned Lamont signing the legislation into law in May 2022. The law allocated state funding to help local and regional school boards develop curriculum on Asian American history and contributions to the United States. Make Us Visible Connecticut's advocacy shows how AAPI political engagement in the state extends beyond elections to include education policy, public memory, and the struggle over whose histories are recognized in schools. It also demonstrates how grassroots organizing by racial minority communities can shape state policy through coalition building, bipartisan appeals, and locally grounded claims about representation. Still, AAPI representation lags Black and Latino representatives in the CGA. Currently, there are only 7 members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Issues Caucus.[32]

2.4 Industry in Connecticut

Connecticut's Industrial Development

Connecticut has a long history of industrial might. From its early agrarian economy to the manufacturing boom of the nineteenth century, the state has a rich history of innovation, production, and industrial excellence. Situated between New York and Boston, Connecticut benefited greatly from the commercial success of Atlantic Ocean trade networks, via which colonial merchants exported furs, agricultural produce, timber, and iron to international markets in exchange for British finished goods and enslaved Africans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[33]

By the nineteenth century, Connecticut had become a center of industrial manufacturing, producing textiles, firearms, and metal goods made from brass, iron, and silver.[34] In Hartford, firearms manufacturers pioneered mass-production processes later adopted by a variety of other industries, and the city quickly emerged as a center of production. During the twentieth century, like many of the Northeastern states, Connecticut transitioned toward a more diversified, post-industrial economy centered on services, finance, and advanced manufacturing.[35]



Image 2.1: Wooden packing crates used for transporting goods, c. 1920–1950, displayed in the Museum of Connecticut History.

Today, Connecticut remains an economic stronghold of the Northeast corridor.[36] It ranks among the fastest-growing economies on the East Coast, driven primarily by growth in manufacturing, finance, and information sectors. Financial services and insurance remain among Connecticut's largest industries, contributing approximately $38.5 billion to the state's real gross domestic product. Earning its reputation as the "Insurance Capital of the World" more than 180 years ago, Connecticut has long served as a national hub for the financial services and insurance industry; with the capital city of Hartford anchoring this sector, supporting tens of thousands of insurance-related jobs and thousands of establishments statewide.[37] Similarly, southeastern Connecticut operates as the mainstay of advanced manufacturing, particularly in defense and maritime production, exporting billions of dollars in goods annually and securing billions of dollars more in federal defense contracts, generating significant corporate tax revenue for the state.[38] This concentration of economic activity not only drives wealth creation in Southwestern Connecticut but also reinforces Connecticut's dual identity as both a center of economic innovation and a commuter-

linked extension of the New York metropolitan economy.

Collectively, insurance and financial services represent one of the most powerful engines of Connecticut's gross domestic product, generating billions of dollars in revenue, sustaining tens of thousands of high-paying jobs, and reinforcing the state's position within the economic infrastructure of the northeast. However, as traditional manufacturing and commercial sectors left Connecticut's cities, a growing share of the state's economic burden began to shift. In the mid-1950s, the urban cores of many Connecticut cities, once animated by the economic success of these industries, were in decline.

Aging infrastructure, disinvestment, and sustained suburbanization drew middle-class residents away from city centers in search of improved housing, schools, and economic opportunity. Businesses needing new or expanded facilities followed this outward migration, looking toward the urban suburbs. For example, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company relocated its downtown Hartford headquarters north to Bloomfield into a newly-constructed complex in 1957, as part of a larger migration of corporate and professional employment to the state's suburban areas.[39] Other insurance and financial services companies followed this example, moving operations jobs from downtown Hartford to a suburban location, often citing lower operating expenses, lower taxes, more open space for employee amenities, a less stressful commute, and free parking for employees.

Manufacturing companies with technologically-outdated urban facilities flocked to new, cleaner, more energy efficient, cheaper to operate and maintain, and more technologically advanced suburban or out-of-state locations, leaving older, outdated factories in portions of Connecticut's industrial cities in economic distress. The relocation of insurance and financial services operations from cities to suburbs began to reverse in the late 2000s. Three examples that occurred in the Hartford area include Aetna closing its Middletown facility and relocating 3,600 workers to Hartford in 2010, The Hartford closing its Simsbury campus and moving 1,500 employees to Hartford in 2013, and The Hartford selling its Windsor facility in 2022 and moving 500 employees to Hartford. This Windsor facility was originally opened in 2008.

Connecticut's New Wave of Industry

As the industrial sectors in Connecticut cities contracted, the hospitals and colleges (see Figure 2.5) emerged as stabilizing institutional anchors in many of these cities. Virtually all of Connecticut acute care hospitals and its major colleges and universities are located in cities. The hospitals and healthcare industry employs approximately one in eight Connecticut workers, making it one of the fastest-growing employment sectors in the state. Connecticut supports this workforce pipeline through fifteen schools of nursing and three medical schools, including those affiliated with Yale University and the University of Connecticut. Moreover, growing demand for healthcare services, driven primarily by demographic changes, population aging, and advances in medical technology, has rendered the industry increasingly important to Connecticut's economy. In 2022, hospital and health systems collectively generated nearly $40 billion annually for the state's economy through direct employment, research activity, and related service industries, further underscoring healthcare's central economic role.[40]

The expansion of the education sector has similarly shaped Connecticut's mid-twentieth-century economic landscape, with higher education alone (14 nonprofit, independent colleges and universities) generating an estimated $19.3 billion in total economic impact in 2023, and collectively employing more than 31,400 people, according to a recent study by the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC).[41] These institutions serve as magnets attracting students, faculty, alumni, and tourists to the state, who spend money locally, as well as federal funding for research grants, boosting local economies across Connecticut.

2.5 Connecticut's Economic Landscape

Few states in the nation experience inequality as that which occurred within Connecticut's borders, where extreme wealth and extreme poverty coexist in startling proximity. Connecticut's average salaries, for instance, rank among the highest in the nation. As of 2025, Connecticut residents' average salaries rank eighth nationally, with nearly half of households earning more than $100,000 per year, and one in five earning more than $200,000 annually.[42] Wages of Connecticut residents grew by one and a

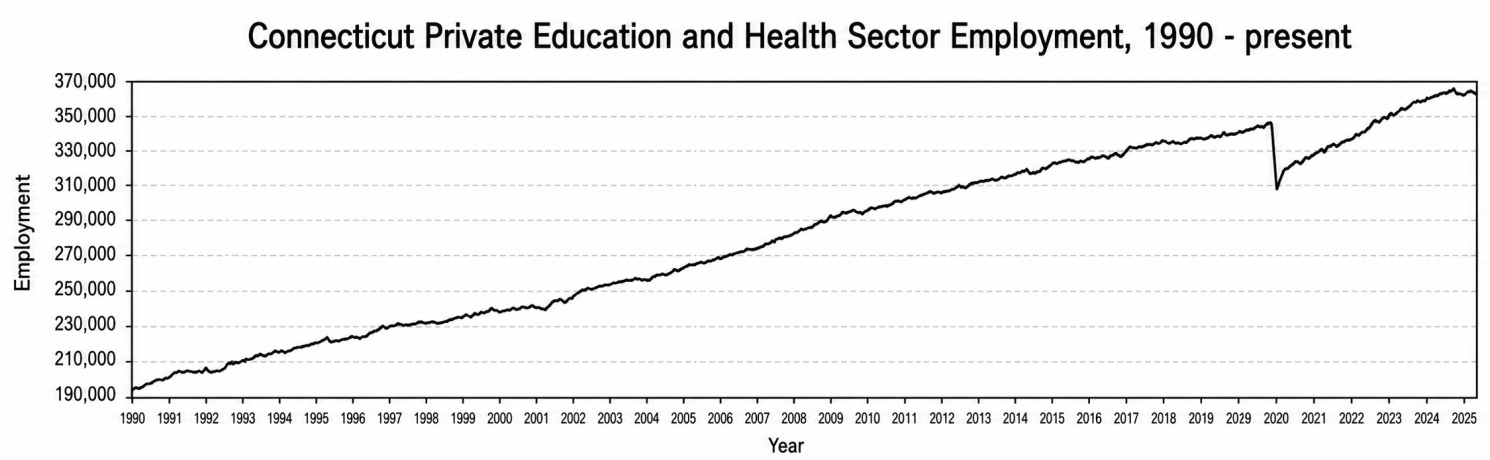


Figure 2.5: Employment Trends of Education and Health Sectors in Connecticut, 1990 to Present. Connecticut Department of Labor.

half percentage points in the prior year.[43] Moreover, extreme wealth in the state has yielded over 130,000 millionaire households, ranking among the top in the nation for the highest concentration of millionaires per capita.[44] However, poverty rates simultaneously rose more than 40 percent, driven by the growing cost of living and the expiration of key federal programs, such as food assistance, healthcare coverage, and school grants.[45] Thus, despite the state's overall affluence, a record-high proportion of Connecticut households (approximately 581,000) cannot afford a basic "survival" budget,[46] meaning a growing proportion of Connecticut families cannot afford to pay for their essential, non-negotiable monthly expenses necessary to live and work, such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, healthcare, technology, and taxes.[47]

The statewide poverty rate is about 10 percent (below the national average of 12.5 percent) but this masks intense localized poverty. Childhood poverty rates in the largest cities are severe: 35 percent in Waterbury, 32.4 percent in Hartford, 31.9 percent in Bridgeport, and 24.9 percent in New Haven. These communities are majority Black and Latino, and the concentration of poverty there reflects a self-reinforcing cycle: property-tax-based school funding, limited economic mobility, and housing segregation.

Income and Wealth Inequality

Connecticut consistently surpasses national averages on measures of income inequality. It historically ranks among the five most unequal states in the nation (Figure 2.6). According to 2023 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Connecticut ranks second among the fifty states on the Gini coefficient, the principal measure of income inequality, narrowly behind New York.[48] This level of inequality reflects the concentration of extreme wealth, as well as high annual income, of residents living in southwest Connecticut (particularly, Fairfield County) and affluent suburbs near Hartford, in contrast with the economic distress of cities such as Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven.[49] Thus, while Connecticut's overall poverty rate is lower than that of many states, income disparities within the state are stark: the state's top one percent earn more annually than the bottom ninety-nine percent of residents by more than thirty-seven times. This gap signals not only income inequality but also systemic barriers in the Connecticut economy, in which generational wealth accumulates in high-income areas while leaving lower- and middle-income residents behind.

Connecticut's geography further intensifies this contrast. In larger states such as New York, concentrations of wealth and poverty are often separated by substantial geographic distances; in Connecticut, however, extreme affluence and poverty frequently exist within only a few miles of one another, rendering inequality highly visible and spatially compressed (Figure 2.7). "You have Greenwich and New Canaan physically quite close to Bridgeport," said Connecticut Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney, a New Haven Democrat, in an interview with Alex Putterman of the *CT Mirror*. "Whereas they might as well be on a different planet economically."[50]

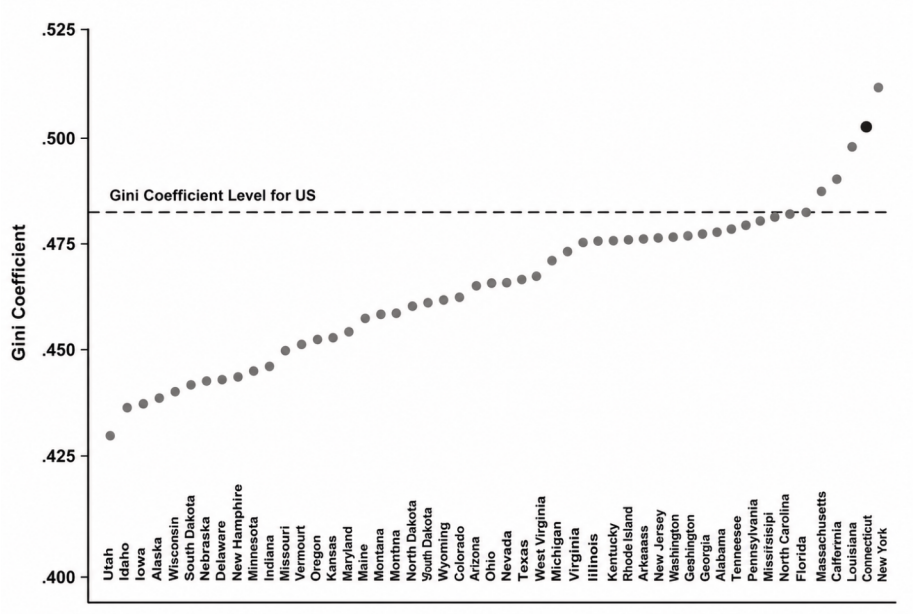


Figure 2.6: Pre-Tax Income Inequality by State, 2024. Data from the US Census Bureau.

The greater Hartford area is especially emblematic of these broader economic inequalities, concentrated in pockets across the state. Two of the state's five poorest ZIP codes, in Hartford's North End, with average incomes of $32,000 and $38,000, abut one of the area's wealthiest ZIP codes, a West Hartford neighborhood with an average income of $229,000.[51] Income levels in Hartford, adjusted for inflation, have remained virtually unchanged since 2000, despite growth in its neighboring suburbs.[52] Thus, in 2023, Hartford's median household income sat nearly three times lower than that of its westward neighbor. The persistence of low-income levels in its capital city underscores how structural forces have entrenched poverty in Connecticut's urban sectors, even as the state has continued to accumulate wealth in recent decades.

Driven by high costs of living and a shortage of affordable housing, economic disparities in Connecticut are stratified uniformly across racial lines.[53] In fact, Connecticut contains one of the greatest *racial* wealth and income gaps in the nation: the average annual earnings for white residents are approximately 57 percent higher than for Black residents and

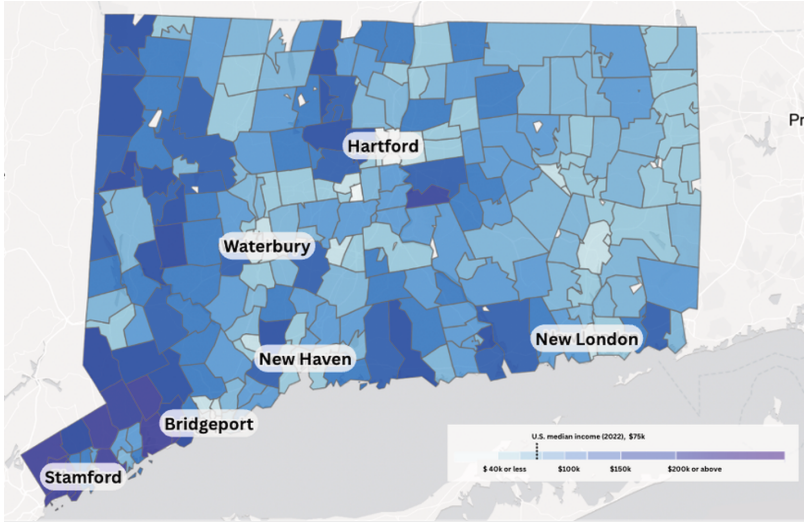


Figure 2.7: Average Income of Taxpayers in Connecticut.
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2023

75 percent higher than for Latino residents.[54] Furthermore, white households earned more than $103,000 annually, while Latino households made just over $60,000 (as of 2024), and Black households averaged less than $63,000 annually. The state’s municipal tax structure, which relies on local property taxes to finance public education and other municipal services, compounds these inequalities. Property values, reflecting the state’s history of exclusionary zoning, redlining, and discriminatory housing practices, therefore generate greater tax investment for wealthier, predominantly white suburbs and further disadvantage predominantly Black and Latino urban communities.[55] Consequently, Latino and Black residents experience poverty rates of 21.4 percent and 17.3 percent, respectively, compared to the fewer than 10 percent of White and Asian residents who live in poverty. These racial disparities in income, wealth, and poverty create a self-reinforcing cycle of economic stratification, in which racialized patterns of residential segregation translate directly into educational inequality, housing insecurity, and limited upward mobility in predominantly Black and Brown cities, such as Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven.

2.6 Urban Versus Suburban and Rural Connecticut

A political adage in Connecticut holds that the central political divide in the state is not along partisan lines, of Republican versus Democrat, but between cities and suburbs. Indeed, Connecticut's internal political dynamics are contoured by sociocultural divides between urban, rural, and suburban areas –– divides that mirror patterns of disparity in income, race, economic health, and opportunity. These spatial divisions shape not only partisan affiliations and legislative outcomes, but also the distribution of state resources and access to opportunity.

Unlike states organized around a single metropolitan core, Connecticut's population is distributed across several mid-sized cities, including Bridgeport, Stamford, New Haven, Hartford, and Waterbury. As such, Connecticut ranks among the most urbanized states on a per capita basis; approximately 88 percent of its population lives in areas classified as urban.[56] A majority of Connecticut towns (approximately 55 percent, or 93 of Connecticut's 169 towns), however, are classified as rural. Compared to other states in the region, Connecticut resembles Massachusetts and Rhode Island, with urbanization rates of 92 and 90 percent, respectively, more closely than it does New Hampshire (60 percent), Vermont (38.9 percent), or Maine (38.7 percent).[57]

Connecticut's unique construction is distinguished by preeminent racial and economic segregation embedded within its metropolitan regions, rather than by its urbanization per se. Mid-twentieth-century suburbanization, or "white flight" to the suburbs, affected the concentration of poverty and communities of color in Connecticut's central cities, while homogenizing the surrounding towns. The construction of federal interstate highways in the 1950s and large-scale urban renewal projects in cities such as Hartford and New Haven in the 1960s further enabled suburban out-migration. Highway projects, often routed through or along the borders of predominantly Black and immigrant neighborhoods, displaced residents and fragmented community networks. At the same time, federally subsidized mortgages and the expansion of suburban infrastructure enabled many working- and middle-class families to relocate to suburban municipalities.[58] Black residents and low-income households, by contrast, often endured discriminatory lending practices

and exclusionary zoning barriers that limited suburban access, reinforcing patterns of racialized residential concentration in urban cores and few select suburbs.

The state's municipal system also shifted affluence outward, further institutionalizing these divides by allowing suburban jurisdictions to collect property taxes from these homeowners and invest the tax revenue to fund schools, parks, social services and other amenities primarily for the benefit of the people living in these towns. Moreover, strict land-use regulations in many suburbs, including large-lot requirements and prohibitions or limits on multifamily housing, prevented the development of affordable housing and the encroachment of industrial and commercial land uses, establishing these communities as exclusive residential enclaves. These land-use laws constrained socioeconomic integration while stabilizing high property values and strong tax bases in many suburban towns. The Governors and members of the General Assembly serving during this time were complicit in the creation and fortification of this inequitable system, since the state eliminated the county government system and held dominion over municipalities, as all municipal authority was derived from state statutes. In essence, the state set the ground rules that enabled this system to thrive.

In contrast to the suburbs, older industrial cities with historically mixed residential, commercial, and manufacturing land uses experienced deindustrialization and capital flight. So, as manufacturing declined, municipalities such as Hartford and New Haven were left with shrinking tax bases, vacant industrial sites, aging infrastructure, and a deteriorating housing stock. Because municipal revenue capacity in Connecticut is inextricably bound to property values, economic restructuring translated directly into fiscal stress for cities and fiscal resilience for suburbs.

This economic gap illustrates a broader transformation in Connecticut's economic geography: from industrial dynamism to a service-based commuter economy, where income is high but unevenly shared. The "tale of two Connecticuts" narrative—one prosperous and suburban, the other urban and struggling—remains a defining feature of the state's social landscape, fueling deep disparities in housing, education, and opportunity, making inequality a defining issue across the state. *Connecticut Metro Patterns* by Orfield and Luce argues that cities are struggling financially while suburban areas are becoming wealthier, creating greater political and

social divisions. “Connecticut’s central cities are severely stressed. These places must provide for their great social needs with tax resources less than half the statewide average and growing at one-eighth of the average rate.”[59] Many of the financial difficulties urban areas face stem from an insufficient tax funding required to adequately support public services in those areas. Historical policies of redlining and zoning laws further perpetuated economic inequality in Connecticut by concentrating poverty in urban areas, locking people of color out of wealth-building opportunities (e.g., homeownership and employment), and maintaining segregated, affluent suburbs, leading to disparities in schools, jobs, and health outcomes that persist today.[60]

Today, racial segregation in Connecticut remains spatially concentrated in urban areas. Approximately half of the state’s nonwhite residents live in just ten towns, while nearly 30 towns have more than 90 percent White residents (Figure 2.8). Moreover, U.S. Census data shows that bordering towns often experience segregation most acutely. For example, 67 percent of Waterbury’s population is non-white, but neighboring towns Wolcott, Plymouth, Watertown, Thomaston, and Middlebury all have non-white populations of less than 15 percent. These demographic disparities reflect the cumulative effects of housing policy, zoning practices, and uneven access to economic opportunity, illustrating the importance of municipal borders. The proximity of racially distinct communities—often only a few miles apart—makes segregation highly visible while simultaneously entrenching structural inequality. In this way, racial residential concentration is not merely a demographic outcome but a central organizing feature of Connecticut’s political economy.

Educational Inequality in Connecticut

Connecticut has consistently been ranked as one of the most highly educated states in the nation, ranking second behind Massachusetts for the most educated state. As reported by the Hartford Business Journal, Connecticut has “the second highest percentage of 18-to-24-year-olds enrolled in post-secondary institutions, at 49.6 percent,” and, from 2011 to 2021, the graduation rate has increased for high school students to 89.6 percent.[61] However, education within the state is not equal. Gaps exist

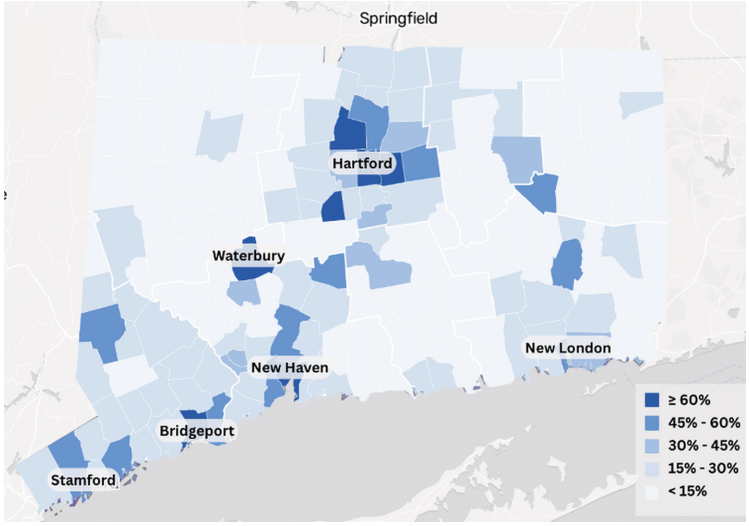


Figure 2.8: Percent of Nonwhite Residents, by Town. Source: 2020 U.S. Census.

in the Connecticut public high school system across racial demographics. The high school graduation rate for Latino students, for example, is 76 percent compared to 92 percent among White students. This disparity between White and Latino students in Connecticut also exists in standardized testing and college entrance exams.[62] These markers of educational inequality are especially evident in urban centers like Hartford, where 26 percent of residents aged 25 or older have not attained a high school diploma or equivalent—more than triple the statewide rate of 8 percent. Equitable schooling is one of Connecticut's most pressing issues, despite being such a highly educated state. As Hartford exemplifies, the resources and achievements are not shared equally throughout the state.

