

CIDOB INTERNATIONAL YEARBOOK 2009

KEYS TO FACILITATE THE MONITORING
OF THE SPANISH FOREIGN POLICY AND
THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN 2008

United States: Country Profile.

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The United States, country profile

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Back in 2004 a largely unknown Illinois state senator running for the U.S. Senate delivered the keynote speech at the Democratic Party's national convention. Convention keynote speeches are rarely remembered much after the next day's news cycle. Not so this one. The speech electrified the convention hall. It energized the millions of television viewers. The speech-maker went on to win the Senate seat. Much more than that, he catapulted to national stature. His name was Barack Obama.

Four years later he was President Barack Obama. One of the most meteoric rises in American history --- and, as the first African-American President, among the most momentous.

2008 was a momentous year in another respect, and this one much less positive. The American economy crashed like it had not done since the Great Depression of the 1930s. While other countries did have economic problems of their own making (Spain, being one example), it was the American crash that was widely seen as the principal source of the global economic crisis.

This came on top of a very full U.S. policy agenda both at home and abroad. The domestic agenda included a health care system that cost too much money and covered too few people, failing public educational systems, environmental and energy policies much more part of

the global warming problem than solution, crumbling infrastructure and lagging public transportation systems, controversies over immigration, and numerous other major issues. The foreign policy agenda was at least as broad and pressing: two wars (Iraq, Afghanistan), Middle East peace, Europe and NATO, Russia, China, global AIDS, global environment, Darfur, terrorism, the WTO Doha Round in collapse, and much more.

In the first main section the focus is on the 2008 election. We then turn to three other key topics: the U.S. domestic policy agenda; immigration and the changing profile of the American people; and the Bush policy and the challenges and opportunities left for the Obama Administration.

The 2008 election

In March 2007, while in Spain as a Fulbright Senior Research Fellow, I gave a talk in Barcelona hosted by *La Vanguardia* on American foreign policy and the 2008 election. Most of the questions reflected the sense that the two U.S. presidential candidates would end up being Hillary Clinton as the Democrat and Rudolph Giuliani, former mayor of New York City and 9/11 fame, as the Republican. Giuliani did very poorly in the Republican primaries and Senator John McCain (Arizona), who had fallen way behind, came back to win the Republican nomination. What really bucked the conventional wisdom was Barack Obama's victory over Hillary Clinton. Both at home and abroad one heard three main reasons why he "could not win". He was inexperienced, having been in Congress barely two years and with no prior national policy and political experience, most especially in foreign affairs. He was running against Hillary Clinton, Senator from New York and former First Lady, who had a formidable political organization and fundraising network. And he was African-American.

Barack Obama won the presidency with 52.9% of the total popular vote (69.4 million votes) compared to 45.7% for John McCain (59.9 million). This was the largest margin of victory in the popular vote since Ronald Reagan's re-election in 1984.

Obama's electoral college margin, 365-173, was even larger than his popular vote margin. While the popular vote matters, it's the electoral college vote that is decisive. Each state gets a total number of electoral college votes equal to the size of its congressional delegation; i.e. the number of members of the House of Representatives, which varies by state population, plus the two senators all states get, plus three electoral college votes for the District of Columbia, the city of Washington, totaling 538 electoral college votes. Whoever wins the most popular votes in each state gets all of that



state's electoral college votes. While it is rare in American history for a candidate to win the popular vote but lose the electoral college vote, this is what happened in the Bush-Gore 2000 election. Al Gore won the popular vote by 543,895 votes. But George Bush narrowly won the electoral college – and this was only after the Supreme Court intervened and ruled on Bush's behalf in deciding the disputed vote count in Florida over a month after election day.

Nine states that had voted for Bush in 2004, when he defeated Massachusetts Senator John F. Kerry, voted for Obama in 2008. These were in the South (Virginia, Florida, North Carolina), Midwest (Ohio, Iowa, Indiana) and West (Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada). No state that had voted Democratic in 2004 voted Republican in 2008.

Voting rates in U.S. elections tend to be lower than in many other democracies. The high points were between 1952 and 1968 when 59% and 63% of the voting age population participated. Since then the rate had fallen, as low as 49% in 1996. In 2008 the rate was up to 56.8%, the highest in 40 years.

