

Ideologies - The USA

This unit is based on the BBC Bitesize Modern Studies website.

Go to the site to find a number of short videos which will greatly help your understanding of the topics which follow.

You can also use the excellent www.modernstudies.org.uk which has been the source for much of the information below.



Content and concepts

You should know about:

- The ideology of the USA (Cap_____ism, The Amer_____ Dr_____)
- Equality and In_____ in the USA (wealth, rights etc.)
- Par_____tion in the USA
- Ways of protesting in the USA (Pre_____e G_____ps and Interest G_____ps)

Knowledge and Understanding questions for the USA will be based on four concepts:

- Eq_____y
- Id_____gy
- Part_____tion
- R_____s and r_____ties

Why do many people want to live in the USA?

The attractions (**pull factors**) of the USA are

- A free democ_____ political system where people v_____ for the govt
- The opportunity to work in your own bus_____, or for a company
- The chance to make a good inc_____
- Freedom to follow your own choice of rel_____
- A well developed ed_____ system

Problems (**push factors**) which persuade people to leave their country of origin are:

- W__r
- Fam_____
- P_____ty
- Lack of political fr_____m
- Lack of rel_____s freedom
- Natural d_____ers

How are the rights of US citizens protected by the constitution?

The constitution is a document which was written at the founding of the United States that lists the rights US citizens are entitled to receive. These rights are protected by the l_____l system. The rights include

- Freedom of sp_____
- F_____ of the press (i.e. the media) to report news
- Freedom to prot_____
- The right to own a g_____
- The right to v_____
- The right to a free and open tr_____l

The original constit_____ has been changed down the years in a series of "amendm_____ts".

What are the responsibilities of US citizens?

- Freedom of speech brings the responsibility to not slander (lie about) others or make sexi__t, r____t, or __geist remarks
- Freedom of the press (media) brings responsibility to respect the individual's right to ____vacy
- Freedom to protest brings the responsibility not to use v____e or intimidation
- The right to own guns brings the responsibility to only use them in ____-defence

How can US citizens participate in politics?

- By v_____ in Federal, State and County (local) elections
- By standing for election
- By j_____ a political party, and helping them during election campaigns
- By contacting (e.g. by telephone, letter, internet) their elected repre_____s
- By contributing to party funds. The two main parties are the Republicans and the Demo_____s

How can US citizens participate in elections?

- They can vote in elections to the Federal Government. This controls national and inter_____ affairs. Political candidates are elected to the Congress, which is roughly the US equivalent of the UK Westminster parliament. The Congress is made up of the Senate (100 S_____ors) and the House of Represent_____s (435 Congressmen/women)
- US citizens vote for the P_____. This is a separate vote from the Congress so that the President can come from a different party than that which has the majority of seats Congress
- They can vote in State Elections to elect their State Gover____r, Senators and Members of the House of Representatives
- They can vote in County elections for example Sh____iff, ____x Collector, Jud____, District Attorney and even Dog Ca_____er!

How can US citizens use the media to criticise their representatives?

The USA has freedom of the press which means newspapers, TV, radio and websites are free to report on almost everything. Just as in the UK, this means ordinary citizens can use the media to criticise their representatives at county, st_____ and federal level. For example, they could contact a journ_____ to suggest a news report on something a politician has or has not done. Or they could write to the letters page in a news_____. They could also take part in a radio _____-in or appear on a TV discussion programme. The internet gives people other ways of participating. For example they could contribute to an internet forum or even set up their own w_____e to criticise or praise) political representatives. In all of the above, citizens have rights but they also have responsibilities not to tell lies about people as this would be against the US co_____tion.

Why is the participation of US voters low?

- There are so many el_____s it can put people off
- Citizens have to register bef_____ they can vote and some don't bother
- The voting paper can be comp_____d
- Some voters do not see much d_____e between the parties and therefore don't see the point in voting

Apart from participating in elections, how else can US citizens influence their government?

- As in the UK, people can join pressure groups - these are known as **interest g_____s** in the USA
- An example of an interest group in the National Rifle Association (NRA), which is a strongly pro-gun ownership organisation which campaigns against gun con_____l
- Writing letters, lobbying politicians, petitions, demon_____g and advertising your cause

Why do fewer members of ethnic minority groups participate in elections?

