



100 FICHES DE CIVILISATION AMÉRICAINNE ET BRITANNIQUE

Fast-check sur les sujets
d'actualité du monde anglophone

- CPGE
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PERSPECTIVES



Section 1

American Civilisation

Fast check 1

→ Organization and structure of US political system

Introduction

The political system of the United States is a complex framework characterized by a constitutional democracy, federalism, and a system of checks and balances. At its core, the U.S. government is structured around three distinct branches: the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. Each branch has its own powers and responsibilities, ensuring that no single entity can dominate the political landscape. The U.S. political system is built on democratic principles that ensure representation, accountability, and a balance of power. Its federal structure allows for flexibility, while the separation of powers and checks and balances safeguard against potential abuses of power.

The Executive Branch

The Executive branch of the United States government was established by the Constitution in 1787, primarily to enforce and administer federal laws. It is headed by the President, who serves a four-year term and is responsible for implementing policies, conducting foreign relations, and overseeing the various federal agencies and departments. The creation of the Executive branch aimed to provide a strong, centralized authority to ensure effective governance while maintaining a system of checks and balances. The President has the power to veto legislation, appoint federal officials and judges, and serve as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

The Legislative Branch

The Legislative branch of the United States government, established by the Constitution in 1787, is responsible for making laws and representing the interests of the public. It is composed of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate consists of 100 members, with each state represented by two senators serving six-year terms. The House of Representatives includes 435 members, with representation based on each state's population, serving two-year terms. The role of the Legislative branch

is to debate, draft, and pass legislation, as well as to oversee the Executive branch and ensure accountability through hearings and investigations. Key powers include the ability to levy taxes, regulate commerce, declare war, and confirm presidential appointments, such as judges and cabinet members.

The Judicial Branch

The Judicial branch of the United States government, established by the Constitution in 1787, is responsible for interpreting laws and ensuring justice. It is comprised of a system of federal courts, with the Supreme Court at its apex. The Supreme Court consists of nine justices who are appointed for life by the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate. The primary role of the Judicial branch is to interpret the Constitution and federal laws, resolve legal disputes, and protect individual rights. It has the power of judicial review, allowing it to determine the constitutionality of legislative and executive actions. This function is crucial in maintaining the system of checks and balances within the government.

Federalism

U.S. federalism is a system that divides governmental authority between the national government and the 50 individual states. This structure, established by the Constitution, ensures that both the federal and state governments have distinct powers, allowing for a balance between national unity and state autonomy. While the federal government oversees issues such as defense, foreign policy, and interstate commerce, states have the authority to manage areas like education, law enforcement, and local governance. U.S. federalism promotes flexibility and diversity in policy-making, enabling states to address the unique needs of their populations while still adhering to overarching federal laws and standards.

Federalism in the United States is a system of governance in which power is divided between a central (national) government and individual state governments. Under U.S. federalism, the federal government is granted certain enumerated powers by the Constitution, such as regulating interstate commerce, conducting foreign policy, and providing for national defense. Meanwhile, the states retain sovereignty over many local and regional issues, such as education, public safety, and infrastructure.

This division of powers is designed to balance the authority between the national government and the states, allowing for both national cohesion and local autonomy. Federalism also °fosters cooperation between levels of government, while maintaining a system of checks and balances to prevent any one level from becoming too powerful.

