

that a majority of states deny convicted felons voting rights while in jail, on parole, or on probation. Such restrictions deny about 1 adult in 50 the right to vote.

Low voter-turnout rates have fueled concern that Americans are becoming less connected to their communities and see less reason to get involved in politics. Experts say that the 2012 presidential election showed a decrease in voter turnout compared with both the 2004 and 2008 elections.

10.3 Choosing Candidates for Public Office: The Nomination Process

Approximately half a million people hold elective office in the United States. Candidates for nonpartisan offices, such as county sheriff, typically face one another in a single election. The candidate with the highest vote totals wins. For most national or state offices, however, candidates must compete for their party's nomination in a **primary election**. If they win this election, they go on to face the nominees of other parties in the **general election**, held later that year.

Primary Elections: Closed, Open, Blanket, and Nonpartisan

Primary elections, though common in the United States, are rare in the rest of the world. The idea of holding elections to choose a party's nominees was popularized during the Progressive Era in the early 1900s. Before then, nominees were often selected by party leaders who met behind closed doors. Primary elections brought the selection process out into the open and allowed party members to participate. Today, primary elections take several forms.

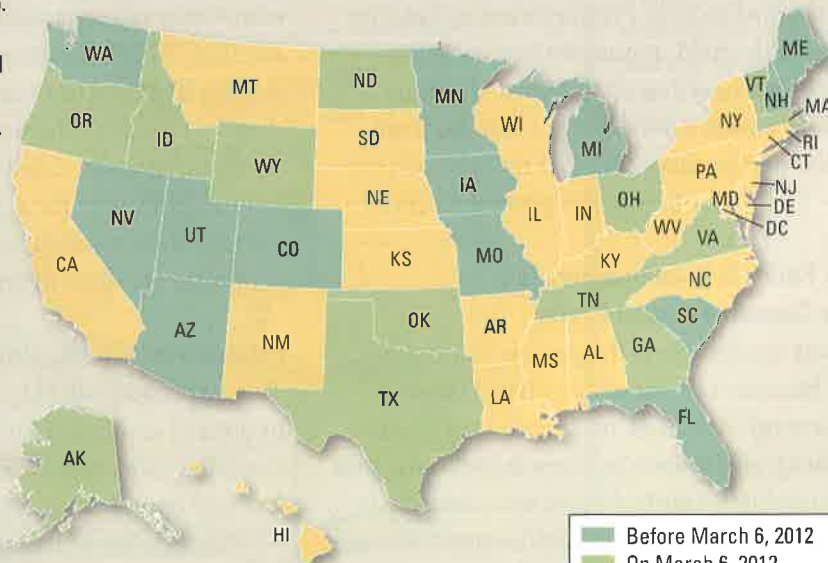
Closed primaries. States with a **closed primary** limit voting to registered party members. Independents are not allowed to participate. In some states, voters may declare their party affiliation on Election Day and vote in that party's primary. In general, party leaders prefer a closed primary because it limits voting to the party faithful.

Open primaries. States with an **open primary** allow all voters to vote in primary elections. In this system, also known as pick-a-party primaries, voters decide which party primary to vote in on Election Day. Independent voters like this system because it allows them to participate in the primary of their choice.

The Incredible Shrinking Primary Season

In 2008, nearly two dozen states held their primaries on February 5. This number was much smaller in 2012, when only 13 states held their primaries on March 6, also known as Super Duper Tuesday.

Presidential Primaries and Caucuses, 2012



*Some states hold separate primaries or caucuses for Republican and Democrat candidates. This map reflects the date of the first primary or caucus for these states.

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures.

Tossing One's Hat Into the Ring

In April 2011, Barack Obama declared his candidacy by posting a video that asked: "Are you in?" Obama both e-mailed supporters and "tweeted" a link to the video on Twitter, marking the beginning of a social media-centered election. Republican hopeful, Mitt Romney, announced his candidacy in New Hampshire. Later that day he posted a photograph of himself delivering this speech on Facebook with the words "Presidential Announcement" boldly written above it.



However, party leaders worry about "raiding" in open primaries. Raiding occurs when voters cross party lines to vote in the other party's primary. Usually their purpose is to help nominate a weak candidate that their own party nominee can then easily defeat in the general election.

Blanket primaries. In a **blanket primary**, voters can pick and choose one candidate for each office from any party's primary list. Today this system is used in only a few states.