The largest minority groups are Blacks (often known as African Americans) and Hispanics (sometimes called Latinos)

- Ethnic minorities have fewer role models in politics
- Less Blacks and Hispanics register to vote
- Sometimes there will be language problems - many Hispanics don't speak English
- Some are put off participating in a system they feel discriminates against them
- The cost of standing for election is a barrier to more Blacks and Hispanics than other ethnic groups where individuals are wealthier
- Some US citizens will not vote for candidates from other ethnic groups

Why has participation by ethnic minority groups increased in recent times?

- The emergence of some ethnic minority role models, particularly African American and Hispanic politicians
- Grass roots campaigns, such as the "Southwest Voter Registration Education Project," to encourage Hispanics to register to vote, and then participate in elections
- The growth, in some areas, of an ethnic minority "middle class", who have traditionally taken a bigger part in politics and elections

Why do many people believe the economic system of the US works well?

The USA has a capitalist economic system. This means for example

- People can run their own businesses
- There is competition between companies, which is good for consumers
- Companies and individuals aim to make profits

People in favour of capitalism argue it brings benefits

- High ownership of consumer goods
- High incomes for many (more money to spend)

- People are rewarded with wealth for h_____ work e.g. successful businesses make good profits
- The government does not interfere too much with the individual, and therefore ta____s are kept low

Why do some US citizens have higher living standards than others?

- Some people do not have the same level of oppo_____es as others – (e.g. they may live in a ghetto and the poverty can be difficult to break out of)
- Some people are not able to get high quality ed_____n
- Some people suffer prej_____ and disc_____
- Some areas are richer than others with higher levels of emp_____ment & pay
- Working hard does not always guarantee successful business or high pay

Why are Black & Hispanic citizens less likely to achieve social & economic success?

Many Blacks and Hispanics live in run-down, inner city areas (ghettos). Problems found in the ghetto include

- Poor quality hou_____g
- Poor h_____ e.g. higher infant mortality and lower life expectancy
- Higher levels of cr_____
- Higher unem_____
- Higher levels of d____g use
- Poor levels of educational attainment (fewer people get good qu_____)
- Family breakdown is common with very high levels of single parent families
- A lack of male r_____ mod_____, particularly boys with no father figure at home
- Greater po_____ty

Other disadvantage include

- Disc_____
- Language difficulties (many Hispanics speak Spanish but not E_____sh)
- Some Hispanics are i_____ immigrants

Revise how elections work in the USA, how American citizens can participate in pol_____s and why there has been a tendency for many people from ethnic minority communities not to participate.

The American dream



This means that any American citizen however poor their background can aim to succeed by w_____ h____. The American system of f_____ e_____ise capitalism encourages people to set up their own _____ with the incentive of becoming we____hy and successful. In the USA success is admired. There are no inherited titles. The government does less than in many European countries and tax is relatively low. Many services are provided by private companies rather than the state. For example many Americans expect to pay for health care. Standards of medical care in the USA are among the best in the world for those who can afford to pay but are very poor for those who cannot afford h_____ i_____.

Evidence for the s_____ss of the American system is that so many leading international companies are based in the USA and the high _____g standards enjoyed by many – but not all - American citizens. More people want to move to the USA than any other country in the _____.

Illegal i_____tion is a controversial issue in many states especially those along the M_____n border. Besides the chance of economic success, p_____cal and p_____onal freedom is an attraction to some immigrants.

Inequality

The American system means there are winners and losers. Reasons why some do not succeed include -

- Poor ed_____
- Some areas have declining industries and high une_____
- Living in poor areas with high c_____ rates and negative r_____ models (e.g. ghettos)
- Lang_____ barriers can affect recent immigrants
- Disc_____ against minorities
- Welfare ben_____s are not high and vary from place to place

Although on average Blacks and Hispanics do less well than white Americans there are growing middle classes among all minorities. Some eg Japanese Americans have higher average incomes than the w_____e majority.

Political participation



Voting system

The United States has a federal political system. This means that it is divided into 50 states, each of which has its own g_____ and makes l____s about many things. Certain things are decided at 'Federal' level, for the w_____e of the USA. The government in _____ DC makes these decisions. The USA is the most powerful country in the world. It has more than 300 million _____, and the strongest economy of any nation. However, just like Britain and the other major European powers, the USA has been badly hit by major economic problems since the financial crash in 2008.

