

# The Electoral Process

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



*Barack Obama speaks at the Democratic National Convention in 2012.*

## It's Election Time!

Every four years, our country holds a presidential election. The candidates debate, hit the road talking to voters, and put advertisements on television, radio, and the internet. All this hard work actually starts months or even years before Election Day in November. So what does it take to go from a hopeful candidate to a victorious president?

The first public step a candidate has to take is to **declare** to the nation that he or she wants to be the president. Then candidates must get support for their campaign, raise money, and get the attention of the leaders of his or her political party.

## Narrowing the Field

Candidates for the larger political parties are chosen at party meetings called **conventions**. The parties hold conventions at the local, state and national levels. There are two main ways the states send people to the national convention: the caucus and the primary. Both methods result in a set of **delegates** who will attend the national conventions. The delegates pledge that when they attend the convention, they will vote for the candidate the state political party supports.

*Q: What if the president runs for re-election?*

*A: The nomination process still happens, but it is shorter because the incumbent rarely has anyone to run against!*

**Iowa** hosts the first caucus of the season

and **New Hampshire** holds the first primary election, both in early February!

### Caucus System

Meetings where party leaders and supporters select candidates through discussions and consensus.

*(less common)*

### Primary Election

Party delegates from each state are sent to the national conventions to select the nominee.

*(more common)*

Elections host a secret ballot and people vote for the candidate they want to represent their party in the national election.

## And the Nominee is...

Each party holds its national conventions in huge arenas with balloons, confetti, funny looking hats, and lots of media coverage. Delegates chosen from each state discuss and debate the candidates, listen to speeches, and help create the party platform. Near the end of the multi-day convention, the delegates cast their votes for the party's **nominee** who will run in the national election.

The presidential and vice presidential nominees each make an **acceptance speech** that is meant to bring the party together to support the nominees and forget about the months of debate and arguments that led up to their nomination. This is the first major step in getting the national campaign for president up and running.

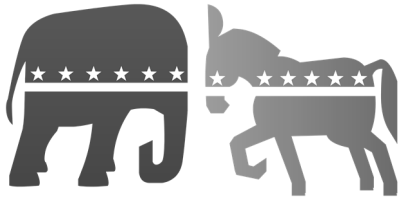


*Mitt Romney at the 2012 Republican National Convention*

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## On the Campaign Trail



Millions of dollars are spent in the months leading up to the national conventions, but that is just the beginning! Once the field is narrowed to the two main party candidates, fundraising becomes even more important. There are only a few months before the general election, and each candidate needs to get his or her message out to the American public. The parties in each state help the candidates with paying the bills and organizing support.

## Get the Word Out!

A political **campaign** is the process of gathering public support for a candidate. The goal of a campaign is to deliver as much information about the candidate and the party's platform to as many people as possible. Candidates campaign in a variety of ways.

<b>Direct Mail :</b> Send information packets directly to voters	<b>Personal Appearances:</b> Radio & TV interviews, debates and speeches
<b>Printed Material:</b> Posters, bumper stickers, leaflets, buttons, t-shirts	<b>The Internet:</b> Emails, websites, videos, blogs, social networking

## Election Day!



All of these efforts lead up to Election Day in November. People across the nation go to the polls and select which candidate they want for the next president. As polls close from state to state, the news media reports who is getting the most votes. The next morning, the media announces a winner of the **popular vote**, which is a tally of all the votes cast. But that is just one step in the process of electing the president...

## The Electoral College

The U.S. Constitution requires an extra step in the process of electing the president. This step is called the **Electoral College**. Each state has a group of people called **electors** who cast the actual votes for president. When

you vote for a presidential candidate, you're really voting to decide which candidate the electors in your state will vote for.

In December after the election, the electors meet in their state capitols and cast their ballots. Even though you cast one vote for a president/vice-president team, electors cast two votes—one for each office. After the electors vote, president of the Senate collects the votes and counts them. There are 538 electors, and in order to win, the presidential and vice-presidential candidates must have an **absolute majority** of votes. That means more than half the votes—at least 270. Then, on January 20, the President-elect and Vice President-elect take the oath of office and are inaugurated.

But what if there's a tie? Or what if no candidate gets 270 votes? In that case, the House of Representatives votes to decide which candidate will become president. If they haven't done that by the time Inauguration Day rolls around, then the vice president-elect acts as president. The Senate decides who that will be by voting to choose one of the vice-presidential candidates. And if that's a tie, too? Then the current Speaker of the House becomes president. That's never happened, but the elections of 1800 and 1824 both had to be resolved by Congress.

You can find out how many electors your state has if you know how many representatives you have in Congress.

EXAMPLE: Illinois has two senators (like all states) and 18 members of the House of Representatives.

2 Senators  
+ 18 Representatives  
20 Electors

# The Electoral Process

## When is Election Day?

November 2020						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

An act of Congress sets the day for presidential and congressional elections as the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

**Circle the date!**

When is Election Day, 2020?

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Electors meet at their state capitols to cast their ballots on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December.

**Circle the date!**

When do the electors meet in 2020?

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December 2020						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

January 2021						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	23	24	15	16
17	18	19	20	21		
24/31	25	26	27	28		

The new president and vice president are sworn into office on January 20th.

The President of the Senate (current Vice President) counts the electoral votes on January 6, unless it falls on a Sunday.

**Circle the date!**

When are the electoral votes counted in 2021?

