

United States

The **United States of America** (U.S.A. or USA), commonly known as the **United States** (U.S. or US) or **America**, is a country primarily located in **North America**. It consists of 50 states, a federal district, five major unincorporated territories, 326 Indian reservations, and nine minor outlying islands.^[g] At nearly 3.8 million square miles (9.8 million square kilometers), it is the world's fourth-largest country by land area and third-largest by total area. The United States shares land borders with Canada to the north and Mexico to the south as well as maritime borders with the Bahamas, Cuba, and Russia, among others.^[h] With more than 331 million people, it is the third most populous country in the world. The national capital is Washington, D.C., and the most populous city and financial center is New York City.

Paleo-Indians migrated from Siberia to the North American mainland at least 12,000 years ago, and European colonization began in the 16th century. The United States emerged from the Thirteen British Colonies established along the East Coast. Disputes with Great Britain over taxation and political representation led to the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783), which established the nation's independence. In the late 18th century, the U.S. began expanding across North America, gradually obtaining new territories, sometimes through war, frequently displacing Native Americans, and admitting new states. Slavery was legal in the southern United States until the second half of the 19th century, when the American Civil War led to its abolition. The Spanish-American War and World War I established the U.S. as a world power, and the aftermath of World War II left the United States and the Soviet Union as the world's two superpowers. During the Cold War, both countries fought in the Korean and Vietnam War but avoided direct armed conflict. The superpowers competed in the Space Race, culminating in the 1969 American spaceflight that first landed humans on the Moon. The Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991 ended the Cold War, leaving the United States as the world's sole superpower. In the post-Cold War era, the United States has engaged in several conflicts in the Middle East.

United States of America



Flag



Coat of arms

Motto:

"In God We Trust"^[1]

Other traditional mottos:

"E pluribus unum" (Latin)^[2]
"Out of many, one"

"Annuit coeptis" (Latin)^[2]

"Providence favors our undertakings"

"Novus ordo seclorum" (Latin)^[2]
"New order of the ages"

Anthem: "The Star-Spangled Banner"^[3]



Capital	Washington, D.C. 38°53'N 77°01'W
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Largest city	New York City 40°43'N 74°00'W
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The United States is a federal presidential-constitutional republic with three separate branches of government, including a bicameral legislature. It is a founding member of the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization of American States, and other international organizations. It is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. The United States is a member of multiple military alliances, including NATO, AUKUS, and unilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines. Considered a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities, its population has been profoundly shaped by centuries of immigration. The United States is a liberal democracy; it ranks high in international measures of economic freedom, quality of life, education, and human rights; and it has low levels of perceived corruption. Unlike other western democracies, the United States lacks universal health care, retains capital punishment, and has high levels of incarceration and inequality.^[24]

The United States is a highly developed country, and its economy accounts for approximately a quarter of global GDP and is the world's largest by GDP at market exchange rates. By value, the United States is the world's largest importer and second-largest exporter of goods. Although its population is only 4.2% of the world's total, it holds over 30% of the total wealth in the world, the largest share held by any country. Making up more than a third of global military spending and with overseas military bases in over 85 countries, the United States is the foremost military power in the world and a leading political, cultural, and scientific force.^[25]

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Official languages	None at the federal level ^[a]
National language	English (<i>de facto</i>)
Ethnic groups (2020) ^{[6][7][8]}	By race: 61.6% <u>White</u> 12.4% <u>Black</u> 6.0% <u>Asian</u> 1.1% <u>Native American</u> 0.2% <u>Pacific Islander</u> 10.2% <u>Multiracial</u> 8.5% <u>Others</u> By Hispanic or Latino origin: 18.7% <u>Hispanic or Latino</u> 81.3% Non-Hispanic or Latino
Religion (2021) ^[9]	63% <u>Christianity</u> —40% <u>Protestantism</u> —21% <u>Catholicism</u> —2% <u>Other Christian</u> 29% <u>No religion</u> 6% <u>Others</u> 2% <u>Unknown</u>
Demonym(s)	<u>American</u> ^[b] ^[10]
Government	Federal presidential constitutional republic
• President	Joe Biden (D)
• Vice President	Kamala Harris (D)
• House Speaker	Nancy Pelosi (D)
• Chief Justice	John Roberts
Legislature	Congress
• Upper house	Senate
• Lower house	House of Representatives
Independence from Great Britain	
• Declaration	July 4, 1776
• Confederation	March 1, 1781
• Treaty of Paris	September 3, 1783
• Constitution	June 21, 1788
• Last state admitted	August 21, 1959
Area	
• Total area	3,796,742 sq mi (9,833,520 km ²) ^[c] ^[11] (3rd/4th)
• Water (%)	4.66 ^[12]
• Land area	3,531,905 sq mi

Cold War, civil rights movement, political turmoil	(9,147,590 km ²)
1990s and early 2000s	
Geography	
Topography and climate	
Biodiversity	
Environment	
Government and politics	
Political divisions	
Parties and elections	
Foreign relations	
Government finance	
Military	
Law enforcement and crime	
Economy	
Science and technology	
Income, wealth, and poverty	
Transportation	
Energy	
Demographics	
Population	
Language	
Religion	
Health	
Education	
Culture and society	
Literature, philosophy, and visual art	
Food	
Music	
Cinema	
Theater	
Sports	
Mass media	
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Etymology

The first known use of the name "America" dates back to 1507, when it appeared on a world map produced by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller in the French city of Saint-Dié-des-Vosges. On his map, the name is shown in large letters on what would now be considered South America, in honor of Amerigo Vespucci. The Italian explorer was the first to postulate that the West Indies did not represent Asia's eastern limit but were part of a previously unknown landmass.^{[26][27]} In 1538, the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator used the name "America" on his own world map, applying it to the entire Western Hemisphere.^[28]

The first documentary evidence of the phrase "United States of America" dates from a January 2, 1776 letter written by Stephen Moylan to Joseph Reed, George Washington's aide-de-camp. Moylan expressed his wish to go "with full and ample powers from the United States of America to Spain" to seek assistance in the revolutionary war effort.^{[29][30][31]} The first known publication of the phrase "United States of America" was in an anonymous essay in The Virginia Gazette newspaper in Williamsburg, on April 6, 1776.^[32]

The second draft of the Articles of Confederation, prepared by John Dickinson and completed no later than June 17, 1776, declared "The name of this Confederation shall be the 'United States of America'."^[33] The final version of the Articles, sent to the states for ratification in late 1777, stated that "The Stile of this Confederacy shall be 'The United States of America'."^[34] In June 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote the phrase "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" in all capitalized letters in the headline of his "original Rough draught" of the Declaration of Independence.^[33] This draft of the document did not surface until June 21, 1776, and it is unclear whether it was written before or after Dickinson used the term in his June 17 draft of the Articles of Confederation.^[33]

The phrase "United States" was originally plural in American usage. It described a collection of states—e.g., "the United States are..." The singular form became popular after the end of the Civil War and is now standard usage. A citizen of the United States is an "American". "United States", "American", and "U.S." refer to the country adjectivally ("American values", "U.S. forces"). In English, the word "American" rarely refers to topics or subjects not directly connected with the United States.^[35]

History

Indigenous peoples and pre-Columbian history

It has been generally accepted that the first inhabitants of North America migrated from Siberia by way of the Bering land bridge and arrived at least 12,000 years ago; however, some evidence suggests an even earlier date of arrival.^{[36][37][38]} The Clovis culture, which appeared around 11,000 BC, is believed to represent the first wave of human settlement of the Americas.^{[39][40]} This was likely the first of three major waves of migration into North America; later waves brought the ancestors of present-day Athabaskans, Aleuts, and Eskimos.^[41]



The Cliff Palace, built by the Native American Puebloans between AD 1190 and 1260

Over time, indigenous cultures in North America grew increasingly complex, and some, such as the pre-Columbian Mississippian culture in the southeast, developed advanced agriculture, architecture, and complex societies.^[42] The city-state of Cahokia is the largest, most complex pre-Columbian archaeological site in the modern-day United States.^[43] In the Four Corners region, Ancestral Puebloan culture developed from centuries of agricultural experimentation.^[44] The Haudenosaunee,

located in the southern Great Lakes region, was established at some point between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.^[45] Most prominent along the Atlantic coast were the Algonquian tribes, who practiced hunting and trapping, along with limited cultivation.

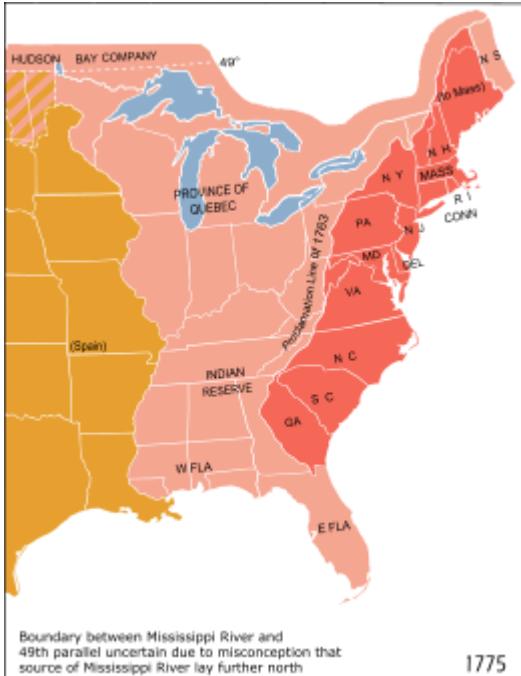
Estimating the native population of North America at the time of European contact is difficult.^{[46][47]} Douglas H. Ubelaker of the Smithsonian Institution estimated that there was a population of 92,916 in the south Atlantic states and a population of 473,616 in the Gulf states,^[48] but most academics regard this figure as too low.^[46] Anthropologist Henry F. Dobyns believed the populations were much higher, suggesting around 1.1 million along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, 2.2 million people living between Florida and Massachusetts, 5.2 million in the Mississippi Valley and tributaries, and around 700,000 people in the Florida peninsula.^{[46][47]}

European settlements

Claims of very early colonization of coastal New England by the Norse are disputed and controversial. The first documented arrival of Europeans in the continental United States is that of Spanish conquistadors such as Juan Ponce de León, who made his first expedition to Florida in 1513. Even earlier, Christopher Columbus had landed in Puerto Rico on his 1493 voyage, and San Juan was settled by the Spanish a decade later.^[49] The Spanish set up the first settlements in Florida and New Mexico, such as Saint Augustine, often considered the nation's oldest city,^[50] and Santa Fe. The French established their own settlements along the Mississippi River, notably New Orleans.^[51] Successful English settlement of the eastern coast of North America began with the Virginia Colony in 1607 at Jamestown and with the Pilgrims' construction of a colony at Plymouth in 1620.^{[52][53]} The continent's first elected legislative assembly, Virginia's House of Burgesses, was founded in 1619. Documents such as the Mayflower Compact and the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut established precedents for representative self-government and constitutionalism that would develop throughout the American colonies.^{[54][55]} Many English settlers were dissenting Christians who came seeking religious freedom. In 1784, the Russians were the first Europeans to establish a settlement in Alaska, at Three Saints Bay. Russian America once spanned much of the present-day state of Alaska.^[56] The native population of America declined after European arrival for various reasons,^{[57][58][59]} primarily from imported European diseases such as smallpox and measles.^{[60][61]}