Much of the increase was among young voters (18-25 years old), for whom turnout had been 41% in 2000, 48% in 2004 and close to 53% in 2008. Among voters in this age group, Obama won 66-32%. He won by smaller margins among 30-44 year olds (52-46%) and 45-64 year olds (50-49%), and lost among those over 65 (45-53%).

He lost narrowly among males (48-49%) but won among females (56-43%), who constituted 53% of voters. He lost among whites by a substantial margin (43-55%), but won 85% of the African-American vote, 67-31% among Hispanic-Americans and 62-35% among Asian-Americans.

Analyses of Obama's victory stress four main factors. One was organizational: Obama and his team devised a masterful political strategy. The state of Iowa holds the first party nomination contest (caucuses rather than the primaries that most states use). Even though it was a small state, Iowa gets huge media attention since it comes first. The Obama campaign was highly skilled at organizing --- Obama himself had been a community organizer in Chicago earlier in his career. They turned their supporters out and won by a substantial margin. The fact that Iowa had only a small African-American population helped counter the argument that an African-American couldn't win. Mastering the Internet and related new technologies also was a big part of their organizational success. The Obama cam-

paign effectively used Facebook, YouTube and other social networking to organize and communicate with supporters as well as the new media.

Second was financial. The Obama campaign raised almost \$750 million, breaking all fundraising records. While some of this was done the traditional way from large donors attending fundraising cocktail parties, much was done online and from smaller donors. Over 2.3 million people contributed to the Obama campaign. Even when this was only \$25 or \$50, with such huge numbers of donors it adds up. While other politicians had started to tap the Internet's fundraising capacity, the Obama campaign did it on an unprecedented scale.

Third were its ideas. Themes like "change" and "yes we can" powerfully tapped the mood of the country. Political scientists often study social movements that political leaders then seek to tap. The Obama campaign was a social movement in its own right. The desire for change and renewal was largely diffuse. Political analysts had some sense of it, but largely underestimated it. The Obama campaign tapped it, added to it and mobilized it into support for his candidacy in ways American politics had rarely seen. Some of this was Bush fatigue: Bush left office with the lowest presidential approval ratings ever recorded. Some was the excitement that Obama generated, his own appeal.

Fourth was the economy. The American economy had been having problems for awhile. Then in September, in the midst of the final laps of the presidential race, things went from bad to crisis. We discuss the issues more below. The point here is how the economic crisis helped Obama's candidacy both by reinforcing the general theme of change and by Obama coming across as much more knowledgeable and in touch than McCain. It also helped push aside the "culture wars" issues (e.g., abortion, same sex marriage) McCain and his vice presidential choice, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, kept trying to exploit.

When the results were in, Barack Obama spoke to tens of thousands of supporters gathered in Grant Park in Chicago as well as to millions watching on television, listening on the radio, and linking in on the Internet: "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible; who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time; who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer." To those around the world, "from parliaments and palaces to those who are huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of our world -- our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared, and a new dawn of American leadership is at hand."¹

But he also focused on the difficult work that lay ahead. "For even as we celebrate tonight, we know the

"The United States has the highest income inequality among developed nations"

challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime.” The two themes together, the historic achievement that the election manifested and the formidable challenges at home and globally, were a fitting combination as the Obama candidacy ended and the Obama presidency began.

The US domestic policy agenda

Problems in the U.S. economy had been evident for quite some time. The federal budget, which finally had been balanced during the Clinton Administration, was back in deficit throughout the Bush Administration. The trade deficit had surpassed -\$700 billion in 2007. The dollar kept falling, going as low as \$1 =€0.62 Euro in July 2008. But problems became a crisis starting in September 2008 amidst the bursting of the housing bubble and the collapse and near-collapse of major financial firms and corporate giants one after the other.

The numbers were staggering. GDP fell 6.2% in the last quarter of 2008. By early 2009 unemployment was over 8%, and climbing. In the month of February alone over 600,000 jobs were lost. Home prices fell in December 2008 at the fastest pace on record, pushing the value of single-family homes in 20 major metropolitan areas 18.5% lower than a year earlier. Millions of homeowners were losing their homes to foreclosures. The consumer confidence index, which had been around 90% at the end of 2007, was below 40% at the end of 2008 (1985= 100). The Dow Jones index, the heartbeat of Wall Street, was down over 40% from its high.

