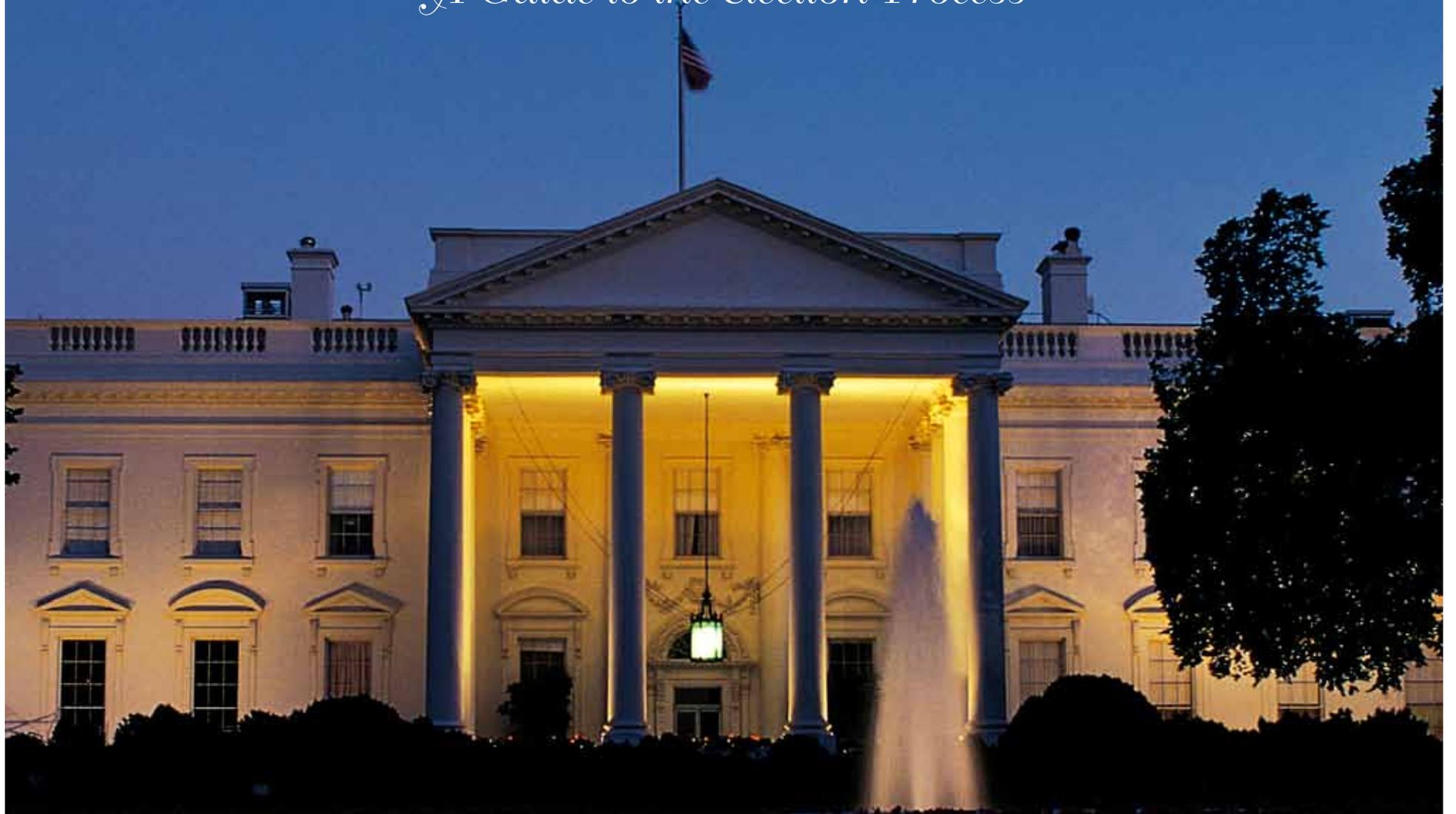


# ELECTING THE PRESIDENT

*A Guide to the Election Process*



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®

[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

## Introduction

The U.S. presidential election is the biggest event in American politics. It's an exciting and complicated process that begins immediately after the preceding election and doesn't end until the voters have their say.

What happens during this extended campaign is a quest not just for votes, but also for political contributions, favorable media coverage, online advertising exposure, social media – likes & tweets, endorsements, and all the other makings of a winning candidacy for the highest elected office in America. Key events along the way include the primaries and caucuses, the party conventions, and the debates—not to mention all the speeches, polls, and focus groups, plus the barrage of radio and television commercials imploring you to vote this way or that.

It's easy to be overwhelmed. And that's why the League of Women Voters produced this supplement. It is an update of the 2012 Newspaper in Education supplement, based on the LWV publication *Choosing the President 2008: A Citizen's Guide to the Electoral Process*.



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS**  
www.lwv.org • @lwv • @vote411

## What is the League of Women Voters? What does it do?

A primary undertaking of the League is to engage all Americans in the election process — from defending voters' rights, to registering voters, to helping voters learn what the candidates think about the issues that impact every American's life. The League is a community-based nonpartisan political organization that has fought since 1920 to improve our systems of government and public policies through education and advocacy.

## How can you get involved?

Join passionate men and women in your community in the important work of keeping your community strong, safe and vibrant. Join us in making democracy work! Contact the League in your community to learn more.

## THE ONE-STOP SITE



## FOR ELECTION INFORMATION

You will find here:

- Primary election dates and registration deadlines
- Voter registration tool
- Data on candidates in federal, state, & local elections
- Your polling place location
- Voting procedures
- Overseas voting information
- Other election and voting topics

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How do I register to vote?

Visit the voter registration tool at: [www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org)

### What are the requirements to be eligible to vote?

You must be: 1) A citizen of the United States. 2) A resident of the state and 18 years old by the general election.

### How do I know if I'm registered?

Within a few weeks after you send in or hand in your registration application, you should get a registration card or notice in the mail telling you that you are now officially a registered voter and where to vote. Hold on to that notice.

### I'm a college student living away from home. Where should I register?

You can register either at your home or school address. It is important to update your registration each time you move. If you are registered at your home address while at school, remember to request an absentee ballot at least 30 days before the election.

### I am registered, but I've recently moved. Does this affect my registration?

Yes. If you are registered and have moved within your current election community, contact your local election office to update your registration and determine where you should vote. If you moved outside of your old community, you will have to reregister in your new area before the registration deadline in your state. In many states, you can now verify online whether or not you are registered. Visit [www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org) to get started.

### Are there other ways to vote besides going to the polls?

All states are required to have an absentee ballot (vote by mail) program to allow citizens who will be away from home on Election Day or who cannot go to the polls to vote. Some states also have early voting programs. For questions on other ways to vote and what to bring visit [www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org).

### What should I bring with me to the polls?

To be safe, bring your drivers' license or another photo ID. In some places, a current utility bill, paycheck, or other document that includes your name and street address may also work. You can also bring notes, a sample ballot you've marked up, or any other information.

### What if my name isn't on the registration list at my polling place?

Get help from a poll worker to make sure your vote is counted. You should be given a provisional ballot or given directions to another polling place.

### What kind of machine will I be voting on? Is it going to be different from what I've used in the past?

Some voters will face a new voting machine and others will continue to use the same equipment they've used in the past. To find out what equipment you'll be using in your polling place, contact your local elections official or check [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org).

# PART 1 — THE PLAYERS

## We the People

The most important players in the election of a U.S. president are not the candidates or their staffs, not the political parties or the other organizations, and not the media pundits. A presidential election revolves around the beliefs and the actions of American voters. Come Election Day, no one else's opinions matter, and no one else has control over the outcome.

Voting is the great equalizer in American society. No matter how much money you have or who your friends are or whether or not you contributed to a particular candidate, you have one vote—the same as everybody else. And with that one vote, you have the power to influence decisions that will affect your life. Your job, your taxes, your health care, your Social Security, whether the nation goes to war, you name it—they are all at stake.

## Voting in the Nation's Early Years

Today, every American citizen age eighteen and older has the right to vote. Sometimes it's a right we take for granted. We forget how much blood, sweat, and tears have gone into making sure that all segments of the American population—minorities, women, and youth—are able to have their say.

Despite their opposition to arbitrary rule and their faith in popular sovereignty, the founders of the United States did not believe that all adults should be able to vote. During the early years of the country's history, legislatures in the United States generally restricted voting to white males who were twenty-one or older. Many states also limited voting rights to those who "had a stake in society." Translation: To vote, you had to own property. State governments began to eliminate the property requirement during the 1820s and 1830s.

## Unfinished Business: Lowering the Barriers to Voting

The fact that the Constitution told states they couldn't deny certain groups the right to vote didn't keep states from erecting barriers that ensured certain groups would be underrepresented in registration and voting.

