

# POLITICS



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# THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary republic, where the power is divided into three parts: executive, legislative and judicial.

## **Legislative power**

Legislative power (the power to make laws) consists of two houses: the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Chamber of Deputies drafts and adopts laws, the Senate revises drafted laws and has the ability to refuse them and send them back. There are 200 deputies and they are elected for a four-year term. Senators are elected for a six-year term – one-third of the 81 senators are elected every two years.

## **Executive power**

Executive power is held by the government (consisting of the prime minister and other ministers) and the president, who is the formal head of state and appoints the prime minister. On the prime minister's recommendation, he/she appoints other ministers. He/she has the power to recall the members of the government and he/she also appoints the justices of the Constitutional Court (a special court that decides whether an action is against the constitution or not). The president can veto laws, but the parliament can override his/her veto. He/she is elected by the citizens for a five-year term. The same person can only be elected president twice in a row, not more.

## **Judicial power**

Judicial power is exercised by a system of independent courts.

## **Voting system**

There are two main systems of voting: majority and proportional. The majority system means that even if the winning party only gets 20% of the votes, it will get over 50% of the seats. Therefore it can form the government. Conversely, in the proportional system, the parties win seats in proportion to how many people vote for them. So if a party gets 20% of the votes, it should get approximately 20% of the seats. In countries with the majority system, there are usually two main parties. However, the Czech Republic has more than two major parties due to the proportional system. Both systems bring advantages and disadvantages. The majority system is simple and helps to form a strong and stable government. Nevertheless, it does not reflect the preferences of people well and gives almost no chance to smaller parties. The proportional system, on the other hand, reflects the real preferences better and allows even minorities to be represented. However, for the government to be stable, parties must form meaningful coalitions. In the Czech Republic, the proportional system is used in parliamentary elections. All parties that get over 5% of the votes enter the Parliament. The Senate elections use the majority system. If no candidate gets over 50% of the votes in the first round, the two most successful candidates continue to the second round and the one who wins it takes the seat. In the case of presidential elections, candidates standing for office must be at least 40 years of age and must not have already been elected twice consecutively. The president is elected directly by the people in two rounds. The two candidates who obtained the most votes in the first round face each other again in the second one.

## **Political parties**

There are currently nine parties in the Chamber of Deputies: *ANO* (centre to centre-right), *ODS – the Civic Democratic Party* (centre-right to right-wing), *the Czech Pirate Party* (centre to centre-left), *SPD – Freedom and Direct Democracy* (right-wing to far-right), *the Communist Party* (far left), *the Social Democratic Party* (centre-left), *the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party* (centre to centre-right), *TOP 09* (centre-right) and *Mayors and Independents* (centre to centre-right).

# THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE UK

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a constitutional monarchy. The Constitution is not written as a single document – it is formed partly by statute, partly by common law and partly by convention.

## **Head of state (King or Queen)**

The monarch, currently Elizabeth II born in 1926 and Queen in 1952, has little power and can only reign with the support of the parliament. The monarch opens the parliament's annual session and has the ability to summon and dissolves the parliament. He/she also gives the royal assent to new laws and appoints the Prime Minister, senior ministers, judges and diplomats. The monarch is expected to be completely impartial and not to support any political party. The monarch lives at the Buckingham Palace in London, which has served as the official London residence of the UK's sovereigns since 1837.

## **Legislative power**

The UK parliament consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords and is situated in the Palace of Westminster. The House of Commons is the lower house of the parliament and has 650 MPs (members of parliament). England has 533 MPs, Wales 40, Scotland 59 and Northern Ireland 18. MPs are elected by universal adult suffrage every five years (minimum voting age is 18, candidates must be over 21). Like the upper house, the House of Lords, it meets in the Palace of Westminster. The Commons have the real power, the MPs introduce new bills and debate them there. The presiding officer – the Speaker – keeps the House in order and has to be neutral (not a member of a political party). The Commons Chamber is green and the red lines along each side of the Chamber must not be crossed during debates. The most important MPs sit in the front benches and are thus called frontbenchers. Backbenchers sit behind them. The ministers of the government occupy the front benches on the right and the opposition sits on the left. The House of Lords is the upper house of the UK parliament. The number of its members is not fixed (790 members in June 2021). There are Lords Spiritual (26 senior bishops of the Church of England) and Lords Temporal (life peers appointed by the Monarch and hereditary peers – aristocrats who have inherited their seats). Therefore, members are not elected. Their task is to debate the bill after it has been passed by the House of Commons and propose amendments to the legislation. The House of Lords can delay non-financial bills for a period of a year. The presiding officer is called Lord Speake. The Lords Chamber is red.