Like so many crises this one did not come out of the blue. The trends were there to be seen; they just were ignored. The triple deficits run up during the Bush Administration – budget, trade and international investment – constituted “the worst financial deterioration in our history,” as the esteemed Peter Peterson called it well before the late 2008 meltdown. Financing this torrent of red ink meant becoming the largest borrower in the world, becoming what *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf calls a “superpower on borrowed money” – and about which he asked “how long can it last?” Not much longer, as we all found out.²

America’s technological edge was being challenged in one industry after another, and not just because of the strides being taken by other nations but as a consequence of self-inflicted problems like under-investment. The Business Roundtable tellingly used the term “atrophy” to express its concern about what had been happening to American scientific and technological superiority. The U.S. National Intelligence Council pointed to science and technology as the key uncertainty for whether the United States could remain the world’s “single most important actor”. The declining

competitiveness of the American automotive industry, that which for a century was a driving economic engine and defining cultural symbol, was very evident before the 2008 bailout crisis. Even the high tech sector was showing signs of declining competitiveness. The \$15 billion surplus in sectoral trade balance (1999) became a \$44 billion deficit. Ranking for broadband internet access dropped from first to 16th. While Microsoft and Google may still be in a class of their own, overall only six of the world’s top information technology companies are U.S.-based compared to 14 in Asia.

Such data are disturbing but shouldn’t be surprising in light of underlying measures. The United States ranked 24th of 29 in math literacy among 15 year-olds; the same low ranking for problem solving skills. In 2004 the United States already was behind 16 countries in Asia and Europe on the proportion of college degrees in science and engineering. By 2006 it had fallen further to 32nd. In higher education over 50% of engineering Ph.D.s in U.S. universities were being earned by foreign nationals. No wonder 35% of 200 U.S.-based multinationals surveyed were planning to relocate at least some of their R&D facilities overseas, especially in India and China.

The deterioration of the nation’s infrastructure not only was further hampering economic competitiveness but posed dangers to basic safety. One study found one-quarter of the bridges “structurally deficient or obsolete”, drinking water and wastewater facilities in need of “extensive repair”, and public transportation “unable to keep pace with growing demand”.

The U.S. health care system also had fallen from its heralded status. It was spending more but getting less overall: #1 in health care as percentage of GDP but 22nd of 30 in life expectancy, according to OECD data. It was especially bad for children: 84th in the world for measles immunization, 89th for polio; 43rd in the world in infant mortality, including 11.5 babies dying per 1,000 live births before their first birthday in Washington, D.C., compared to 4.6 in Beijing.

A growing number of studies also were showing that social mobility in the United States was not what it once was, that only the United Kingdom and South Africa are showing less economic mobility from generation to generation, and that the United States has the highest income inequality among developed nations. The jobs created in the 2004-05 recovery paid 21% less than those lost in the 2001-03 recession. Median family income was falling. Poverty reached an all-time high. Child poverty went up five years in a row. Meanwhile the top 1% were garnering a larger share of national wealth. The wealthiest 300,000 take in almost as much as the bottom 150,000,000. For the federal minimum wage to have stayed proportional to executive compensation, it would have to be over \$23/hour instead of under \$6.



Most of the Bush economic and domestic policies were too little too late at best, fundamentally flawed at worst. President Bush came across to many as out of touch. Many corporate leaders appeared to still care more about their bonuses and perks such as private jets and lavish office decorations than the consequences of their mismanagement to their employees, stockholders and others.

This was the situation as the Obama Administration took office.

Immigration and the changing profile of the American people

The United States has been in the midst of the greatest surge of immigration since the early 20th century. One in five residents is now a recent immigrant or a close relative of one (Reynolds; Haaga, 2005 and Thompson, 2009) This actually is still less than the early 20th century when about one-third of the population had been

born in another country or to at least one foreign-born parent. That wave of immigration, drawn largely from Western and Eastern Europe

and largely to American cities and manufacturing jobs of the industrial

revolution, had profound impact on American politics

and society. While often portrayed in history

books as a harmonious “melting pot”, in which resi-

dents were accepting and immigrants assimilating, there were plenty

of controversies over jobs, discrimination and other contentious issuers. So too with this

21st century immigration wave, which has its own distinctive characteristics and its own major political and policy debates.