In the late nineteenth century, in fact, many Southern states tried to get around the Fifteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal voting rights for blacks by adding "grandfather clauses" to their state constitutions. These clauses generally limited the right to vote to those individuals who had been able to vote before the Fifteenth Amendment became law, along with their descendants. The Supreme Court declared these laws unconstitutional in the early twentieth century.

Over the years, states also have used Poll

taxes, literacy tests and English-language requirements, length-of-residency requirements, and onerous voter registration rules to keep registration and voting rates down among racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and other groups, such as college students.

In recent decades, three major pieces of federal legislation have sought to break down these and other barriers to registration and voting: the Voting Rights Act, originally enacted in 1965; the National Voter Registration Act, signed into law in 1993; and the 2002 Help America Vote Act.

Some states have found new ways to suppress the vote including by passing laws requiring photo identification at the polls, which pose a barrier to millions of voters.

## Voter Turnout: Turn-offs and Turn-ons

With more people eligible to vote and voter registration rates on the rise, you'd think that the percentage of Americans showing up at the polls would be higher than ever. But that's not the case. In fact, between the 1960s and the 1990s, there was a steady drop in voter turnout, defined as the percentage of the voting age population that voted in a given election.

Turnout rebounded a bit in 2000, when over 50 percent voted. And in 2004 and 2008, the upturns were even sharper, as more than 55.5 percent of the voting age population went to the polls in 2004 and 57.1 percent in 2008. In 2012 it decreased to 54.9 percent.

The increase in turnout among young Americans was especially noticeable. Nearly five million more people ages 18 to 29 voted in 2004 than in 2000, representing an increase from 40 to 49 percent with 2008 increasing to 51 percent. In 2012 it decreased to 45 percent.

## Turning Things Around: How to Increase Voter Turnout

There are a number of possible remedies to the decreasing voter turnout in the United States. Nine states have adopted election-day registration, which means citizens can go to their polling place or county courthouse, register, and vote all at one time. These states generally rank among those with the highest turnout in the nation. In 2012, they had a voter turnout 10 percent higher than other states.

Allowing people to vote at times and places other than the traditional Election Day visit to the polling station generally helps turnout. Thirty-two states currently do this.

According to the League of Women Voters' research, the degree to which people feel that the outcome of an election will affect them and their families has a lot to do with whether or not they vote. In other words, people need information that connects the election to what's happening at work, in their communities, and in their homes.

Yet another way to increase voter turnout is for citizens to become involved in encouraging friends, family members, and coworkers to vote. A country where just over half the voting-age population is counted on Election Day clearly can and should do a better job of involving citizens in our democratic process.



## Constitutional Election Rights

**FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT, Section 1.** The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. (Ratified in 1870)

**NINETEENTH AMENDMENT, Section 1.** The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. (Ratified in 1920)

**TWENTY-FOURTH AMENDMENT, Section 1.** The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax. (Ratified in 1964)

**TWENTY-SIXTH AMENDMENT, Section 1.** The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age. (Ratified in 1971)



## The Candidates

The candidates, of course, are the star players in the presidential election. They get all the attention, and they select the issues they'll focus on and the messages they'll convey to voters. They also determine how their campaigns will be run—though the candidate's campaign managers, pollsters, and other advisers usually play major roles in these decisions. How they'll go about their fundraising, how many debates they'll participate in, how they'll organize their social media and digital outreach strategies, whether they'll "go negative" in their advertising, and how much information they'll provide about their policy positions: These are all aspects of the campaign the candidate must address.

### Where Do They Come From?

Where do these people come from—these individuals who feel themselves qualified to lead their country? More often than not, they come from other elective offices—governorships, the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives—where they have shown they are attractive to voters and where they have built a public record of decision-making and action on a variety of policy issues. To qualify for the Presidency a person must be a natural-born U.S. citizen and at least 35 years old.

Because American politics has been dominated by white men for so long, women and minority candidates for the presidency have been few and far between. Notable exceptions in the past include Democrat Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988, Republican Elizabeth Dole in 2000, the Reverend Al Sharpton and Carol Mosely-Braun in 2004, and Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. In 2016 we have Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republicans Bobby Jindal, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Carly Fiorina and Dr. Ben Carson.

### Campaign Strategy: The Candidates and the Issues

Deciding what issues to focus on—and how to do that—is a major decision for the candidates as they weigh how



best to connect with American voters. To be taken seriously by the media and the public, candidates need to define in simple terms why they are running and project ideas that connect with key concerns of the electorate. Many candidates, in fact, select just one or two high-profile issues that will differentiate them from the other contenders in their party. Standing out is key in the early going, when a candidate may face ten or more possible competitors for the party's nomination.

### Campaign Strategy: Dividing the Electorate

Many candidates seek to differentiate themselves by making direct appeals to specific segments of the party faithful, e.g., the conservative wing or the liberal wing. However, front-running candidates in both parties rarely propose controversial goals or policies that might alienate significant portions of their party's voters and prove a liability during the general election. The front-runners' goal during the early going and beyond is to get the mainstream of the party behind them as consensus candidates and to demonstrate "electability," or the ability to attract the support of the majority of American voters—Democrats, Republicans, other parties, and independents—come November.

## The Parties and Other Behind-the-Scenes Powers

The challenge of running a competitive campaign for the U.S. presidency is made easier by the existence of the political parties and other organizations that support individual candidates and their agendas. The Democratic and Republican parties sponsor political advertising, organize volunteers, and help get-out-the-vote on Election Day.

### Early History: How the Political Parties Came to Be

The U.S. Constitution has nothing to say about political parties. In fact, the Constitution's framers were resolutely opposed to the formation of political parties in this country. Based on their knowledge of the way things worked in Britain, the framers believed that parties created unnecessary and counterproductive divisions within a nation. They thought that candidates should be judged on their personal merits and their stands on the issues, not their party affiliations.

Before long, however, early opposition gave way to the political and practical convenience of a party system. Parties enhanced cooperation between the executive and

legislative branches of government and made it easier to coordinate policymaking among the different levels of government—from the federal level down to the states, counties, and towns. More importantly, parties allowed diverse groups of like-minded Americans from throughout the country to come together and have an influence on national policymaking and the election of the president.

## The Life of the Parties: The Democrats and Republicans Take Center Stage

From the beginning, American politics has been dominated by two major parties. However, the constituencies and the names of these parties changed during the early years of the republic.

Many observers note that in recent years the Republican Party has become increasingly conservative. Although there is a range of opinion within the party, Republicans generally advocate a limited role for the federal government in solving society's ills. Republicans also tend to support lower taxes, cuts in a range of domestic programs from social welfare to environmental protection, and increases in spending for defense. They also tend to oppose reproductive choice and gun control.

The Democrats have been identified since the 1930s as the more progressive party, due in large part to Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs, designed to alleviate problems caused by the Great Depression. The Democrats generally support a more active government role in protecting the environment, public education, and public health and in ensuring equal opportunity for all citizens. The party also tends to support reproductive choice and some forms of gun control.

### The National Committees

Each of the major political parties is led by a national committee headquartered in Washington, D.C. While the national parties used to come to life only every four years in running the presidential nominating conventions, in the

## Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1960-2012

Year	Percentage of Voting-Age Population
1960	62.8
1964	61.4
1968	60.7
1972	55.1
1976	53.6
1980	52.8
1984	53.3
1988	50.3
1992	55.2
1996	49.0
2000	50.3
2004	55.5
2008	57.1
2012	54.9

We each have  
the ability to increase  
voter turnout in  
this country.

### How you can help:

- Register to vote and help others register, too. Get started at [www.vote411.org](http://www.vote411.org)
- Talk to people about the candidates and the issues and why you feel it's important to vote.
- Find out if your family, friends, and neighbors have what they need to make informed decisions and get to the polls. Maybe all they need is a ride.
- Don't go to the polling place alone. Make a date to take a neighbor.

last three decades they have shifted dramatically to full-time professional organizations supporting state and local parties and recruiting and training candidates.

In recent election cycles, a key function of the Democratic and Republican National Committees (DNC and RNC) has been to raise money to support its party and candidates. In 2012, the DNC took in \$316 million and the RNC raised \$409 million. The amounts raised by the parties almost invariably increase from one election cycle to the next.

## Who's Sponsoring That Ad?

As the presidential campaign season gets under way, television, radio and digital/online ads will start appearing out of nowhere. Make sure to listen or watch until the end of the ad for the sponsor—and if it's not a candidate's campaign, take the whole thing with a grain of salt.

If a radio or TV ad is paid for by a candidate's organization, it is required to have "My name is X and I approved this ad" (or something similar). That rule, passed as part of BCRA in 2002, is intended to make candidates and their campaigns more accountable for what their advertising says.

