



*The United States of America*  
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- The United States of America is a constitutional federal republic comprising fifty states and a federal district. The country is situated mostly in central North America, where its forty-eight contiguous states and Washington, D.C., the capital district, lie between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, bordered by Canada to the north and Mexico to the south. The state of Alaska is in the northwest of the continent, with Canada to its east and Russia to the west across the Bering Strait, and the state of Hawaii is an archipelago in the mid-Pacific. The United States also possesses several territories, or insular areas, scattered around the Caribbean and Pacific.
- At 3.79 million square miles (9.83 million km<sup>2</sup>) and with over 300 million people, the United States is the third or fourth largest country by total area, and third largest by land area and by population. The United States is one of the world's most ethnically diverse nations, the product of large-scale immigration from many countries.[7] The U.S. economy is the largest national economy in the world, with a nominal 2006 gross domestic product (GDP) of more than US\$13 trillion (over 19% of the world total based on purchasing power parity).[4][8]
- The nation was founded by thirteen colonies of Great Britain located along the Atlantic seaboard. Proclaiming themselves "states," they issued the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. The rebellious states defeated Great Britain in the American Revolutionary War, the first successful colonial war of independence.[9] A federal convention adopted the current United States Constitution on September 17, 1787; its ratification the following year made the states part of a single republic. The Bill of Rights, comprising ten constitutional amendments, was ratified in 1791.



- Geography
- Main articles: Geography of the United States and Territorial evolution of the United States
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- Topographic map of the contiguous United States
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- Climate zones of the contiguous United States
- The United States is situated almost entirely in the western hemisphere: the contiguous United States stretches from the Pacific on the west to the Atlantic on the east, with the Gulf of Mexico to the southeast, and bordered by Canada on the north and Mexico on the south. Alaska is the largest state in area; separated from the contiguous U.S. by Canada, it touches the Pacific on the south and Arctic Ocean on the north. Hawaii occupies an archipelago in the central Pacific, southwest of North America. The United States is the world's third or fourth largest nation by total area, before or after China. The ranking varies depending on (a) how two territories disputed by China and India are counted and (b) how the total size of the United States is calculated: the CIA World Factbook gives 9,826,630 km<sup>2</sup>,<sup>[1]</sup> the United Nations Statistics Division gives 9,629,091 km<sup>2</sup>,<sup>[14]</sup> and the Encyclopedia Britannica gives 9,522,055 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>[15]</sup> Including only land area, the United States is third in size behind Russia and China, just ahead of Canada.<sup>[16]</sup> The United States also possesses several insular territories scattered around the West Indies (e.g., the commonwealth of Puerto Rico) and the Pacific (e.g., Guam).



- Environment
- The bald eagle has been the national bird of the United States since 1782
- Main article: Environment of the United States
- U.S. plant life is very diverse; the country has more than 17,000 identified native species of flora.[20] More than 400 mammal, 700 bird, 500 reptile and amphibian, and 90,000 insect species have been documented.[21] The Endangered Species Act of 1973 protects threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which are monitored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The U.S. has fifty-eight national parks and hundreds of other federally managed parks, forests, and wilderness areas.[22] Altogether, the U.S. government regulates 28.8% of the country's total land area.[23] Most such public land comprises protected parks and forestland, though some federal land is leased for oil and gas drilling,[24] mining, or cattle ranching.
- The energy policy of the United States is widely debated; many call on the country to take a leading role in fighting global warming.[25] The United States is currently the second largest emitter, after the People's Republic of China, of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels.[26]



- History
- Main article: History of the United States
- Native Americans and European settlers
- Main articles: Native Americans in the United States, European colonization of the Americas, and Thirteen Colonies
- The indigenous peoples of the U.S. mainland, including Alaska Natives, are thought to have migrated from Asia. They began arriving at least 12,000 and as many as 40,000 years ago.[27] Several indigenous communities in the pre-Columbian era developed advanced agriculture, grand architecture, and state-level societies. In 1492, Genoese explorer Christopher Columbus, under contract to the Spanish crown, reached several Caribbean islands, making first contact with the indigenous population. In the years that followed, the majority of the indigenous American peoples were killed by epidemics of Eurasian diseases.[28]
- The Mayflower transported Pilgrims to the New World in 1620, as depicted in William Halsall's *The Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor*, 1882
- On April 2, 1513, Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León landed on what he called "La Florida"—the first documented European arrival on what would become the U.S. mainland. Of the colonies Spain established in the region, only St. Augustine, founded in 1565, remains. Later Spanish settlements in the present-day southwestern United States drew thousands through Mexico.



