

U. S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



a. Principles and calendar

This is a complicated system of *indirect popular vote (suffrage universel indirect)*.

Voters **cast their votes** for a delegate at the Electoral college (→ electors who will choose the president and vice-president.)

In the run-up to the election there have been:

- the primaries and caucuses to select the candidate of each party (it is mostly a two-party system)
- the national conventions: Each party officially chooses its final candidate.
 - o Noisy event in the summer
 - o The presidential candidate has chosen a *running mate* who will also be ratified for vice-president. (= Ticket)
 - o The platform must be approved
 - o The Candidate's *acceptance speech*

Election Day

When: **Held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November every leap year** (means it is never on Nov.1st). In 2024, on Nov 5rd

15th (1870): secured the right to vote for all males, regardless of race.

19th (1920): gave women the right to vote.

22th (1951): no person shall be elected to the office of President more than twice.

24th (1964): prohibited the poll tax, which had previously been charged in order to vote especially by states in the South as a means of keeping down the black vote.

26th (1971): lowered the voting age to 18.

The Electoral College:

When: All the electors in a state meet in their state capital on **the first Monday following the second Wednesday in December.**

How: Each party in each state has a number of delegates equal to the number of senators (2) plus the number of representatives in Congress (apportioned by population) of that state. There are 538 electors. In the **"winner-take-all"** system, all the electoral votes of a state will be cast for the candidate who wins the majority of the popular vote.

Once the electors have cast their **ballots** (*leur bulletin*) for president and vice-president the ballots are sealed and sent to the Capitol in Washington DC where they are counted by the president of the Senate in front of a joint session of the Congress in January. Since there are 538 electors, a majority of 270 is necessary to win **the Electoral College.**

Inauguration Day:

Purpose: The president-elect is **sworn in.**

When: **At noon on January 20th in front of the Capitol.**

How: by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court before the members of the congress, justices of the Supreme Court, dignitaries. The president-elect makes the following declaration

"I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

b. More vocabulary

1. **A voter:** un électeur
2. **≠ an elector (at the Electoral College):** *un grand électeur*
3. **running mate** (Donald Trump and vice president J.D. Vance, Kamala Harris and Tim Walz): *colistier*
4. **incumbent:** *Le sortant* (in this case, it is Joe Biden)
5. **lame-duck:** the incumbent during the transition period (in case he hasn't been reelected) Joe Biden
6. **the President-Elect** (the new president before he has sworn in)
7. **Capitol Hill** (the seat of Congress in Washington)
8. **Pennsylvania Avenue** (1600 - White house)
9. **Platform** (*le programme du candidat*)
10. **Domestic issues ≠ foreign affairs, foreign policy**
11. **A liberal** (*un « gauchiste », quelqu'un à gauche du parti démocrate*)
12. **Swing states** : *Etats-clés, états en balance, qui peuvent basculer jusqu'au dernier moment* (Pennsylvania, Georgia, Wisconsin but also, Michigan, North Carolina, Arizona, Nevada). They are key in this year's election as **there is a toss-up** (c'est très serré)

c. Parties: The USA is mostly a two-party system:

- **The Republican Party** is the right-wing party: also called GOP (the Grand Old Party). Symbols: elephants, colour red
 - **Democratic Party** is the centre-left party: It is the party of the Democrats. Symbols: donkeys (*ânes*, colour blue)
- One speaks of "**blue states**" (that vote for the Democrats) and "**red states**" (that vote for the Republicans)
Roughly, the Deep South and the mid-West is pro-republican and the coasts are pro-democrats.

The rust belt, formerly iron belt of the midwest (industrial states), used to be pro-democrat. Some of those states voted for Trump in 2016.

Given the complicated indirect voting, **the popular vote** may not equal the electoral vote (results of the **Electoral College**). For example, in 2016, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by almost 3 million votes!

The mismatch is due to the winner-take-all system: In that particular case, Trump won some big states by very small margins and Clinton, won fewer big states by big margins

So, Trump got all the electors of the big states he won (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin)
Whereas Clinton got all the electors of fewer big states (California, Illinois, New York)

That is also why, in their campaign, the candidates always target swing states rather than states where they are sure to get a majority (see above).

The Issues in 2024:

- Foreign affairs: Ukraine and the Middle East. Trump opposes federal funds to help Ukraine, but since he **brags that** (*to brag: se vanter, fanfaronner*) he would end the war in Ukraine, it would mean accepting the status quo of Russian annexation of parts of Ukrainian territory. Concerning the current conflict in the Middle East, Trump is a stalwart supporter (*un partisan inconditionnel*) of Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu and of Israel's settlements on the Gaza strip and the West Bank. (*Bande de Gaza et territoires occupés/territoires palestiniens*). He accuses President Biden and vice-president Harris of being enemies of Jewish Americans. FYI, the Jewish community has always supported the Democrats.
- Domestic affairs:
 - The economic record: Biden's record (**record: bilan**) is considered as good by nonpartisan experts
 - "culture wars":
 - Abortion : the Supreme Court **overturned** (*annuler, casser*) the constitutional protection of the right to abort "Roe vs. Wade" (because, with President Trump's appointment of an arch-conservative judge, the majority of the highest jurisdiction has been conservative)
 - "wokeness": (definition of "woke: aware of social problems such as race and inequalities)
The Republicans oppose the left's "woke" activism on race and gender.
 - Immigration: Trump's fear-mongering (*attitude qui consiste à attiser les peurs*) has remained as acute as before. Trump promises to suppress protections from deportation (deportation: *expulsions*)
- ...And **mud-slinging**: Donald Trump's campaign is based on **grandstanding** (le populisme/la démagogie politique). He spends his time **villifying** (*vilipender, traîner dans la boue*) and insulting his opponent, rather than putting forward political arguments to his platform

The Supreme court is the Judicial Branch of power in the United States. It is very powerful (*en France, certaines de ses prérogatives pourraient être à la fois celles du Conseil Constitutionnel et du Conseil d'Etat*), making **rulings** (*décisions, arrêts*) about constitutional issues. Any individual can take their case right up to the Supreme Court

All nine judges are appointed by the president in office each time a judge passes away (life appointment = they serve for life).

Many past rulings have been **landmark** decisions (*décisions historiques, qui ont fait date*)

Roe vs. Wade in 1973 about abortion (Roe as in Jane Doe for an alias of the alleged victim of a rape who wanted to abort and Wade for the name of the defendant of the State of Texas) see above.

Brown vs Board of Education: the plaintiff was the father of an African-American little girl (Linda Brown) who had been denied access to an all-white school 1951 Kansas

Replaced **Plessy vs. Ferguson** that upheld the constitutionality of the "separate but equal" system "as long as the facilities were equal in quality". 1896

On Election day, voters also cast their ballots to renew part of **Congress** (the entire **House of Representatives** and one third of the **Senate**) and for a number of local government officials. They may also be asked to vote for or against a number of local referendums.