## The State and Local Parties

The parties also have committees at the state and local levels throughout the country that play an important role in a presidential campaign. They keep up enthusiasm at the grassroots, distribute campaign literature, and provide staff for candidates' headquarters. Support from party leaders and volunteers at the state and local levels is considered crucial to the success of a presidential campaign.

## Independents' Day: Beyond the Parties

The Democratic and Republican Parties have been the dominant political parties in the United States for more than a century, but for many years, a considerable number of Americans have called themselves independents. A 2012 NBC/WSJ poll asked the question: Do you consider yourself a (party identification)? The results were: 10% Just Independent, Republican Leaning Independent 12%, Not Strong Republican 7%, Strong Republican 22%, Democrat Leaning Independent 10%, Not Strong Democrat 8%, Strong Democrat 30% and Other 1% (total 100%).

## Enter the Special Interests: Independent Groups Step Up Their Campaign Activity

The political parties aren't the only organizations working to influence the outcome of American elections. Recent presidential and congressional races have seen groups such as the Christian Coalition, the AFL-CIO, the American Medical Association, the Tea Party, and many others playing an increasingly important role in promoting candidates and their ideas and getting Americans to the polls.

In addition, in recent elections, individuals and organizations with millions of dollars to spend have formed special committees to influence the outcome of the presidential and congressional races. In some cases, these groups are established under the law so that they can accept unlimited funds and may not have to reveal who their donors are.

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA), placed new restrictions on what interest groups can do to help favored candidates, especially in the period just before Election Day.

## The Media

Broadcast television, radio news, and the mainstream print and online newspapers and newsmagazines have enormous influence on the presidential election process. These pillars of the traditional media are still the sources from which the majority of Americans get most of their news and information about the candidates, the issues, and the election.

In recent years, however, Americans have become increasingly disenchanted with the traditional media and their dominant role in American politics. The public's distrust of traditional institutions—together with the advent of new technologies—has opened the door to new ways for voters to get their election information. Radio talk shows to the Internet and twenty-four-hour cable news channels offer a growing assortment of election information resources.

Over the last decade, social media sites, blogs, viral marketing, e-mail outreach and other vehicles for online information sharing have virtually changed the definition of "media" by democratizing the process and allowing everyday citizens to shape the making of the news. Increasingly, candidates, supporters, voters and the media from all over the world are able to respond instantaneously and cheaply to events as they happen.

## Running for Coverage: The Candidates and the Media

Despite the burgeoning competition, the traditional media are still enormously important. Newspapers and network television still reach the largest audiences in the United States. A modern presidential campaign is as much a battle for favorable coverage in the mainstream news media as it is a battle for votes.

Some believe the major newspapers and the network news programs can virtually create a presidential frontrunner by giving a candidate valuable exposure or simply by identifying the candidacy as the one to beat. Most news outlets give the greatest coverage to candidates who have the most money (their own money plus campaign contributions), as well as the most favorable ratings in public opinion polls.

While acceptance by the mainstream media as a "major candidate" is a crucial asset, a candidate can attract media attention and buzz by performing unexpectedly well. The unexpected rise of a little-known candidate, with innovative tactics and appeal, attracts ratings and readers.

There are plenty of well-known ways to draw favorable media attention: Stage events with "good visuals" for the television cameras and news photographers, such as large crowds enthusiastically waving banners and American flags.

## DUTIES AND POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT U.S. CONSTITUTION, ARTICLE II

**Section 2.** The President shall be commander in chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several states, when called into the actual service of the United States; he may require the opinion, in writing, of the principal officer in each of the executive departments, upon any subject relating to the duties of their respective offices, and he shall have power to grant reprieves and pardons for offenses against the United States, except in cases of impeachment.

He shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, judges of the Supreme Court, and all other officers of the United States, whose appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by law: but the Congress may by law vest the appointment of such inferior officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the courts of law, or in the heads of departments.

The President shall have power to fill up all vacancies that may happen during the recess of the Senate, by granting commissions which shall expire at the end of their next session.

**Section 3.** He shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient; he may, on extraordinary occasions, convene both Houses, or either of them, and in case of disagreement between them, with respect to the time of adjournment, he may adjourn them to such time as he shall think proper; he shall receive ambassadors and other public ministers; he shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed, and shall commission all the officers of the United States.

Learn more at:  
[www.usconstitution.net/const.html#Article2](http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html#Article2)

**Name,  
Address,  
and SSN**See separate  
instructions.**Presidential  
Election Campaign**

P R I N T  C L E A R L Y	For the year Jan. 1–Dec. 31, 2010, or other tax year beginning _____, 2010, ending _____, 20_____		OMB No. 1545-0074
	Your first name and initial	Last name	<b>Your social security number</b>
	If a joint return, spouse's first name and initial	Last name	<b>Spouse's social security number</b>
	Home address (number and street). If you have a P.O. box, see instructions.		Apt. no.
City, town or post office, state, and ZIP code. If you have a foreign address, see instructions.			<input type="checkbox"/> <b>You</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Spouse</b> Checking a box below will not change your tax or refund.

Check here if you, or your spouse if filing jointly, want \$3 to go to this fund . . . . .  **You**     **Spouse**

## What Happens When a Taxpayer Checks the Presidential Election Fund Box on Their Tax Return?

Checking the box at the top of your tax return does not increase the taxes you pay or reduce your refund. It simply deposits \$3.00 of the tax you've already paid into the Presidential Election Fund. The size of the Fund and the strength of our democracy depend entirely on the number of people who choose to check the box. And, it's the only part of your taxes that you actually can designate for a specific purpose!

A dramatic backdrop that highlights some of the issues the candidate is talking about—a pristine lake if the topic is the environment, or a factory if the candidate is addressing economic issues, or a family living room or a local coffee shop to convey the message that this is someone who cares about real people.

### How to Find the Best Election Coverage?

Recognize the pluses and the minuses of the information you receive from all the different types of media. If you don't feel you're getting enough information about the candidates and their positions on the issues from the mainstream press, check out some of the alternatives—for example, by searching online for more detailed breakdowns of where the candidates stand.

Don't be fooled by ads from other sources. If a radio or TV ad is paid for by a candidate's organization, it is required to include this statement, "My name is X and I approved this ad" (or something similar).

### Money:

#### Who Gives It, Who Gets It

Presidential candidates spent \$2.34 billion in the 2012 U.S. election campaign, more than four times the 2004 amount, based on Federal Election Commission filings.

President Barack Obama, the first major-party nominee to reject federal funding for the general election in 2008, spent \$1.107 billion in 2012. His Republican challenger Mitt Romney spent \$1.24 billion. Each amount was double the combined \$646.7 million that Republican President George W. Bush and Democratic nominee John Kerry spent in 2004 and in total was about double the \$1.2 billion that Barack Obama and Republican John McCain spent in 2008.

These are huge increases compared with historic spending on Presidential elections.

### The Cost of Running for President

These are the total amounts of money spent by presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in the 2012 elections, according to the FEC and the Center for Responsive Politics. (Note: Both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney declined to accept federal funds in the primary and general elections.)

Candidate	Total Funds Raised (in millions \$)	Federal Funds (in millions \$)
Barack Obama	\$1,107	\$0.00
Mitt Romney	\$1,238	\$0.00

### Attacks of the PACs

Groups that want to have influence in U.S. politics often form political action committees. PACs, Political Action Committees, can contribute to candidates and parties and can spend money independently, such as by running their own ads. Business corporations and labor unions are prohibited from donating to candidates or spending their own money on campaigns, but they can legally form PACs funded by donations from their individual members.

A new element in the 2012 presidential race was the candidate Super PAC. Because of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (see "The Court Weighs In" below), these Super PACs can raise unlimited funds from individuals, corporations and unions to support or oppose federal candidates. Donors are contributing lots more money to directly support their candidates by using Super PACs to avoid the normal candidate contribution limits. In 2012 there were 1,310 super PAC's that raised \$828,224,700 and spent \$609,417,654 supporting candidate campaigns. These huge "independent" expenditure campaigns may exceed \$1 billion in 2016.

### How Did We Get Here?

#### A Short History of Campaign Finance

The effect of campaign contributions on politics has been a concern throughout America's history. Congress passed a law making corporate contributions to federal campaigns illegal in 1907. President Richard Nixon signed into law the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971. Among other things, the law required candidates and donors to report their political contributions and spending.

After the Watergate scandal of 1972–1974, which involved big donors to President Nixon's campaign, legislators revisited the campaign finance issue. The FECA amendments signed into law in 1974 represented the most comprehensive campaign finance legislation ever adopted at the federal level.