- Independence and expansion
- Main articles: American Revolution, American Revolutionary War, and Manifest Destiny
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- Declaration of Independence, by John Trumbull, 1817–18
- Tensions between American colonials and the British during the revolutionary period of the 1760s and early 1770s led to the American Revolutionary War, fought from 1775 through 1781. On June 14, 1775, the Continental Congress, convening in Philadelphia, established a Continental Army under the command of George Washington. Proclaiming that "all men are created equal" and endowed with "certain unalienable Rights," the Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, drafted largely by Thomas Jefferson, on July 4, 1776. In 1777, the Articles of Confederation were adopted, uniting the states under a weak federal government that operated until 1788. Some 70,000–80,000 loyalists to the British Crown fled the rebellious states, many to Nova Scotia and the new British holdings in Canada.[31] Native Americans, with divided allegiances, fought on both sides of the war's western front.



- Civil War and industrialization
- Main articles: American Civil War, Reconstruction, and Spanish-American War
- 
- Battle of Gettysburg, lithograph by Currier & Ives, ca. 1863
- Tensions between slave and free states mounted with increasing disagreements over the relationship between the state and federal governments and violent conflicts over the expansion of slavery into new states. Abraham Lincoln, candidate of the largely antislavery Republican Party, was elected president in 1860. Before he took office, seven slave states declared their secession from the United States, forming the Confederate States of America. The federal government maintained secession was illegal, and with the Confederate attack upon Fort Sumter, the American Civil War began and four more slave states joined the Confederacy. The Union freed Confederate slaves as its army advanced through the South. Following the Union victory in 1865, three amendments to the U.S. Constitution ensured freedom for the nearly four million African Americans who had been slaves,[33] made them citizens, and gave them voting rights. The war and its resolution led to a substantial increase in federal power.[34]



- Immigrants landing at Ellis Island, New York, 1902
- After the war, the assassination of President Lincoln radicalized Republican Reconstruction policies aimed at reintegrating and rebuilding the Southern states while ensuring the rights of the newly freed slaves. The resolution of the disputed 1876 presidential election by the Compromise of 1877 ended Reconstruction; Jim Crow laws soon disenfranchised many African Americans. In the North, urbanization and an unprecedented influx of immigrants hastened the country's industrialization. The wave of immigration, which lasted until 1929, provided labor for U.S. businesses and transformed American culture. High tariff protections, national infrastructure building, and new banking regulations encouraged industrial growth. The 1867 Alaska purchase from Russia completed the country's mainland expansion. The Wounded Knee massacre in 1890 was the last major armed conflict of the Indian Wars. In 1893, the indigenous monarchy of the Pacific Kingdom of Hawaii was overthrown in a coup led by American residents; the archipelago was annexed by the United States in 1898. Victory in the Spanish-American War that same year demonstrated that the United States was a major world power and resulted in the annexation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines.[35] The Philippines gained independence a half-century later; Puerto Rico remains a commonwealth of the United States.
- World War I, Great Depression, and World War II
- Main articles: American Expeditionary Force, Great Depression, and Military history of the United States during World War II

- Government and politics
- Main articles: Federal government of the United States and Politics of the United States
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- The west front of the United States Capitol, which houses the United States Congress
- The United States is the world's oldest surviving federation. It is a constitutional republic, "in which majority rule is tempered by minority rights protected by law."<sup>[48]</sup> It is fundamentally structured as a representative democracy, though U.S. citizens residing in the territories are excluded from voting for federal officials.<sup>[49]</sup> The government is regulated by a system of checks and balances defined by the United States Constitution, which serves as the country's supreme legal document and as a social contract for the people of the United States. In the American federalist system, citizens are usually subject to three levels of government, federal, state, and local; the local government's duties are commonly split between county and municipal governments. In almost all cases, executive and legislative officials are elected by a plurality vote of citizens by district. There is no proportional representation at the federal level, and it is very rare at lower levels. Federal and state judicial and cabinet officials are typically nominated by the executive branch and approved by the legislature, although some state judges and officials are elected by popular vote.



