

[11.3] Electing the President



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Learning Objectives

- Describe the role of conventions in the presidential nominating process, understand the caucus-convention process, and outline the events that take place during a national convention.
- Evaluate the importance of presidential primaries.
- Examine the characteristics that determine who is nominated as a presidential candidate.
- Describe the features of the presidential campaign.
- Analyze how the electoral college provides for the election of the President.
- Identify several flaws in the electoral college system and outline the advantages and disadvantages of proposed reforms of the electoral college.

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Key Terms

- presidential primary
- winner-take-all
- proportional representation
- Ronald Reagan
- keynote address
- swing voters
- battleground States
- Richard M. Johnson
- district plan
- proportional plan
- national popular vote plan

Presidential Primaries

Recall, the congressional caucus was the first method the parties developed to pick their presidential candidates. The closed, unrepresentative character of that arrangement led to its downfall in the mid-1820s. For the election of 1832, both major parties turned to the national convention as their presidential nominating device, and it has continued to serve them ever since.

Presidential Primaries

- History of the Presidential Primary
- A System with Many Variables
- Significance of Primary Timing
- Shifting Primary Styles
- Preference Primary

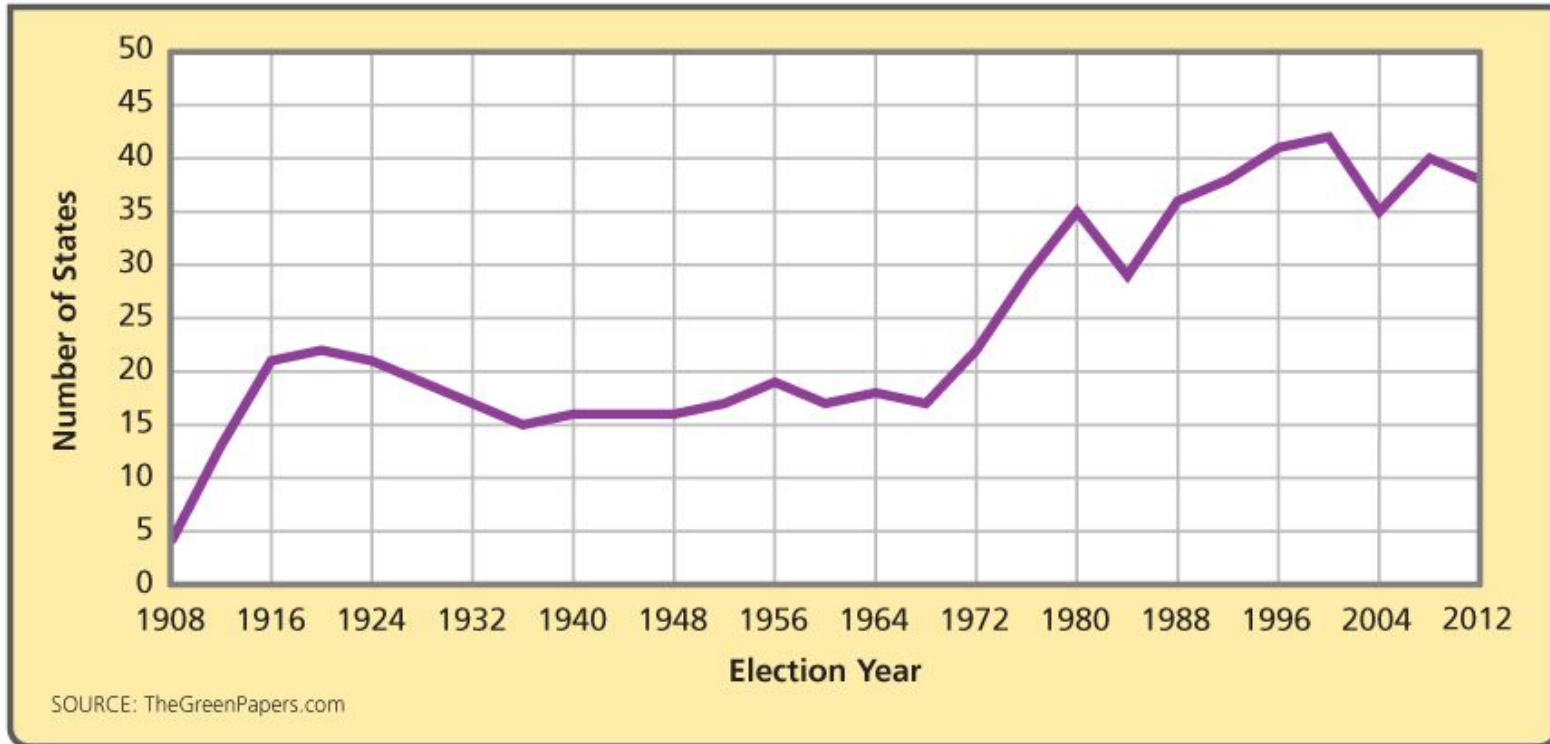
Presidential Primaries



Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney announces his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination. Romney won the nomination but lost the election to Barack Obama.

