The US institutions

1. The United States Constitution

The **Constitution** is the most important **legal document** in the United States. It was written in **1787** and explains how the American government works.



The Constitution creates **three branches of government**:

- **The** …… **branch** → makes laws.
- **The** …… **branch** → applies and enforces laws.
- **The** …… **branch** → interprets laws.

This system is called **the separation of** ……..

2. The legislative branch: Congress



The **Congress** is the American parliament. It is made up of two chambers:

- The **House of** ……..
- The ……..

Congress's main role is to **make** ……..

The House of Representatives

There are **435 representatives**. The number of representatives for each state depends on its population: California (39 million inhabitants) has 52 representatives, while Vermont (650 000) has only 1 representant. Representatives are elected for …….. **years**.



The Senate

There are …… **senators**: **two senators for each state**, regardless of its population. Senators are elected for …….. **years**.

Important: The House represents the ……., while the Senate represents the ……..

3. The Executive Branch: the President

The **President** is the head of the executive branch and is also **Head of** …….. and **Commander-in-Chief** of the armed forces.

The President:

- enforces federal laws;
- chooses members of the administration;
- conducts foreign policy;
- can veto laws passed by Congress;
- is elected for a ……..

A president can serve a maximum of …….. **terms**. The **Vice President** is also the **President of the Senate**. They can vote in the Senate when there is a tie.

4. The Judicial Branch

The judicial branch is made up of the **federal** ……..

The most important court is the …….. …….. **(SCOTUS)**. The Supreme Court has …….. **judges called justices**. They are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. Their job is to decide whether laws and government actions are compatible with the Constitution. This is called **judicial review**.

5. Checks and Balances

One important idea in American institutions is **checks and balances**. It means that **no branch of government has** ……. ……. . Each branch can limit the power of the others.

For example:

- Congress makes laws → the President can **veto** them.
- The President nominates Supreme Court justices → the **Senate confirms** them.
- The Supreme Court can declare that a law is **unconstitutional**.

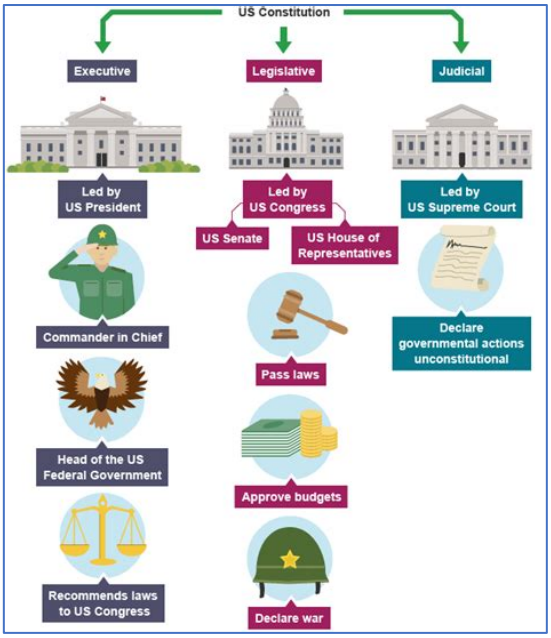
The goal is to prevent one person or institution from becoming too powerful.

6. Federalism

The United States is a ……. **country**. This means that power is divided between:

- the ……. **government** → the government of the entire country;
- the ……. **governments** → governments of the 50 individual states.

States have their own government, laws, courts and police forces. For example, laws about education, elections or criminal justice can be different from one state to another.



Remember

……. → makes laws
……. → enforces laws
……. ……. → interprets the Constitution
……. → have their own governments and laws
……. ……. → prevents one branch from becoming too powerful

The American political system is based on **the separation of powers** between three branches: Congress, the President and the courts. The system of **checks and balances** prevents any branch from having too much power.