In the early days of colonization, many European settlers were subject to food shortages, disease, and attacks from Native Americans. Native Americans were also often at war with neighboring tribes and European settlers. In many cases, however, the natives and settlers came to depend on one another. Settlers traded for food and animal pelts, and natives for guns, tools and other European goods.^[62] Native Americans taught many settlers to cultivate corn, beans, and other foodstuffs. European missionaries and others felt it was important to "civilize" the Native Americans and urged them to adopt European agricultural practices and lifestyles.^{[63][64]} With the increased European colonization of North America, Native Americans were often displaced or killed during settler conflicts.^[65]

European settlers also began the trafficking of African slaves into Colonial America via the transatlantic slave trade.^[66] Because of a lower prevalence of tropical diseases and better treatment, slaves had a much higher life expectancy in North America than in South America, leading to a rapid increase in their numbers.^{[67][68]} Colonial society was largely divided over the religious and moral implications of slavery, and several colonies passed acts both against and in favor of the practice.^{[69][70]} However, by the turn of the 18th century, African slaves had supplanted European indentured servants as cash crop labor, especially in the American South.^[71]



The original Thirteen Colonies (shown in red) in 1775

the development of self-government, but their unprecedented success motivated British monarchs to periodically seek to reassert royal authority.^[77]

Independence and expansion

The American Revolutionary War fought by the Thirteen Colonies against the British Empire was the first successful war of independence by a non-European entity against a European power in modern history. Americans had developed an ideology of "republicanism", asserting that government rested on the will of the people as expressed in their local legislatures. They demanded their "rights as Englishmen" and "no taxation without representation". The British insisted on administering the empire through Parliament, and the conflict escalated into war.^[78]

The Second Continental Congress, an assembly representing the United Colonies, unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776; this day is celebrated annually in the United States as Independence Day.^[79] In 1777, the Articles of Confederation established a decentralized government that operated until 1789.^[79]

After its defeat at the Siege of Yorktown in 1781, Britain signed a peace treaty. American sovereignty became internationally recognized, and the country was granted all lands east of the Mississippi River. Tensions with Britain remained, however, leading to the War of 1812, which was fought to a military stalemate.^[80] Nationalists led the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 in writing the United States Constitution, ratified in state conventions in 1788. Coming into force in 1789, this constitution reorganized the federal government into three branches, on the principle of creating salutary checks and balances.

The Thirteen Colonies that would become the United States of America were administered by the British as overseas dependencies.^[72] All nonetheless had local governments with elections open to most free men.^[73] With extremely high birth rates, low death rates, and steady settlement, the colonial population grew rapidly, eclipsing Native American populations.^[74] The Christian revivalist movement of the 1730s and 1740s known as the Great Awakening fueled interest both in religion and in religious liberty.^[75]

During the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), known in the U.S. as the French and Indian War, British forces captured Canada from the French. With the creation of the Province of Quebec, Canada's francophone population would remain isolated from the English-speaking colonial dependencies of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and the Thirteen Colonies. Excluding the Native Americans who lived there, the Thirteen Colonies had a population of over 2.1 million in 1770, about a third of Britain's. Despite continuing new arrivals, the rate of natural increase was such that by the 1770s only a small minority of Americans had been born overseas.^[76] The colonies' distance from Britain had allowed



Declaration of Independence, a painting by John Trumbull, depicts the Committee of Five presenting the draft of the Declaration to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, July 4, 1776.

George Washington, who had led the Continental Army to victory, was the first president elected under the new constitution. The Bill of Rights, forbidding federal restriction of personal freedoms and guaranteeing a range of legal protections, was adopted in 1791.^[81]



Territorial acquisitions of the United States between 1783 and 1917

Purchase almost doubled the nation's area,^[89] Spain ceded Florida and other Gulf Coast territory in 1819,^[90] the Republic of Texas was annexed in 1845 during a period of expansionism,^[91] and the 1846 Oregon Treaty with Britain led to U.S. control of the present-day American Northwest.^[92] Victory in the Mexican–American War resulted in the 1848 Mexican Cession of California and much of the present-day American Southwest, making the U.S. span the continent.^{[87][93]}

The California Gold Rush of 1848–1849 spurred migration to the Pacific coast, which led to the California Genocide^[94] and the creation of additional western states.^[95] The giving away of vast quantities of land to white European settlers as part of the Homestead Acts, and to private railroad companies and colleges as part of land grants spurred economic development.^[96] After the Civil War, new transcontinental railways made relocation easier for settlers, expanded internal trade, and increased conflicts with Native Americans.^[97] In 1869, a new Peace Policy nominally promised to protect Native Americans from abuses, avoid further war, and secure their eventual U.S. citizenship. Conflicts with the natives continued throughout the West into the 1900s.

Civil War and Reconstruction era

Irreconcilable sectional conflict regarding the enslavement of and African Americans ultimately led to the American Civil War.^[98] With the 1860 election of Republican Abraham Lincoln, conventions in thirteen slave states declared secession and formed the Confederate States of America (the "South" or the "Confederacy"), while the federal government (the "Union" or the "North") maintained that secession was illegal.^[99] In order to bring about this secession, military action was initiated by the secessionists, and the Union responded in kind. The ensuing war would become the deadliest military conflict in American history, resulting in the deaths of approximately 620,000 soldiers as well as upwards of 50,000 civilians.^[100] The Union initially fought to keep the country united, but as casualties mounted after 1863 and Lincoln delivered his Emancipation Proclamation, the main purpose of the war became the abolition of slavery. When the Union ultimately won the war in April 1865,



The Battle of Gettysburg, fought between Union and Confederate forces on July 1–3, 1863, around Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, marked a turning point in the American Civil War.

each of the states in the defeated South was required to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which prohibited slavery except as penal labor. Two other amendments were also ratified, ensuring citizenship and voting rights for blacks.

Reconstruction began in earnest following the war. While President Lincoln attempted to foster friendship and forgiveness between the Union and the former Confederacy, his assassination on April 14, 1865 drove a wedge between North and South again. Republicans in the federal government made it their goal to oversee the rebuilding of the South and to ensure the rights of African Americans. They persisted until the Compromise of 1877 when the Republicans agreed to cease protecting the rights of African Americans in the South in order for Democrats to concede the presidential election of 1876.^[101]

Southern white Democrats, calling themselves "Redeemers", took control of the South after the end of Reconstruction, beginning the nadir of American race relations. From 1890 to 1910, the Redeemers established so-called Jim Crow laws, disenfranchising most blacks and some impoverished whites throughout the region. Blacks would face racial segregation nationwide, especially in the South.^[102] They also occasionally experienced vigilante violence, including lynching.^[103]

Further immigration, expansion, and industrialization



Film by Edison Studios showing immigrants disembarking at Ellis Island in New York Harbor, which served as a major entry point for European immigration into the U.S.^[104]

In the North, urbanization and an unprecedented influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe supplied a surplus of labor for the country's industrialization and transformed its culture.^[105] National infrastructure, including telegraph and transcontinental railroads, spurred economic growth and greater settlement and development of the American frontier. The later inventions of the electric light and the telephone would also affect communication and urban life.^[106]

Armed conflicts with Native Americans escalated west of the Mississippi River from 1810 to at least 1890.^[107] Most of these conflicts ended with the cession of Native American territory and their confinement to Indian reservations. The Trail of Tears in the 1830s exemplified the Indian removal policy that forcibly resettled Indians. This further expanded acreage under mechanical cultivation, increasing surpluses for international markets.^[108]

Mainland expansion also included the purchase of Alaska from the Russian Empire in 1867.^[109] In 1893, pro-American elements in Hawaii overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy and formed the Republic of Hawaii, which the U.S. annexed in 1898. Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were ceded by Spain in the same year, following the Spanish–American War.^[110] American Samoa was acquired by the United States in 1900 after the end of the Second Samoan Civil War.^[111] The U.S. Virgin Islands were purchased from Denmark in 1917.^[112]

Rapid economic development during the late 19th and early 20th centuries fostered the rise of many prominent industrialists. Tycoons like Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie led the nation's progress in the railroad, petroleum, and steel industries. Banking became a major part of the economy, with J. P. Morgan playing a notable role. The American economy boomed, becoming the world's largest.^[113] These dramatic changes were accompanied by growing inequality and social unrest, which prompted the rise of organized labor along with populist, socialist, and anarchist movements.^[114] This period eventually ended with the advent of the Progressive Era, which saw significant reforms including women's suffrage, alcohol prohibition, regulation of consumer goods, and greater antitrust measures to ensure competition and attention to worker conditions.^{[115][116][117]}

World War I, Great Depression, and World War II

The United States remained neutral from the outbreak of World War I in 1914 until 1917 when it joined the war as an "associated power" alongside the Allies of World War I, helping to turn the tide against the Central Powers. In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson took a leading diplomatic role at the Paris Peace Conference and advocated strongly for the U.S. to join the League of Nations. However, the Senate refused to approve this and did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles that established the League of Nations.^[118]

In 1920, the women's rights movement won passage of a constitutional amendment granting women's suffrage.^[119] The 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of radio for mass communication and the invention of early television.^[120] The prosperity of the Roaring Twenties ended with the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression. After his election as president in 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt responded with the New Deal.^[121] The Great Migration of millions of African Americans out of the American South began before World War I and extended through the 1960s;^[122] whereas the Dust Bowl of the mid-1930s impoverished many farming communities and spurred a new wave of westward migration.^[123]



U.S. Marines raising the American flag on Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima in one of the most iconic images of World War II

At first effectively neutral during World War II, the United States began supplying materiel to the Allies in March 1941 through the Lend-Lease program. On December 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, prompting the United States to join the Allies against the Axis powers, and in the following year, to intern about 120,000^[124] U.S. residents (including American citizens) of Japanese descent.^[125] Although Japan attacked the United States first, the U.S. nonetheless pursued a "Europe first" defense policy.^[126] The United States thus left its vast Asian colony, the Philippines, isolated and fighting a losing struggle against Japanese invasion and occupation. During the war, the United States was one of the "Four Powers"^[127] who met to plan the postwar world, along with Britain, the Soviet Union, and China.^{[128][129]} Although the nation lost around 400,000 military personnel,^[130] it emerged relatively undamaged from the war with even greater economic and military influence.^[131]

The United States played a leading role in the Bretton Woods and Yalta conferences, which signed agreements on new international financial institutions and Europe's postwar reorganization. As an Allied victory was won in Europe, a 1945 international conference held in San Francisco produced the United Nations Charter, which became active after the war.^[132] The United States and Japan then fought each other in the largest naval battle in history, the Battle of Leyte Gulf.^{[133][134]} The United States developed the first nuclear weapons and used them on Japan in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 under the authorization of President Harry S. Truman; the Japanese surrendered on September 2, ending World War II.^{[135][136]}

