



November 2006

About the USA – Virtual Classroom Newsletter for English Teachers

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Midterm Elections – November 7, 2006

On November 7, Americans will elect a new Congress and decide 36 state governorships. At stake are all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 33 of the 100 U.S. Senate seats. Members of the House of Representatives are elected to two year terms. Senators are elected to six year terms, staggered so that one third of the Senate stands for election every two years. Presidents are elected to four-year terms. The elections in which Americans vote for their congressional representatives, but not for president, are known as midterm elections.

Republicans currently control the presidency and both houses of Congress. Opposition Democrats need a gain of 15 seats to retake the House and six seats to win a majority in the Senate. Republicans have controlled both chambers since 1994, except for a brief period in 2001 and 2002 when Democrats were in charge of the Senate. Because Congress has the power to pass laws and controls federal funding authorizations, the outcome of the midterm elections could affect significantly U.S. policies and how they are carried out.

Ballot Measures

In many states, voters will also decide on more than 100 "ballot measures." Ballot measures, including initiatives and referendums, give voters an opportunity to enact or repeal laws, endorse proposed laws, determine how funds will be raised or spent and approve or reject potential amendments to the state constitution. More than 100 propositions are set to appear before voters during November's midterm elections -- covering a topics including funding education, establishing lotteries and changing immigration laws. [More...](#)

Read more:

- [Ballot Initiative Strategy Center \(BISC\)](#)
- [Initiative & Referendum Institute \(University of Southern California\)](#)

Voter Turnout Rates

The first criterion for voting eligibility is citizenship. Only citizens of the United States (either native or naturalized) are allowed to vote in elections. Another is age. Since 1972, every state has required that a person must be at least 18 years of age to be eligible to vote. The voting age population (VAP) – all those 18- and older - is a population base often used in presenting voting statistics. A third criterion is registration. Every state, with the exception of North Dakota, requires eligible voters to register to vote. A majority of people who are registered to vote actually do vote – 89 percent in the November 2004 election. Fifty-five million potential voters, however, were not registered in 2004. Voter registration efforts are an important part of the political campaign process – both on the part of parties and organizations.

Read more:

- [Voting & Registration in the Election of Nov 2004 \(U.S. Census Bureau\)](#)
- [Who Votes? \(Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball. University of Virginia's Center for Politics\)](#)
- [Who Votes, Who Doesn't, and Why \(Pew Research Center\)](#)



Background

- **Elections ... the American Way**
(Library of Congress)
memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/election/home.html
- **About the USA – Government**
(U.S. Mission to Germany)
usa.usembassy.de/government.htm
- **What is Democracy? – Elections**
(U.S. Dept. of State, IIP)
usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/whatsdem/whatdm5.htm
- **Midterm Elections – Virtual Classroom**
(U.S. Mission to Germany)
usa.usembassy.de/classroom/midtermelection.htm

Commentary

- **Midterm Elections**
(U.S. Dept. of State, IIP)
<http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/democracy/elections.html>
- **Midterm Elections**
(U.S. Dept. of State, Foreign Press Centers)
<http://fpc.state.gov/fpc/c18259.htm>
- **A Look at the Midterm Elections**
(Voice of America)
www.voanews.com/english/elections2006.cfm

News

- **CQ 2006 Election Forecast**
www.cqpolitics.com/
- **Electionline**
www.electionline.org/
- **The Hill - Newspaper about the U.S. Congress**
www.hillnews.com/
- **New York Times – Election Guide**
[New York Times Election Guide](http://www.nytimes.com/electionguide/)
- **Washington Post – Elections 2006**
[Washington Post - Elections 2006](http://www.washingtonpost.com/elections2006/)



Polls

- **The Cook Political Report**
www.cookpolitical.com/poll/
- **Gallup Poll**
www.galluppoll.com/
- **Project Vote Smart**
<http://www.vote-smart.org/>
- **PollingReport.com**
www.pollingreport.com/2006.htm
- **Zogby Polls**
www.zogby.com/index.cfm

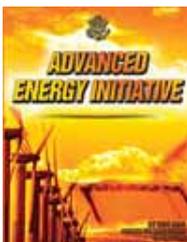


An Inconvenient Truth
<http://climatecrisis.org/>

Former Vice President Al Gore put global warming on center stage with warnings of calamity in his best selling film and book, "An Inconvenient Truth." Gore developed a slide show about the threat posed by global warming. Over the last six years, he has presented the show more than 1,000 times around the world. In hopes of reaching a wider audience, Gore joined filmmakers and turned the lecture into a documentary film.

Read more:

[Eco-Apocalypse and the Powerpoint Film: Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth](#)
Harsin, Jayson, *Bright Lights Film Journal*, #53, Aug 2006.