Despite statewide successes, the Connecticut school system harbors significant achievement gaps. The existence of this gap was evidenced by an event in 2024, when the *Connecticut Mirror* published a story about Aleysha Ortiz, a 19-year-old Hartford Public High School graduate who could not read or write despite spending 12 years in the city's public school system. Ortiz, who immigrated from Puerto Rico at age five, told Hartford's City Council that the school system "stole [her] education." Because she could not write, she composed her speech using the talk-to-text function on her phone and memorized it word for word. Ortiz's story exposed an alarming convergence of disability neglect, linguistic barriers, and

institutional apathy. Diagnosed with ADHD and a speech impediment in childhood, she never received reading instruction or occupational therapy services guaranteed under her Individualized Education Plan (IEP). For years, she was advanced from grade to grade through a combination of social promotion and administrative avoidance—a pattern that, according to district employees interviewed by the *Connecticut Mirror*, was not unique to her case.[63] This story, while extraordinary in its detail, is emblematic of structural failures that reach far beyond a single district. It highlights the consequences of underfunded special education services, chronic staffing shortages, and inadequate oversight, all of which are most acute in Connecticut's poorest urban areas. Her case also reveals how language barriers and systemic bias can silence families of color in educational decision-making. For many policymakers, Ortiz's experience reignited debates about equity, accountability, and the enduring gap between Connecticut's reputation for academic excellence and the reality of its most vulnerable students.

Connecticut has experienced demographic shifts in recent years, slowly becoming more diverse, driven by the state's growing Latino population. Connecticut is also a wealthy and educated state, consistently ranked among the most educated in the nation. Despite this, Connecticut has some of the worst income and education inequality between different racial and ethnic groups and its urban centers compared to the surrounding suburbs. Hartford is emblematic of the struggles the state confronts. There is a significant difference between Connecticut's urban centers and the statewide averages in income, education, and racial makeup. These demographic patterns present a challenge for the legislature to balance the needs of an increasingly diverse and unequal state.

2.7 Conclusion

According to Judge Robert Satter:

> A state defines the legislature that it governs. Its fundamental and often unique characteristics determine the issue that its legislature must face.[64]

In addition to the unique character of the state General Assembly, Connecticut's distinctive physiognomy includes its location in the northeast and along Long Island Sound; its small size and dense population; the diversity of its people; and the distress of its central cities. These features "generate grist for Connecticut's legislative agenda."

Connecticut's landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of demographics, economic factors, history, and cultural dynamics. Despite being one of the wealthiest and most educated states in the country, Connecticut has one of the highest levels of income inequality. The state is known for its strong insurance and financial, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors, among others. However, Connecticut's heavy reliance on a commuter economy, where many residents commute to New York City or Boston for work, presents serious challenges. While this boosts individual household incomes, it limits local consumer spending, weakens the in-state job market, and reduces tax revenue. The high cost of living limits affordable housing, and aging infrastructure further complicates efforts to retain workers and attract new residents.

A strong divide exists between wealthy suburban communities, white working-class rural areas, and struggling urban centers, which is reflected in politics. Urban areas generally support Democratic policies focused on social investment and public infrastructure, while rural regions lean more conservative, emphasizing smaller government and local sovereignty. Suburban communities, once Republican, have shifted blue in recent years, aligning more with urban voters and increasing Democratic influence in statewide elections.

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CHAPTER 3

A Brief History of Constitutional and Party Politics in Connecticut

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3.1 Introduction

CONNECTICUT HAS LONG BEEN NICKNAMED THE "Land of Steady Habits." Rooted in the state's religious traditions and political stability, the moniker has become emblematic of Connecticut's historical character. The most steadfast of the state's features, however, has been its capacity for change. This dynamism is particularly true of the state's political institutions and policymaking landscape. This chapter provides an overview of party dynamics in Connecticut, with a focus on the historical role of political parties in the Connecticut General Assembly. In examining the changing political complexion of Connecticut, this chapter presents a large body of evidence charting the state's eventual emergence as a stronghold of liberal politics in the U.S. partisan landscape. In particular, it discusses the nascence of the state's modern party structure following the reapportionment of the state legislature in 1965, and the political culture of the General Assembly today, shaped by nearly three decades of Democratic majorities.

3.2 The Founding of the Connecticut Colony

Native communities had inhabited Connecticut (originally spelled as "Quinnehtukqut," the Mohegan word for "Beside the Long Tidal River") for approximately 11,000 years before colonies or statehood.[1] In 1614, Dutch explorer Adriaen Block sailed up the Connecticut River north of present-day Hartford to a point now known as the Enfield Rapids. In 1621, the Dutch government chartered the West India Company to establish trading posts primarily to purchase beaver pelts from the indigenous peoples. One such post, known as the House of Hope, was established on the Connecticut River at the mouth of the Little River in Hartford. Another post was set up at the mouth of the Housatonic River, and a warehouse was built in Old Saybrook. Over time, the once-plentiful beaver disappeared from the area.

Puritans from the Massachusetts Bay colony occupied the future sites of Windsor and Wethersfield beginning in the early 1630s. Settlers established a fort in Old Saybrook at the mouth of the Connecticut River in 1635, and Thomas Hooker and his party arrived in Hartford in 1636. A Puritan congregation led by John Davenport established New Haven as a separate colony in 1638.



Image 3.1: "The destruction of the Pequots and their fort near Stonington (Connecticut) by the English colonists under the command of Captain John Mason, May 1637," from the Public Domain

Tensions between Dutch traders and English settlers escalated quickly into the Pequot War in 1636. By 1638, English settlers and their allies from the Narragansett and Mohegan nations defeated the Pequot tribe and their Dutch allies. The Treaty of Hartford of 1638, negotiated by delegates from the major sovereignties of the Connecticut region, formally ended the two-year war. In accordance with the treaty, which stated, "after they, the Pequots, shall be divided as aforesaid shall no more be called Pequots but Narragansetts and Mohegans…,"[2] the Pequot tribe was formally abolished, their cultural identity eradicated. Furthermore, the Treaty of Hartford established the English's right to the sole claim of land in the region, cementing the Connecticut River valley colonies' claim of legitimacy and sovereignty in the region. In the following decades, the colony grew, absorbing the New Haven and Saybrook colonies and negotiating its borders with New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island; and, by the American Revolution, there were about 200,000 Connecticut residents, plus members of several tribes.[3]

Early Government in Connecticut

The Connecticut Colony was originally governed by the Massachusetts Bay Commission until the patent of the commission expired in 1636, when it was replaced with an elected General Court, "consisting of six magistrates and three members 'committees' from the communities of Hartford, Windsor, and Wethersfield."[4] Under the Court, towns had no formal instrument of government, and it was soon replaced by a more formal body politic in 1639, known as the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut.

The Fundamental Orders, adopted in 1639, were a civil covenant drafted by Puritan settlers that established a system of self-governance for the river towns of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield.[5] Expanding on the simple magistrate system under which the towns had previously cooperated, the Orders created a formal instrument of government vested with the authority to make laws, levy taxes, and govern, which provided for the annual assembly of legislators and the election of a governor in each town. The Orders, replacing the General Court's committees with deputies, established that each town would elect three or four deputies for six-month terms, which would sit alongside magistrates.[6] Although the magistrates and deputies voted separately, in 1645, it was decreed that a measure had to have the approval of both groups in order to pass legislation.

By 1650, the Connecticut General Court adopted the colony's first formal codification of Connecticut laws, known as the "Code of 1650," which established a formal legal structure for the colony. It established foundational rights, such as protection against arbitrary punishment and the preservation of liberty and property. Similarly, it codified strict moral laws known as early "blue laws," which prohibited heresy, idleness, and serious crimes. Statutes, in line with the colony's Puritan values, also enforced religious observance and moral behavior on Sundays.

In 1662, King Charles II issued an official charter to Connecticut, which lowered the number of deputies per town to no more than two and joined the New Haven Colony with the Connecticut Colony. The practical effect of the 1662 charter was minimal, however, and Connecticut continued to operate much as it had under the Fundamental Orders. Two years later, Charles's successor, James II, sought to incorporate Connecticut into a single colony extended from the Delaware River to the Connecticut River.



Image 3.2: An advertisement critiquing Connecticut's "Blue Laws," published in Reverend Samuel Peters's General History of Connecticut. Connecticut University Library.

The Crown's effort failed soon after the deposition of King James II in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. However, according to some historical accounts, Connecticut officials stowed the charter (Image 3.3) in an oak tree to prevent its seizure by royal authorities.

The Charter of 1672 significantly granted colonists in Connecticut "all liberties and immunities" afforded to English citizens. It also changed the name of the legislature to the General Assembly. Nearly forty years later, in 1698, the General Assembly "divided itself into its current bicameral form, with the twelve assistants [replacing the six magistrates] as the Council," which would later become the Senate and the deputies as the House of Representatives, which began electing the Speaker to preside over it.[7]

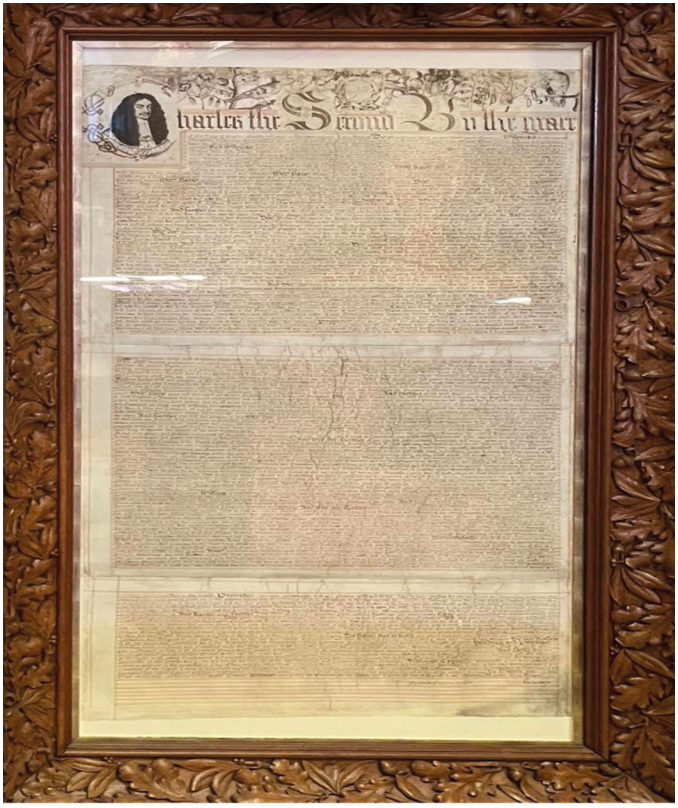


Image 3.3: The Charter of 1662, shown in the Connecticut State Library in Hartford. Photo Credit: Erin Barbakoff

Early Political Influences

Its early colonial era, extending from the mid-17th century to the eve of American independence, was fundamentally shaped by religious orthodoxy. The Fundamental Orders had the dual purpose of institutionalizing the tenets of theocratic governance in the early Connecticut political system. Pursuant to the Orders, political membership in Connecticut was exclusive to parishioners of the Congregational Church, thereby enforcing political homogeneity in the newly formed polity. As observed by former President John Adams:

"The state of Connecticut has always been governed by an aristocracy,

> more decisively than the empire of Great Britain is. Half a dozen, or, at most, a dozen families, have controlled that country when a colony, as well as since it has been a state."[8]

Political power during this period, conferred exclusively among the property-owning elite, was reserved for a small circle of conservative elite known as the Standing Order. Accordingly, the government in Connecticut was relatively stable from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth century. Politicians were uniformly members of the Congregational Church, and governors were re-elected, oftentimes more than once. Yale College, established in 1701 as a Congregational institution, produced the intellectuals and ministers who inherited political influence within Connecticut's Standing Order, helping maintain Puritan orthodoxy in the state's political leadership. To some degree, the Congregational Church and its members were the de facto first majority political party for the state. Political power sat firmly in the hand of Congregationalists.

In 1801, an article in the *Connecticut Courant* written under the pseudonym "The Lover of Old Steady Habits," described the apprentice system as a weeding-out process which curated political candidates from "men [of] fair character, whose lives were free from vices, who were attached to the established systems of the State, who revered, and cherished its civil, moral, and religious institutions."[9] In addition, the Congregational Church was the "official" church of Connecticut. Any new town, therefore, had to have a Congregational church and a minister; Connecticut citizens also had to pay taxes to support the operations of the Congregational Church.

While the General Assembly was the formal authority for the state's governance, the Standing Order held the real social and political power in Connecticut during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This elite class, comprised almost exclusively of members of the Federalist Party, was the "nexus of political, clerical, and social power" in Connecticut's aristocratic political system.[10] This insular pool of wealthy white Protestant men, combined with the custom of elected officials pursuing lengthy terms, led to the frequent re-election of incumbents, creating a distinct legacy of political stability — a legacy which systemically excluded the voice of black, brown, and indigenous Americans and women.[11]

The Rise of the Two-Party System

Puritanism continued to animate Connecticut's political landscape for decades; however, national political shifts began to undermine the Congregational Church's stronghold on the state's political institutions. Beginning in the 1770s, Connecticut's Standing Order came under increased attack, as the issue of British support engendered political division.[12] The "Whigs," or those who opposed British rule, served as a voice of dissent in Connecticut politics and advocated for colonial resistance as revolutionary sentiment grew. In 1774, despite the conservative political landscape, the Whigs successfully organized resistance to the Coercive Acts, reflecting the first enduring anti-establishment campaign in Connecticut's political history.

Between 1780 and 1800, numerous cases of anti-establishment politics would emerge in Connecticut, "generally centered on issues of nationalism, exclusiveness, the limits of democracy, and the religious establishment."[13] These religious divisions, geographical splits, and economic divides manifested in the emergence of different political parties, such as the Jacksonian "Democrats" in 1828 and the "Know-Nothing" Party, which took control of the General Assembly in 1855. As the U.S. party system developed nationally in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Connecticut's party structure also formalized with the emergence of the conservative Federalist Party and the more egalitarian Democratic-Republican Party.

This two-party dynamic emerged as Connecticut's "Standing Order" lost its hegemony over the state's political apparatus. By the turn of the century, Connecticut's Congregationalist population comprised less than half of the state, due to the decline of the Congregational Church and the rise of various other Protestant denominations. However, the state's early political culture would continue to reflect deep ties to colonial traditions, namely those influenced by Puritan values and Congregationalism. Consequently, Connecticut remained a stronghold of the Federalist Party, a party centered on its support for a strong central government, commercial interests, and maintaining close ties with the Congregational Church, throughout the nineteenth century.

According to the Connecticut Historical Society curator Nancy Finlay, Ph.D., "in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the

Congregationalists remained in control of the state government, and the Congregational Church still dominated most aspects of civic life."[14] "Only a very small percentage of eligible voters turned out to vote in Connecticut's frequent elections, and they continued to support the Federalist Party, the party of the Standing Order, and the Congregationalists."[15] Thus, the Federalists were afforded significant control of the state legislature and the governor's office during this period. Moreover, "Newspapers such as the *Hartford Courant* promoted Federalist ideals, teachers taught Federalist propaganda in the classroom, and preachers extolled Federalism and the status quo from their pulpits."

A national shift in politics, however, brought on by the expansion of white male suffrage and the rise of the two-party system, introduced new ideas about equality and governance in Connecticut. The national amplification of these egalitarian values during the Jeffersonian Era challenged Connecticut's Federalist majority. Additionally, the Federalists' unpopular opposition to the Embargo Act of 1807, the War of 1812, and the anti-slavery movement gave rise to the party's eventual demise. This national decline of the Federalist Party came to a head in 1815, following



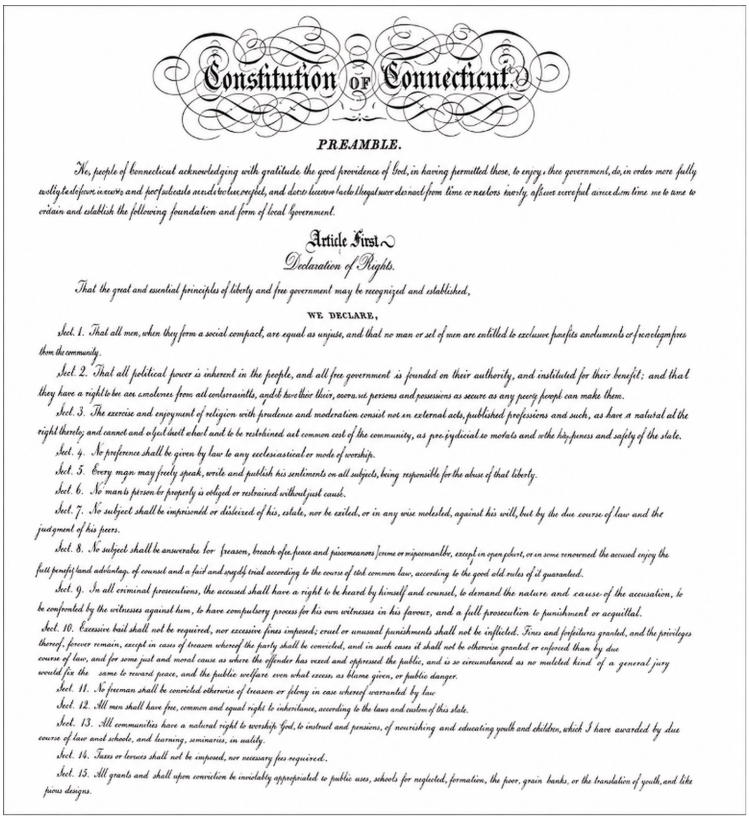
Image 3.4: A political cartoon from the 1816 U.S. presidential campaign following the Hartford Convention, illustrating the discredited Federalist Party as a devilish figure wearing the British Crown. Library of Congress.

the Hartford Convention of 1814, a covert meeting of Federalist delegates from Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, and held in Hartford, at which the representatives discussed their grievances with the Madison Administration, with the most extreme delegates suggesting that New England secede from the Union. The secrecy and unpopularity of the Hartford proceedings discredited the Federalist Party in Connecticut, whose representatives played a prominent role in the Convention, and contributed to the electoral success of the Toleration Party in 1817, marking the end of Federalist political dominance and ushering in a more representative government.

The Constitution of 1818

In the October 1818 gubernatorial election, Oliver Wolcott, Jr. of Litchfield, was elected to the state governorship as the leader of the Toleration Party, a third-party coalition consisting of Democratic-Republicans and Episcopalians, by a margin of 600 votes over the Federalist Party's incumbent, John Cotton Smith. Wolcott advocated for the modernization of the state's governmental machinery, including a reformation of the state constitution. Soon after Wolcott's election, the General Assembly passed an act securing equal rights, powers, and privileges to Christians of every denomination in the state; and in May 1818, the legislature called for a constitutional convention to meet the following month. The delegates chosen to represent their towns at the convention were representative of a range of political opinions and economic classes. On August 26, 1818, they gathered at the State House in Hartford to develop a new frame of government for the state, one that would effectuate the Jeffersonian Republicans' separation of church and state and compromise between the radical Tolerationists and conservative Federalists.

The new constitution, submitted to the voters by the 1818 Constitutional Convention, was ratified by the state's electorate by a narrow margin. A decisive and significant departure from the Royal Charter of 1662, the Constitution of 1818 established a formal Declaration of Rights recognizing "the great and essential principles of liberty and free government," including the equality of rights, religious freedom, freedom of speech and the press, the right to bear arms, and due process.



Constitution of Connecticut.

PREAMBLE.

We, people of Connecticut acknowledging with gratitude the good providence of God, in having permitted those, to enjoy, their government, do, in order more fully ratify and confirm it in words, and more particularly recognize, and declare the principles, and rights, which shall ever remain inviolate, agree, and ordain that no alteration or amendment shall be made in the same, except such as shall be approved by the people, in the manner hereinafter mentioned, and also reserving to the legislature at their discretion, at the session to be holden in May, 1819, and every ten years thereafter, to propose such alterations or amendments, as they may think proper, to the people, who shall have power to adopt or reject the same, at their annual meeting to be holden in April, next thereafter, as they shall judge for the best interest of the state, do ordain, and establish the following declaration of rights, and form of civil government.

Article First.

Declaration of Rights.

That the great and essential principles of liberty and free government may be recognized and established,

WE DECLARE,

Sect. 1. That all men, when they form a social compact, are equal in rights, and that no man or set of men are entitled to exclusive, separate emoluments or privileges from the community.

Sect. 2. That all political power is inherent in the people, and all free government is founded on their authority, and instituted for their benefit; and that they have a right to be governed by such rulers as they think best qualified for their safety and happiness, always having the power to alter their constitution, or form of government, whenever it may be necessary to their safety and happiness; but the right of the people to make and alter their constitution of government, is to be exercised in a manner prescribed by the constitution.

Sect. 3. The exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination, shall forever be free to all persons in this state, provided that the right hereby declared and established, shall not be construed to excuse acts of licentiousness, or to justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of this state.

Sect. 4. No preference shall be given by law to any religious society, or mode of worship.

Sect. 5. Every man may freely speak, write and publish his sentiments on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of that liberty.

Sect. 6. No man's person or property is to be seized or restrained, except by virtue of a judicial process.

Sect. 7. No person shall be imprisoned or detained for debt, after he shall have delivered all his estate, real and personal, to his creditors, in such manner as shall be prescribed by law.

Sect. 8. No person shall be compelled to give evidence against himself in a criminal prosecution.