Cold War, civil rights movement, political turmoil

After World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union competed for power, influence, and prestige during what became known as the Cold War, driven by an ideological divide between capitalism and communism.^[137] They dominated the military affairs of Europe, with the U.S. and its NATO allies on one side and the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies on the other. The U.S. developed a policy of

containment towards the expansion of communist influence. While the U.S. and Soviet Union engaged in proxy wars and developed powerful nuclear arsenals, the two countries avoided direct military conflict.^[138]

The United States often opposed Third World movements that it viewed as Soviet-sponsored and occasionally pursued direct action for regime change against left-wing governments, occasionally supporting authoritarian right-wing regimes.^[139] American troops fought communist Chinese and North Korean forces in the Korean War of 1950–1953.^[140] The Soviet Union's 1957 launch of the first artificial satellite and its 1961 launch of the first crewed spaceflight initiated a "Space Race" in which the United States became the first nation to land a man on the Moon in 1969.^[140] The United States became increasingly involved in the Vietnam War (1955–1975), introducing combat forces in 1965.^[141]

At home, the U.S. had experienced sustained economic expansion and a rapid growth of its population and middle class following World War II. After a surge in female labor participation, especially in the 1970s, by 1985, the majority of women aged 16 and over were employed.^[142] Construction of an Interstate Highway System transformed the nation's infrastructure over the following decades. Millions moved from farms and inner cities to large suburban housing developments.^{[143][144]} In 1959, the United States formally expanded beyond the contiguous United States when the territories of Alaska and Hawaii became, respectively, the 49th and 50th states admitted into the Union.^[145] The growing civil rights movement used nonviolent tactics to confront segregation and discrimination, with Martin Luther King Jr. becoming a prominent leader.^[146] A combination of court decisions and legislation, culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1968, sought to end racial discrimination.^{[147][148][149]} Meanwhile, a counterculture movement grew, which was fueled by opposition to the Vietnam war, the Black Power movement, and the sexual revolution.^[150] Four prominent American politicians and social activists were assassinated during the 1960s: President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and his brother Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, Malcolm X in 1965, and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968.^[151] Public trust in the federal government was further rocked by President Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal, which began in 1972 and ended in 1974 when Nixon became the only U.S. president to resign from office.

The launch of a "War on Poverty" expanded entitlements and welfare spending, including the creation of Medicare and Medicaid, two programs that provide health coverage to the elderly and poor, respectively, and the means-tested Food Stamp Program and Aid to Families with Dependent Children.^[152]

The 1970s and early 1980s saw the onset of stagflation. The United States supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War; in response, the country faced an oil embargo from OPEC nations, sparking the 1973 oil crisis. After his election, President Ronald Reagan responded to economic stagnation with free-market oriented reforms. Following the collapse of détente, he abandoned "containment" and initiated the more aggressive "rollback" strategy towards the Soviet Union.^{[153][154]} The late 1980s brought a "thaw" in relations with the Soviet Union, and its collapse in 1991 finally ended the Cold War.^{[155][156][157]} This brought about unipolarity^[158] with the U.S. unchallenged as the world's dominant superpower.^[159]



Martin Luther King Jr. gives his famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington, August 1963.



U.S. president Ronald Reagan (left) and Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev at the Geneva Summit, February 1985

1990s and early 2000s

The first crisis after the Cold War was a conflict in the Middle East, when in 1990 Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait, an ally of the United States.^[160] Fearing the spread of instability, in August, President George H. W. Bush launched the Gulf War against Iraq; the U.S. led the coalition force of 34 nations, and the war ended in February 1991 with the successful expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of its monarchy.^[161]

Originating within U.S. military defense networks, the Internet spread to international academic platforms and then to the public in the 1990s, greatly affecting the global economy, society, and culture.^[162] Due to the dot-com boom, stable monetary policy, and reduced social welfare spending, the 1990s saw the longest economic expansion in modern U.S. history.^[163] Beginning in 1994, the U.S. signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), causing trade among the U.S., Canada, and Mexico to soar.^[164]

On September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda Islamic terrorist hijackers flew passenger planes into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., killing almost 3,000 people and injuring approximately 25,000 more.^[165] Hundreds more died later from illnesses related to the attacks, and perhaps thousands of first responders, cleanup workers, and survivors suffer from long-term effects.^[166] In response, President George W. Bush launched the War on Terror, which included a nearly 20-year war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 and the 2003–2011 Iraq War.^{[167][168]} A 2011 military operation in Pakistan led to the killing of Osama bin Laden.^[169]



The World Trade Center in New York City burning from the September 11 terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda in 2001

Government policy designed to promote affordable housing,^[170] widespread failures in corporate and regulatory governance,^[171] and historically low interest rates set by the Federal Reserve^[172] led to the United States housing bubble in 2006; this culminated with the financial crisis of 2007–2008 and the Great Recession, the nation's largest economic contraction since the Great Depression.^[173] During the crisis, assets owned by Americans lost about a quarter of their value.^[174] Barack Obama, the first multiracial^[175] and African-American president, was elected in 2008 amid the crisis.^[176] He subsequently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 economic stimulus and the Dodd–Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act in an attempt to mitigate its negative effects and ensure there would not be a repeat of the crisis.

Republican Donald Trump was elected as the 45th president in 2016, a result viewed as one of the biggest political upsets in American history.^[177] He led the country through the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is estimated to have caused the deaths of over 900,000 Americans as of December 2021.^[178] In 2020, Democrat Joe Biden was elected as the 46th president;^[179] President Trump refused to concede the election, and on January 6, 2021, a group of his supporters stormed the United States Capitol in an unsuccessful effort to disrupt the presidential Electoral College vote count.^[180]

Geography

The 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia occupy a combined area of 3,119,885 square miles (8,080,470 km²). Of this area, 2,959,064 square miles (7,663,940 km²) is contiguous land, composing 83.65% of total U.S. land area.^{[181][182]} Hawaii, occupying an archipelago in the central Pacific, southwest of North America, is 10,931 square miles (28,311 km²) in area. The five populated but unincorporated territories of Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands together cover 9,185 square miles (23,789 km²).^[183] Measured by only land area, the United States is third in size behind Russia and China, just ahead of Canada.^[184]

The United States is the world's third- or fourth-largest nation by total area (land and water), ranking behind Russia and Canada and nearly equal to China. The ranking varies depending on how two territories disputed by China and India are counted, and how the total size of the United States is measured.^{[c][187][188]}

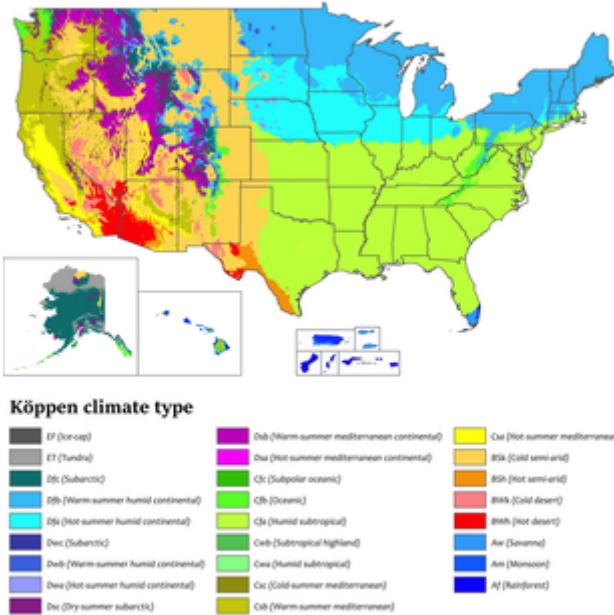
Topography and climate

The coastal plain of the Atlantic seaboard gives way further inland to deciduous forests and the rolling hills of the Piedmont.^[189] The Appalachian Mountains divide the eastern seaboard from the Great Lakes and the grasslands of the Midwest.^[190] The Mississippi–Missouri River, the world's fourth longest river system, runs mainly north–south through the heart of the country. The flat, fertile prairie of the Great Plains stretches to the west, interrupted by a highland region in the southeast.^[190]

The Rocky Mountains, west of the Great Plains, extend north to south across the country, peaking around 14,000 feet (4,300 m) in Colorado.^[191] Farther west are the rocky Great Basin and deserts such as the Chihuahua and Mojave.^[192] The Sierra Nevada and Cascade mountain ranges run close to the Pacific coast, both ranges reaching altitudes higher than 14,000 feet (4,300 m). The lowest and highest points in the contiguous United States are in the state of California,^[193] and only about 84 miles (135 km) apart.^[194] At an elevation of 20,310 feet (6,190.5 m), Alaska's Denali is the highest peak in the country and in North America.^[195] Active volcanoes are common throughout Alaska's Alexander and Aleutian Islands, and Hawaii consists of volcanic islands. The supervolcano underlying Yellowstone National Park in the Rockies is the continent's largest volcanic feature.^[196]

The United States, with its large size and geographic variety, includes most climate types. To the east of the 100th meridian, the climate ranges from humid continental in the north to humid subtropical in the south.^[197] The Great Plains west of the 100th meridian are semi-arid. Much of the Western mountains have an alpine climate. The climate is arid in the Great Basin, desert in the Southwest, Mediterranean in coastal California, and oceanic in coastal Oregon and Washington and southern Alaska. Most of Alaska is subarctic or polar. Hawaii and the southern tip of Florida are tropical, as well as its territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.^[198] States bordering the Gulf of Mexico are prone to hurricanes, and most of the world's tornadoes occur in the country, mainly in Tornado Alley areas in the Midwest and South.^[199] The United States receives more high-impact extreme weather incidents than any other country in the world.^[200]

Köppen climate types of the United States



Köppen climate classifications of U.S. states and territories



Rock formations in the Grand Canyon, northern Arizona

Biodiversity

The U.S. is one of 17 megadiverse countries containing large numbers of endemic species: about 17,000 species of vascular plants occur in the contiguous United States and Alaska, and more than 1,800 species of flowering plants are found in Hawaii, few of which occur on the mainland.^[202] The United States is home to 428 mammal species, 784 bird species, 311 reptile species, and 295 amphibian species,^[203] as well as about 91,000 insect species.^[204]



The bald eagle has been the national bird of the United States since 1782.^[201]

There are 63 national parks and hundreds of other federally managed parks, forests, and wilderness areas, which are managed by the National Park Service.^[205] Altogether, the government owns about 28% of the country's land area,^[206] mostly in the western states.^[207] Most of this land is protected, though some is leased for oil and gas drilling, mining, logging, or cattle ranching, and about 0.86% is used for military purposes.^{[208][209]}

Environment

Environmental issues in the U.S. include debates on oil and nuclear energy, dealing with air and water pollution, the economic costs of protecting wildlife, logging and deforestation,^{[210][211]} and climate change.^{[212][213]} The most prominent environmental agency is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), created by presidential order in 1970.^[214] The idea of wilderness has shaped the management of public lands since 1964, with the Wilderness Act.^[215] The Endangered Species Act of 1973 is intended to protect threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which are monitored by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.^[216]

The country ranks as the world's second-highest emitter of greenhouse gases, exceeded only by China.^[217] The United States had been the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases and ranks third, tied with Canada, for greenhouse gas emissions per capita.^[218]

