

Elections in the USA:

1) Voter Registration – Who is allowed to vote?

In many states, like in Austria, every citizen who is older than 18 automatically has the right to vote. In the USA, you have to register if you want to attend the Federal elections. This means that Americans must fill out a **voter registration form** before they can vote. Only in North Dakota it is not necessary to be registered if you want to vote.

2) Presidential Elections:

The American Presidential Elections actually start with the **Primaries** or the **Caucuses**, which are internal meetings of the members of the two big parties (the Democrats and the Republicans). In these meetings, the political parties vote for **delegates** to the **national conventions**, where the official **presidential candidates** of each party are announced.

The President of the USA is elected indirectly. This means that all registered voters elect an **elector** (Wahlmann), who then elects the President. The number of electors in each state depends on the number of the states' Representatives in Congress.

The electors of one state form the **slate of electors** (Wahlmännerliste). The party that receives the majority of votes in a state gets the votes of all the electors listed in their slate, while the other parties miss out. This procedure is called "**winner-takes-all contest**". The electors vote for their presidential candidate with a single majority.

3) The legislative branch – electing the Congress:

The **legislative branch** in the US consists of the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**, which together form the **Congress**.

Each state nominates **two senators** who are directly elected by a simple majority from the voters. Senators can be independent (they do not have to belong to a party) and have one vote in Congress. They are elected for a term of **six years** and have to be at least 30 years old.

There are also **435 representatives** in the senate. The number of representatives for a state depends on the size and the total population of this state, however each state has at least one representative. Representatives are directly elected by the voters every **2 years**. They have to be at least 24 years old and must have been an American citizen for 7 years.

The 2006 Midterm Elections

On November 07, 2006 midterm elections were held in the US. The voters elected 435 representatives and 33 senators.

The House of Representatives consists of 435 members who are directly elected. The number of representatives depends on the state's total population. Every tenth year a **census** is taken and the 435 seats are **reassigned**. Usually 500 000 people are represented by one member of the House of Representatives. However, each state has to be represented by at least one representative. Representatives are elected every two years.

The Senate is composed of 100 senators. Every state nominates two senators. Senators are elected for a term of six years, which means that every two years one third of the senators are elected.

Congress consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is seated in the **Capitol** in Washington. Congress is the legislative branch. It is responsible for legislation, controls the executive branch (including the President and the intelligence services) and owns the **power of the purse**, which means that it is the only institution which can **collect taxes** and spend state revenue.

In 2006, midterm elections have led to mayor changes in the House of Representatives as well as in the Senate. While the last midterm elections were dominated by the Republicans, this time the Democrats clearly were the winners. They now hold the majority in the House of Representatives and in Senate.