

Topic 4 THE USA TODAY – STILL THE NATION TO TRUMP OTHERS?

1 Complete the text using vocabulary from topic 4.

Current issues in the United States

It is not surprising that a nation the size of the United States faces many complex political and social issues. These issues often seem new and modern and something that Americans are confronting for the first time. However, looking more closely at many of these discussions it becomes clear that similar discussions have been held in the past and indeed many of the issues have been there before.

For example, since WWII, because of its military strength and economic influence, the U.S. often did not refrain from exerting influence around the world, from forming alliances and creating institutions like the United Nations to actually intervening in the affairs of other nations. This was not always the policy of the U.S. Up until the early 20th century, the U.S. followed a policy called isolationism, meaning that they refrained from interfering with the affairs of other nations with the understanding that other nations not get involved in the affairs of the U.S.

Recently, many political analysts claim that President Trump is returning the U.S. to a more isolationist policy. For instance, he has backed out of international trade agreement negotiations and is not abiding by the Paris climate accord. He also expressed an unwillingness to engage actively in certain United Nations agencies (e.g. by pulling out of UNESCO) and also showed skepticism towards the NATO alliance, which has caused unease amongst allies. On the other hand, some analysts are of the opinion that recent moves such as the decision to acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of Israel are a clear indication of a more interventionist stance.

Gun control as a means of reducing gun violence has been an issue hotly debated in the U.S. for decades. The founding fathers felt very strongly about allowing Americans the right to own guns. They guaranteed it in the second amendment to the constitution. At that time there was no standing army. Protection was provided by armed citizen militias that formed when there was a threat. Today, many people say that this law should be changed. The situation now is different than 200 years ago, and assault weapons have become far more powerful and dangerous. There have been devastating shootings that have cost many lives in recent years. But others fiercely hold on to their right to bear arms. They are represented by the NRA, the National Rifle Association, which is the main organ of the gun lobby. Because of the strong differences of opinion, this issue is likely not to be resolved in the near future.

The legalization of cannabis (also called marijuana) has been a much discussed issue in the U.S. recently. Cannabis is a plant that was used in the past to make many different products including cloth, rope and paper. Because it contains a substance called THC, it can also be used as a drug. Consequently, the United States and many other countries made cannabis illegal. However, this did not stop the use of cannabis as a drug. Even though it was illegal many people smoked it and to a certain extent, it became “cool” to use it because of the fact that it was illegal. Many popular figures including musicians, film stars and politicians admitted to having smoked it, and it symbolizes the lifestyle of the hippie movement in the 1960s. Through a referendum in 2012, the states Colorado and Washington made recreational use of marijuana legal. Many others states have followed suit. Although the marijuana issue is new, the arguments whether certain drugs should be legal or not are quite old. The U.S. banned the making and selling of alcoholic beverages in 1920. This was called *prohibition*. It lasted 13 years. The arguments back then for and against banning alcohol are very similar to those used in the cannabis debate today.

Finally, possibly one of the most important issues of our day is the influence of the internet and social media on our society as a whole. Terms such as “fake news”, “post-truth” and “echo chamber” among others are being used in connection with a phenomenon that was largely unforeseen only a few years ago. Whereas Facebook at the beginning was seen as a new way for people to connect, reconnect or just find new interest groups and friends, it has turned out to have been instrumental in the spread of false information that had an enormous impact on recent elections. In the past, most of us received our news from radio, television or newspapers written by professional journalists who generally followed a code of ethics that involved fact-checking and verifying information. Within the internet this filter is now often missing and the proliferation of invalidated and often distorted information robs us all of the ability of carrying out educated debates and making informed decisions. Actually, a similar situation existed within the newspaper industry in the early part of the 20th century. Individual newspapers aimed at a particular audience expressing the views of just one political party or community created, back then, a kind of echo chamber similar to those found today. The problem was recognized and in 1923 the American Society of Newspaper Editors formulated the “Code of Ethics or Canons of Journalism”. This improved the quality of journalism.

2 Match the words on the left (1-8) with their synonyms on the right (A-H).

D	1	to assess something	A	wonderful
F	2	to generate something	B	not enough
B	3	insufficient	C	extent
A	4	terrific	D	to judge something
H	5	quantity	E	following
C	6	scale	F	to create something
E	7	subsequent	G	following something
G	8	in the wake of something	H	amount

3 Match the words on the left (1-8) with their definitions on the right (A-H).

F	1	to appall somebody	A	to become faster or stronger
A	2	to gain momentum	B	to make something worse
B	3	to compound something	C	to check that something is true
D	4	to resume something	D	to begin an activity again after an interruption
C	5	to verify something	E	extreme anger
H	6	devastating	F	to shock somebody very much
E	7	fury	G	to officially decide not to punish somebody
G	8	to pardon somebody	H	causing a lot of damage

4 Fill in the gaps.

- In recent years, we have encountered the phenomenon of filter bubbles which have the effect that internet users are only provided with news items that appeal to their emotions.
- There have always been filter bubbles to a certain degree, but never to the extent as we experienced them in 2016; this was unprecedented.
- Another important issue in current US politics is the question of gun control, i.e., of how to deal with firearms.
- In recent years, there have been terrible shootings which have had terrible, devastating consequences.
- They have left many people grieving for loved ones that they lost.
- Most measures that have been taken were insufficient, they were not enough to really work.

5 What is it in English?

- Einschätzung assessment
- etwas gegen etwas eintauschen to swap something for something
- Waffenruhe ceasefire
- Haushaltskürzung budget cut
- Verschwörungstheorie conspiracy theory
- noch nie dagewesen unprecedented
- empört outraged