The political institutions of the United States of America

The USA comprises:

- 50 states
- a federal district: the District of Columbia
- territories: Puerto Rico, Guam, etc.

- Each state has its constitution, its laws, its head of state (the governor), its executive, its legislature and judiciary.

The federal government of the United States has a legislative branch, an executive branch, and a judicial branch.

- The legislative branch is the bicameral Congress.
  - In the lower house of the United States Congress, the House of Representatives (simply called "the House" when the context makes it clear enough), states are represented proportionally to their population, with a minimum of one representative for each state. Representatives are elected to two-year terms. Every ten years, a decennial census (a population count) serves to change the distribution of House seats between states if the proportions of their populations have changed. Representatives are elected to two-year terms. The representatives elect one of them to preside over the House as the Speaker.
  - In the upper house of the United States Congress, the Senate, every state is represented by two senators. Senators are elected to six-year terms. Every other year, approximately one third of Senators are elected. The senators whose terms begin and end in the same year are called a class. Both senators from one state cannot be in the same class. The vice-president of the United States presides over the Senate; therefore the president of the Senate is not a senator and may not belong to the same political party as the majority of senators.
  - In both houses of Congress, the states, not the citizens, are represented, which means that citizens of other US territories than states (the federal district, Puerto Rico...) are not represented in Congress.
- The executive branch is led by the president of the United States.
  - The president nominates:
    - the members of the administration, including the secretary of state (the chief of the USA's foreign policy), the secretary of defence, the attorney-general (the chief of the USA's judiciary policy), etc.
    - the chiefs of national agencies such as the United States Postal Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, etc.
    - United States ambassadors
    - federal judges, including the members ("justices") of the United States Supreme Court.
    - These nominations must be confirmed by the United States Senate.
  - The president is elected to a four-year term. A presidential term begins on January 20 of the year after the presidential election, which is a leap year. Since the 22nd amendment to the United States Constitution (ratified 1951), it has been impossible to serve more than two presidential terms. The only president who was elected more than once was Franklin Delano Roosevelt (elected in 1932, 1936, 1940 and 1944).
- The judicial branch consists of federal courts:
  - United States district courts
  - United States courts of appeals
  - the Supreme Court of the United States, whose rulings, which cannot be appealed, have crucial importance:

- Its decisions in individual legal cases set authoritative precedents.
- It has the power of judicial review to decide if a law or an executive measure is constitutional or unconstitutional.

Elections take place in even-numbered years, on election day: the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November.

- Every election year, American citizens vote for their representatives in the U.S. Congress and, depending on where they reside, participate in a number of other votes: state elections, local elections, referendums, etc. In approximately two thirds of states, they also vote for one their two US senators.
- Every other election year (leap years), they also vote for the United States' president and vice-president. Based on their votes, the president and vice-president are elected on the first Tuesday after the second Wednesday of December by an Electoral College where every state has a number of votes that is equal to the size of its delegation in the US Congress. For instance, the states with the smallest populations are entitled to three votes since they have one representative and two senators. Additionally, the federal district is entitled to three votes, but no other part of the United States other than a state can take part in the presidential election (for example, the inhabitants of Puerto Rico cannot vote). Most states choose to give all their votes to the candidate who has received the most popular votes ("winner-take-all").
- The national elections taking place between presidential elections, which encompass the whole House and approximately one third of Senate seats, are called mid-term or midterm elections or simply mid(-)terms. In recent decades, midterm elections have been very significant: the last time the House majority changed in a presidential election year was in 1952. Since then, the House majority has only changed in midterm elections, and always from the president's party to the opposite party:
  - 1954: from Republican to Democratic, during Republican Dwight Eisenhower's presidency
  - 1994: from Democratic to Republican, during Democrat Bill Clinton's presidency
  - 2006: from Republican to Democratic, during Republican George W. Bush's prsidency
  - 2010: from Democratic to Republican, during Democrat Barack Obama's presidency
  - 2018: from Republican to Democratic, during Republican Donald Trump's presidency
  - 2022: from Democratic to Republican, during Democrat Joseph Biden's presidency.
  - The last time a president's party had the majority of House seats during the second half of a presidency was in 1979-1980, during Democrat Jimmy Carter's presidency.
- It is important to remember that all elections are organised and regulated by the states, not by the federal government, even national elections, including the presidential election.