



GeauxVote Smart!

Louisiana Citizenship Education Program

Louisiana's Old State Capitol
Museum of Political History
www.sos.la.gov/osc

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

How do citizens vote for president?

Every four years, on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November, the people of the United States elect a new president. Voters from all across the country go to the polls, or voting sites, to make their choice for the next U.S. President. Voters fill out voting forms, called ballots, inside voting booths. Voters fill out their ballots in secret so they can make their choice without anyone telling them how to vote. This is the popular vote - the vote of the people.

How do parties choose their presidential candidate?

The process of choosing a president starts long before Election Day. Political parties must choose one candidate to represent them in the presidential election. To do this, each state holds either a caucus, which is a meeting of party representatives, or a primary election in which members of political parties say which candidate they want to represent their party. After the state primaries, each major political party holds a large meeting called a convention to announce the party's candidate for president.

How do voters learn about the candidates?

Once chosen, candidates give speeches and debate the other candidates about their stand on important issues, or topics, such as education, health care and the economy.

Selecting a president is one of the most important duties of American citizens and choosing the best presidential candidate can be very difficult. It is not always easy to know how all of the candidates feel about all of the issues. This means you must listen to all of the candidates carefully and choose the candidate who will best represent the interests of all the people. Information is available through television, newspapers and the Internet to help people decide.

What is the Electoral College?

After the election, all votes are counted. However, this is not the final step in selecting a president. Special representatives from each state meet in Washington, D.C. to cast the official state votes. These representatives are called electors, and the group is called the Electoral College.

The number of electoral votes each state can cast is equal to the total number of U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives that the state elects. Each state elects two U.S. Senators. A state's population determines the number of U.S. Representatives that state elects. For this reason, candidates try to win the states with the largest populations in order to gain large numbers of electoral votes.



The Electoral College vote is usually the same as the popular vote, but when the two are different, the Electoral College decides who will be president.

How do candidates get money to pay for their campaigns?

Running for a political office is very expensive. Candidates get campaign money from a number of sources, including private individuals.

The high cost of campaigns

- Means candidates must conduct extensive fund-raising activities
- Can limit the number of people who have the opportunity to run for public office
- Can give an advantage to wealthy individuals who run for office

Campaign donations can have an affect on who runs for office and how candidates conduct their campaigns.

Rising campaign costs have led to efforts to reform U.S. campaign finance laws. Concerned over the way heavy campaign spending could affect the democratic process, Congress has passed laws to limit the amount of money any one individual or group can donate to a candidate.

Activities

1. What is the smallest number of electoral votes a state can have?
2. Investigate the reasons the writers of the Constitution set up the electoral college system.
http://www.usconstitution.net/constop_elec.html
3. Critics of the electoral college system believe the President should be chosen by the popular vote. Research the reasons for their views.
4. Hold a classroom debate about the merits and disadvantages of the electoral college system for selecting the President of the United States.
5. Is it possible for a candidate to win the popular vote and not become president? Has this ever happened?
6. Why is running for political office so expensive? Find out how much money is spent on campaigns and how candidates spend money they raise. Prepare a chart or graph that shows how candidates spend campaign money.
7. Should the government limit campaign contributions and spending? Investigate and debate the topic with members of your class.



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LESSON PLAN

Grade Levels	Elementary, middle and high school
Time	Adapt to meet needs
Overview	The introductory reading and supporting activities encourage classroom conversation and investigation about the process of electing the President of the United States. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the materials and activities to meet the needs, grade level and interests of their students.
Focus Question	What is the role of political parties, presidential candidates and voters in selecting the President of the United States?
Materials	Presidential Elections reading; computer and Internet access optional
Preparation	Make copies of reading, one per student

Benchmarks and GLEs

First Grade

- Identify and recognize the current president of the United States (C-1A-E5)

Third Grade

- Explain how government officials at the state and national levels are elected (C-1A-E6)

Seventh Grade

- Identify current government leaders at the national level (C-1A-M6)

Eighth Grade

- Identify current government leaders at the state, local, and national levels in the United States (C-1A-M6)
- Describe the role of the Electoral College and how Louisiana participates in that system (C-1B-M6)
- Explain how political parties, campaigns, and elections provide opportunities for citizens to participate in government (C-1B-M6)

High School Civics

- Assess the significance of campaigns, campaign finance, elections, the Electoral College, and the U.S. census in the U.S. political system (C-1B-H5)



Vocabulary

1. ballot
2. campaign
3. campaign finance law
4. caucus
5. Congress
6. convention
7. Electoral College
8. issue
9. poll
10. popular vote
11. primary
12. representative
13. senator

Activities

1. Ask students to name the current President and Vice President of the United States. Discuss the qualifications for each office as well as their duties and responsibilities.
2. What is the smallest number of electoral votes a state can have?
3. Investigate the reasons the writers of the Constitution set up the Electoral College system. http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_elec.html
4. Critics of the Electoral College system believe the popular vote should determine the winner of the general election. Research the reasons for their views.
5. Hold a classroom debate about the merits and disadvantages of the Electoral College system for selecting the President of the United States.
6. Is it possible for a candidate to win the popular vote and not become president? Has this ever happened?
7. Why is running for political office so expensive? Find out how much money is spent on campaigns and how candidates spend money they raise. Prepare a chart or graph that shows how candidates spend campaign money.
8. Investigate: Should the U.S. government limit campaign contributions and spending?