Sect. 9. No person shall be arrested, detained or punished, except in cases clearly warranted by law.

Sect. 10. All persons shall be bailable by sufficient sureties, except for capital offences, when the proof is evident or the presumption great.

Sect. 11. No person shall be liable to be transported out of this state for any offence committed within the same.

Sect. 12. No ex post facto law, nor any law impairing the obligation of contracts, or making any irrevocable grant of special privileges, franchises or immunities, shall be passed by the general assembly.

Sect. 13. No person shall be attainted of treason or felony by the general assembly.

Sect. 14. No attainder shall work corruption of blood, nor forfeiture of estate.

Sect. 15. The property of no person shall be taken by the legislature, or any authority of the state, without just compensation therefor.

Image 3.5: The 1818 Constitution is displayed in the State Library.
Photo Credit: Erin Barbakoff

The 1818 Constitution also created a clearer separation of powers — similar in many respects to the federal model — by establishing independent spheres of constitutional authority for the state legislature, judiciary, and executive. The separation of executive and legislative authority in the 1818 Constitution was an important development, as it directly enhanced the leadership capacity of the Connecticut state governorship, whose authority had been largely subsumed by the General Assembly under the charter system. The Constitution established a stronger chief executive to correct longstanding legislative dominance. However, even after 1818, the General Assembly remained the preeminent element of state government. State governors were granted a substantial number of formal powers, including appointment authority and a qualified

veto, but in reality, few of these powers were fully exercised. And, for much of the nineteenth century, prestige and custom rather than legal authority proved to be the most important sources of gubernatorial authority.

In addition to structural reforms, the Constitution of 1818 established a system of near-universal suffrage for white males. Replacing the restrictive, property-based requirements that had operated under the Royal Charter of 1662, it extended voting rights to white males twenty-one years of age or older who had paid taxes, had lived in the state for at least six months, or had served in the state's militia. The 1818 Constitution thus extended voting rights to previously disenfranchised citizens. Despite this liberalization, the Constitution explicitly limited suffrage to white males, thereby embedding racial exclusion into the state's fundamental law. In this respect, Connecticut was less progressive than other New England states, where free Black men could vote under certain conditions during the early nineteenth century. As Liebman (2018) states, "States like Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey (which had previously authorized black voting) abandoned black voting in the nineteenth century by amending their constitutions."[16] The original 1818 qualifications prescribed in the Constitution were amended several times: adding a literacy requirement in 1855, adding "in the English language" to the literacy requirement in 1897, and striking out the word "white" in 1876. Only in 1920 would voting rights in Connecticut be extended to women, in compliance with the Nineteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

The Constitution of 1818's most significant departure from the Royal Charter of 1662, however, was the formal disestablishment of the Congregational Church, ending the formal and legal association between the state government and the church. As such, the Congregational Church ceased to be the official "state" church of Connecticut, cutting the long-established policy of supporting Congregationalism through local taxes. According to historian Jarvis Means Morse:

> "The new constitution swept away all special privileges of a religious nature, declaring that no preference should be given by law to any Christian sect or mode of worship. Congregationalism was thus put on a level with other faiths; its ministers could no longer get together to march in procession, drink rum, and decide who was to be governor of Connecticut."[17]

With the adoption of "the Constitution of 1818, democratic government, albeit in modified form, began its evolution within Connecticut politics."[18] Historians contend that "the 1818 Constitution was also in many ways Connecticut's first constitution in the true sense of the term. Unlike the Royal Charter and Fundamental Orders, the 1818 Constitution met what had become the "standards of constitutionalism in the United States."[19]

The movement toward Connecticut's 1818 Constitution unfolded not only as a legal transformation but as a reshaping of the state's political and institutional order. The Congregational Church had functioned as the state's de facto political establishment for decades, buttressing the Federalist Party, which had dominated the state's politics. But by the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Federalist Party was in a state of rapid decline, and, without the institutionalized support of the state Constitution, "party warfare was dying out altogether, as the Federalists continued to dwindle both in states and nation."[20] The Democratic-Republican Party, incarnating the politics of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, had by 1818 eclipsed the Federalist Party in popular support. In Connecticut, "Democratic-Republican candidates were being elected to the General Assembly and town councils, and with this partisan development a new and fresh perspective towards government emerged."[21]

Early Partisan Dynamics

Partisan dynamics evolved towards a two-party system after the adoption of the 1818 Constitution in Connecticut. The adoption of the new constitution rendered the rapid collapse of the Federalist "Standing Order" and the rise of competitive party dynamics. The Toleration Party, a coalition of Jeffersonian Republicans and non-Congressionalists, continued to gain popularity following the disestablishment of the Congregational Church. By the late 1820s, this coalition had evolved into the Jacksonian Democratic Party, while former Federalists merged into the Whig Party. Party competition in this era was defined largely by issues of federalism, with the Democratic Party advocating for states' rights and the Whig Party supporting a stronger federal government, economic modernization, and protective tariffs. However, this two-party binary soon developed into a multi-party arena, driven by sectionalism and the rise of the anti-slavery

movement. The 1840s introduced the Liberty Party to the state's partisan landscape, emerging from the abolitionist movement to challenge both major parties on the issue of slavery.

In the 1860 election, Connecticut was a key battleground state. Its politics were characterized by intense mobilization of the anti-slavery Republican Party, which had replaced the Whigs, and a Democratic Party, deeply divided over issues related to industry, labor, and the expansion of slavery. Central Connecticut was the birthplace of the "Wide Awakes," a youth organization that organized massive rallies for Abraham Lincoln and would later host the Republican presidential candidate as he campaigned across the United States. By the eve of the Civil War, Connecticut was a stronghold of the new, competitive Republican Party, and, upon his election, Lincoln received all six of Connecticut's electoral votes. According to the 1860 Connecticut Register, Lincoln also won the majority of the popular votes in Connecticut, amassing 43,798 votes. Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge received 16,106 votes, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas received 15,333 votes, and Constitutional Union candidate John Bell received 2,263 votes.[22] Bridgewater, Killingworth, Monroe, Portland, Weston, and Wolcott were the only Connecticut towns where Lincoln did not carry the popular vote.[23]

In Connecticut, the growth of the urban population during the 1830s and 1860s led to more frequent Democratic majorities in the state Senate, while the House remained strongly Republican. This divide in the General Assembly engendered legislative stagnation. In 1913, Governor Simeon Baldwin and Democratic leaders in the General Assembly took advantage of their rare majority in the Senate to pass the state's first Workers' Compensation Act. This aside, however, party politics in mid-twentieth-century Connecticut were dominated by a highly organized Republican machine, heavily influenced by state chairman J. Henry Roraback and Governor (and later U.S. Senator) Morgan G. Bulkeley. Republicans held practically all political offices in the state, save those few in the legislature granted to the Democrats by Roraback, who dominated the Connecticut legislature, picking candidates, making key committee assignments, setting legislative agendas, and dispensing patronage.[24]

3.3 Reapportionment in Connecticut

Malapportionment in Twentieth-Century Connecticut

According to Judge Robert Satter in *Under the Gold Dome*: "The reapportionment of 1965 was the watershed event that put into play forces that changed the character of the Connecticut General Assembly, the bright dividing line that separates the moribund legislature of the past from the vital body of today."[25] The Constitution of 1818 served as the supreme governing document for the state of Connecticut for a century and a half. Through periods of tumult and growth, the 1818 Constitution served as a pillar of stability for the state. Many of its provisions endured through the twentieth century, including those relating to legislative apportionment, which established equal representation for each town, regardless of population. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, "the growing population imbalance between Connecticut's urban and rural communities raised questions of fair legislative representation."[26] Population growth in Connecticut's urban centers far outpaced its sparsely populated rural towns, and heavily populated cities began to emerge along the southwestern corner and central corridor of the state. Legislative representation did not correspondingly increase, however, as the formula of one or two representatives per local community remained fixed regardless of the community's population growth.

Disproportionate legislative representation was characteristic of Connecticut politics during this era. The vote cast by a resident of a small, rural town held far more power than the vote cast by a resident of one of Connecticut's burgeoning cities, rendering individual voting power at the mercy of geography. By 1900, for instance, the city of New Haven, which had grown to 108,000 inhabitants, was allotted only two state representatives, while Union, with a population of 428, also had two representatives.[27] Recognizing the democratic implications of this political disproportionality, a constitutional convention convened in 1902 to reapportion representation in the General Assembly; however, voters rejected the proposal, leaving the existing structure intact.

By the mid-twentieth century, malapportionment in Connecticut had rendered the 1818 arrangement of political representation increasingly

untenable, spurring questions of constitutional reform. Connecticut, at the time, was composed primarily of small towns and mid-sized cities; it lacked a major metropolitan center yet had long been one of the more urbanized states in early American history. According to the 1920 Census, while nearly half of the total U.S. population lived in rural areas, only 32.2 percent of Connecticut residents lived in its rural areas. The ongoing shift in population towards urban areas in the mid-twentieth century further skewed the state's geodemographic distribution, and its political system struggled to adapt to this change.

Each Connecticut town or city had two representatives in the lower house of the General Assembly, affording Connecticut's major cities the same number of representatives as the smallest towns in the state. Thus, apportionment under the 1818 Constitution afforded heavily populated cities the same number of representatives as the state's smallest rural communities. This system enabled rural towns to dominate the legislature throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to historians, "44 towns, with a population of about 30,000, could legislatively overwhelm the four largest cities, with a population of about 300,000."[28] Consequently, rural, Republican-leaning towns dominated the Connecticut legislature throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as shown in Figure 3.1. This malapportionment contributed to sectional politics in the legislature and produced a staunch party divide between the chambers, which stalled any meaningful legislation during the period.

The Constitution of 1965

During the early 1960s, federal courts began enforcing the Constitutional principle of "one man-one vote" pursuant to the Supreme Court's decision in the 1964 Alabama apportionment case, *Reynolds v. Sims*, which required that legislative districts be drawn to ensure "substantially equal state legislative representation for all citizens."[29] Spurred by civil rights struggles sweeping the nation, several state districting plans were successfully challenged in the Supreme Court. These challenges catalyzed redistricting across the states, and Connecticut was no exception: The Connecticut General Assembly convened a special session on August 5, 1964, to seek a reapportionment formula for the 1964 elections.

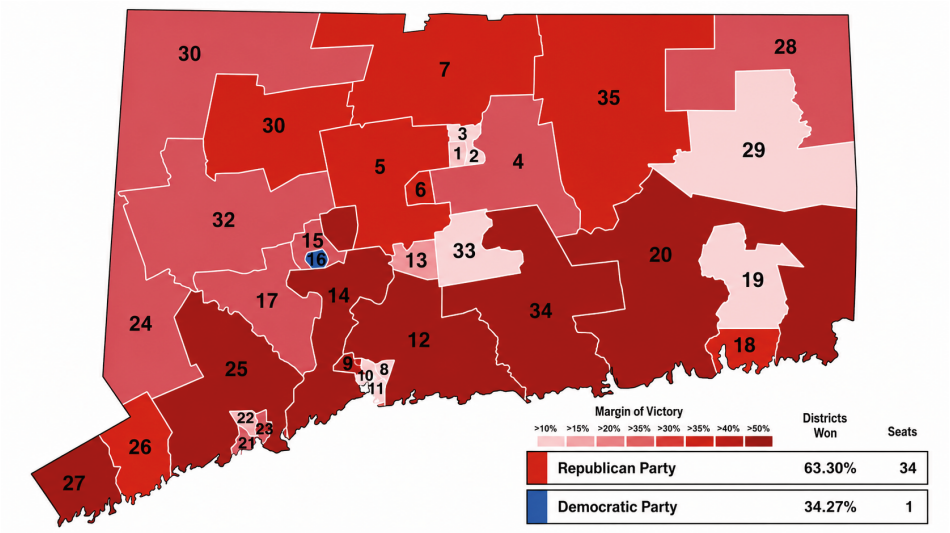


Figure 3.1: Partisan Control of Connecticut's 1920 State Senate Election in Connecticut (Source: Office of the Secretary of State)

Two years prior, West Hartford resident Oliver Butterworth, together with nine urban and suburban Connecticut voters, filed a suit in New Haven federal district court against the state, in which they alleged that their rights under the equal protection clause were impaired by the method of apportionment in both houses of the General Assembly, asserting that the makeup of the population-based Senate and the town unit-based House was unconstitutional.[30] In its February 1964 decision, the court agreed, holding that Connecticut's legislative appointment scheme is unconstitutional under *Reynolds*, which established that "seats in both houses of a bicameral state legislature must be apportioned on a population basis," holding that the apportionments must be "based substantially on population."[31] The district court subsequently held that both chambers must be "reapportioned promptly in such a way as to achieve substantially equal weighting of the votes of all voters."[32]

When *Butterworth v. Dempsey* was filed, the Connecticut Senate had 36 members and 294 members in the House of Representatives. Representation was based on town units rather than population, meaning a town with more than 2,500 people had one representative unless it qualified for two because (1) its population was greater than 5,000 or (2) it

had two representatives under the 1818 constitution. Towns generally had one or two representatives in the House. In *Butterworth*, the court observed that the largest Senate district had 175,940 people and the smallest had 21,627, noting that the largest town, Hartford, with 162,178 people, and the smallest town, Union with 383 people, each had two representatives."[33] The last complete Senate redistricting occurred in 1903, when the General Assembly created 35 senatorial districts. The General Assembly added a 36th district in 1941," as there was no legal mandate requiring the legislature to redraw its districts periodically.[34]

Characterizing the redistricting puzzle as "probably the most difficult problem of our age," the district court issued an injunction prohibiting a legislative election under the existing apportionment scheme. It ordered the legislature to reapportion itself and granted a stay of execution to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, which later affirmed the Connecticut ruling, instructing the district court to order relief consistent with the views outlined in *Reynolds*. In response to the federal District Court's order, Governor John Dempsey convened a Special Session in August 1964 during which the General Assembly passed House Joint Resolution No. 1 and later Senate Joint Resolution No. 2 during a second Special Session convened in November. According to a 1964 New York Times article, the House took three hours to approve the constitutional convention bill on a voice vote. It reports that "eleven proposed amendments were rejected by overwhelming margins, some on roll-call votes.[35] Among the rejected amendments was one proposing a statewide referendum in February to determine whether the voters wanted a constitutional convention."[36]

During the 1964 Special Sessions, the General Assembly established a 32-member joint committee, composed of 10 Senators and 22 Representatives, to hear bills pertaining to the court-ordered constitutional convention and to prescribe its procedures and methods for selecting delegates. The leadership of their respective chambers appointed Senate and House members. Members of the minority party were appointed by its leaders. Senator Charles Alfano (D-Suffield) and Representative Nicholas Eddy (R-New Hartford) chaired the committee.[37] Seven of the 10 Senate members were Democrats, the remaining three were Republicans. Of the 22 Representatives, fourteen were Republicans, and eight were Democrats. The committee held public hearings on bills to

establish a constitutional convention and to set up the delegate selection process. The committee appears to have dissolved once its work was completed. The party chairmen played a crucial role behind the scenes at the convention. Placing statesmanship above partisan competition, they met frequently to develop the agreements that ensured success and joined forces to support the campaign for ratification by the voters.

In preparation for the convention, the legislature passed Senate Joint Resolution No. 10 during the 1965 Regular Session, which established an eight-member Constitutional Convention Planning Commission. The Senate President Pro Tempore and the Speaker of the House each appointed three members, and the Governor appointed two.[38] The Commission sought to:

> "…make preparations for the convening and operation of the constitutional convention established under the provisions of substitute for House Bill Number 2006 of the current session, as it determines to be proper and necessary, including, but not limited to, the selection of facilities for meetings, the preparation of a tentative agenda, the preparation of a tentative subcommittee plan, the preparation of a tentative staffing pattern for professional and clerical assistance to the convention and the tentative recruitment of personnel for such purposes."[39]

The Convention's reapportionment efforts, which organized legislative districts on the basis of population, invalidated the previous system where each town had equal representation in the House, regardless of population. Coupled with the dismantling of municipal-based Senate districts, this legislative reorganization significantly increased the political clout of urban and suburban areas. Moreover, it diminished the influence of old-style political "power brokers," like Democratic leader John Bailey, enabling stronger leadership from within the legislature.

Post-Reapportionment Political Dynamics

During middle and late twentieth century, vibrant two-party competition redefined national and state politics in Connecticut. From 1932 to 1960, both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates won the state four times each, resulting in a perfectly balanced split of election victories. This dynamic of political competition persisted in presidential races for the next three decades. In the elections of 1960, 1964, and 1968, Connecticut favored the Democratic candidates, but in 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, and 1988, the state leaned Republican. From 1960 to 1988, Democrats secured victories in three presidential elections, while Republicans triumphed in five.

Similarly, as the dominance of the Republican machine within the state began to wane, Connecticut emerged as a Democratic-leaning state by the 1950s-60s. Among the top Democratic power brokers were state party chairman John M. Bailey, and governors Abraham Ribicoff and John Dempsey. The Great Depression and the New Deal era significantly reshaped Connecticut's political landscape. The Democratic Party, with its emphasis on economic reform and social welfare programs, gained considerable support from working-class and urban voters. Meanwhile, Republicans maintained their strength in many regions of the state, particularly in rural areas and among wealthier and conservative suburban communities. However, cities like Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport increasingly became strongholds of Democratic support.

3.4 Current Party Developments

In recent history, Connecticut has been considered a decidedly blue state. In the 2024 presidential election, polls in Connecticut closed at 8:00 p.m.; the Associated Press called the race a minute later, at 8:01 p.m., for Democratic nominee Kamala Harris. They reported a 14.5-point margin for Harris over the Republican candidate, Donald J. Trump, making Connecticut one of the fewest and most decisive victories for the Democratic Party candidate in that presidential election.[40] Harris's win in 2024 marked the ninth consecutive year of Democrat wins in presidential elections in Connecticut–a voting pattern reflected in all levels of state

politics. As of 2025, both of Connecticut's U.S. Senators, all five of its U.S. Representatives, as well as its Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Treasurer, Comptroller, and Secretary of the State, are members of the Democratic Party.[41]

Prior to the Democratic Party's current dominance in state elections, Connecticut was historically a bastion of centrist Republicanism. Figure 3.2 shows that from 1900 to 1930, Republicans dominated the House of Representatives. Races for Congress continued to be competitive until the 1980s. Presidential contests in Connecticut between 1960 and 1988 were exceptionally competitive, while several were landslide elections. During this period, moderately conservative Republican candidates, such as Ford, Bush, and (arguably less moderate) Reagan, won the state in five Presidential elections, while centrist Democratic candidates won it three times.[42] However, beginning in 1992, the Connecticut electorate began to shift left of center, as dissatisfied voters of all stripes flocked to the campaign call of former Arkansas governor and moderate Democratic presidential candidate William Jefferson Clinton. Winning back large numbers of Reagan Democrats, attracting middle-class Republicans, engaging with centrist Democrats, and delivering in traditional Democratic strongholds, Clinton clinched the Connecticut vote. He received 42.2 percent of the state's popular vote, a 6.5 percent margin of victory, over Republican incumbent George Herbert Walker Bush. During his first term, Clinton's appeal to moderate Republican voters and centrist Democrats continued to grow, and in 1996, Connecticut voted overwhelmingly to reelect President Bill Clinton, nearly tripling his margin of victory.

The 1992 election proved to be one of Connecticut's last competitive presidential contests, as the state began voting for Democratic candidates on a routine and predictable basis. Connecticut's pattern of supporting Democratic presidential candidates has continued to deepen. Clinton's margin of victory during the 1992 election, fortified by his 'new Democrat' moderate coalition, would prove to be one of the highest percentages of the popular vote that a Democratic presidential candidate received in Connecticut up to then.

This trend went beyond "party realignment" but was the culmination of two developments in Connecticut electoral politics between 1970 and the early 2000s: the partisan dealignment of blue-collar working-class voters

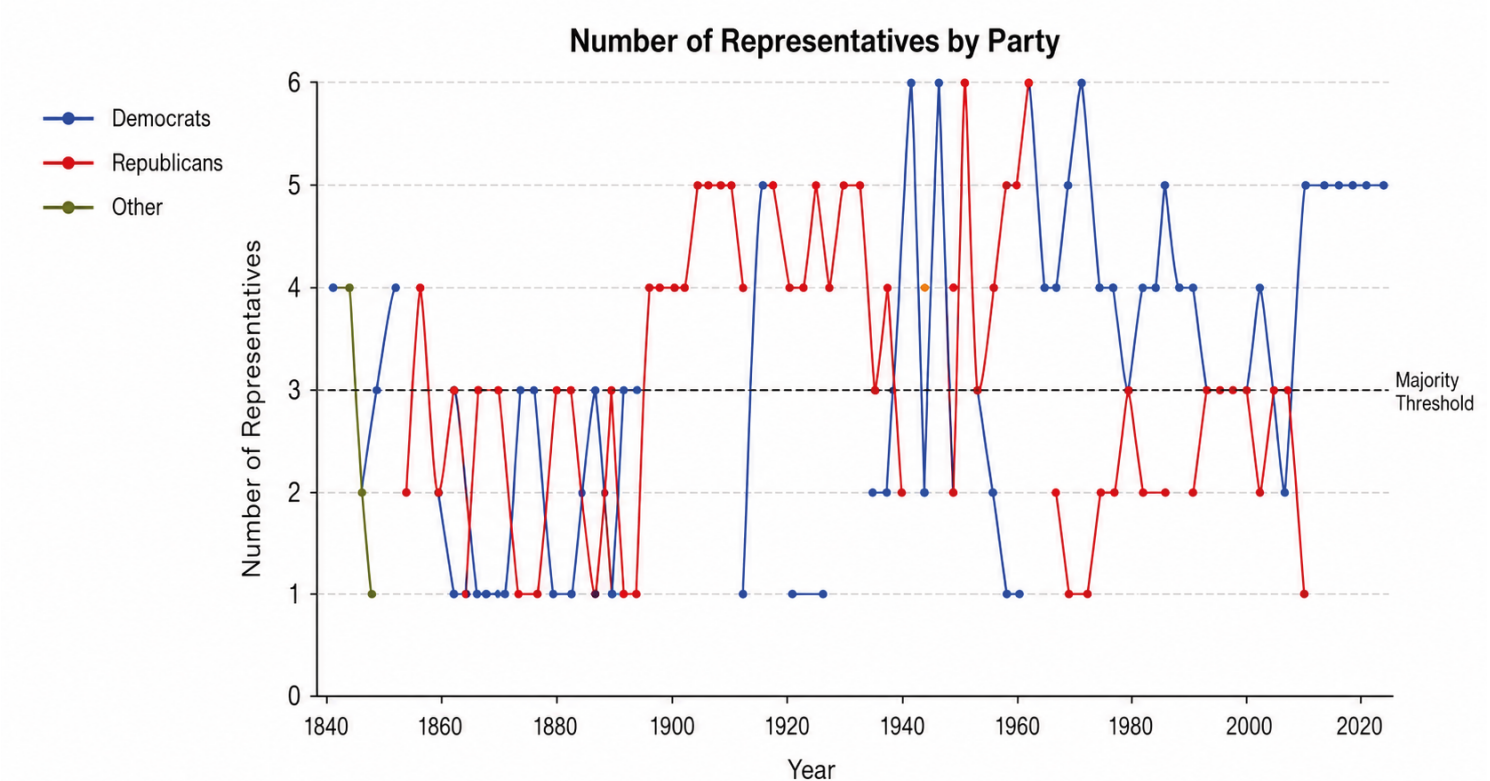


Figure 3.2: Number of House of Representatives from Connecticut by Party, 1840 to 2026 (source: Data taken from *American Panorama: An Atlas of U.S. History*)[43]

who found themselves loosely aligned with the Republican Party after 1980, and the increasing social liberalism of wealthy Republicans predominantly located in the southwestern Connecticut suburbs of New York City. The politically conservative, wealthy towns of Fairfield and Litchfield Counties had warmed up to Clinton's brand of Democratic politics. By the end of the twentieth century, Fairfield County was still the most solidly Republican area of the state, but there were noteworthy areas of Democratic support in these elections, including Stamford and Westport, which Schlichting attributes to not only "generational replacement and in-migration of liberals from New York," but also the of changing party orientations toward issues at the national level.

