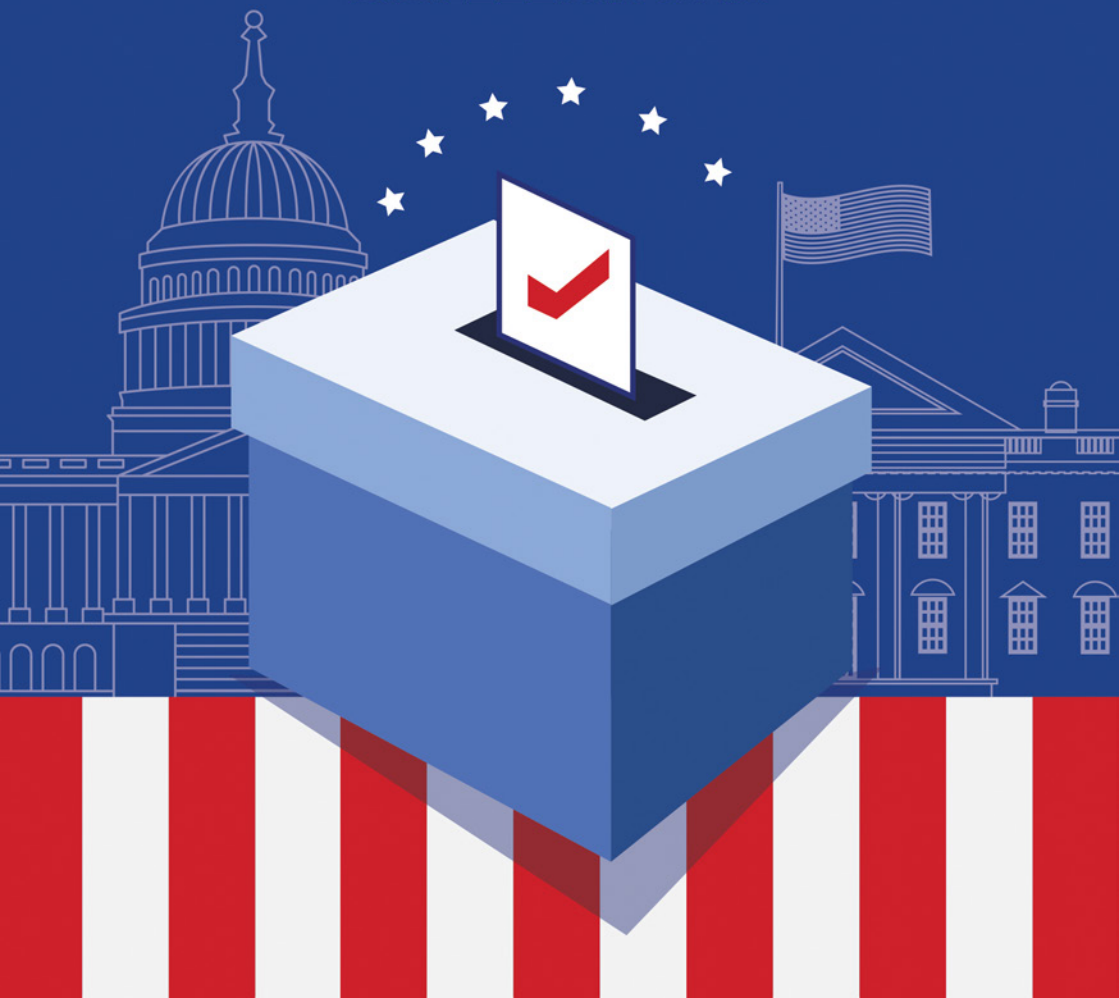


U.S. ELECTIONS

★ 101 ★

**A GUIDE TO
U.S. ELECTIONS**



U.S. ELECTIONS 101

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WHY DO ELECTIONS MATTER?



FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS ARE THE



Elections give citizens a voice in their government in the most fundamental way: by deciding who governs.

Elections help ensure that power passes in a peaceful, orderly manner from citizens to their elected representatives – and from one elected official to his or her successor.

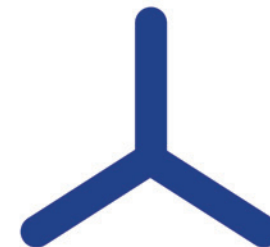
**The American system can appear complicated,
but it ensures that voters have a voice
at all levels of government.**



The U.S. Constitution gives certain powers to the national (or “federal”) government and reserves others for the individual states and the people.

The Constitution requires that each state have a republican form of government, in which people exercise their power through elected representatives, and it forbids states from violating certain specified rights, but states otherwise retain considerable power.