Vocabulary List

<i>Amendement</i>	Amendment
<i>Bipartisme</i>	Bipartisanship
<i>Campagne électorale</i>	Electoral campaign
<i>Caucus</i>	Caucus
<i>Chambre des représentants</i>	House of Representatives
<i>Collège électoral</i>	Electoral College
<i>Congrès</i>	Congress
<i>Constitution</i>	Constitution
<i>Contrôle juridictionnel</i>	Judicial oversight
<i>Cour de district</i>	District court
<i>Cour fédérale</i>	Federal court
<i>Cour suprême</i>	Supreme Court
<i>Décision jurisprudentielle</i>	Judicial precedent
<i>Décret présidentiel</i>	Executive order
<i>Délégation de pouvoirs</i>	Delegation of powers
<i>Démocrate</i>	Democrat
<i>Démocratie représentative</i>	Representative democracy
<i>Droit de vote</i>	Voting rights
<i>Élection présidentielle</i>	Presidential election
<i>État</i>	State
<i>Fédéralisme</i>	Federalism
<i>Gouvernement fédéral</i>	Federal government
<i>Juridiction</i>	Jurisdiction
<i>Libertés civiles</i>	Civil liberties
<i>Lobbyisme</i>	Lobbying
<i>Mandat</i>	Term
<i>Parti politique</i>	Political party
<i>Pouvoir de contrôle</i>	Oversight power
<i>Pouvoir discrétionnaire</i>	Discretionary power
<i>Pouvoir exécutif</i>	Executive branch

<i>Pouvoir judiciaire</i>	Judicial branch
<i>Pouvoir législatif</i>	Legislative branch
<i>Primaires</i>	Primaries
<i>Processus de ratification</i>	Ratification process
<i>Projet de loi</i>	Bill
<i>Républicain</i>	Republican
<i>Révision constitutionnelle</i>	Constitutional review
<i>Scrutin majoritaire</i>	First-past-the-post
<i>Séparation des pouvoirs</i>	Separation of powers
<i>Souveraineté populaire</i>	Popular sovereignty
<i>Suffrage universel</i>	Universal suffrage
<i>Système bipartite</i>	Two-party system
<i>Système de freins et contrepoids</i>	Checks and balances

Questions For Debating

- Is federalism in the U.S. political system an effective way to manage a large and diverse country, or does it create too much inconsistency between states?
- Is the two-party system in the U.S. conducive to a healthy democracy, or does it limit political diversity and marginalize alternative voices?

Cultural References

- *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville (1835). This classic work provides an in-depth analysis of American society and its political system during the early 19th century. Tocqueville examines the strengths and weaknesses of American democracy, federalism, and civil society, offering observations that remain relevant to contemporary debates on U.S. politics.
- *The West Wing* (1999-2006). This critically acclaimed television series created by Aaron Sorkin explores the inner workings of the White House and the U.S. political system.

Fast check 2

→ US political parties

Introduction

The U.S. political landscape is primarily characterized by a two-party system, dominated by the Democratic and Republican parties. This system has its roots in the early years of the republic, where differing ideologies about governance and economic policies led to the formation of distinct political factions. Over time, these factions solidified into the modern Democratic and Republican parties, each representing a broad coalition of interests and perspectives.

The two-party system is significant in shaping the political dialogue and electoral processes in the United States. It simplifies the voting process for citizens but can also lead to a lack of representation for third parties and independent candidates. The dominance of these two parties influences policy-making, party alignment, and voter behavior, as individuals often find themselves aligning with one of the two major parties to have their voices heard.

Recap On Political Parties

	Democratic Party	Republican Party
Date of Creation	1828	1854
Creator	Andrew Jackson	Anti-Slavery activists and former Whigs
Color Associate	Blue	Red
Symbol	Donkey	Elephant
History of the Symbol	The donkey became a symbol during Andrew Jackson's campaign in the 19 th century, initially as a derogatory term that was later embraced for its connotations of hard work.	The elephant was popularized as a symbol for the Republican Party by political cartoonist Thomas Nast in the 1870s, representing strength and dignity.
Key Politicians	Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama	Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush

	Democratic Party	Republican Party
Mainstream	Emphasis on social justice, equality	Focus on limited government
Political Ideas	Environmental protection, and government intervention in the economy	Individual liberties, free markets, and traditional values

