



U.S. ELECTIONS

Guide to the 2008 Elections



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Introduction

Every four years, U.S. citizens elect a President and Vice President, thereby choosing both national leaders and a course of public policy. The system that governs the election of the President combines constitutional and statutory requirements, rules of the national and state political parties, political traditions, and contemporary developments and practices. As initially prescribed by the Constitution, the election of the President was left to electors chosen by the states. Final authority for selecting the President still rests with the electoral college.

When Americans vote for a President and Vice President, they actually vote for presidential electors, known collectively as the electoral college. It is these electors, chosen by the people, who elect the chief executive. The Constitution assigns each state a number of electors equal to the combined total of its Senate and House of Representatives delegations; at present, the number of electors per state ranges from three to 55, for a total of 538, a figure which includes three electors for the District of Columbia. Anyone may serve as an elector, except for Members of Congress, and persons holding offices of "Trust or Profit" under the Constitution. In each presidential election year, a group (ticket or slate) of candidates for elector is nominated by political parties and other groups in each state, usually at a state party convention, or by the party state committee. It is these elector-candidates, rather than the presidential and vice presidential nominees, for whom the people vote in the election day.

The process of electing the President is essentially divided into four stages:

- (1) the pre-nomination phase, in which candidates compete in state primary elections and caucuses for delegates to the national party conventions;

- (2) the national conventions—held in the summer of the election year—in which the two major parties nominate candidates for President and Vice President and ratify a platform of the parties' policy positions and goals;

- (3) the general election campaign, in which the major party nominees, as well as any minor party or independent contenders, compete for votes from the entire electorate, culminating in the popular vote on election day in November; and

- (4) the electoral college phase, in which the President and Vice President are officially elected.

Presidential elections in recent years differ in several important respects from those held earlier in American history.

Presidential elections in recent years differ in several important respects from those held earlier in American history.

The first is the far wider participation of voters today in determining who the party nominees will be; the political parties have in recent years given a much greater role to party voters in the states (in lieu of party leaders) in determining the nominees. The second difference involves the role of the electronic media and, most recently, the Internet, both in conveying information to the voters, and shaping the course of the campaign. Third, the financing of presidential campaigns is substantially governed by a system of public funding in the pre-nomination, convention, and general election phases, enacted in the 1970s in response to increasing campaign costs in an electronic age and the concomitant fundraising pressures on candidates. Thus, contemporary presidential elections blend both traditional aspects of law and practice and contemporary aspects of a larger, more complex, and more technologically advanced society.

The Electoral College

When American voters go to the polls to vote for president, many believe that they are participating in a direct election of the president. Technically, this is not the case — they are actually voting for “electors” who have pledged to vote for a particular candidate.

The candidates who win the popular vote within a state usually receive all the state's electoral votes. (Technically, all the electors pledged to those candidates are elected.)

If no candidate for president receives a majority of the electoral votes, the House of Representatives must determine the winner from among the top three vote-getters in the Electoral College. Members of the House vote by states, with each state delegation casting one vote.

A state's number of electors equals the number of senators and representatives from that state. The District of Columbia, which has no voting representation in Congress, has three electoral votes.

The electors meet and officially vote for president and vice president on the first Monday following the second Wednesday in December in a presidential election year. A majority of the vote is required for a candidate to be elected. Since there are 538 electors, at least 270 electoral votes are necessary to win the election.

If no candidate for vice president receives a majority of the electoral votes, the Senate must determine the winner from among the top two vote-getters in the Electoral College.

The president and vice president take their oath and assume office on January 20 of the year following the election.