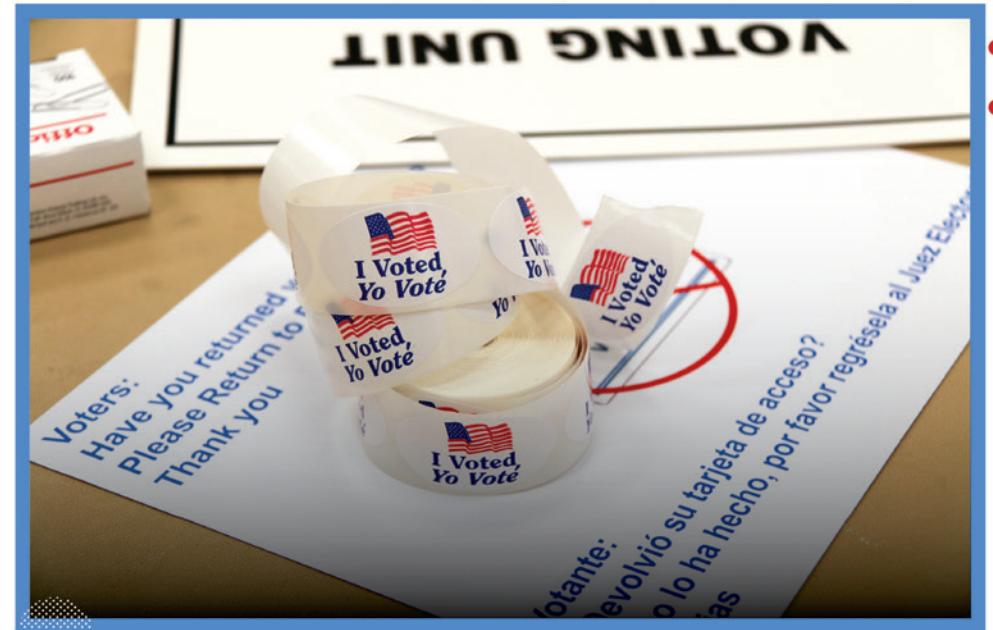
THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



**FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT**

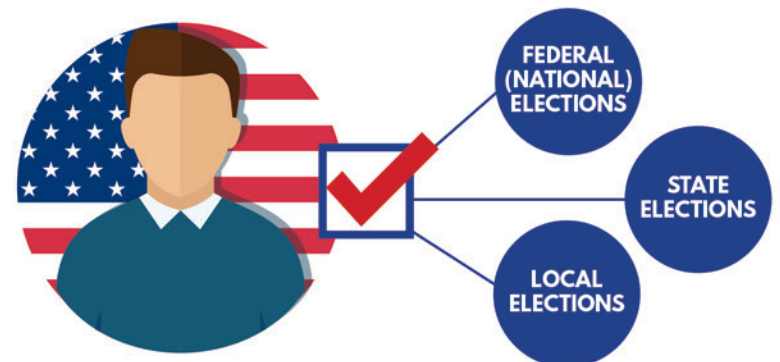
**STATE
GOVERNMENT**

WHO VOTES?



"I voted" stickers in English and Spanish, Virginia, USA, November 2014. (GPA Photo Archive / OSCE)

The U.S. Constitution guarantees that U.S. citizens over the age of 18 can vote in





WHEN ARE ELECTIONS HELD?



Elections for federal office are held in even-numbered years and take place on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

The presidential election is held every four years.



Election for all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives is held every two years.



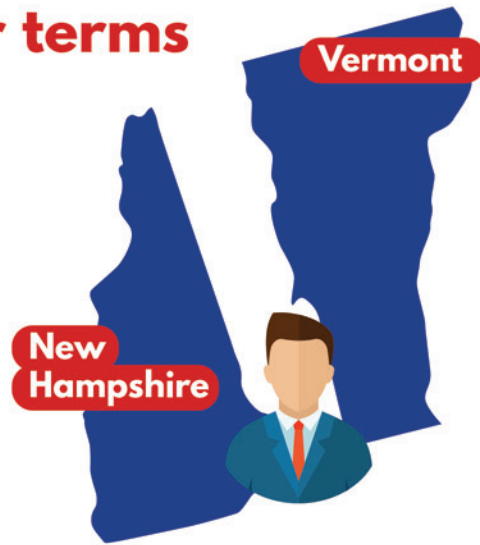
U.S. senators serve six-year terms

that are staggered so that one-third (or one-third plus one) of the 100 senate seats come up for election every two years.

If a senator dies or becomes incapacitated while in office, some states will hold a special election to fill the seat. The newly elected senator serves until the end of the original senator's term. Some state legislatures empower the state's governor to appoint a replacement to complete the term or to hold office until a special election can take place.