As the national GOP moved in an ideologically conservative direction at the end of the twentieth century, Connecticut's wealthier voters began to drift left of center. Consistent with a New England tradition rooted in class conflict, Connecticut Republicans were "usually against taxes and suspicious of government involvement and intervention, but in favor of liberal or libertarian positions on social issues such as abortion rights, equal rights for women, and gun control."[44] However, by the late 1970s, the GOP's national party leadership was increasingly politicking on a Southern brand of conservatism that took highly public stands opposite to these. Thus, by the 1990s, the Democratic Party embrace of moderate positions on taxing and spending issues, and liberal positions on most social issues, was well poised to pick up votes in Connecticut's conservative basins like Fairfield County, which have remained blue since, with "each generation [tending] to lean a bit more Democratic than the last."[45]

Connecticut's Democratic Trifecta

Since 2011, Connecticut's state government has been under the control of a Democratic trifecta, meaning the Democratic Party holds the governor's office and majorities in both chambers of the legislature. Democrats have controlled the state Senate since the 1996 election, and the state House since the 1986 election. The trifecta occurred when Democrat Dannel Malloy, the former mayor of Stamford, was elected governor after defeating Republican businessman Tom Foley in a closely contested race. Malloy's victory was propelled by an extensive, targeted get-out-the-vote campaign

focused on cities and key suburban towns, and supported by public employee unions across Connecticut. Malloy's election marked the beginning of Connecticut's second-longest stretch of Democratic trifecta in the United States, trailing only Delaware (Connecticut is tied with California and Hawaii).[46] With this trifecta, Connecticut has led the way in advancing progressive policies, including strengthening LGBTQ rights, enacting common-sense gun reforms, pushing for police reform, and establishing one of the nation's most generous paid family leave policies.

State Legislative Elections

State legislative elections provide additional proof of Connecticut's evolving political complexion. From 1967 to the present day, the Democratic Party has enjoyed comfortable control in the Connecticut House of Representatives. With the exception of 1973–74 and 1985–86, the Democrats have consecutively won a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, occupying an average of 62 percent of the seats from 1987 to 2005 and 71 percent following the 2006 midterm election.[47] Likewise, the state senate has remained securely within the Democratic majority, although the party-to-party ratio has been much closer. "Like their Republican colleagues in the state house, senate Republicans occupied a majority of seats in 1973–74 and [from] 1985–86. However, from 1997 to the present, the Democratic Party has ruled the Senate," he continues, adding that the ratio of Democrats to Republicans expanded during this time from Democrats controlling 52 percent of the seats from 1997 through 200, a two-seat margin, to 56 percent from 2001 to 2004, and 67 percent in 2006.[48] During the 2016 session, when the State Senate was deadlocked at 18 seats, however, Democrats maintained effective control of the chamber because Lieutenant Gov. Nancy Wyman (D) could cast tie-breaking votes. The 2016 election, therefore, resulted in a veto-proof Democratic majority in the Connecticut General Assembly, which, as shown in Table 3.1, remains unbroken–yet another indication of a state that has become decidedly Democratic in both the Governor's Office and in the Connecticut General Assembly.

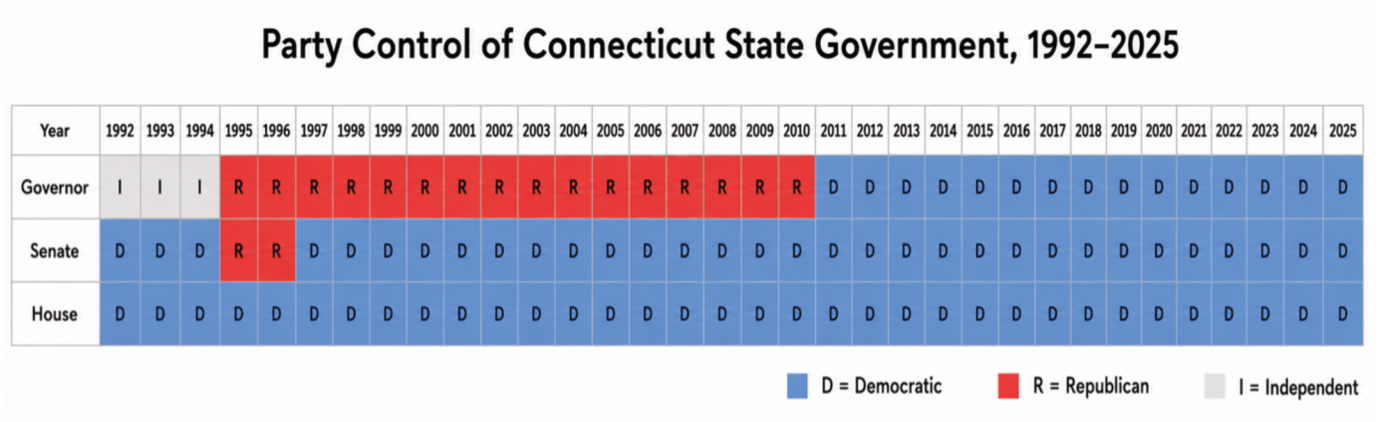


Table 3.1: Connecticut Party Control: 1992–2025

In 2026, Connecticut is one of 16 Democratic-controlled states in the United States with a trifecta in state government. Conversely, there are 23 Republican trifectas and 11 split governments in the United States.[49] Today, both chambers of the state legislature have veto-proof supermajorities, meaning a majority of the members of a single party caucus has enough votes to override a governor's veto. Before the current run of electing Democratic Governors, Connecticut's Republican governors typically trended toward more moderate positions on social and moral issues, despite drawing their primary political support from the suburbs, wealthier voters, business interests, and the white-collar class. For example, in the tradition of Rockefeller Republicans, Republican governors John G. Rowland (1995–2004) and M. Jodi Rell (2004–2011) championed urban renewal initiatives and supported civil unions, campaign finance reform, stem cell research, and pro-choice policies, respectively. Rose remarks that, regardless of party affiliation, elected officials in Connecticut, like Governor

Rowland and Rell, generally "[support] positions that reflect the moderate to liberal character of the state's population."[50]

Modern Party Dynamics in Connecticut

The longstanding election of Democratic majorities in the Connecticut General Assembly, coupled with the election of Democratic Governors, has had a liberalizing impact on the laws and policies enacted in the State of Connecticut. However, this party dominance has exposed the Senate and House Democratic Caucuses to the risk of fracturing within each majority caucus, as a lack of competition in one-party dominant contexts tends to atrophy party organization. "The parties in the most competitive states are likely to have […] the highest cohesion in the legislatures," remarks J. Austin Ranney, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley.[51] Meanwhile, "party cohesion is generally very low in the one-party and modified one-party states." In Connecticut to date, however, the dominant Democratic caucuses in the Senate and House have demonstrated strong internal cohesion and cooperation within each caucus. That does not mean that the Senate and House Caucuses do not have their differences from time to time. In fact, bills often fail because the two majority caucuses cannot reach an agreement on the language of a bill.

The Senate Democratic Caucus is quarterbacked by President Pro Tempore Martin Looney and Majority Leader Bob Duff. The House Democratic Caucus is led by Speaker Matthew Ritter and Majority Leader Jason Rojas. The caucus leaders host joint press conferences at the beginning and end of each legislative session, in which they announce the collective priorities of the two chambers and the accomplishments of the recently-concluded sessions. Senate President Looney described these events as being emblematic of the united mission of Connecticut Democrats, which "[highlight] the important issues that are of major importance to both majority caucuses at this point."[52]

Emphasizing the critical role that inter-party cooperation plays in the General Assembly's policymaking capabilities, Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff described transparency and trust as the "invisible glue" that binds the members of the Senate Democratic Caucus:

> "We all [Senate Democrats] work together, and we talk a lot. We can't possibly know what's going on in everyone's committee, but since the caucus is represented in every committee, we communicate openly about bills so that we are as informed as possible. There is a trust level between Democrats in both chambers that we are not putting our fellow colleagues in harm's way. This whole building runs on relationships. The only thing that brings us together is that no one is the boss of anyone; our bosses are back in our districts, and that's how relationships and our word keep us tied together. If you give someone your word, you've got to stick to it. This is the invisible glue that holds everyone together. If I say I am going to vote for a bill and don't, it is not three strikes you're out, it is one strike you're out."[53]

Another factor that unites the members of the Senate Democratic Majority Caucus is that each senator chairs at least one joint legislative committee. Each senator has their own legislative committee priorities to promote and must rely on the support of their colleagues to enact their bills. Hence, members of the Senate Majority Caucus are each fellow Democrats, fellow Senate colleagues, and fellow committee chairs (Figure 3.3 shows a map of Senate Districts). This additional unifying element is absent in the State House, where there can be up to 100 members of the Majority Caucus.

Finally, and perhaps most important, each of the two partisan caucuses hold their own private caucuses before each Senate Session. During these pre-session caucuses, Senate leaders review the bills to be taken up that day and discuss them within the caucus. Leaders confirm which bills will be designated as "caucus bills," meaning that each caucus member will be expected to vote the same way, which bills have a sufficient number of votes to pass with partisan or bipartisan support, and which bills may be problematic, in terms of extended debate time or uncertain vote tallies. Such bills might be held for that session day. The House does not caucus before each session.

Since 2011, Democrats in Connecticut have enjoyed a trifecta, controlling the Governor's Office, the Senate and House. Leadership must come up with compromises when there are differences in priorities among the Governor and Democratic legislators.

State legislative elections in Connecticut are typically localized political contests, normally not characterized by the hyper-partisan "wedge issues" that dominate national politics. Nevertheless, state legislative politics are invariably swayed by national politics, and the Connecticut General Assembly is no exception. Democratic, Republican, and minor party candidates for the General Assembly will disagree on issues, most notably taxing and spending, and while the ideological orientation of Connecticut politics may not be fully gauged from the results of such localized contests, the data still shed light on the political leanings of the state's electorate.

The Democratic trifecta, often with input and support from Republican legislators, has implemented significant initiatives on issues such as minimum wage, environmental protection, and ballot access. In Connecticut, major policies were often enacted when Congress struggled to take action, including expanded abortion rights, stronger gun control measures (relative to the national standards), an increased minimum wage, the repeal of the death penalty, drivers' licenses for undocumented immigrants, and the introduction of mandatory paid sick leave. These changes, combined with partisan stagnation in the United States Congress, and the contentious Conservatism of the Trump Administrations, have deepened ideological divides between the political parties.

Democrats in Connecticut rallied around issues like 'paid sick leave' in 2011 to garner lots of support from the public. Joe Dinkin, who was a campaign manager for the *Working Families Party* in Connecticut, a minor party that often endorses Democratic candidates for the General Assembly, said that "[Paid sick days] went from not being an issue in political discourse, to being something the Democrats had to make their mind up on, to being something that was a winning issue in Democratic primaries, [then] a way for Democrats to win the general election" (New America).

There has been a shift towards a more democratic and inclusive leadership structure in Connecticut. The reforms of 1970 played a significant role in this transformation, leading to a more decentralized and transparent decision-making process. Writing for the Connecticut Mirror, reporter Mark Pazniokas states that "unlike in Congress, seniority plays a lesser role in leadership roles in the General Assembly, where the caucus leaders make the choices and turnover is greater. Of the 151 House members, only 31 won their seats before 2014."[54] When Senate Majority

Leader Duff was asked about how the Senate chose its committee chairs, he said, “There has also been a noticeable increase in diversity among the leadership of the General Assembly.” Over the decades, more women, people of color, and individuals from various backgrounds have assumed leadership positions in the CGA.

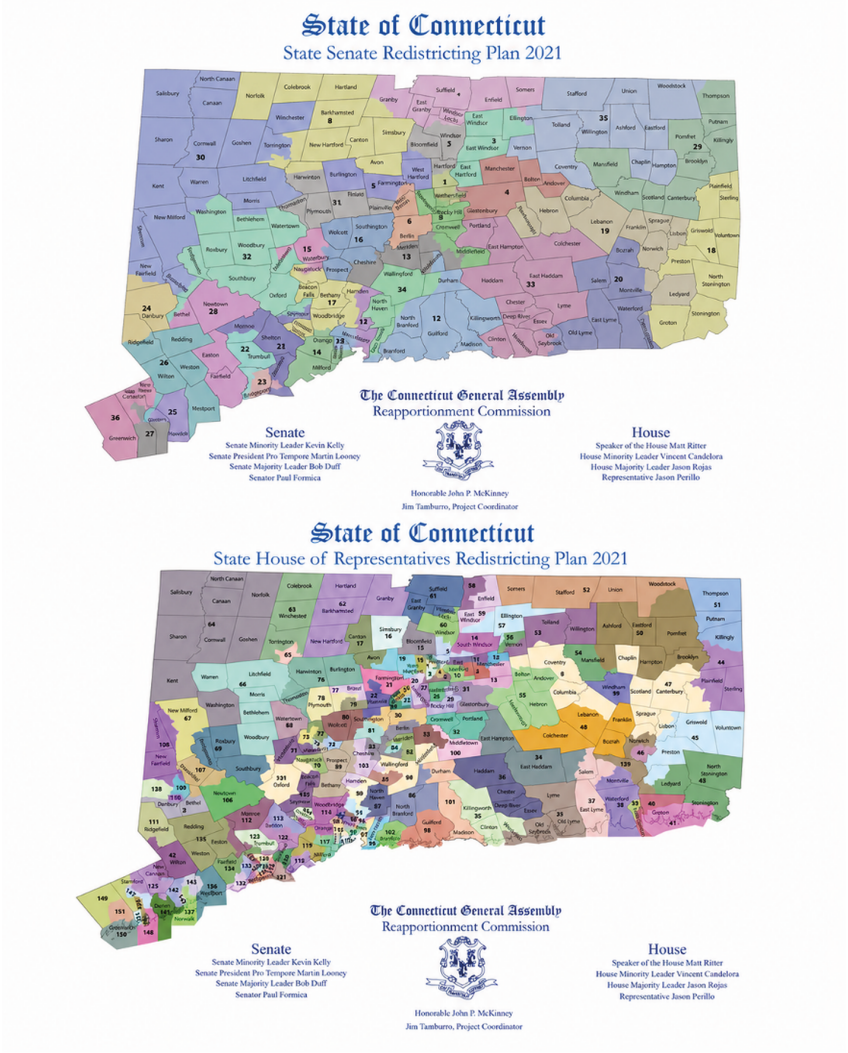


Figure 3.3: Map of 2025 State Senate and House of Representatives Districts, from the CGA Redistricting Project

Party Changes and Development

In the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in diversity among the General Assembly's leadership. Over the decades, more women, people of color, and individuals from various backgrounds have assumed leadership positions in the Connecticut General Assembly. The number of women in the Connecticut General Assembly has increased by 12.5 percent over the past 42 years, from 22.5 percent in 1983 to 35 percent in 2025. Women in Connecticut make up 51 percent of the population, while the General Assembly reflects a 35 percent representation. In comparison, the United States Congress is only 28 percent female. Women in Connecticut make up 51 percent of the population, while the General Assembly reflects a 37 percent representation.[55] In comparison, the United States Congress is only 28 percent female, even though women make up half of the country's population. In the House of Representatives for the 2025 legislative session, there are 14 female committee chairs across 26 committees.[56] In the Connecticut Senate, there are 10 female Senators, and each has at least 1 committee assignment, while some, like Senator Gadkar-Wilcox, chair 3 committees. Female leaders in Connecticut have significant influence. Senator Cathy Osten and Representative Toni Walker are the chairs of the important appropriations committee, while Representative Maria Horn is the chair of the Finance Committee. It is important to note, however, that the current caucus leadership in both parties is all-male.

The Connecticut General Assembly has also seen the rise of the influential Black and Puerto Rican Caucus (BPRC). This caucus was founded in 1976 to, as stated by the 2021 Vice-Chair of the caucus, Representative Bobby Gibson, "promote and assist minorities in becoming more actively involved in the political process, and in attaining political office, and to raise the economic potential for minorities and empower the minority community in the state."[57]

The Black and Puerto Rican Caucus has 39 members out of 187 in the Connecticut General Assembly. However, while the BPRC typically works with the Governor and Caucus Leaders, it has not always sided with the Democratic Governor and Caucus Leaders. In 2022, 14 Democrats and 10 BPRC legislators voted against a bill to protect abortion rights in Connecticut. This piece of legislation was still passed and signed into law,

but it demonstrated the independence of the BPRC on certain issues. When asked about the importance and power of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, Minority Leader Vincent Candelora said,

> "There could be bills where organically the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus come our way (side with the Republicans) on an issue, and when this starts to happen this is where the Speaker kind of identifies this and in order to avoid a piece of legislation collapsing we have a conversation about how to get it to a place where a majority of people will vote for it" (Candelora, 2025)

National Politics in the General Assembly

Unlike the intense polarization and increasing vitriol in Congress, the Connecticut General Assembly is characterized by a much more cordial and respectful atmosphere between the two major parties. Republicans and Democrats have signed historic bipartisan legislation in Connecticut, all while disregarding the partisan animosity of national politics. Republican Minority Leader Candelora spoke about working with Democrat leaders Speaker Ritter and Majority Leader Rojas by saying,

> "We are trying to put our best foot forward to get the most meaningful legislation passed. If you try to hide the football, you will lose. That means getting in the rooms and having those discussions. It depends on the leader; we have two leaders on the other side of the aisle who are willing to have those conversations."

Minority Leader Candelora then gave an example from 2017, when the two parties passed a budget from a minority party, without the direct involvement of Democratic Governor Malloy, something that does not usually happen in Connecticut or in any other state. Minority Leader Candelora said,

> "In 2017, when we had a complete impasse, the Governor put out a budget that no one agreed with. Connecticut is the only state in the country's history where the minority party produces budgets. I am proud to be a part

> of that process. We started that in 2007, and we have carried on that tradition. I think we have proposed 14 different budgets since I took office in 2007. What was unique in 2017 was that we actually passed a minority budget through both chambers. The Speaker and the Leadership felt strongly to vote on each the Democratic budget and the Republican budget, and some Democrats voted with the Republican budget, and that Republican budget passed through both chambers. Governor Malloy then vetoed that budget, and it ended up causing us not to have a budget because we did not have enough to override the veto. It forced us to get in a room and create a compromise budget. I remember Speaker Ritter pulled me aside and said, 'Are you guys genuine; do you really want to come in and negotiate with us?' I said, 'Absolutely, we are here in good faith.' This comprised a budget that created the fiscal guardrails."[58]

Connecticut legislators have historically worked well together to pass bipartisan legislation. Senate Majority Leader Duff mentioned in an interview how the Senate passes "95% bipartisan bills," and House Minority Leader Candelora said that the House "roughly 90% of bills are bipartisan." Majority Leader Duff and Minority Leader Candelora also agree on the idea that Republicans and Democrats work well together in Connecticut. Senate Majority Leader Duff said:

> "I still think that's the case [that Democrats and Republicans in Connecticut work well together]. I think that a lot of work gets done on the committee level by folks who try to come together on issues. I would say that the bulk of the issues are pretty mundane; it is not page one or page two stuff. It's just about keeping the gears of government running, and sometimes there are philosophical differences on things like the budget or social issues. In general, people do try to work together in the most pragmatic ways. There are some people who want the government to do everything, and there are some people who want the government to drown in a bathtub, and then there is everyone else in the middle, and I think you kind of have most people here in the middle."[59]

House Minority Leader Candelora described the process of civility and bipartisanship in the Connecticut General Assembly by saying:

> "It gets more overtly political depending on the topics of the season. Right now, you have a very polarizing President. The Democrats in Connecticut are going to take a certain approach, and you are starting to see the politicization of certain issues that might not happen. There is more theatre externally, focusing on issues like the cuts at the federal level or executive orders on immigration. Connecticut is unique because it requires some minority input. There is more of a voice, we can file amendments and filibuster on the floor. To avoid contention, it is better to have a dialogue and contention and try to come to a compromise. In a lot of states, you cannot even file an amendment."[60]

In the 2025 session, some Connecticut Republican proposals mirrored those of Republican President Donald Trump, sometimes even using the same rhetoric as Trump. Governor Lamont has even seen a shift in Republican lawmaking and rhetoric in the General Assembly, saying:

> "He's [Donald Trump] the president of the United States. The first three weeks, you're generally pretty popular, so I think the [Connecticut] Republicans are shifting a little more in that direction."[61]

The *Connecticut Mirror* reported, "just after President Trump signed several executive orders, including banning transgender athletes from women's and girls' sports. [Connecticut] Republicans filed a dozen bills that would do the same thing in Connecticut."[62] Democrats in the past have been able to ignore these bills; however, now they are priority bills for Republicans. Senate Minority Leader Stephen Harding (R-Brookfield) has described the Connecticut Republican agenda as:

> "An agenda of common sense and an agenda built around addressing undocumented immigration, addressing crime in this country, and restoring economic development through smaller, more efficient government and through tax relief."[63]

Though Minority Leader Candelora and Harding have not defended President Trump by name, Minority Leader Candelora has said, "It's going to be a little bit tense this session because I'm not here to roll over and put

up with this behavior."