- The north side of the White House, home and work place of the U.S. president
- The federal government is composed of three branches:
- Legislative: The bicameral Congress, made up of the Senate and the House of Representatives makes federal law, declares war, approves treaties, has the power of the purse, and has the rarely used power of impeachment, by which it can remove sitting members of the government.
- Executive: The president is the commander-in-chief of the military, can veto legislative bills before they become law, and appoints the Cabinet and other officers, who administer and enforce federal laws and policies.
- Judicial: The Supreme Court and lower federal courts, whose judges are appointed by the president with Senate approval, interpret laws and can overturn laws they deem unconstitutional.
- The House of Representatives has 435 members, each representing a congressional district for a two-year term. House seats are apportioned among the fifty states by population every tenth year. As of the 2000 census, seven states have the minimum of one representative, while California, the most populous state, has fifty-three. Each state has two senators, elected at-large to six-year terms; one third of Senate seats are up for election every second year. The president serves a four-year term and may be elected to the office no more than twice. The president is not elected by direct vote, but by an indirect electoral college system in which the determining votes are apportioned by state.



- The front of the United States Supreme Court building
- All laws and procedures of both state and federal governments are subject to review, and any law ruled in violation of the Constitution by the judicial branch is overturned. The original text of the Constitution establishes the structure and responsibilities of the federal government, the relationship between it and the individual states, and essential matters of military and economic authority. Article One protects the right to the "great writ" of habeas corpus, and Article Three guarantees the right to a jury trial in all criminal cases. Amendments to the Constitution require the approval of three-fourths of the states. The Constitution has been amended twenty-seven times; the first ten amendments, which make up the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment form the central basis of individual rights in the United States.



- Parties and elections
- Main articles: Elections in the United States and Political ideologies in the United States
- Politics in the United States have operated under a two-party system for virtually all of the country's history. For elective offices at all levels, state-administered primary elections are held to choose the major party nominees for subsequent general elections. Since the general election of 1856, the two dominant parties have been the Democratic Party, founded in 1824 (though its roots trace back to 1792), and the Republican Party, founded in 1854. Since the Civil War, only one third-party presidential candidate—former president Theodore Roosevelt, running as a Progressive in 1912—has won as much as 20% of the popular vote.
- The incumbent president, Republican George W. Bush, is the 43rd president in the country's history. All U.S. presidents to date have been white men. If the Democrats win the next presidential election, in November 2008, either an African-American, Barack Obama, or a woman, Hillary Rodham Clinton, will become president. Following the 2006 midterm elections, the Democratic Party controls both the House and the Senate. Every member of the U.S. Congress is a Democrat or a Republican except two independent members of the Senate—one a former Democratic incumbent, the other a self-described socialist. An overwhelming majority of state and local officials are also either Democrats or Republicans. Within American political culture, the Republican Party is considered "center-right" or conservative and the Democratic Party is considered "center-left" or liberal, but members of both parties have a wide range of views. In a January 2008 poll, 39% of Americans described themselves as "conservative," 33% as "moderate," and 20% as "liberal."<sup>[50]</sup> On the other hand, a plurality of adults, 35.9%, identify as Democrats, 32.9% as independents, and 31.3% as Republicans.

- States

- Main article: U.S. state

- The United States is a federal union of fifty states. The original thirteen states were the successors of the thirteen colonies that rebelled against British rule. Most of the rest have been carved from territory obtained through war or purchase by the U.S. government. The exceptions are Vermont, Texas, and Hawaii; each was an independent republic before joining the union. Early in the country's history, three states were created out of the territory of existing ones: Kentucky from Virginia; Tennessee from North Carolina; and Maine from Massachusetts. West Virginia broke away from Virginia during the American Civil War. The most recent state—Hawaii—achieved statehood on August 21, 1959. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the states do not have the right to secede from the union.
- The states compose the vast bulk of the U.S. land mass; the only other areas considered integral parts of the country are the District of Columbia, the federal district where the capital, Washington, is located; and Palmyra Atoll, an uninhabited but incorporated territory in the Pacific Ocean. The United States possesses five major territories with indigenous populations: Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands in the Caribbean; and American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific. Those born in the territories (except for American Samoa) possess U.S. citizenship.





