

US Presidential Forum

Study Guide

Ending World War II



<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/9437729/Harry-Truman-grandson-to-visit-Hiroshima.html>

The opinions of our scientific colleagues on the initial use of these weapons are not unanimous; they range from the proposal of a purely technical demonstration to that of the military application best designed to induce surrender. Those who advocate a purely technical demonstration would wish to outlaw the use of atomic weapons, and have feared that if we use the weapons now our position in future negotiations will be prejudiced. Others emphasize the opportunity of saving American lives by immediate military use, and believe that such use will improve the international prospects, in that they are more concerned with the prevention of war than with the elimination of this specific weapon. We find ourselves closer to these latter views; we can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use.

Science Panel's Report to the Interim Committee, May 1945

Dear Delegates, this study guide is designed to introduce you to the topic that you will be discussing in your committee: the US Presidential Cabinet Crisis.

Presidential Cabinet

The US presidential cabinet brings together the most memorable and impactful US presidents throughout history, to provide expert advice to sitting US presidents. As a member of the cabinet, you have been instantly transported through time to join the current president.

Ending World II

The date is August 4, 1945, and President Harry Truman sits alone in a conference room. Earlier today, he was asked to approve the nuclear bombing of the Japanese city of Hiroshima. As he sits and thinks, weighing the consequences, his eyes start to feel heavy. He hasn't slept much lately, feeling the stress of weighty decisions, the kinds where each path leads to death. Slowly President Truman puts his head down to rest for a few minutes, and as he does his hands rub the gold-plated corner of his desk. Suddenly he hears a rustling behind him. Picking his head up he's astonished by what he witnesses: people start to appear in the seats. Not just any people: some are US presidents from the past, people he learned about as a kid, such as Washington and Lincoln. The others, he doesn't recognize at all. In fact, these are all American presidents, from 1776 to 2025. These are the people you will be representing today, with the task of ending the WWII fighting between the USA and Japan.

History

WWII has been raging in Europe for 6 years, and the US has been involved since December 1941, after [the bombing of Pearl Harbour](#). Since then, the USA has been at war with the Axis Powers, especially Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. In recent months, the fighting in Europe started coming to an end, following Hitler's suicide, Nazi Germany's surrender, and the Soviet capture of Berlin, but war is still waging fiercely across the Pacific.

The [Manhattan Project](#) has borne results: after three years of secret research and development, the US tested its first atomic weapon just one month ago. In May, the Scientific Committee issued a secret report [recommending the use of atomic weapons to end the war with Japan](#). But the same report outlined the controversy among the scientific community, including those developing the weapons themselves: some warned that a first use of such a devastating weapon would harm future efforts to limit the spread and use of atomic weapons, while others claimed that the use of an atom bomb should follow the same cold calculus of war: if it was expected to end the war sooner and minimize harm to human life, environment and economy, particularly on the US side, then it should be used; if not, it should be avoided.

Timeline:

- **May 7-8, 1945** Germany surrenders to the Allies
- **June 22, 1945** US Military takes control of Okinawa after 82 day battle
- **July 16** [Trinity Test](#) is world's first nuclear weapons test
- **July 26, 1945** [Potsdam Declaration](#) calls on Japan to surrender or face utter destruction.
- **August 4, 1945** Committee starts

List of Presidents

- George Washington (1789-1797)
- Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809)
- Abraham Lincoln (1861-1865)
- Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877)
- Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909)
- Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921)
- Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945)
- Harry S. Truman (1945-1953)
- Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961)
- John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)
- Richard Nixon (1969-1974)
- Ronald Reagan (1981-1989)
- Bill Clinton (1993-2001)
- George W. Bush (2001-2009)
- Barack Obama (2009-2017)
- Donald Trump (2017-2021; 2025-2029)

Key issues

- **Current costs of the ongoing war:** The costs to the world, and especially to the US, must be balanced against the costs and benefits of ending the war with one big blast.
- **Setting a precedent:** will the use of atomic weapons now usher in a new age of even more horrific warfare? Or will it have the opposite effect—will the prospect of atomic warfare lead to a reduction of hostilities?
- **The race for weapons:** If the US doesn't use an atom weapon first, will it fall behind the Soviet Union, or one of the other countries racing to develop the technology? And will the public use of an atom bomb trigger a new arms race, as more countries develop this fearsome weapon to use in the next world war?
- **Reconstruction:** The sooner that all the combat can be ended, the faster the US can turn its focus and resources on to reconstruction, with Europe smoldering, and the Soviet Union positioning itself to try to expand its spheres of influence around the world. At the

same time, the damage from an atom bomb, and any reconstruction costs it will trigger, must also be weighed.