Electoral votes by state/federal district for the elections of 2008

Calendar of the 2008 State Primaries/Caucuses

Last Updated: October 29, 2007

2008 Presidential Nominating Calendar
TBD: New Hampshire
JANUARY 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 3: Iowa • January 5: Wyoming (R) • January 15: Michigan • January 19: Nevada, South Carolina (R) • January 26: South Carolina (D) • January 29: Florida
FEBRUARY 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 1: Maine (R) • February 5: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho (D), Illinois, Kansas (D), Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico (D), New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah • February 9: Louisiana, Kansas (R) • February 10: Maine (D) • February 12: District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia • February 19: Hawaii (D)¹, Washington, Wisconsin
MARCH 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 4: Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont • March 8: Wyoming (D) • March 11: Mississippi
APRIL 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 22: Pennsylvania
MAY 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May 6: Indiana, North Carolina • May 13: Nebraska, West Virginia • May 20: Kentucky, Oregon • May 27: Idaho (R)
JUNE 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 3: Montana, New Mexico (R), South Dakota
AUGUST 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • August 25-28: Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado
SEPTEMBER 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 1-4: Republican National Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota
<p><i>NOTE: The Kansas State Legislature opted not to fund a presidential primary election in 2008; parties will hold caucuses instead.</i></p>

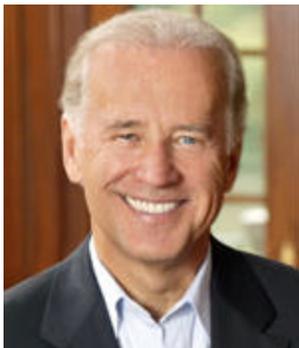
¹ According to staff with Hawaii's Republican Party, the party is not technically holding a presidential primary or caucus. Delegates will be selected during a week-long period tentatively ending on February 7, but they will not be committed to any candidates as part of the vote.

Source: National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS)

The Presidential Candidates - Democrats

Joe Biden

Joe Biden is a U.S. senator representing Delaware. He first was elected to the Senate in 1972 at age 29, and currently is the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, which reviews foreign policy matters including treaties, national security initiatives and humanitarian assistance.



An outspoken critic of the Iraq war, Biden has written a "Five-Point Plan for Iraq" that calls for unifying Iraq "by federalizing it and giving Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis breathing room in their own regions." Biden was born November 20, 1942, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He attended the University of Delaware and Syracuse University Law School in New York. Biden and his wife, Jill, have three children and five grandchildren. <http://www.joebiden.com/>

Hilary Rodham Clinton

Hilary Clinton is a senator representing New York. She also was U.S. first lady from 1993 to 2001 while her husband Bill Clinton served as president. Hillary Clinton, in 1993, headed a task force that developed proposed legislation to provide universal health care to all Americans. That legislation ultimately was not passed, but she continues to make universal health care one of her top political goals. Experts consider Clinton the first female presidential candidate with a realistic chance of winning the nomination and the election. Clinton



was born October 26, 1947, and grew up in Park Ridge, Illinois. She attended Wellesley College in Massachusetts and Yale Law School. The Clintons have a daughter. <http://www.hillaryclinton.com>

Chris Dodd

Chris Dodd is a senator from Connecticut. Dodd, whose father also represented Connecticut in the Senate, worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic and served in the Army National Guard. Dodd has opposed President Bush's troop surge strategy for Iraq, and has pledged that, if elected, he would



not increase the troop level. Dodd was born May 27, 1944, in Willimantic, Connecticut. He earned a law degree from the University of Louisville School of Law in Kentucky. Dodd and his wife, Jackie, have two daughters.

<http://chrisdodd.com/>

John Edwards

John Edwards is a former senator from North Carolina and was the Democratic candidate for vice president in 2004. The first in his family to attend college, Edwards was a practicing attorney until he was elected to the Senate. Edwards has said he would build a "new energy economy based on clean renewable energy and energy efficiency" if elected. Edwards was born June 10, 1953, in Seneca, South Carolina. He attended North Carolina State University and received a law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Edwards and his wife, Elizabeth, have had four children, one of whom died in a car accident in 1996. <http://johnedwards.com>



Mike Gravel

Mike Gravel represented Alaska in the U.S. Senate from 1969 to 1981. He also served in the U.S. Army and was once a New York City taxi driver. Gravel has proposed abolishing the income tax and replacing it with a progressive sales tax. He also advocates legisla-



tion capping U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

Gravel was born May 13, 1930, to French Canadian immigrants in Springfield, Massachusetts. He attended Columbia University in New York City. Gravel and his wife, Whitney Stewart Gravel, have two children and four grandchildren. <http://www.gravel2008.us/>