Among other things, the law:

- Strengthened requirements for reporting of campaign contributions and spending.
- Set new limits on spending in congressional elections.
- Limited the size of contributions to candidates and parties and put a cap on an individual's total contributions per campaign cycle.
- Created a system of public financing to support the campaigns of presidential candidates who agree to specific contribution and spending limits.
- Created an independent agency, the Federal Election Commission, to enforce the new rules.

## The Court Weighs In

In 1976, the Supreme Court held parts of the FECA unconstitutional with its decision in *Buckley v. Valeo*. The Court declared that mandatory spending limits on congressional campaigns violated the Constitution's free-speech protections. However, the justices let stand the spending limits for presidential candidates who accepted public funds, asserting that these were voluntary limits and thus could pass constitutional muster.

The Court also ruled in *Buckley* that independent groups and individuals could spend unlimited amounts of money—a decision that has had an enormous and lasting impact. Though the Court may have been thinking of small, local groups, this decision gave rise to large amounts of money being spent by national interest groups.

The 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court that the First Amendment protects corporate and union political funding and that the government may not ban political spending by them in candidate elections. It struck down previous campaign finance reform provisions that prohibited such groups from "electioneering communications," such as broadcast, cable or satellite communications that mention a candidate within 60 days of a general election or 30 days of a primary. The case did not involve the federal ban on direct contributions from corporations or unions to candidates or political parties, which are still illegal in federal races. But, the introduction of candidate Super PACs (see "Attack of the PACs") into the 2012 presidential race with their "big money" influence is an unfortunate result.

## Public Funding of Presidential Elections

Candidates in every presidential election since 1976 have been eligible to receive public funds to cover some of the costs of their campaigns. The idea behind public funding of presidential elections is to make candidates less dependent on contributions from special interests and wealthy donors. Public money for presidential elections comes from a fund supported by the "taxpayer check-off" on individual tax returns.

The public financing system is voluntary for candidates—it offers them a deal, which must be made attractive for them to agree to it. The deal is: If you agree to limit the amount of money you raise and spend and play by our rules, we will give you lots of money for your campaign—partial funding in the primaries and full funding in the general election. Up until 2000, almost all candidates found this set of trade-offs agreeable and participated.

In 2000, the system began to show weakness, when George W. Bush declined to accept public financing for the primaries and instead raised more money from private sources. Both he and his Democratic opponent Al Gore accepted public financing in the general election, though. Neither Obama nor Romney accepted public funding in 2012.

It seems very likely that the best financed candidates will forgo public financing in both the primary and general elections in 2016.

## How Much Can You Give a Candidate?

Want to support a candidate yourself? Individuals may contribute up to \$2,700 to a presidential candidate during the primary election campaign, whether or not the candidate accepts public matching funds.

During the general election, major-party candidates who have accepted public funding may not accept individual campaign contributions, with minor exceptions. However, if a candidate does not accept public financing for the general election (this happened for the first time in 2008), then individuals can contribute another \$2,700 to a presidential candidate for the general election.

The sky's the limit when a presidential candidate refuses to accept public funds and the accompanying restrictions on campaign contributions and spending.

## Independent Advocacy: Really Independent?

For interest groups that want to influence elections, help favored candidates, and damage candidates they don't like, there are ways to do so independently of the official campaigns and political parties.

## How to Decipher the Polls

During a presidential election race, the news media often become fixated not on the candidates' ideas or their campaigning, but on the latest poll results. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you sort through all the numbers:

- Who sponsored the poll? Special-interest organizations often sponsor polls that are designed to place their issues at the top of the list of voters' concerns.
- Who was surveyed? Was it all adults or just likely voters? All parents or parents of school-age kids? Such factors can have a dramatic impact on poll results.
- How were the questions worded? The exact wording of survey questions also can skew the results.
- When was the survey conducted? A poll is a snapshot of people's opinions at a specific time. If one candidate is getting favorable attention in the news during the week of the poll, then the numbers are likely to reflect it.
- What is the margin of error? Typically, a reputable poll has a margin of error of 5 percent or less. Translation: If the margin of error is 5 percent and one candidate is ahead in the poll by 5 percent, then it's just as likely that the race is a dead heat.

*Remember this:* The only poll that matters is the official one on Election Day. There's no telling what will happen until the people vote.

Individuals & organizations may give election donations	To each candidate or candidate committee per election	To national party committee per calendar year	To state, district & local party committee per calendar year	To any other political action committee (PAC) per calendar year [1]	Addition National Party committee accounts [2]
Individual	\$2,700*	\$33,400*	\$10,000 (combined limit)	\$5,000	\$100,200* per account, per year
National Party Committee	\$5,000 [3]	No limit	No limit	\$5,000	
State, District & Local Party Committee	\$5,000 (combined limit)	No limit	No limit	\$5,000 (combined limit)	
PAC (multicandidate)	\$5,000	\$15,000	\$5,000 (combined limit)	\$5,000	\$45,000 per account, per year
PAC (not multicandidate)	\$2,700*	\$33,400*	\$10,000 (combined limit)	\$5,000	\$100,200 per account, per year
Authorized Campaign Committee	\$2,000 [5]	No limit	No limit	\$5,000	

\* Indexed for inflation in odd-numbered years. 1. "PAC" here refers to a committee that makes contributions to other federal political committees. Independent-expenditure-only political committees (sometimes called "super PACs") may accept unlimited contributions, including from corporations and labor organizations. 2. The limits in this column apply to a national party committee's accounts for: (i) the presidential nominating convention; (ii) election recounts and contests and other legal proceedings; and (iii) national party headquarters buildings. A party's national committee, Senate campaign committee and House campaign committee are each considered separate national party committees with separate limits. Only a national party committee, not the parties' national congressional campaign committees, may have an account for the presidential nominating convention. 3. Additionally, a national party committee and its Senatorial campaign committee may contribute up to \$46,800 combined per campaign to each Senate candidate.

# Electoral College Map 2012



## Surfer, Beware!

The openness of the Internet is what makes it a great election-year resource for voters: No matter what kind of information you're looking for, it's a good bet you'll find it. But the Internet's free-wheeling, wide-open culture also makes it a place where special interests can seek to influence your vote. A few factors to keep in mind:

- Try to determine the source of election information. Some websites thrive on rumor and innuendo, others publish patently false stories about the candidates, and still others distort the candidates' views and backgrounds to serve their own political interests.
- During campaigns, some people set up Web sites that mimic the sites of candidates so they can provide false or misleading information or satirize the candidate.

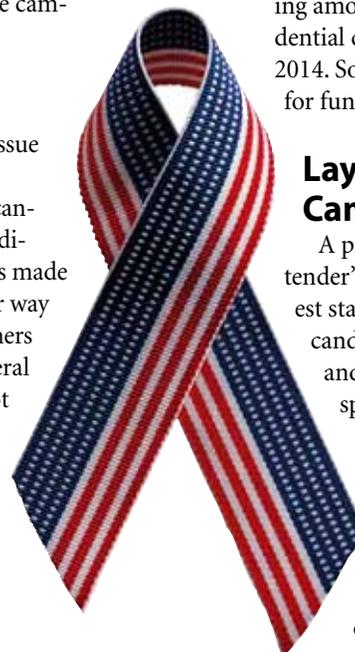
The bottom line: Surfer, beware! There are plenty of good sites out there that provide helpful information for voters such as the League of Women Voters' [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org). And the not-so-good ones? Take them off your "Favorites" list.

## Independent Expenditures

Individuals, corporations, unions, and political action committees can spend unlimited amounts of money on advertising and other activities endorsing individual candidates. This is perfectly legal as long as the spending is disclosed to the FEC and is not coordinated with a candidate's campaign. (The reason for this rule is that "independent" activities that are coordinated with the campaign are not truly independent.)

## Issue Advocacy

Issue ads just before an election or issue ads run by electoral organizations are often designed to build support for a candidate without explicitly telling the audience to vote for the candidate. This has made issue advocacy an increasingly popular way for corporations, labor unions and others to try to influence the outcome of federal elections. However, all issue ads are not candidate ads in disguise. Our constitutional right to speak in the media to elected officials about issues that are important to us can be expressed through issue ads.



## PART 2 - THE PROCESS

### Early Action

Presidential campaigns have always started well in advance of the first caucus or party primary. The 2016 election has followed, and even accelerated, this pattern. Because of the front-loaded primary schedule and the need to raise increasing amounts of campaign cash, contenders in the 2016 presidential contest were busy campaigning and raising money in 2014. Some experts on politics used to call this competition for funds "the invisible primary."