A major difference is in the identity of the immigrants. In the early 20th century close to 80% came from Western Europe and another 15% from Eastern Europe; only about 2% came from Latin America. By 1950 the percentages were about 50%, 25% and 8%, respectively. Now they are about 15% from Western Europe, 10% from Eastern Europe and 55% from Latin America. Another 25% hail from Asia and the Middle East. Overall Hispanics now constitute about 15% of the total U.S. population. Forecasts are that by 2050 the Hispanic population will nearly triple in absolute numbers and reach a 30% share of the total U.S. population.

All told, by 2023 the “minority” population (Hispanic, black, Native American, Asian, others) is expected to constitute a majority of the nation’s children under 18; by 2039 a majority of working-age Americans; and

by 2042 a majority of the overall population. States such as California and Texas already have “majority minorities”.

One main area in which the impact is intense is education. Over the last decade the number of students who are in the process of learning English has grown by about 60%. Spanish is the native language of about 77% of these.³ Moreover, this is not just concentrated in states like California and Texas. In North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia and other southern states the increases in Spanish-speaking students have been close to 200%.

Much of the political debate has centered on illegal immigration. Estimates put the number of illegal immigrants at 12 million. Should they be deported back to Mexico and the other countries from which they came? Should they be put on a path to citizenship? What rights do illegal immigrants have while these other issues are being worked out? Do they have civil rights protections? Should they receive health benefits? And how to reduce future illegal immigration? Efforts to answer these questions through new legislation failed in 2008.

Americans tend to “celebrate their immigrant past while being wary about recent immigrants,” as Professor Daniel Tichenor, a leading authority on immigration, has put it.⁴ As difficult as these issues have been in recent years, the economic crisis makes them all the more difficult and even volatile.

The Bush foreign policy and its legacies

Overall the Bush foreign policy left the United States in a substantially weakened global position. Public opinion polls showed how much America’s reputation had fallen globally, At home as well Bush’s foreign policy approval rating, over 80% back in the immediate post-9/11 days, was below 30%. But it wasn’t just a matter of opinions globally and nationally. It was the actual policy problems that filled the agenda: wars, crises, dangerous trends and new challenges that were, as New York Times reporter David Sanger titled his book, “the inheritance” that the Bush foreign policy was leaving its successor (Sanger, 2009).

The Iraq war has now lasted longer than U.S. involvement in World War II. The shift in strategy to “the surge” in 2007 did help stabilize Iraq. But doubts remained as to whether it would be sustainable either militarily or politically. Moreover, it could not undo the damage already done. Sanger captures these well:

The long-term costs of the Iraq war goes beyond the tragic loss of more than 4,000 of America’s finest young men and women, the tens of thousands of Iraqis, countless casual-

"The Bush foreign policy left the United States in a substantially weakened global position"

ties, and the roughly \$800 billion spent since the invasion. There were also huge opportunity costs. We squandered many opportunities to project American influence around the globe and lost the credibility we needed to rally the world to confront far more imminent threats to our security than Saddam Hussein's Iraq ever posed. (Sanger, 2009)

One of Barack Obama's main campaign pledges was to end the war in Iraq. Early in his presidency he modified his original 16-month timeline for getting American combat troops out of Iraq to 19 months. There was some criticism of this shift as well as of 50,000 forces that would remain for anti-terrorism, training and other limited but ongoing missions. Obama also pledged to shift from a military surge to a diplomatic surge, more actively engaging global and regional powers as well as the sectarian groups in Iraq.

The Bush Administration also left Afghanistan in a precarious situation. The Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai had grown weaker not stronger over time. The Taliban were resurgent. Al Qaeda was displaced but not decimated. About half of Afghanistan's gross domestic product is coming from opium poppy growing and the narcotics trade, with some of the blame tracing back to Afghan government corruption. Controversies over civilian casualties increased. Here too a so-called victory had been short-lived, and the Bush policy needed major overhaul. Indeed the failures had spread to now include Pakistan where despite the embrace of and aid to military dictator Pervez Musharraf al Qaeda had found a safe haven and internal instability was rampant.

The broader Middle East was also in bad shape. The Bush Administration ignored two main lessons of the Arab-Israeli conflict: (1) As hard as peace is today, it is that much harder tomorrow; (2) While the United States cannot impose peace on the parties, the main way progress has been made over the past 30-40 years has been when the U.S. plays an active role as peace broker. The Bush Administration heralded its Annapolis conference in late 2007 as a renewed peace process, but it was more "drive-by diplomacy" than sustained and priority effort. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict grew worse, culminating in the December 2008 Gaza war. Efforts to isolate Syria had little impact. Relations with Iran grew ever worse amidst tensions over Iran's nuclear program, its support for Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and its President's extreme rhetoric about Israel and the United States.