- **Environmental impacts:** What will the long-term impacts of an atomic weapon be, and how can we prepare for them?
- **Failure:** Although the bomb was tested, it has never been used in combat. What happens if it fails, either exploding early, or failing to explode on impact? What if the plane delivering it is shot down or has a technical failure?
- **Targets:** If an atomic weapon is chosen, what should be the targets? How many sites should be hit, and which ones should they be?

Guiding questions:

- Did your character have to lead Americans through any wars?
- Does your president have any military experience or expertise?
- Which other presidents might you ally with?
- Can you find any grounds for compromises?
- Can you come up with any alternatives or are you forced to choose between these two difficult choices?

Learn More:

- <https://verdict.justia.com/2023/08/02/why-didnt-the-u-s-bomb-kyoto>
- <https://www.tamucc.edu/library/exhibits/s/hist4350/page/debate-over-the-bomb>
- <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/history/debate-over-bomb/>
- <https://www.historyextra.com/period/second-world-war/atomic-bomb-hiroshima-nagasaki-justified-us-debate-bombs-death-toll-japan-how-many-died-nuclear/>
- <https://www.osti.gov/opennet/manhattan-project-history/Events/1945/debate.htm>
- <https://idebate.net/this-house-believes-that-the-use-of-atomic-bombs-against-hiroshima-and-nagasaki-was-justified~b1002/>
- <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/hiroshima-and-nagasaki-a-moral-dilemma/>

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Study Guide

Make America Great Again



<https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-big-beautiful-bill-ai-regulation-ban-tech-2025-6>

Just a few months ago, in a beautiful Pennsylvania field, an assassin's bullet ripped through my ear. But I felt then and believe even more so now that my life was saved for a reason. I was saved by God to make America great again.

That is why each day under our administration of American patriots, we will be working to meet every crisis with dignity and power and strength. We will move with purpose and speed to bring back hope, prosperity, safety, and peace for citizens of every race, religion, color, and creed.

President Donald J. Trump, Inaugural Address, Jan. 20, 2025

Make America Great Again (MAGA)

Fast forward 70 years. President Donald John Trump is hard at work, enjoying a bucket of KFC in his office. Like many of his predecessors, he is feeling the stress of the moment, from trying to secure better trade agreements for the United States, to achieving global peace. But mostly, he feels the pressure that he puts on his own shoulders. After all, he has made a promise—to himself and to the American people, to **Make America Great Again**, a promise emblazoned on the made in China **MAGA** hat he wears to protect his all-natural hair from the sun during business meetings at Mar-a-Lago. . Unfortunately years of non-Trump presidents have left America in a bad position—selfishness and bipartisan squabbling have left gaps in everything from healthcare and immigration policy to education and economics.

As President Trump’s mind wanders, his eyes are drawn to the corner of his desk, to a small gold tile sitting atop some papers. It’s a remnant of the old Oval Office desk, now used by President Trump as a fidget spinner, because who wouldn’t want a historic, gold-plated fidget spinner?! As he rubs the shiny metal, he suddenly notices people filling the room. Stuffing fried chicken hastily into the shelves of the desk, President Trump is alarmed—some of these men look completely strange—perhaps they are illegal immigrants, sent to harm him? But no, it turns out they are all native sons—presidents throughout history. President Trump breathes a sigh of relief. Here are men who can understand what he is facing. This is just the team to help him realize his dream of MAGA.