7. Watch this video from WHYY (PBS/NPR from Philadelphia): What Are The Three Branches of U.S. Government? | Your Democracy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RDUCM3P2nU

Important vocabulary

The government → gouvernement **a branch** → branche / pouvoir
The constitution → la constitution **a law** → une loi **a bill** → un projet de loi
to pass a law → voter/adopter une loi **to enforce a law** → faire appliquer une loi
to veto → mettre son veto **election** → élection **to elect** → élire
A representative → un.e représentant.e **A senator** → un.e sénateur.trice
The House of Representatives → Chambre des représentants **The Senate** → Sénat
The Congress → Congrès. (H of R + Senate) **The Supreme Court** → Cour suprême
A Justice → un.e juge de la Cour suprême **a federal court** → tribunal fédéral
a state → un état fédéré **the federal government** → gouvernement fédéral
the state government → gouvernement d'un État **a/ the power** → pouvoir
the separation of powers → séparation des pouvoirs **checks and balances** → système de contrôle et d'équilibre des pouvoirs **constitutional** → constitutionnel
unconstitutional → anticonstitutionnel **rights** → droits (a right)
to appoint → nommer **to declare war** → déclarer la guerre **a term** → un mandat
the Commander-in-Chief → chef des forces armées. **a two-term limit** → limite de deux mandats

Quiz

1. How many branches are there in the U.S. government?
A. Two
B. Three
C. Four

2. What is Congress made up of?
A. The President and the Senate
B. The Supreme Court and the House
C. The House of Representatives and the Senate

3. How many senators does each state have?
A. 1
B. 2
C. It depends on the population

4. What is the main role of Congress?
A. To interpret laws
B. To make laws
C. To enforce laws

5. How long is a presidential term?
A. 2 years
B. 4 years
C. 6 years

6. What can the President do to a bill passed by Congress?
A. Veto it
B. Arrest it
C. Cancel the Constitution

7. What is the highest court in the United States?
A. The Federal Court
B. The Supreme Court
C. The Senate Court

8. What does "federalism" mean?
A. There is only one government
B. Power is divided between the federal government and the states
C. The President controls all the states

9. What is the purpose of checks and balances?
A. To give the President more power
B. To prevent one branch from becoming too powerful
C. To eliminate elections

10. Complete the sentence:
"The President belongs to the _____ branch."
A. Legislative
B. Executive
C. Judicial

Question 1
A bill has been passed by both the **House of Representatives** and the **Senate**. What can happen next?
A. The governors of all states must approve it.
B. The Supreme Court must immediately approve it.
C. The Senate must vote on it again every two years.
D. The President can sign the bill into law or veto it.

Question 2
Why does every state have **two senators**, even though states have very different populations?
A. Senators are chosen according to the number of representatives in each state.
B. The Constitution requires senators to represent only large cities.
C. The Senate is designed to give equal representation to the states.
D. The President decides how many senators each state receives.

Question 3
Which of the following are examples of **checks and balances**? **Select all the correct answers.**
A. The President can veto a bill passed by Congress.
B. The Senate confirms many presidential appointments.
C. The Supreme Court can review the constitutionality of government actions.
D. The President can dissolve Congress whenever necessary.

Question 4 - True or False?
Because the United States has a **federal system**, state governments and the federal government can both exercise governmental authority.

Question 5 - Which statement best explains the role of the **Supreme Court**?
A. It creates most federal laws.
B. It interprets the law and the Constitution in cases before the Court.
C. It directly manages the executive branch.
D. It chooses the members of Congress.

Question 6 - True or False?
A U.S. state can have laws that differ from federal laws because federalism gives states their own governmental powers.

Question 7 - Which situation best illustrates the **separation of powers**?
A. A citizen registers to vote.
B. Two candidates campaign for the presidency.
C. Congress passes a bill and the President vetoes it.
D. A state holds a local election.

Question 8
Why is the **House of Representatives** more directly connected to population than the Senate?
A. House members serve six-year terms.
B. House members are appointed by the President according to population.
C. Each state has exactly the same number of House members.
D. House seats are distributed among states according to population.

Oral challenge : Can you explain the American political system in 5 sentences?