

# The 50 states



CANADA

WASHINGTON

OREGON

IDAHO

MONTANA

NORTH DAKOTA

MINNESOTA

MICHIGAN

WISCONSIN

MICHIGAN

VERMONT

MAINE

NEW HAMPSHIRE

MASSACHUSETTS

RHODE ISLAND

CONNECTICUT

NEW YORK

PENNSYLVANIA

NEW JERSEY

DELAWARE

MARYLAND

WASHINGTON DC

INDIANA

OHIO

W. VIRGINIA

VIRGINIA

KENTUCKY

ATLANTIC OCEAN

NORTH CAROLINA

SOUTH CAROLINA

TENNESSEE

ALABAMA

GEORGIA

FLORIDA

MISSISSIPPI

LOUISIANA

OKLAHOMA

KANSAS

MISSOURI

NEBRASKA

IOWA

SOUTH DAKOTA

WYOMING

UTAH

COLORADO

NEVADA

CALIFORNIA

ARIZONA

NEW MEXICO

MEXICO

Gulf of Mexico

THE BAHAMAS

HAWAII

PACIFIC OCEAN

CANADA

ALASKA

PACIFIC OCEAN

500 km

## 5 CHECKS AND BALANCES

The constitution is based on the separation of powers – legislative, executive, judiciary – each being able to limit the powers of the others and prevent any misuse\* of them. This is called a system of **checks and balances**\*.

### Executive power

= the President & Vice-President

The President is the head of the executive and the commander-in-chief of armed forces. He suggests new legislation to Congress but may veto the bills\* which were not voted for by two-thirds of the Representatives. He appoints\* Supreme Court Judges and the Secretaries of State.

The President and Vice-President are elected for four years on the same ticket\*. If the President is ill or resigns\* before the end of his term\*, the Vice-President takes over. The President can be re-elected once only.

### Legislative power = Congress

Congress puts forward laws and votes to pass them. It also controls the executive (controls the budget, taxation, the military, and can, with a two-thirds majority, override\* the President's veto of a bill, can impeach\* the President.)

Congress is made up of:

- The House of Representatives (with the number of representatives proportional to the population of each state.) It consists of 435 members, elected for 2 years. They represent the interests of individuals. The House of Representatives is presided over by the "speaker of the House", a member of the majority party.
- The Senate: 100 elected senators (two Senators for each state). They are elected for 6 years, with one third of Senate renewed every two years.) They represent the interests of the state.

### The Judiciary

= The Supreme Court

The highest court of justice. It checks that the laws (both federal and state laws) are constitutional and it interprets acts of Congress.

The Supreme Court is made up of 9 members, appointed by the President for life, but their nomination must be approved by the Senate.

## 7 PARTIES & ELECTIONS

### ■ A two-party system

A split soon appeared among the framers of the American Constitution\*, some, like Hamilton, being in favour of a strong federal government (they became the Federalist Party, which disappeared a few decades later), others, like Jefferson, argued for more autonomous states. The latter formed the Democratic-Republicans, which later split into two parties, which developed into the present two-party system.

– The Republicans (= the GOP, Grand Old Party). Their emblem is the elephant. It is a more conservative party on the side of big business, in favour of economic liberalism and defending the rights of individuals against too powerful a central govern-

ment. The Republicans pride themselves on Lincoln's fight against slavery and on helping pass the law that gave women the vote in 1920.

– The Democrats. Their emblem is the donkey\*. They are traditionally more in favour of state intervention in economic and social affairs and closer to the minorities. Democratic presidents in the past tended to have more social programmes, Roosevelt with his New Deal, Kennedy and Johnson with their Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, Clinton with education and health reforms, Obama with 'Obamacare'.

Since 2009, the Tea-Party movement has been on the fringe of the Republican Party. Named after the Boston Tea Party of 1773, when colonists protested against a British tax on tea, it is a loose, decentralized association of local groups which share a number of libertarian and populist ideas: limiting the size of the federal government, reducing government spending (hence their opposition to Obama's PACA) and curbing tax increases.

■ **a framer of the Constitution** : *un artisan de la Constitution*; **a donkey**: *un âne*

## ■ The elections

The President is not elected directly but by an electoral college, itself elected by the people. In each state, it is the candidate with the largest number of votes who gets all the votes in the electoral college.

This system makes it difficult for a smaller party to be more than a pressure group\*.

## ELECTING THE US PRESIDENT

### When does an election take place?

The President and Vice-President are elected every four years. The election takes place in November, on the Tuesday following the first Monday. The President can be elected for a second term\*, but not for a third one (Roosevelt being the exception).

### Who can run for\* President?

The candidates must be native-born US citizens, have resided in the United States for at least 14 years, and be at least 35 years of age.

### How are the candidates of each party chosen?

First each party selects delegates:

- either in "primary elections" held in the states by secret ballot\* of party members
- or in "caucuses" in other states, where delegates are chosen after a series of meetings at county, then district, then state levels.

Some delegates can also be chosen because they are prominent party members.

During the summer which precedes each November election, political parties hold conventions, which are very large meetings attended by the delegates.

A majority of delegate votes is needed for a candidate to win the party's nomination. He/she becomes the party's "nominee"\*. Usually, the delegates let the chosen presidential candidate select a vice-presidential candidate.

### The "ticket"

The candidates for President and Vice-President (also called the President's "running mate") "run" together on a "ticket": they will win together or lose together; Americans cannot vote for one of the two and not the other.

### The electoral college

The American presidential election is not a direct one. In November, elections are held in each of the 50 states and in the District of Columbia, where the voters choose "electors"\* who promise to vote for one of the tickets. These electors form the "Electoral College".

Each state has the same number of electors as it has senators (two for each state) and representatives (the number is proportional to the population of the state.) The District of Columbia (Washington) has three electors. There are therefore 538 electors (435 + 100 + 3).

### The result of the vote

In most states the "winner-take-all" system\* prevails, which is to say that the ticket which receives the largest number of votes in the state gets all the electors of the state. (The exceptions are Maine and Nebraska, where the electors are chosen by district.) This means that it is possible for a President to be elected although he had fewer popular votes than his/her rival.

### Voting for the President

The Electoral College then votes for the President and Vice-President, each elector being given one vote. Normally, one of the tickets receives a majority of votes (at least 270), so that the President and Vice-President are elected. If there is no majority, it is the House of Representatives which then chooses the President from the three candidates who received the largest number of votes in the Electoral College. It is the Senate which would then choose the Vice-President.

The incumbent president\* remains in office until the official inauguration of the new president, who is sworn into office\* in January.

**a pressure group:** un groupe de pression; **a term:** un mandat; **to run for:** être candidat à; **a secret ballot:** un vote à bulletin secret; **the nominee:** le candidat désigné, choisi par un parti; **an elector:** un grand électeur; **the winner-take-all system:** le système électoral où toutes les voix vont au vainqueur; **the incumbent president:** le président sortant, le président en exercice; **to be sworn into office:** prêter serment.