- Economy
- Main article: Economy of the United StatesEconomy of the United States
- National economic indicators
- Unemployment 4.8% February 2008[61]
- GDP growth 2.9% 2005–2006[4]
- CPI inflation 4.0% February 2007–February 2008[62]
- National debt \$9.396 trillion March 24, 2008[63]
- Poverty 12.3% or 13.3% 2006[5][64]
- The United States has a capitalist mixed economy, which is fueled by abundant natural resources, a well-developed infrastructure, and high productivity. According to the International Monetary Fund, the United States GDP of more than \$13 trillion constitutes over 25.5% of the gross world product at market exchange rates and over 19% of the gross world product at purchasing power parity (PPP).[4] The largest national GDP in the world, it was slightly less than the combined GDP of the European Union at PPP in 2006.[65] The country ranks eighth in the world in nominal GDP per capita and fourth in GDP per capita at PPP.[4] The United States is the largest importer of goods and second largest exporter. Canada, China, Mexico, Japan, and Germany are its top trading partners.[66] The leading export commodity is electrical machinery, while vehicles constitute the leading import.[67] The national debt is the world's largest; in 2005, it was 23% of the global total.[68] As a percentage of GDP, U.S. debt ranked thirtieth out of 120 countries for which data is available.[69]
- The private sector constitutes the bulk of the economy, with government activity accounting for 12.4% of GDP. The economy is postindustrial, with the service sector contributing 67.8% of GDP.[70] The leading business field by gross business receipts is wholesale and retail trade; by net income it is finance and insurance



- Sports
- Main article: Sports in the United States
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- The Pro Bowl (2006), American football's annual all-star game
- Since the late nineteenth century, baseball has been regarded as the national sport; football, basketball, and ice hockey are the country's three other leading professional team sports. College football and basketball also attract large audiences. Football is now by several measures the most popular spectator sport in the United States.[213] Boxing and horse racing were once the most watched individual sports, but they have been eclipsed by golf and auto racing, particularly NASCAR. Soccer, though not a leading professional sport in the country, is played widely at the youth and amateur levels. Tennis and many outdoor sports are also popular.
- While most major U.S. sports have evolved out of European practices, basketball, volleyball, skateboarding, and snowboarding are American inventions. Lacrosse and surfing arose from Native American and Native Hawaiian activities that predate Western contact. Eight Olympic Games have taken place in the United States. The United States has won 2,191 medals at the Summer Olympic Games, more than any other country,[214] and 216 in the Winter Olympic Games, the second most.[215]





- Education
- Main articles: Education in the United States and Educational attainment in the United States
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- The University of Virginia, designed by Thomas Jefferson, is one of 19 American UNESCO World Heritage Sites
- American public education is operated by state and local governments, regulated by the United States Department of Education through restrictions on federal grants. Children are obliged in most states to attend school from the age of six or seven (generally, kindergarten or first grade) until they turn eighteen (generally bringing them through 12th grade, the end of high school); some states allow students to leave school at sixteen or seventeen.[158] About 12% of children are enrolled in parochial or nonsectarian private schools. Just over 2% of children are homeschooled.[159] The United States has many competitive private and public institutions of higher education, as well as local community colleges of varying quality with open admission policies. Of Americans twenty-five and older, 84.6% graduated from high school, 52.6% attended some college, 27.2% earned a bachelor's degree, and 9.6% earned graduate degrees.[160] The basic literacy rate is approximately 99%.[1][161] The United Nations assigns the United States an Education Index of 0.97, tying it for twelfth-best in the world.[162]



- The famous Hollywood sign
- In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge demonstrated the power of photography to capture motion. In 1894, the world's first commercial motion picture exhibition was given in New York City, using Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope. The next year saw the first commercial screening of a projected film, also in New York, and the United States was in the forefront of sound film's development in the following decades. Since the early twentieth century, the U.S. film industry has largely been based in and around Hollywood, California. Director D. W. Griffith was central to the development of film grammar and Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) is frequently cited in critics' polls as the greatest film of all time.[201] American screen actors like John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe have become iconic figures, while producer/entrepreneur Walt Disney was a leader in both animated film and movie merchandising. The major film studios of Hollywood are the primary source of the most commercially successful movies in the world, such as *Star Wars* (1977) and *Titanic* (1997), and the products of Hollywood today dominate the global film industry.[202]

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