

Introduction

The President of the United States is probably the most powerful leader of the world. He has many duties, like signing bills and commanding the armed forces. The president's advisors get together in the Cabinet.

Congress and the Supreme Court control the president and his decisions.

America has had great presidents: George Washington, the first president of the newly formed United States, Abraham Lincoln who abolished slavery, Franklin D. Roosevelt who led America through World War II or John F. Kennedy , a popular president who was assassinated in Dallas.

A presidential election is held every four years. Americans do not choose their president directly. Instead they vote for electors who get together in the Electoral College.



Jobs and Duties of a President

The President of the United States is one of the most powerful people in the world. He must lead a strong nation and make sure that laws are put into effect. He is the commander of the army and can send American soldiers to war. The President also decides which relationships America has with other countries. He is the Head of State and meets with leaders of other nations.

To become president a person

- must be at least 35 years old
- must have lived in the United States for at least 14 years
- must be born in the United States

A president serves his country for four years. He can also be elected a second time. Until 1951, US presidents were able to hold office for more than eight years. Franklin D. Roosevelt , for example, was elected four times and was president from 1933-1945.

If Congress finds out that a president has done something wrong he can be removed from the White House.

Life of a President

An American President is always busy. He has several conferences and meets up to a hundred or more people every day.

The President lives in the White House in Washington, D.C. Most of the time he does his work in the Oval Office. There, he meets his helpers, leaders from other countries and other people.

Presidents often spend their weekends at Camp

David, a retreat in the Maryland mountains. There they relax, play golf, go riding and fishing and have time for their families.

The Secret Service protects the American President around the clock. It checks food and the hotels where a President stays and plans his trips and journeys.

A President travels across the country or abroad in his own plane - Air Force One. It is a Boeing 747 in which he can work and live as he does in the White House.

Even though presidents are closely protected some of them were killed in office. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865 when he was at a theatre performance. John F. Kennedy was murdered on the streets of Dallas, Texas in 1963.