### Laying the Groundwork: Campaigning Unannounced

A presidential campaign begins long before a contender's formal announcement of candidacy. In the earliest stages of the campaign, "unannounced" presidential candidates try to build a favorable image in their party and throughout the country by making frequent public speeches and appearing at important party functions. It is now common for presidential candidates to start visiting leadoff primary and caucus states such as Iowa and New Hampshire two years or more before voters in those states choose among their parties' contenders. The goals of these early visits are to build name recognition, make important connections with party leaders, and create a founda-

tion of support in states that traditionally have set the tone for the primary season.

## The Money Chase: PAC It Up

Another established practice among would-be candidates long before a presidential election is to establish one or more political action committees. These “leadership PACs” allow candidates to collect contributions that do not count against their presidential fundraising and spending limits—as long as they haven’t officially filed with the Federal Election Commission as candidates for president.

The ostensible purpose of the PACs is to make contributions to other politicians in their campaigns for office. With PAC money, however, candidates also are able to travel around the country, hire staff and consultants, and develop mailing lists and fundraising appeals that will form the basis of their presidential campaigns.

## The Money Chase: The Exploratory Committee

The next step is to file papers with the Federal Election Commission (FEC). This allows candidates to start raising money for polling and other campaign activities that will move them closer to a formal announcement.

Filing papers with the FEC usually coincides with announcements by candidates that they have formed an “exploratory committee” to investigate the possibility of a presidential run. Even if it’s clear that the candidates have every intention of running for president, this exploratory committee provides an escape hatch should they decide the time’s not right to run. Equally important, the announcement of an exploratory committee offers candidates an early shot of free publicity that can be repeated later on, when these candidates make it official that they are running for president.

Raising lots of money early in the game shows that a candidate is a serious contender and therefore helps raise even more money. Candidates have to file quarterly financial reports with the FEC, and these are public records. So all interested players can immediately see who is doing well in “the money primary.”

## Competing for Talent: Lining Up Key Advisers and Staff

Another important task in the early going of a presidential campaign is to line up a campaign team. Often, candidates will compete for their party’s top strategists and consultants—individuals believed to have the skills and the experience to help ensure the success of a candidate’s campaign.

Of course a real campaign team includes top advisors as well as hundreds, and often thousands, more. Other key players are the campaign volunteers throughout the country who help organize local events, manage digital outreach, distribute bumper stickers and buttons, and support the candidate at the local level.

## Making It Official: The Announcement

A presidential candidate’s formal announcement often looks like a homecoming rally, with cheering crowds, banners, balloons, and emotional appeals to family, home, and country. More often than not, the candidates return to the places where they were born or grew up so they can

## Website Directory

- **VOTE411.org** - Has all the information you need to participate in the election.
- **C-SPAN’s campaign Web page** - [www.c-span.org/campaign2016](http://www.c-span.org/campaign2016)
- **Factcheck.org** - Nonpartisan site checks the accuracy of political ads and allegations.
- **Federal Election Commission** - Official site of the government agency that regulates campaign finance. [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)
- **FollowTheMoney.org**
- **League of Women Voters** - [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)
- **National Student/Parent** - Mock election [nationalmockelection.org](http://nationalmockelection.org)
- **The Center for Responsive Politics** – non-partisan site on money in U.S. elections. [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org)
- **PollingReport.com**

show they’re normal Americans and haven’t forgotten their roots.

Even though the media and the public usually know exactly what will be said at the announcement, the candidate’s campaign makes the most of the opportunity to rouse the troops, highlight the candidate’s unique qualifications and background, and offer a compelling vision for the country’s future.

The announcement provides the candidate with a great opportunity for free publicity, as reporters and television crews from throughout the country draw attention to the candidate’s bid for the presidency.

## After the Early Going: A Winnowing of the Field

By the end of the year preceding the presidential election—for the 2016 election, that means the end of 2015—the field of contenders for the party nominations usually has narrowed.

## The Primaries and Caucuses

It used to be that a political party’s nominee for president was selected by influential party members at the party’s national convention—generally after a lot of wheeling and dealing in smoke-filled rooms. Realizing that this was not a very democratic way to choose a major-party presidential candidate, the Democratic and Republican parties have over the last half century opened up the process to voters. The result is today’s often confusing schedule of primaries and caucuses which makes voters—and not party leaders—the VIPs in choosing the parties’ presidential nominees.

The series of Presidential primary elections and caucuses is a very important step in the long, complex process of electing the President of the United States of America. The primary elections are run by state and local governments in the states that do not have caucuses.

The goal of the primaries and caucuses are to choose

delegates that have committed themselves to a particular candidate that they will represent at the party’s national convention. Although voters may see the candidate’s name at the primary poll, they are actually voting for delegates that will represent the candidate. Sometimes the delegates name and party is listed and shows the candidate they will represent.

A caucus is a meeting of members of a political party on the precinct level, the smallest election district. Thousands of caucuses occur at the same time and date throughout a state.

In most states, only voters registered with a party may vote in that party’s primary, known as a closed primary. In some states, a semi-closed primary is practiced, in which voters unaffiliated with a party (independents) may choose a party primary in which to vote. In an open primary, any voter may vote in any party’s primary. Also, there are *presidential preference contests*, which are merely “beauty contests” or straw polls that do not result in the selection of any delegates, which are instead chosen at caucuses.

Nearly all states have a *binding* primary, in which the results of the election legally *bind* some or all of the delegates to vote for a particular candidate at the national convention, for a certain number of ballots or until the candidate releases the delegates. A handful of states practice a *non-binding* primary, which may select candidates to a state convention, which then selects delegates.

Often less than 25 percent of eligible voters participate in the primaries and less than 10 percent for caucuses. These voters tend to be more partisan than general election voters. That means that Republican primary voters tend to be more conservative; Democrat voters more liberal.

Thus, to win over these voters during the primary campaign candidates often speak about issues that are more partisan and ideological.

To learn more about your state’s primary or caucus, visit their election site or your local/county election office.

## The Early States: Iowa and New Hampshire

The **Iowa caucus** is the first major electoral event of the nominating process for President of the United States. The **New Hampshire primary** is the first primary election held in the United States.

These states have traditionally served as an early indication of which candidates might win their party’s nomination. Winning these two states has become so important that potential candidates start campaigning years in advance. Winners receive front-runner status and additional media exposure that may help them in the primaries that follow.



## Super Tuesday, March 1, A Mega Primary for 2016

**Super Tuesday** is the day when the most states simultaneously hold their primary elections, and the single day when the most nominating delegates can be won. This is an incredibly influential primary day.

This year more states have moved their primaries forward and thus compressed the primary election season. States vie for earlier primaries in order to claim greater influence in the nomination process. The early primaries can act as a signal to the nation, showing which candidates are popular, giving those who perform well a major advantage. If a candidate seems likely to win after Super Tuesday, or at some later point, the party faithful will start to unify around the candidate as they prepare for the party convention.

## The Conventions

The national party conventions mark the official turning point in the presidential campaign from the primary season to the general election in the fall. The convention allows the party to put aside any intra-party jockeying and squabbles that occurred during the primaries, unite behind its nominee, define itself for the voters, and set the tone for the fall offensive.

### What's It All About?

#### The Function of the National Conventions

The conventions are the highest, most important source of authority for a national party. The conventions are officially the top decision-making body of the parties.

The party conventions play some important formal roles. In addition to nominating their presidential and vice presidential candidates, conventions officially establish party rules and priorities for the four years between presidential elections.

They also serve as a launching pad and media exposure opportunity for up-and-coming party leaders.

The major items on the convention agenda are:

- Nominate candidates for president and vice president;
- Adopt a national party platform;
- Adopt the rules that govern the party for the next four years;
- Rally the party faithful.

## Where the Money Comes From

The Center for Responsive Politics provided this record of spending for the 2012 presidential race. These are figures for all candidates, both Democratic and Republican, in both the primaries and the general election. Learn more at: [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org).

Individual contributions to presidential candidates	\$1.16 billion
Democratic and Republican National Committees	\$678 million
527 group spending (presidential & other races)	\$600 million
PAC / Independent contributions to presidential candidates	\$645 million
Convention host committee spending	\$142 million
FEC / Public funds for party conventions	\$35 million
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3.260 billion</b>

## The Delegates: Who Are All These People?

In 2016, the Republican convention will seat about 2,500 delegates, and the Democratic convention about 5,000 delegates.

Convention delegates are selected based on the results of the primaries and caucuses in their states, with most of the delegates coming to the convention pledged to support a specific candidate.

The job of the convention delegates has not been to choose the party's standard-bearer but to confirm the choice that voters throughout the country made months before during the primaries and caucuses.

Of course, the delegates aren't the only people at the conventions. There are also hordes of media representatives and television pundits, along with issue advocates, from environmentalists and farmers to labor union and business representatives, who all want the party to embrace their issues.