Nonpartisan primaries. Primaries are sometimes used to narrow the field in nonpartisan contests, such as for school board or city council elections. If one candidate wins a majority in a **nonpartisan primary**, that person takes office. If not, the two top vote-getters face each other in the general election.

Joining the Race: Self-Announcement, Exploratory Committees, and Drafts

To participate in a primary, the person running for office must become a declared candidate. This can happen in several ways. The most common is **self-announcement**, also known as throwing your hat into the ring. Candidates simply declare their interest in seeking election to a public office. Self-announcement is usually done at a press conference or other public event. In 2007, Hillary Clinton chose to self-announce her candidacy for president on her Web site.

Before making a formal announcement, however, the candidate may form an **exploratory committee**. This is a group of advisers who evaluate the candidate's chances for election. Exploratory committees often take several weeks to test the waters and determine the level of public support for their candidate. If the committee decides that circumstances are favorable, the candidate makes a formal announcement of candidacy.

For presidential candidates, announcements are sometimes made as early as two years before the election. By announcing early, candidates give themselves extra time to raise the funds and the support they will need for the hard primary campaign ahead.

In some cases, candidates do not self-announce. Instead, they wait for a groundswell of public support for their candidacy. In effect, they allow their supporters to draft them into the race.

Establishing a Campaign Organization

To win elective office, candidates must run a well-organized campaign. In most cases, this requires a campaign organization. These organizations vary in size and complexity, depending on the race.

Running for a city council seat might require a very small, local campaign organization. This group might consist of no more than a volunteer campaign manager and a treasurer. The candidate works with

this small team to write speeches, print posters and flyers, and manage other details of the campaign.

Running for president, on the other hand, demands a large, complex organization. A presidential race requires the services of hundreds of people, from unpaid volunteers to highly paid campaign professionals. Included in this staff would be a campaign manager, a public opinion pollster, a media consultant, a fundraising specialist, accountants, lawyers, and a press secretary. A presidential campaign organization would also have offices in every state. Of course, to set up and run such an organization requires money.

Building a War Chest by Dialing for Dollars

Jesse Unruh, a California politician, once observed, "Money is the mother's milk of politics." Without money, a political campaign cannot survive for long. This is true at all levels, whether a candidate is running for a local office or for president of the United States.

At the start of a campaign, candidates typically spend a great deal of time and energy raising money the old-fashioned way. They "dial for dollars," getting on the phone to ask associates and supporters for money. They hold fundraisers, such as \$1,000-a-plate dinners, to solicit contributions from major donors. They also organize direct-mail campaigns and set up Web sites designed to attract funds from large numbers of small donors. If a candidate's

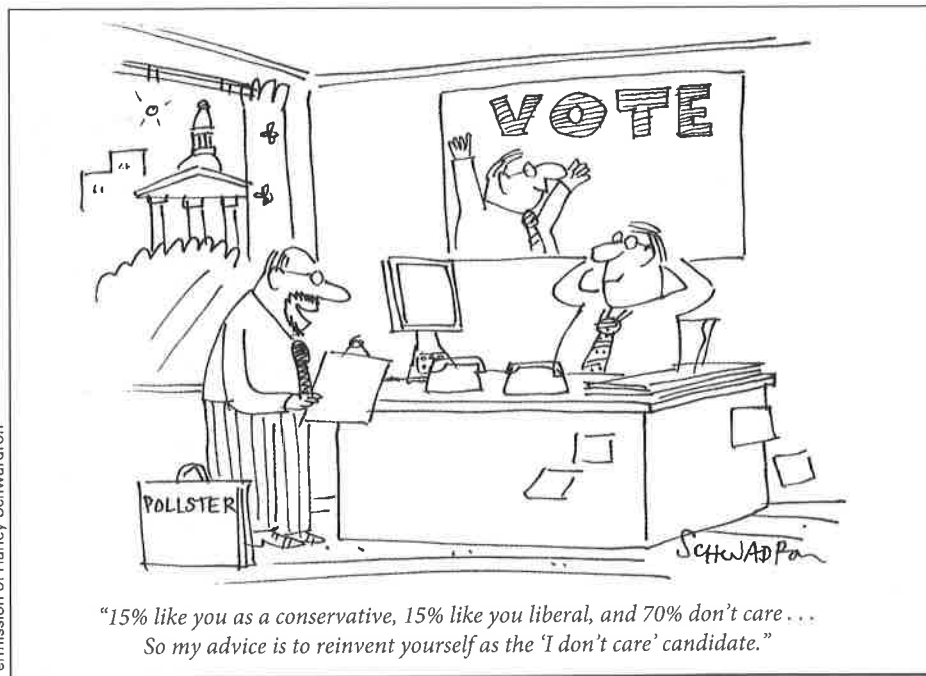
fundraising efforts are successful, the campaign will build up a **war chest**, or funds that can be used to move the campaign forward.

