



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

TOPICS

Elections in the U.S., to prove someone wrong, effect vs. affect, to wait on someone vs. to wait for someone, big vs. large, I'm fine vs. I'm good vs. I'm well

GLOSSARY

primary election – an election where voters decide which candidate (the person who wants the position) from each party will run in a future election against the other parties

* The primary election will cut down the number of candidates for governor from eight to two.

to take office – to begin work in a specific job, usually used for important government positions

* Do you think that the new mayor will keep his promises after he takes office?

legislative – related to making laws or policies

* The legislative council voted to pass the new budget before the deadline.

midterm elections – elections where members of the U.S. Congress are elected but the U.S. president is not; elections in the middle of the U.S. president's term of office

* There were fewer people who voted in the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections than in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

term of office – the number of years someone can hold an office or a government position

* Some people think that the president of the United States should have a longer term of office than four years.

to cast a ballot – to vote; to indicate who you want to hold a public office or a government position

* If you cast a ballot for me, you're casting a ballot for a cleaner environment and better schools.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

candidate – someone who wants to hold an office or a job, or be the winner of a prize

* Did you know that Dr. Jeff McQuillan is a candidate for the Nobel prize this year?

polling place – the place where people go to vote

* Right before the polls closed at 8 p.m. last night, we saw a lot of people standing in line at the polling place.

voter turnout – the percentage of people who vote in an election of all those who are allowed to vote

* The voter turnout for the election this year was the highest in 10 years.

to prove (someone) wrong – to show, usually with evidence, that someone is wrong or has made a mistake

* His teacher told him that he wouldn't do well in college. To prove her wrong, he studied hard and was admitted to the University of California, Berkeley.

effect – result or outcome

* Even though she's very beautiful, she has no idea of the effect she has on men when she walks into a room.

to affect – to influence or to change

* The team didn't allow their early losses in the season to affect their playing.

to wait on (someone) – to give someone service; to be a servant for someone

* When you get married, don't expect your husband or wife to wait on you.

to wait for someone – to expect someone; to stay in a place where you expect someone to arrive

* We've been waiting for Brianna for an hour. I don't think she's coming.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

“And so, my fellow Americans: Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.” – President John F. Kennedy (1961)

For many Americans, President John F. Kennedy is one of the presidents the country has ever had. This quote is from President Kennedy’s “inaugural address.” The word “inaugural” means the beginning of a period of time, usually the beginning of a time when someone serves in a governmental office or job. An “address” is a formal speech, usually given by an important person. This quote is well known to most Americans, and in it, President Kennedy is asking his “fellow” Americans, or other Americans like him, to stop waiting for the government to do something good for them. Instead, he wants Americans to start thinking about how to do things that will benefit their own country.

John F. Kennedy was president for less than three years when he was “assassinated,” or killed. (The verb “to assassinate” is used instead of “to murder” when we talk about an important person, usually someone who is a political or religious leader.) President Kennedy was killed by a gunshot while he was riding in a “convertible,” or a car with a folding or removable roof, in a “parade,” or a public celebration, in Texas. There have been many “conspiracy theories” about how he was killed. A conspiracy theory is a belief that a powerful organization is controlling others and is responsible for something that happened. Even though the police “arrested,” or took to jail, the man who they believed shot the president, some people still believe that someone else shot him or that his assassination was arranged by powerful people who didn’t like him politically.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café number 53.

This is English Café episode 53. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

On today's Café, we're going to talk about elections in the United States. This is the time of year when we have our elections, some of our elections, for our representatives in government. So, I'm going to talk a little bit about how that works here in the U.S., and as always, we're going to answer several of your questions. Let's get started.

Be sure to visit our website at eslpod.com, where you can find the Learning Guide for this podcast. You can get a list of all the words that we use and their definitions, as well as additional words and definitions, culture notes and a complete transcript of this episode.

Our topic today is elections in the United States. This is how we select, or pick, people who lead the government, or don't lead the government, depends on your opinion of them.

We have two kinds of elections. The first kind of election is what we would call a primary election, "primary." A primary election is an election to vote for the person who's going to represent a particular political party. In the United States, we have two major political parties, two large political parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Someone who is in the Democratic Party is called a Democrat and someone in the Republican Party is called a Republican. And each of these parties gets to select, or choose, who is going to represent them for the second kind of election, which is called the general election. So, the primary election is when you choose the representative from each party, and the general election decides who will actually win that particular office. We call the positions in the government, like the president, the vice president, the governor – these are called offices, and when you win an election, usually a couple of months later, you take office, meaning you start your job as that elected official, that elected person.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

We have a primary election in the United States, and usually these are in the spring or the summer, and then we have general elections that are usually in November. The traditional day for the general election is the first Tuesday in November. Now, this is not a holiday. This is not a day you get off work. In some countries, elections are on Sunday or people get off work for the election. That is not true in the United States. The day of our national elections, or our state elections, or our city elections are not holidays. The general election, I said, usually is the first Tuesday of November.