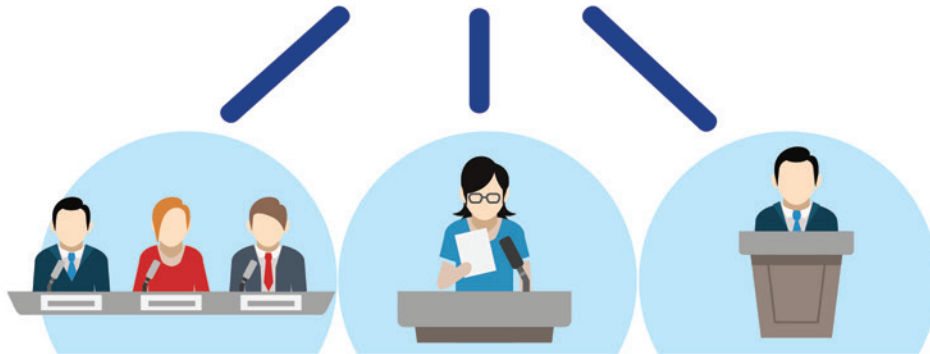
Most U.S. governors serve four-year terms

except those in New Hampshire and Vermont, who serve two-year terms.



Midterm elections

Occurring at the midpoint of a U.S. president's term of office



U.S. Representatives

U.S. Senators

State Governors

WHICH PUBLIC OFFICIALS ARE ELECTED?

VOTE

An illustration of a large, stylized hand in shades of orange and brown, holding a red rectangular sign with the word 'VOTE' written in white capital letters. Below the hand is a teal silhouette of a person's head and shoulders.

★ U.S. ELECTIONS 101 ★

The U.S. Constitution sets the requirements for holding federal office, but each of the 50 states has its own constitution and its own rules for state offices.

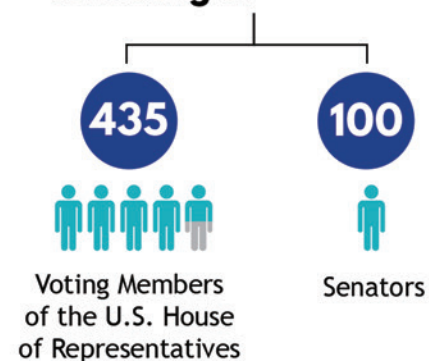


House on Jefferson Avenue in Uptown New Orleans has an array of signs for the numerous candidates in the post-Hurricane Katrina mayor election, together with the humorous comment "More Candidates Than Voters?" (GPA Photo Archive / Infrogmation of New Orleans)

Federal Level

The only elected federal officials:

- **President**
- **Vice president**
- **Members of Congress consisting of**



State and Local Level

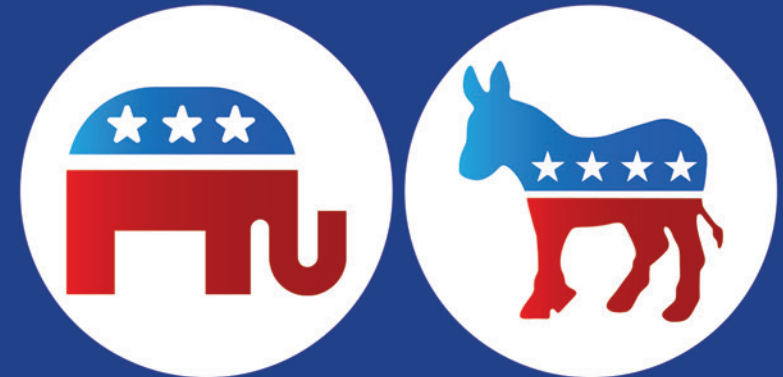
Governors in most states serve four-year terms, but in other states the governor is elected for only two years.

Voters in some states elect judges, while in others judges are appointed to office. States and localities elect thousands of public officials – from governors and state legislators to school board members and even dogcatchers.



WHY DOES THE UNITED STATES HAVE ONLY TWO MAJOR PARTIES?

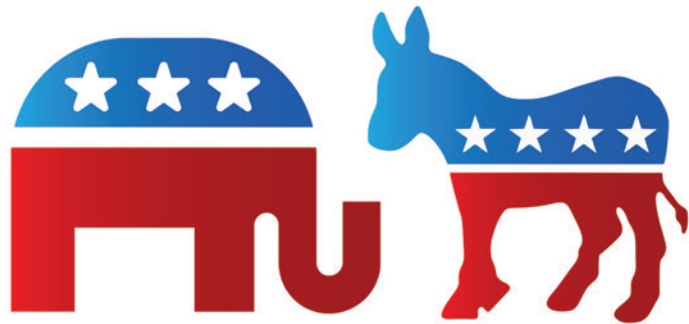
VS



The drafters of the U.S. Constitution did not envision political parties, but as voting rights broadened and the nation expanded westward, political parties emerged. Today, the Republican and Democratic parties dominate the political process – both of them heirs to predecessor parties from the 18th and 19th centuries.

With rare exceptions, members of the two major parties control the presidency, the Congress, the governorships, and the state legislatures. Every president since 1852 has been either a Republican or a Democrat.