During presidential primary campaigns, the candidate with the largest war chest is often hailed as the front-runner. During the 2000 election, for example, George W. Bush raised a record amount of money early in the campaign and became the leading Republican candidate. A year before the first presidential primaries in 2008, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were declared front-runners in the race for the Democratic nomination, based on their early success at raising record amounts of campaign funds.

Developing Campaign Strategies and Themes

In most states, the road to nomination in partisan races is the primary election. But some states use a different method: the party **caucus**. A caucus is a closed meeting of people from one political party who will select candidates or delegates.

In a caucus state, small groups of party members meet in their communities to discuss the various candidates. Each caucus then chooses delegates to represent its views at the party's state convention. Approximately a dozen states hold caucuses. The best known are the Iowa caucuses, which take place early in presidential election years. The Iowa caucuses are watched closely, because they provide the



In choosing a campaign theme and message, candidates often consult polls and pollsters. This cartoon takes aim at the kind of advice pollsters may give.

first indications of how well each candidate is doing at winning the support of average voters.

To prepare for caucuses and primaries, candidates must develop a campaign strategy. If this plan of action works well and the candidate wins the nomination, some of that strategy may carry over to the general election. Key elements of a strategy include tone, theme, and targeting.

Tone. Candidates must decide whether to adopt a positive or a negative tone for their campaigns. This means determining how much time and money to spend stressing the positive things about their candidacy and how much to spend criticizing their opponents.

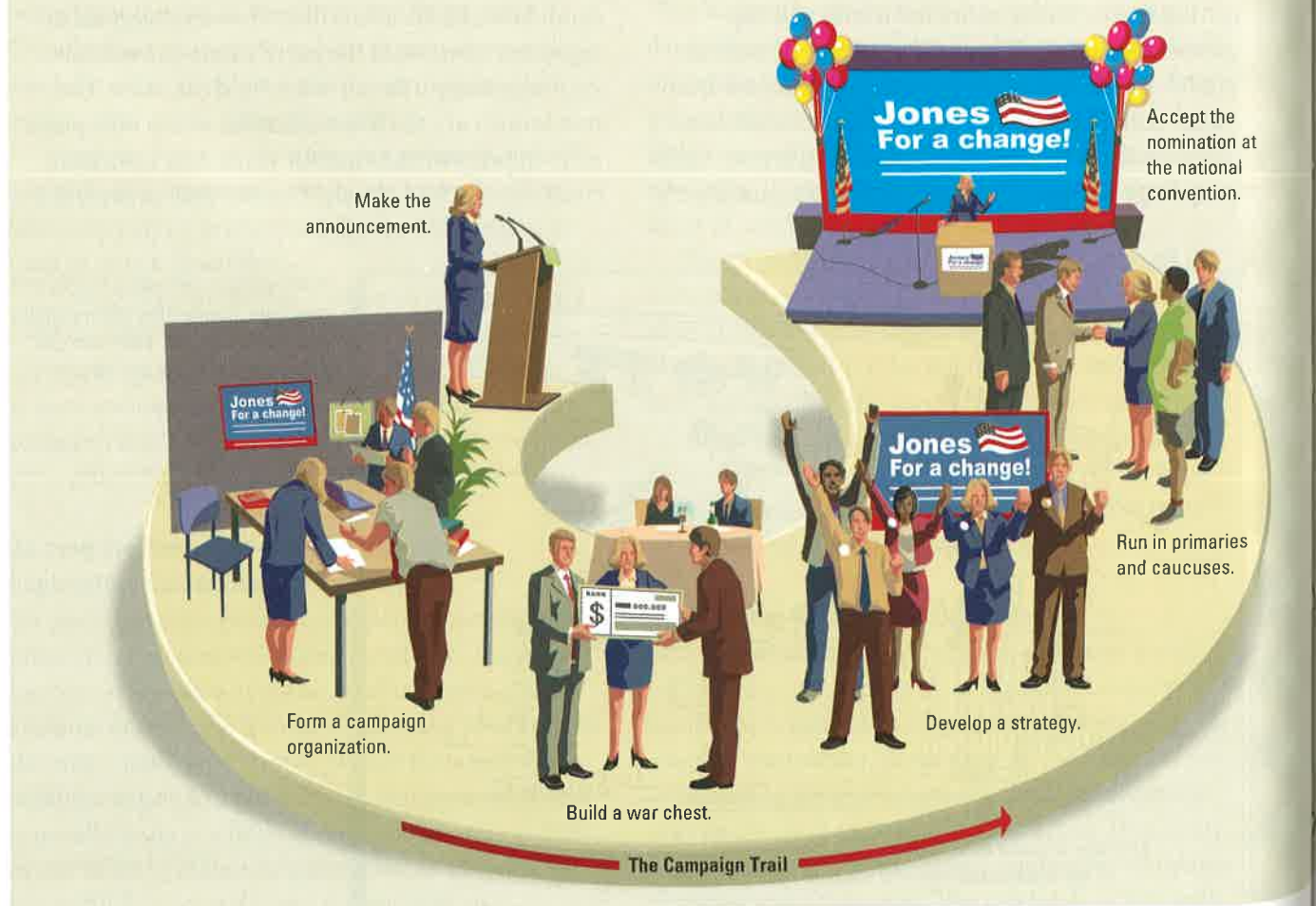
Theme. Every candidate needs a theme—a simple, appealing idea that gets repeated over and over. A theme helps distinguish a candidate from his or her