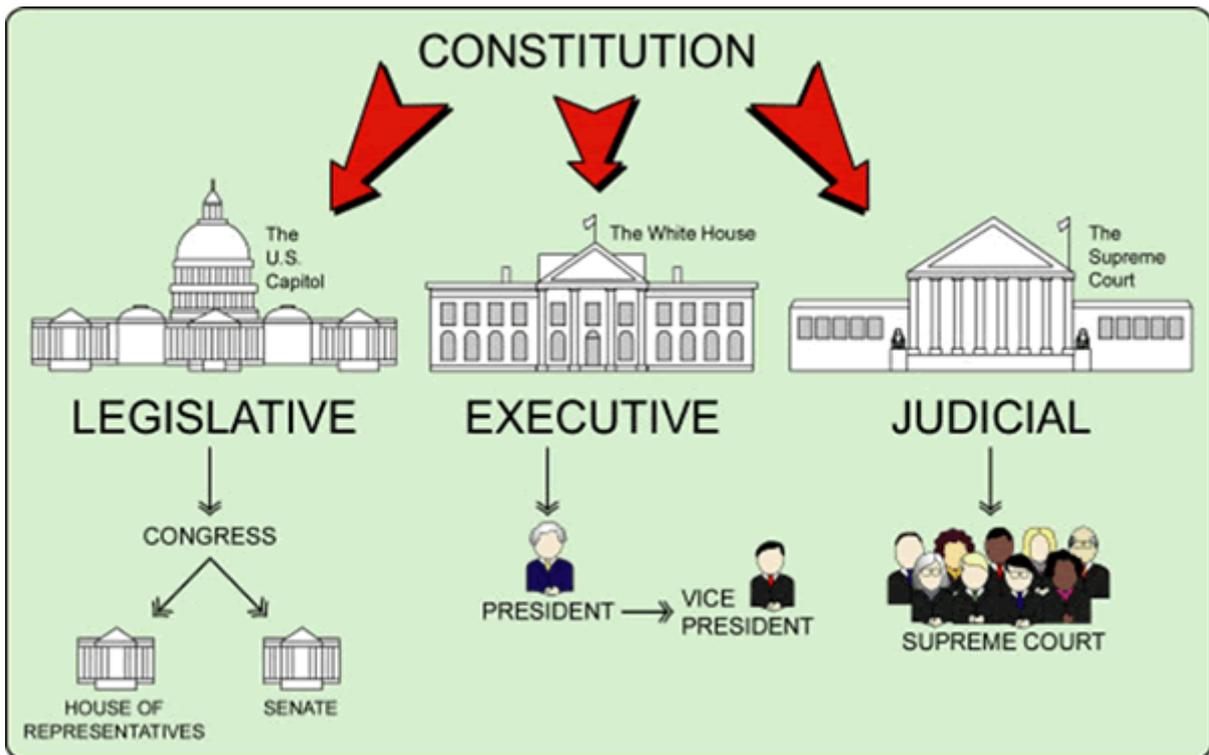
The Oval Office

How the American Government Works

The legislative branch makes laws for the country. This is done in Congress, which is made up of two parts. The House of Representatives has 435 members. Small states have only a few members and big states, like California or New York have many representatives. The Senate has 100 senators, two from each state. Members of Congress are elected every two years.

The executive branch makes sure that people follow the laws, that the legislative branch makes. The leaders of this branch are the President and his Vice President. They are elected by the people every four years.

When people are not sure about the meaning of a law, the judicial branch listens to the opinions and makes a decision. It is made up of courts. The U.S. Supreme Court is the highest in the country. 9 judges, who are appointed by the President, meet in a building in Washington D.C.



The Electoral College

The Americans do not elect their president directly. They vote for an elector - a representative who must vote for the same candidate. There are 538 electors. Together, they are called the Electoral College. Each state has as many electors as it has members in Congress. There are 435 representatives in the House, based on the number of inhabitants each state has, and one hundred Senators, two from each state. There are three additional electors from the District of Columbia.

On Election Day voters go to the polls to choose the electors in their state; however they only see the names of the presidential and vice presidential candidates. When they vote for a candidate of a party they actually vote for an elector of that state. This is called the popular vote.

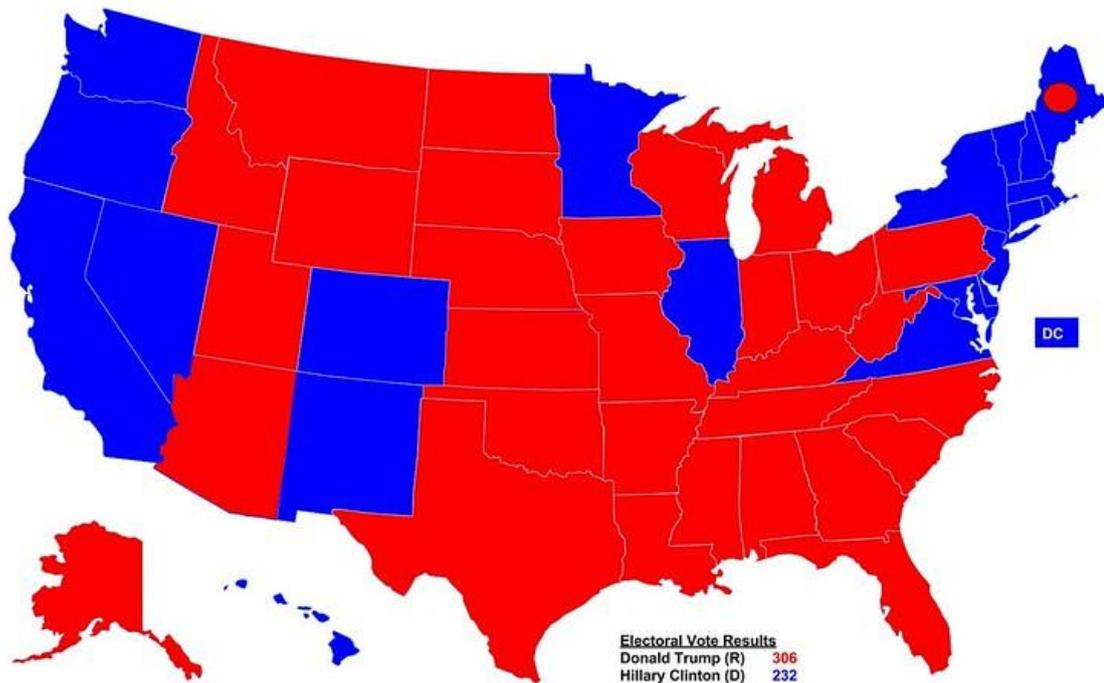
In almost all of the states the candidate who receives the most popular votes wins all that state's electoral votes. A candidate needs 270 votes to win the election. Even though the winner of the election is known by the following morning he or she is officially elected president in December when the electors meet.