The United States is ranked 24th among nations in the Environmental Performance Index.^[219] The country joined the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2016 and has many other environmental commitments.^[220] It left the Paris Agreement in 2020,^[221] and rejoined it in 2021.^[222]

Government and politics

The United States is a federal republic of 50 states, a federal district, five territories and several uninhabited island possessions.^{[223][224][225]} It is the world's oldest surviving federation. It is a federal republic and a representative democracy "in which majority rule is tempered by minority rights protected by law".^[226] In 2021, the U.S. ranked 26th on the Democracy Index, and is described as a "flawed democracy".^[227] On Transparency International's 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, its public sector position deteriorated from a score of 76 in 2015 to 69 in 2019.^[228]

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.^[i]

The government is regulated by a system of checks and balances defined by the U.S. Constitution, which serves as the country's supreme legal document.^[229] The Constitution establishes the structure and responsibilities of the federal government and its relationship with the individual states. Article One protects

the right to the writ of habeas corpus. The Constitution has been amended 27 times;^[230] the first ten amendments, which make up the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment form the central basis of Americans' individual rights. All laws and governmental procedures are subject to judicial review, and any law can be voided if the courts determine that it violates the Constitution. The principle of judicial review, not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, was established by the Supreme Court in Marbury v. Madison (1803)^[231] in a decision handed down by Chief Justice John Marshall.^[232]

The federal government comprises 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,^[233] and has the power of impeachment, by which it can remove sitting members of the federal government.^[234]
- Executive: The president is the commander-in-chief of the military, can veto legislative bills before they become law (subject to congressional override), and appoints the members of the Cabinet (subject to Senate approval) and other officers, who administer and enforce federal laws and policies.^[235]
- Judicial: The Supreme Court and lower federal courts, whose judges are appointed by the president with Senate approval, interpret laws and overturn those they find unconstitutional.^[236]



The United States Capitol, where Congress meets: the Senate, left; the House, right



The White House, residence and office of the U.S. President



The Supreme Court Building, where the nation's highest court sits

The House of Representatives has 435 voting members, each representing a congressional district for a two-year term. House seats are apportioned among the states by population. Each state then draws single-member districts to conform with the census apportionment. The District of Columbia and the five major U.S. territories each have one member of Congress—these members are not allowed to vote.^[237]

The Senate has 100 members with each state having two senators, elected at-large to six-year terms; one-third of Senate seats are up for election every two years. The District of Columbia and the five major U.S. territories do not have senators.^[237] 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 to the states and the District of Columbia.^[238] The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice John Roberts, has nine members, who serve for life.^[239]

Political divisions

The 50 states are the principal political divisions in the country. Each state holds jurisdiction over a defined geographic territory, where it shares sovereignty with the federal government. They are subdivided into counties or county equivalents and further divided into municipalities. The District of Columbia is a federal district that contains the capital of the United States, the city of Washington.^[240] The states and the District of Columbia choose the president of the United States. Each state has presidential electors equal to the number of their representatives and senators in Congress; the District of Columbia has three because of the 23rd Amendment.^[241] Territories of the United States such as Puerto Rico do not have presidential electors, and so people in those territories cannot vote for the president.^[237]

The United States also observes tribal sovereignty of the American Indian nations to a limited degree, as it does with the states' sovereignty. American Indians are U.S. citizens and tribal lands are subject to federal jurisdiction. Like the states, they have a great deal of autonomy, but are also not allowed to make war, engage in their own foreign relations, or print and issue currency.^[242] Indian reservations are usually part of a single state, though 12 reservations cross state boundaries.^[243] Indian country jurisdiction over legal disputes is shared by tribes, states, and the federal government.

Citizenship is granted at birth in all states, the District of Columbia, and all major U.S. territories except American Samoa.^{[j][247][244]}



Map of the United States showing the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the five major U.S. territories

Parties and elections

The United States has operated under a two-party system for most of its history.^[248] For elective offices at most levels, state-administered primary elections choose the major party nominees for subsequent general elections. Since the general election of 1856, the major parties have been the Democratic Party, founded in 1824, 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, though the self-financed Reform party campaign of Ross Perot took 18.9% in 1992.^[249] The president and vice president are elected by the Electoral College.^[250]

In American political culture, the center-right Republican Party is considered "conservative" and the center-left Democratic Party is considered "liberal".^{[251][252]} The states of the Northeast and West Coast and some of the Great Lakes states, known as "blue states", are relatively liberal. The "red states" of the South and parts of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains are relatively conservative.

Democrat Joe Biden, the winner of the 2020 presidential election and former vice president, is serving as the 46th president of the United States; his vice president is Kamala Harris. Leadership in the Senate includes President pro tempore Patrick Leahy, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.^[253] Leadership in the House includes Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.^[254]

In the 117th United States Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate are narrowly controlled by the Democratic Party. The Senate consists of 50 Republicans and 48 Democrats with two Independents who caucus with the Democrats, with Vice President Harris, a Democrat, able to break ties. The House consists of 221 Democrats and 209 Republicans.^[255] Of state governors, there are 28 Republicans and 22 Democrats. Among the D.C. mayor and the five territorial governors, there are three Democrats, one Republican, and one New Progressive.^[256]



Joe Biden
46th President



Kamala Harris
49th Vice President

since January 20, 2021

Foreign relations

The United States has an established structure of foreign relations. It is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and New York City is home to the United Nations Headquarters. It is also a member of the G7,^[257] G20, and OECD. Almost all countries have embassies in Washington, D.C., and many have consulates around the country. Likewise, nearly all nations host American diplomatic missions. However, Iran, North Korea, Bhutan, and Taiwan do not have formal diplomatic relations with the United States (although the U.S. maintains unofficial relations with Taiwan and supplies it with military equipment).^[258]

The United States has a "Special Relationship" with the United Kingdom^[259] and strong ties with Canada,^[260] Australia,^[261] New Zealand,^[262] the Philippines,^[263] Japan,^[264] South Korea,^[265] Israel,^[266] and several European Union countries, including France, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Poland.^[267] It works closely with fellow NATO members on military and security issues and with its neighbors through the Organization of American States and free trade agreements such as the trilateral United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement. Colombia is traditionally considered by the United States as its most loyal ally in South America.^{[268][269]}

The U.S. exercises full international defense authority and responsibility for Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau through the Compact of Free Association.^[270]

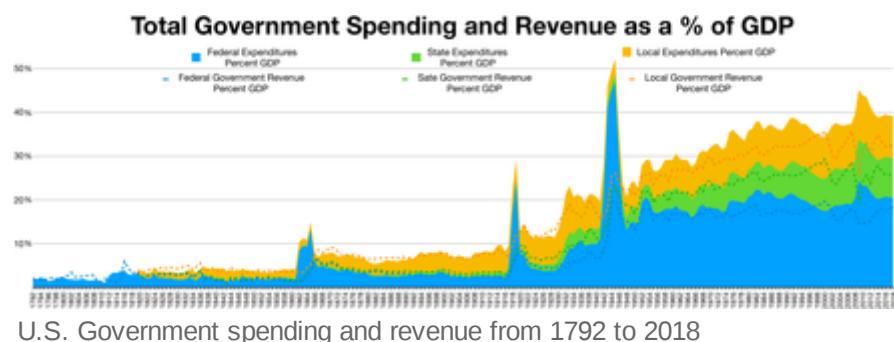


The United Nations Headquarters has been situated in Midtown Manhattan since 1952. The United States is a founding member of the United Nations.

Government finance

Taxation in the United States is progressive,^{[271][272]} and is levied at the federal, state, and local government levels. This includes taxes on income, payroll, property, sales, imports, estates, and gifts, as well as various fees. Taxation in the United States is based on citizenship, not residency.^[273]

Both non-resident citizens and Green Card holders living abroad are taxed on their income irrespective of where they live or where their income is earned. The United States is one of the few countries in the world to do so.^[274]



In 2010, taxes collected by federal, state and municipal governments amounted to 24.8% of GDP.^[275] For 2018, the effective tax rate for the wealthiest 400 households was 23%, compared to 24.2% for the bottom half of U.S. households.^[276]

During fiscal year 2012, the federal government spent \$3.54 trillion on a budget or cash basis. Major categories of fiscal year 2012 spending included: Medicare & Medicaid (23%), Social Security (22%), Defense Department (19%), non-defense discretionary (17%), other mandatory (13%) and interest (6%).^[277]

In 2018, the United States had the largest external debt in the world.^[278] As a percentage of GDP, it had the 34th largest government debt in the world in 2017; however, more recent estimates vary.^[279] The total national debt of the United States was \$23.201 trillion, or 107% of GDP, in the fourth quarter of 2019.^[280] By 2012, total federal debt had surpassed 100% of U.S. GDP.^[281] The U.S. has a credit rating of AA+ from Standard & Poor's, AAA from Fitch, and AAA from Moody's.^[282]

Military

The president is the commander-in-chief of the United States Armed Forces and appoints its leaders, the secretary of defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Department of Defense, which is headquartered at the Pentagon near Washington, D.C., administers five of the six service branches, which are made up of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Space Force. The Coast Guard, also a branch of the armed forces, is normally administered by the Department of Homeland Security in peacetime and can be transferred to the Department of the Navy in wartime.^[283] In 2019, all six branches of the U.S. Armed Forces reported 1.4 million personnel on active duty.^[284] The Reserves and National Guard brought the total number of troops to 2.3 million.^[284] The Department of Defense also employed about 700,000 civilians, not including contractors.^[285]



The Pentagon, located across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., is home to the U.S. Department of Defense.

Military service in the United States is voluntary, although conscription may occur in wartime through the Selective Service System.^[286] From 1940 until 1973, conscription was mandatory even during peacetime.^[287] Today, American forces can be rapidly deployed by the Air Force's large fleet of transport aircraft, the Navy's 11 active aircraft carriers, and Marine expeditionary units at sea with the Navy, and Army's XVIII Airborne Corps and 75th Ranger Regiment deployed by Air Force transport aircraft. The Air Force can strike targets across the globe through its fleet of strategic bombers, maintains the air defense across the United States, and provides close air support to Army and Marine Corps ground forces.^{[288][289][290]} The Space Force operates the Global Positioning System, operates the Eastern and Western Ranges for all space launches, and operates the United States' Space Surveillance and Missile Warning networks.^{[291][292][293]} The military operates about 800 bases and facilities abroad,^[294] and maintains deployments greater than 100 active duty personnel in 25 foreign countries.^[295]

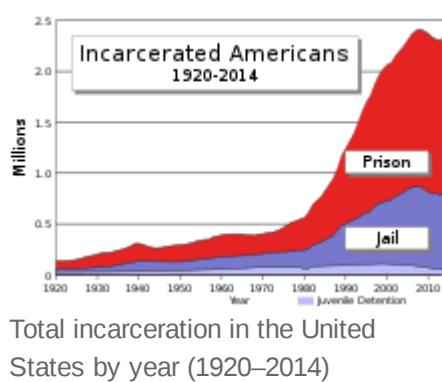
The United States spent \$649 billion on its military in 2019, 36% of global military spending.^[296] At 4.7% of GDP, the rate was the second-highest among the top 15 military spenders, after Saudi Arabia.^[296] Defense spending plays a major role in science and technology investment, with roughly half of U.S. federal research and development funded by the Department of Defense.^[297] Defense's share of the overall U.S. economy has generally declined in recent decades, from early Cold War peaks of 14.2% of GDP in 1953 and 69.5% of federal spending in 1954 to 4.7% of GDP and 18.8% of federal spending in 2011.^[298] In total number of personnel, the United States has the third-largest combined armed forces in the world, behind the Chinese People's Liberation Army and Indian Armed Forces.^[299]

The United States is one of the five recognized nuclear weapons states, and one of nine countries to possess nuclear weapons. It has the world's second-largest stockpile of nuclear weapons, after that of Russia. The United States also owns more than 40% of the world's 14,000 nuclear weapons.^[300]

Law enforcement and crime

Law enforcement in the United States is primarily the responsibility of local police departments and sheriff's offices, with state police providing broader services. Federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Marshals Service have specialized duties, including protecting civil rights, national security and enforcing U.S. federal courts' rulings and federal laws.^[301] According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and Charles H. Ramsey, former Philadelphia, Pennsylvania police chief, appearing on *Meet the Press*, there are about 18,000 U.S. police agencies in the United States. That number includes city police departments, county sheriff's offices, state police/highway patrol and federal law enforcement agencies.^[302] State courts conduct most criminal trials while federal courts handle certain designated crimes as well as certain appeals from the state criminal courts.