The donkey and elephant

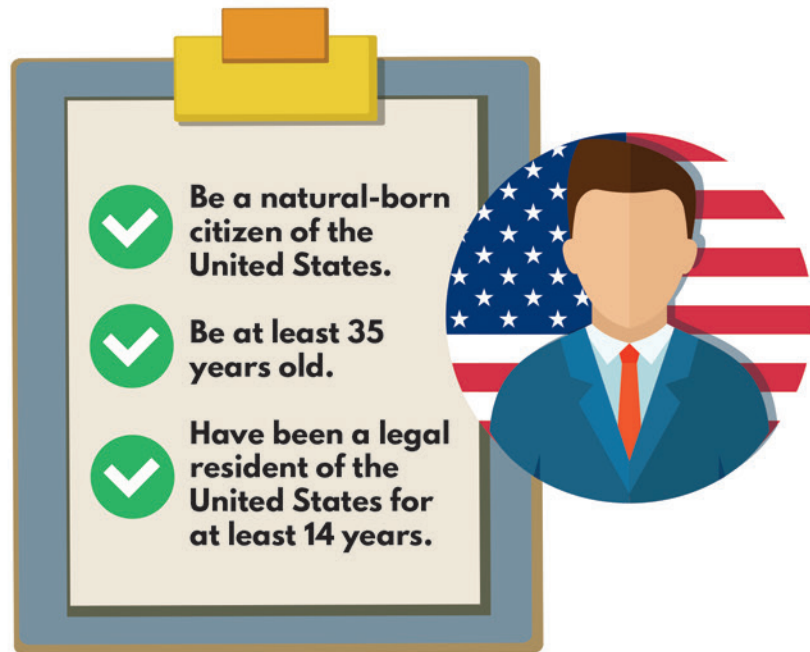


have been the symbols of the Democrats and the Republicans since the 19th century.

WHO CAN RUN FOR POLITICAL OFFICE?



To serve as president, one must:



A vice president must meet the same criteria and cannot have served two terms as president.

Candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives must be at least 25 years old, have been U.S. citizens for at least seven years, and live in the state they seek to represent in Congress.

U.S. Senate candidates must be at least 30 years old, have been U.S. citizens for at least nine years, and live in the state they wish to represent.

HOW ARE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES CHOSEN?



During the summer of a presidential election year, the Republicans and Democrats each hold a national convention where they

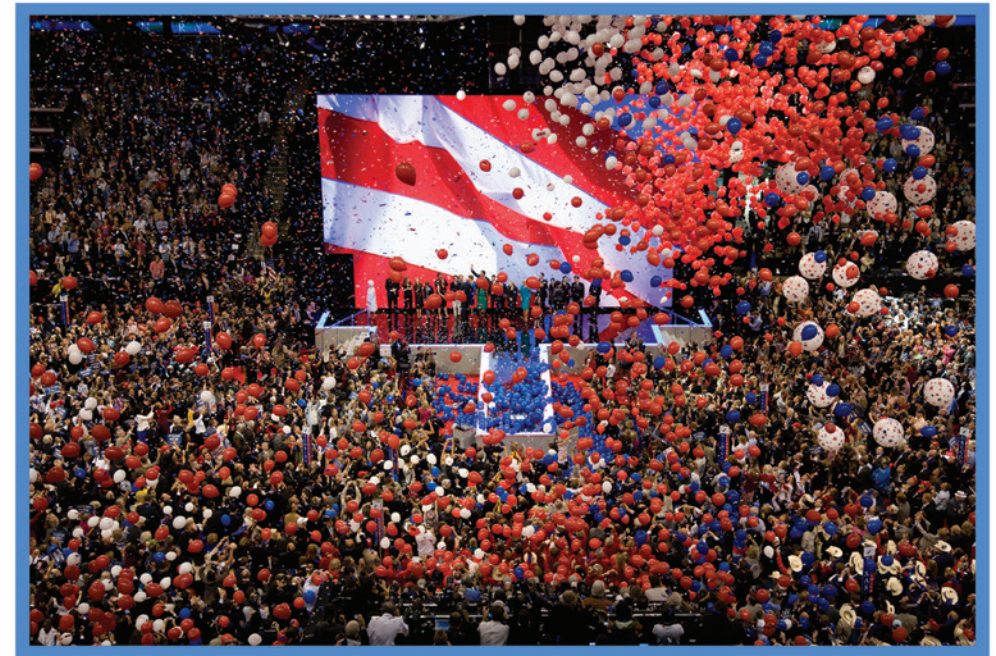


Today, a majority of delegates' votes is needed to capture the nomination, and each party's presidential nominee is known before its convention begins.

Each state (plus the District of Columbia and several U.S. territories) is allotted a number of delegates.