[White House Advanced Energy Initiative](#)

Read more:
www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/environment/

Issues

Former House of Representatives Speaker Tip O'Neill once said, "all politics is local," in reference to how citizens are more passionate about and tend to vote for issues that are directly related to their own lives. Mid-term election campaigns in the United States are usually dominated by so-called "bread and butter" issues - things like jobs, health care and the economy in general. But this year, things are shaping up to be different. By many accounts, American voters are very concerned about two main foreign policy issues -- the war in Iraq and the global war on terror. Domestic issues are, however, still important. American public opinion polls show economic issues, questions of governance and immigration reform as top election concerns.

A Wild Year for Forecasting

Charles E. Cook Jr., *The Cook Political Report*, October 21, 2006.
"Unlike 99.99 percent of the people who watch politics with a passion, political analysts don't care about which side wins, but they do care about correctly predicting the outcome. And that's why this election season has been so maddening: Trying to get a fix on what's going on has been like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall; it just won't stay put..."
Charles E. Cook, a political analyst for NBC News and editor and publisher of the Cook Political Report, a Washington-based, nonpartisan newsletter analyzing U.S. politics and elections, writes about the difficulties of forecasting election results.
[Full text.](#)

The Environment

Although the Iraq war, national security, the economy and immigration are commanding most voter attention, Americans' environmental concerns are reflected in numerous local and state ballot initiatives. In the state of Washington, one initiative would mandate and increase the amount of renewable energy. This is a policy that is already in operation in over 20 states. Candidates across the political spectrum are campaigning on environmentally friendly policies in order to address important new economic realities facing the electorate. Candidates from both parties argue in favor of enhancing opportunities in environmental protection and the advantages of embedding environmental protection in economic development strategies.

The League of Conservation Voters, which publishes an annual National Environmental Scorecard, praises cities and states across the U.S. for the enactment of forward-looking energy solutions that focus on efficiency, renewable energy, and conservation. Federal energy and environmental policies were given mixed marks. A number of federal environmental initiatives, however, enjoyed broad, bipartisan support, demonstrating that environmental issues clearly resonated with both the public and Members of Congress in 2006. **Read more:** [The National Environmental Scorecard](#)

The goal of the White House "Advanced Energy Initiative" (released in Feb. 2006) provides for a 22-percent increase in funding for clean-energy technology research: "To change how we power our homes and offices, we will invest more in zero-emission coal-fired plants, revolutionary solar and wind technologies, and clean, safe nuclear energy. To change how we power our automobiles, we will increase our research in better batteries for hybrid and electric cars and in pollution-free cars that run on hydrogen. We will also fund additional research in cutting-edge methods of producing ethanol, not just from corn, but from wood chips, stalks, or switch grass."

The U.S. and Europe enjoy significant common ground on a number of environmental policies, particularly in the development of new technologies. Jim Connaughton, chief environmental policy adviser to President Bush discussed transatlantic cooperation in an online discussion on a recent trip to Germany. **Read more:** [Webchat transcript.](#)

U.S. Foreign Assistance

Total U.S. financial flows to the developing world - official development assistance (ODA), private capital flows and private grants - reached a record-breaking \$104.4 billion in calendar year 2005, according to new figures released by the U.S. government.

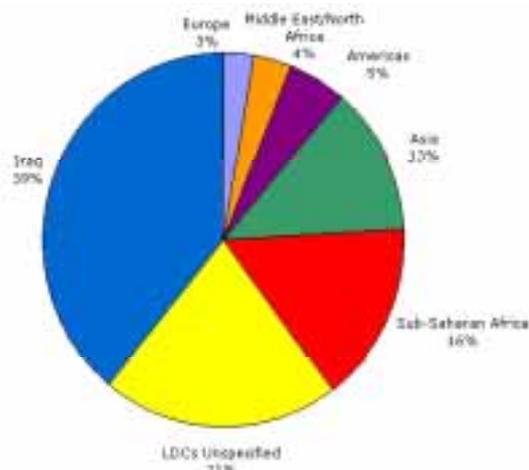
The latest figures also show that official development assistance from the U.S. government - nonmilitary grants and loans - attained a record \$27.6 billion, an increase of \$7.9 billion over 2004.

The largest recipients of U.S. aid were Iraq (\$10.8 billion), Afghanistan (\$1.3 billion), Sudan (\$771 million), Ethiopia (\$625 million), Egypt (\$397 million), Pakistan (\$362 million), Jordan (\$354 million), Colombia (\$334 million), Uganda (\$242 million) and Serbia-Montenegro (\$181 million).

U.S. money accounted for more than 25 percent of all government aid provided by the 30 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the industrialized-country group that provides the bulk of foreign assistance worldwide.

