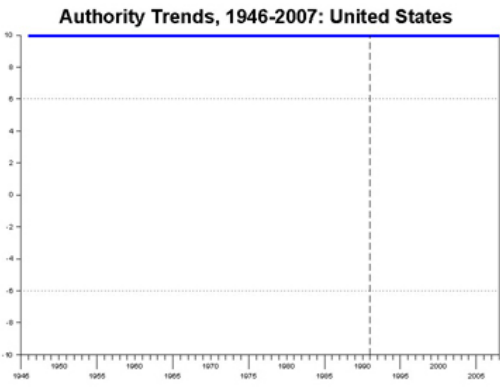


## Polity IV Country Report 2007: United States of America

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td></td> <td>198</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	10	10	0	<b>Democ:</b>	10	10	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Durable:</b>		198		<b>Tentative:</b>		No		
Score:	2006	2007	Change																						
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<b>Durable:</b>		198																							
<b>Tentative:</b>		No																							
SCODE	<b>NTH</b>	CCODE	<b>210</b>	Date of Report	<b>20 January 2009</b>																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	5	5																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date		4 March 1809		Begin Date		5 March 1809																			
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>		1789																							
<b>Executive(s)</b>		President-elect Barack H. Obama (Democratic); directly elected, 4 November 2008, 52.4%																							
<b>Legislature</b>		<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>House of Representatives (435 seats; 2-year term seats allocated to states by population size; directly elected by plurality in single-member districts; most recent elections, 4 November 2008)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Democratic Party: 255</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Republican Party: 175</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Vacant/Undecided: 5</p> <p>Senate (100 seats; two seats for each state, directly elected in staggered six year terms; most recent elections, 4 November 2008)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Democratic Party: 56</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Republican Party: 40</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Independent Party: 1</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Connecticut for Lieberman Party: 1</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">(Note: both minority party members caucus with the Democratic Party, giving that party a 58-40 majority)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Vacant: 2</p>																							
<b>Judiciary</b>		Supreme Court																							

## **Narrative Description:**

### **Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)**

The American president is indirectly elected through a competitive multi-party electoral system and is limited to a maximum of two four-year terms. The party system has long been dominated by two, roughly equal parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party; party support tends to shift marginally from election to election due to the performance of the ruling party and/or the executive branch. According to the Constitution, the president is ultimately elected by an electoral college, whose members (their number corresponding to the number of representatives plus two) are elected by the population of each state every four years, and represent their states' choices for the presidency. Forty-one days following the general election, the Electoral College meets and casts their votes for the presidency, which typically reflect the results of the popular vote in their states. On four occasions (1824, 1876, 1888, and 2000 elections) the winner of the Electoral College election has not won the popular vote. The general election is preceded (by approximately 9-11 months) by a race for the party nomination, which takes place in a series of staggered state elections under rules that differ from state-to-state, and, in some instances, from party-to-party within states. This nomination race culminates in conventions for each party in which the elected party representatives from each state (as well as other ranking party officials and leading national political figures known as "super-delegates") attend and cast their votes for their preferred nominee.

Although the executive recruitment process has generally been free and fair in American history, occasions when the Electoral College vote has resulted in a different outcome than that determined by the popular vote have been met with substantial criticism. Most recently, the presidential election of 2000 led to a crisis in which the loser of the Electoral College vote, the Democratic Party candidate and then-Vice President Al Gore, challenged the election results in court, citing voting irregularities and misleading ballots used in the state of Florida which he narrowly lost. Gore had gained a narrow majority in the total popular vote. The case was eventually decided by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of George W. Bush's victory. Similar allegations of voting irregularities and disenfranchisement, especially in areas with heavy concentrations of minority voters, also reappeared in the 2004 election. Presidential elections held on 4 November 2008 were especially significant in that they resulted in a victory for Democratic Party candidate Barack Obama, who became the first non-white president in the country's history when he was inaugurated on 20 January 2009.