Most delegates are “pledged” to support

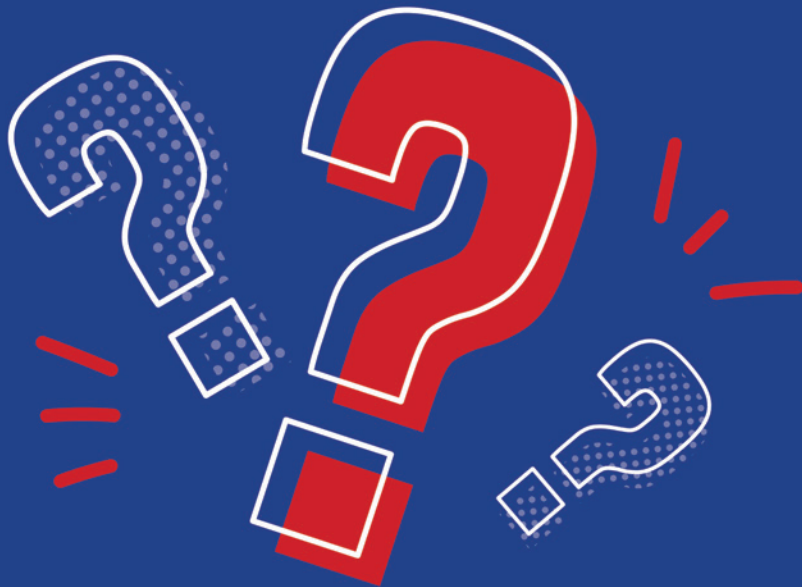
a particular candidate, at least on the first ballot, and no convention has required more than one ballot to nominate its presidential candidate for many years.



Republican National Convention, September 1-4, 2008. Balloons drop at the convention in the Xcel Center, St. Paul, Minnesota. (GPA Photo Archive / Carol M. Highsmith / Library of Congress)



HOW MANY TIMES CAN A PERSON BE PRESIDENT?



IN 1951,

the 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, which prohibits anyone from being elected president of the United States

MORE THAN TWICE.



Then President Obama meets with President-elect Donald Trump in the Oval Office, November 10, 2016. (GPA Photo Archive / Pete Souza / White House)

WHAT ABOUT OTHER POLITICAL OFFICES?

There are no term limits for members of Congress.

Term limits, if any, for state and local officials are spelled out in state constitutions and local ordinances.



HOW DO AMERICANS VOTE?



In most elections in the United States, voters need to vote either in-person at an official polling place or by casting an absentee ballot.

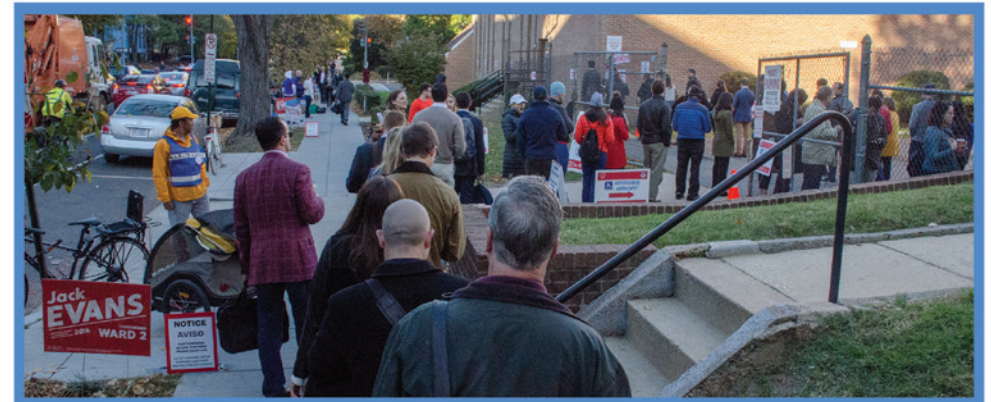
VOTE IN PERSON



ABSENTEE VOTING



Since local authorities rather than a single national authority conduct elections, different localities – even in the same state – can have different types of ballots and voting technology.



*Voters approach the entrance to their polling place, in the basement of a local church.
(GPA Photo Archive / Tim Brown)*



A mother shows her children the voting process. (GPA Photo Archive / Ken White / Department of State)



Today, very few voters mark paper ballots by putting an “X” next to a candidate’s name.

That is because many localities use optical systems that mechanically scan paper ballots on which voters fill in circles or connect lines. Still others employ a wide variety of mechanized voting devices.

In recent years, several states have adopted procedures that make ballots available to voters before the election.



Oregon and Washington conduct their elections entirely by mail.

Absentee voters generally return their completed ballots by mail.



HOW DO AMERICANS ELECT THE U.S. PRESIDENT?



HOW TO BECOME PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

U.S. CONSTITUTION'S REQUIREMENTS FOR A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

START

- ✓ NATURAL BORN CITIZEN
- ✓ MINIMUM AGE 35 YEARS
- ✓ U.S. RESIDENT 14 YEARS

The presidential candidates campaign throughout the country to win the support of the general population.



...AND I APPROVE THIS MESSAGE.



2 NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

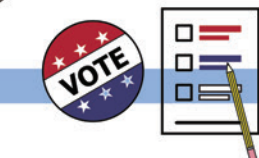


At each convention, the presidential candidate chooses a running mate (vice presidential candidate).



Each party holds a national convention to select a final presidential nominee.