Vocabulary List

<i>Adhérent</i>	Party member
<i>Agenda politique</i>	Political agenda
<i>Campagne électorale</i>	Electoral campaign
<i>Coalition</i>	Coalition
<i>Convention nationale</i>	National convention
<i>Électeurs indécis</i>	Swing voters
<i>Élections primaires</i>	Primary elections
<i>Électorat</i>	Electorate
<i>Lobbyisme</i>	Lobbying
<i>Mandat</i>	Mandate
<i>Opinion publique</i>	Public opinion
<i>Opposant politique</i>	Political opponent
<i>Parti politique</i>	Political party
<i>Reforme électorale</i>	Electoral reform
<i>Résultat électorale</i>	Election result
<i>Système bipartite</i>	Two-party system
<i>Vote par correspondance</i>	Mail-in voting
<i>Vote populaire</i>	Popular vote
<i>Vote stratégique</i>	Strategic voting

Questions For Debating

- How do the foundational principles of the Democratic and Republican parties reflect the evolving values of American society?
- Is the two-party system in the United States beneficial for democracy, or does it limit political diversity and voter choice?

Cultural References

- *The Candidate* (1972). This film stars Robert Redford as a young, idealistic politician running for the U.S. Senate. It explores the complexities of campaigning, political compromise, and the challenges faced by candidates within the party system.
- *All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren (1946). This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel tells the story of a fictional Southern politician, inspired by the real-life figure Huey Long.

Fast check 3

→ The American presidential elections

Introduction

The U.S. presidential election, held every four years, selects the nation’s leader through a two-step process: the popular vote and the Electoral College. Voters cast ballots for electors, who then vote for the president. Key aspects include primary elections, party conventions, and the general election.

Key Dates

Key Dates	Description
First Tuesday after the first Monday in November	Election Day for presidential elections, occurring every four years.
January 20 following the election	Inauguration Day, when the newly elected president officially takes office.
Late December	Electors from each state meet in their respective state capitals to cast their votes for president and vice president.
Mid-July to late August	National conventions for the major political parties, where delegates officially nominate their presidential candidates.
March to June (varies)	Primary elections and caucuses take place across the states to select delegates for the national conventions.

The Electoral Process

Primaries and Caucuses	Political parties hold state-level primary elections and caucuses to select delegates for their preferred presidential candidates.
National Conventions	Each party convenes to formally nominate their candidate for president and adopt a party platform outlining key policies.
General Election Campaign	Candidates campaign across the country, engaging in debates, rallies, and advertisements to gain voter support.
Election Day	Voters cast their ballots on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, selecting electors pledged to their preferred candidate.
Electoral College	Each state's electoral votes are determined by its congressional representation. A candidate needs a majority (270 out of 538) to win the presidency.
Inauguration	The elected candidate is inaugurated on January 20 th of the following year, officially assuming the office of the President of the United States.

Key Numbers

- **538:** Total number of electoral votes in the Electoral College.
- **270:** A candidate needs at least votes to win the presidency.
- **435:** Number of voting members in the House of Representatives, which contributes to the total electoral vote count.
- **100:** Number of U.S. Senators, each state having two, also contributing to the electoral vote count.
- **04:** Length of a presidential term in years; a president can serve a maximum of two terms (eight years total).

Key Concepts

Primaries	Primaries are state-level elections where party members vote to select delegates who will represent their preferred presidential candidate at the national convention. Primaries can be open (any registered voter can participate) or closed (only registered party members can vote).
Caucuses	Caucuses are local gatherings where party members discuss and vote on their preferred candidates. Unlike primaries, caucuses involve more direct discussion and deliberation, and they often require participants to physically group together to show support for a candidate.
Electoral Delegates	Delegates are individuals selected during primaries and caucuses to represent their state’s vote at the national convention. Each candidate receives a number of delegates based on the results of the primaries and caucuses in each state, influencing the nomination process.
Conventions	National conventions are major events held by political parties to officially nominate their presidential candidate. Delegates gather to vote, adopt the party platform, and rally support for the nominee, culminating in a formal acceptance speech from the chosen candidate.