The Presidential Candidates - Democrats

Dennis Kucinich

Dennis Kucinich is currently a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Ohio. Formerly the mayor of Cleveland, he was the youngest person elected to run a major U.S. city when he took office at the age of 31 in 1977. Kucinich wants to form a Department of Peace, which would "offer a new clear vision of people working out their differences without resort to primitive violence." Kucinich was born October 8, 1946, in Cleveland. He attended Case Western Reserve University in the same city. He has a wife, Elizabeth, and a daughter from a previous marriage. <http://www.dennis4president.com/>



Barack Obama



Barack Obama is a first-term senator from Illinois. Previously, he served in the Illinois state Legislature and worked as a civil rights attorney. Obama has proposed legislation that would create a new employment eligibility system for companies to verify if their employees

are legal residents.

Obama, whose father is from Kenya, is considered by experts to be the first African-American candidate with a reasonable chance of winning the presidency. Obama was born August 4, 1961, in Hawaii and has lived in many places, including Indonesia. Obama attended Columbia University in New York and earned a law degree at Harvard University in Massachusetts. He and his wife, Michelle, have two daughters. <http://www.barackobama.com/>

Bill Richardson

Bill Richardson is the governor of New Mexico and a former congressman. He served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and secretary of energy during the Clinton administration. During his career, Richardson has negotiated with foreign leaders, including Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro.

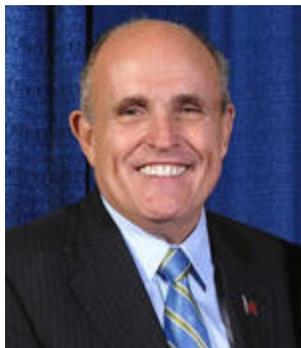


Richardson says he has the experience "to bridge gaps" and "achieve political solutions" and has criticized the Bush administration for not engaging with difficult regimes. Richardson was born November 15, 1947, in Pasadena, California, and lived in Mexico City for many years. He attended Tufts University in Massachusetts. Richardson and his wife, Barbara, have no children.

<http://www.richardsonforpresident.com>

The Presidential Candidates - Republicans

Rudy Giuliani



Rudy Giuliani is the former mayor of New York City, where he served during the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He previously was U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York and prosecuted several high-profile cases. As part of his campaign, Giuliani has made "12 commitments to the American people," including "I will keep America on offense in the terrorists' war on us" and "I will impose accountability on Washington." Giuliani was born May 28, 1944. He attended Manhattan College and New York University Law School. His wife is Judith, and he has two children from a previous marriage. <http://www.joinrudy2008.com/>

Mike Huckabee

Mike Huckabee is the former governor of Arkansas and a former Baptist preacher. Huckabee, who has diabetes, received national attention for losing 110 pounds and encouraging others to improve their diet and exercise. Huckabee says withdrawing American troops from Iraq "would have serious strategic consequences for us and horrific humanitarian consequences for the Iraqis." Huckabee was born August 24, 1955, in Hope, Arkansas. He attended Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas. Huckabee and his wife have three children. <http://www.mikehuckabee.com/>



Duncan Hunter

Duncan Hunter is a congressman from San Diego. He is also a Vietnam War veteran. Representing a border community, Hunter authored the Secure Fence Act, which would extend the border fence 1,375 kilometers across California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Hunter says his experience on this issue in San Diego has shown that "building fences in strategic locations along our international borders is a proven method of keeping America safe." Hunter was born May 31, 1948,

in Riverside, California. He attended Western State University Law School in San Diego. Hunter and his wife, Lynne, have two sons. <http://www.gohunter08.com/>



John McCain

John McCain is a senator representing Arizona. He served in Vietnam, where he was a prisoner of war for more than five years. McCain was also a presidential candidate in 2000. He has called for a "greater military commitment to Iraq," saying that more troops are necessary to rebuild the nation and prevent sectarian violence. McCain supports immigration reform legislation that would provide illegal immigrants a path to citizenship and establish a temporary guest worker program. McCain was born August 29, 1936, in the Panama Canal Zone, where his father was serving in the U.S. Navy. He attended the U.S. Naval Academy. McCain has a wife, Cindy, seven children and four grandchildren. <http://www.johnmccain.com/>



Ron Paul

Ron Paul is a representative from Texas. He previously served as a flight surgeon in the U.S. Air Force and worked as a doctor, delivering more than 4,000 babies in his career. Paul says that he "never votes for legislation unless the proposed measure is expressly authorized by the Constitution." Paul has advocated withdrawing from several trade pacts, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, saying that they limit American independence. Paul was born



The Presidential Candidates - Republicans

August 20, 1935, in Pittsburgh. He attended Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania and Duke University School of Medicine in North Carolina. He and his wife, Carol, have five children and 17 grandchildren.