opponents in the primaries. It is also critical in the general election, when candidates from different parties compete. When running for reelection in 1984, Ronald Reagan emphasized optimism, as expressed in his slogan, “It’s morning again in America.” For the 2008 election, Barack Obama organized his campaign around the theme of change with the slogan “Yes we can.” Obama continued with this theme for the 2012 presidential election. The slogan for this campaign was “Forward.”

Targeting. Candidates must also decide whether to target specific groups of voters. Is there any group—blue-collar workers, women, the middle class, the elderly—that is particularly unhappy with the status quo? If so, that group is a likely target for specially designed appeals from candidates.

The Route to Nomination

To win elective office, candidates must first win their party’s nomination. The process is similar for both congressional and presidential candidates. Presidential nominees, however, have the added step of the national convention.



Wholesale and Retail Politics

Early in the primary season, presidential candidates, like Democratic hopeful Barack Obama, have time to meet and greet voters individually. As the season wears on, retail politics gives way to wholesale methods, designed to reach large numbers of voters. One popular forum is the televised debate. Here, Republican candidates for president debate during the 2011–2012 primary season.



Another aspect of campaign strategy is how to present the candidate's political views during the primaries as opposed to during the general election. For the primaries, candidates tend to couch their message in terms that will appeal to the **party base**. The party base consists of party activists who are more likely to vote in primary elections than less-committed centrists. This base also holds more extreme views than the average middle-of-the-road voter. As a result, candidates often emphasize more liberal or conservative views in the primaries than they would in a general election campaign.

Reaching the Voters: Retail Politics, Wholesale Politics, and Microtargeting

Candidates for public office try to reach voters in various ways, both during the primaries and in the run-up to the general election. Political scientists have identified three general approaches: **retail politics**, **wholesale politics**, and **microtargeting**.

Retail politics. This meet-and-greet style of campaigning relies on direct, personal contact with voters. Candidates take part in parades, dinners, and other local events. They stand outside factories and shopping malls to shake hands and kiss babies. During these face-to-face encounters with voters,

candidates try to present themselves as leaders who are in touch with ordinary people.

Wholesale politics. Many voters can be reached only by large-scale mail or media campaigns. Candidates may develop direct-mail campaigns, in which thousands of letters are sent to voters asking for their support. Even more common is the use of both paid and free media. Candidates and their staff prepare television ads and take part in televised town hall meetings and debates. These broadcasts can reach millions of people at a time. The Internet is also being used to reach voters on a large scale. Most candidates have a professional Web site that has an archive of campaign ads and a link that allows voters to directly donate to a campaign. Social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest are also used to reach out to voters.

Microtargeting. This campaign approach uses databases to target narrow groups of voters and then reach them with carefully crafted messages. According to the *Washington Post*, candidates who adopt this technique “use the latest data-mining technology to vacuum every last scrap of information about voters.” Armed with that data, they “churn out custom-tailored messages designed to herd their supporters to the polls.” These messages present

National conventions are held after the primary season ends. They used to be part of the nominating process. Today, party gatherings are occasions for raising party spirit and cheering the party's nominee.



the candidate's position on issues of importance to each targeted group. For example, a candidate might target a message on social security to senior citizens.