The Connecticut Republicans on March 27th, 2025, did just that and attacked Governor Lamont as well as Democrats as a whole. This change in rhetoric is more extreme than what was said in past years. Senate Minority Leader Harding had this to say in a statement on the Connecticut House Republicans' website, "It's shocking that the Governor and Democrats have remained largely silent as state government ethics go sideways. Their inaction and failure to speak out forcefully only emboldens those who believe they can bend rules and norms for personal or political gain."[64]



Image 3.6: This is a billboard posted outside of the Connecticut House Republicans' office on display for all to see. It alleges that Governor Lamont and some of his aides have misused state funds. Photo credit: Erin Barbakoff, 2025

In an interview with *The Connecticut Capitol Report*, conservative Republican Senator Rob Sampson (R-16) offered his perspective on Connecticut's politics … "My view on politics in Connecticut right now is we're at war," Sampson said. "We've been operating as if it's peacetime for too long as Connecticut Republicans." This rhetoric marks a departure from

the collegial spirit that has historically defined politics in the Connecticut General Assembly. Two years prior, Minority Leader Candelora reflected on the General Assembly's resistance to the partisanship of national politics:

> "We [Connecticut's Republican Party] share many of the same concerns that the Democratic Leadership has referenced this legislative session, and we certainly look forward to working with them where we can on a bipartisan basis on those issues. It would be a pretty lousy job if you came up to the Capitol every day to just throw punches across the aisle. There are days this happens, but then you have the good days where there are meaningful conversations. I can't stand going home to my district complaining about the 'other side.' You are basically telling your constituents that you are ineffective" (Candelora, 2025).

Likewise, Majority Leader Rojas remarked:

> "I try to take every opportunity to remind the public that a lot of good work comes out of us working together as Democrats and Republicans with different political views, but all with the shared goal of working on behalf of our communities" (Rojas, 2023).

Both the Republican and Democratic House leaders espoused civility and bipartisanship, but then, in public, they have offered different and more contentious rhetoric. Senator Duff, in a 2025 interview, spoke candidly about working with a former deputy Republican leader. Senator Duff said,

> "A few years back, I worked on a bill with the Deputy Republican Leader in the Senate, and it had to do with Occupational licensing reform, and we did this bipartisanly. This was a big deal for President Obama, and I at first sort of found it boring, but the more you dig into it, you find out occupational licensing can be such a barrier for a lot of things, and we were able to work on this in a bipartisan way" (Duff, 2025).

This work occurred at about the time when Connecticut Senate Republicans held a midterm caucus and voted to replace their Minority Leader, Kevin Kelly, their three-year leader, in favor of freshman senator and

former House member Stephen Harding. The Connecticut Mirror reported at the time that "(t)he removal of a leader at mid-term is extraordinary in Connecticut, but the Senate GOP caucus and its staff have been widely seen as divided and toxic at the state Capitol."[65]

Connecticut Senate Democrats have also criticized Connecticut Republicans for defending President Trump's decisions. When Connecticut Senate Republicans issued the following statement:

> "If Attorney General Tong and other Democrat leaders invested half as much effort into lowering costs for electric ratepayers as they do defending criminal illegal aliens and librarians promoting sexualized content in schools, Connecticut families would be far better off" (Hwang, 2022);

Senate Democratic Caucus Leadership posted the following statement:

> "If Connecticut Republicans have no interest in the role and responsibilities of government, they can leave the governing to us, as the people of Connecticut so recently indicated they prefer, as they elected overwhelming Democratic majorities in both the state House, the state Senate, and in our Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C" (Looney, 2025)

While these interchanges between state politicians may simply represent the usual political rhetoric, there are increasing concerns that the extreme politics that have characterized federal politics have infected the traditions that have governed legislative work in the Connecticut body politic.

On the first day of the 2025 Regular Session, Senate President Looney expressed a hopeful sentiment:

> "While this chamber now boasts a historically strong Democratic majority, let us not forget that our most enduring achievements have always come from working together… Bipartisanship is not a relic of the past but a guiding principle for our future" (Looney, 2025)

Time will tell. Under the shadow of deep polarization and heightened

partisanship, the CGA's leadership offers some light toward commitment to civility and institutional norms across party lines. A revealing example came on the 2026 Opening Day of the legislature, when Representative Cara Pavalock-D'Amato wore a jacket with a pro-ICE political message during Governor Ned Lamont's address to a joint session of the legislature. The act drew attention because it pushed the boundaries of the chamber's rules and traditions of decorum. What was hopeful was the response from legislative leadership. House Speaker Matt Ritter publicly reminded members that the House chamber is a place for debate, not political display. As reported by the *Connecticut Mirror*, Ritter said, "'Think about the fact that you represent the town and represent your state. You're lucky to be one of 151 people who can engage in debate and pass laws. Think about that. Have pride in that," Ritter said, his voice rising. "But don't turn this place into a circus.'"[66]

House Minority Leader Vincent Candelora also acknowledged the need to lower the political temperature and enforce rules of decorum across party lines. The reactions from both sides of the leadership suggest that, even in a period of deep ideological conflict in politics, the CGA continues to recognize a shared responsibility to maintain decorum and respect in their work. Though partisanship is an unavoidable and often productive part of democratic politics, the Connecticut General Assembly depends on the willingness of leaders in both parties to uphold norms and preserve the collegiality that is emblematic of the current legislature. From this perspective, Connecticut's "steady habits" may still offer something different than what we observe in interminably gridlocked U.S. Congress: a political and partisan culture in which conflict persists, but its leaders are able to work together with respect for one another for the good of everyone in the state.

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CHAPTER 4

The Three Branches of Connecticut State Government

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4.1 Introduction

IN HIS SEMINAL ACCOUNT, *UNDER THE GOLD DOME*, Judge Robert Satter writes, "A state defines the legislature that it governs. Its fundamental and often unique characteristics determine the issue that its legislature must face."[1] Along with the distinctive composition of its General Assembly, Connecticut's state government is shaped by the state's geographic position. Situated in the northeast along Long Island Sound, Connecticut is small in area but densely populated. The diversity of its residents, the challenges facing its central cities, the absence of county government, and a longstanding tradition of home rule all help shape the state's legislative agenda. This chapter explores the office of the governor and the state judicial system, providing insight into the constitutional powers of the governorship and the role that public approval plays in effective executive leadership. A closer examination reveals that Connecticut's governorship closely resembles the American presidency, albeit on a smaller scale. It also discusses the structure of the state judicial system, including the court's current workload, the procedure for appealing a case to the state supreme court, and the method by which cases are heard and opinions are written. Consistent with the preceding chapter on the state legislature, it also examines the support staff that assists the Governor's office and the courts.

4.2 Looking Inside the CGA

The Connecticut Constitution of 1818 established a three-branch system of state government. "Each branch of government was given its own independent sphere of constitutional authority: those which are legislative, to one; those which are executive, to another; and those which are judicial, to another." Each branch was moreover "empowered to impose checks on the others." This commitment to the separation of powers, combined with a system of checks and balances, was reaffirmed in the Constitution of 1965. Beginning with the devolution of power to state governments in the early 1980s and continuing to the present, the three branches of government have been substantially modernized to accommodate the needs of Connecticut's growing and increasingly diverse population. As public expectations of state government have increased, these reforms have enhanced the capacity of all three branches to respond to the state's evolving needs.

In its exploration of Connecticut's General Assembly, this chapter situates the state's legislative branch within the broader structure of state government, alongside the executive and judicial branches. A comprehensive understanding of the General Assembly's powers, roles and responsibilities requires comparable consideration of the other two branches.

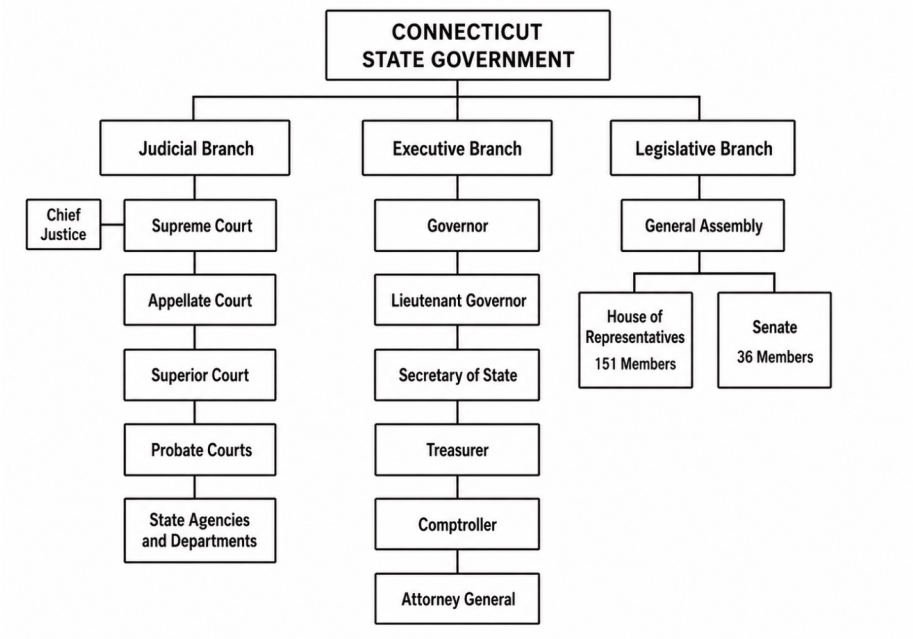


Figure 4.1: The Tripartite Structure of Connecticut's Government.

4.3 THE LEGISLATURE

The Connecticut legislature consists of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Although both chambers are equal in power and share responsibility for passing laws, they differ in structural design, legislative procedure, and formality.[2] The House, the lower chamber, is composed of 151 members elected from single-member districts, each representing an average of approximately 24,000 people.[3] During each legislative session, the House convenes on the second floor of the State Capitol building in a large, wood-paneled room adorned with

gold-leaf trim and stained-glass rafters. Members' desks are arranged in curved rows facing the Speaker's rostrum, which is flanked by the Connecticut state flag on the left and the American flag on the right. Below the Speaker's podium are the clerks' desks, which handle the chamber's administrative business. Above, behind gold-topped pillars, a stadium-style viewing gallery provides seating for members of the public observing proceedings on the House floor.

In the House chamber, seating is organized by party. Democrats are situated to the left and Republicans to the right when facing the Speaker's rostrum. In the House Chamber, the only formally designated seats are those reserved for the Majority Leader and Minority Leader, located near the middle of either side of the chamber. These leaders typically sit near their Deputy Leaders and help assign seats to members of their respective caucuses. Committee chairs, ranking members, and more senior legislators are often assigned aisle or back-row seats to allow for easier movement in and out of the chamber, better access by colleagues and staff, and recognition of their years of service.

The Senate, the upper chamber of the legislature, is composed of thirty-six members elected from single-member districts of approximately 100,000 people. It occupies the third floor of the Capitol building. Its meeting room is distinguished by three sunburst stained-glass windows and richly colored furnishings. Senators' desks form a circle around the state's baroque shield crest, with the rostrum of the presiding officer positioned at the center opening. Members are seated on either side of the chamber according to the numerical designation of their senatorial districts, creating a symmetrical arrangement in which senators from corresponding districts sit opposite or adjacent to one another. Public galleries in the clerestories on both sides of the chamber provide visitors with a view of the proceedings during the legislative session.

The design of the Senate chamber reflects the character of the General Assembly's upper house. The circular arrangement of senators' desks and the inward-facing orientation of members evoke the image of a deliberative council, in contrast to the House chamber's stadium-style rows. There, representatives face forward and are separated by party and aisle, a configuration that more readily conveys partisan division.

The state Senate operates with propriety, somewhat less partisanship,

and measured decorum. As the smaller and more intimate of the two chambers, its scale allows for a more muted style of politics and a more relaxed procedural pace. The House, by contrast, is larger and often more partisan than its sister chamber. The vaulted House chamber, softly illuminated by chandelier-style lighting, possesses a striking grandeur when empty but fills with clamorous vigor when in session, as representatives levy accusations of partisan warfare across the aisle[4] and extend floor debates into the early hours of the morning.[5]

Legislative Districts of the Connecticut State House and Senate

While both chambers are organized into districts of roughly equal populations, the legislative districts of the state House and the state Senate differ markedly in character. Connecticut's state Senate districts are substantially larger, both geographically and demographically, than House districts. The Senate chamber is therefore considerably smaller than that of the House; its roster of thirty-six members is less than one-fourth the size of its sister chamber. Most Senate districts encompass multiple towns or portions of a city together with several surrounding towns. Connecticut's Thirtieth state Senate district, for example, spans more municipalities than any other district in the state. Located in the state's northwestern corner, the sprawling rural district includes fourteen towns: Brookfield, Canaan, Cornwall, Goshen, Kent, Litchfield, Morris, New Milford, North Canaan, Salisbury, Sharon, Winchester, Warren, and part of Torrington. Several Senate districts, however, are contained largely within a single city, as more populous urban areas such as Bridgeport, New Haven, and Hartford are often divided between two districts. The first Senate District, for example, includes part of Hartford and part of Wethersfield, while the Second District encompasses the remainder of the capital city along with portions of Bloomfield and Windsor.

This structure, characterized by a small number of large districts, requires the state Senate to function as a broader political body representing regional concerns. State senators serve as a mouthpiece for the needs of diverse constituencies across several neighboring towns. Compared to House members, senators, "due to the nature of their districts, must acquire a broader working knowledge of state and local

policy matters."[6]

In comparison, the House is composed of many small districts; the chamber fields 151 members for the 5,000 square-mile state. Most of these districts consist of a portion of a single town or city, or parts of several towns.[7] The sixteenth House district, for example, is composed entirely of Simsbury, a town measuring just shy of thirty-five square miles. By contrast, the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and seventh districts are all located within the city of Hartford. Due to the small size of the House districts, state representatives represent a narrower constituency of voters. This pushes hyper-local concerns to the forefront of the chamber's policy-making agenda and exposes them to more acute political pressures.

Reapportioning Legislative Districts

The legislative districts of both chambers of the General Assembly are reapportioned every 10 years following the federal census to ensure that each district maintains equal representation.[8] As previously discussed in Chapter Three, the U.S. Supreme Court established the "one person, one vote" principle in *Baker v. Carr* (1962), *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964), and *Butterworth v. Dempsey* (1964) to ensure fair and equal representation. These rulings require that state legislative districts be redrawn every decade to reflect population growth and prevent the underrepresentation of urban populations.

Amendment XVI of the Connecticut Constitution details the process of legislative reapportionment in the General Assembly. It requires that reapportionment proposals be approved by a supermajority of at least two-thirds in each chamber, a standard intended to give the minority party significant leverage to block a plan it deems egregious. Because Democrats hold a veto-proof, two-thirds supermajority in both chambers of the state legislature, this dynamic theoretically undermines the institutional safeguard against gerrymandering. However, historically, the General Assembly has deferred responsibility of reapportionment planning to its bipartisan commission, allaying most concerns about partisan influence on redistricting initiatives.

Political Responsibilities of the CGA

As Justice Robert Satter writes in his keynote book on Connecticut state government, *Under the Gold Dome*, "State governments derive their vitality from their legislatures." He notes that, "as a result of court-mandated reapportionment, state legislatures nationwide have eliminated rotten boroughs and have become more representative of urban centers of population and more responsive to the demands of their constituents."[9]

Established procedures and informal mechanisms underwrite the operation of the state Legislature. The state constitution holds that state representatives are elected to two-year terms, with no limit placed on reelection. Any individual seeking a seat in the House or Senate must be at least eighteen years of age.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Connecticut state legislature operates under a joint committee structure. This means that membership within these standing committees consists of representatives from both the House and Senate chambers. Each committee is headed by co-chairs: one is appointed by the Speaker from the House, and the other by the Senate President Pro Tempore. Over the years, these committees have increased their support staff and enhanced their research capabilities to better manage complex issues.

The legislative standing committees are the principal forum for lawmakers to create and develop legislation that shapes Connecticut's laws. Committees are the first stop for bill proposals, which originate with the governor, lawmakers, lobbyists, executive branch officials, or constituents.

According to Satter (2009),

> "The state legislature—the elected body closest to the people—is the most democratic institution of our government. It is the forum where ideas to improve the state are proposed, debated, and voted upon. The legislative sessions are a continuum. Each year, the General Assembly grapples with difficult issues of public policy. It resolves some, and in succeeding sessions, new ones arise, and old ones reappear. The process repeats itself over and over. Sometimes small steps are taken; sometimes major reforms are enacted. But the direction is always forward."

Parties in state legislative chambers differ from those in Congress and from one another. They vary in the extent of power exercised by party caucuses. Party caucus power is largely a function of the size and degree of party competition in the chamber. In some legislative chambers, party caucuses are powerful enough to make votes binding on issues of importance. The more evenly matched the parties and the smaller the chamber, the greater the importance of caucuses.

The power and influence parties have in shaping their members' ability to achieve their policy or career goals varies substantially across states and over time. However, there are some states that have come to operate in ways similar to Congress. When a majority party is divided into ideological factions, some state legislative leaders have adopted a version of a "Hastert Rule." Named after a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, the "Hastert Rule" is an unofficial norm that has been used by Republican leaders in Congress since the late 1990s. It holds that GOP leadership will not bring a bill to the floor for a vote unless a majority of the party caucus supports it. It is commonly referred to as the "majority of the majority" rule.

Since 1967, the Connecticut House of Representatives, and by extension the state's legislative agenda, has been controlled by the Democratic Party. Several factors have contributed to this sustained dominance, including incumbents' name recognition, effective use of legislative staff for constituent service, strong fundraising capacity, Connecticut's status as a "blue" state, and the effects of reapportionment and elements of gerrymandering. Together, these factors have helped secure long-term Democratic control of the state House of Representatives. The only exceptions to this period of Democratic dominance were the 1973–74 and 1985–86 legislative sessions. Following the 2026 legislative election, Democrats controlled 107 seats (71 percent) in the state House, while Republicans held 44 seats (29 percent). In the state Senate, Democrats held 24 seats (67 percent), compared to 12 seats (33 percent) for Republicans.

Incumbents in both chambers tend to be reelected with ease. Caucus leaders assign each legislator with a constituent case worker and a press officer. Case workers and press officers work with several legislators in their caucus. While both chambers rely on a set of rules to govern legislative proceedings, a key difference between the chambers is their reliance on party caucus meetings. Given the large number of Representatives in both

the Majority and Minority caucuses, it is logistically challenging to convene either group before a session, with the exception of the budget vote and other major issues. In short, House members rarely caucus. On the other hand, Majority and Minority Senators meet in caucus before and often during each legislative session. Since Senators can comfortably fit into the caucus rooms adjacent to the chamber, caucus meetings are common practice. Unlike in the House, party caucuses in the Senate are where many crucial policy decisions are made. Swanson (1978) found that major decisions regarding the fate of bills are often reached in party caucuses rather than on the Senate floor.[10] Due to the relative intimacy of the Senate chamber, freshmen senators, compared to their counterparts in the House, also have a greater voice in the legislative process, according to Swanson. Satter (2009), a former state representative, confirms Swanson's observation regarding the importance of the Senate caucus and notes that, compared to the House, more bills are placed on the Consent Calendar. He adds that "the Senate usually finishes its work first and waits around for the House to send up business."

4.4 The Executive

The Executive Branch of Connecticut consists of six elected constitutional officers: the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Secretary of State, the Treasurer, the Comptroller, and the Attorney General. The Governor, as head of the executive branch, is responsible for executing the duties of state government in accordance with Article 4, Section 5 of the State Constitution. These duties include appointing people to state positions and offices, serving as commander-in-chief of the state's military forces, delivering the state of the government address, and signing or vetoing bills passed by the state legislature. The Secretary of State is responsible for the "administration of many aspects of business law, including the approval of all certificates of incorporation, organization, and dissolution, as well as annual and biennial reports." The Treasurer of Connecticut is responsible for overall policy, planning, and general administration. The office provides direction and leadership in carrying out treasury functions and in promoting the economic well-being of the state and its citizens and businesses within fiduciary standards, ensuring the financial integrity and

soundness of treasury operations.

The statutory responsibility of the Office of the State Comptroller includes adjusting and settling all public accounts and demands; accepting grants and orders of the General Assembly; providing for the budgetary and financial needs of the executive branch; paying all wages and salaries of state employees; and administering miscellaneous appropriations. The Attorney General of Connecticut "serves as legal counsel to all state agencies and acts to protect the public interest for the people of the State of Connecticut."

As the chief executive of the state, the Connecticut Governor, currently Ned Lamont, has historically exerted strong influence over state policy while often acting as a moderating force in the modern period. Connecticut governors often occupy a more moderate position than the General Assembly because they must speak to a statewide electorate, manage the state budget, and balance the demands of both more conservative business interests and progressive constituencies. The financial crisis of 2008 led to large recurring deficits in the state budget, which were plugged up by increased taxes. Under these pressures, Governors during this period acted as strict fiscal watchdogs. This pattern is especially visible under Governor Ned Lamont. Although Lamont is a Democrat governing alongside Democratic majorities in both chambers, he has repeatedly positioned himself as a fiscal moderate, especially in debates over Connecticut's budget "guardrails," spending caps, and tax policy.[11]

The Governor's Influence on Legislation

The Governor's role in Connecticut's legislative process is both powerful and nuanced. Through the ability to sign or veto bills, or allow them to become law without a signature, governors wield considerable influence over policymaking. The veto process, including the line-item veto for appropriations bills, provides an additional mechanism for shaping legislative outcomes. Beyond proposing a state budget and exercising veto authority, governors influence legislation through agenda-setting, negotiation, and public advocacy. They identify and elevate specific policy goals, directing legislative attention and shaping the political agenda. One key mechanism for doing this is the annual State of the State address, in which they outline their top priorities for a joint convention of the General

Assembly. This speech not only communicates their vision to lawmakers but also signals which proposals should take legislative precedence. Governors also work closely with legislative leaders to build coalitions and secure support for their initiatives. By engaging with the media and the public, they can rally support for or against specific legislation and apply pressure on lawmakers to act. These dynamics illustrate the balance of power between Connecticut's executive and legislative branches.