<http://www.ronpaul2008.com/>

Mitt Romney

Mitt Romney is the former governor of Massachusetts. He also oversaw the committee that organized the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. Romney supports President Bush's surge strategy for Iraq and has called on Americans to demonstrate a "surge of support" for its troops. If elected, Romney would be

the first Mormon president. Romney was born March 12, 1947, in Detroit, when his father was governor of Michigan. Romney attended Brigham Young University in Utah and Harvard University's business and law schools in Massachusetts. He and his wife, Ann, have five sons. <http://www.mittromney.com/>



Tom Tancredo

Tom Tancredo is a member of the House of Representatives from Colorado. He previously served in the Colorado Legislature and worked as a schoolteacher. He is vocal in his support of the right to bear arms and

his opposition to amnesty for illegal immigrants. He vows to eliminate social benefits and job prospects for illegal immigrants. Tancredo was born December 29, 1945, in Denver. He graduated from the University of Northern Colorado. He and his wife, Jackie, have two sons and five grandsons.

<http://www.teamtancredo.com/>



Fred Thompson

Fred Thompson is a former Tennessee senator. He is perhaps best known for playing the role of District



Attorney Arthur Branch on the television show *Law & Order*. Thompson says he has "always cared deeply about the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms" and is a big proponent of federalism. Thompson was born August 19, 1942 in Sheffield, Alabama and received a law degree from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. He has a wife, Jeri, and four children.

<http://www.fred08.com/>

How the Internet Is Changing the Playing Field

By Mercedes Suarez
USINFO Special Correspondent

Washington -- Previously, the best way for the average American citizen to get involved in a presidential campaign was volunteering to distribute flyers or to organize local campaign events. But today, thousands of Americans are getting involved in the 2008 campaign by logging onto the Internet and writing blogs.

Web logs, commonly called blogs, are Web sites written by individuals (bloggers) to express their opinions or thoughts much like an online diary. Individual bloggers write commentaries in support of their favorite candidates and debate the virtues of other candidates with other bloggers.

"What appeals to me about most blogs is ... that they are written by people who are not controlled in any way, shape or form," blogger Jeff Commaroto told *USINFO* September 7. "I like the idea that if they support a candidate or position, they tell me so. Not because they are employed by a campaign but because it's the way they feel."

Randy Calypso has been writing a blog supporting Hillary Clinton for president since May 2005, two years before she officially declared her candidacy. "I'm really excited about [this blog] and I'm really excited about the possibility of Hillary for America," he told *USINFO* September 24.

Of course, campaigns also have been quick to adopt this new medium. All the presidential campaigns now maintain their own blogs, which detail the daily activities on the campaign trail. The bloggers on these sites are campaign staffers paid to write in support of a particular candidate.

The difference between professional campaign blogs and blogs written by amateur enthusiasts is important. Blogger Ethan Demme, who maintains a site supporting Senator John McCain, points out that while official campaign bloggers must deliver a specific mes-

sage, independent bloggers can offer "constructive criticism" and suggestions for candidates they support.

Demme wrote an open letter to McCain urging him to "write some short blogs that don't look like press releases" and to use the video Web site YouTube more often. Demme also noted that these sites are free; McCain's campaign has struggled to compete with other candidates in attracting financing.

The low cost of new media outlets like blogs and the instant access they provide to voters are two of the main reasons presidential campaigns have been keen to capitalize on them. Campaigns are looking to facilitate involvement for their supporters at every level through a variety of Internet tools. Supporters can connect through online forums, find local events and donate money with a few clicks of the computer mouse.