## The General Election Campaign

Today's general election contest is an elaborate production, with the candidates and their supporters crisscrossing the country and blanketing the airwaves with poll-tested political commercials.

With the primaries and the conventions behind them, the goal of the presidential candidates during the fall is to appeal to as many different kinds of people in as many different ways as possible. To accomplish this in a country where more than 200 million individuals are eligible to vote is a staggering task. It requires an effective national organization, enormous discipline on the part of the candidates and their campaigns, and large numbers of staff and volunteers, not to mention a great deal of money.

### Campaign Strategy: A Shift to the Center

The fall brings with it a number of strategic decisions for the candidates and their campaign organizations. But perhaps the most important decision facing the candidates as they approach the general election season is how to refine their message so it resonates with a majority of the American electorate.

Why tinker with a message that worked fine in the primaries? Because in the primaries the candidates were appealing to voters of their own parties, but now they are trying to connect with a much larger audience. This means they need to adopt a more mainstream message, a message with broad appeal, beyond the party faithful.

"Shifting to the center," as it is called, is often a tightrope walk for the candidates, because they don't want to offend their primary supporters or make it appear as though they are abandoning their earlier commitments.

### Campaign Strategy: Targeting a Candidate's Appeal

At the same time that the candidates have to reach out to a broad cross section of the American electorate, they must also decide how to target their campaigning for maximum effect. Because of the limited amounts of time and money available to candidates, it simply isn't possible for them to wage a full-fledged campaign in every state or among all voters. This means that the candidates have to focus on specific states and regions that they feel will be decisive in determining the winner of the election.

For a well-run campaign, that means keeping your eye on the Electoral College votes required to win the election. It also means that the candidates have to target their appearances and their advertising to specific groups of voters. To help cover the many places they can't visit, candidates rely on state and local party organizations to generate interest in the campaign and turn out the vote.

### Targeting Key States...

Under the Electoral College system, almost all of the states award their electoral votes on a winner-take-all basis, so that the candidate who receives the most popular votes in a state receives all of that state's electoral votes.

Candidates devote their energies to the largest states that they feel they have a chance of winning. At the same time, they tend to make only token appearances in states where they are assured of victory, while conceding those states where their chances are slim. The candidates generally focus their campaigning on "swing states" that could go either way in the presidential election.

Learn more about the Electoral College on page 13.

### ...And Swing Voters...

Just as there are swing states, there are also swing voters—individuals who don't necessarily vote along party lines or whose votes are still up for grabs. With the number of independent voters a sizeable 10 to 12 percent of the American electorate in recent years, presidential campaigns have focused on attracting the support of this all-important group.

### ...Without Ignoring Your Base

The importance of swing states and swing voters doesn't mean the candidates can ignore their most loyal supporters; in fact, they do so at their peril. For the candidates, the parties, and independent organizations, a major focus as Election Day approaches is to organize comprehensive get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns that bring loyal voters to the polls.

## Campaign Tactics: The Candidates in Control

The Federal Election Campaign Act, which establishes the rules for presidential campaign financing, requires candidates to create national organizations to handle campaign contributions and expenditures. As campaigns have grown more complex, these campaign organizations have become more professional, relying on political consultants, media experts, and pollsters to plot strategy and provide information and advice. The campaign generally has a close relationship with the national party, with the presidential campaign playing the dominant role.

A finely tuned and cohesive campaign organization can make the difference in steering a candidate to victory.

## Campaign Tactics: A Little Help from My Friends

The candidates and their organizations aren't alone in waging their campaigns, however. The political parties and other groups play very important roles in promoting their candidates of choice. After the campaign organizations themselves, the parties are the most important players.

## Campaign Tactics: Four Campaigns at Once

Today's presidential candidates essentially wage four campaigns at the same time. The first is the grassroots campaign. While the candidates themselves have little direct involvement in it, national campaign staff help to give it direction. It includes hundreds of local campaign headquarters and party organizations, from which volunteers and a few paid staff reach out into local communities. They register voters, make phone calls, send out mail, help friendly voters apply for absentee ballots, put up signs, do door-to-door canvassing, and get-out-the-vote on Election Day. While each of these activities is small in scale, when multiplied by thousands, their combined impact can carry a state.

The second level of campaigning is "on the ground," and includes all of the candidate's appearances and speeches, as well as the appearances throughout the country of key supporters, from the candidate's spouse and children to the vice presidential nominee, Hollywood celebrities, and prominent party leaders. The on-the-ground campaign is tightly controlled by the candidate's campaign organization, with advance teams scoping out locations, rounding up enthusiastic, cheering crowds, and creating compelling visuals for television by placing the candidate before a dramatic backdrop and distributing truckloads of banners, signs, and American flags among the crowd.

The third campaign in which the candidates are engaged is an on-the-air battle of radio and television commercials. This advertising is the most expensive line item in the campaign budget—an estimated one-third of the more than \$2.6 billion spent on the 2012 presidential campaign. The advertising gives the candidates massive nationwide exposure that they couldn't possibly achieve on the ground. It



takes the campaign directly into voters' living rooms and allows the candidates to project a fine-tuned, poll-tested image.

The fourth and newest arena consists of the fast-evolving online world of the Internet. This includes candidate websites and their presence on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, as digital advertising strategies, as well as campaign blogs (which also means monitoring the flow of messages in the blogosphere and responding quickly to them).

## Debate Watching

### 101

#### What Is A Debate?

A debate is an event at which the candidates meet face-to-face to answer questions that are asked of them. This gives the candidates a chance to state their views and to respond to their opponents' statements. It gives viewers a chance to directly compare the candidates and their positions.

Debates usually take place in front of a live audience and may also be televised or broadcast on the radio or the Internet. A televised or broadcast debate allows many more people to watch and learn about the candidates and issues.

Debates can follow different formats, or a combination of formats. The most common

formats are:

- **Single moderator:** one moderator asks the questions;
- **Panel:** a panel of journalists or experts question the candidates;
- **Town hall:** questions are submitted by members of the audience or randomly selected voters, in person or by phone or email. The Town Hall format allows for questions to be submitted in advance or during the debate.

The debate usually begins with an introduction of the candidates, who may also be given time to make opening statements. The heart of the debate takes place when the candidates are asked questions and they respond. There usually is a time limit for responses. The questioner may ask follow-up questions to get the candidates to explain or clarify their responses. Some debates give candidates an opportunity to "cross-examine" or ask questions directly of each other. At the end of the debate, the candidates are usually given time to make closing statements.

## Before The Debate

Thinking about and preparing for the debate before it takes place will enable you to get the most from watching it. It will familiarize you with the candidates and issues. The preparation will help you focus on what to look for in the debate so that you will get the information you need in deciding who to vote for.

It will help if you take some time before the debate to:

- Follow the campaign to learn about the candidates and their backgrounds;
- Find out what the important campaign issues are;
- Decide what issues are most important to you;
- Think about the questions you may have and the information you want to get from the debate to help you in your decision making;
- Open your mind to new opinions/impressions of the candidate regardless of party affiliation.

You may want to make plans to get together with friends or family to watch the debate. Watching the debate in a group and discussing it afterwards helps to clarify your thoughts about what was said in the debate and how the candidates performed.

## The Cost of Consultants

The cost of presidential campaigns is pushed up in part by consultants—these are private firms hired by the campaign organizations to supply expert advice. By far the most expensive of these are the media consultants, who develop strategies, get the TV and radio ads made, and then place the ads. These media consultants take a commission on all media buys, so they have an incentive to spend as much as possible.

## During The Debate

When watching the debate, ask yourself questions like these to help you judge the fairness of the debate and the performance of the candidates:

The debate format and questions:

- Does the format give each candidate an equal opportunity to speak and respond to questions?
- Are the questions clear, fair and equally tough on all candidates?
- Do the questions cover the issues that are important to you?
- Is the moderator in control of the debate? Does the moderator need to say less and let the candidates say more?

The candidates:

- Do they answer questions directly, or do they evade them or fail to answer the specific question?
- Do they give specifics about their stands on the issues, or do they speak in generalities? Do they support their positions and arguments with facts and figures?
- Do they talk about their own policies and positions, or do they mostly attack their opponents?
- Are their proposals realistic? Can they



actually carry out the promises they are making?

- Do they appear sincere, confident and relaxed?
- Do they show how their backgrounds and experience qualify them to hold the office?
- Are their answers consistent with their previous positions, and if not, do they explain why?
- What image are they trying to create?
- Do their responses appear overly rehearsed or “canned”?

Media coverage:

- If you are watching the debate on television, are reaction shots or other techniques used to create a sense of drama or conflict?
- Are you being influenced by comments made by reporters and commentators immediately before and after the debate?