## **Executive power**

The UK government is led by the Prime Minister, currently Boris Johnson (Conservative Party) since July 2019. The Prime Minister is the leader of the party which wins the most seats in the general elections (if no single party has enough votes to form a majority government, the two most successful parties can decide to form a coalition government. The Prime Minister selects the other members of the Cabinet. The Cabinet is a decision-making body composed of the Prime Minister and 22 Cabinet Ministers. Cabinet Ministers are heads of government departments (e.g. Department for Education; Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; Home Office; Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Justice...) and are called Secretary of State for X. Whitehall in London is the home of UK government ministries. The Cabinet meets at the Prime Minister's house in 10 Downing Street in London. The Prime Minister spends every Wednesday (when the House of Commons is sitting) half an hour answering questions from the MPs – Prime Minister's Question Time.

## **Political parties**

The three biggest parties are the Conservative Party, known colloquially as the Tories (centre-right), the Labour Party (centre-left) and the Liberal Democrats, commonly referred to as the Lib Dems, (centre to centre-left). Plaid Cymru (Wales) and the SNP (Scottish National Party) are nationalist parties (centre-left to left-wing and centre-left, respectively) in favour of Welsh and Scottish independence. There is also the Democratic Unionist Party (centre-right to right-wing), Sinn Féin (centre left to left-wing), active in both Northern Ireland and Ireland, and finally, the Green Party (left-wing).



# THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN THE US

The United States of America is a federal union made up of 50 states. The Federal Government is composed of three distinct branches: legislative, executive, and judicial, whose powers are vested by the U.S. Constitution (ratified in 1788 and consisting of: Preamble, 7 Articles and 27 Amendments) in the Congress, the President and the Federal courts, respectively.

## **Legislative branch**

The US Congress, which makes laws and decides on budgets and taxation, is composed of two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives, which is the lower chamber of the US Congress, has 435 members, referred to as congressmen and congresswomen, which are voted in for 2 years. The more populated the state is (according to the US Census), the more representatives it has in the House. E.g. California has the most representatives. Conversely, the Senate is the upper house. The Senate is composed of senators, each of whom represents a single state in its entirety. Each state is equally represented by two senators who serve staggered terms of six years. There are currently 100 senators representing the 50 states. The official presiding officer of the Senate is the Vice President, currently Kamala Harris.

## **Executive branch**

The President of the United States, currently the 46th president Joe Biden, is the head of the executive branch. The president gets help from the Vice President, department heads (called Cabinet members / secretaries), currently 15 departments, and heads of independent agencies. The president can propose laws to Congress and has the ability to veto bills. However, Congress can override the veto if a two-third majority vote is secured in both chambers. The president is also the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. He/she appoints ambassadors, ministers and consuls. The Executive Office of the President (EOP) comprises the offices and agencies that support the work of the president.

## **Electoral College**

The United States Electoral College is the group of presidential electors required by the Constitution to form every four years for the purpose of electing the president and vice president. Elections are held in November. Each state appoints electors according to its legislature, equal in number to its congressional delegation (senators and representatives). "Swing states" are those state where the two major political parties have similar levels of support among voters and are viewed as important in determining the overall result of a presidential election. Of the current 538 electors, an absolute majority of 270 or more electoral votes is required to elect the president and vice president. The presidential term lasts for four years and a president can serve a maximum of two terms. He/she must be at least 35 years old to be able to run for office.

## **Judicial branch**

The judicial branch interprets the meaning of laws, applies laws to individual cases and decides if laws violate the Constitution. It is comprised of the Supreme Court and other federal courts. The president has the power to nominate the justices and appointments are made with the advice and consent of the Senate. There are nine Supreme Court justices: one chief justice and eight associate justices. They are appointed for life, though they may resign or retire.

## **Political parties**

The two main and most powerful political parties in the US are the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The symbol of the Republican Party is an elephant and the symbol of the Democratic Party is a donkey. The 21st century Democratic Party is predominantly a coalition of centrists, liberals, and progressives, with significant overlap between the three groups. The modern Republican Party includes conservatives, centrists, libertarians and right-wing populists. Yet, there are other parties, such as the Reform, Libertarian, Socialist, Natural Law, Constitution and Green Parties.