Every campaign has an automated letter that supporters can e-mail to their friends. These e-cards can be personalized depending on the issue in which the individual has the most interest: send a letter about Hillary Clinton's troop withdrawal plan; invite your friends to check out Rudy Giuliani's Web site; or express your support for John McCain. Some campaigns even offer tutorials on how to start a blog, teaching individuals how to generate a Web site in support of their candidate.



Ron Paul supporter Avery Knapp poses for a photograph beside part of a sign for presidential hopeful Paul on the rooftop of a building in the East Village neighborhood of New York. The entire sign reads "Google Ron Paul." The entreaty to search the internet for a candidate is one of the more visible signs of enthusiasm from a do-it-yourself base of web fans. (© AP Images)

Senator Barack Obama has been in the forefront of using new media tools that are popular among many of his young supporters. Obama's Senate Web site has podcasts (digital audio files) of his speeches in the Senate explaining his support for bills like new ethics legislation. Obama's official campaign blog also has sought dialogue with other bloggers.

On Facebook, a social networking site popular with college students, approximately 330,000 people have joined the "Obama 2008" feature. Of those supporters, nearly 330 people are daily contributors to the Obama section of Facebook, adding pictures and quotes and participating in online discussions. The group, started by Farouk Aregbe in February, grows daily; new member Michael Rubenstein wrote: "Great use of Facebook. I hope more campaigns do something like this."

Rubenstein's wish came true, and now most campaigns

maintain a presence on the Facebook site and other networking sites like Myspace, YouTube, and Flickr. Small icons at the bottom of each campaign Web site allow viewers to register themselves, for instance, as Hillary Clinton supporters on Facebook, or Giuliani supporters on Flickr.



Senator Barack Obama has taken advantage of using media tools such as YouTube to engage his supporters about his campaign. (YouTube)

Not all blogging is positive, and many campaigns already have experienced how a statement by a campaign staffer on a Web forum or a video of a candidate posted on YouTube can blow up into a scandal. Many professional journalists resent the influence bloggers can have on the media, and they object to the fact that some influential bloggers have been given press credentials usually reserved for professional journalists. Nevertheless, new media tools like blogging are highly influential and likely will play a major role as the 2008 race continues.

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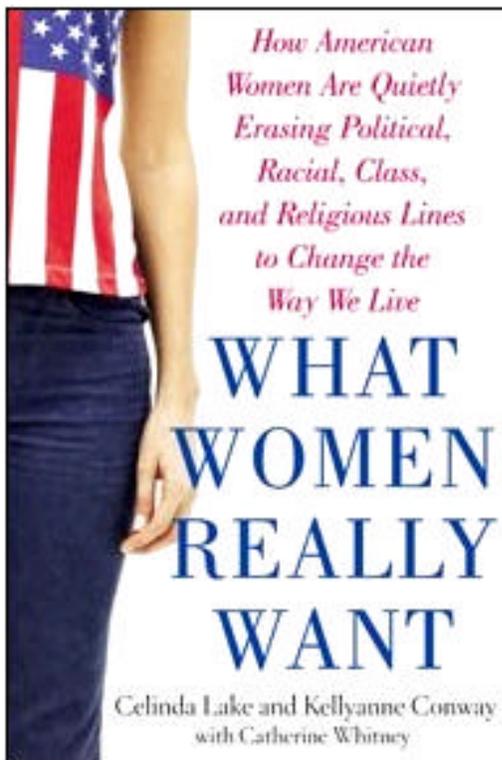
06 November 2007

Women Voters in the United States

By Kellyanne Conway

Book cover of What Women Really Want, written by author Kellyanne Conway, 2005.

The political, average woman in the United States wakes up each morning to a myriad of responsibilities, curiosities, and concerns, none of which are per se, but all of which are affected by political and governmental action. These issues might include: Is my child learning in this school? Is this neighborhood safe? If I switch jobs, will I lose my health insurance? Is Social Security income enough for my parents to keep their house and not deplete their savings?



