



Politics In The US

We have an extensive vocabulary course on the topic of politics, which focuses on the political system in the UK. Although the "politics" vocabulary overlaps with any political system, there are some additional words specific to politics in the US. Let's take a look at how politics and government work in the US.

The Structure of Government

The United States has a **federal government**, which means power is shared between the **national government** in Washington, D.C., and the **state governments**. Each state has its own Governor, legislature, and courts, but all states must follow the **U.S. Constitution**, the country's founding document that sets out the structure of government and the rights of its citizens. The Constitution created three **branches of government**: the Executive, the Legislative, and the Judicial.

1: The Executive Branch

The **President (POTUS)** is both the Head of State and the Head of Government. He or she is responsible for enforcing the laws and leading the country's foreign policy and defense. The President lives and works in the **White House**, where their main office is called the **Oval Office**.

The President is supported by the **Vice President**, who can take over if the President dies, resigns, or is removed from office.

The President's main team is called the Cabinet, which includes **Secretaries** who lead different Departments such as the **Department of State**, Department of Defense, and Department of Education. These are similar to ministries in other countries.

When a President is near the end of their term and no longer has much political power, they are sometimes called a **lame duck president**.

The President who is currently in power is known as the **incumbent**, while the candidate most likely to win an election is called the **front-runner**.

2: The Legislative Branch

The U.S. **Congress** makes the laws. Congress has two parts — the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives** — together known as the **bicameral legislature**.

- The **Senate** has 100 members — two from each state, regardless of size.
- The **House of Representatives** has 435 members, and the number from each state depends on its population.

Members of the House are called **Representatives** or **Congressmen/Congresswomen**, and they serve for two years. Members of the Senate are called **Senators** and they serve for six years.

Congress debates and votes on Bills. A Bill must be approved by both houses and then signed by the President to become Legislation.

3: The Judicial Branch

The Judicial Branch interprets the laws and ensures they follow the Constitution. It is made up of the **Supreme Court** and other lower **Federal Courts**. The Supreme Court has nine **Justices**, who are appointed for life. They can declare laws or government actions **unconstitutional** — meaning they go against the Constitution.

Political Parties in the U.S.

The United States has two main political parties: the **Democratic Party** and the **Republican Party**.

- The **Democrats** are often seen as left-wing or liberal, focusing on equality, social programs, and government involvement in the economy.
- The **Republicans** are generally right-wing or conservative, supporting individual freedom, business growth, and limited government intervention.

People who strongly support one party are called **partisan** voters. However, some politicians and laws have **bipartisan** support — meaning both major parties agree on them.

Other **third parties** exist — such as the Libertarian Party and the Green Party — but they rarely win major elections.

There are also independent groups called **think tanks**, which research political and economic issues and try to influence public policy.

How Americans Vote

The U.S. uses an **Electoral College** system to elect the President. This means that when citizens cast their votes, they are technically voting for a group of **Electors** who will vote for the President on their behalf.

Each state has a certain number of **Electoral Votes**, based on its population. There are 538 votes in total and a candidate needs 270 to win the Presidency.

Most states use a **winner-takes-all system**, meaning that the candidate with the most votes in a state wins all of its Electoral Votes. Only two small states, Maine and Nebraska, use a proportional method.

States that almost always vote for the same party are called **safe states**. States that could vote for either party are called **swing states** or **purple states** — a mix of “red” (Republican) and “blue” (Democrat). Because these swing states can decide the election, candidates spend a lot of time and money campaigning there, often through TV advertising and media — known as the **air war**.

Campaign teams also work hard to influence public opinion through **spin** — presenting information in a way that makes their candidate look better. Some campaigns use **robocalls** — automatic phone calls that deliver a recorded political message to thousands of voters.

Voting usually happens every four years in November on Election Day. Citizens can vote in person at a polling station, by **mail-in ballot**, or using an **early voting** option in some states.

Each state runs its own election process, so the rules can differ slightly. Voters often show their **voter ID** before receiving a ballot paper (or electronic ballot).

After voting ends, the ballot boxes are collected and counted. The results are first projected by exit polls, and the official count follows later.

If the election is very close, there might be a recount in a particular state. Once all the votes are certified, the new President officially takes office in January during the **Inauguration** ceremony.

The percentage of people who actually vote is called the **voter turnout**. This number is often discussed after elections to measure public engagement.

How Candidates Are Chosen

Before the general election, each political party holds **primaries** or **caucuses** to choose its candidate for President. These are held in different states, and party members vote for their preferred nominee. The most important of these is **Super Tuesday**, when many states hold their primary elections on the same day.

The process starts in Iowa and New Hampshire and continues across the country. By the end, one candidate from each party wins enough **delegates** to secure the nomination.