## After The Debate

It will help clarify your thoughts about the candidates and the issues if you take some time after the debate to reflect on what you have just seen and heard. You can do this by:

- Turning off the TV and avoid listening to the commentaries;
- Comparing your impressions with others who watched the debate;
- Asking yourself, based on the information you got from watching the debate, which candidate appears most qualified for the office;
- Identifying the issues on which you agree with a candidate and those on which you disagree, and deciding whether that makes you more or less likely to vote for a particular candidate;
- Asking yourself if you learned something new about the issues or the candidate;
- Thinking about whether you have more questions about the issues or the candidates that you want to follow up on;
- Getting more information about the candidates’ positions from news reports, candidate Web sites and nonpartisan voter information Web sites such as [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org);
- Watching later debates for more information or to confirm your current impressions of the candidates.

### Other Resources:

League of Women Voters:  
[www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org)

LWVUS Presidential Debate Archive:  
[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

Commission on Presidential Debates:  
[www.debates.org](http://www.debates.org)

## Most Important Problems Facing The U.S. Today

Dissatisfaction with govt.	14 percent
Economy in general	12 percent
Unemployment/Jobs	10 percent
Race Relations / Racism	8 percent



Ethical / Moral decline	6 percent
Immigration	6 percent
Healthcare	5 percent
Education	4 percent
Federal budget deficit	3 percent
Lack of money	2 percent

Source: Gallup Poll, May 6-10, 2015

A number of other issues are important to the nation’s, and even the world’s, future, such as global warming, the aging U.S. population and the pressures that will bring on Social Security and Medicare, the American people’s low savings rate, and America’s huge and persistent trade deficit.

## Election Day

On the Tuesday in November that falls between November 2 and November 8, control of the presidential election finally passes into the hands of the American voter—where it belongs. Join with others in your community in helping to make this decision. It comes down to this: the voters’ decision about which of the candidates

they feel is most qualified to lead the nation.

Way states can help boost voter turnout are by early voting programs by mail or in-person and allowing voter to register to vote or update their voter registration close to or on Election Day.

#### Some basic things you can do:

1. Vote and encourage others to vote, including early or absentee if needed.
2. Find out about the candidates and their positions: read the papers, check the websites; visit [VOTE411.org](http://VOTE411.org)
3. Decide what you're looking for in a candidate.
4. Evaluate the candidates' stands on the issues important to you.
5. Learn about the candidates' leadership abilities.
6. Talk about the candidates and issues with friends, relatives, and coworkers. Provide information by e-mail, instant-message, blogs or mail.
7. Verify your voter registration status and make sure you have the correct ID required to vote in your state (check [www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org) for the rules).
8. Make sure you know where to vote. The vast majority of calls received on Election Day hotlines are from voters

asking about their polling place. The League of Women Voters' site – [www.VOTE411.org](http://www.VOTE411.org) – provides this information.

9. Tweet any problems you are seeing to #votingproblems.

## A College Education:

### How Does the Electoral College Work?

The Electoral College was established by the founding fathers as a compromise between election of the president by Congress and election by popular vote. The people of the United States actually vote for electors who then vote for the President.

The Constitution authorizes each state to appoint a number of electors equal to the number of representatives (435) plus senators (100) that the state has in Congress. To this total of 535, the Twenty-Third Amendment added three for the District of Columbia—the same number of electors as the least populous state—bringing the total of the college to 538 members.

If one candidate for the office of President (and one candidate for the office of Vice-President) gets 270 electoral votes—a majority of the total numbers of 538 electors—a President has been elected.

The Constitution is silent on how a state is to choose its electors. In the early years, legislatures adopted several methods: appointment by legislature, election by the people on the statewide basis, or a combination of these methods. But by 1836, almost every state was using a popular vote system.

On Election Day, when voters in each state go to the polls, each one casts a ballot for the slate of presidential electors who are pledged to support the candidate the voter prefers. These slates have been selected by political parties, through conventions, committees or primaries.

In some states, only the names of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates appear on the ballot, masking the fact that voters are choosing electors rather than voting directly for the candidates. In the other states, both candidates and

electors are identified.

To learn more about the electoral college and the electoral vote in your state visit: [www.electoral-vote.com](http://www.electoral-vote.com).

## Tabulating the Outcome: The Results Are In!

Before the advent of television, electronic voting machines, and computerized balloting, it could take days or even weeks for the nation to know whom it had elected president. But starting in the 1950s, and accelerating in later decades, this process changed. The national TV networks began coverage of election returns while the polls were still open and continued until the results were known, which generally didn't take very long.

Early projections of election results became a controversial public issue. Critics said that by predicting the outcome while Americans were still voting, the media were in effect discouraging some people from voting.

As a result of these concerns, the major broadcast and cable networks decided to wait until a state's polls have closed before reporting election results for that state. But they still are able to project a winner of the presidential election before the polls close in all states across the country. The media emphatically point out that their First Amendment right to freedom of the press would be violated by any restrictions on their announcing election winners.

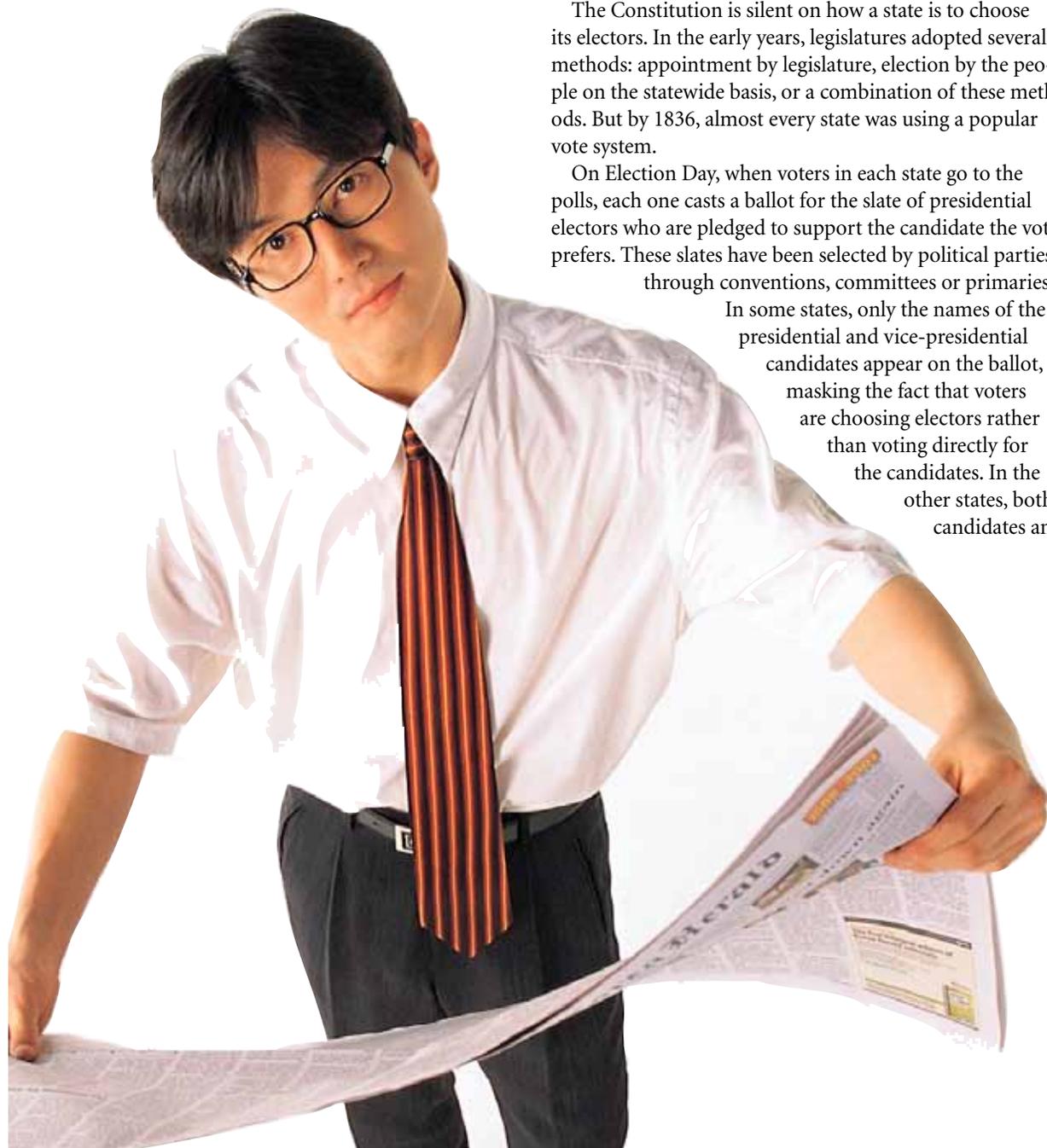
Thanks to computerized tabulation of ballots and a technique known as exit polling, now the winner is often announced just hours after the polls have closed.