### **Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)**

The Constitution of the United States places significant constraints on the autonomy of the chief executive. Both the legislature and judiciary are independent of executive control and place substantial constraints on executive power. The legislature consists of a bicameral Congress divided into the House of Representatives (lower chamber) and Senate (upper chamber). Collectively, the Congress has the responsibility to propose, make and amend laws, and authorize and control government expenditures. The House has the power to impeach, try and remove the president, and the Senate is responsible for ratifying treaties, declaring war, and approving presidential nominations of high-ranking executive officials, ambassadors, and federal justices. The House has twice impeached sitting presidents (Andrew Johnson and William J. Clinton), although neither impeachment led to a conviction and/or dismissal (Richard Nixon resigned from office on 9 August 1974 in order to avoid impeachment proceedings). Although the president can veto congressional legislation, vetoes can be overridden with supermajorities in both houses of Congress, an achievement that rarely (but occasionally) occurs. The Supreme Court has the power of judicial review, further limiting the power of the president.

Despite these institutional constraints on presidential power, in practice the chief executive has taken on many additional roles, which have historically been checked to varying degrees by the legislature and judiciary. The president frequently issues executive orders, presidential initiatives carrying the force of law that are not subject to congressional approval, although they can be repealed by Congress with a majority vote, and can be ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Similarly, as commander-in-chief, the president has frequently sent the military into combat without congressional approval, bypassing the Senate's authority to issue declarations of war. Although the War Powers Act of 1973, a direct response to American involvement in the Vietnam War, requires the president to consult with Congress before sending troops into combat and places limits on the time that troops can remain in combat without congressional authorization, in practice this bill has placed few substantial checks on the president's war-making power. Ultimately, the greatest check in this regard comes in the form of Congress's control over financial

authorizations, including special authorizations for the funding of overseas conflicts. Furthermore, in recent years presidents have begun issuing “signing statements,” when signing bills, effectively announcing their intention to not execute portions of the signed legislation with which they have not agreed. Although the courts have ruled that the president is constitutionally required to execute approved legislation, in practice executives have avoided this requirement by reorganization of funding and executive departments, prioritization of tasks, or sheer negligence.

Since becoming involved, reluctantly, in the First World War in 1917, the United States has increasingly assumed a role of “primacy” in world affairs and has become especially activist in its foreign policy since the end of the Second World in 1945 (and the beginning of the so-called “Cold War” with the Soviet Union). This activism in foreign policy has tended to expand the powers of the executive branch and the latitude of action and accountability allowed by the legislative branch, particularly during periods of crisis and warfare. The period since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have seen a significant increase in the power of the executive, particularly vis-à-vis the Congress. In one of the most notable examples, warrantless surveillance of American citizens has been conducted by intelligence agencies under executive order by the Bush administration since late 2001, in apparent violation of the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), which restricts intelligence gathering to foreign targets. The failure of the executive branch to consult with congressional intelligence committees or to seek judicial warrants has put the presidency at odds with the other branches. Although judicial proceedings on this program are ongoing, for the present the president’s ability to collect intelligence on U.S. citizens and domestic organizations remains unchecked. Similarly, the right to habeas corpus has been routinely denied to individuals, and the assets and activities have been restricted of groups, suspected of supporting terrorist organizations, with only minor checks by the judiciary.

**Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)**

The United States is a competitive, entrenched democracy that has traditionally been dominated by two parties (the center-right Republicans and the center-left Democrats); the high degree of institutionalization and the high costs of campaigning in national elections present considerable barriers to the emergence and sustainability of new parties. Freedom of speech and assembly, among others, are constitutionally protected and the civil rights of citizens are generally respected. Until the 1960s, however, the civil rights of blacks were routinely denied amid widespread discrimination. The last five decades have seen a gradual, but generally successful, period of racial integration into both the economy and political system, including positions of significant political power. The period immediately surrounding the Civil Rights Act and its implementation, however, was a particularly turbulent era for American political participation, with opposition to the Vietnam War and the fight for civil rights creating serious, mutually reinforcing political divisions throughout society. The widespread unrest during this period left lasting marks on the nature of political participation, particularly affecting the willingness of politicians to engage in foreign conflicts and the social norms surrounding racial equality. Discrimination has also limited the integration of the native population and various immigrant groups. Heightened levels of immigration by “Hispanics” from Central American countries have triggered a strong anti-immigrant backlash, in recent years, among a population that is almost exclusively descended from immigrant groups.