While the governor has the authority to veto legislation passed by the Assembly, the legislature itself has the power to override that veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.[12] Due to this required minimum, veto overrides are exceedingly rare; since 1971, Connecticut governors have vetoed nearly 650 bills, but only fifty-five have been re-passed by the legislature.[13] More recently, Governor Dannel Malloy vetoed over fifty bills passed by the CGA in his term as governor from 2011 to 2019 – only three were ever overridden.[14] The veto override process, although difficult to achieve, ensures that the legislature cannot be easily sidelined by the governor, making it a potent force in the state government.

History of Gubernatorial Vetoes and Veto Overrides, 2015 - 2024

Year	Gubernatorial Vetoes	Vetoes Overridden - House	Vetoes Overridden - Senate	Successful Veto Override
2015	9	0	0	0
2016	8	6	4	3
2017	5	1	1	1
2018	7	1	0	0
2019*	3	0	0	0
2020	0	0	0	0
2021	4	0	0	0
2022	2	0	0	0
2023	5	0	0	0
2024	2	0	0	0

*Governor Lamont's first year in office

Table 4.1: History of Gubernatorial Vetoes and Veto Overrides in Connecticut, 2015–2024[15]

Furthermore, this safeguard incentivizes the legislature to be united in its stance on a particular issue. If the opportunity to override a veto presents itself, both chambers of the CGA must come to a bipartisan agreement and maintain a strong front on the issue. In this way, the gubernatorial veto process promotes cooperation and teamwork in the CGA, creating countless bonds and relationships over shared perspectives on issues. This collaboration, as well as the ability to challenge a veto ruling, speaks to the strength of the CGA when it comes to deciding impactful legislation. Finally, the ability to overrule vetoes empowers legislators to pass laws that reflect the needs and concerns of their constituents, even when the governor may have a different viewpoint. This causes legislators to be more connected to their district's residents and account for their needs when passing legislation. As a result, it gives the CGA a sense of independence and authority in shaping Connecticut's policy landscape and reinforces the idea that the legislature is an equal and necessary branch of state government.

The professionalization of the Connecticut General Assembly in the late 1960s marked a major turning point in the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches. For much of the state's history, legislators had limited staff, limited expertise, and relatively little resources and ability needed to make policy. There were no experts or staff on the side of the legislature that could help them get the information they need and assist in the growing responsibilities of a state legislator. As a result, both the Senate and the House of Representatives often depended on the governor and executive agencies for information, bill drafting, budget analysis, and policy expertise. That began to change after reapportionment and legislative modernization. In 1969, legislative leaders from both parties passed the Legislative Management Act, which created professional support staff and gave the General Assembly greater control over its own operating budget. Governor John Dempsey vetoed the bill, but both chambers unanimously overrode him, a symbolically important act that asserted the legislature's independence. The reform helped build the modern legislative infrastructure of the Capitol, including nonpartisan research, fiscal analysis, legal drafting, and committee support. By developing its own professional staff, the General Assembly reduced its dependence on the executive branch and strengthened its ability to initiate, analyze, amend, and oversee public policy. Legislative reorganization

helped the CGA reemerge as a coequal branch of government, capable of challenging the governor and state agencies rather than simply reacting to the executive branch's agenda.

Another factor that makes the CGA stand out is its reliance on nonpartisan staff. The Connecticut General Assembly is unique in how it operates, with a team of nonpartisan experts who provide objective advice and support to legislators. This contrasts with the often politically charged environment of many other state legislatures, where staff can be directly aligned with partisan interests.

Nonpartisan staff in the CGA include the Legislative Commissioner's Office (LCO), the Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA), and the Office of Legislative Research (OLR). These groups are involved in every aspect of policymaking and work to ensure that the legislative process remains fair, transparent, and focused on delivering good governance. They conduct research, provide analysis, and assist in drafting bills, all while maintaining neutrality. This allows legislators to access impartial information, helping them make informed decisions. Furthermore, it helps bridge partisan divides by providing a common base of knowledge that all lawmakers can use when debating policies.

This impartiality among staff is critical to fostering an environment where issues can be discussed on their merits rather than viewed through a purely partisan lens. Nonpartisan staffers are assigned as committee administrators to some of the CGA's most contentious committees - appropriations, education, finance, judiciary, and public health - to ensure partisanship is not overly considered in deciding legislation. Susan Keane started out her career at the CGA as an intern for the Connecticut House Democrats on the Transportation Committee. Now, after decades in the building, she holds a nonpartisan position as Administrator of the Appropriations Committee.[16] In many state legislatures, staff partisanship can lead to skewed information or biased analysis, ultimately affecting the decision-making process. In contrast, the CGA's nonpartisan staff serves as a key advantage in promoting transparency, integrity, and effective governance. Keane's shift in position required her to develop a nonpartisan view of her work, an experience she described as liberating.

As noted before, a key battleground between the CGA and the Governor involves the negotiations related to the state budget. Connecticut operates

on a biennial budget system, with the General Assembly required to pass a two-year budget during odd-numbered years. The process formally begins when the governor submits a proposed budget to the legislature, however, this executive proposal serves as a recommendation — not a binding framework.[17] The real budgeting authority lies with the legislature, primarily in the Appropriations Committee and the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. The Appropriations Committee reviews and modifies spending proposals, while the Finance Committee adjusts tax policy and revenue forecasts. Ultimately, the General Assembly must approve a budget, which then goes to the governor, who holds only a limited line-item veto power.

Connecticut operates under several fiscal constraints that guide the budget-making process, known as "fiscal guardrails."[18] These were reinforced in 2017 and extended again in 2023 through bipartisan agreements. Key provisions such as the Budget Reserve Fund (BRF), also known as the 'Rainy Day Fund,' exist to foster fiscal discipline and improve the state's credit ratings.[19] There are also several caps set by the fiscal guardrails, including the spending cap to limit the growth in general budget expenditures to the greater of either personal income growth or inflation, a volatility cap that requires that excess revenues from estimated and final income tax payments (i.e., highly volatile sources) be deposited into the state's Budget Reserve Fund (BRF) rather than used for general expenditures, and bond caps to set statutory limits on how much the state can issue in new bonding each year.[20] These guardrails, as set by the CGA, have dramatically reshaped Connecticut's fiscal management in recent years, promoting long-term financial stability statewide.

4.5 THE JUDICIARY

The Judicial branch, conversely, is entrusted to uphold the laws of the state by "determining the guilt of persons accused of breaking the law, resolving disputes involving civil or personal rights, interpreting constitutional provisions of laws enacted by the legislature or deciding what is to be the law of the state when none exists for certain situations and by determining whether a law violates the constitution of either the State of Connecticut or the United States."[21] The Judicial Branch is organized into four courts, including the Supreme Court, the Appellate Court, the Superior Court, and

the Probate Court. Connecticut's Supreme Court is the state's highest court. It consists of one Chief Justice and six Associate Justices who hear and decide on cases. The Supreme Court reviews decisions of the Appellate Court, as well as cases in which the Superior Court has declared a provision of the state constitution or a state statute invalid, or has found convictions of capital felonies. The Appellate Court consists of nine judges, including a Chief Justice. The Superior Court hears all legal cases except those that fall exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Probate Court. Connecticut's probate courts operate independently from the Superior Court. They have jurisdiction over matters including the estates of deceased persons, trusts, adoptions, guardianships, conservatorships, and commitment of the mentally ill. There are 54 probate courts and six regional children's probate courts, each with an elected judge serving a four-year term. Probate courts are typically housed in municipal facilities, such as city or town halls, reflecting their community-based focus.

The Supreme Court has the authority to challenge or reinterpret legislation enacted by the General Assembly by issuing a decision and establishing a precedent. One notable example is *Sheff v. O'Neill* (1996), in which the court held that Connecticut had a constitutional obligation to address educational inequities in the Hartford public school system. The Court determined that the school district boundaries based on municipal lines resulted in the racial, ethnic, and economic isolation of students, thereby violating the state constitution. By finding the state liable for unconstitutional de facto racial segregation, the decision placed responsibility on the General Assembly to develop a legislative remedy. In response, the General Assembly repealed Section 10-4a of the general statutes and replaced it with language establishing a statewide interdistrict public school choice program designed to improve academic achievement, reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation, preserve racial and ethnic balance, and expand educational opportunities for students. As a result, *Sheff v. O'Neill* highlights the dynamic between Connecticut's Supreme Court and the Connecticut General Assembly as well as the power the judicial branch has over the legislative branch. Because the Court found Connecticut's 1996 law unconstitutional, the General Assembly was compelled to enact new legislation aimed at reducing segregation throughout the state.

Within Connecticut's governmental structure, there are various offices that individuals may be elected or appointed to. As previously noted, individuals can be elected to serve as either Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Comptroller, or Attorney General within the Executive Branch. Likewise, individuals can be elected to the Legislative Branch as either State Representatives or State Senators, or to serve in the Judicial Branch as a Probate Judge.

Service in other courts follows a different process. The Governor appoints a judge to preside in the Superior Court, Appellate Court, or Supreme Court (listed in order of rank), and the Legislature confirms the appointment of any nominee. The distinction between securing a seat in the Judicial branch and serving in the Executive and Legislative branches reflects a critical difference in the functions of these government entities. State Representatives, Senators, and Probate Judges are elected to represent their constituents and enact legislation pertinent to their districts. Other Judges, by contrast, are appointed to uphold the laws of the state. By constructing an alternative system for individuals to serve in one of Connecticut's three courts, the state helps judges remain objective as they carry out their statutory obligations.

4.6 Conclusion

Beyond the formal veto process, the Executive Branch influences legislation through agenda-setting, negotiation, and public advocacy. Governors identify and elevate specific policy goals, directing legislative attention and shaping the political conversation. One key way they do this is through the annual State of the State address, where they outline their top priorities for the session. This speech not only communicates their vision to lawmakers but also signals which proposals should take legislative precedence. Governors also work closely with legislative leaders to build coalitions and secure support for their goals. By engaging with the media and the public, they can rally support for or against specific legislation and apply pressure on lawmakers to act.

Overall, the Governor's role in Connecticut's legislative process is both powerful and nuanced. Through the ability to sign, veto, or allow bills to become law without a signature, governors wield considerable influence

over policymaking. The veto process, including the line-item veto for appropriations bills, provides additional mechanisms for shaping legislative outcomes. Furthermore, the Governor plays an essential role in agenda-setting, negotiations, and public advocacy, ensuring their policy priorities remain at the forefront of legislative discussions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the balance of power between Connecticut's executive and legislative branches.

The Judicial Branch, on the other hand, primarily works independently to help support and check the actions of the legislative and executive branches. Occasionally, its decisions have far-reaching consequences for the state, as in *Sheff v. O'Neil*. This decision led to a massive overhaul and reform of the public school system that has continued to this day. The CGA mostly interacts and negotiates with the Executive Branch, the judicial arm of the state continues to act as the impartial review arm by deciding how those laws apply in real life instacnes and whether government actions are consitutional. This unsung ability gives the judiciary an important form of power, as it is Connecticut courts that shape major policy areas, like that of education, housing, civil rights, and criminal justice. Judges, at the same time, depend on public trust in their independence and on the Governor's nomination and the CGA's ratification.

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2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

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5 In May 2019, the Connecticut General Assembly held a marathon, overnight debate which would stretch into its thirteenth hour before House Bill 5004 (Public Act No. 19–4) was passed a the Democratic majority in the Connecticut House of Representatives by a vote of 85–59. The landmark bill, which raise the state's minimum wage, was shapely contested on partisan lines. Similarly, in May 2025, Republicans in the House staged a nearly twelve-hour filibuster against the Democrat-lead housing reform bill, HB 5002. The bill, which was passed by the legislature but later vetoed by Governor Ned Lamont, drew strongly opposition from the minority party. https://ctmirror.org/2019/05/09/after-all-nighter-house-poised-to-endorse-15-minimum-wage.

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CHAPTER 5

Localism in Connecticut State Politics

Written by

LIP Class of 2025:
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5.1 Introduction

THE MODERN MAP OF CONNECTICUT, DRAWN over more than 375 years of splitting, shuffling, and stitching together tracts of land, resembles a jigsaw puzzle. Each piece, diverse in size and shape, reflects the state's unique history of formation and unification. Today, there are 169 incorporated towns in Connecticut: the largest, New Milford, is 62 square miles; the smallest, Derby, is 5 square miles. The newest town, West Haven, was created in 1921, and the oldest, Windsor and Wethersfield, were first formally recognized in 1633 and 1634, respectively.[1] In addition, five state-recognized Native American tribes—the Mashantucket Pequot, Mohegan, Schaghticoke, Paucatuck Eastern Pequot, and Golden Hill Paugussett—hold reservation lands in Connecticut. Once assembled, its pieces reflect a near-complete picture of the "Constitution State"; however, one piece remains absent from the board, leaving a gap known as "the Southwick Jog," along the state's northern boundary. The "Jog," a disputed piece of land covering two square miles, has sat between Connecticut's northern border and Massachusetts's southern border since two Massachusetts surveyors in 1642 first drew the line separating the sister states.[2] Nevertheless, this piecemeal map illustrates the unique composite structure of local power in the Connecticut state government.

Towns have been the fundamental unit of government in Connecticut since the arrival of the earliest English settlers in the original Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay Colonies. Today, independent, incorporated towns continue to be an essential unit of government in the state. With local power to levy taxes and regulate land use, towns in Connecticut have broad authority to manage local affairs and administer a range of important public functions, such as local public education.[3] A strong tradition of local control reinforces the "Home Rule" authority of towns. In the past decade, attempts in the General Assembly to undercut local autonomy in areas such as zoning reform and housing policy "have been rebuffed by nearly religious intonations of the need to preserve Connecticut's 'strong home rule tradition'"[4]—an indication of the sacrosanctity of local control in Connecticut state politics.

Charting the development of local government in Connecticut, this chapter discusses the relationship between state and local powers.

Broadly, it maps the political and legal development of Connecticut's Home Rule tradition to assess the institutional forces underpinning the General Assembly's legislative operations. Here, the complex legacy of local control in Connecticut is explored by expanding on the themes of inequality and disproportionality in the state as explored in prior chapters. In reviewing the development of Home Rule and its effects, we find that, though local input and deference to town independence play an important role in governance, prioritizing home rule at the cost of state benefits is problematic: adherence to "Home Rule" has created a political culture rooted in regionalism, leading to barriers in solving statewide pressing, complex issues like the housing crisis.

5.2 The History of Town Division and Unification in Connecticut

More than 350 years of history underlie Connecticut's local government structure. Towns in Connecticut were established upon the arrival of the earliest English settlers in the 1630s. They served principally as a settlement unit "adapted for the ecological and economic conditions of small-scale colonial agriculture in the New England environment."[5] Within this material geography, towns in Connecticut naturally assumed layers of legal and associative power; as both political jurisdictions and social blocs, they constituted the foundation of the colonial government. Thus, early towns in Connecticut "expressed an attitude often assumed but rarely made explicit in theories of democracy: the self in self-government is constituted geographically."[6] Figure 5.1 presents an early map of Connecticut counties and towns.

Colonial Settlement in Connecticut

Towns remained the principal unit of geography and polity of Connecticut throughout the state's early history. In 1633, Windsor became Connecticut's first colonial settlement; it was followed soon after by the establishment of Wethersfield (originally called Pyquag by the Wangunk people), and Hartford (previously known as Sicaogg), along the east side of the Connecticut River on land previously inhabited by the Poquonock, along

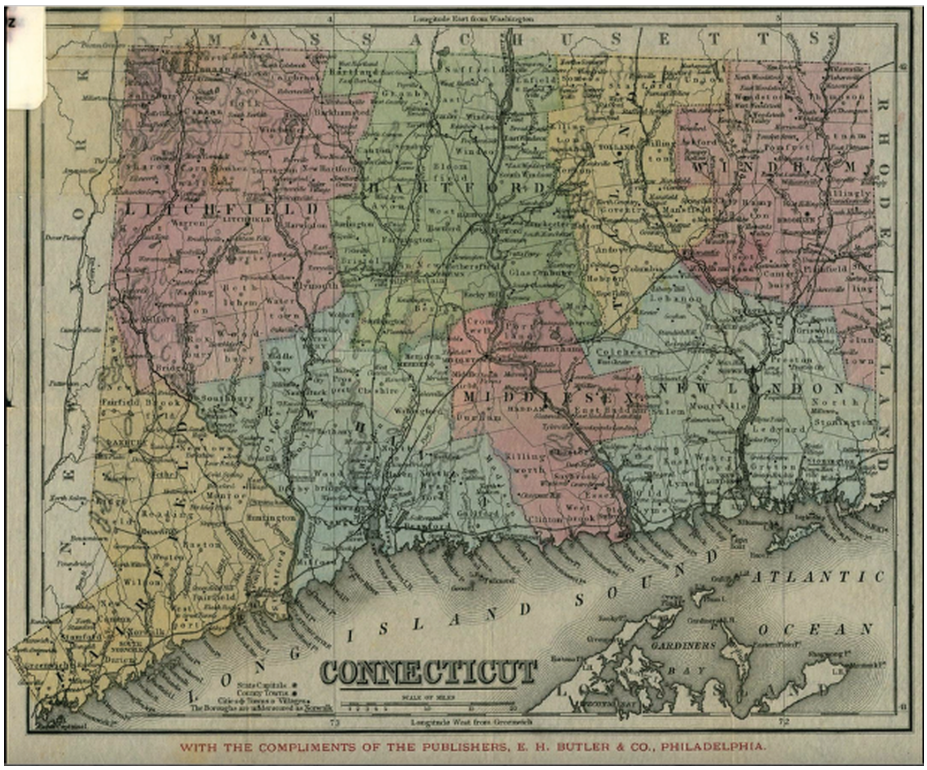


Figure 5.1: Map of Connecticut, c. 1875. on display in the Connecticut State Library. Originally Drawn by E. H. Butler & Co.

with Sicaog and Tunxis, and the Podunk people.[7] In 1636, representatives from the three towns held a court in Hartford, which would later become the Colony of Connecticut. Together, the towns, in an early display of autonomous political organizing and governance, would authorize war against the Pequot people under the command of Captain John Mason of Windsor the following year.[8]

In this brief span, the early town of Windsor would grow to encompass 16,000 acres distributed among ninety-two families.[9] Prompted by this large, dispersed geographic spread, settlers began to form their own townships, submitting petitions to the General Assembly seeking permission to incorporate, lay out land, and manage their own affairs. In 1670, Simsbury split from Windsor, making it the first of Windsor’s “daughter towns.” According to the Windsor Historical Society, the “towns

of Coventry, the southern portions of Enfield and Suffield, Tolland, Litchfield, Harwinton, Morris, Bolton, Vernon, Torrington, East Windsor, South Windsor, Ellington, Barkhamstead, Granby and East Granby, Colebrook, Manchester's north side, Bloomfield, and Windsor Locks" all split from Windsor.[10] The final daughter town, Windsor Locks, was formed in 1854.

Soon after the establishment of Windsor and its daughter towns along the Connecticut River, Governor John Winthrop Jr. obtained a charter for the Connecticut Colony from King Charles II. Among its provisions, which legitimized Connecticut's political identity and afforded the colony a significant degree of self-government, the Charter of 1662 opaquely defined the territories of the Connecticut Colony:

> "We, of Our abundant Grace, … have given, granted, and confirmed… unto the said Governor and Company… all that Part of Our Dominions in New-England… bounded on the East by… Narragansett-Bay, … on the North by the Line of the Massachusetts-Plantation; and on the South by the Sea; and in Longitude… From the said Narraganset-Bay on the East, to the South Sea on the West Part…"

However, Connecticut's internal political structure was far more complex than the charter's description of its external boundaries. Although they were now unified in the letter of the law, these early settlements remained distinct and largely independent of one another. They were not random clusters of homesteads but planned communities, each with primary authority to manage its own affairs and organized around a shared religious and civic identity.

Town Formation and Expansion

As the population in the settlements grew, town formation in Connecticut accelerated through a pattern of subdivision. An established town would grow, outlying areas would become populous, and residents living far from the town center would petition either the General Court or the parent town to form a new, separate town. Almost immediately, towns were governed through town meetings. All free adult male inhabitants (later restricted

more formally to freemen meeting property and religious qualifications) could gather to make collective decisions about land distribution, road maintenance, livestock regulation, the support of the minister, and the poor. Selectmen were chosen to handle affairs between meetings.

A map of Connecticut today, compared to the late 19th century, reveals the process of dividing and subdividing towns (Figure 5.2). Farmington, for instance, formed all or parts of seven daughter towns—Southington, Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, Avon, New Britain, and Plainville—as settlers pushed into new areas and communities sought their own governance. As a result, towns emerged as a central unit for organizing local communities.

This pattern of local development reinforced the local identity of each town. For example, by the seventeenth century, Windsor—Connecticut's first officially recognized town—had emerged as a homogeneous and socially cohesive community.[11] According to the Windsor Historical Society, "Large land grants [in the town] were subdivided to meet the needs of the second and third generations; [and] of the 289 marriages in Windsor in its first fifty years, 74 percent were those where both parties had been born in Windsor."[12] Likewise, towns throughout Connecticut began to develop distinct social and political identities, shaped by geography, religion, and shared cultural experience. Thus, early settlements in Connecticut developed as almost entirely separate entities, each with distinct regional roots.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the basic geography of Connecticut's towns was largely set. The colony had developed a dense network of self-governing towns covering its entire territory, each with its own political forums, churches, roads, schools, and identity. When Connecticut became a state in 1776, it needed relatively little new governmental architecture at the local level, since the towns were already there, already functioning, and already deeply rooted in the landscape and the culture.