Presidential Primaries

Number of States Holding Presidential Primaries, 1908–2012



The popularity of the primary method of nominating presidential candidates has gone up and down through the years. Analyze Graphs When did the popularity of primaries peak?

Presidential Primaries



The map shows the month in which presidential primaries were held in 2012. Analyze Maps How would spreading out State primaries affect a candidate's campaign?

Evaluation of the Presidential Primary

No one who has surveyed the presidential primary system needs to be told that it is complicated, or that it is filled with confusing variations. Still, these primaries are vital. For half a century now, they have played the major part in deciding the presidential nominating contests in both parties—and particularly in the party out of power.

Evaluation of the Presidential Primary

- Out of Power vs. In Power
- Reform Proposals
- Presidential Caucuses
- Decline in Popularity

Evaluation of the Presidential Primary



Republican presidential candidates participate in a debate during the 2012 election campaign. Debates and primaries can help narrow the field early in the delegate selection process.

The National Convention

Once all the primaries and caucuses have been held and all of the delegates have been chosen, another event looms large. The two major parties hold their national conventions, the quadrennial meetings at which the delegates select their presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

The National Convention

- Convention Arrangements
- Apportioning Delegates
- Convention Goals
- Opening the Convention
- Showcasing the Platform and the Party
- Nominating the Vice President
- Nominating the President

The National Convention



Democratic and Republican national conventions have been held in cities across the country. Analyze Maps Why might certain cities be chosen for conventions more frequently than others?

The National Convention



A young Republican shows her enthusiasm by dressing as “Super Romney.” Patriotism and excitement for both the candidates and the process are high at political conventions.

Who Is Nominated?

If an incumbent President wants another term, and the 22nd Amendment is not in play, the convention's choice is easily made. The sitting President is virtually certain to gain the nomination, and usually with no real opposition from within the party. The President's advantages are immense: the majesty and publicity of the office and close control of the party's machinery.

Who Is Nominated?