3 GENERAL ELECTION



People in every state across the country vote for one President and Vice President.

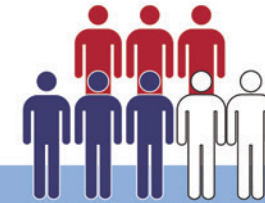


When people cast their vote, they are actually voting for a group of people known as electors.

1 PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES



There are many people who want to be President, each with their own ideas about how government should work.

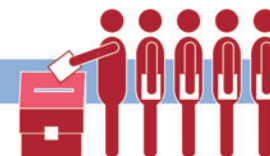


People with similar ideas belong to the same political party, this is where primaries and caucuses come in.



Candidates from each political party campaign through the country to win the favor of their party members.

IN A PRIMARY

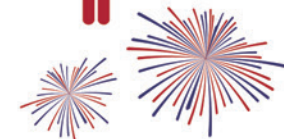


Party members vote for the best candidate that will represent them in the general election.

IN A CAUCUS



Party members select the best candidate through a series of discussions and votes.



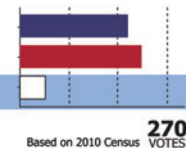
The newly elected President and Vice President are inaugurated in January.

4 ELECTORAL COLLEGE

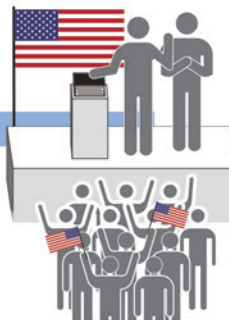


In the electoral college system, each state gets a certain number of electors based on its representation in Congress.

538
ELECTORAL VOTES



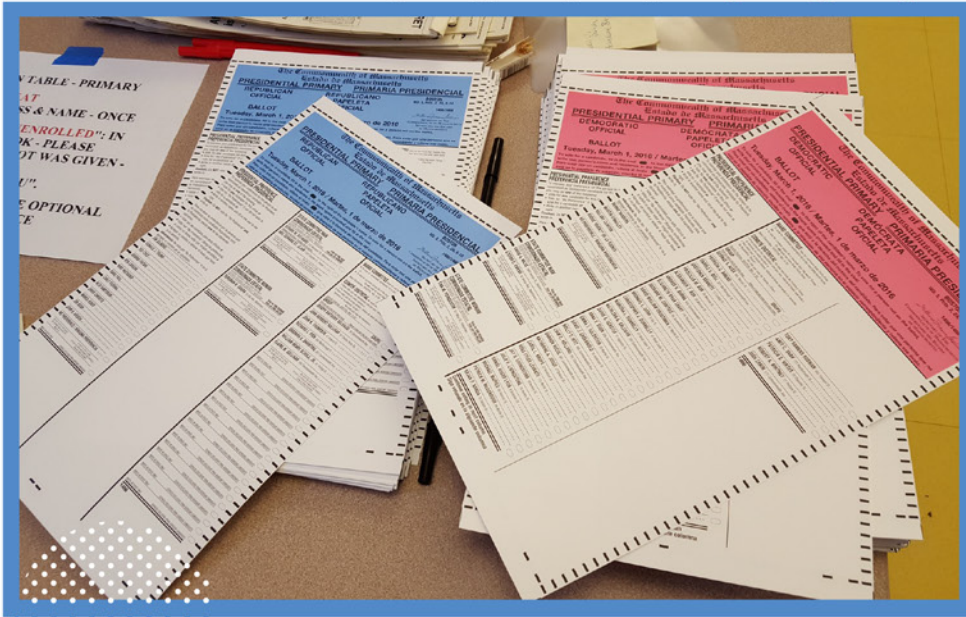
Each elector casts one vote following the general election, and the candidate who gets more than half (270) wins.



PRIMARIES AND CAUCUSES

The election process begins with primary elections and caucuses.

These are two methods that states use to select a potential presidential nominee. Primary elections and caucuses differ in how they are organized and who participates. And rates of participation differ widely.



A photo of Super Tuesday 2016 presidential primary election ballots in Massachusetts. (GPA Photo Archive / Whoisjohngalt)

Primaries are run by state and local governments. Voting happens through secret ballot.



Some states hold “closed” primaries in which only declared party members can participate. In an open primary, all voters can participate, regardless of their party affiliation or lack of affiliation.

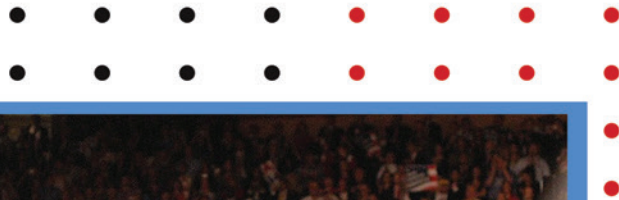
Caucuses are private meetings run by political parties. They are held at the county, district, or precinct level.



In most, participants divide themselves into groups according to the candidate they support. At the end, the number of voters in each group determines how many delegates each candidate has won.

NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

After the primaries and caucuses, most political parties hold national conventions, during which each political party selects a nominee to unite behind.



President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, with First Lady Laura Bush and Lynne Cheney at the Republican National Convention, September 2, 2004. (GPA Photo Archive / Kyle Cassidy)

WHAT HAPPENS AT A NATIONAL POLITICAL CONVENTION?

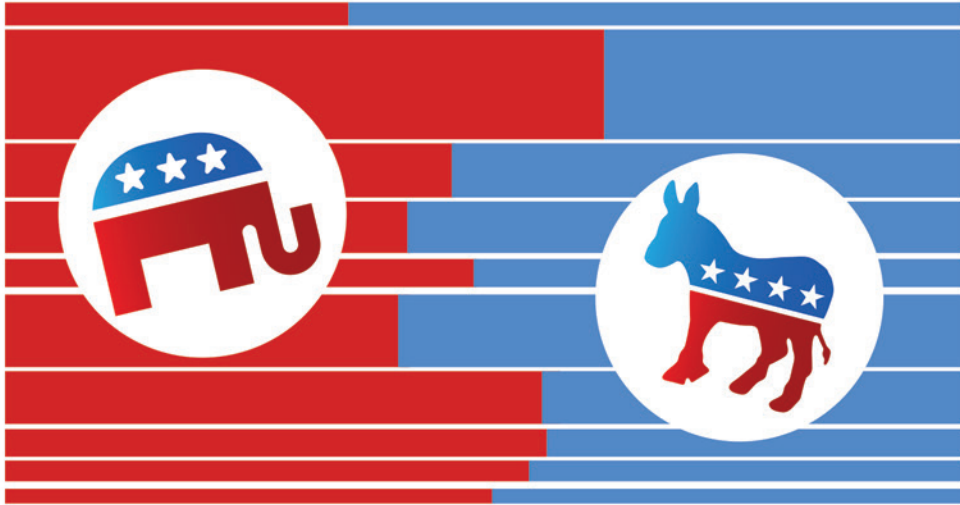
Conventions finalize a party's choice for presidential and vice-presidential nominees. The conventions give each party the opportunity to promote its nominees and define its differences with the opposition. The nominating conventions are widely televised and mark the start of the national presidential campaigns.



Presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney at the second presidential debate, October 16, 2012. (GPA Photo Archive / Scout Tufankjian / Obama for America)

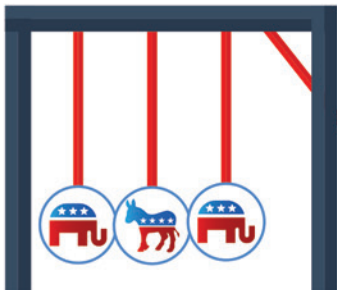
After the national conventions, the candidates campaign across the country to explain their views and plans to voters. They may also participate in debates with candidates from other parties.

SWING STATES



While each major U.S. political party has many states it counts on winning in November's presidential election, a handful of states are too close to call.

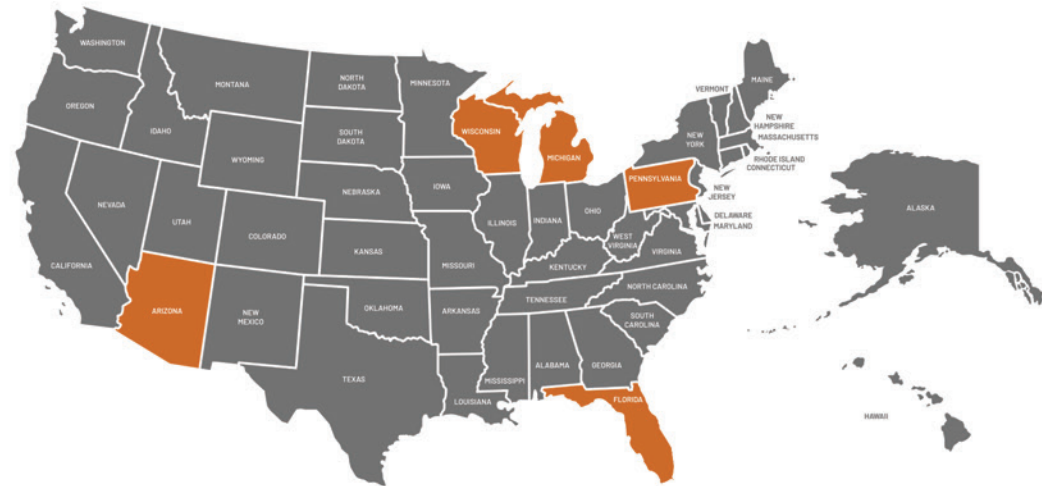
These “swing states” have populations that are closely divided politically.



They have swung back and forth between Democratic and Republican candidates in recent years.

These are the battleground states that candidates will target with campaign visits, advertising, and staffing.

