

■ 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.