We have, as you know, three parts of our national government and three parts of our state government. The executive part of our government is the president for the national government or the governor for the state government. We also have representatives, individuals that come from different parts of each state, or from different states, and this is the legislative branch of government. Legislative, “legislative,” means that they are the ones that decide on what the laws are going to be. In the U.S., in most states and nationally there are two parts of our legislative branch: there’s the Senate, “senate,” and there’s the House of Representatives. The senators are smaller in number; there are fewer senators. On the national level, there are two senators for every state, so we have 50 states, which means we have...that’s right, 100 senators. In the U.S. House of Representatives, we have 435 voting representatives, and these come from different parts of the state, in different states. The bigger states, like California, Texas, New York, the larger population states have more representatives; the small population states have fewer representatives.

The national elections are held every four years for the president. So, our last election was in 2004, our next election will be in 2008. But, we also have elections, what we call midterm elections, “midterm,” all one word. A midterm election is an election in the middle of the four year period for the president, so 2006, 2010 – those would be midterm elections. And, in the midterm elections, we have two kinds of elections: We have elections for the House of Representatives. All of the House of Representatives have to be elected every two years, so your term of office, that is, the length that you can stay in your office after you are elected, is two years for the House of Representatives. For the Senate, it’s six years. So, every two years, all of the 435 national House of Representative members have to be elected. For the senators – we have 100 senators; we break them up into three groups. So, a third of the senators are elected every two years, and they have six years in their term of office. So, this year, about 33 or 34 senators will be elected.



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

The elections in the United States are usually ones where you go to a certain place and you cast your ballot. Your ballot, “ballot,” is the piece of paper or the computer screen – I guess nowadays – that you use to indicate, to say, I want this person, I want this person. That’s your ballot. The verb to cast, “cast,” your ballot is one that we use when we talk about elections.

The people that are trying to be elected are called candidates, “candidates,” plural. A candidate is a person who wants to be elected to a certain office. The place where you go to cast your ballot is called a polling place, or sometimes we just say the polls, “polls.” A poll, or a polling place, is a place where you go to cast your ballot, and in the U.S., those are usually in schools or churches – they are temporary places where you can go and vote. In some smaller communities, people even have polling places in their garages so people can come and vote, but mostly it’s school, churches, other places – public places where people can go and vote.

In many states, including California, if you are going to be gone on the day of the election, you can cast your ballot by mail. Now, in California and a few other states, even if you’re going to be present in the state on the day of the election, you can vote by mail. I, for example, now do all of my voting by mail. So, the government sends me my paper ballot a couple of weeks before the election, usually, I think a month before the election, and then I fill it out and I have to mail it by the day of the election, and, if I mail it by the day of the election, then they will count it. That is becoming much more popular because, of course, it’s more convenient. You cannot vote on the Internet, however, though some people would like that to happen.

The qualifications for voting in the United States are pretty simple. You have to be 18 years old, you have to be a citizen of the United States, and in some states, you have to be someone who has not committed a serious crime, hasn’t done anything serious wrong. Sometimes, in some states, if you are in prison because you are a criminal – you’ve done something wrong, you’ve broken the law – you do not have the right to vote. But generally speaking, if you’re 18 and you are a(n) official citizen of the United States you can vote. There are no tests that you have to take, no taxes you have to pay to vote. It’s free to vote. In many states, such as California, there are people who speak different languages, we actually have ballots that are bilingual – that is, you can see the information in



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

Spanish or Vietnamese or Korean or Chinese or Armenian, depending on the people who live in that area. Not all states have bilingual ballots, but many do.

One more term that you might be interested in learning about is something that became very popular in the last election – actually I think it was probably in the 2000 presidential election – and that’s red state and blue state. If someone says, “I come from a red state,” that means they come from a state that is Republican. If they say they come from a blue state that means they come from a state where most of the people are Democrats. Now, why red and blue? Well, on the television stations, when we have a presidential election, an election for our president, if a certain candidate wins the majority of the votes for that state, they put the color, either blue or red on the state and they show a map of the United States on election night, and you can see which state voted for which candidate, for which political party. Why red and blue? I’m not sure exactly. Those are just the colors that the television stations picked to represent the different parties. So, now we say that we have red states and we have blue states, and that means that we have Republican states and Democratic states.

The U.S. in some elections has very low voter turnout. Turnout, “turnout,” means the percentage of people that could vote that actually did vote. In our presidential elections, I think it’s a little over 50 percent, which means that almost half of the people don’t go and vote. And this, of course, is a problem in many places where we have people who don’t actually go and vote.

Now let’s answer a few questions. Our first question today comes from Juan, “Juan,” Luis, “Luis.” Juan Luis is in Mexico. He wants to know the meaning of the expression “she proved me wrong.” To prove, “prove,” someone wrong means that you show them that they are incorrect, that they have made a mistake, usually by giving them some evidence, or some proof, we would say “proof,” that someone did something wrong. So, for example, someone says, “I think the capitol city in Minnesota is Minneapolis,” and someone else says, “No, no, you’re wrong.” This other person gets a map and shows it to you and says, “See? It’s not Minneapolis, it’s St. Paul.” I have proven you wrong. I have showed you why you are incorrect.