States generally considered as swing states are Arizona, Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.



Some experts would add New Hampshire, North Carolina, and a handful of others to the list.

GENERAL ELECTION

A final election for a political office with a limited list of candidates is held on the election day.



Early voting center at Bauer Drive Community Recreation Center in Rockville, Maryland.
(GPA Photo Archive / Ben Schumin)

The candidates in the general election are the people who received their party's nomination.

General elections happen at a local, state, and national level.



In other U.S. elections, candidates are elected directly by popular vote. But the president and vice president are not elected directly by citizens. Instead, they are chosen by “electors” through a process called the Electoral College.



Signs in English, Spanish, and Chinese mark the entrance to the polling place.
(GPA Photo Archive / Tim Brown)

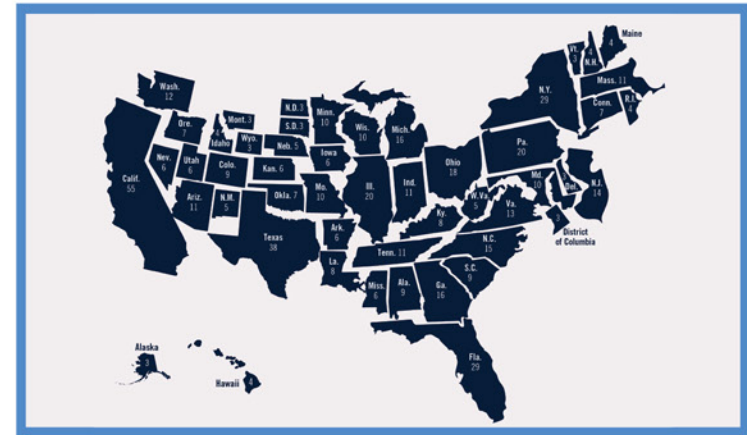
ELECTORAL COLLEGE



The process of using electors comes from the Constitution. It was a compromise between a popular vote by citizens and a vote in Congress.

Each state gets as many electors as it has members of Congress (House and Senate). Including Washington, D.C.'s three electors, there are currently 538 electors in all. Each state's political parties choose their own slate of potential electors.

ELECTORAL COLLEGE MAP



(GPA / State Dept. / J. Maruszewski)

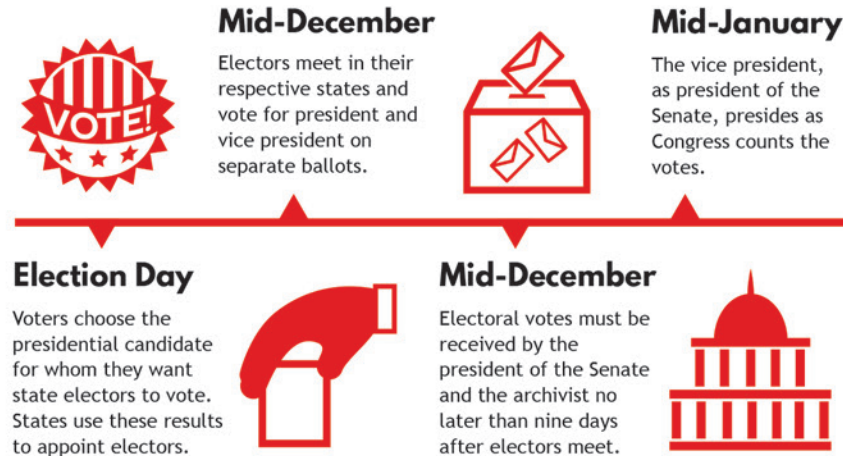
After voters cast their ballots for president, their votes go to a statewide tally. In 48 states and Washington, D.C., the winner gets all the electoral votes for that state. Maine and Nebraska assign their electors using a proportional system.

A candidate needs the vote of at least 270 electors (more than half of all electors) to win the presidential election.

It is important for candidates to campaign in all states, even ones with smaller populations and fewer electoral votes, in order to get a total of 270 electoral votes.



One consequence of the winner-take-all system is that a candidate can win the most votes nationally but lose the election. This happened in 2016, in 2000, and three times in the 1800s.



INAUGURATION



On this day, the president-elect and vice-president-elect are sworn in and take office.

In most cases, a projected winner is announced on election night in November after the polls are closed. But the actual Electoral College vote takes place in mid-December when the electors meet in their states. Congress officially counts the results in January.

If no candidate receives the majority of electoral votes, the vote goes to the House of Representatives. House members choose the new president from among the top three candidates. The Senate elects the vice president from the remaining top two candidates.

Inauguration Day occurs every four years on January 20 (or January 21 if January 20 falls on a Sunday) at the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.



The Inauguration of President Barack H. Obama, 44th president of the United States, on the West Front of the Capitol. January 20, 2009. (GPA Photo Archive / Architect of the Capitol)

The vice-president-elect is sworn in first, and around noon, the president-elect recites the following oath, in accordance with the U.S. Constitution:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."



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