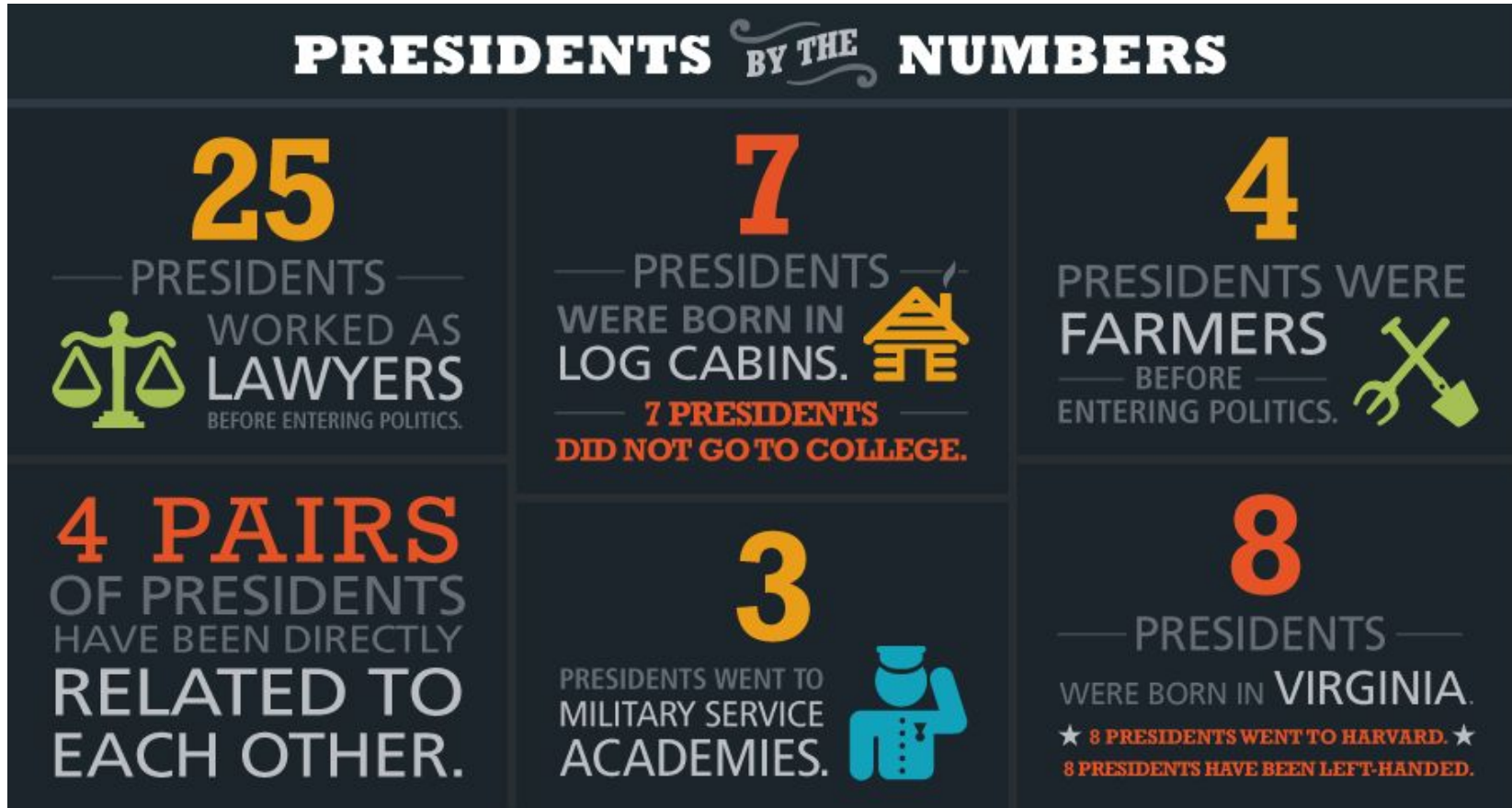
- Political Experience
- Prominence at Home
- Other Characteristics
- Shattering Barriers

Who Is Nominated?



President Barack Obama accepts the nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate in the 2012 election. Only five sitting presidents have failed to win the nomination to a second term.

Who Is Nominated?



U.S. Presidents have had a variety of experiences prior to getting elected. Analyze Charts How might those backgrounds and experiences have helped candidates get elected?

The Presidential Campaign

As you know, the Constitution calls for a presidential election to be held every four years. The first one was held in 1789, and, like clockwork, 56 of those contests have followed along, right on schedule. That remarkable fact is unmatched in the history of any other nation in the world. Even during a civil war, two world wars, several economic depressions, and various other crises, the Constitution's command has been met.

The Presidential Campaign

- Saturating the Country
- Targeting Key Voters
- Debates
- Who's Watching?
- Election Day

The Presidential Campaign



An 1864 campaign poster from the Civil War era depicts third-party candidates who later endorsed Lincoln. Even during the most challenging times, the U.S. has maintained its traditions.