Focus On “The Winner Takes All”

Definition	The “winner-takes-all” system refers to an electoral system in which the candidate who receives the most votes in a state secures all of that state’s electoral votes.
Application	In most states, the candidate who wins the majority of the popular vote receives all of the electoral votes allocated to that state, reinforcing the importance of winning statewide.
Impact on Campaigns	This system incentivizes candidates to focus on winning entire states rather than individual votes, often leading to targeted campaigning in swing states that could go either way.
Controversy	Critics argue that the “winner-takes-all” approach can disenfranchise voters whose preferred candidate loses, as their votes do not contribute to the overall electoral outcome.
Exceptions	Maine and Nebraska are the only states that do not use the “winner-takes-all” system; they allocate electoral votes proportionally based on the popular vote.

Focus On The Electoral Delegates

Electoral Delegate Allocation	Electoral delegates are allocated based on a state’s population and congressional representation, which includes both Senate (2 votes) and House of Representatives (varies by population) seats.
Proportionality	States with larger populations have more electoral delegates, reflecting their greater representation in Congress. Conversely, less populated states have fewer delegates, ensuring all states have at least three votes (two Senators and one Representative).
Most Populated State Example	California: As the most populous state, California has 54 electoral votes (as of 2020), reflecting its significant population and representation in Congress.

Vocabulary List

<i>Alliances stratégiques</i>	Strategic alliances
<i>Annonce de candidature</i>	Declaration of candidacy
<i>Conflit d'intérêts</i>	Conflict of interest
<i>Conventions politiques</i>	Political conventions
<i>Débat présidentiel</i>	Presidential debate
<i>Démarche participative</i>	Participatory approach
<i>Électeurs à faible participation</i>	Low-participation voters
<i>Engouement électoral</i>	Electoral enthusiasm
<i>Légitimité démocratique</i>	Democratic legitimacy
<i>Mandat présidentiel</i>	Presidential mandate
<i>Mobilisation électorale</i>	Voter mobilization
<i>Pluralisme politique</i>	Political pluralism
<i>Propriété des médias</i>	Media ownership
<i>Représentation démographique</i>	Demographic representation
<i>Scrutin électoral</i>	Electoral scrutiny
<i>Scrutin proportionnel</i>	Proportional voting
<i>Sondage préélectoral</i>	Pre-election poll
<i>Stratégie de campagne</i>	Campaign strategy
<i>Système bipartite</i>	Bipartisan system
<i>Tactiques de campagne</i>	Campaign tactics
<i>Transparence électorale</i>	Electoral transparency

Questions For Debating

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Electoral College in representing voters' preferences?
- How does the two-party system affect political representation and the emergence of alternative viewpoints in U.S. elections?

Cultural References

- *The West Wing* (TV Series). This political drama explores the inner workings of the White House and the complexities of presidential campaigns, offering insights into the challenges faced by candidates and their teams.
- *The American President* (Film). This romantic comedy-drama showcases the personal and political struggles of a sitting president, emphasizing the interplay between politics, public opinion, and personal relationships during an election period.

Fast check 4

→ Campaign financing

Introduction

The financing of U.S. presidential elections is a complex and critical aspect of the democratic process. It involves the collection and allocation of funds used by candidates to run their campaigns, reach voters, and promote their messages. Understanding the intricacies of election financing is essential for grasping the dynamics of political power and influence in the United States. This fast check provides an overview of the sources of campaign financing, relevant laws and regulations, major developments, and ongoing challenges.

Historical Context

The financing of U.S. elections has evolved significantly over the years, shaped by various political, social, and legal factors. In the early years of the republic, candidates relied primarily on personal funds, local party organizations, and grassroots contributions. However, as elections grew in scale and complexity, the need for more substantial financial resources became apparent.

