

Midterm elections in the USA

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– Why care about who controls Congress?

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AIMS

- discuss and elaborate on culture and social conditions in several English-speaking countries
- present and discuss current news items from English-language sources
- use own notes to write texts related to one's education programme
- evaluate different sources and use contents from sources in an independent, critical and verifiable manner

FIRST

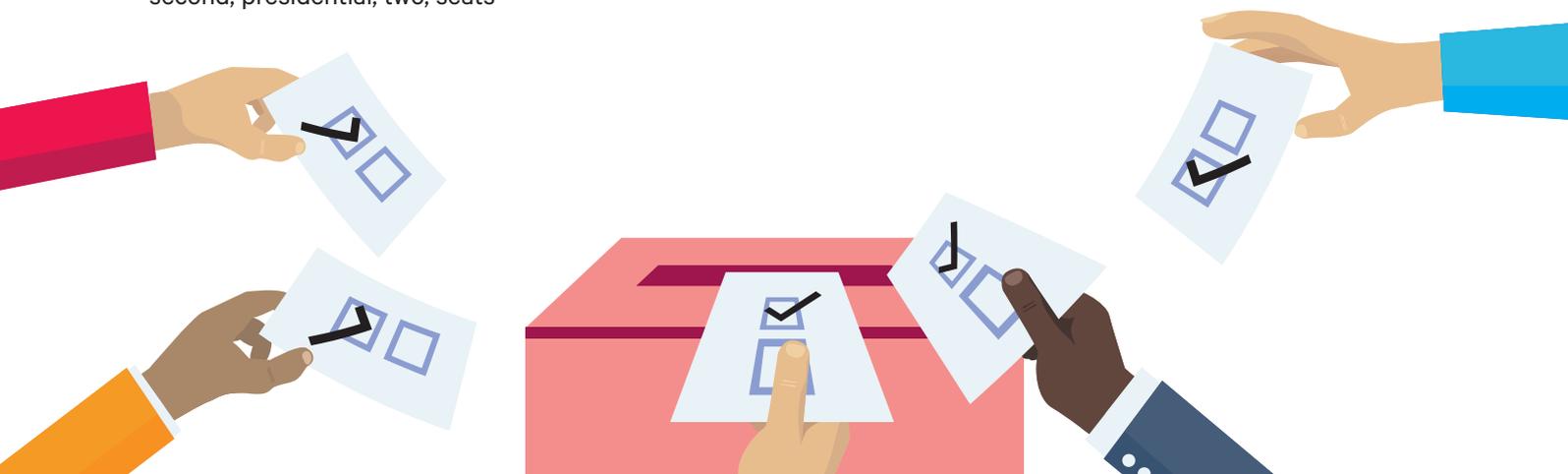
1. What president Trump says and does attracts so much attention that we get the impression that he decides everything in American politics. How much does he really decide?
 2. Have you heard of midterm elections? If so, what are they?
 3. What issues do you think are important for American voters at the moment?
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A first glance at the elections

Watch the video “What are midterm elections?” and fill in the words in their appropriate places in the text below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZy8CACTFOQ>.

Representatives, agenda, important, governors, two, six, four, states, midterm, party, 100, second, presidential, two, seats



The US holds nationwide elections every _____ years. Presidents serve _____-year terms.

The election between is called a _____ election.

Participation is never as high as for _____ elections. The midterms are very _____.

All 435 members of the House of _____ are up for election every _____ years.

1/3 of the _____-member US Senate is up for election.

Senators serve for _____- year terms.

Most US _____ elect _____ in midterm elections. The president's party almost always loses _____ in both houses of Congress.

Sometimes the loss changes the _____ in control of the legislature. * That impacts the president's ability to pursue an _____ during the _____ half of his or her term.

*the legislature means Congress

Summing up what you have learnt so far:

In writing, explain how the numbers 2, 4 and 6 are key elements of the midterm elections.

Some background knowledge – the American system of government

The American system of government is quite different from the Norwegian one. Not only do they have an elected president, there are some other institutions that play a very important role in the running of the country, too. First you should study this visual presentation of the various institutions, what responsibilities they have and how they work together:

<https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government#item-211477>

Now you are now going to watch a video which will explain the historical background of the American political system at the federal, or national, level. While watching this video entitled “How is power divided in the US government”, you are going to decide whether the statements below are true or false.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuFR5XBLYfU>

True/false

1. The president acts alone in decision-making and executing power.
2. The Founding Fathers wanted to establish a country that was not ruled by a king.
3. The national government should not abuse its power.
4. The new constitution was adopted in 1776.
5. The purpose of the system of checks and balances is to make sure the national government is powerful.
6. Checking the other branches of government means controlling the power that the other branches have.

7. The legislative branch is made up of 200 senators and 435 Congressmen or Congresswomen (members of the House of Representatives).
8. The legislative branch is, among other things, responsible for passing laws.
9. The executive branch is made up of the President and the Vice President.
10. Among the responsibilities of the executive branch are education and criminal law.
11. The executive branch does not employ a lot of people.
12. The courts of law do not interpret the laws passed by Congress.