The candidates then campaign across the nation, attend debates, and try to convince voters with their manifestos and policy platforms.

Other Types of Elections

The U.S. doesn't just vote for a President. Every two years, Americans vote in **midterm elections**, which choose all members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate.

There are also **state elections** for **Governors, Mayors**, and local councils. Some cities and states even hold referendums where people vote directly on laws or policies.

If a position becomes empty before the end of the term, a **special election** is held — similar to a by-election in the UK.

Checks and Balances

A key idea in the U.S. system is **checks and balances**. This means no single branch of government can become too powerful. For example:

- Congress can **impeach** the President (formally charge them with wrongdoing).
- The President can **veto** laws passed by Congress.
- The Supreme Court can strike down unconstitutional laws.

This system helps protect democracy and freedom of speech, which are core American values.

In short, U.S. politics is built on a balance of power between the federal and state governments, and between the three branches of government. Elections take place regularly, allowing citizens to have their say on who leads them — from their local area right up to the White House.

Although the system may seem complicated, it's designed to ensure that no one person or group has complete control — keeping the United States a strong and democratic nation.

American Politics Vocabulary

Word	Definition
Federal government	<i>The national government that shares power with the states</i>
National government	<i>The government of the whole country</i>
State government	<i>The government of an individual U.S. state</i>
U.S. Constitution	<i>The document defining the government and citizens' rights</i>
Branch of government	<i>Part of government</i>
President (POTUS)	<i>The elected leader of the U.S.</i>
White House	<i>The President's official residence and office</i>
Oval Office	<i>The President's main office inside the White House</i>
Vice President	<i>The second-highest official, replaces the President if needed</i>
Secretary	<i>Head of a government department</i>
Department of State	<i>Government department handling foreign affairs</i>
Lame duck president	<i>A President nearing the end of their term with less influence</i>
Incumbent	<i>The current officeholder running for re-election</i>
Front-runner	<i>The leading candidate in an election</i>
Congress	<i>The U.S. law-making body</i>
Senate	<i>The upper chamber of Congress with two members from each state</i>
House of Representatives	<i>The lower chamber of Congress based on population</i>
Bicameral legislature	<i>A legislature with two chambers (Senate and House)</i>

Word	Definition
Representatives	<i>Elected members of the House of Representatives</i>
Congressmen / Congresswomen	<i>Member of Congress</i>
Senator	<i>Member of the Senate</i>
Supreme Court	<i>The highest court in the U.S.</i>
Federal Court	<i>A court under the federal government</i>
Justice	<i>A judge of the Supreme Court</i>
Unconstitutional	<i>Against the rules of the Constitution</i>
Democratic Party	<i>One of the two main U.S. parties, liberal/left-wing</i>
Republican Party	<i>One of the two main U.S. parties, conservative/right-wing</i>
Democrat	<i>Member of the Democratic Party</i>
Republican	<i>Member of the Republican Party</i>
Partisan	<i>Strong supporter of one political party</i>
Bipartisan	<i>Supported by both major parties</i>
Third party	<i>Smaller political party outside the main two</i>
Think tank	<i>Organisation that researches political issues</i>
Electoral College	<i>System that officially elects the President</i>
Elector	<i>Person who casts a vote in the Electoral College</i>
Electoral vote	<i>A vote cast by an elector in the Electoral College</i>
Winner-takes-all system	<i>The candidate with most votes in a state gets all its electoral votes</i>
Safe state	<i>A state that usually votes for the same party</i>

Word	Definition
Swing state	<i>A state where either major party could win</i>
Purple state	<i>A swing state with mixed political support</i>
Air war	<i>TV, radio, and online campaigning during elections</i>
Spin	<i>Presenting information to make a candidate look good</i>
Robocall	<i>Automated political phone call to voters</i>
Mail-in ballot	<i>Voting by post instead of in person</i>
Early voting	<i>Voting before the official election day</i>
Voter ID	<i>Identification required to vote</i>
Inauguration	<i>Ceremony where the new President takes office</i>
Voter turnout	<i>Percentage of eligible voters who vote</i>
Primary	<i>Party election to choose a candidate</i>
Caucus	<i>Meeting where party members select candidates</i>
Super Tuesday	<i>Day when many states hold primaries at once</i>
Delegate	<i>Person representing others at a political meeting</i>
Midterm election	<i>Elections held halfway through a President's term</i>
State election	<i>Election for state-level positions</i>
Governor	<i>Elected leader of a state</i>
Mayor	<i>Elected leader of a city or town</i>
Special election	<i>Election held when an office becomes vacant early</i>
Checks and balances	<i>System preventing any branch from becoming too powerful</i>

Word	Definition
To impeach	<i>To formally charge a government official with misconduct</i>
To veto	<i>President's power to reject a law</i>