A cross-sectional analysis of the World Health Organization Mortality Database from 2010 showed that United States homicide rates "were 7.0 times higher than in other high-income countries, driven by a gun homicide rate that was 25.2 times higher."^[303] In 2016, the U.S. murder rate was 5.4 per 100,000.^[304]



Total incarceration in the United States by year (1920–2014)

The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate and largest prison population in the world.^[305] The Department of Justice said that the imprisonment rate for all prisoners sentenced to more than a year in state or federal facilities in 2019 stood at 419 per 100,000 residents which was at its lowest point since 1995 and that the total prison population for the same year stood at 1,430,800 which represented an 11% decrease in the population size from a decade earlier.^[306] Other sources such as the Prison Policy Initiative had put the aggregate number of prisoners in 2020 at 2.3 million.^[307] According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the majority of inmates held in federal prisons are convicted of drug offenses.^[308] Efforts to reduce the prison population include

government policies and grassroots initiatives that promote decarceration — recent examples include laws at the federal and state level such as the Fair Sentencing Act, First Step Act, Maryland's Justice Reinvestment Act and California's Money Bail Reform Act. About 9% of prisoners are held in privatized prisons,^[307] a practice beginning in the 1980s and a subject of contention.^[309] On January 26, 2021, the Biden Administration signed an executive order that halted the renewal of federal government contracts with private prisons,^{[310][311]} but it did not apply to detention centers that held undocumented immigrants.^[312]

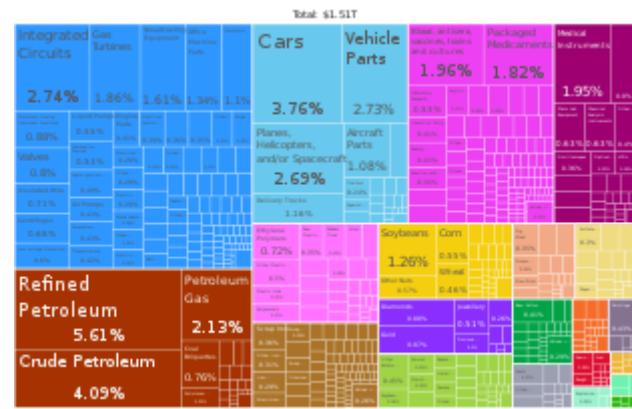
Although most nations have abolished capital punishment,^[313] it is sanctioned in the United States for certain federal and military crimes, and at the state level in 28 states, though three states have moratoriums on carrying out the penalty imposed by their governors.^{[314][315][316]} In 2019, the country had the sixth-highest number of executions in the world, following China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Egypt.^[317] No executions took place from 1967 to 1977, owing in part to the 1972 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Furman v. Georgia* that struck down the previous practice. Since the decision, however, there have been more than 1,500 executions, although 186 of those convicted and sentenced since *Furman* have been exonerated, as tabulated by the Death Penalty Information Center.^[318] In recent years, the number of executions as well as the presence of capital punishment statutes in the states has trended down nationally, with several states recently abolishing the penalty.^{[316][319]}

Economy

According to the International Monetary Fund, the U.S. GDP of \$22.7 trillion constitutes 24% of the gross world product at market exchange rates and over 16% of the gross world product at purchasing power parity.^{[320][15]} On February 2, 2022, the United States had a national debt of \$30 trillion.^[321]

The United States is the largest importer of goods and second-largest exporter,^[322] though exports per capita are relatively low. In 2010, the total U.S. trade deficit was \$635 billion.^[323] Canada, China, Mexico, Japan, and the European Union are its top trading partners.^{[324][325]}

From 1983 to 2008, U.S. real compounded annual GDP growth was 3.3%, compared to a 2.3% weighted average for the rest of the G7.^[326] The country ranks fifth in the world in nominal GDP per capita^[327] and seventh in GDP per capita at PPP.^[15] The U.S. dollar is the world's primary reserve currency.^[328]



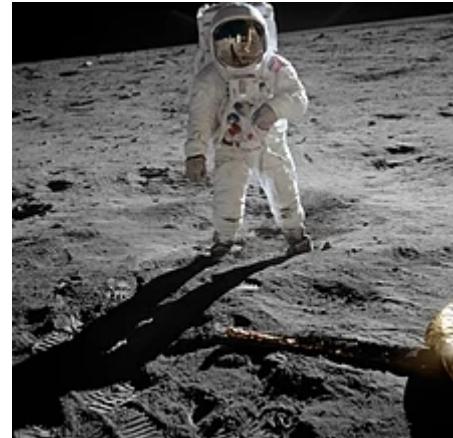
A proportional representation of United States exports, 2019

In 2009, the private sector was estimated to constitute 86.4% of the economy.^[329] While its economy has reached a post-industrial level of development, the United States remains an industrial power.^[330] In August 2010, the American labor force consisted of 154.1 million people (50%). With 21.2 million people, the public sector is the leading field of employment. The largest private employment sector is health care and social assistance, with 16.4 million people. It has a smaller welfare state and redistributes less income through government action than most other high-income countries.^[331]

The United States is the only advanced economy that does not guarantee its workers paid vacation^[332] and is one of a few countries in the world without paid family leave as a legal right.^[333] Some 74% of full-time American workers get paid sick leave, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, although only 24% of part-time workers get the same benefits.^[334]

Science and technology

The United States has been a leader in technological innovation since the late 19th century and scientific research since the mid-20th century. Methods for producing interchangeable parts were developed by the U.S. War Department by the Federal Armories during the first half of the 19th century. This technology, along with the establishment of a machine tool industry, enabled the U.S. to have large-scale manufacturing of sewing machines, bicycles, and other items in the late 19th century and became known as the American system of manufacturing. Factory electrification in the early 20th century and introduction of the assembly line and other labor-saving techniques created the system of mass production.^[335] In the 21st century, approximately two-thirds of research and development funding comes from the private sector.^[336] The United States leads the world in scientific research papers and impact factor.^{[337][338]}



Buzz Aldrin on the Moon, 1969

In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell was awarded the first U.S. patent for the telephone. Thomas Edison's research laboratory, one of the first of its kind, developed the phonograph, the first long-lasting light bulb, and the first viable movie camera.^[339] The latter led to emergence of the worldwide entertainment industry. In the early 20th century, the automobile companies of Ransom E. Olds and Henry Ford popularized the assembly line. The Wright brothers, in 1903, made the first sustained and controlled heavier-than-air powered flight.^[340]

The rise of fascism and Nazism in the 1920s and 30s led many European scientists, including Albert Einstein, Enrico Fermi, and John von Neumann, to immigrate to the United States.^[341] During World War II, the Manhattan Project developed nuclear weapons, ushering in the Atomic Age, while the Space Race produced rapid advances in rocketry, materials science, and aeronautics.^{[342][343]}

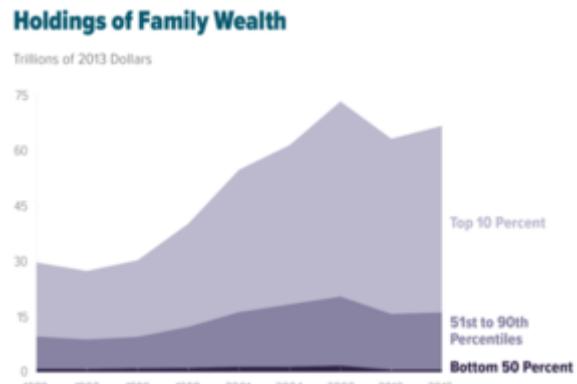
The invention of the transistor in the 1950s, a key active component in practically all modern electronics, led to many technological developments and a significant expansion of the U.S. technology industry.^[344] This, in turn, led to the establishment of many new technology companies and regions around the country such as Silicon Valley in California. Advancements by American microprocessor companies such as Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) and Intel, along with both computer software and hardware companies such as Adobe Systems, Apple Inc., IBM, Microsoft, and Sun Microsystems, created and popularized the personal computer. The ARPANET was developed in the 1960s to meet Defense Department requirements, and became the first of a series of networks which evolved into the Internet.^[345] The United States ranked third in the Global Innovation Index in 2021, after Switzerland and Sweden.^[346]

Income, wealth, and poverty

Accounting for 4.24% of the global population, Americans collectively possess 29.4% of the world's total wealth, the largest percentage of any country.^{[347][348]} The U.S. also ranks first in the number of billionaires and millionaires in the world, with 724 billionaires and 10.5 million millionaires as of 2020.^{[349][350]} Prior to the 2019–2021 global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, Credit Suisse listed some 18.6 million U.S. citizens as having a net worth in excess of \$1 million.^[351] In 2020, the Food Security Index ranked the United States 11th in food security, giving the country a score of 77.5/100.^[352] Americans on average have more than twice as much living space per dwelling and per person as EU residents.^[353] For 2019, the United Nations Development Programme ranked the United States 17th among 189 countries in its Human Development Index (HDI) and 28th among 151 countries in its inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI).^[354]

Wealth, like income and taxes, is highly concentrated; the richest 10% of the adult population possess 72% of the country's household wealth, while the bottom half possess only 2%.^[356] According to the Federal Reserve, the top 1% controlled 38.6% of the country's wealth in 2016.^[357] According to a 2018 study by the OECD, the United States has a larger percentage of low-income workers than almost any other developed nation, largely because of a weak collective bargaining system and lack of government support for at-risk workers.^[358]

After years of stagnation, median household income reached a record high in 2016 following two consecutive years of record growth. Income inequality remains at record highs however, with the top fifth of earners taking home more than half of all overall income.^[359] The rise in the share of total annual income received by the top one percent, which has more than doubled from nine percent in 1976 to 20 percent in 2011, has significantly affected income inequality,^[360] leaving the United States with one of the widest income distributions among OECD members.^[361] The top one percent of income-earners accounted for 52 percent of the income gains from 2009 to 2015, where income is defined as market income excluding government transfers.^[362] The extent and relevance of income inequality is a matter of debate.^{[363][364][365]}