These and other issues impacted U.S.-European relations. That the Alliance survived Iraq was not a given, and was telling in its own right. The outpouring of enthusiasm and excitement that greeted Barack Obama's electoral victory, and all that it manifested historically and culturally as well as for foreign policy,

was extraordinary. All this was quite understandable – politically, social psychologically, emotionally. Strategically, though, this should not yet be taken too far in considering the future of the Atlantic Alliance. Much will be better, much will be well – but much will remain to be worked through. Issues of "the logic and character of the Atlantic political order and its future," as one group of scholars write in *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, run deeper than just who is the American President. Indeed whether we are *Growing Apart?* is a matter not just of the particulars of the foreign policy agenda but of social forces and other dynamic within our political systems and overall societies.⁵

Three main sets of issues dominate U.S.-European relations. One is the future of NATO and relations with Russia. As NATO expansion came up to Ukraine and Georgia, it was an even more contentious issue with Russia than prior expansions. Proponents of NATO expansion in both the United States and Europe saw the Russia-Georgia war as evidence that Russia remains expansionist and aggressive, putting NATO's credibility even more at stake. If it did not go ahead with expansion. No, NATO expansion opponents contend, expansion did not strengthen deterrence so much as provoke Russia. Russia expressed its concerns all along, and now that it has recovered economically and the issues are hitting closer to home what we are seeing is less a shift than a culmination in what had been building all along as NATO expanded. Overall relations with Russia entail other issues as well including human rights, energy security, Kosovo independence, missile shield deployments, and the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Getting on a more balanced course will take both collaborative Alliance initiatives and national but coordinated ones from Washington and European capitals – and, of course, from Moscow.

Afghanistan is another major issue in U.S.-European relations. The war/peace operations there have been bringing out serious intra-alliance differences over commitment and strategy. Polls show similar views in Europe and America on some dimensions of the mission – e.g., 73% of Americans and 79% of Europeans in favor of providing security for economic reconstruction projects, 76% and 68% for assisting training of Afghan police and military forces, 70% and 76% on anti-narcotics. But on conducting combat operations support diverged between 67% of Americans and 43% Europeans ("Transatlantic...", 2008).

The other major issue is the global economic crisis. While Europe is far from blameless, American policies and markets were the principal causes. It thus is not unreasonable for Europeans and others to argue for greater U.S. sharing of the burdens of adjustment. At the same time Europe has its own problems even har-



monizing economic policies within the EU. The Bush Administration did host a G-20 meeting in November, but this was more of a photo op than a serious effort at global coordination.

Turning to China, the Bush foreign policy got off to a bumpy start but ended up with a better record. Its original view stressed China as more of a strategic competitor to be contained than a potential strategic partner to be engaged. Issues such as trade, Taiwan, human rights and military competition did continue to cause tensions. But overall they were effectively managed. There was increasing recognition that as a Princeton University study put it, “the shifting distribution of power in Asia is one of the largest, if not the largest, geopolitical events confronting the United States . . . Although this power shift has many components it is largely defined by the rise of China” (Fukuyama; Ikenberry, 2005). Efforts were made to reassure traditional allies such as Japan that improved relations with China would not negatively affect them. Indeed Japan and others in East Asia pursued their own relations with

China both bilaterally and within regional organizations. There also was increased recognition that China needed to be more effectively engaged on global issues such as Iran and Darfur.

"Three main sets of issues dominate US-European relations: The future of NATO and relations with Russia, Afghanistan, and the global economic crisis"

In Africa the Bush Administration did more than some others on Darfur but still too little too late. It invoked the term genocide when others would not. It supported various UN Security Council resolutions authorizing a peacekeeping force. But it never gave the issue the prominence or brought to bear the pressure that would have reflected a genuine U.S. priority. The Bush Administration played some role in resolving the elections crisis in Kenya in late 2008, but most of the credit went to the UN and former Secretary-General Kofi Annan for effective diplomacy. On global AIDS, an issue that particularly affects Africa, the Bush policy got credit for significantly increasing U.S. funding, but with criticism for attaching restrictive conditions such as stressing abstinence education.