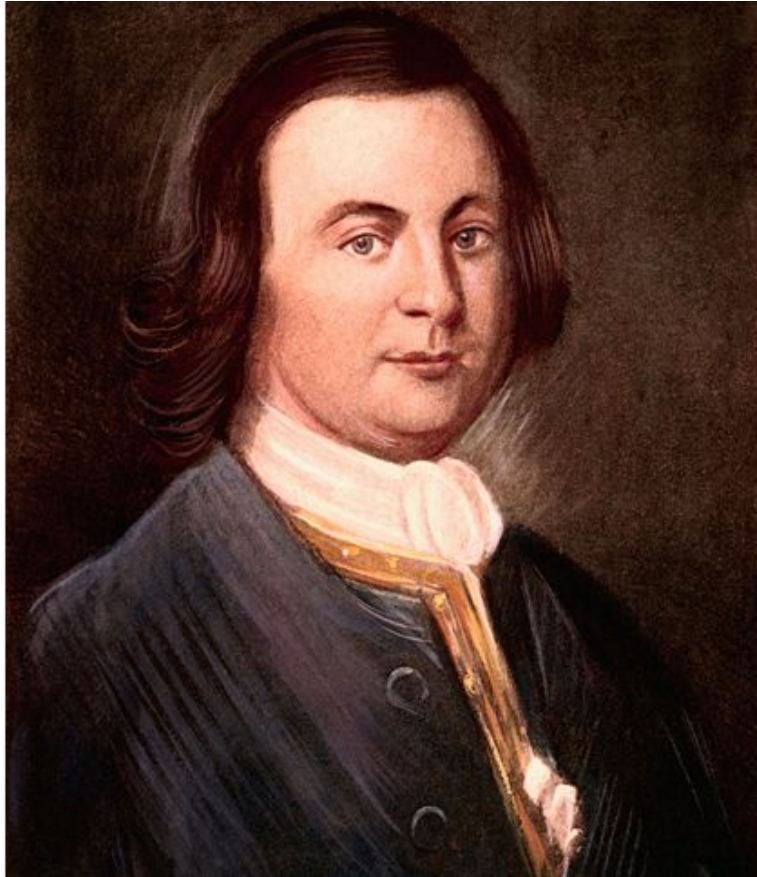
The Electoral College

You have arrived at one of the least understood points in the American political process. As the people vote in the presidential election, they do not cast a vote directly for one of the presidential candidates. They vote, instead, for presidential electors.

The Electoral College

- Choosing Electors
- Counting the Electoral Votes
- Special Cases

The Electoral College



In 1787, George Mason said the size of the country made it impossible for all Americans to evaluate candidates. Make Predictions How has modern media changed the way presidents are elected?

Flaws in the Electoral College

The electoral college system is plagued by three major defects: (1) the winner of the popular vote is not guaranteed the presidency; (2) electors are not required to vote in accord with the popular vote; and (3) any election might have to be decided in the House of Representatives.

Flaws in the Electoral College

- The First Major Defect
- When the Defect Becomes Reality
- A Consistent Problem
- The Second Major Defect
- The Third Major Defect
- Objections to Election by the House of Representatives

Flaws in the Electoral College



The 2000 presidential election, which pitted George W. Bush against Al Gore, was only the fourth time in U.S. history that the winner of the popular vote did not win the election.

Flaws in the Electoral College

ELECTORAL VOTES

CALIFORNIA

WYOMING



In 2012, California's 55 electoral votes went to Barack Obama, while Mitt Romney got Wyoming's 3. Analyze Charts Why are the figure icons in Wyoming so much larger than those in California?