## Making It Official

Normally, by the morning after the election, the final results are in, and the entire country knows who the next president and vice president will be. But whether we have a normal election or a contested one, the outcome still has to be made official. In December, the members of the Electoral College travel to their state capitals to cast their official electoral votes, sign some necessary documents, and pose for pictures, before returning home. When Congress convenes in January, senators and representatives gather for a joint congressional session, and the official results are announced from all the states.

At noon on the 20th of January following a presidential election, the term of the preceding president ends and that of the incoming president begins. At a formal inauguration ceremony, the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court swears in the president and the vice president before members of Congress, government dignitaries, representatives of foreign governments, and important well-wishers, as well as a national television audience.

After an inaugural address and parade, the new president is on the job. The American people have made their choice and are looking to the new president to prove them right.



## Election Newspaper Activities for Teachers and Students

**Assessing the Candidates:** Find articles in the newspaper about the candidates. Analyze and evaluate their positions on issues that are important to you. Which candidate stands out, why?

**Bias in the News:** News stories are supposed to present the facts. Sometimes the reporter's own bias is reflected in a story. Read elections stories. Identify the facts in the story. Do you find opinions in the story or an effort to lead you to a particular viewpoint?

**Candidate Quotes:** Develop a classroom portfolio of quotes by the presidential candidates. Sort the quotes by issues and then by what position the candidate took a stand on. At various points during the election cycle discuss the issues. Take notice if the recent candidate quotes show that they have altered their positions on an issue. Before the election decide where you stand on the issues and choose the candidate that represents your stance. Write an editorial supporting your candidate.

**Comparing Media:** Follow an issue that is being reported about in the newspaper, on TV, and online. Compare and contrast the coverage between these news sources. Which provides the most in-depth, accurate information? Do the media report on the same issues or events differently? Do they focus on different slices of an issue or event?

**Editorial Bias:** A newspaper's opinions about candidates is usually confined to the editorial pages. However, choice of news stories and candidate coverage can reflect the bias of the newspaper. Over a period of time pull all the elections stories in the newspaper. Now analyze and evaluate the number of stories for each candidate as well as how the candidate was portrayed. How many stories were published for each candidate? How many reflected positively or negatively on the candidate? Based on your results, is the paper biased in its coverage toward a particular candidate? Write a Letter to the Editor about your results.

**Editorial Cartoons:** Editorial cartoonists use a variety of tools to communicate their message. Among them are use of symbols, caricatures, stereotypes and analogies. Find editorial cartoons about the candidates. Which of these tools is being used in the various cartoons? What prior knowledge did you need to call on in order to make sense of the cartoon? Now create your own editorial cartoon about a candidate's position that you either agree or disagree with.

**Editorial Opinion:** From the editorial section find editorials, cartoons and letters to the editor focused on election issues and/or the candidates. Make a two-column sheet with facts on one side and opinions on the other. Based on your analysis, evaluate which ones you think are most persuasive, those with more facts or with more opinions.

**Election Vocabulary Board:** Find election words in the newspaper on an ongoing basis. When you first find a word, write your own vocabulary definition of the word. If you don't know the meaning of the word, use context clues in the story to help determine the meaning. Look up your

word in the dictionary to determine if your definition is accurate. Place your definition or the dictionary definition on the board in alphabetical order for the class to refer to during the election campaign.

**Endorsements:** Organizations and the media often endorse a candidate that reflects their view or that they think will do a good job. Look for endorsements in the newspaper and other media. What impact might the endorsement have on voters' opinions?

**Issue Comparison:** Choose a major issue that is in the newspaper. Briefly describe the issue. What do the Democratic and Republican candidates say about the issue? What does your newspaper editorial page write about the issue? What is your own opinion on the issue? Explain why?

**Party Platform:** Using the newspaper and online resources create a chart of the party platform (core beliefs) of the Republican and Democratic Parties.

**Picture Tells a Thousand Words:** Find several pictures of the candidates in the newspaper over time. Do you think the pictures show the candidate positively or negatively? Why might a particular picture of a candidate be chosen for the particular story? What does the picture tell you?

**Polls:** During the election campaign collect polls from newspaper and online sources. Create a graph and update it weekly showing the most recent polling information. Based on the graph, has the advantage shifted between the candidates? Who appears likely to win? After the election, based on the final results, determine if the polls were accurate.

**Political Candidate Stance:** As a class, discuss and reach a definition of conservative and liberal. Also discuss what positions each side takes on major issues. Based on information from the newspaper and online sources, determine the political stance of the candidates, conservative or liberal or perhaps middle of the road. Which position do you agree with and why? Which candidate does this lead you to support?

**Presidential Choices:** Find articles about important decisions or policy choices the current President is making. Now pretend you are a news reporter at a press conference with Presidential candidates. Write questions you'd ask them about the current President's choices and what choices they would make. Now try to find the answer to your questions using the newspaper and the Internet. Finally, write your news story with the answers to your questions. Make sure to use the 5W's and H (Who, What, When Where, Why & How) in the first paragraph.

**Where do the Candidates Stand on the Issues:** Using newspaper articles and online resources, create a guide showing where the candidates stand on important issues such as: the war in Iraq, the economy, health care/insurance, defense/homeland security, education, immigration, crime, reproductive choice, environment/global warming, the trade deficit, and taxes/federal budget deficit.

## Campaign Techniques

Before each election voters are bombarded with word and images hoping to persuade them to support one candidate while rejecting another. Citizens should understand the tricks used by candidates, campaign staff members and the media to take advantage of a voter's emotions. Some techniques are:

- **Bandwagon:** Claiming that "everyone else is doing it" is an effective technique used to help people make up their minds on issues.
- **Cardstacking:** Presenting only one side of an issue. "Cardstacking" gives only the facts that support the candidate's claims.
- **Evading Real Issues:** Talking around a subject or changing the subject so as to avoid having to give direct answers or details.
- **Generalities:** Generalities are phrases that promise a lot but don't explain how the promise will be kept.
- **Guilt by Association:** Criticizing an opponent for the views or actions of their supporters or friends.
- **Loaded Statements:** Using half-truths and distorted facts to make an opponent look bad.
- **Name Calling:** Referring to someone using a negative name or symbol.
- **Passing the Blame:** Unfairly accusing another candidate or party of being the cause of a problem beyond their control.
- **Plain Folks:** Pretending to be "one of the regular folks" is an attempt to get people to relate to a candidate.
- **Promising the Sky:** Making election promises that are unrealistic.
- **Testimonials:** Having some important person endorse a candidate.

Read newspaper articles about the election to identify at least two of these campaign techniques candidates or the media are using.

How does understanding the techniques help people become better voters? Write a newspaper article describing how this information can help you and others make better voting decisions.

Some of these techniques are also used in ads to make them more persuasive. Look through ads in the newspaper and identify ads where these techniques were used. Now create your own campaign ad for a candidate using one of these techniques.

*(Credits: Activity adapted from R. Sam Garrett and James A. Thurber, Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, American University)*

# 2016 Presidential Primary Calendar

## February 2016

- **Monday, February 1:** Iowa caucus (Dem)
- **Tuesday, February 2:** Iowa caucus (GOP)
- **Tuesday, February 9:** New Hampshire
- **Saturday, February 20:** South Carolina
- **Tuesday, February 23:** Nevada caucus

## March 2016

- **Tuesday, March 1 (Super Tuesday):** Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado caucuses, Georgia, Massachusetts, Minnesota caucuses, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia
- **Saturday, March 5:** Louisiana
- **Tuesday, March 8:** Hawaii Republican caucuses, Mississippi, Ohio, Michigan
- **Sunday, March 13:** Puerto Rico (GOP)
- **Tuesday, March 15:** Florida, Illinois, Missouri
- **Tuesday, March 22:** Arizona, Utah

## April 2016

- **Tuesday, April 5:** Maryland, Washington, DC, Wisconsin
- **Tuesday, April 26:** Connecticut, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island

## May 2016

- **Tuesday, May 3:** Indiana
- **Tuesday, May 10:** Nebraska, West Virginia
- **Tuesday, May 17:** Kentucky, Oregon

## June 2016

- **Sunday, June 5:** Puerto Rico (Dem)
- **Tuesday, June 7:** California, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota  
States with no firm dates yet: New York, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Washington, Wyoming

## July 2016

- **July 18 to 21:** Republican National Convention in Cleveland, OH
- **Week starting July 25:** Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, PA

Sources: <http://www.uspresidentialelectionnews.com>  
June 8, 2015



**NEW YORK STATE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY- TUESDAY APRIL 19, 2016**