The 1971 Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was a landmark piece of legislation that aimed to regulate campaign finance. It established guidelines for contributions and expenditures, requiring candidates to disclose their financial sources. In 1974, amendments to FECA introduced limits on individual contributions and created the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to oversee compliance with campaign finance laws.

Sources Of Campaign Financing

U.S. presidential campaigns are funded through a variety of sources:

- **Individual Contributions:** Individuals can donate money directly to candidates. As of 2021, the limit for individual contributions to a candidate in a single election cycle is \$2,900.

- **Political Action Committees (PACs):** PACs are organizations that collect contributions from members and donate them to candidates. They can contribute up to \$5,000 to a candidate per election.
- **Super PACs:** Following the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, Super PACs emerged as a significant force in campaign financing. These independent expenditure-only committees can raise unlimited funds from individuals, corporations, and unions but cannot contribute directly to candidates or coordinate with their campaigns.
- **Public Financing:** Candidates can opt for public funding, which provides matching funds for contributions raised from individuals. However, to qualify for public funding, candidates must agree to spending limits. Public financing is less common today due to its constraints. Regulations and Oversight.

Campaign finance is governed by a patchwork of federal, state, and local laws. The FEC is responsible for enforcing federal campaign finance laws, including the reporting of contributions and expenditures.

Key regulations include:

- **Disclosure Requirements:** Candidates must disclose their campaign finances, including contributions and expenditures, to ensure transparency.
- **Contribution Limits:** There are strict limits on how much individuals and entities can contribute to candidates, parties, and PACs.
- **Coordination Rules:** Candidates and their campaigns cannot coordinate with Super PACs or other independent groups.

Despite these regulations, enforcement can be challenging, and many argue that loopholes exist that allow for circumvention of the rules.

Major Developments And Trends

In recent years, several significant developments have impacted campaign financing:

- **Citizens United v. FEC (2010):** This landmark Supreme Court decision allowed for unlimited independent expenditures by corporations and unions, fundamentally changing the landscape of campaign financing. Critics argue that this decision has led to a disproportionate influence of wealthy donors and special interests in politics.

- **Rise of Digital Fundraising:** The internet has transformed campaign financing, enabling candidates to raise small contributions from a large number of individuals. Platforms like ActBlue have facilitated online fundraising for Democratic candidates, while Republican candidates have also leveraged digital tools to mobilize support.
- **Increased Scrutiny of Dark Money:** The rise of organizations that can spend unlimited amounts on elections without disclosing their donors has raised concerns about transparency and accountability in campaign financing. Advocacy groups are pushing for reforms to increase disclosure requirements for these “dark money” entities.

Challenges And Future Considerations

The financing of U.S. presidential elections continues to face challenges, including:

- **Inequality of Influence:** The growing role of Super PACs and wealthy donors raises concerns about the equal representation of all citizens in the electoral process. Critics argue that the voice of everyday voters is drowned out by the influence of a few wealthy individuals and organizations.
- **Call for Reform:** Many advocates are pushing for campaign finance reform to limit the influence of money in politics. Proposed reforms include implementing stricter contribution limits, increasing transparency for all political spending, and exploring public financing options.
- **Impact of Technology:** As digital fundraising continues to evolve, the implications for campaign financing will require ongoing scrutiny. Ensuring that new technologies enhance, rather than undermine, democratic participation is a crucial consideration.

Vocabulary List

<i>Budget de campagne</i>	Campaign budget
<i>Campagne électorale</i>	Electoral campaign
<i>Collecte de fonds</i>	Fundraising
<i>Comité d'action politique (PAC)</i>	Political Action Committee (PAC)
<i>Commission électorale fédérale (FEC)</i>	Federal Election Commission (FEC)
<i>Contributions individuelles</i>	Individual contributions
<i>Cycle électorale</i>	Election cycle
<i>Dépenses</i>	Expenditures
<i>Divulgateion</i>	Disclosure
<i>Donateur</i>	Donor
<i>Dons politiques</i>	Political donations
<i>Élection générale</i>	General election
<i>Élection primaire</i>	Primary election
<i>Événements de collecte de fonds</i>	Fundraising events
<i>Financement de base</i>	Base funding
<i>Limites de contribution</i>	Contribution limits
<i>Lobbyisme</i>	Lobbying
<i>Plaidoyer</i>	Advocacy
<i>Stratégie électorale</i>	Electoral strategy
<i>Super PAC</i>	Super PAC

Questions For Debating

- Should there be stricter regulations on campaign financing to reduce the influence of money in politics?
- What role does transparency play in campaign financing, and how can it be improved to ensure public trust?