Key Issues

- **Debt:** The US national debt has ballooned to 37 trillion dollars, nearly 100 times what it was a century ago,¹ with most of that growth coming in the last 20 years (2001 was the last year that the US had a balanced budget)². The debt is already bigger than the US annual GDP,³ and it would take every American paying more than \$100,000 to pay off the debt. The annual interest alone is already almost 900 million dollars, as much as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg are worth combined. And the real amount owed may be almost ten times as large once Medicare and Social Security are considered.⁴

¹ <https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/national-debt/>

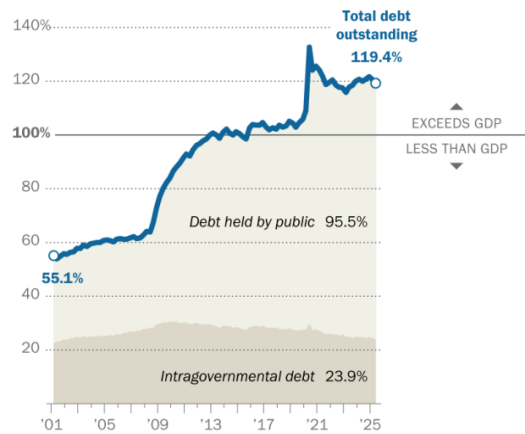
² <https://www.pgpf.org/national-debt-clock/>

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/12/key-facts-about-the-us-national-debt/>

⁴ https://www.truthinaccounting.org/about/our_national_debt

U.S. national debt has risen as a share of gross domestic product

Public debt outstanding as a percentage of GDP, quarterly



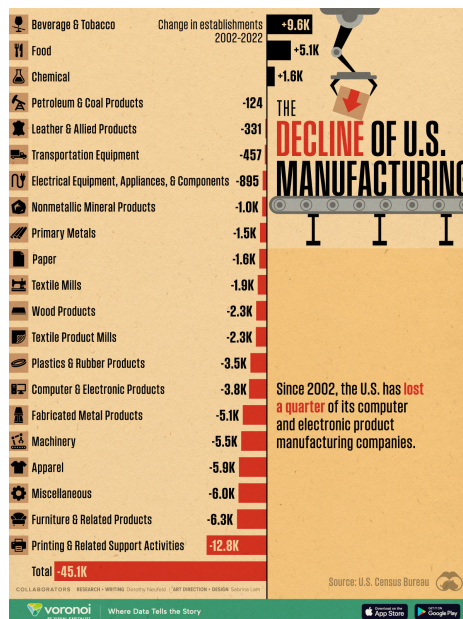
Note: Data as of June 30, 2025.

Sources: Pew Research Center analysis of GDP data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and data from the U.S. Treasury Department's "Monthly Statement of the Public Debt."

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

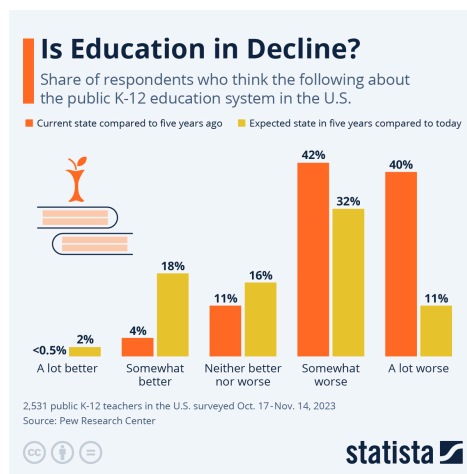
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/12/key-facts-about-the-us-national-debt/>

- Trade Deficit:** The US has run a [trade deficit](#) for the last half century, with the gap growing particularly high over the last 25 years. This is linked to the issue of national debt, as cash flows outward, but is also reflective of a [decline in US manufacturing](#), along with cheaper production centers abroad (including for US owned companies). While President Trump initiated a wide-ranging series of tariffs designed to address this issue, [thus far the results have been mixed](#).



<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-decline-of-u-s-manufacturing-by-sector/>

- **Gun violence:** Shootings and gun violence have gained notoriety in recent years, with public shootings gaining mass attention, and [death by shooting now the leading cause of mortality for Americans under the age of 18](#). However, the situation is more complex than often portrayed. While the murder rate hit its highest rate in 1974, [suicides by shooting are at all-time highs](#), and responsible for the most deaths by shooting. Thus mental health is a key component of the gun shooting phenomenon, along with gun access and other socio-economic factors.
- **Education:** The US has a respectable rank globally, coming in [18th place](#) in the latest PISA rankings, there's still [significant room for improvement](#) to be truly great. In particular the US has struggled with closing gaps between different demographics and regions. While the [Common Core Standards](#) were supposed to improve the situation, fifteen years on, its [failure is widely acclaimed](#), with the only dispute being [over why it failed](#). The fact that most states [cut funding for education](#) has likely not helped, [leading to a teacher shortage of over 100,000](#) nationwide.