Wealth inequality in the U.S. increased between 1989 and 2013.^[355]

There were about 567,715 sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons in the U.S. in January 2019, with almost two-thirds staying in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program^[366] Attempts to combat homelessness include the Section 8 housing voucher program and implementation of the Housing First strategy across all levels of government.^{[367][368][369][370]} In 2011, 16.7 million children lived in food-insecure households, about 35% more than 2007 levels, though only 845,000 U.S. children (1.1%) saw reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns at some point during the year, and most cases were not chronic.^[371] As of June 2018, 40 million people, roughly 12.7% of the U.S. population, were living in poverty, including 13.3 million children. Of those impoverished, 18.5 million live in deep poverty (family income below one-half of the poverty threshold) and over five million live "in 'Third World' conditions".^[372] In 2017, the U.S. states or territories with the lowest and highest poverty rates were New Hampshire (7.6%) and American Samoa (65%), respectively.^{[373][374][375]} The economic impact and mass unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic raised fears of a mass eviction crisis,^[376] with an analysis by the Aspen Institute indicating that between 30 and 40 million people were at risk for eviction by the end of 2020.^[377] While the CDC and the Biden government issued a federal eviction moratorium, the Supreme Court invalidated the order, ruling they lacked the authority under federal law to do so.^[378]

Transportation

Personal transportation is dominated by automobiles, which are operated on a network of 4 million miles (6.4 million kilometers) of public roads.^[380] The United States has the world's second-largest automobile market,^[381] and has the highest vehicle ownership per capita in the world, with 816.4 vehicles per 1,000 Americans (2014).^[382] In 2017, there were 255 million non-two-wheel motor vehicles, or about nine vehicles per ten people.^[383]



The Interstate Highway System in the contiguous United States, which extends 46,876 miles (75,440 km)^[379]

Civil aviation is privately-owned and was deregulated in 1978, while most major airports are publicly owned.^[384] The four largest airlines in the world by passengers carried (American, Delta, Southwest, and United) are U.S.-based.^[385] Of the world's 50 busiest passenger airports, 16 are in the United States, including the busiest, Hartsfield–Jackson Atlanta International Airport.^[386]

The United States has the longest rail network in the world, nearly all standard gauge. The network handles mostly freight, with intercity passenger service provided by the government-subsidized Amtrak to all but four states.^[387]

Transportation is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States.^[388]

Energy

As of 2019, the United States receives approximately 80% of its energy from fossil fuels.^[389] In 2019, the largest source of the country's energy came from petroleum (36.6%), followed by natural gas (32%), coal (11.4%), renewable sources (11.4%) and nuclear power (8.4%).^[389] Americans constitute less than 5% of the world's population, but consume 17% of the world's energy.^[390] They account for about 25% of the world's petroleum consumption, while producing only 6% of the world's annual petroleum supply.^[391]

Demographics

Population

The U.S. Census Bureau reported 331,449,281 residents as of April 1, 2020.^[393] This figure, like most official data for the United States as a whole, excludes the five unincorporated territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands) and minor island possessions. According to the Bureau's U.S. Population Clock, on January 28, 2021, the U.S. population had a net gain of one person every 100 seconds, or about 864 people per day.^[394] The United States is the third most populous nation in the world, after China and India. In 2020, the median age of the United States population was 38.5 years.^[395]

In 2018, there were almost 90 million immigrants and U.S.-born children of immigrants in the United States, accounting for 28% of the overall U.S. population.^[396] The United States has a diverse population; 37 ancestry groups have more than one million members.^[397] White Americans of European ancestry, mostly German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish and French,^[398] including White Hispanic and Latino Americans from Latin America, form the largest racial group, at 73.1% of the population. African Americans constitute the nation's largest racial minority and third-largest ancestry group, and are around 13% of the total U.S. population.^[397] Asian Americans are the country's second-largest racial minority (the three largest Asian ethnic groups are Chinese, Filipino, and Indian).^[397]

In 2017, out of the U.S. foreign-born population, some 45% (20.7 million) were naturalized citizens, 27% (12.3 million) were lawful permanent residents, 6% (2.2 million) were temporary lawful residents, and 23% (10.5 million) were unauthorized immigrants.^[399] Among living immigrants to the U.S., the top five countries of birth are Mexico, China, India, the Philippines and El Salvador. Until 2017, the United States led the world in refugee resettlement for decades, admitting more refugees than the rest of the world combined.^[400]

About 82% of Americans live in urban areas, including suburbs;^[188] about half of those reside in cities with populations over 50,000.^[401] In 2008, 273 incorporated municipalities had populations over 100,000, nine cities had more than one million residents, and four cities had over two million (namely New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston).^[402] Many U.S. metropolitan populations are growing rapidly, particularly in the South and West.^[403]

As of 2018, 52% of Americans age 15 and over were married, 6% were widowed, 10% were divorced, and 32% had never been married.^[404] As of 2020, the total fertility rate stood at 1.64 children per woman.^[405] In 2013, the average age at first birth was 26, and 41% of births were to unmarried

Historical population		
Census	Pop.	%+
1790	3,929,214	—
1800	5,308,483	35.1%
1810	7,239,881	36.4%
1820	9,638,453	33.1%
1830	12,866,020	33.5%
1840	17,069,453	32.7%
1850	23,191,876	35.9%
1860	31,443,321	35.6%
1870	38,558,371	22.6%
1880	50,189,209	30.2%
1890	62,979,766	25.5%
1900	76,212,168	21.0%
1910	92,228,496	21.0%
1920	106,021,537	15.0%
1930	123,202,624	16.2%
1940	132,164,569	7.3%
1950	151,325,798	14.5%
1960	179,323,175	18.5%
1970	203,211,926	13.3%
1980	226,545,805	11.5%
1990	248,709,873	9.8%
2000	281,421,906	13.2%
2010	308,745,538	9.7%
2020	331,449,281	7.4%
2021 (est.)	331,893,745 ^[13]	7.5%

Note that the census numbers do not include Native Americans until 1860.^[392]

women.^[406] In 2019, the U.S. had the world's highest rate (23%) of children living in single-parent households; the rates in Canada and Mexico were 15% and 7%, respectively.^[407]

Language

English (specifically, American English) is the de facto national language of the United States. Although there is no official language at the federal level, some laws—such as U.S. naturalization requirements—standardize English, and most states have declared English as the official language.^[408] Three states and four U.S. territories have recognized local or indigenous languages in addition to English, including Hawaii (Hawaiian),^[409] Alaska (twenty Native languages),^{[k][410]} South Dakota (Sioux),^[411] American Samoa (Samoan), Puerto Rico (Spanish), Guam (Chamorro), and the Northern Mariana Islands (Carolinian and Chamorro). In Puerto Rico, Spanish is more widely spoken than English.^[412]

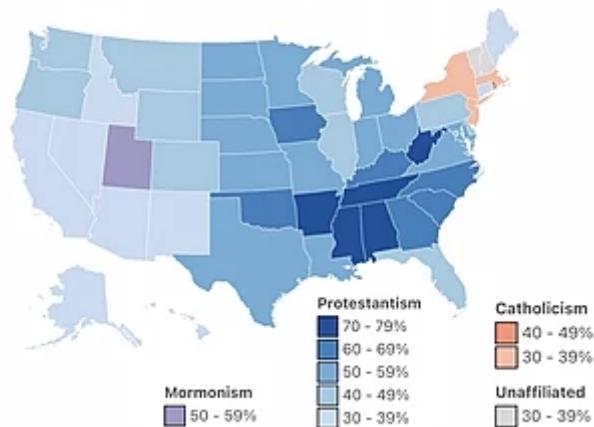
According to the American Community Survey, in 2010 some 229 million people (out of the total U.S. population of 308 million) spoke only English at home. More than 37 million spoke Spanish at home, making it the second most commonly used language in the United States. Other languages spoken at home by one million people or more include Chinese (2.8 million), Tagalog (1.6 million), Vietnamese (1.4 million), French (1.3 million), Korean (1.1 million), and German (1 million).^[413]

The most widely taught foreign languages in the United States, in terms of enrollment numbers from kindergarten through university undergraduate education, are Spanish (around 7.2 million students), French (1.5 million), and German (500,000). Other commonly taught languages include Latin, Japanese, American Sign Language, Italian, and Chinese.^{[414][415]} About 18% of all Americans claim to speak both English and at least one other language.^[416]

Religion

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion and forbids Congress from passing laws respecting its establishment.

The United States has the world's largest Christian population.^[418] In a recent survey, 70.6% of adults in the United States identified themselves as Christians;^[419] Protestants in general accounted for 46.5%, while Catholics, at 20.8%, formed the largest single Christian denomination.^[420] The Latter-day Saints (LDS, informally known as the Mormons) and the Jehovah's Witnesses are two U.S.-founded denominations that make up around 2% and 1%, respectively, of all American Christians.^[421] In 2014, 5.9% of the U.S. adult population claimed a non-Christian religion.^[422] These include Judaism (1.9%), Islam (1.1%), Hinduism (0.7%), and Buddhism (0.7%).^[422] The survey also reported that 22.8% of Americans described themselves as agnostic, atheist or simply having no religion—up from 8.2% in 1990.^{[420][423][424]} Membership in a house of worship fell from 70% in 1999 to 47% in 2020, with much of the decline related to the number of Americans expressing no religious preference. However, membership also fell among those who identified with a specific religious group.^{[425][426]}



Most prominent religion by state according to a 2014 Pew Research study.^[417]

Protestantism is the largest Christian religious grouping in the United States, accounting for almost half of all Americans. Baptists collectively form the largest branch of Protestantism at 15.4%,^[427] and the Southern Baptist Convention is the largest individual Protestant denomination at 5.3% of the U.S. population.^[427] Apart from Baptists, other Protestant categories include nondenominational Protestants, Methodists, Pentecostals, unspecified Protestants, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians/Anglicans, Quakers, Adventists, Holiness, Christian fundamentalists, Anabaptists, Pietists, and multiple others.^[427]

The Bible Belt is an informal term for a region in the Southern United States in which socially conservative evangelical Protestantism is a significant part of the culture and Christian church attendance across the denominations is generally higher than the nation's average. By contrast, religion plays the least important role in New England and in the Western United States.^[428]

Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that the United States had an average life expectancy at birth of 77.3 years in 2020 (74.5 years for men and 80.2 years for women), down 1.5 years from 2019. According to provisional figures, this was the lowest average U.S. life expectancy recorded by the CDC since 2003, the first overall decline since 2018, and "the largest one-year decline since World War II." Some three-quarters of the decrease was attributed to deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of the rest due to accidents and drug overdoses.^[429] The country also has one of the highest suicide rates among wealthy countries.^{[430][431]} Starting in 1998, the average life expectancy in the U.S. fell behind that of other wealthy industrialized countries, and Americans' "health disadvantage" gap has been increasing ever since.^[432] From 1999 to 2019, more than 770,000 Americans died from drug overdoses.^[433] Life expectancy was highest among Asians and Hispanics and lowest among blacks.^{[434][435]}