Read more:

- [The Index of Global Prosperity \(Hudson Institute\)](http://www.gpr.hudson.org/files/publications/GlobalPhilanthropy.pdf)
- [International Development Goals Moving Forward](http://www.usinfo.state.gov/journals/ites/0805/ijee/ijee0805.htm)
- [U.S. Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](http://www.usaid.gov/)



2005 U.S. Net ODA Disbursements \$27.6B

Thanksgiving - November 23, 2006

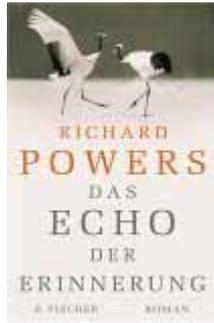
In the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony celebrated the autumn harvest with a three-day feast. They had arrived in Massachusetts the year before, determined to practice their dissenting religion without interference. After the first harsh winter, they turned for help to neighboring Indians, who taught them how to plant corn and other crops and cook local foods. The next fall's bountiful harvest inspired the Pilgrims to invite members of the local Wampanoag tribe to a celebration to thank the Indians for teaching them how to live in the New World. Without the Indians, the first settlers would not have survived. Chief Massasoit brought ninety of his tribesmen to the feast. The Pilgrims served wild turkey, duck, geese, venison, lobsters, clams, bass, corn, green vegetables, and dried fruits were served at the celebration which also included athletic contests. Other harvest celebrations were held in early colonial America but this feast is widely accepted as the "first Thanksgiving" - and the beginning of an American tradition.

After the United States became an independent country, Congress recommended one yearly day of thanksgiving for the whole nation to celebrate. George Washington suggested the date November 26 as Thanksgiving Day. In 1863, at the end of a long and bloody civil war, Abraham Lincoln asked all Americans to set aside the last Thursday in November as a day of thanksgiving. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set it one week earlier - to the 4th Thursday in November. He wanted to help business by lengthening the shopping period before Christmas. Congress ruled that after 1941 the 4th Thursday in November would be a federal holiday proclaimed by the President each year. Many Americans take a day of vacation on the Friday to make a four-day weekend, during which they may travel long distances to visit family and friends.



A detail of a photographic reproduction of J.L.G. Ferris's early-20th century painting, "First Thanksgiving." (Library of Congress, American Memory)

- [Thanksgiving in American Memory](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features/thanks/thanks.html) (The Library of Congress)
- [About the USA: Thanksgiving](http://usa.usembassy.de/holidays-thanksgiving.htm) (U.S. Mission Germany)
- [The History of Thanksgiving](http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/thanksgiving/) (History Channel)
- [Thanksgiving Day in the United States](http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/thankstories.htm) (U.S. Dept. of State/ IIP)
- [The First Thanksgiving](http://teacher.scholastic.com/thanksgiving/index.htm) (Scholastic)



- **Das Echo der Erinnerung (Fischer Verlag)**

www.fischerverlage.de

- **The Echo Maker (National Book Award)**

www.nationalbook.org/nba2006_fict_powers.html

- **Migratory Spirits (review of "The Echo Maker" by Colson Whitehead. New York Times Book Review, Oct. 22, 2006)**

www.nytimes.com

- **Richard Powers – American Novelist**

<http://www2.english.uiuc.edu/powers/bib/>

Webchat Station

www.usembassy.de/germany/chat.html

Upcoming Webchats:

Nov 1 - Upcoming 2006 Congressional Midterm Elections

Nov. 2 – Information Literacy

Nov 13 - Studying and Working in the U.S.

Nov. 17 - Education in America

American Bestsellers – Richard Powers National Book Award Finalist

The novels of Richard Power explore the effects of modern science and technology on society. Born in Evanston, Illinois on June 18, 1957, Powers was interested in multiple sciences as a teenager. He enrolled as a physics major at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign but switched his studies to literature, receiving his M.A. in that subject in 1979. After graduation, he worked in Boston as a computer programmer until an encounter with a photograph at the Museum of Fine Arts inspired him to quit his job and spend the next two years writing his first novel, "Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance," which was published in 1985. Powers then moved to the Netherlands, where he wrote *Prisoner's Dilemma*, a work that juxtaposes Disney and nuclear warfare, and then "The Gold Bug Variations," a story that ties together genetics, music, and computer science. Back in the United States, Powers has won increasing recognition. He teaches in the Creative Writing program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

His most novel "The Echo Maker" has been nominated for a National Book Award. The New York Times describes "The Echo Maker" ("Die Echo der Erinnerung") as "a wise and elegant post-9/11 novel... No facile conflation of personal catastrophe with national calamity, but a lovely essay on perseverance in all its forms."

November 23, 2006 - 20:00

Reading from "The Echo Maker" by Richard Powers
November 23, 2006 - 20:00

Literarisches Colloquium
Am Sandwerder 5, 14109 Berlin

Registration:

www.usembassy.de/germany/upcoming_events.html

Ask Richard Powers a Question!

Register for a webchat with Richard Powers
or send your question to

IRCBerlin@state.gov

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About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

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http://www.usembassy.de/germany/classroom_newsletter_nov06.html

Contact: IRCBerlin@state.gov