Locking Up the Nomination

A few months before the presidential election, the Democratic and Republican parties each hold a national convention in a major American city. In the past, party conventions were a critical step in the nomination process. Party delegates would argue over the candidates, sometimes going through several ballots before picking a nominee. On occasion, an underdog would emerge from the pack to challenge, and even overtake, the leading candidate.

Today, however, presidential nominees are chosen through the primary and caucus process. The winner then announces his or her choice for vice president. The national convention has, as a result, evolved into a ritual to formally announce the party nominees and present them to the nation. The nominees also work with party leaders to frame a platform, laying out the party's position on major issues. In addition, the convention helps unite the party and excite the party base.

The Other Way to Run for Office: Nomination by Petition

Not all candidates for public office go through the usual nomination process. For independent or third-party candidates, there is another way to get on the ballot: by petition. The petition process involves collecting signatures of a specific number of qualified

voters in support of one's candidacy. The number of signatures needed depends on the office being sought.

The laws governing nomination by petition differ from state to state. In 2008, a candidate running for president needed 1,000 valid signatures to be put on the ballot in Washington state. In contrast, North Carolina required a candidate to gather the number of signatures equal to 2 percent of the votes cast in the previous presidential election, or approximately 70,000 signatures.

These variations can make it difficult for independent and third-party candidates to get on the ballot in all 50 states. In 2000, for example, Ralph Nader, the presidential nominee for the Green Party, appeared on the ballot in 43 states. Four years later, Nader was able to qualify for the ballot in only 34 states.

10.4 Campaigning in General Elections

Once the primary season ends, the candidates who have won their party's nomination shift gears to campaign in the general election. Although the Constitution calls for regularly scheduled elections, it does not specify when they should be held. Congress has set the date for presidential and midterm elections as the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years. This is different from parliamentary systems, in which the prime minister can call a national election at any time.

Presidential, Midterm, and Off-Year Elections

There are three types of general elections in the United States: presidential, midterm, and off-year. **Presidential elections** are held every four years on even-numbered years. **Midterm elections** occur in the even-numbered years between presidential elections. **Off-year elections** are held in odd-numbered years.

Elected officials in the United States hold office for fixed terms. The Constitution sets the terms of the president and members of Congress. The only federal official affected by **term limits** is the president. The Twenty-second Amendment, ratified in 1951, limits the president to two terms in office. The terms for state officeholders are set by state constitutions.

Building a Winning Coalition: Motivating the Base While Moving Toward the Middle

Candidates gearing up for a general election must make a number of changes in their campaign strategy. One is to shift their attention from winning over fellow party members to taking on the nominee of the other major party.

To appeal to a larger cross-section of voters, many candidates also decide to modify their political message. In the primaries, the ideas and promises that appealed to the party base, with its more extreme views, may need to be moderated to attract centrists and independents. Ideally, however, this move to the

The Three Types of General Elections

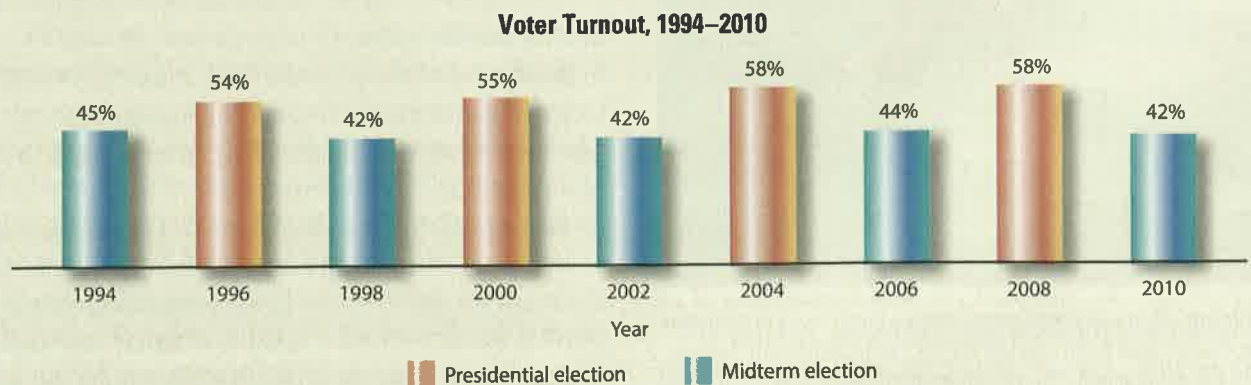
Type of Election	Who Gets Elected
Presidential Election Occurs every four years in even-numbered years	President and vice president One-third of the Senate All members of the House Some state and local officials
Midterm Election Occurs in even-numbered years between presidential elections	One-third of the Senate All members of the House Most state governors Some state and local officials
Off-Year Election Occurs in odd-numbered years	County supervisors City mayors City councils Most boards of special districts

middle should be done in a way that does not upset or alienate the party base.