LOOKING BACK: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since 1964 women have comprised a majority of the eligible electorate, but it was not until 1980 that the percentage of eligible women who actually voted surpassed the percentage of qualified men casting ballots, as Table 1 indicates. For all the angst by the bean counters that a fraction of women seek or hold elective office in this country (and that a woman has never been elected president), women voters have influenced electoral outcomes for more than eight decades, deciding on presidents and precedents in a way that

has shaped public policy directly and dramatically. Women tend to favor incumbents, especially for president, preferring to stick with a trusted brand already on the shelf rather than trying something new and unknown. In fact, the last three presidents who won reelection increased their support among women in their second bids. Women are also reliably pro-incumbent in eJOURNAL USA 20 congressional elections, evidencing more consistency in their voting patterns than men. Ironically, this natural bias toward reelecting incumbents is one reason many women who run for office as challengers are unsuccessful. The female nonvoter is ignored by politicians, parties, pundits, and professional consultants, who seem obsessed instead with “likely” or “swing” voters. In the 2004 presidential election, more than half (54.5 percent) of women between the ages of 18 and 24 did not vote. However, women in this age bracket voted at a higher rate than their male counterparts, only 40 percent of whom cast ballots. At the other end of the age spectrum, only 29 percent of women aged 65 to 74 did not vote, compared to 26.1 percent of men in the same category. The top reasons women offer for opting out include “illness/disability” (19.8 percent), “too busy/scheduling conflict” (17.4 percent), “not interested” (10.7 percent), and “did not like candidates or campaign issues” (9.7 percent). Excluding the final two responses, it is important to note that nearly nine in ten women did not participate for reasons other than a lack of feeling engaged.

WHAT DO WOMEN VOTERS REALLY WANT?

Traditionally, women are thought to gravitate more toward the “SHE” cluster of issues, Social Security, health care, and education, while men are considered more interested in the “WE” issues, war and the economy. The last three national elections (2002, 2004, and 2006) show that these convenient boxes no longer apply. In 2004 and again in 2006, women told pollsters that the concerns that motivated them to decide whether and for whom to vote were centered on nontraditional “women’s issues.” From a closed-ended question in which 10 possible choices were offered, the situation in Iraq topped the list as the motivating concern (22 percent), followed by the war on terror (15 percent). Morality/family values and jobs/economy each received 11 percent, while the remaining six options only garnered single-digit responses, as Table 2 demonstrates. As my coauthor, Democratic pollster Celinda Lake, and I posit in *What Women Really Want: How American Women Are Quietly Erasing Political, Racial, Class, and Religious Lines to Change the Way We Live* (Free Press, 2005), women are not single-issue voters, either. Rather, they tend to consider a plethora of ideas, issues, individuals, impressions, and ideologies before making a final decision. The media’s focus on the contentious ones makes it

seem as if women only care about one issue on Election Day and that it takes special attention to that issue to compel women to vote. In reality, women’s voting patterns indicate quite the opposite.

Table 1
Women's Voting Behavior

	% of Eligible Women Voting	% of Eligible Men Voting
1980	59.4%	59.1%
1992	62.3%	60.2%
1996	55.5%	52.8%
2000	56.2%	53.1%
2004	60.1%	56.3%

WOMEN DO NOT COMPRISE A NICHE

Women are not monolithic in their attitudes about, or votes within, the political system. When it comes to voting, one woman might vote for all Democrats, another might vote straight-ticket Republican, while a third might take the

salad-bar approach and pick and choose from who and what suits her best. In the end, women voters ask themselves two core questions when deciding whom

to support for president: “Do I like that person?” and “Is that person like me?” The first question is the classic “living room” test: Would you like to see that candidate on the television set in your living room for the next four or eight years? The second is a more complex inquiry that probes whether women

believe a candidate cares about, values, confronts, and fears the same things they do.

It is impossible to divide the life experiences and attitudes of American women into the binary Republican and Democrat categories. As women take more than their political ideology to the polls, politicians must be cognizant of the life stages, as well as the demographic categories, into which women fall. A concept we frequently use at my firm, the polling company,™ inc./WomanTrend, is the “Three Faces of Eve,” which is illustrated through the three very distinct lives a 48-year-old woman in this country might have. She could be a blue-collar grandmother, an unmarried and childless professional, or a married mother of two young

Table 2
2004 and 2006 Post-Election Surveys conducted by the polling company,™ inc.

When deciding on whom to vote for in the election today, which of the following issues was most important to you?