Cultural References

- *The Candidate* (Film). This 1972 political drama follows a young idealistic lawyer who runs for the U.S. Senate, highlighting the complexities of campaign financing and the compromises candidates make along the way. It serves as a critical commentary on the influence of money in politics.

Fast check 5

→ Impeachment procedure

Definition

Impeachment in the United States is a constitutional process by which a sitting president, vice president, or other federal officials can be charged with misconduct while in office. It is initiated by the House of Representatives, which has the sole authority to impeach, meaning to bring formal charges against an official. The grounds for impeachment are typically defined as “high crimes and misdemeanors,” as stated in Article II, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution.

Key Statistics And Information About The Impeachment Procedure

Aspect	Details
Constitutional Basis	Article II, Section 4
Who Can Be Impeached?	Federal officials (President, VP, judges)
Impeachment Charges	“High Crimes and Misdemeanors”
House Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Initiates impeachment▪ Investigates through committees▪ Simple majority (218 votes) needed to impeach
Senate Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Conducts trial▪ Chief Justice presides in presidential cases▪ Two-thirds majority (67 votes) needed to convict
Historical Instances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Total impeachments: 20 (as of 2023)▪ Presidents impeached: 3 (Andrew Johnson, Bill Clinton, Donald Trump)
Conviction Rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ No president has been convicted through impeachment▪ Only eight officials (non-presidential) have been convicted
Outcome of Impeachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Acquittal: Official remains in office▪ Conviction: Removal from office

Vocabulary List

<i>Abus de pouvoir</i>	Abuse of power
<i>Accusations</i>	Charges
<i>Acquittement</i>	Acquittal
<i>Article de destitution</i>	Article of impeachment
<i>Chambre des représentants</i>	House of Representatives
<i>Condamnation</i>	Conviction
<i>Constitution</i>	Constitution
<i>Crimes et délits graves</i>	High crimes and misdemeanors
<i>Destitution</i>	Impeachment
<i>Enquête</i>	Investigation
<i>Éthique</i>	Ethics
<i>Fonctionnaires fédéraux</i>	Federal officials
<i>Législatif</i>	Legislative
<i>Majorité</i>	Majority
<i>Majorité des deux tiers</i>	Two-thirds majority
<i>Mauvaise conduite</i>	Misconduct
<i>Partisan</i>	Partisan
<i>Président de la Cour suprême</i>	Chief Justice
<i>Preuve</i>	Evidence
<i>Procédure régulière</i>	Due process
<i>Procès</i>	Trial
<i>Processus politique</i>	Political process
<i>Responsabilité</i>	Accountability
<i>Révocation</i>	Removal
<i>Sénat</i>	Senate
<i>Surveillance</i>	Oversight
<i>Témoignage</i>	Testimony
<i>Témoin</i>	Witness
<i>Transparence</i>	Transparency
<i>Vote</i>	Vote

Questions For Debating

- To what extent should public opinion influence the impeachment process?
- What are the long-term consequences of impeachment for both the individual and the political system?

Cultural References

- *A Very Stable Genius* by Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig. This book offers insights into the Trump administration and its impeachment proceedings.
- *Impeachment: An American History* by Jon Meacham, Timothy Naftali, Peter Baker, and Jeffrey A. Engel. This work explores the history and context of impeachment in the U.S., detailing past presidents who faced similar situations.