Democrat John Kerry faced this delicate balancing act during the 2004 election. During the primary season, Kerry presented himself to party voters as an ardent critic of the war in Iraq. He did this, in part, to drain support away from his Democratic opponent, Howard Dean. Dean's strong antiwar views had fired up the party base.

Voting in General Elections

Voter turnout tends to be lower in midterm elections than in presidential elections, as the graph below indicates. Turnout in off-year elections is usually lower still.



Once Kerry had won the nomination, however, he began moving to the middle. In the run-up to the general election, he tried to soften his antiwar message to win more support from moderate and independent voters. However, his efforts backfired when his Republican opponent, George W. Bush, accused him of being a “flip-flopper” on the war issue. Kerry stuck to his more centrist position for the rest of the campaign, but he lost the election to Bush.

Issues Versus Image: Stump Speeches, Photo Ops, and Televised Debates

In the weeks leading up to the general election, candidates continue to hone their message and polish their image for voters. They spend increased time on the campaign trail, making public appearances and giving variations of their standard **stump speech**. This term harkens back to the days when candidates would stand on a tree stump to deliver their speeches.

During these final weeks, candidates make every effort to remain in the public eye. One way to do this is to stage photo opportunities, or photo ops, for the media. The hope is that pictures of the event will appear on the nightly news and in the next morning’s newspaper.



Politicians often use photo ops to portray themselves in a positive light. Here, Republican candidate Rick Perry poses with a young boy while campaigning for the Iowa caucus in 2012. Photographs like this one depict candidates as friendly, family-oriented people.

For congressional candidates, a favorite photo op involves joint appearances with the president or with their party’s presidential nominee. The candidate hopes that being seen in public with such a powerful figure will give his or her campaign an extra boost. This boost, known as the **coattail effect**, may help a struggling candidate ride into office on the “coattails” of the next president.

The coattail effect does not always work as hoped. In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton won the presidential election, but his coattails were too short to help fellow party members. The Democrats lost ten seats in Congress that year. Four years later, however, Clinton won reelection with longer coattails. In the 1996 election, the Democrats won eight seats in Congress. The coattail effect remains unpredictable, working for some candidates in some campaigns while having little effect in others.

Another way for candidates to boost their exposure is to take part in televised debates. In presidential elections, these debates offer many voters their first opportunity to see and hear the candidates discuss the issues in any depth. However, the image that candidates project in debates may be just as important as what they have to say. A candidate who is attractive, well-spoken, and relaxed during a debate will probably fare better than one who appears stiff and ill at ease on screen.

The impact of televised debates on voters is hard to assess. What candidates do in debates may sway some voters, while simply confirming for others the choice they have already made. Nonetheless, candidates prepare carefully for these televised events, knowing that even though a good performance may not win them that many votes, a poor showing could lose them the election.

Getting Out the Vote

In the last days before the election, campaign workers focus on getting out the vote. This means making sure that all voters who are likely to support their candidate actually cast their ballots.

In the past, almost all votes were cast at a designated **polling place** within each precinct. Today, the majority of Americans still go to the polls to vote on Election Day. However, a growing number of voters now cast **absentee ballots**, or mail-in ballots that voters can use instead of going to the polls. Since 2000, for example,

the state of Oregon has conducted all of its elections by mail. A few states also allow early voting at designated voting places in the month before Election Day.

Campaign organizations use various tactics to get out the vote before and on Election Day. Before the election, volunteers talk with voters by phone or by walking through precincts and ringing doorbells to find out who is likely to support their candidate. On Election Day, they set up phone banks staffed by volunteers who call supporters and urge them to vote. The organizations may also offer free rides to voters who have no other way of getting to the polls.

Campaigns may also send **poll watchers** to polling places on Election Day. Poll watchers are volunteers who monitor the voting process. Their main job is to prevent voter fraud or efforts to intimidate voters. Poll watchers may also observe the tallying of ballots to ensure that all votes are properly counted.