Increasing obesity in the United States and improvements in health and longevity outside the U.S. contributed to lowering the country's rank in life expectancy from 11th in the world in 1987 to 42nd in 2007. In 2017, the United States had the lowest life expectancy among Japan, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and seven nations in western Europe.^{[436][437]} Obesity rates have more than doubled in the last 30 years and are the highest in the industrialized world.^{[438][439]} Approximately one-third of the adult population is obese and an additional third is overweight.^[440] Obesity-related type 2 diabetes is considered epidemic by health care professionals.^[441]



The Texas Medical Center in downtown Houston, one of the largest medical complexes in the world, October 2012

In 2010, coronary artery disease, lung cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, and traffic collisions caused the most years of life lost in the U.S. Low back pain, depression, musculoskeletal disorders, neck pain, and anxiety caused the most years lost to disability. The most harmful risk factors were poor diet, tobacco smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, physical inactivity, and alcohol use. Alzheimer's disease, substance use disorders, kidney disease, cancer, and falls caused the most additional years of life lost over their age-adjusted 1990 per-capita rates.^[442] U.S. teenage pregnancy and abortion rates are substantially higher than in other Western nations, especially among blacks and Hispanics.^[443]

Government-funded health care coverage for the poor (Medicaid, established in 1965) and for those age 65 and older (Medicare, begun in 1966) is available to Americans who meet the programs' income or age qualifications. The United States is the only developed nation without a system of universal health care and the reasons for this and extent to which it is a problem is a matter of debate. Similarly, a significant

proportion of the population does not carry health insurance and the reasons for and extent to which it is a problem is also a matter of debate. In 2010, former President Obama passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (also known as the Affordable Care Act or ACA) which ushered in the most sweeping set of reforms to America's health care system in nearly five decades since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid.^[444] The CDC said that the law roughly halved the uninsured share of the population^[445] and multiple studies have concluded that ACA had reduced the mortality of enrollees^{[446][447][448]} but its legacy remains controversial.

The U.S. health care system far outspends that of any other nation, measured both in per capita spending and as a percentage of GDP but attains worse healthcare outcomes when compared to peer nations.^[449] However, the U.S. is a global leader in medical innovation.^[450]

Education

American public education is operated by state and local governments and regulated by the United States Department of Education through restrictions on federal grants. In most states, children are required to attend school from the age of five or six (beginning with kindergarten or first grade) until they turn 18 (generally bringing them through twelfth grade, the end of high school); some states allow students to leave school at 16 or 17.^[451]



The University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson, is one of the many public colleges and universities in the United States. Some 80% of U.S. college students attend these types of institutions.

About 12% of children are enrolled in parochial or nons sectarian private schools. 3.4% of children are homeschooled as of 2012.^[452] The U.S. spends more on education per student than any nation in the world,^[453] spending an average of \$12,794 per year on public elementary and secondary school students in the 2016–2017 school year.^[454] Some 80% of U.S. college students attend public universities.^[455]

Of Americans 25 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.^[456] The basic literacy rate is approximately 99%.^{[188][457]} The United Nations assigns the United States an Education Index of 0.97, tying it for 12th in the world.^[458]

The United States has many private and public institutions of higher education. The majority of the world's top universities, as listed by various ranking organizations, are in the U.S.^{[459][460][461]} There are also local community colleges with generally more open admission policies, shorter academic programs, and lower tuition.

In 2018, U21, a network of research-intensive universities, ranked the United States first in the world for breadth and quality of higher education, and 15th when GDP was a factor.^[462] As for public expenditures on higher education, the U.S. trails some other OECD (Organization for Cooperation and Development) nations but spends more per student than the OECD average, and more than all nations in combined public and private spending.^{[463][464]} Despite some student loan forgiveness programs in place,^[465] student loan debt has increased by 102% in the last decade,^[466] and exceeded 1.7 trillion dollars as of 2021.^{[467][468][469]}

Culture and society

The United States is home to many cultures and a wide variety of ethnic groups, traditions, and values.^{[471][472]} Aside from the Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Native Alaskan populations, nearly all Americans or their ancestors immigrated or were imported as slaves within the past five centuries.^[473] Mainstream American culture is a Western culture largely derived from the traditions of European immigrants with influences from many other sources, such as traditions brought by slaves from Africa.^{[471][474]} More recent immigration from Asia and especially Latin America has added to a cultural mix that has been described as a homogenizing melting pot, with immigrants contributing to, and often assimilating into, mainstream American culture.^[471]

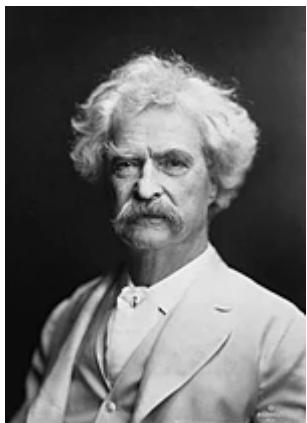


Americans have traditionally been characterized by a strong work ethic, competitiveness, and individualism,^[475] as well as a unifying belief in an "American creed" emphasizing liberty, equality, private property, democracy, rule of law, and a preference for limited government.^[476] Americans are extremely charitable by global standards: according to a 2006 British study, Americans gave 1.67% of GDP to charity, more than any other nation studied.^{[477][478][479]}

The American Dream, or the perception that Americans enjoy high social mobility, plays a key role in attracting immigrants.^[480] Whether this perception is accurate has been a topic of debate.^{[481][482][483]} While mainstream culture holds that the United States is a classless society,^[484] scholars identify significant differences between the country's social classes, affecting socialization, language, and values.^[485] Americans tend to greatly value socioeconomic achievement, but being ordinary or average is also generally seen as a positive attribute.^[486]

For many immigrants, the Statue of Liberty was their first view of the United States. A gift from France, the statue signified new opportunities in life, and thus the statue is an iconic symbol of the American Dream as well as its ideals.^[470]

Literature, philosophy, and visual art



Mark Twain, American author and humorist

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, American art and literature took most of its cues from Europe, contributing to Western culture. Writers such as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry David Thoreau established a distinctive American literary voice by the middle of the 19th century. Mark Twain and poet Walt Whitman were major figures in the century's second half; Emily Dickinson, virtually unknown during her lifetime, is recognized as an essential American poet.^[487] A work seen as capturing fundamental aspects of the national experience and character—such as Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)—may be dubbed the "Great American Novel."^[488]

Thirteen U.S. citizens have won the Nobel Prize in Literature. William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck are often named among the most influential writers of the 20th century.^[489] Popular literary genres such as the Western and hardboiled crime fiction developed in the United States. The Beat Generation writers opened up new literary approaches, as have postmodernist authors such as John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo.^[490]

The transcendentalists, led by Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, established the first major American philosophical movement. After the Civil War, Charles Sanders Peirce and then William James and John Dewey were leaders in the development of pragmatism. In the 20th century, the work of W. V. O. Quine and Richard Rorty, and later Noam Chomsky, brought analytic philosophy to the fore of American philosophical academia. John Rawls and Robert Nozick also led a revival of political philosophy.

In the visual arts, the Hudson River School was a mid-19th-century movement in the tradition of European naturalism. The 1913 Armory Show in New York City, an exhibition of European modernist art, shocked the public and transformed the U.S. art scene.^[491] Georgia O'Keeffe, Marsden Hartley, and others experimented with new, individualistic styles. Major artistic movements such as the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning and the pop art of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein developed largely in the United States. The tide of modernism and then postmodernism has brought fame to American architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Philip Johnson, and Frank Gehry.^[492] Americans have long been important in the modern artistic medium of photography, with major photographers including Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Edward Weston, and Ansel Adams.^[493]

Food

Early settlers were introduced by Native Americans to such indigenous, non-European foods as turkey, sweet potatoes, corn, squash, and maple syrup. They and later immigrants combined these with foods they had known, such as wheat flour,^[495] beef, and milk to create a distinctive American cuisine.^{[496][497]}



Roast turkey, a traditional menu item of an American Thanksgiving dinner, November 2021^[494]

Homegrown foods are part of a shared national menu on one of America's most popular holidays, Thanksgiving, when many Americans make or purchase traditional foods to celebrate the occasion.^[498] Common traditional American Thanksgiving foods include turkey, gravy, stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

The American fast food industry, the world's largest,^[499] pioneered the drive-through format in the 1940s.^[500] Characteristic American dishes such as apple pie, fried chicken, doughnuts, french fries, macaroni and cheese, ice cream, hamburgers, and hot dogs derive from the recipes of various immigrants.^{[501][502]} Mexican dishes such as burritos and tacos, and pizza and pasta dishes freely adapted from Italian sources, are widely consumed.^[503] Salt and black pepper are ubiquitously paired at the dining tables of U.S. restaurants and households alike, as seasonings to flavor American food.^[504] Americans drink three times as much coffee as tea.^[505] Marketing by U.S. industries is largely responsible for making orange juice and milk standard breakfast beverages.^{[506][507]}

Music

Among America's earliest composers was a man named William Billings who, born in Boston, composed patriotic hymns in the 1770s;^[508] Billings was a part of the First New England School, who dominated American music during its earliest stages. Anthony Heinrich was the most prominent composer before the Civil War. From the mid- to late 1800s, John Philip Sousa of the late Romantic era composed numerous military songs—particularly marches—and is regarded as one of America's greatest composers.^[509] By the late 19th century, the Second New England School (sometimes referred to specifically as the "Boston Six") became prominent representatives of the classical tradition, of whom John Knowles Paine was the leading figure.



Grammy Museum at L.A. Live in Los Angeles, April 2009

Although little known at the time, Charles Ives' work of the 1910s established him as the first major U.S. composer in the classical tradition, while experimentalists such as Henry Cowell and John Cage created a distinctive American approach to classical composition. Aaron Copland and George Gershwin—eventually furthered by Leonard Bernstein—developed a new synthesis of popular and classical music.

The rhythmic and lyrical styles of African-American music have deeply influenced American music at large, distinguishing it from European and African traditions. Elements from folk idioms such as the blues and what is known as old-time music were adopted and transformed into popular genres with global audiences. Jazz was developed by innovators such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington early in the 20th century. Country music developed in the 1920s, and rhythm and blues in the 1940s.^[510]

Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry were among the mid-1950s pioneers of rock and roll. Rock bands such as Metallica, the Eagles, and Aerosmith are among the highest grossing in worldwide sales.^{[511][512][513]} In the 1960s, Bob Dylan emerged from the folk revival to become one of America's most celebrated songwriters, and James Brown led the development of funk.

More recent American creations include hip hop, salsa, techno, and house music. Mid-20th-century American pop stars such as Bing Crosby, Frank Sinatra,^[514] and Elvis Presley became global celebrities,^[510] as have artists of the late 20th century such as Michael Jackson, Prince, Madonna and Whitney Houston.^{[515][516]}

With the growth of 21st century digital technologies and the resulting decline in radio,^[517] listening, producing, and sharing of music in the U.S. has become more democratized, growing the independent ("indie") music scene along with opportunities for independent musicians, and diversifying the genres available for listening.^[518] The rise of genres such as indie rock, indie pop, and EDM is a byproduct of these shifts in how Americans create, share, and listen to music.

