U.S Presidential Election

The US has had an elected president since its constitution went into effect in 1789. Unlike in many countries, the Presidential election in the US is rather a year-long process starting from announcing of candidacy to the Inauguration day.

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U.S. Constitutional Requirements for Presidential Candidates

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- The President must:\n\n
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    1. Be a natural-born citizen of the United States
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    2. Be at least 35 years old
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    3. Have been a resident of the United States for 14 years
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- He/She must meet the age and residency requirements by Inauguration Day. Any person who meets these requirements can declare his or her candidacy for President at any time. Vice-President must also meet all of the qualifications of being a President.
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- But in India, President can also be a **naturalized citizen**. Also, a candidate to be nominated for the office of president needs 50 electors as proposers and 50 electors as seconders for his name to appear on the ballot.
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- In the US, a person can be the president for only two terms. But there is no such bar in India.
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A two-party system

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Though there is a constitutional space for a multiparty system the modern politics

is dominated by two major parties. The two-party system consists of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Several third parties also operate in the U.S., and from time to time elect someone to local office. The largest third party since the 1980s is the Libertarian Party.

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Nomination process – Primaries and Caucuses

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- A number of candidates from each party announce their candidacy more than a year before the Election Day. E.g Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton announced their candidacy from the Democratic Party while Ted Cruz and Donald Trump announced their candidacy from the Republican ticket.
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- Among them one candidate is chosen from each party by the nominating process conducted by each party. Unlike in India, where a Prime Minister candidate is chosen by the party leaders, this is rather a lengthy and more democratic process.
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- It currently consists of two major parts\n
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1. A series of **presidential primary elections and caucuses** held in each state &
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2. The **presidential nominating conventions** held by each political party.
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- To become a party's presidential candidate, a nominee must win a simple majority of delegates on the convention day.
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- Each political party can determine how many delegates to allocate to each state and territory.
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- **A delegate** is a person chosen by the people from each state to vote on their behalf to choose the nominee. These delegates are chosen by Primaries and Caucuses.
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- The primary elections are run by state and local governments where party members gather to vote through secret ballot for the best candidates.
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- Caucuses are private meetings run by political parties. Generally, participants divide themselves into groups according to the candidate they support. Each group then gives speeches supporting its candidate and tries to persuade others to join its group.
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- At the end of the primaries and caucuses in each state, the numbers of delegates allocated to the state are divided among the candidates according to their vote share. e.g Bernie Sanders defeated Hillary Clinton in the New Hampshire primary by a margin of more than 22% in the popular vote. Therefore Sanders claimed 15 delegates to Clinton's 9.
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- Some states hold only primary elections, some hold only caucuses, and others use a combination of both. These primaries and caucuses are staggered generally between January and June before the federal election, with Iowa and New Hampshire traditionally holding the first presidential state caucus and primary, respectively.
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- Democratic Party - It has two sets of delegates – the delegates and super delegates. Delegates are representatives of people who vote according to the popular vote of their states on the convention day. Super delegates are lawmakers, governors, past presidents and national party officials who have the freedom to back any candidate, regardless of how their states voted.
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- Republican Party – It has Pledged and unpledged delegates. Pledged delegates are normal delegates. Unpledged delegates are similar to super delegates. They consist of the three top party officials from each state and territory are they vote independently on the party convention day.
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- Remember that this entire process is to choose a presidential candidate for the each party.
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- Unlike the general election, voters in the U.S. territories can also elect delegates to the national conventions.
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- These delegates choose the party’s Presidential Candidate on the convention day held typically on July. The chosen presidential candidate also chooses a vice presidential nominee to run with him or her on the same ticket.
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- This system was never included in the US Constitution and thus evolved over time by the political parties.
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Election Process

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- Article Two of the United States Constitution originally established the method of presidential elections, including **the Electoral College**. This was a result of a compromise between those constitutional framers who wanted the Congress to choose the president, and those who preferred a national popular vote.
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- Generally, voters are required to vote on a ballot where they select the candidate of their choice. But this is an **indirect election**. The voters do not directly elect the president. Instead, they elect representatives called "electors", who usually pledge to vote for particular presidential and vice presidential candidates. (Similar to the delegates in the primary elections).
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- The number of electors in each state is equal to the number of members of Congress to which the state is entitled. Therefore, there are currently 538 electors, corresponding to the 435 Representatives and 100 Senators, plus the three additional electors from the District of Columbia. U.S. territories are not represented in the Electoral College and therefore U.S. citizens in those areas do not vote in the general election for President.
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- Also, most state laws establish **a winner-take-all system**. By this, a number of electors from each state are **not allocated** to each candidate based on their vote share. Instead, the candidate with the most votes gets every elector of the state.
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- This sometimes leads to a situation where a candidate who failed to get popular vote wins, if he wins all the big states with a large number of electors. E.g In 2000 George W Bush won the election, in spite of losing the popular vote to Democratic candidate Al Gore.
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Election Day

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- An election for President of the United States occurs every four years on

Election Day, held the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. The 2016 Presidential election will be held on November 8, 2016.
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- Unlike the Parliamentary form of government, in the Presidential system, there is a clear demarcation between executive and legislature.
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- In a presidential system, the executive is not responsible to the legislature and hence the government is not dissolved if it fails to enjoy a majority.
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- Also if the office of the president becomes vacant, **it does not call for a re-election and the vice president continues as the President for the rest of the term**. Hence the election dates are fixed and it can be clubbed with the other elections like elections for House of Representatives, Senate, Governors and State legislature.
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- This is difficult to be replicated in countries like India, where there are talks **about simultaneous elections** to the Parliament and State Assemblies because there is **no guarantee that a government can finish its term**.
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- **Why Tuesday of November**?
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When voters used to travel to the polls by horse, Tuesday was an ideal day because it allowed people to worship on Sunday, ride to their county seat on Monday, and vote on Tuesday–all before market day, Wednesday. November also fits between harvest time and harsh winter weather.

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Inauguration Day

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- Each state's winning set of electors then meets at their respective state's capital in December to cast their electoral votes on separate ballots for President.
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- Although Electoral College members can technically vote for anyone under the U.S. Constitution, 24 states have laws to punish faithless electors,[19] those who do not cast their electoral votes for the person whom they have

pledged to elect.
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- In early January, votes are counted by the joint session of the incoming Congress.
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- If no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote (currently at least 270), then the President would be decided by a ballot of the House of Representative.
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- The President-elect then assumes office on the Inauguration day – January 20th.
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Some related terms

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Super PACs

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Super PACs are independent political committees that support a candidate with unlimited, often anonymous, donations from companies, unions, or individuals. The groups can't contribute directly to a candidate, but they can run favorable ads about a candidate—or negative ones about their favored candidate's opponent. Most of the ads sponsored by super PACs are negative and take considerable liberties.

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Super Tuesday

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A day when more than a dozen US states hold their primaries and caucuses, putting more delegates at stake in the Democratic and Republican Party than any other day of the year is called super tuesday

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Tea Party

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The Tea Party movement is an American political movement known for its **conservative positions and its role in the Republican Party**. Members of the

movement have called for a reduction of the U.S. national debt and federal budget deficit by reducing government spending, and for lower taxes. E.g The movement opposes government-sponsored universal healthcare and has been described as a mixture of libertarian, populist, and conservative activism

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