Because most voting regulations are set by states and counties, voting methods and types of ballots have varied from one community to the next. In the past, most voters used some form of paper ballots or lever-controlled voting machines. Some paper ballots are relatively easy to use and count, while others are not. The infamous butterfly ballot used in Florida in the 2000 general election confused many voters. As a result, many voted for the wrong candidate by mistake.

Florida also had trouble with punch-card ballots in the 2000 election. Voters mark these ballots by punching out small bits of paper, called chads, beside their choices. Sometimes, however, the chad does not fully detach from the ballot. These “hanging chads” make it almost impossible for the machines used to count ballots to complete an accurate tally. Every time such ballots are fed through the vote-counting machine, it comes up with a different count.

Florida was not alone in having problems. Across the country in the 2000 elections, almost 2 million votes were not properly counted by vote-counting machines. To solve this problem, Congress enacted the Help America Vote Act of 2002. The goal of this act is to help states replace their old voting machines and punch-card ballots with more accurate voting technology, such as optical scanners and touch-screen machines. Progress, however, has been slow, in part because of questions raised about the accuracy and reliability of the newer electronic voting systems.



In Columbus, Ohio, these voters are using an electronic voting machine during an election. However, each voting method has some risk involved. Electronic voting, for example, is susceptible to technological “glitches” or malfunctions.

Who Wins?

Once the votes are counted, the winners are declared. In most presidential elections, the winner receives a majority of the popular vote. That was the case in 2004, when George W. Bush received 51 percent of the votes cast.

When three or more candidates are competing, the winner sometimes receives less than 50 percent of the vote. This occurred in both the 1992 and the 1996 elections, when Bill Clinton won the presidency with 43 percent and 49 percent of the popular vote, respectively. In both cases, a third-party candidate, Ross Perot, captured enough votes to prevent either of the major party candidates from winning a majority.

Our nation’s winner-take-all system has a major effect on presidential elections. In most states, the candidate winning the popular vote captures all of that state’s Electoral College votes. Nebraska and Maine, however, use a different system. They allot Electoral College votes based on the popular vote in each of the states’ congressional districts.

Critics point out that the Electoral College system encourages candidates to focus on populous states with the largest number of electors. In theory, a candidate can win the presidency by capturing the 11 largest states and losing the other 39.

In general, candidates pay the most attention to a few **battleground states**, where the vote is likely to be close, and ignore states where the outcome is

more predictable. For example, a Republican presidential candidate can expect to win Texas and other conservative southern states. Similarly, a Democratic candidate can expect to win Massachusetts and other liberal New England states. For that reason, both sides target states such as Ohio, Florida, and New Mexico, which can be won by either candidate.

Our winner-take-all-system tends to reinforce the nation's two-party system. Most public offices go to candidates of the two major parties because one or the other is likely to win the popular vote. Third parties, which usually have a narrower appeal, have much less hope of winning seats in Congress or state legislatures. Although the winner-take-all system promotes stability in government, it tends to exclude less-mainstream candidates from public office.

In contrast, many European democracies have adopted a **proportional representation** system. In these countries, citizens usually vote for parties rather than for individual candidates. A party wins seats in parliament based on its proportion of the popular vote. For example, if a party wins one-third of the vote in an election, it is awarded approximately one-third of the seats in parliament. Proportional representation thus gives smaller parties a chance to take part in government.

The Electoral College Debate

As important as the popular vote may seem, it is the Electoral College vote that decides presidential elections. The framers of the Constitution devised the Electoral College system because they did not trust voters who were spread out over 13 states to choose the head of the executive branch. Instead, they gave that responsibility to a group of electors who might better know who was best suited for that job.

