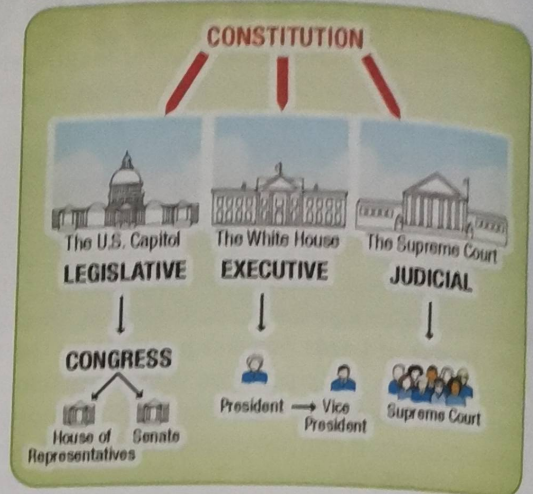


The American System

091

The United States is a **federal republic** made up of fifty states. The **American Constitution**, written in **1787**, is the oldest and shortest constitution still in force in the world today. It has been amended many times and the first ten amendments are known as the **Bill of Rights**. The Constitution provides the framework for the organisation of the United States government and for the relationship of the federal government to the states and to the citizens. It defines the three main branches of government: the **Executive branch** led by the President, the **Legislative branch** (Congress, made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate) and the **Judicial branch** headed by the Supreme Court. The Constitution also specifies the powers and duties of each branch so that no single branch dominates.



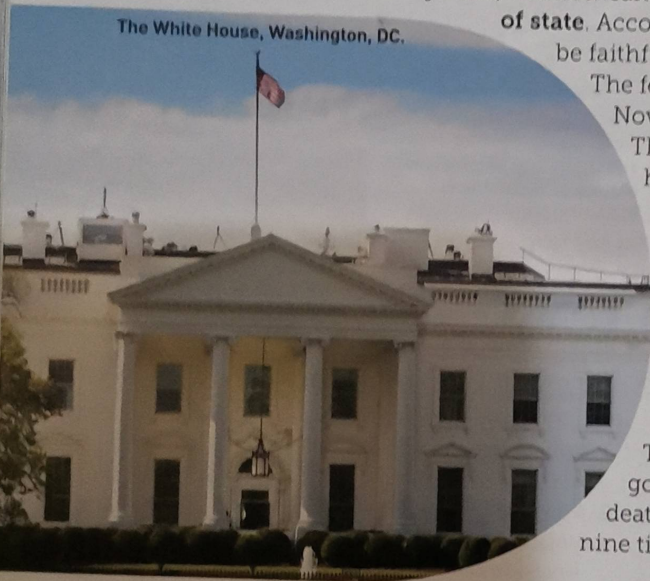
The President

The USA is a **presidential republic**, which means that the **President is both the head of the Executive and the head of state**. According to the Constitution, he or she must 'take care that the laws be faithfully executed' and 'preserve, protect and defend the Constitution.' The forty-sixth and current president is Joe Biden, who was elected in November 2020.

The President has a wide range of powers including appointing the heads, or secretaries, of the 13-14 Executive departments, the most important being the Secretary of State, responsible for foreign affairs. These secretaries are the President's private advisors and he or she can dismiss them. The President is Commander-in-chief of the armed forces and, although only Congress can declare war, the President has extraordinary emergency powers. The President also makes treaties with foreign nations and appoints Supreme Court justices and federal judges with the consent of the Senate.

The **Vice-President** is the second-highest Executive official of the government. In fact, the Vice-President becomes President upon the death, resignation or removal of the President, which has happened nine times in US history.

The White House, Washington, DC.



FACTS & FIGURES

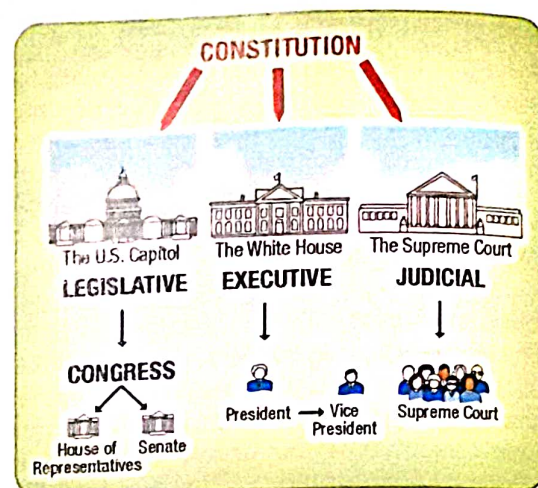
Comparing three systems

	UK 	USA 	Italy 
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT	Constitutional monarchy	Federal republic	Parliamentary republic
CONSTITUTION	No written constitution	Written constitution – 1787	Written constitution – 1948
HEAD OF STATE	Monarch	President	President
EXECUTIVE POWER	Prime Minister, Cabinet	President, Vice-President, Executive departments	Prime Minister, Council of Ministers
LEGISLATIVE POWER	Parliament (House of Commons and House of Lords)	Congress (House of Representatives and Senate)	Parliament (Chamber of Deputies and Senate)
HIGHEST JUDICIAL POWER	House of Lords	Supreme Court	Constitutional Court
ELECTIONS	Parliamentary elections: every 5 years	Presidential elections: every 4 years	Parliamentary elections: every 5 years



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Congress

Congress is the legislative branch of the federal government. It meets in the **Capitol building** in Washington, D.C. It is bicameral, comprising the House of Representatives and the Senate. Both chambers have more or less the same powers and their duty is, of course, to make the laws of the country. The **House of Representatives** consists of 435 members. Each state has a certain number of representatives based on its population, so states like California or Texas which have a bigger population therefore have more representatives. Representatives are elected for two-year terms by a direct vote of the people of the state they represent. They must be 25 years old, a citizen for at least seven years and a resident of the state where they are elected.

The **Senate** instead has a total of 100 senators, two for each state, regardless of their size or population. They serve six-year terms and one third of the Senate stands for election every two years. The consent of both chambers is required to pass any legislation, which then becomes law by being signed by the President.

The Supreme Court

The **Supreme Court** is the **highest court of law in the country**. It consists of **nine judges** appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. It deals with matters pertaining to the federal government like disputes between states and the interpretation of the United States Constitution. It can declare legislation or executive action made at any level of the government as unconstitutional, and so create a precedent for future laws and decisions. Below the Supreme Court there are the courts of appeals and below them there are the district courts, which deal with general legal matters.



4 VOCABULARY Complete the text with the missing words.

The United States is a (1) republic made up of (2) states. The three branches into which the Constitution divides power are the Executive, Legislative and (3) branch. The (4) is the head of the Executive, the state and the (5) forces. If the President dies, resigns or is removed, his/her place is taken by the (6) The two Houses which make up Congress are the (7) and the Senate. The Senate has a total of (8) senators, (9) for each state. The Supreme Court consists of (10) judges appointed by the (11)

5 SPEAKING Read 'The American System' and answer the questions.

- 1 What is the American Constitution and why is it important?
- 2 What is the Bill of Rights?
- 3 Who is the current US President? Can you name any American Presidents of the past?
- 4 What does Congress do?
- 5 Are all US states equally represented in the House of Representatives?
- 6 What do you know about the Supreme Court?

6 PROJECT Create a digital presentation comparing and contrasting the American, the British and the Italian systems of government:

- use PowerPoint or any other presentation software you are familiar with;
- consider the table in the Facts & Figures box;
- add additional information, photos and videos.