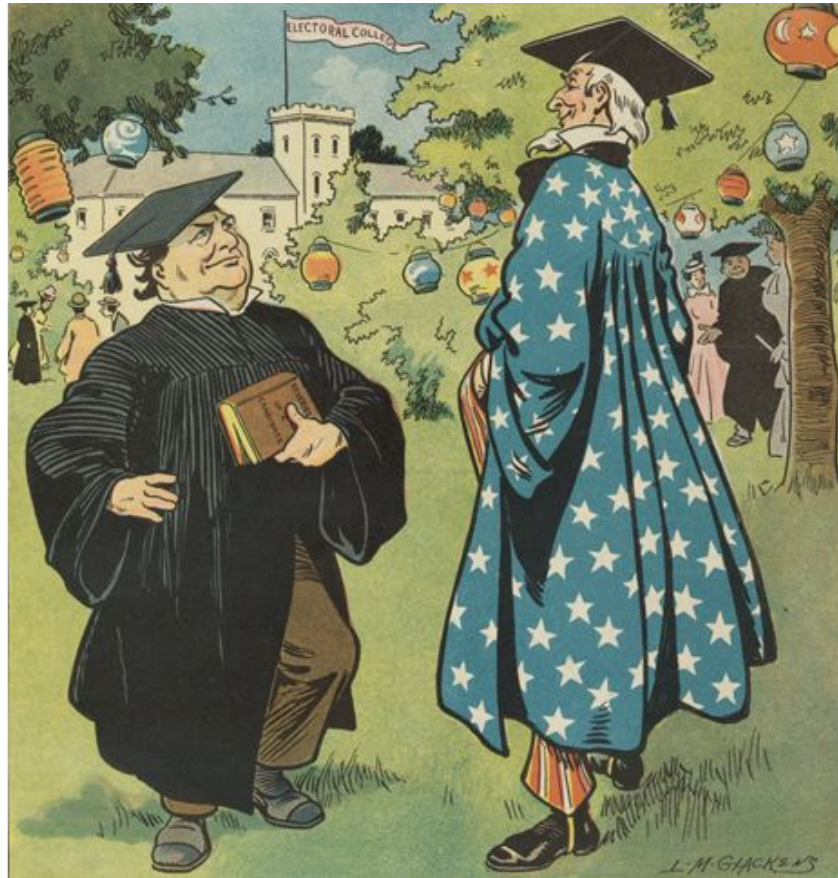
Proposed Reforms and a Defense

The several shortcomings of the electoral college have long been recognized. To that point, Thomas Jefferson once called its original version “the most dangerous blot” on the Constitution. Amendments to revise or eliminate the electoral college have been introduced in every term of Congress since 1789. Most of the proposals fall under four headings: the district plan, the proportional plan, direct popular election, and the national popular vote plan. Over recent years, most advocates of change have supported proposals for the direct election of the President.

Proposed Reforms and a Defense

- District and Proportional Plans
- Direct Popular Election
- What About the Constitution?
- Analyzing Proposed Reforms in Light of Goals
- Applying the Plans to Real Scenarios
- States Against Direct Election
- Other Arguments Against Direct Election
- The National Popular Vote Plan
- Could This Be the Answer?
- Defending the Electoral College
- Stating the Electoral College's Strengths

Proposed Reforms and a Defense



The electoral college is both strongly defended and adamantly criticized. Analyze Political Cartoons
What is this cartoon's objection to the atmosphere of the electoral college?

Proposed Reforms and a Defense



Mitt Romney won 48% of the popular vote in 2012 but 38% of the electoral votes. Analyze Maps How do these results show the significance of the winner-take-all factor in State contests?

Proposed Reforms and a Defense

Different Possible Outcomes: 1960 Presidential Election

PLANS	OUTCOME		
Electoral College (actual)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> John F. Kennedy	<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Nixon	
District Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> John F. Kennedy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Nixon	
Proportional Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> John F. Kennedy	<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Nixon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Undecided, election is thrown into the House of Representatives
Direct Popular Election	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> John F. Kennedy	<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Nixon	
National Popular Vote Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> John F. Kennedy	<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Nixon	

SOURCE: Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, uselectionatlas.org

Seeing how past elections might have turned out is one way to illustrate the impact of the different plans. Analyze Charts Based on this information, did Kennedy win the majority of votes?

Quiz: Presidential Primaries

Changes were made to most State primaries in advance of the 2012 campaign because of

- A. competition between the two parties, each trying to appear to be more reform-minded.
- B. the assertion by individual States of their rights to run unique primaries.
- C. the desire to 'even the playing field' for all candidates.
- D. an outcry from voters about the length and cost of the primaries.

Quiz: Evaluation of the Presidential Primary

In the caucus system, the political power is held by

- A. leaders of the political parties.
- B. elected state officials.
- C. voters.
- D. primary frontrunners.

Quiz: The National Convention

A typical national convention is best described as

- A. a chain of powerful debates staged for effect.
- B. a sequence of events whose outcomes are dependent on each other.
- C. a series of suspenseful, highly dramatic announcements.
- D. a checklist of formalities produced with high emotional appeal.

Quiz: Who Is Nominated?

Based on historical precedent, the individual most likely to win a presidential nomination would be

- A. a business leader from New York City.
- B. a senator from Missouri.
- C. a rear admiral in the U.S. Navy.
- D. the governor of Illinois.

Quiz: The Presidential Campaign

The characteristic of voters that most affects a presidential candidate's desire to personally reach out to them is

- A. age.
- B. occupation.
- C. physical location.
- D. political party preference.

Quiz: The Electoral College

Which statement is true about electors and members of Congress?

- A. Electors and members of Congress are one and the same thing.
- B. Electors can also be members of Congress.
- C. Electors represent voters, but members of Congress do not.
- D. Members of Congress are chosen by voters, but electors are not.

Quiz: Flaws in the Electoral College

Given the actual challenges faced by the electoral college system throughout history, which generalization about the electoral college is most true?

- A. Problems related to the system have become more frequent in the 21st century.
- B. The biggest fear of the system is that the voters' choices can be overridden.
- C. Worries about the House of Representatives determining the outcome of elections are unfounded.
- D. The electors have little power in reality.

Quiz: Proposed Reforms and a Defense

Which statement supports Thomas Jefferson's characterization of the electoral college system as 'the most dangerous blot' on the Constitution?

- A. The system crushes the possibility of a true multiple-party political system.
- B. The system favors some States over others.
- C. The system diminishes the importance of the presidency in favor of Congress.
- D. The disparate points of view about the system prove that it was ill-conceived.