

3.2 Politics in the USA

1 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Legislative Branch → Congress & Senate → elected representatives of the people
→ make laws; impose taxes; control trade; in charge of armed forces

Executive Branch → President & Vice President → sign/veto laws; appointed federal judges
+ other federal employees; in charge of national affairs; influence foreign policy

Judicial Branch → state courts & Supreme Court → 9 judges in the Supreme Court
→ rules on whether laws or policies are unconstitutional → creates legal precedents

2 THE CONSTITUTION

- written in 1787 following independence; ratified 1788
- citizens elect politicians = politicians are responsible for their needs
- separation of powers → system of checks and balances = no one branch of government has too much power
- individual states also have authority

3 THE BILL OF RIGHTS

- first 10 amendments to the Constitution, added in 1791
- freedom of speech, the press, religion
- the right to hold peaceful meetings
- the right to own weapons for protection
- the right to a fair trial; freedom from cruel and unusual punishment

4 ELECTING THE PRESIDENT

- candidates are chosen → through primary elections → through party conventions
- **Electoral College**: originated due to poor communications and transport connections
→ "electors" chosen to vote for "ordinary" people
- today: number of electors = number of Senators & Representatives in the state
→ candidate with most votes receives all electors' votes in that state = "winner-takes-all"
- winner of the popular vote does not necessarily win overall

IMPORTANT VOCABULARY

amendment	Verfassungszusatz	constitution	Verfassung	federal	bundesstaatlich
appeal	Berufung	court	Gerichtshof	judicial	juristisch
capital punishment	Todesstrafe	executive	Staatsführung	legislative	gesetzgebend
				mob	Pöbel