Problems of the Electoral College System

Many people don't agree with the way the Americans elect their president. They think it's wrong for the winning candidate to get all the electoral votes of a state and the loser none. That's why it is possible for a candidate to receive fewer votes from the people and still win

the election by winning the "big" states. This happened last in 2016, when the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton got three million popular votes more than Donald Trump, but lost the Electoral College by 227 to 304.

Electoral Map - 2016 Election



Others criticize that candidates concentrate their campaign on the big states, like California, New York, Texas, Florida and others because they have the most electors. Smaller states or those in which a candidate feels safe may get less attention in the campaign .

Those who are in favour of keeping the system say that smaller states are better represented because they have more electors.

History of the Electoral College

The voting system in America goes back to the days of the founding fathers who wrote the first constitution . They did not want the people to vote directly for the president. Because there was no radio and TV they thought that it was too hard for the people to get information about a candidate.

At first, electors could vote for whoever they wanted to, but then political parties became stronger and they had a growing influence on the electors.

The 2000 Presidential Election

The US election of 2000 was one of the closest and most unusual presidential elections in history. 5 weeks after the election it was finally certain that George Bush, a Republican from Texas had defeated Vice President Al Gore.

On November 7, 2000 more than 100 million Americans went to vote. Because of the American election system, the candidate who has the majority of electoral votes becomes President. Although all across America more people voted for Al Gore, he didn't get enough electoral votes to win.

As the election evening went on, it became clear that the contest would be decided in Florida, a state with 25 electoral votes.

On the morning after the election it turned out that Bush had won Florida by only a few hundred votes. But many ballots had to be counted again because it was not clear who they were for. In some Florida counties people must vote by punching a hole in cards with a machine. Some machines couldn't read the cards and they were thrown away.

During the next few weeks, it was the problem of the courts to decide if the Florida ballots should be recounted or not. Some courts said they should, others said they shouldn't.

The case went to the Supreme Court of the United States, the highest court of the country. It stopped the recounting of ballots and Bush became the winner of Florida's 25 electoral votes. Although Gore defeated Bush by half a million votes, George Bush became the 43rd president of the United States



Voting machine used in Florida elections

Famous Presidents

The American President is one of the most powerful people in the world. Some presidents have become more famous than others, because of the time they lived in, what they achieved or what happened to them. Click on four of the most famous and well-known American presidents to find out what made them so special.

George Washington - America's First President



George Washington is best known as America's first president. But he was much more than that. He fought against and defeated the British army in the War of Independence (1775 - 1783) and he helped to write the American constitution.

As a boy, Washington had an exciting life. He worked on his parents' plantation and learned how to plant tobacco and grow crops. He also loved to explore the wilderness, hunt for food and sleep in the open.

At an early age Washington became a surveyor and helped new settlers buy land. When he grew older, he became a soldier and fought with the British against the French and the Indians.

When Great Britain started to collect more and more taxes from the settlers war broke out between the American colonists and British soldiers. George Washington became commander of the American army.

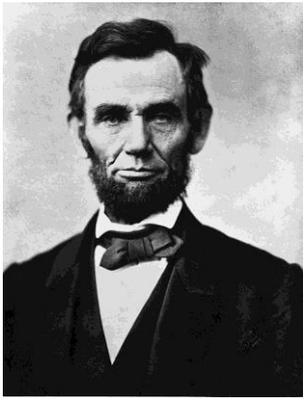
Washington had many problems during the war. The British had more soldiers and weapons. Winters were cold and long. Many soldiers left him and his troops didn't have enough clothes.

When Washington surprised the British army at Yorktown, Virginia almost 8,000 British soldiers gave up. The British king started to lose interest in the colonies and in 1783 the war ended. Washington and his soldiers had won America's independence.

In the following years George Washington and many other leaders helped to write a constitution for the new country. In 1789, Washington was elected as the country's first president. Nobody was against him. He didn't want a second term but his friends convinced him that he was the best person for his country. In 1797, at the age of 65, Washington went back home to his farm. He died on December 14, 1799.