Cinema

Hollywood, a northern district of Los Angeles, California, is one of the leaders in motion picture production.^[519] The world's first commercial motion picture exhibition was given in New York City in 1894, using Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope.^[520] Since the early 20th century, the U.S. film industry has largely been based in and around Hollywood, although in the 21st century an increasing number of films are not made there, and film companies have been subject to the forces of globalization.^[521]



The Hollywood Sign in Los Angeles, California, September 2015

Director D. W. Griffith, an American filmmaker during the silent film period, was central to the development of film grammar, and producer/entrepreneur Walt Disney was a leader in both animated film and movie merchandising.^[522] Directors such as John Ford redefined the image of the American Old West, and, like others such as John Huston, broadened the possibilities of cinema with location shooting. The industry enjoyed its golden years, in what is commonly referred to as the "Golden Age of Hollywood", from the early sound period until the early 1960s,^[523] with screen actors such as John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe becoming iconic figures.^{[524][525]} In the 1970s, "New Hollywood" or the "Hollywood Renaissance"^[526] was defined by

grittier films influenced by French and Italian realist pictures of the post-war period.^[527] In more recent times, directors such as Steven Spielberg and George Lucas have gained renown for their blockbuster films, often characterized by high production costs and earnings.

Notable films topping the American Film Institute's AFI 100 list include Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), which is frequently cited as the greatest film of all time,^{[528][529]} *Casablanca* (1942), *The Godfather* (1972), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Graduate* (1967), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).^[530] The Academy Awards, popularly known as the Oscars, have been held annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences since 1929,^[531] and the Golden Globe Awards have been held annually since January 1944.^[532]

Theater

Theater in the United States is part of the old European theatrical tradition and has been heavily influenced by the British theater.^[533] The central hub of the American theater scene has been Manhattan, with its divisions of Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off-Broadway.^[534] Many movie and television stars have gotten their big break working in New York productions. Outside New York City, many cities have professional regional or resident theater companies that produce their own seasons, with some works being produced regionally with hopes of eventually moving to New York. U.S. theater also has an active community theater culture, which relies mainly on local volunteers who may not be actively pursuing a theatrical career.^[535]

Sports



The "Big Four" among popular sports in the U.S. are American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey.^[536]

American football is by several measures the most popular spectator sport in the United States;^[537] the National Football League (NFL) has the highest average attendance of any sports league in the world, and the Super Bowl, the league's annual championship game, is watched by tens of millions globally.^[538] College football games also receive millions of viewers per television broadcast, in particular the College Football Playoff, which averages 25 million viewers.^[539] Baseball has been regarded as the U.S. national sport since the late 19th century, with Major League Baseball (MLB) being the top league.

Basketball and ice hockey are the country's next two leading professional team sports, with the top leagues being the National Basketball Association (NBA)^[540] and the National Hockey League (NHL). College basketball also attracts large audiences; the Division I championship tournament, also known as March

Madness, is one of the most watched sporting events.^[541] In international competition, the men's national basketball team has been a dominant force, having earned a medal at all 19 Summer Olympics they have entered, including 16 gold medals.

In soccer, a sport that has grown in the U.S. since the 1990s, the country hosted the 1994 FIFA World Cup, the men's national team qualified for 11 World Cups and the women's team has won the FIFA Women's World Cup four times, the most of any nation. Major League Soccer is the sport's top soccer league in the United States (featuring 23 American and three Canadian teams).^[542]

Eight Olympic Games have taken place in the United States. The 1904 Summer Olympics in St. Louis, Missouri, were the first-ever Olympic Games held outside of Europe.^[543] As of 2021, the United States has won 2,629 medals at the Summer Olympic Games, more than any other country, and 330 at the Winter Olympic Games, the second most behind Norway.^[544]

While most major U.S. sports such as baseball and American football have evolved out of European practices, basketball, volleyball, skateboarding, and snowboarding are American inventions, some of which have become popular worldwide.^[545] Lacrosse and surfing arose from Native American and Native Hawaiian activities that predate Western contact.^[546] The most-watched individual sports are golf and auto racing, particularly NASCAR and IndyCar.^{[547][548]} The market for professional sports in the United States is roughly \$69 billion, roughly 50% larger than that of all of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa combined.^[549]

Mass media

The four major television broadcasters in the U.S. are the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), American Broadcasting Company (ABC), and Fox Broadcasting Company (FOX). The four major broadcast television networks are all commercial entities. Cable television offers hundreds of channels catering to a variety of niches.^[550] Americans listen to radio programming, also largely commercial, on average just over two and a half hours a day.^[551]



The headquarters of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City

In 1998, the number of U.S. commercial radio stations had grown to 4,793 AM stations and 5,662 FM stations. In addition, there are 1,460 public radio stations. Most of these stations are run by universities and public authorities for educational purposes and are financed by public or private funds, subscriptions, and corporate underwriting. Much public radio broadcasting is supplied by NPR.^[552] NPR was incorporated in February 1970 under the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967; its television counterpart, PBS, was created by the same legislation. As of September 30, 2014, there are 15,433 licensed full-power radio stations in the U.S. according to the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC).^[553]

Well-known American newspapers include *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today*.^[554] Although the cost of publishing has increased over the years, the price of newspapers has generally remained low, forcing newspapers to rely more on advertising revenue and on articles provided by a major wire service, such as the Associated Press or Reuters, for their national and world coverage.^[555] With very few exceptions, all the newspapers in the U.S. are privately owned, either by large chains such as Gannett or McClatchy, which own dozens or even hundreds of newspapers; by small chains that own a handful of papers; or in a situation that is increasingly rare, by individuals or families. More than 800 publications are produced in Spanish, the second most commonly used language in the United States behind English.^{[556][557]}

Major cities often have "alternative weeklies" to complement the mainstream daily papers, such as New York City's *The Village Voice* or Los Angeles' *LA Weekly*. Major cities may also support a local business journal, trade papers relating to local industries, and papers for local ethnic and social groups. The five most popular websites used in the U.S. are Google, YouTube, Amazon, Yahoo, and Facebook.^[558]

See also

- [Index of United States-related articles](#)
- [Lists of U.S. state topics](#)
- [Outline of the United States](#)

Notes

- a. English is the [official language](#) of 32 states; English and [Hawaiian](#) are both official languages in [Hawaii](#), and English and [20 indigenous languages](#) are official in [Alaska](#). [Algonquian](#), [Cherokee](#), and [Sioux](#) are among many other official languages in Native-controlled lands throughout the country. [French](#) is a *de facto*, but unofficial, language in [Maine](#) and [Louisiana](#), while [New Mexico](#) law grants [Spanish](#) a special status. In five territories, English as well as one or more indigenous languages are official: [Spanish](#) in Puerto Rico, [Samoan](#) in American Samoa, and [Chamorro](#) in both Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. [Carolinian](#) is also an official language in the Northern [Mariana Islands](#).^{[4][5]}
- b. The historical and informal demonym [Yankee](#) has been applied to Americans, New Englanders, or northerners since the 18th century.
- c. The United States is the third-largest country, after Russia and Canada, if coastal and territorial waters are included. If excluded, it is the fourth-largest, after Russia, Canada, and China. Coastal/territorial waters included: 3,796,742 sq mi (9,833,517 km²)^[185]
Coastal/territorial waters excluded: 3,696,100 sq mi (9,572,900 km²)^[186]
- d. The [U.S. Census Bureau](#) also provides a continuously updated but unofficial population clock in addition to its decennial census and annual population estimates: [\[1\]](#) (<https://www.census.gov/popclock/>)
- e. Excludes [Puerto Rico](#) and the other [unincorporated islands](#) because they are counted separately in [U.S. census](#) statistics.
- f. A single territorial jurisdiction, the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#), uses left-hand traffic.
- g. The five major territories are [American Samoa](#), [Guam](#), the [Northern Mariana Islands](#), [Puerto Rico](#), and the [United States Virgin Islands](#). There are 11 smaller island areas without permanent populations: [Baker Island](#), [Howland Island](#), [Jarvis Island](#), [Johnston Atoll](#), [Kingman Reef](#), [Midway Atoll](#), and [Palmyra Atoll](#). U.S. sovereignty over [Bajo Nuevo Bank](#), [Navassa Island](#), [Serranilla Bank](#), and [Wake Island](#) is disputed.^[18]
- h. The United States has a maritime border with the [United Kingdom](#) because the [U.S. Virgin Islands](#) borders the [British Virgin Islands](#).^[19] [Puerto Rico](#) has a maritime border with the [Dominican Republic](#).^[20] [American Samoa](#) has a maritime border with the [Cook Islands](#) (see [Cook Islands–United States Maritime Boundary Treaty](#)).^{[21][22]} [American Samoa](#) also has maritime borders with [independent Samoa](#) and [Niue](#).^[23]
- i. Local governments are a part of the state government, and they exercise powers only within a certain area of that state. See [Local government in the United States](#) and [Enabling act](#) for more information.
- j. People born in American Samoa are non-citizen U.S. nationals, unless one of their parents is a U.S. citizen.^[244] In 2019, a court ruled that American Samoans are U.S. citizens, but the litigation is ongoing.^{[245][246]}

- k. Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Alutiiq, Unanga (Aleut), Dena'ina, Deg Xinag, Holikachuk, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, Gwich'in, Tanana, Upper Tanana, Tanacross, Hän, Ahtna, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian.

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- Key Development Forecasts for the United States (https://www.ifs.du.edu/ifs/frm_CountryProfile.aspx?Country=US) from International Futures

Government

- Official U.S. Government Web Portal (<https://www.usa.gov>) Gateway to government sites
- House (<https://www.house.gov>) Official site of the United States House of Representatives
- Senate (<https://www.senate.gov>) Official site of the United States Senate
- White House (<https://www.whitehouse.gov>) Official site of the president of the United States
- Supreme Court (<https://www.supremecourt.gov>) Official site of the Supreme Court of the United States

History

- [Historical Documents](https://web.archive.org/web/20080314143240/https://www.nationalcenter.org/HistoricalDocuments.html) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20080314143240/https://www.nationalcenter.org/HistoricalDocuments.html>) Collected by the National Center for Public Policy Research
- [U.S. National Mottos: History and Constitutionality](https://www.religioustolerance.org/nat_mott.htm) (https://www.religioustolerance.org/nat_mott.htm) Analysis by the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance
- [USA](https://www.historicalstatistics.org/index2.html) (<https://www.historicalstatistics.org/index2.html>) Collected links to historical data

Maps

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- [!\[\]\(ee90a2b5eb8ba926efd0949f946687ab_img.jpg\) Wikimedia Atlas of the United States](#)
- [Geographic data related to United States](https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/148838) (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/148838>) at OpenStreetMap
- [Measure of America](https://www.measureofamerica.org/maps/) (<https://www.measureofamerica.org/maps/>) A variety of mapped information relating to health, education, income, and demographics for the U.S.

Photos

- [Photos of the USA](https://www.flickr.com/search/?text=USA) (<https://www.flickr.com/search/?text=USA>)

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