Back to the midterm elections

Watch the video below and take notes. What did you learn here that was not presented in the first video? Make a list of new points.

US midterm elections – How do they work?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAj-Y3gr3f4>

Explain the following expressions in the context of the article:

- Fundraiser
- Treat with kid gloves
- Pollster
- A blue wave
- A report card
- 23

In-depth knowledge about the midterm elections 2018 The two major parties

The Democratic Party is sometimes referred to as “the Party of the People”. This party is supported by many immigrants, blue-collar workers, women, and minority groups. Democrats have more liberal views on many issues. They believe that the federal, or national, government should take more responsibility for people who need it. Democrats think it is necessary for people to pay enough tax so that the federal government has money to spend on social programs.

In general, Republicans have more conservative views. They believe that the federal government should be as little involved in people’s lives as possible. Most Republicans are in favour of lower taxes and less government spending. They believe that business life and the economy should be left alone and not be controlled by the government. Some candidates belong to other, smaller parties or they run as independents.

<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4706>

Read the newspaper article below (up to “Isn’t that good for the Democrats?”) and answer the questions:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/midterm-elections-us-how-they-work-why-important-whats-at-stake-1.4755823>

1. a) When and where are the midterm elections?
b) Who is going to be elected?
c) Are the midterms good news for President Trump?

2. Explain these quotations from the article:
 - a) "Democrats steer the the legislative agenda"
 - b) "The founders (that is the Founding Fathers) didn't want politicians to get too comfortable."
 - c) "The Senate is more politically insulated."
 - d) "Midterms are a way for the populace to "lodge their concerns with the chief executive."

Vocabulary in article:

primer: innføring

midterm: mellomvalg

referendum: folkeavstemning

steer the legislative agenda: bestemme hvilke lovforslag som skal fremmes (og vedtas)

embolden: gjøre dristig

significantly: betydelig

makeup: sammensetning

term: regjeringsperiode

reshape: endre

general election: presidentvalg

the Founding Fathers: grunnlovsfedrene

check: kontroll

presidential contest: presidentvalg

staggered: forskjøvet

rein in: legge bånd på

unbridled: ubehersket

in contention: på valg

serve: sitte

term: periode

up for grabs: på valg, fritt frem

territorial governorship: guvernørembete i en stat

stand for election: stille til valg

framer: skaper

insulated: isolert

poll: meningsmåling

rally: møte

reverse: snu

populace: befolkning

lodge concerns: fremsette klager

overreach: strekke seg for langt, gå for langt

chief executive: presidenten, leder av den utøvende makt

on the ballot: på valg

whopping: heidundrende

concede: innrømme

shellacking: nederlag

What's at stake? Some important issues

Below you will get an overview of some current political issues and what opinions are common in the two major parties.

	Republican Party	Democratic Party
Health care The Affordable Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare, is a law from 2010 providing payment for health care for the greater part of the American population	Against public responsibility for providing payment for health care	In favour of public responsibility for providing payment for health care
Gun control	Against making it more difficult to buy guns and particularly hand-guns Wants to keep the present system for getting guns	In favour of making it more difficult to buy guns and particularly hand-guns Wants more restrictions on the process of getting guns
Immigration Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): a law that protects immigrants who have immigrated illegally when they were children from being returned to their native countries	Wants a stricter policy Wants to build a wall on the border with Mexico	Wants DACAs to be allowed to stay and get American citizenship Does not want a wall on the border with Mexico
Abortion	(Mostly) against abortion and providing abortions at public clinics	In favour (mostly) of providing abortions at public clinics
Tax reform	Wants to cut taxes for citizens and businesses	Wants to keep or increase the present level of taxation for citizens as well as businesses

Some candidates

1. Watch at least two of the videos below. What message are the candidates trying to get across? How do they use language to communicate with their voters?
2. Do any of the candidates come across as more trustworthy than the rest? Why?

Young candidates:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbIJgY2ZXMs>

Texan Beto O'Rourke (D):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5IES0UP9sc>

Arizona – Kyrsten Sinema (D) and Martha McSally (R):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWNm3ZmUJCg>

Closing statements of Kyrsten Sinema (D) and Martha McSally (R):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41nE-TM4Q1U>

J. Hegar (Texas):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zi6v4CYNSIQ> (commercial)

Over to you – what may influence the outcome of the elections

1. Work in groups of 4. Each student is to choose *one* of the aspects that may decide the outcome of the elections. Do some research and share what you have found out with the other members of your group. Then decide which aspect you think is going to be most important. Finally, explain why your group has chosen this particular aspect to the rest of your class.

Voter turnout and voter registration

Female candidates

The economy – economic growth of 4% and an unemployment rate of 3,7%

Opposition to Trump

2. Write a five-paragraph essay on one of the following topics:
 - a) Why the 2018 midterm elections are particularly important.
 - b) How famous people may influence this year's midterm elections. (Former president Obama and artists such as Taylor Swift are part of the campaign for the 2018 midterm elections.)
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