Relations with Latin America were in bad shape on a number of fronts. With Mexico, immigration had become an even bigger controversy. So too was the drug trade for which the United States blamed Mexico for corruption and poor law enforcement while Mexico pointed to the demand for drugs as well as the supply of guns both coming from the U.S. side of the Rio Grande. While there was decreasing support for Venezuelan caudillo Hugo Chavez in the rest of Latin America,

many saw the Bush efforts to overthrow and demonize him as strengthening more than weakening him. The stubborn refusal to even begin to explore relations with Cuba was widely seen as frozen in the past.

More broadly the Bush Administration left behind a reputation of being ideologically opposed to multilateralism. Even before Iraq it had established an in-your-face approach to global diplomacy --- pronouncing the Kyoto treaty “dead on arrival”, writing off international law as “deeply and perhaps irrevocably flawed”, repeatedly castigating the United Nations. “Has George Bush ever met a treaty that he liked?,” the *Economist* editorialized. “It is hard to avoid the suspicion that it is the very idea of multilateral cooperation that Mr. Bush objects to” (Jentleson, 2007). While on some issues the Bush approach has tempered in its final years, it had not repaired the breach. On the global environment the United States was still seen as the laggard not the leader. On the Doha Round World Trade Organization (WTO) trade talks, while not alone in sharing the blame for the deadlock it also could not claim much leadership. It stayed outside new institutions like the International Criminal Court even as they got up and running. To be sure, multilateral institutions need to do much better. But it is one thing to constructively criticize and seek to improve, quite another to appear to take solace in their failings.

Even after eight years of the Bush foreign policy, most of the world still held to the view that international peace and prosperity are most likely to be achieved if the United States plays a significant and constructive leadership role. Developing and pursuing policies consistent with this global role was the challenge facing President Barack Obama as he came to office.

Combined with the economic crisis, the rest of the domestic agenda, and the societal and cultural dynamics of immigration, one could see the truth in Obama’s Grant Park election night speech, that “the challenges that tomorrow will bring are the greatest of our lifetime.”

Notes

1. Transcript: Obama’s Acceptance Speech,” November 4, 2008, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ynews/ynews_pl135
2. These and other quotes and statistics in paragraphs that follow drawn from Bruce W. Jentleson, Inner Strength: U.S. Economic Competitiveness and the Lessons of Tonya Harding,” *The Globalist*, August 6, 2007, www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=6364

3. The next largest is Vietnamese at 2-3%.
4. Daniel Tichenor, "Immigration and Ethnic Minorities," presentation at conference on "The Obama Presidency: From Hope to Achievement," University of Quebec at Montreal, March 5, 2009.
5. Books cited are Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse, eds., *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), and Jeffrey Kopstein and Sven Steinmo, eds., *Growing Apart? America and Europe in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). For further discussion see Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Atlantic Alliance in a Post-American World," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, March 2009.

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WARNING: WARNING: Several US cities are currently enforcing a COVID curfew. Take extreme caution of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the United States recommends all international travelers to stay in isolation for 2 weeks upon arrival, or until a negative COVID test is provided*. Traveling across some state lines without following these guidelines may also be prohibited. Rarely, the virus has trapped people in the country for a prolonged period of time. Hospital bills for serious COVID-19 United States country profile. BBC â€¢ November 9, 2020. Map of the USA.Â The United States originated in a revolution which separated it from the British Crown. The constitution, drafted in 1787, established a federal system with a division of powers which has remained unchanged in form since its inception. Read more country profiles - Profiles by BBC Monitoring. FACTS. LEADERS. Country name. conventional long form: United States of America. conventional short form: United States. abbreviation: US or USA. etymology: the name America is derived from that of Amerigo VESPUCCI (1454-1512) - Italian explorer, navigator, and cartographer - using the Latin form of his name, Americus, feminized to America.Â time difference: UTC-5 (during Standard Time). daylight saving time: +1hr, begins second Sunday in March; ends first Sunday in November. note: the 50 United States cover six time zones. etymology: named after George Washington (1732-1799), the first president of the United States. Administrative divisions. United States country profile. Published. 6 days ago.Â The United States originated in a revolution which separated it from the British Crown. The constitution, drafted in 1787, established a federal system with a division of powers which has remained unchanged in form since its inception. Read more country profiles - Profiles by BBC Monitoring. FACTS. United States of America. Capital: Washington, DC. Population 316 million.