No other American has become more famous than George Washington. The nation's capitol was named after him. Many towns, streets, lakes and parks have his name. Even a state is called Washington. His portrait is on stamps and the one dollar bill.

Abraham Lincoln



Abraham Lincoln was one of the greatest presidents in American history. He helped end slavery and stopped America from breaking apart in the Civil War (1861 - 1865). He was also the first president to be murdered in office.

Lincoln grew up in Kentucky in the early 19th century. During his childhood his family moved to Indiana and then to Illinois. As a young man, Lincoln was tall and thin. He had dark skin and his hair was black. He did all kinds of work, like cutting wood or ploughing the fields and growing corn.

In Illinois, Abe started to get interested in politics. He was a great speaker and people liked to listen to him. Lincoln started studying law and became a successful lawyer.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln won the presidential elections for the Republican party. It was a time of crisis in America. Slavery was a big problem. The Southern states needed slaves to work on their big farms and the people in the North were against slavery.

In 1861 the American Civil War started. The Southern states broke away from the North and formed their own army. It became the bloodiest war in American history.

On January 1st 1863, Lincoln declared that all slaves in America were free. But nothing really changed for them. They kept on working for white landowners in the Southern states for the next decades.

As the war went on, the Northerners won many battles - the most famous one was at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. On April 9th 1865 the South gave up and the war was over. Five days later Lincoln attended a theatre performance in Washington. Shortly after 10 o'clock he was shot in the head by John Booth, a famous actor. Lincoln died a few hours later.

Many people say that Lincoln was America's most important president. He ended slavery and helped America stay one country.

Franklin D. Roosevelt - A President During Wartime



Franklin D. Roosevelt was the only president who was elected four times and he served his country for 12 years. He died 83 days after he started his fourth term.

As a young man Roosevelt became crippled by polio. He could not stand or move his legs. His muscles were also damaged and he spent most of his life in a wheelchair. When many people thought that this

illness would end his political career, Roosevelt became President for the first time in 1933.

At that time, America suffered from bad depression. Many people had lost their jobs and families didn't have enough to eat. Roosevelt started a new programme called the New Deal. The government spent lots of money to create new jobs - it built roads, bridges, new schools and did other important things to help the population.

America's people saw that FDR could do a lot for his country and they elected him for a second time in 1936.

When Roosevelt started his third term in office in 1941, Europe was at war. At first, he wanted America to stay out of World War II but when Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, the USA declared war on Japan and Germany.

Roosevelt's health was already very bad when he started his fourth term in January 1945. He met with the leaders of Great Britain and Russia, Churchill and Stalin, at Yalta. There the three leaders planned the final attacks on Germany and talked about how they would divide the country after the war. Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945.

John F. Kennedy - The Assassinated President



John F. Kennedy was the youngest man who has ever been elected President of the United States. His term ended after two years and ten months when he was shot to death in Dallas, Texas.

Kennedy came from an Irish family that left Ireland during the 1840's. In America the Kennedys became rich and JFK's father was a politician and millionaire. After John had studied politics at Harvard University, he joined the US Navy and was commander of a boat during World War II. He became a war hero and was honoured because he rescued the crew of his boat when it was bombed by Japanese airplanes.

In the 1940s Kennedy's political career began. He became a member of the House of Representatives and later a Senator in his home state of Massachusetts. In 1960 Kennedy won the race for the White House and became the first Roman Catholic president of the USA. People liked him because he was good-looking and rich. He was a young, dynamic American and he had an attractive wife, Jacqueline.

Kennedy had many things to do during his short presidency. He helped African Americans in their fight for equal rights. He also sent US advisors to Vietnam because the Communists threatened to take control of it. JFK promised to put a man on the moon before the Soviets. His main problem, however, was Cuba. In 1961 the Soviet Union put missiles, which could attack the US, on the island. When Kennedy threatened to start a war, the Russians removed their missiles.

On November 22, 1963 JFK's presidency ended when he rode in his open car through the streets of Dallas, Texas. Bullets hit him in the back of the head. He was rushed to hospital but doctors couldn't save his life. Shortly afterwards he died, and Vice President Lyndon Johnson became President.

A few hours after the murder Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested, because he was in the building from which the shots came. The police were sure that Oswald was the murderer. A few days later, Oswald himself was killed. The assassination is still a mystery today. First, it was thought that Oswald acted alone, but today many people think that there were more people involved in Kennedy's murder.