Our next question is from Alexis, “Alexis,” and Alexis is in Tibet. His question has to do with the difference between the words “effect,” effect and “affect,” affect. Well, it’s a good question, and it’s something that is often very confusing, even for native speakers. Generally speaking, we use the word effect, “effect,” as a



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

noun to mean something that is a change, something that has changed because of some cause. Something did something...someone did something, rather, to change something. So, you would say, “The weather has an effect on me,” meaning the weather has changed me, or “One effect of the election this year is that we will have higher taxes,” means one consequence, one result of the election. That is effect, with an “e” used as a noun.

Affect, with an “a,” “affect,” is usually used as a verb, and when we say affect we are saying that something has an affect on something else. So, “The weather affected me,” means the weather changed me. Notice that we use affect as a verb to mean to change, and we use effect, with an “e,” to be a noun meaning a change. So, it can be very confusing. Now, to make things even more confusing, sometimes you can use effect, with an “e,” as a verb as well. But generally speaking, when we use effect with an “e,” we use it as a noun meaning a change. When we use affect with an “a,” we use it as a verb meaning to have an affect, to change something. So, thank you Alexis, from the beautiful region of Tibet, for that question. (All regions, of course, are beautiful, not just Tibet.)

Our next question comes from Zsolti, “Zsolti,” in Hungary, and Zsolti wants to know the meaning of the expression to “wait on (someone)” and to “wait for (someone).” When you say you are waiting on someone, usually you are in a restaurant or you are somewhere where you are helping someone else. The person who takes your order and brings your food in a restaurant is called a waiter, “waiter.” The verb is to wait on. “He is waiting on you,” means he is taking care of you; he is providing you with service. To wait for someone means that you are sitting somewhere and you are expecting someone else to come; that is to wait for someone. So, I told my friend that I would wait for him at the mall, at the shopping mall, at three o’clock. So, I go to the shopping mall at three o’clock and I stand there, and I wait for my friend to come.

It is sometimes possible to use “wait on” to mean something similar to “wait for,” especially if you are waiting for an answer to your question or the results of a test, and depending on what happens, you are going to act one way or another, you’re going to do something. I, for example, call the doctor and ask her what happened to my blood test, and I say to my friend, “I’m waiting on the results to see if I need to take some more medicine.” So, I can’t make my decision until I hear the answer. So, in that case you can use “waiting on” in a similar way as “waiting for.” But typically, you wait on someone in a restaurant, if you work in a



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

restaurant you are taking care of them. You wait for someone means you are standing or sitting, or in a place expecting someone to come.

Our next question comes from Andreas in Berlin, “Andreas.” Andreas wants to know the difference between big and large. Well, big and large are adjectives usually used to describe the size of something when it is a size that is more than normal, or more than something else. For example, you can say, “This dress is too big for me; it is a bigger size than I need.” You could say, “The dress is too large for me,” there really isn’t a difference in meaning. If there is a difference it depends on the particular item or thing that you are talking about. I don’t think there’s a general rule about that. If I’m talking about a vegetable, like a tomato, I may say, “This is a large tomato.” You could also say, “This is a big tomato,” but I think large, maybe, would be a little more common in talking about, say, vegetables, or a piece of meat, some sort of food that you eat.

When you’re talking about clothing you can use either big or large, but again, I think large might be a little more common. If you’re talking about an idea, it’s usually more common to use big. So, someone says, “I have a big idea,” that means I have an idea that will require a lot of changes, something that is going to have a big result, or a large result. We would probably not say, “Think large,” although you could. The more common expression would be to “think big,” or “I have a big idea.” So, it depends on the noun that you’re describing, whether you would use big or large, usually though, you can use either one.

Our next question comes from Francesca, “Francesca,” in Italy. Francesca wants to know the meaning of the expression “I’m fine,” “fine,” and “I’m good,” and “I’m well.” If someone says, “How are you?” do you say I’m fine, I’m good or I’m well?

Well, all three of these expressions are popular. When you say to someone, “I’m fine,” usually that means that you’re okay, that there’s no problem. If you say, “I’m good,” that means that you’re not just okay, you’re better than okay; you’re feeling pretty good, for example. “How you doing?” “I’m good, I’m good!” When you say, “I’m well,” usually people use that expression when they are talking about their health. Someone may say, “How are you feeling?” you say, “Well, I’m well” – I’m no longer sick. Again, those are general uses, you may hear people say, “I’m fine,” when they mean they’re doing very, very well, but all of them are popular, and depending on exactly what you are trying to communicate, you may



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 53

use one versus the other. “I’m good” is a little more informal, some people think it’s ungrammatical, but it’s very common and you will hear it often.

Well, I hope that you’re good, you’re fine, you’re well. That’s all we have time for on today’s Café. From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan, thanks for listening. We’ll see you next time on the English Café.

ESL Podcast’s English Café is written and produced by Dr. Jeff McQuillan. This podcast is copyright 2006 by the Center for Educational Development.