

The Electoral Process

Time Needed: One class period

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets

Projector

Copy Instructions:

Reading (2 pages; class set)

Activity (3 pages; class set)

Learning Objectives Students will be able to:

- Describe the electoral process in primary and general elections.
- Compare the popular vote with the Electoral College as a means to elect government officials.
- Explain how a candidate can be elected without receiving the majority of the popular vote.
- Contrast primaries and caucuses as ways to nominate someone within a political party.
- Explain the role of local, state and national conventions in political parties.
- Identify key dates for national elections.

STEP BY STEP

- ANTICIPATE** by asking students what they remember about the last presidential election. Ask if anyone went to the polls with an adult, if they watched the returns, and if they remember who won. If students remember watching the returns, ask whether they remember seeing a map with states being colored in red and blue. Continue asking questions until you've exhausted students' prior knowledge.
- DISTRIBUTE** the reading pages to the class.
- READ** the reading with the class, pausing to explain and elaborate as necessary.
- IDENTIFY** the number of your state's electors by working through the math on page 2.
- PROJECT** the calendar activity or run the calendar activity section of the PowerPoint.
- WORK THROUGH** the activity with the class, pausing to discuss. **Explain** that there is a way to hold office without getting elected. The Constitution requires that all vacancies in Congress be filled by an election. If something happens to an elected official like a senator or representative during their term, the state governor can appoint (assign) someone to fill the spot until that special election can be held. Each state handles this situation differently, and some do not allow appointments.
- DISTRIBUTE** the worksheet activity to the class.
- ASSIGN** students to complete the activities. We highly suggest working through the activities together. The PowerPoint presentation is a good way to do this.
- REVIEW** the answers with the class. (The PowerPoint works well for this.)
- CLOSE** by asking students to list five facts about elections from the lesson on a piece of scratch paper and share their list with a partner. Collect the lists as an exit ticket.

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?

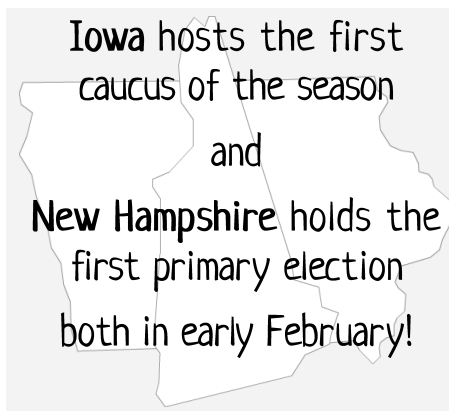
The first public step a candidate has to take is to **declare** to the nation that he or she wants to be the president. Then candidates must get support for their campaign, raise money, and get the attention of the leaders of his or her political party.

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.

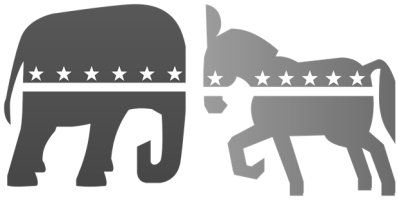


Mitt Romney at the 2012 Republican National Convention

The Electoral Process

Name: _____

On the Campaign Trail

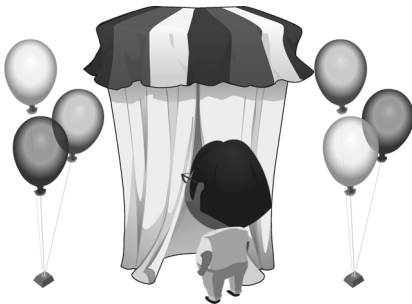


Millions of dollars are spent in the months leading up to the national conventions, but that is just the beginning! Once the field is narrowed to the two main party candidates, fundraising becomes even more important. There are only a few months before the general election, and each candidate needs to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

The Electoral Process

When is Election Day?

November 2016						
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.



When is Election Day, 2016?

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 2016?

December 2016						
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 2017						
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				

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.



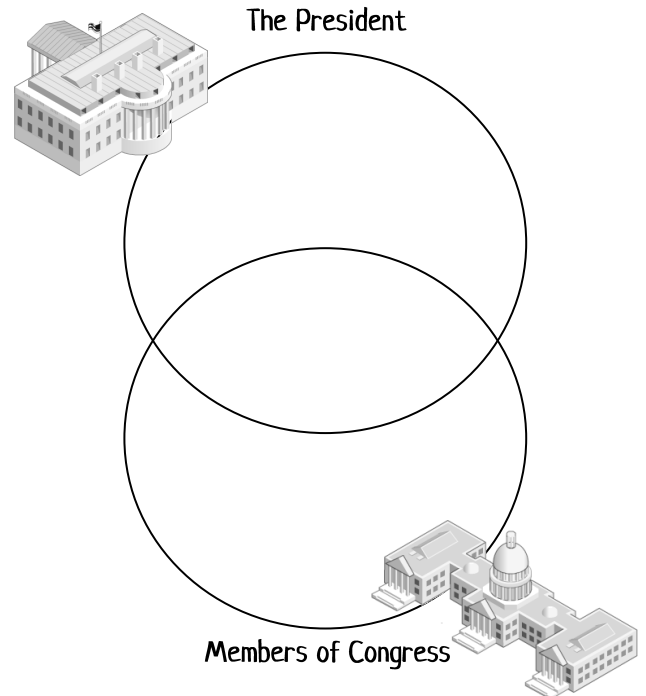
When are the electoral votes counted in 2017?

The Electoral Process

Name: _____

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.

