

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?

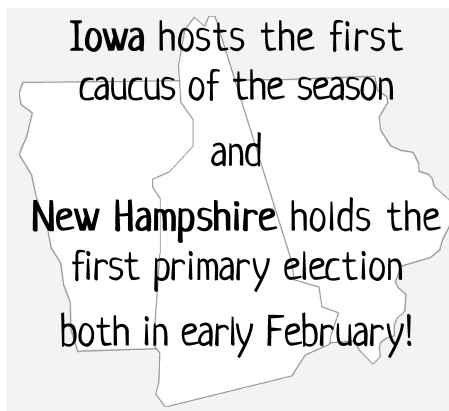
The first public step a candidate has to take is to **declare** to the nation that he or she wants to be the president. Then candidates must get support for their campaign, raise money, and get the attention of the leaders of his or her political party.

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!



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.

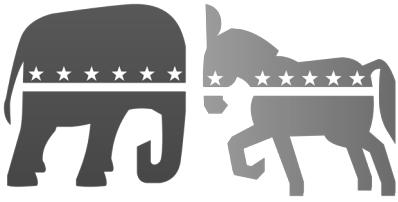


Mitt Romney at the 2012 Republican National Convention

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On the Campaign Trail

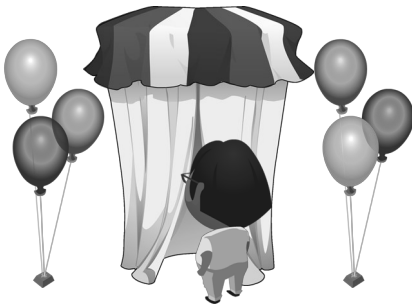


Millions of dollars are spent in the months leading up to the national conventions, but that is just the beginning! Once the field is narrowed to the two main party candidates, fundraising becomes even more important. There are only a few months before the general election, and each candidate needs to 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.

Direct Mail : Send information packets directly to voters	Personal Appearances: Radio & TV interviews, debates and speeches
Printed Material: Posters, bumper stickers, leaflets, buttons, t-shirts	The Internet: 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...

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.

$$\begin{array}{r} 2 \text{ Senators} \\ + \text{ 18 Representatives} \\ \hline 20 \text{ Electors} \end{array}$$

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 people vote for a presidential candidate, they are really voting to decide which candidate the electors in their state will vote for.

In December after the election, the electors meet in their state capitols and cast their ballots. The President of the Senate collects the votes and counts them. In order to win, a candidate must have an **absolute majority** of the electoral votes, which means more than half the votes.

But what if there's a tie? If the electors' votes are split, then the full House of Representatives votes. If *that* results in a tie, then the Senate votes. The elections of 1800 and 1824 both resulted in ties that were resolved by Congress.

On January 20, the President-elect and Vice President-elect take the oath of office and are inaugurated.