Congressionalist Influence on Colonial Land Division

The contours of early geographic boundaries in Connecticut were deeply influenced by the establishment of religion in the state. Early society in Connecticut was organized politically and spatially around religious communities, with towns both founded and apportioned around Congregational churches. In Connecticut, colonial towns were developed

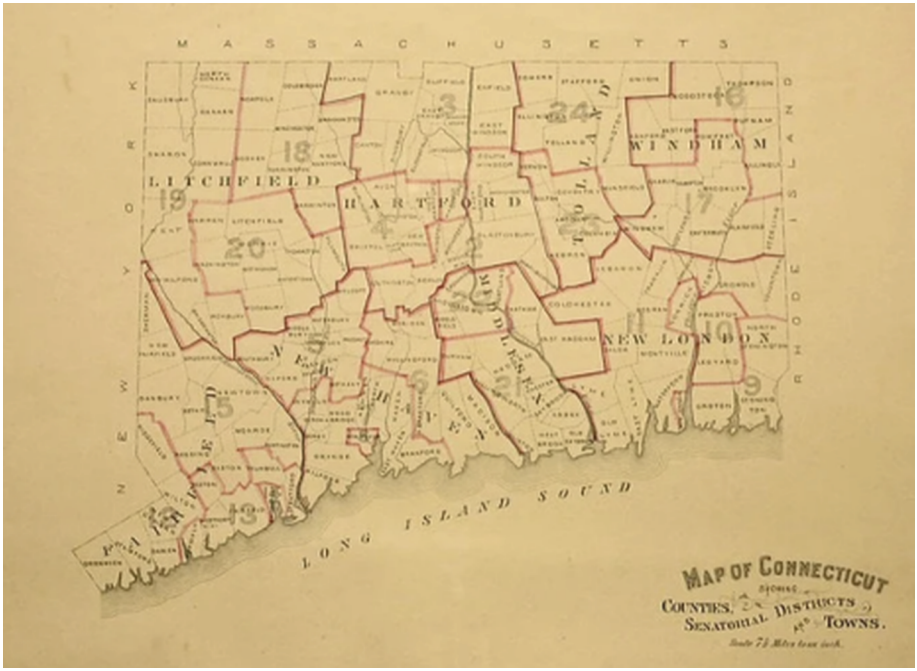


Figure 5.2: Map of Connecticut showing Counties, Senatorial Districts, and Towns c. 1893. Credit: University of Connecticut Map and Geographic Information Center.

around the model of a "Bible commonwealth" espoused by the colony's Puritan forebears, Reverend John Davenport and Thomas Hooker. As soon as they cleared land, settlers "set about organizing a way of living together under both Biblical and civil law," Ellsworth S. Grant wrote in *The Miracle of Connecticut*.[13] Thus, early patterns of town creation are deeply influenced by the colony's established religious institution, the Congregationalist Church. Puritan settlers sought the swift establishment of religious and civic institutions in their communities. The church and its organizational structures provided the foundation for building these institutions. Once a settlement had generated enough taxpayers to support its own ministry, communities often built a local meetinghouse, where residents could seek legal authorization from the General Assembly for membership in the ecclesiastical society.[14] With basic institutions in place, the settlement could quickly seek official recognition as a precursor to its full establishment as a town in the growing colony.

The designation of ecclesiastical society allowed religious groups "to manage all religious affairs within [their] defined geographic area," as well as secular affairs beyond the reach of the Church, including "the election of local officers and representatives to the General Assembly, passing and enforcing ordinances, and levying and collecting taxes, within their boundaries."[15] These societies, crucial to town formation, served as the local governing bodies before towns were formally incorporated, handling civic responsibilities such as building roads, taxing residents to pay the minister, and supporting schools until the Congregational Church's disestablishment from government in the reforms of 1818, as described in Chapter 1.

By the 1670s, Connecticut comprised twenty-one incorporated towns; each town encompassed the same boundaries as its corresponding ecclesiastical society.[16] State historian Diana Ross McCain notes that "[t]his sequence of colonization—from proprietor grant to incorporated town, then ecclesiastical society—continued to occur in areas of Connecticut not yet settled by Europeans until the mid-1700s."[17] However, by the late seventeenth century, the entire colony had been apportioned, and a new pattern of land division emerged: Existing towns began to divide into multiple ecclesiastical societies, a reversal of the original pattern of town development, where towns formed around ecclesiastical societies.

The proliferation of ecclesiastical societies soon outpaced that of towns. For example, by 1767, Middletown had been divided into five separate ecclesiastical societies.[18] From the mid-eighteenth century onward, most new towns formed when an ecclesiastical society in an existing town sought incorporation as an independent town. By 1790, more than two dozen new towns had been created in this way.[19] Most residents lived no more than three miles from one of the 203 Congregational society meetinghouses in the state. For example, parishes once included in Hartford would break off and become the independent towns of West Hartford, East Hartford, and Manchester, in 1783, 1823, and 1854, respectively.

In some cases, it was not a single distinct ecclesiastical society that sought incorporation as a town, but factions of several societies from different towns, "for whom circumstances dictated a joining together."[20] According to McCain:

> In 1785 residents in adjacent portions of the eastern Connecticut towns of Windham, Pomfret, Brooklyn, Canterbury, and Mansfield petitioned the General Assembly for incorporation as a new town, citing "their remote and difficult circumstances—ten and even fourteen miles from the seat of business, amounting at times to a total deprivation of those rights and privileges which God and nature have given them." The following year, those fragments of five towns united into the town of Hampton.

Population and industrial growth also influenced the formation of towns in Connecticut, as centers of commerce and industry emerged in the nineteenth century, establishing cities within some towns. Most Connecticut towns have since merged with political subdivisions within their boundaries, such as Willimantic with Windham and Rockville with Vernon.[21]

The removal of the Congregational Church from government in 1818 severed the formal ties between religion's ecclesiastical societies and local governance. However, its influence on towns remained within the political construction and spatial boundaries of the state's 169 municipalities. The early foundation of Connecticut towns around autonomous Congregational churches instilled in them a deep and abiding sense of localism and self-reliance, anchoring the state's rich tradition of local control.[22] According to American historian Charles Andrews, early towns in Connecticut "were recognized not only as organic parts of the colony, but as the peculiar form, indestructible and unchangeable, in which the colonial structure had been cast."[23] Therefore, throughout the constitution, there is a clear declaration of town autonomy: Towns, not their inhabitants, are expressly mentioned as channels for taxation, administration, and representation.[24] The 1818 Constitution thus cast towns as the organs around which the machinery of the new government was formed.[25]

Colonial-era Divides and Connecticut's Dual Capitol System

The enduring rivalry between New Haven and Hartford highlights and exemplifies the developing localism that culminated in Home Rule, a tradition that still permeates contemporary politics. In 1698, the General Court of Connecticut reorganized to address the increasingly complex politics in the state following the union of the New Haven Colony and the Connecticut Colony under the Connecticut Charter. As the outlines of the modern legislative system began to emerge under the 1662 Charter, which incorporated New Haven into the Connecticut Colony, so too did the animus to political centralization. The New Haven Colony, refusing to accept this unification, struggled for nearly two years to maintain its independent existence. It petitioned the colonial organization known as the New England Confederation to redress its grievances against Connecticut. Although the petition was unsuccessful, a sense of incongruence persisted between the two settlements.

Despite their shared Puritan theology, a sense of alterity existed between the settlement at Hartford, established in 1636 by followers of the Reverend Thomas Hooker, and the settlement of New Haven, established in 1638 by the followers of the Puritan minister Reverend John Davenport and the merchant-organizer Theophilus Eaton. The settlement at Hartford, established by a congregation of nearly 100 settlers from a small inland town of Massachusetts, emerged as an agricultural stronghold in the center of the state, whereas the New Haven settlement formed around a party of parishioners of wealthy London merchants on the Long Island Sound.

The settlements departed on the issue of religion as well. Though both groups advocated for the "purification" of the Anglican church, "stripp[ed] of ritual and returning it to the simplicity described in the Bible, Davenport and his followers proved much more extreme." The New Haven colony limited church membership and participation in government to a greater degree than the Hartford settlement, which pursued universal suffrage for white Christian men. The principles of government adopted by the Connecticut Colony, deeply influenced

by Reverend Hooker's egalitarian theology, were more democratic than those of its New Haven counterpart. In a 1638 sermon, he declared that "the foundation of authority is laid, firstly, in the free consent of the people." The people, which at the time meant only certain land-holding, male church members, should have the power to choose their own leaders and to set limits on those officials' power, Hooker believed…. "We deny," Hartford founder Thomas Hooker wrote, "that Christ hath given power of jurisdiction to one particular congregation over another."[26]

Despite emerging cultural differences, the two settlements were joined together in 1665 by a royal charter. Hartford assumed the sole role of capital of the newly united Connecticut Colony. However, in 1701, New Haven petitioned the General Assembly for status as the colony's co-capital. To balance competing regional interests, the Assembly approved a plan for implementing a two-capital system under which Connecticut's original two cities would jointly serve as co-capitals. Figure 5.3 shows what the New Haven Capitol looked like in the mid-19th century. Connecticut thus had two capital cities and two operating state capitol buildings: the first being in New Haven, and the second in Hartford. This alternating system continued for over 170 years.

From 1701 to 1874, the two cities shared duplicative legislative responsibilities: Meetings of the General Court, later known as the General Assembly, alternated between the two cities, holding sessions in both cities on a rotating schedule until 1875. These biannual General Assembly meetings took place in Hartford each May and in New Haven each October. Considering the logistical obstacles and financial ramifications of maintaining two capitals, state officials put the issue to public vote via referendum to decide which city would take the sole title of capital. Proponents of a New Haven capital saw the city's booming industry and larger population as advantageous. New Haven offered a site, if the State would appropriate $500,000 for the building. Hartford, however, offered the state a plot of land previously occupied by Trinity College and a $500,000 contribution toward the construction of a new Capitol building on the site. According to Guide to the History and Historic Sites of Connecticut by Florence S. M. Crofut:

> "The more liberal offer of Hartford was accepted … and, in 1873, it was voted by the General Assembly that there should be only one capital and that it should be located at Hartford."[27]

The vote was ratified in the fall of 1873 as a Constitutional Amendment and took effect two years later in 1875. The State House in New Haven, built of stone and marble in the image of an ancient Greek temple, quickly fell into disrepair, and despite protests from many local citizens, the building was razed in 1889.[28] Historians and preservationists alike lament the destruction of the New Haven State House—one of "the most regrettable architectural losses in Connecticut history"—as the physical remnants of this unique period in the state's history, connecting Connecticut's modern politics with its colonial past, were cleared from New Haven's Greens.

Although the formal divide between Hartford and New Haven formally ended in 1875 with the designation of the new state capitol in the cultural distinction between the two cities persisted for centuries. As the political and cultural identity of each town continued to reflect its historical origins, local and regional divisions remained. The capital contest between Hartford and New Haven is one of the first major disputes between competing local interests.



Figure 5.3: New Haven State House. Public Domain Image.

5.3 The Rise and Fall of Connecticut's County System

Historically counties in Connecticut were far less central to governance than those in other states. Unlike in most other states, counties held little power in early state government. Nonetheless, they operated in Connecticut in one form or another for nearly 300 years before the state abolished them as an administrative subdivision with governmental powers in 1960. Today, Connecticut remains divided geographically into eight counties, but these counties lack any associated government structure or power, unlike in other states. Rather, counties exist only as geographical subdivisions marking the boundaries for the state's judicial, electoral, and state marshal systems.

The Establishment of Counties

The Connecticut Colony adopted county government in May 1666, three decades after the river towns of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield were established. These counties were created early in the colonial period, but they differed from towns. Counties were imposed from above rather than grown organically from community life. The General Court established the first four counties in 1666:

- Hartford County, located in the heart of the Connecticut River Valley
- New Haven County, centered in the former New Haven Colony, which had only merged with Connecticut the year prior
- New London County, located on Connecticut's eastern shoreline
- Fairfield County, the southwestern corner bordering New York

These counties reflected the four major regions of English settlement at the time and acknowledged the distinctiveness of each region in the administration of the new state government. Four more counties were later added, as the distances to county seats became burdensome, to accommodate the state's expanding population. These were: Windham County in 1726, Litchfield County in 1751, Middlesex County in 1785, and Tolland County in 1785. This expansion rounded out the state's county system to eight, a tally that would remain fixed until the system was abolished two centuries later.

In the shadow of well-established autonomous towns, there was little appetite to hand significant governing authority upward to a county level. Thus, counties in Connecticut filled a narrower, more specialized role. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, counties were responsible for managing regional courts, overseeing roads and infrastructure, collecting demographic statistics, and maintaining jails and, later, county homes for the poor who fell outside the care of their own towns. At their peak influence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, counties also issued liquor licenses, operated homes for neglected or abandoned children, administered the widow's aid programs, and supported agricultural extension programs.[29]

Connecticut's county governments relied principally on a county tax, levied annually on towns and cities located within each county, to finance their operations. Each county set its own tax rate annually, based on a percentage of municipal property tax collections, generally about 1% of a municipality's total expenditures. In 1959, the total amount of county tax levied on municipalities in Connecticut was approximately $2.6 million—the total tax revenue received by individual counties ranged from $749,726 in Fairfield County to $58,000 in Tolland County. Additional operational revenues were generated through a variety of mechanisms, including liquor licensing fees, payments from towns for jail inmates, and a share in the state's unincorporated business tax.[30] In 1959, counties generated a total of $88,433 in liquor license fee revenue, ranging from $26,000 in Hartford County to $0 in Tolland County. Further, county officials appointed by the General Assembly enacted county budgets. This taxing authority, however, was limited and relatively insubstantial even for its scope of operation.

Connecticut's county system never assumed the broad governing powers afforded to those in Southern or Midwestern states. According to the General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research:

> Connecticut county governments were granted only executive authority. No chief executive authority existed; instead, the administrative authority was divided between an appointed three-member board of commissioners and an elected sheriff. The commissioners had no exclusive authority over any single activity.[31]

As a result, counties did not control significant budgets for local services, such as schools, or develop the kind of political patronage machinery that made county government powerful elsewhere.

The Abolition of the County System

At the turn of the twentieth century, the power of the county government system peaked: the court system expanded, county infrastructure grew, and sheriffs' offices became more professionalized. Yet, by the mid-twentieth century, little need for the county system remained.[32] As the state built out its own administrative apparatus, such as the state police, state welfare agencies, state highway department, and state public health infrastructure, many of the remaining functions of the county government were taken over by the state. For instance, the State Highway Department took over road construction in 1895, and, in 1933, the State Liquor Control Commission removed the counties' lucrative license revenue. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the relatively few remaining county employees were absorbed into state civil service positions.

At the time of its abolition, the county system was considered an administrative burden to the cities and the state. A 1957 study commissioned by the state legislature examining the county government system concluded that its functions could be efficiently absorbed by either the state or the towns. According to the Office of Legislative Research:

> The reasons for abolishment varied in scope; however, the primary reason is that county government was never restructured from the eight counties established in 1785, even when labor, transportation, and communication advances were apparent. As a result, county government gained the reputation of being ineffective. In addition, the formation of state and local governments in approximately 1634 had preceded the original formation of county governments by approximately 32 years and were already firmly entrenched as political and decision-making sources of authority. Because the state and local governments had historically wielded substantial authority within Connecticut, county governments never achieved the authority needed to gain a stronghold as a viable source of government.[33]

Allegations of incompetence and abuse through the late 1950s similarly brought demands for reform. According to University of Connecticut Professor Rosaline Levenson, counties served as a political "patronage" system, rather than a true regional government. "[They] displayed a sterility of imagination, leadership and innovation, and became practically intellectual wastelands," she observed, noting that they left little mark on the state "for future school children to read about and refer to with patriotic pride."[34]

On October 1, 1960, the General Assembly formally abolished the county government system. With the passage of Public Act 59–152, the legislature transferred to the state the sparse remaining functions of the eight county governments. The measure passed the House 144–129 and was approved by an overwhelming voice vote in the Senate. The vote followed a four-and-a-half-hour debate, according to a *New York Times* article reporting on the historic reform. The abolition of the county system, it wrote,

> [F]ulfilled a long-standing aim of the Democratic party that had repeatedly been frustrated by the traditional control the Republicans maintained in the State House of Representatives. In the election of 1958, when Gov. Abraham A. Ribicoff, Democrat, won re-election by a landslide, his party captured control of the House of Representatives for the first time in eighty-three years. With control in the State Senate also, the Democrats wasted no time in putting through a bill to abolish county government.[35]

The bill produced little controversy, however. In fact, the end of the county government system had remarkably few ripples. Under the legislation, "about 300 county employees," in all, "were transferred to the state payroll at comparable salaries [and] the eight county sheriffs, who are elected officials created by the State Constitution, [were] designated as correctional directors in their areas."[36] In 2000, the last vestige of county government in Connecticut, the elected office of county high sheriff, was abolished by constitutional referendum.

Since the abolition of its county government system, counties in Connecticut exist merely as geographic and judicial districts. Connecticut's break from other states, whose counties served as the governing unit immediately under state governance with wide powers, is largely due to the fact that Connecticut's towns have already established themselves as

capable of managing county duties. The strong political culture oriented towards local towns meant that there was little appetite to cede any significant governing authority to the county level. The state government took on the responsibilities that were traditionally left to counties in other states. With pressure from the state government above and towns below, counties were essentially squeezed out of Connecticut's governing structure. No county government meant stronger allegiance to towns and a further cementing of localism focused on town identity.

5.4 Towns, Cities, and Boroughs of Connecticut

Connecticut has one of the most distinctive local government structures in the United States. The state is divided into 169 municipalities, which contain towns and any incorporated cities or boroughs under a single local government; collectively, they cover every square inch of the state. Unlike most states, where counties are the primary units of local government, towns are the main units of state government in Connecticut. Some towns have subdivisions, either boroughs or cities, that have additional taxation and governmental powers. Most cities in Connecticut, including Hartford, Bridgeport, Stamford, New Haven, and Waterbury, are now coextensive with their towns, meaning that cities are often also towns simultaneously (although a city is a specific legal charter status, distinct from a town). Additionally, albeit less frequently, some towns have boroughs, or municipalities, *within* a town.

In Connecticut, towns possess a broad authority over their own affairs. They have full municipal powers, which include: legislative powers, to adopt, amend, and repeal ordinances to regulating, for example, zoning, traffic, or public health; fiscal power, to levy and collect taxes, issue bonds, and adopt annual budgets to fund services; corporate powers, to acquire, manage, and sell property, and enter into contracts; powers of eminent domain, which allow state and local governments to take private property for public use, such as roads, schools, or economic development, upon providing just compensation; and the authority to provide public services infrastructure. Municipalities can cooperate with one another under this authority through intermunicipal agreements, regional government councils, and regional projects. Typically, municipalities collaborate on

matters relating to public health and safety, education, land use planning, environmental protection, transportation, and economic development.

Local Government Structure

Towns and cities in Connecticut have the unique ability to create individual forms of local governance. They may operate under the state's statutes or adopt its own local charter. These charters act like a local constitution, establishing the structure, powers, and procedures of municipal government. It specifies the form of government under which the municipality intends to operate. Although there are variants of each, the three basic forms of municipal government are:

- Selectman—Town Meeting: Utilized in half of the state's municipalities, a board of selectmen (usually 3–5 elected people) acts as the executive branch, managing daily town operations, policies, ordinances, and budgets. The Town Meeting operates as the legislative body where residents vote on ordinances and budget.
- Mayor—Council: In Connecticut, the mayor-council system is a municipal structure featuring an elected executive mayor and a separate legislative council. In "strong-mayor" systems, such as in Hartford and New Britain, the mayor has broad executive powers over the management of city departments and the ability to propose budgets for council approval. The city council is the main legislative body of the municipality with the responsibility of passing ordinances, setting policies, approving mayor appointments, and setting the budgets.
- Manager—Council: The elected city or town council serves as the primary governing body in this system. The council then appoints a professional town or city manager as the chief executive, rather than granting executive power to a separately elected mayor. The manager is typically trained in public administration and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the municipality, including overseeing departments, implementing policies, preparing the budget, and advising the council. Unlike in mayor–council systems, the executive authority is not vested in a directly elected

> mayor with strong powers. Instead, the council collectively sets policy, passes ordinances, and hires or removes the manager, who is expected to operate in a nonpartisan capacity. A mayor may still exist in some towns, but often serves a more ceremonial or limited role compared to "strong-mayor" systems. This system is a result of the progressive movements of the early 20th century, pushing back against the corruption resulting from patronage and party-machine systems that dominated politics at the time.

On occasion, a local community will adopt a new model of government in response to the town's changing economic, social, and political conditions. For example, in 2003, the residents of Stratford approved a change to their local charter. The 2003 referendum established a Council-Mayor form of government, replacing the Council-Manager system, which had been in place since 1921. Under the Council-Manager system, voters in Stratford elected a town council, which appointed the town's executive manager; the system now features a strong-mayor office, with the mayor elected to a four-year term. This transition centralized executive power in Stratford under an elected mayor, as proponents sought to promote greater accountability and oversight, and more effective leadership for the town.

In addition to electing mayors, councilors, or selectmen, local communities typically elect a variety of board members and commissioners. For example, local Boards of Education are elected in most Connecticut communities, along with Planning and Zoning Commissioners. Although town managers are, in several of Connecticut's communities, appointed by town councils, there is still no escaping the fact that local elected officials are the primary people who structure and determine the quality of life in Connecticut's towns and cities. Elected local officials determine many policies, including mill rates, property taxes, school budgets, financial support for sports teams, additions to public schools, local school curricula, and community development. Local elections are critical events that directly affect a community's way of life.

5.5 The History of Home Rule in Connecticut

The concepts of local self-government have existed throughout the United States since the country's founding. The idea of "Home Rule," as codified and reinforced in Connecticut, reflects a longstanding commitment to local autonomy rather than reliance on faraway central authority. The story and myth-making of the Charter Oak Incident in 1687 capture this tradition well. According to legend, Connecticut leaders hid their colonial charter in an oak tree to prevent its seizure by the King's representative, symbolizing resistance to external control.[37] Whether myth or history, the episode reflects a deeper political value: a preference for governing through local rules and institutions rather than accepting authority imposed from afar. This sense of identity and culture is the root of "Home Rule."

In Connecticut, early government developed as a confederation of towns, rather than a top-down establishment by a central government. The cultural and political development of the state is indelibly tied to its independent towns. This history fostered a durable tradition of local, town-level authority that continues to shape state politics in Connecticut. In the logic of the Charter Oak Incident, the state government now serves as the distant authority, while towns defend their autonomy much as colonial leaders once did.

Home Rule in the U.S.