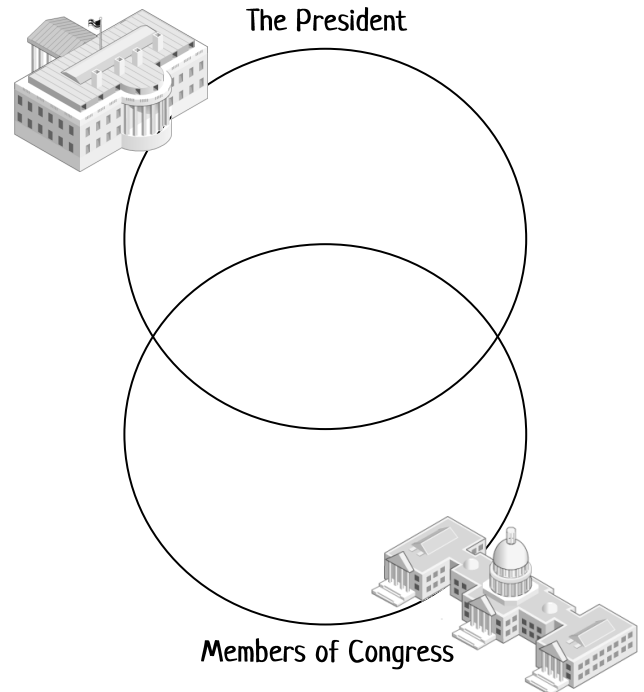
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**A. What's different when there are elections for U.S. Congress?** Candidates for the Senate and House of Representatives have a smaller audience for the campaigns, since they are elected by districts within a specific state. Congress also goes back to work earlier than the President. How do the processes compare? Using this information and what you learned in the lesson, complete the Venn diagram with the letters from the list.

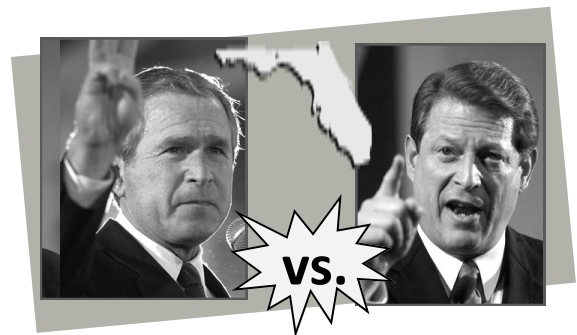
- A. Candidates declare that they want to run for office
- B. Political parties select their nominee for the national election in primaries and caucuses
- C. Candidates run campaigns to inform the public about their agendas and positions on the issues
- D. The winner is directly elected through popular vote.
- E. Officially selected through the Electoral College
- F. Takes office on January 3.



**B. Recount!** Occasionally, election results end up very close and a candidate may call for a recount of all the votes to make sure the winner is the winner. This happened in 2000 when Al Gore and George W. Bush ran for the presidency. The election came down to one state — Florida — where the votes were too close to call.

Bush was declared the winner in Florida, but there were lots of problems with the ballots. Gore pushed the courts to allow a recount in Florida. Bush tried to prevent it. The Florida Supreme Court ruled there should be a recount in the districts where the ballots were in question. Bush appealed that ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Which controversial 5 - 4 decision did the U.S. Supreme Court make?



- ☐ **Decision A:** Get those ballots out and count again! Bush ends up behind in the recount of ballots. Gore wins!
- ☐ **Decision B:** No recounts! The Florida Supreme Court can't order a recount in some districts of the state but not others. There isn't enough time anyway! Bush wins!
- ☐ **Decision C:** Recount ALL the votes in Florida, not just in the messed up districts, fast! Bush takes more of a lead in the recount and Gore concedes (gives up). Bush wins!

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**C. In the Funny Pages** The battle over the results of the 2000 Presidential election between Al Gore (D) and George W. Bush (R) lasted well over a month after Election Day. The confusion over the ballots, recounts, and election rules gave cartoonists a lot of material! Look closely at the cartoon below and answer the questions that follow.

(Remember, the donkey is the symbol for the Democratic Party and the elephant represents the Republican Party.)



1. What is the Democratic message?  
(Look at the sign and t-shirt.)

2. What is the Republican message?  
(Look at the sign and t-shirt.)



Cartoon by Steve Sack, The Minneapolis Star-Tribune

3. What is the purpose of this cartoon?

4. What makes you think that's the purpose?

- ☐ Support the Republican Party's call to end the recount.
- ☐ Support the Democratic Party's call for a recount.
- ☐ Point out that there is a problem with how both parties are dealing with the election.

5. Political cartoons often have captions at the bottom that title, summarize, or explain the cartoon. Create *two* different captions for this cartoon, using what you know about the 2000 election.

Caption 1

Caption 2

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## D. Vocabulary. Match the definitions to the words they describe.

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| __1. When a candidate states that he or she is planning to run for office                                     | A) delegate          |
| __2. Party meetings where candidates are selected and the platform is created                                 | B) nominee           |
| __3. Someone who represents the party views of a state at a national convention                               | C) campaign          |
| __4. The person who is chosen to run as a party's candidate in the national election                          | D) declare           |
| __5. Given by the people selected to run for President and Vice President at the end of a national convention | E) convention        |
| __6. A collection of all the efforts a candidate makes to win an election                                     | F) acceptance speech |

## E. Something's Missing! Fill in the paragraph with the correct terms in the

Electoral College      popular vote      absolute majority      electors



Every four years on Election Day, the American public elects the president of the United States. The first set of election results tallies the \_\_\_\_\_, a count of every vote cast. These results determine whom each state's \_\_\_\_\_ will support when they meet and participate in the \_\_\_\_\_. In order to win, a candidate must have 270 out of a total of 538 electoral votes. This number is half of 538 (269) plus one, which is considered a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.

## F. Oops! A candidate made a to-do list for his run for the presidency, but he dropped it and everything got mixed up. Help him out by numbering the items so the list can be put in the right order.