The USA prides itself on being a democracy. This means that people have the opportunity to participate in politics at all levels. From local upwards, the main types of government elected are -

- County
- State
- Federal

In addition, Americans vote for individual positions ranging from local officials right up to the President. Presidential elections take place every four years, and it's not unusual for a President to be elected from one party while Congress (The Senate and the House of Representatives) is dominated by the other main party.

The White House is the official residence of the President of the United States of America. Try to use as many American terms and phrases in your answers as you can. For example

- Oval _____
- Congr_____
- Sen_____
- House of Repr_____ives
- S_____ators
- Cong_____men
- Pri_____ary Elections
- Fed_____al System

The USA is an example of a democracy with the President and the White House at the top of the system.

The President must stand for re-election every _____ years and can only have _____ terms of office

The President is answerable to the Senate and the House of Representatives to make sure that no one part of the American political system becomes too powerful. The President is also answerable to the Supreme Court which can rule on whether a political decision is unconstitutional.

Political rights

The political rights of Americans are contained within the C_____tion and the Bill of Rights. These guarantee certain freedoms and ensure that no one part of the political system becomes too p_____. Before being able to vote, Americans must register as voters. Unlike Britain, where people are included on the electoral register as soon as they're 18, Americans have to make the eff_____ to register themselves. This puts some people off, and is one reason why there is lower participation by ethnic minorities such as Black and Hispanic Americans.

Voter registration and turnout increased in the run during the campaign and election of B_____ O_____ 2008. (He took up office in January 2009).

Ethnic minority communities

The USA has a large black population. Most of these Americans are descendants of _____, taken to the USA from Africa to work on cotton plantations. Today, Black Americans are found across the country, although the majority are still in the S_____rn states.

For many years, Black Americans were the victims of pre_____ and discri_____, but since the 1960s, they have been entitled to full equality. Many have become better off, gained a good ed_____ and hold important, well-paid jobs. Others live in comparative poverty, in poorer areas of American _____ies and in rural areas of the South.

In the past thirty years, most immigrants to the USA have been of H_____c origin - from Mexico, C____a and other parts of L____in America. They view the USA as a much better place to live than the countries they are leaving.

Many enter the USA legally and are entitled to all the benefits of American c_____ship. Others are _____ immigrants who sneak across the border. They have to take casual jobs and often stay in the USA for only a few months. Many come to the USA to earn money to send back to their families in poorer Latin American countries



Ethnic Minorities and Political participation

The turnout for many elections in the US is low compared to what we might expect in the UK. However, the voter turnout for the 2008 Presidential election when Obama won, was high by American standards with a record number of votes being cast.

Voter registration amongst ethnic minority communities is lower than that for whites. However, voter registration rates are improving. The reasons include:

- increasing number of role models – i.e. members of the ethnic minorities who are elected as politicians, particularly President Barack Obama – has persuaded many more Black Americans and Hispanics to register and use their vote
- there are more middle-class members of the ethnic minorities, especially the emerging Black middle class who earn more and are better educated – as a result they are more likely to take an interest in politics and how it affects them
- both the federal government and state governments have run campaigns, often using celebrities such as young black singers and sports stars, to increase the number of people from the ethnic minorities who register to vote
- the concentration of ethnic minorities in some of America's largest cities has meant they are more likely to vote as they believe that they have a better chance of getting a minority candidate elected for their local area

Other ways of participating in politics



Americans can participate in politics in other ways, apart from voting, just as they do in the UK. It's the same situation as in the UK. US citizens can -

- Join a political party, often the D_____ats or Rep_____
- Cam_____gn on behalf of a party at elections
- Become a c_____ at elections But remember, even though people participate in the same way in the UK and the US, the terms used to describe government are different. Always try to use American terms such as fed____l, primary, or Presidential election.
- American citizens can also join or support p_____ groups, usually known as int____est groups in the USA. They campaign and put pressure on the American g_____t on certain issues. One of the best known American interest groups is the Nat____al R____le A_____tion, which campaigns for the right of Americans to carry g____s.