Constitutional Home Rule was introduced into American politics in the Missouri Constitution of 1875, which endowed the City of St. Louis with certain powers of local self-determination. The city was authorized, by popular vote, to extend the boundaries of the city "to frame a charter for the government of the city thus enlarged." The basic feature of the Missouri home rule provision empowered the city to frame a charter for its own government. It drew on a post-Civil War era doctrine known as "Dillon's Rule," which held that local governments are creatures of the state, possessing only those powers expressly granted by the state legislature, those necessarily implied by granted powers, and those essential to the declared purposes of the municipality.[38] Under this provision, any doubt about whether a power had been granted was to be resolved against the municipality.

Under these constraints, local government was limited in its authority and flexibility, and, in Connecticut, like most other states operating under Dillon's Rule in the late nineteenth century, the state "legislature faced continuous requirements to the referee in local issues regarding power."[39] This doctrine, thus, constrained the independent operation of both the state legislature and the town governments. If, for instance, a town wanted to use its governing apparatus to regulate an issue, establish a new service, or change its own governmental structure, it had to obtain specific legislative authorization. No matter the scope of the matter, town governments had to consult the General Assembly.

This system was workable when local needs were simple, and the legislature was not overwhelmed. However, as the beginning of the twentieth century neared, this system became increasingly untenable. The legislature became inundated with permission-granting to every local government in the state, and towns and cities faced considerable obstacles to local self-government. "Dissatisfaction with this situation, in large part, led both local and state officials to seek solutions in the direction of interested local self-determination under strict guidelines."[40]

Home Rule in Connecticut

The development of home rule in Connecticut is embedded in a deep history that predates the state's establishment. Because Connecticut was created by the union of the three original towns, local rule advocates argue that towns could be entitled to "inherent power of local self-government."

The formal legal foundation for Home Rule in Connecticut came in two stages in the middle of the twentieth century. The first development came in 1953, when Connecticut voters approved a constitutional amendment that afforded municipalities a degree of constitutional protection for local self-government. The amendment, Article Tenth, authorizes the General Assembly to delegate legislative power to municipalities concerning their own organization, form of government, and local powers, providing a constitutional basis for local self-governance beyond the grace of legislative privilege. Four years later, the General Assembly enacted the Home Rule Act of 1957, which established that municipalities had the power to adopt, revise, and amend their own charters through a local process, without

needing special legislative approval for each change. It also attempted to define a sphere of "local affairs" within which municipalities could act on their own authority. Taken together, these provisions afforded greater legitimacy to the operation of local government in Connecticut and affirmed the right of municipalities to manage their local concerns.

According to the Connecticut Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1987),

> At the beginning of the 20th century, a movement for home rule swelled in Connecticut. This resulted in the enactment of the 1915 General Statute, providing for greater local control by authorizing municipalities to adopt charters. While the Selectmen town meeting form of government has continued to remain the sole standardized form of local government prescribed in the general statutes, as Connecticut and its towns grew, this traditional form no longer served the needs of the state's more populous area […] There was also a desire on the part of towns to have greater control over the management of their affairs.

Home Rule offered to municipalities the freedom to adapt their governmental structures, manage their finances, and address local problems without constant legislative interference. In the early twentieth century, these increased capacities of towns were intended to address the increasingly complex needs of Connecticut's growing industrial cities. Proponents drew on several currents of Progressive Era thought, which held that government should be efficient and expert, that local problems were best understood and solved locally, and that the constant parade of special legislation through the General Assembly invited favoritism and corruption.

Connecticut courts have articulated a moderate view of the Home Rule framework. They have tended to read the concept of "statewide concern" broadly, often siding with the legislature when conflicts arose. The Connecticut Supreme Court in *Cook-Littman v. Fairfield Board of Selectmen* (2018), held:

> [I]n an area of local concern, … general statutory provisions must yield to municipal charter provisions governing the same subject matter. Our

> constitutional home rule provision… prohibits the legislature from encroaching on the local authority to regulate matters of purely local concern. …In contrast, matters that concern public health and safety, and other areas within the purview of a state's police power, have traditionally been viewed as matters of statewide concern. Ultimately, a matter is of local concern when it relates to concerns that are of particular importance to the town itself or, put differently, impacts only the municipality itself and does not affect the interests of the rest of the state (328 Conn. 758).

Home Rule in Connecticut thus affords municipalities genuine autonomy over their governmental structures and a range of local regulatory matters. In practice, however, the state retains broad authority to override local decisions when it determines that a matter rises to statewide significance.

5.6 The Landscape of Home Rule Today

Home Rule in Connecticut today is best understood less as a robust legal shield against state authority and more as a deeply ingrained and often sacrosanct feature of the state's political culture, even as it remains formally limited and contested. Municipalities have authority over their own governmental structures through the charter process and the day-to-day administration of local services, such as roads, parks, and local land use within state parameters. The state government, however, retains the authority to override local decisions on matters it defines as *statewide concerns*. In response to growing inequality in the state, the legislature has increasingly clashed with local-control advocates, particularly over housing, educational equity, and environmental regulation.

Under the Home Rule Act, nearly every significant public service in Connecticut is delivered and financed locally. Education, land use, public safety, social services, and infrastructure are all primarily the responsibility of individual towns. However, Connecticut's towns are among the most economically stratified in the nation; they vary enormously in their wealth, tax base, and capacity to deliver services. As a result, the quality of public services ranges widely from town to town. To this end, local control is a mechanism by which advantaged communities have protected and

reproduced their advantages, while disadvantaged communities have been left to manage serious problems with inadequate resources.

Taxation

Local property taxes are the primary revenue source for Connecticut municipalities. Under the Home Rule provision, each town levies its own property tax on real estate and certain personal property within its borders. The revenue generated depends on the town's total assessed value of taxable property. Towns with high property values, like the affluent suburbs of Darien, Westport, New Canaan, or Greenwich, generate enormous tax revenue even at relatively modest tax rates, while towns with low property values, such as Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, or New Britain, generate far less revenue even when they tax at rates multiple times higher.

Educational Inequality

Because public schools are funded primarily through local property taxes and governed by locally elected boards of education, the quality of public education in Connecticut varies dramatically by town. The tax bases of wealthy towns generate more revenue with less burden on individual taxpayers. Wealthy towns are able to spend far more per student than poor ones. As a result, suburban districts routinely spend significantly more per pupil than urban districts, even after accounting for state aid. They offer broader course offerings, better-maintained facilities, more experienced and better-compensated teachers, richer extracurricular programs, and more extensive support services. Their students arrive with advantages accumulated from family wealth and neighborhood stability. The schools reinforce and extend those advantages. Urban districts, by contrast, serve concentrations of students living in poverty, students with greater needs for specialized services, English language learners, and students dealing with the effects of trauma, housing instability, and food insecurity. They do so with comparatively fewer resources, in older buildings, often struggling to attract and retain experienced teachers.

The 1996 Connecticut Supreme Court case *Sheff v. O'Neill* laid bare the educational inequality concentrated in Connecticut's poor urban districts.

The court found that students in Hartford were afforded worse educational opportunities in violation of the state constitution's guarantee of an equal educational opportunity. The decision acknowledged that local control of education, operating within a system of dramatic residential segregation, had produced a separate and unequal educational system. In response to *Sheff*, the legislature chartered interdistrict magnet schools and voluntary desegregation programs to move some students across district lines. The fundamental structure of the education system, however, remained unchanged: schools are still locally controlled, funded, and organized along town boundaries, meaning that segregated housing patterns continue to produce segregated schools. Thus, decades after *Sheff*, Hartford's schools and those in other cities like it remain among the most racially and economically isolated in the nation.

5.7 Local Problems and Regional Solutions for Connecticut's Housing Crisis

Exclusionary Zoning and Residential Segregation

Perhaps the most consequential arena in today's Home Rule debate is zoning and housing policy. For decades, Connecticut's towns have exercised their local zoning authority in ways that have entrenched patterns of racial and economic segregation. While Home Rule is often defended as a cornerstone of local autonomy, in practice it has enabled municipalities to restrict the development of new, higher-density housing through tools such as single-family zoning, minimum lot sizes, and procedural barriers to approval. These choices, made at the local level, have limited the supply of affordable housing and reinforced exclusionary patterns across town boundaries. As a result, Home Rule in Connecticut has not simply preserved local control but has played a central role in producing and sustaining housing inequality.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, towns shaped who lived within their borders. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 prohibited explicit racial exclusion; however, towns instituted a slew of economic conditions and rules that, though at face value had nothing to do with racial exclusion, achieved similar results. Towns established minimum lot sizes, which

required homes to be built on large, expensive lots; suburbs allowed permitting of only single-family homes, which prohibited multifamily housing like apartments, condominiums, and townhouses. They levied minimum house size requirements, which required homes to meet minimum square footage thresholds. Similarly, towns issued restrictive accessory dwelling regulations, prohibited secondary units that might allow for more affordable housing in single-family neighborhoods, and imposed development fees, which imposed expensive infrastructure requirements on new development, adding to housing costs.

The cumulative effect of these local zoning decisions was to wall off Connecticut's affluent suburbs from working-class and poor families. These families, which were disproportionately Black and Hispanic, were confined to urban centers with declining tax bases and deteriorating services.

Local Zoning Power

Zoning is perhaps the most consequential power of Connecticut municipalities, and the most guarded prerogative of local governments. Towns have historically had near-total control over land use decisions, and this local zoning authority became deeply embedded in Connecticut's suburban character through the mid-twentieth century. These exclusionary zoning practices, particularly the exclusion of affordable multifamily housing, effectively price out lower-income residents and concentrate poverty in urban centers. It has become a matter of recognized statewide concern.

Connecticut has a history of zoning and real estate practices that have contributed to creating high levels of residential segregation; this has led to a pattern where suburban and rural towns have predominantly white residents, and urban areas have a higher concentration of non-white residents for reasons other than non-white residents choosing to live in segregated areas. These local patterns of exclusion did not emerge in a vacuum but were reinforced by federal housing policy through the practice of redlining in the 1930s. Policies like "redlining" created and sustained high levels of racial segregation, lower property values, and a reduced tax base, which have led to a decline in resources and opportunities in communities with high

concentrations of non-white residents. As documented in the University of Richmond's Mapping Inequality project, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation created color-coded maps that graded neighborhoods based on perceived lending risk, with areas marked in red deemed "highly risky" and largely denied access to mortgage financing (Figures 5.4 and 5.5). These assessments were explicitly tied to racial and ethnic composition, systematically directing capital away from Black and immigrant communities while subsidizing white homeownership elsewhere. The result was not only the entrenchment of residential segregation but also the creation of durable wealth inequalities, as access to homeownership was unevenly distributed. Homeownership has long been the primary mechanism of intergenerational asset accumulation in the United States, and, since many racial minorities were denied the opportunity to acquire property early in our history, the inequality between White Americans and their racial minority counterparts has exacerbated.

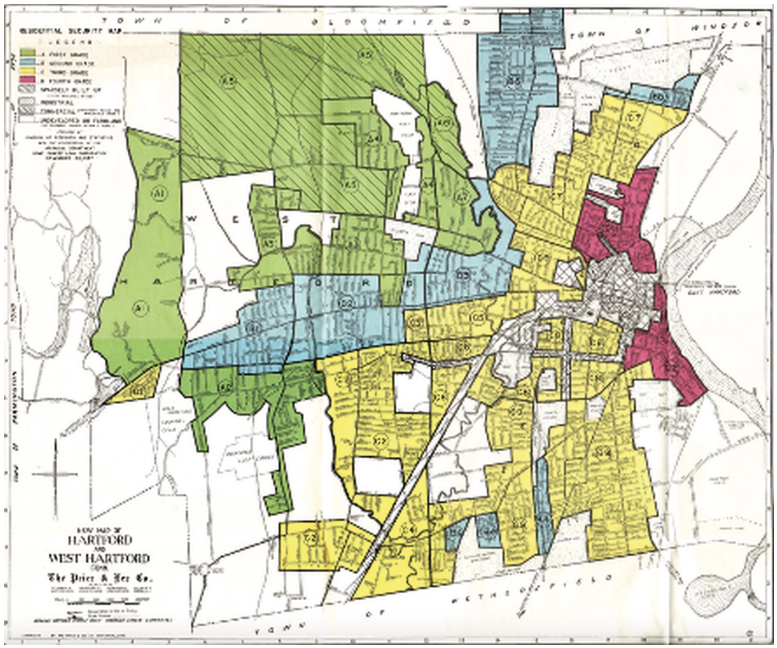


Figure 5.4: Zoning in Hartford and West Hartford, from City Survey Files, 1935–1940. (https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining)

The residential areas in Hartford and West Hartford are mapped in Figure 4. It shows 32 percent of the city is denoted as "Best" (shown in green), 15 percent as "Still Desirable" (shown in blue), 41 percent as "Definitely Declining" (shown in yellow), and 6 percent ("Hazardous") (shown in red). These designations were not neutral assessments of housing quality but were deeply shaped by racial, ethnic, and class biases embedded in federal lending practices. Areas marked as "Best" were overwhelmingly white and affluent, while those labeled "Declining" or "Hazardous" often included Black, immigrant, and working-class communities that were systematically denied access to credit. As a result, these maps actively structured patterns of investment and disinvestment that would persist for decades. In the Hartford region, the spatial distribution of these grades foreshadows the sharp municipal and neighborhood inequalities that later became entrenched, particularly as suburban towns like West Hartford attracted and retained resources while the city of Hartford experienced sustained disinvestment. The legacy of these patterns remains visible today, as areas historically marked in yellow and red continue to experience higher levels of poverty, lower property values, and reduced access to opportunity.

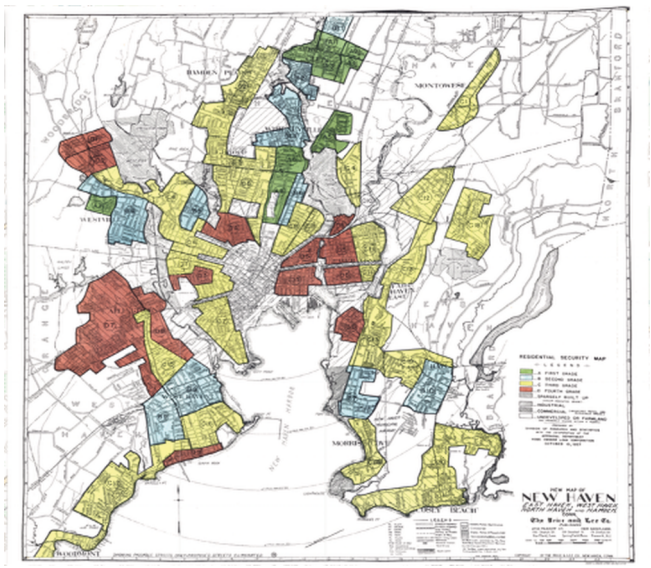


Figure 5.5: Zoning in New Haven from City Survey Files, 1935–1940. (https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining)

We see similar patterns in Connecticut's other large city. The zoning map of New Haven, shown in Figure 5.5 shows 6 percent of the city is denoted as "Best" (shown in green), 15 percent as "Still Desirable" (shown in blue), 45 percent as "Definitely Declining" (shown in yellow), and 17 percent ("Hazardous") (shown in red).

These disparities extend across the full range of municipal services, including public safety, public health, and infrastructure. Housing inequality perpetuates inequality by restricting access to high-quality education, jobs, healthcare, and wealth-building, primarily through residential segregation and exclusionary zoning. According to Trinity College professor Garth Myers,

> If you look at the story of redlining, it begins with the Homeowners Loan Corporation in the 1930s, which, on one level, was trying to do a good thing. They were trying to provide for homeownership as a means of stabilizing communities, but they did so within a racist context and provided for placing a red line around communities that were risky for loans, which just coincided with the places where black and brown communities lived, and that facilitated the white flight out of the cities.

Unequal housing opportunities perpetuate wealth inequality. Thirteen towns in Connecticut, all categorized as rural, across the state have an estimated 0 percent child poverty rate: Canterbury, Pomfret, Marlborough, Durham, Barkhamsted, Beacon Falls, Bridgewater, Chester, Killingworth, Lebanon, Roxbury, Sharon, and Salisbury. Six urban and suburban towns report over one-third of children living below the federal poverty line: Hartford, New London, New Haven, Waterbury, Windham, and Bridgeport. Hartford had the highest child poverty rate of 46.3 percent.

Legislative Efforts for Housing Reform

As the housing crisis metastasized in Connecticut's urban areas in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the legislature began to target local zoning authority. Connecticut's 8–30g, also known as the Affordable Housing Land Use Appeals Procedure, was an early and significant incursion on local zoning autonomy in the name of a statewide housing

interest. It is an affordable housing appeals statute, originally enacted in 1989, which allows developers of affordable housing projects to appeal local zoning denials to the courts if a municipality has less than ten percent of its housing stock classified as affordable. The General Assembly began addressing this local exclusionary zoning in earnest in the 2010s and 2020s. The General Assembly began addressing local exclusionary zoning in earnest in the 2010s and 2020s. The legislature enacted requirements that municipalities allow higher-density housing near transit stations, overriding local single-family zoning in those areas, and required municipalities to permit accessory dwelling units as of right in residential zones, further limiting local exclusionary zoning practices.

House Bill 6107, An Act Concerning the Zoning Enabling Act, Accessory Apartments, Training For Certain Land Use Officials, Municipal Affordable Housing Plans, and a Commission on Connecticut's Development and Future (Now Public Act 21–29) raised concerns that local rights were being transgressed by the state. Aimed at increasing housing diversity and affirmatively furthering fair housing goals, the 2021 bill significantly reformed the state's zoning laws by mandating that towns allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as of right, streamlining zoning for "middle housing" (such as duplexes, and townhouses), requiring updated municipal affordable housing plans, and establishing clearer guidelines for land use officials, all aimed at increasing housing diversity and affirmatively furthering fair housing goals. During the public hearing, Representative Joe Zullo (99th District) stated:

> "…there is a reason why we have local control, there is a reason why, it's because we know what's good for our towns, we know what we need to be doing in our towns to promote economic development and the type of development that we want to see."

Representative Jason Perillo (113th District) said:

> "We have local control for a reason. We have trusted in local control; we need to continue to trust in local control. And more importantly, we just simply need to respect that folks know what their communities need better than we do. It really is that simple."

5.8 Regional Fragmentation and Its Consequences

Connecticut's extreme municipal structure makes regional cooperation to address inequality increasingly difficult. Each town has its own government, its own interests, and its own political incentives. Wealthy towns have powerful reasons to resist regional approaches to housing, education funding, and public service delivery that might require them to share their advantages or accept unwanted development.

Regional Planning

Regional planning is "a cooperative effort by a group of municipalities to plan jointly those elements of the regional community that affect them all and to cope with problems that cross municipal boundaries.[41] According to the Connecticut State Library, "Connecticut's planning regions provide a geographic framework within which municipalities can jointly address common interests, and coordinate such interests with state plans and programs. State statutes authorize the secretary of the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to designate or redesignate the boundaries of logical planning regions, whereas the member municipalities of each planning region are authorized under separate state statutes to establish a formal governance structure known as a regional council of governments (RCOG)." Regional planning organizations, however, lack meaningful authority to compel cooperation. They can plan, recommend, and coordinate, but they cannot override local zoning decisions, redistribute local tax revenues, or force towns to accept affordable housing.

The Mandate Problem

In Connecticut, a recurring tension in the landscape of Home Rule has been the practice of state mandates, or requirements imposed by the legislature on municipalities without accompanying state funding. When the state requires towns to provide services, meet standards, or follow procedures without providing the funds to do so, it effectively constrains local budgetary autonomy while nominally respecting local government. Connecticut has grappled with this issue for decades. Municipal advocacy

organizations, such as the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), have argued that unfunded mandates undermine the practical meaning of Home Rule by forcing local governments to spend money on state-dictated priorities rather than locally determined ones. The legislature has periodically acknowledged the issue and made partial gestures toward mandate relief, but it has never been fully resolved.

Municipalities also argue that inadequate or inequitably distributed state aid forces heavy reliance on local property taxes and limits genuine local fiscal autonomy. Municipalities also argue that inadequate or inequitably distributed state aid forces heavy reliance on local property taxes and limits genuine local fiscal autonomy. Public education is still funded largely through local property taxes; towns with high property wealth can raise more money for schools than poorer cities can, even when those cities serve students with greater educational needs. This reliance on local property wealth was central to the *Horton v. Meskill* school finance cases, and other high-profile cases, in which the Connecticut Supreme Court found that disparities in towns' wealth could violate the state's obligation to provide substantially equal educational opportunity.[42]

As part of the solution, the Connecticut Education Cost Sharing (ECS) system seeks to mitigate these inequalities. The Connecticut State Department of Education describes ECS as the state's "primary education equalization aid program," and the formula is designed to distribute state aid to local and regional school districts by considering a foundation amount, student need, town wealth, and phase-in rules. Using a relatively complex formula, the Department of Education estimates the cost of education per student based on their educational needs. Then they estimate whether the towns themselves can afford to pay, using their tax bases and median household incomes. The state then allocates funding to cover any gap between its estimated cost and the amount of funds the towns can reliably pay.[43]

Though a step in the right direction, ECS does not fully address educational inequality in the state. The underlying system of public financing is still organized around towns, municipal control, and the local tax base. It means that a child's educational opportunity is based primarily on where they live. The system, hence, perpetuates a system that

reproduces geographic inequalities across the state that is often, if not always, rooted in race and socio-economic class.

5.9 Conclusion

The absence of meaningful regional government means there is no institutional actor with both the authority and the geographic scope to address inequality that is fundamentally regional in nature. Poverty in cities like Hartford is a clear result of how regional problems can be trapped inside municipal borders. These cities are asked to solve problems that require a coordinated response across multiple towns and cities, such as creating jobs, building infrastructure, and providing public services. Local control, as exemplified by the canonization of Home Rule, can protect community voices but also may instill a selfishness that impedes overall regional growth.

Poverty, school inequity, transportation access, housing affordability, and economic development are statewide problems even when they are more keenly felt in larger cities. Connecticut's focus on local rule, fragmented by 169 towns and municipalities, makes coordination difficult. Rationally, towns are motivated to protect their own tax bases, school control, and zoning authority. They rightly fear the loss of local character in favor of out-of-towners. However, a stronger Connecticut would require thinking beyond town boundaries and recognizing that small towns, suburbs, and larger cities are inextricably connected. Perhaps the avoidance of share responsibility, a habit of Home Rule, should be replaced with a collective perspective. Adherence to "Collective Rule" in lieu of "Home Rule" may open doors for the required collective action needed to solve the myriad pressing issues that the state faces.

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[20] *Ibid.*

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