

The Electoral Process

Name: _____



Barack and Michelle Obama at the Democratic National Convention in 2004

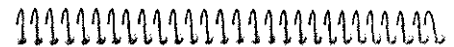
It's Election Time!

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

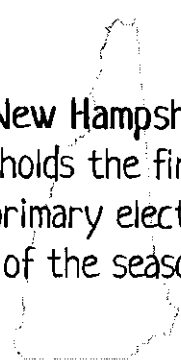
Candidates for the larger political parties are chosen at party meetings called **conventions**. The parties hold conventions at the local, state and national levels. There are two main ways the states send people to the national convention: the caucus and the primary. Both methods result in a set of **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!

New Hampshire holds the first primary election of the season!



Caucus System

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

(less common)

Primary Election

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

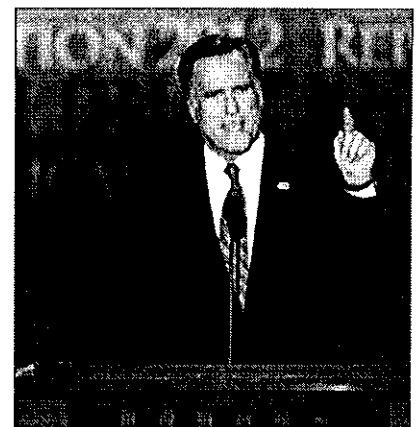
(more common)

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

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.



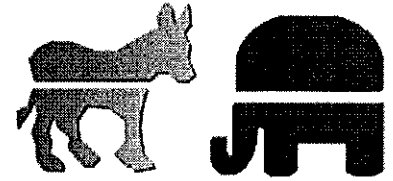
Mitt Romney at the 2012 Republican National Convention

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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.



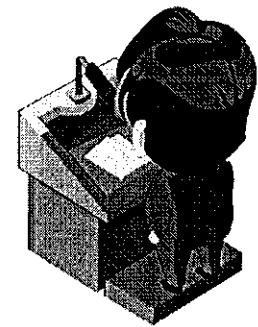
Direct Mail : Send information packets directly to voters	Personal Appearances: Radio & TV interviews, debates and speeches
Printed Material: Posters, bumper stickers, leaflets, buttons, t-shirts	The Internet: Emails, websites, videos, blogs, social networking

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.

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.

2 Senators
+ 18 Representatives
20 Electors

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.

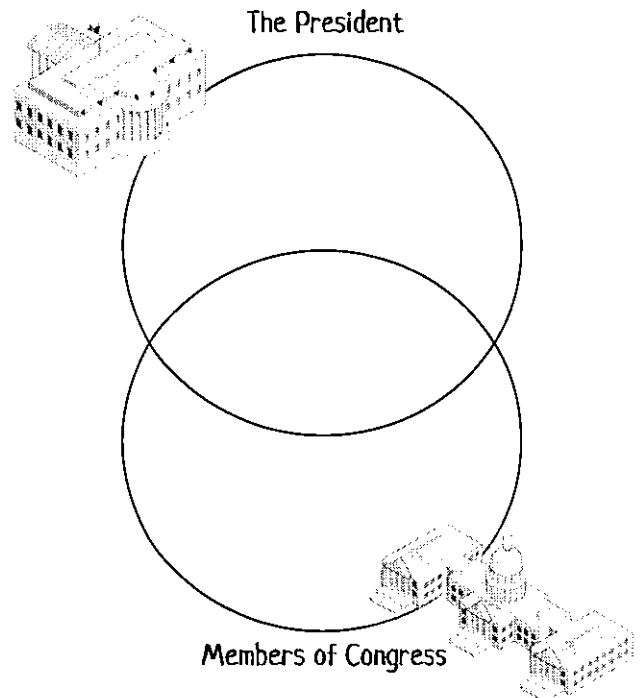
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A. What's different when there are elections for U.S. Congress? Candidates for the Senate and House of Representatives have a smaller audience for the campaigns, since they are elected by districts within a specific state. Congress also goes back to 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.



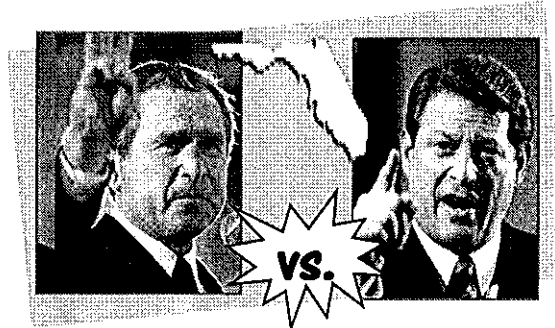
- A. Candidates declare that they want to run for office
- B. Political parties select their nominee for the national election in primaries and caucuses
- C. Candidates run campaigns to inform the public about their agendas and positions on the issues
- D. The winner is directly elected through popular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



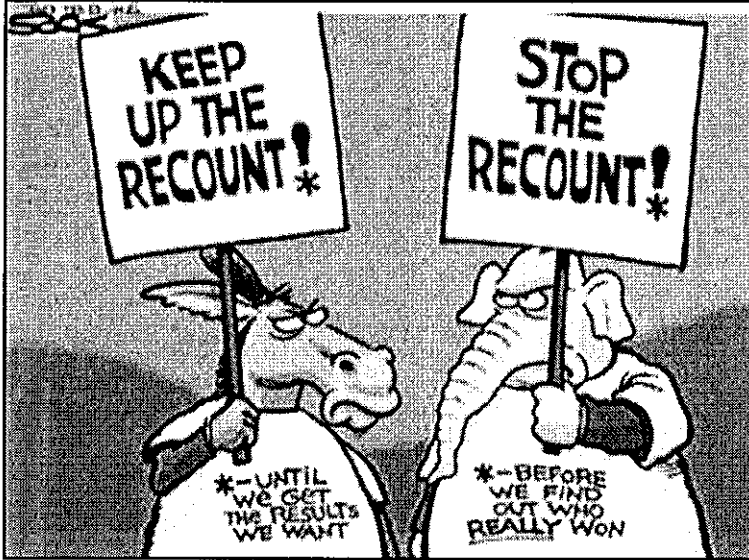
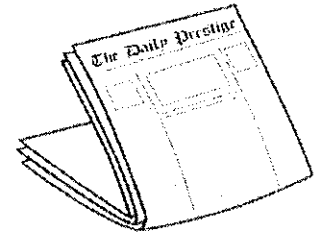
- Decision A:** Get those ballots out and count again! Bush ends up behind in the recount of ballots. Gore wins!
- Decision B:** No recounts! The Florida Supreme Court can't order a recount in some districts of the state but not others. There isn't enough time anyway! Bush wins!
- Decision C:** Recount 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!

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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.)



Cartoon by Steve Sack, The Minneapolis Star-Tribune

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.)

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