<https://www.statista.com/chart/33184/current-and-future-quality-of-the-public-k-12-education-system-in-the-us/>

- **Immigration reform:** America is a nation founded on immigration, [home to nearly 50 million immigrants or first generation citizens](#). However the immigration system hasn't had any serious reforms [in almost 40 years](#), leaving it outdated and ill-equipped for modern immigration challenges. Illegal immigration and undocumented immigrants have become one of the most divisive domestic topics of debate, with lots of fingerpointing and little solutions. There are an estimated [11 million undocumented immigrants](#) in the US, while [immigration court cases have skyrocketed](#). This situation contributes to human trafficking, human rights and children's rights abuses, and conflicts over labor conditions. The attempts thus far to use [ICE](#) to crack down on illegal immigrants have only [exacerbated tensions between the state and federal governments](#).

- **Healthcare:** Rising costs of healthcare are a challenge for government and citizens alike. As [healthcare costs have risen](#), both individuals and employers struggle to pay the insurance premiums, as well as any out of pocket fees for hospital visits or other serious issues. That's before considering the [26 million Americans without any health insurance](#). These challenges are [particularly hard for lower socioeconomic demographics](#), leading to [36% of adults reporting that they've skipped getting needed medical care in the last year](#) and [20% who didn't fill a prescription](#) because of financial considerations. The situation is [compounded by staff shortages](#), and even closing of hospitals and other medical facilities. These factors, along with dietary and other lifestyle choices are responsible for the US [ranking only 49th](#) in global life expectancy ratings, certainly not great! Innovative ideas are needed to bring back high quality medical care and ensure that it is accessible for everyone.

Guiding questions:

- Was your president involved in any of these issues as a president?
- Which issues are most directly related to your character's presidency?
- Which innovative ideas can you suggest for each issue?

Learn More:

- **Debt**
 - <https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/national-debt/>
 - <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/07/07/how-the-us-deficit-could-spark-a-crisis-.html>
 - <https://www.crfb.org/debtfixer>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILEgD83r5Vs>
- **Trade Deficit:**
 - <https://www.newsweek.com/us-trade-deficit-surges-donald-trump-tariffs-2091131>
 - <https://www.wsj.com/economy/us-manufacturing-decline-service-economy-ee97a1e2>
- **Gun Violence**
 - <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/american-gun-violence-goes-global>
 - <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/03/05/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-us/>
- **Education:**
 - <https://community.thriveglobal.com/the-truth-behind-the-curtain-bryan-wetzel-on-why-americas-education-system-is-failing-and-how-we-can-fix-it/>
 - <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/americas-education-system-mess-and-its-students-who-are-paying-price>
 - <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/the-15-biggest-failures-of-the-american-public-education-system>

- <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2025/01/29/naep-reading-scores-decline-and-struggling-students-fall-behind/>
- <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/the-15-biggest-failures-of-the-american-public-education-system>
- <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/americas-education-system-mess-and-its-students-who-are-paying-price>
- **Immigration:**
 - <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-immigration-debate-0>
 - <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-collapse-of-bipartisan-immigration-reform-a-guide-for-the-perplexed/>
 - <https://www.cato.org/publications/us-immigration-policy-lags-behind-globalizing-world>
 - <https://law.stanford.edu/2024/07/24/slss-jennifer-chacon-discusses-the-failures-of-u-s-immigration-policy-over-the-last-decade/>
 - <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/can-the-u.s.-government-compel-states-to-enforce-immigration-law>
- **Healthcare:**
 - <https://time.com/6246045/collapse-us-health-care-system/>
 - <https://www.ajmc.com/view/it-s-time-to-address-our-nation-s-health-care-price-crisis>
 - <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20250402/Healthcare-affordability-crisis-in-the-US-reaches-a-new-high.aspx>
 - <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/issue-brief/americans-challenges-with-health-care-costs/>
 - <https://www.facs.org/for-medical-professionals/news-publications/news-and-articles/bulletin/2025/february-2025-volume-110-issue-2/us-healthcare-system-is-in-crisis/>