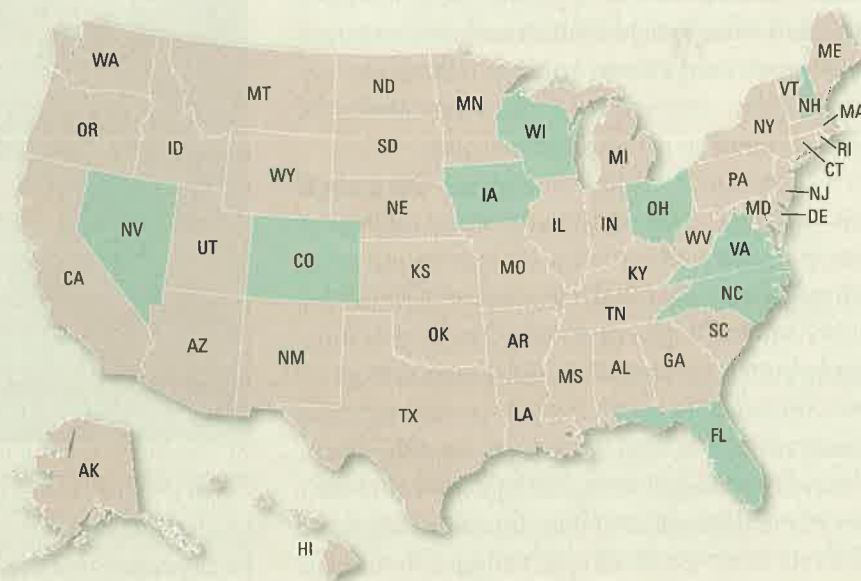
At first, each state legislature chose its own electors. In 1789, all 69 electors who had been chosen this way cast their ballots for George Washington as president. A majority cast their votes for John Adams as vice president. After 1800, states began allowing voters to choose electors. When you vote for president in the next election, you will actually be voting for electors who have promised to support your candidate.

The number of electors from each state equals the number of that state's representatives in Congress. For example, Virginia has 2 senators and 11 House members, giving it a total of 13 electoral votes. Washington, D.C., has 3 electoral votes. There are 538 electors in all, which means that a candidate must win at least 270 electoral votes to become president. If no candidate wins a majority of elec-

States Up for Grabs

This map highlights the nine battleground states targeted by both major candidates in the 2012 presidential election. These states are so evenly divided between Democratic and Republican voters that they could swing either way, thereby adding crucial electoral votes to the winner's tally. Presidential campaigns spend far more time and money in battleground states than in states that already appear committed to one candidate or the other.

Battleground States, 2012



Source: CNN News, as of November 2012.

toral votes, the House of Representatives selects the president, with each state casting one vote.

Not surprisingly, the Electoral College system has provoked controversy over the years. The chief criticism is that it is undemocratic. Critics point to three elections in U.S. history—in 1876, 1888, and 2000—in which the candidate who won the popular vote failed to win the Electoral College. The most recent example was Al Gore's loss to George W. Bush in 2000.

For years, critics have called for a reform of the Electoral College. Most advocate electing the president by direct popular vote. This change would require a constitutional amendment.

However, many Americans also support the Electoral College system. Some states, especially smaller ones, fear that a reform would reduce their influence in presidential elections. Under the popular vote system, candidates might be motivated to only campaign in large states.

An alternative option is the congressional district method. Under this method, now used in Maine and Nebraska, the candidate who wins the popular vote in each congressional district gets that district's electoral vote. The overall winner in the state receives the two additional electoral votes that represent the state's senators. The consequence of this method is that if it was widespread, candidates might only focus on campaigning in specific districts rather than in entire states.

Another option is the national popular vote. Under this plan, states would cast their electoral votes for the winner of the national popular vote. This change can be implemented by state legislatures, thereby avoiding the need for a constitutional amendment. In 2007, Maryland became the first state to adopt this Electoral College reform. The reform will not go into effect, however, unless approved by enough states to constitute a majority of the Electoral College vote. Critics claim that there is little benefit to this method and argue that it diminishes federalism since it reduces the states' role in elections.

■ 10.5 Financing Election Campaigns

In the United States today, elections are centered more on candidates than on political parties. This



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Many Americans find the Electoral College system confusing at best—and at worst, undemocratic. Some would like to replace it with a system based on the popular vote. However, many highlight the benefits of this system, such as protecting the interests of smaller states and less populated areas.

was not always the case. At one time, candidates relied heavily on their parties to help them win elections. Today, however, candidates behave more like independent political actors than party representatives. They depend mainly on their own political skills and the efforts of their campaign organizations to get elected.

The High Cost of Running for Office

Money has played a large part in this shift from party-centered to candidate-centered elections. As campaigns have grown more expensive, candidates have come to rely increasingly on their own fundraising abilities or personal fortunes to win public office. For example, about \$6 billion was spent on the 2012 presidential election campaigns. On average, winning candidates for a seat in the House of Representatives spent \$1.5 million each. Winners of each Senate seat spent an average of \$9.7 million. In future elections, the cost will likely be even higher.

The high cost of running for office is a concern for various reasons. Candidates with limited resources