

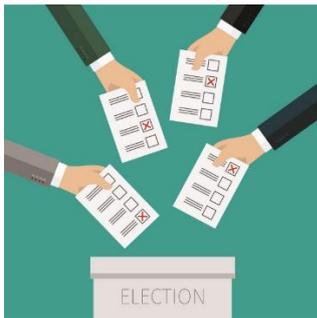
ELEPHANTS AND DONKEYS

How does the US presidential election work?

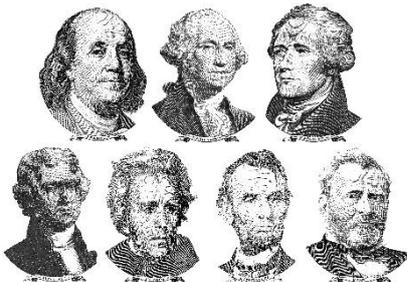
What do you already know about the way in which the US president is elected? Make your own list, or look at the following questions and answer those you know.

- 1) When are the US elections held?
- 2) Who can vote, and who can run for president?
- 3) What have elephants and donkeys got to do with the US political system?
- 4) What are debates and conventions for?
- 5) Who is a running mate? What is a ticket?
- 6) Can someone become the US president if they do not get the greatest number of votes?
- 7) What is the electoral college?

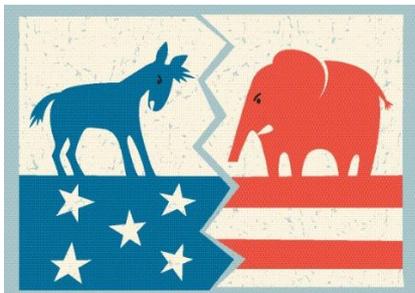
Now, read the text and check your answers, or find the information you did not know.



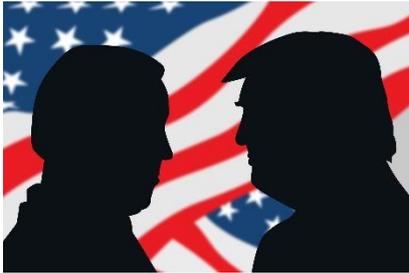
The US presidential elections are held every four years, on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. People come to places where they can cast their votes, which they do by filling in a special piece of paper called a ballot. Nowadays, ballots can also be digital. Most votes are counted on the same day, except when voting is done through the post, as it happened in 2020 because of the pandemic. All votes must be counted by early December.



In the past, only white men older than 21 could vote. This has changed over the years so that today any citizen of the USA who has turned 18 can vote, regardless of race and gender. However, if somebody wants to run for president, there are more rules. The person must be born in the USA, older than 35, and live more than 14 years in the USA. They also have to persuade their party to accept them as a presidential candidate.



The US president usually belongs to one of the two main political parties, either the Republicans or the Democrats. (There are several minor parties, such as the Libertarian, the Green, and the Constitution ones.) The Democrats use colour blue and a donkey as their symbols, while the Republicans use red and an elephant. This is why there are “red” and “blue” states – those that give more votes to one candidate or the other. Republicans are more conservative and oriented on big businesses, defence, and veteran rights. Democrats are more liberal and support social justice, mixed economy, and the welfare state. Donald Trump was a Republican, and Joe Biden is a Democrat.



Presidential candidates try to convince the public they are the right person to elect by appearing in ads on TV, giving speeches, and meeting their voters. They also take part in three or four debates with their opponent, in which they talk about their politics. This can win the votes of people who have not yet decided which candidate they prefer. Large teams of experts help them during the campaign. They also go to their party's conventions (big meetings) during the summer, before which they decide who their running mate for vice president will be. The candidates and their running mate together are called a "ticket".



Becoming a president of the US does not just mean convincing the majority of people to vote for you. In the past, candidates for whom more people voted did not win every time. It happened twice in the 19th and twice in the 21st century. The reason for this is the electoral college. This is a group of 538 people – who represent each of the 50 states – and who give the final votes to the candidates in December. Depending on who the majority in their state voted for, electors cast their votes. The candidate with more than half of the electoral votes wins. If the candidates are tied (have an equal number of votes), the election is not repeated, but the House of Representatives chooses the president. The new president is inaugurated, or sworn in, on 20th January in Washington DC.

Tasks:

- 1) Research how presidential elections in Croatia differ from those in the US.
- 2) Pick a US president and make a report about him.
- 3) Learn the names of all the US states and have a competition in class to see who can remember more of them.
- 4) Print out a large map of the US. Cut out each state. If you want, colour it according to how they voted in the last election. Put them together like a puzzle.
- 5) Role-play US elections: Pick two candidates, make an electoral college, let them have a debate, and vote to see who wins.