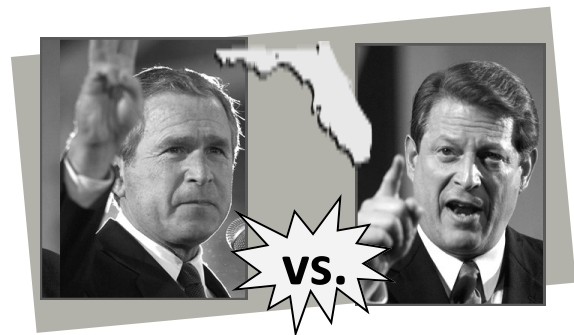
- A. Candidates declare that they want to run for office
- B. Political parties select their nominee for the national election in primaries and caucuses
- C. Candidates run campaigns to inform the public about their agendas and positions on the issues
- D. The winner is directly elected through popular 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 actually 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!

The Electoral Process

Name: _____

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?

- 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.

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

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

The Electoral Process

Name: _____

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 word box.

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.

___ Attend the national convention for my party! Hopefully, I will be nominated.

___ As part of my national campaign, I'll make speeches, show up on tv, send out mailings, and attend rallies.

___ Wait for the results of the Electoral College and prepare my acceptance speech for inauguration!

___ Declare my candidacy! I want to be the President, and I hope my party will support me!

___ Hang out with family and friends to await the results of the popular vote on Election Day.

___ Campaign for the primary and caucus season by making speeches and talking to voters.

When is Election Day?

Directions: Due to weekends and tradition, the government created rules for when election events should occur. Display the projection master. Along with the class, follow the official descriptions to see when the next presidential election will take place. Answers are below.

November 2016						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
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An act of Congress sets the day for presidential and congressional elections as the Tuesday after the first Monday in November.



When is Election Day, 2016?

November 8

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



When do the electors meet in 2016?

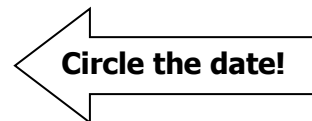
December 19

December 2016						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
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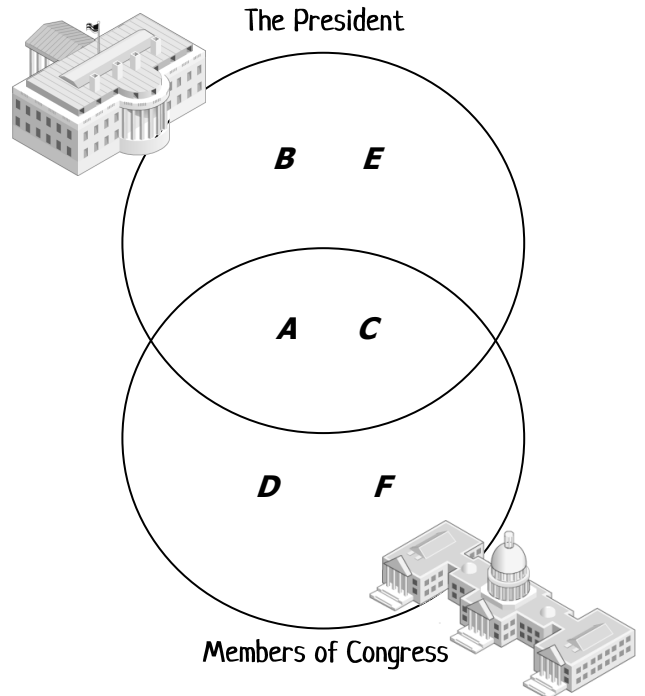
January 6

Teacher's Note: Why does it take so long?

Early in our nation's history information only traveled as fast as the quickest horse. Electors had to travel, as did the messenger with the results of their voting. Information can travel at a faster pace, now that we have the internet and phone, but a lot of work has to be done between getting elected and setting up a new presidency. The cabinet members need to be selected and approved by Congress, and presidential agendas need to be made.

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.

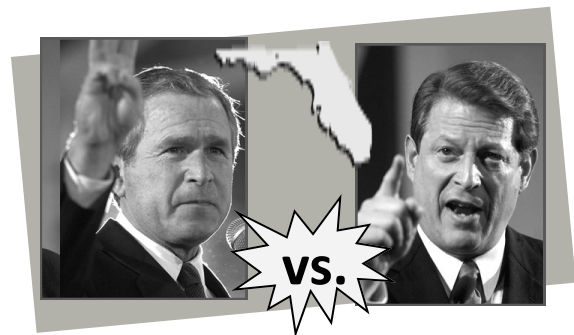
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(Remember, the donkey is the symbol for the Democratic Party and the elephant represents the Republican Party.)

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

Keep up the recount until we get the results we want!

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

Stop the recount before we find out who really won!



Cartoon by Steve Sack, The Minneapolis Star-Tribune

3. What is the purpose of this cartoon?

- 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.

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

Answers will vary.

Neither party seems to think the outcome will be fair or correct.

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

Answers will vary.

Caption 2

Answers will vary.

The Electoral Process

** TEACHER GUIDE **

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

- | | |
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| <u>E</u> 2. Party meetings where candidates are selected and the platform is created | B) nominee |
| <u>A</u> 3. Someone who represents the party views of a state at a national convention | C) campaign |
| <u>B</u> 4. The person who is chosen to run as a party's candidate in the national election | D) declare |
| <u>F</u> 5. Given by the people selected to run for President and Vice President at the end of a national convention | E) convention |
| <u>C</u> 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 word box.

Electoral College popular vote absolute majority electors



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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.

3 Attend the national convention for my party! Hopefully, I will be nominated.

1 Declare my candidacy! I want to be the President, and I hope my party will support me!

4 Yay! I'm the nominee! As part of my national campaign, I'll make speeches, show up on tv, send out mailings, and attend rallies.

5 Hang out with family and friends to await the results of the popular vote on Election Day.

2 Campaign for the primary and caucus season by making speeches and talking to voters.

6 Wait for the results of the Electoral College and prepare my acceptance speech for inauguration!