Actual Women Voters on Election Night

2006	2004	
22%	16%	Situation in Iraq
15%	23%	War on Terror
11%	17%	Morality/ Family Values
11%	16%	Jobs/Economy
6%	3%	Education
6%	7%	Health Care/ Medicare/ Prescription Drugs
5%	3%	Taxes
5%	N/A	Abortion
4%	N/A	Immigration
2%	2%	Environment

children. Technically, they would all fall into the same age and gender demographic categories, but their life experiences vastly differ, resulting in varied perspectives on the current state of affairs. Politics is not an isolated category for women; rather, politics is an all-encompassing arena into which women export their life experiences, needs, and expectations.

Some groups of women to watch in 2008 include:

- **Woman Entrepreneurs:** Women own approximately 10.4 million firms in the United States and employ more than 12.8 million Americans. While 75 percent of all U.S. firms do not have employees, an eye-popping 81 percent of woman-owned firms are single-person or “Mom-and-Pop” operations. The rate of growth of woman-owned firms consistently increases at a rate double to that of all firms.
- **Unmarried Women:** American women are delaying marriage not because they are without choices, but simply because they do have choices. Currently, 49 percent of all women over the age of 15 are not married and more than half (54 percent) of these women fall in the 25 to 64 age category.
- **Not-Yet-Moms:** With more women entering the workforce and the ever-increasing number of women having children beyond the traditional childbearing years, fewer women in their late 20s and early 30s can identify with the “married-with-children” label.
- **Junior-Seniors:** Women aged 50 to 64, many with children living at home, are expecting entitlements and eternity (the quest to extend life), seeking solutions and sophistication.
- **Minority Women:** Minorities now comprise one-third of U.S. residents, and four states are already a majority-minority, with five others expected to follow by 2025. The Hispanic population is poised to have the most significant impact to the U.S. population, but the increase in Asian-American voters is also a trend to follow.
- **Gen Y Women:** As Table 3 indicates, a survey for Lifetime Television by the polling company,™ inc., and Lake Research Partners found that a majority (54 percent) of Gen Y women (those born since 1979) believe that the best way to make a difference in American politics is to vote. Beyond politics, almost half (42 percent) of Gen Y women indicated that the best way to make a difference in the world was to “help those less fortunate than I, with either time or money.” Among the six other options

posed to them, only 2 percent said that taking an “active role in politics” was the best way to do so. Behind helping those in need, included “be a good person” (16 percent), “help stop violence and sexual assaults against women” (9 percent), “help save the environment” (8 percent), and “defend my country and keep it safe by serving in the military” (4 percent).

If a woman bristles, “I hate politics,” what she is saying in effect is that she cares not who manages the public schools and what is taught there; how health care is accessed, delivered, and paid for in the United States; whether the nation is safe, prosperous, and globally competitive. Yet clearly she does not mean that. Politics and governance are the vehicles through which change in these areas is accomplished but not necessarily the prism through which women interact with them.

Table 3
Which of the following do you think is the best way for you personally to make a difference in American politics?
(accepted one answer)

54%	Vote in elections
9%	Volunteer for a political campaign
8%	Donate to a cause
7%	Write a letter or e-mail to an elected official
7%	Activate my social network of friends and family
4%	Run for political office
3%	Donate money to a campaign

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2008

What can the 2008 presidential contenders expect from women voters? The variable in this presidential election could be a woman candidate, taking the debate from not if, but when. The discussion has shifted from a hypothesized woman president to that woman president; namely, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Still, past practice has proved that women do not necessarily vote for other women. If they did, U.S. Senators Elizabeth Dole or Carol Moseley-Braun would have won their parties’ nominations for president when they sought the nod in 2000 and 2004, respectively, based on the simple notion that women comprise a majority of the voters. The 2008 race differs from past elections in that this is an election of many firsts. A woman, an African American, a Mormon, and a Hispanic are all well-poised to take their parties’ nominations.

Party loyalty trumps gender, as indicated by a July 2007 Newsweek survey, which found that 88 percent of men and 85 percent of women say that if their party nominated a woman candidate that they would vote for her if she were qualified for the job. Americans express less enthusiasm, however, about the “female factor,” when it comes to how they judge their fellow citizens: Only 60 percent of men and 56 percent of women believe that the country is ready for a woman president. With regard to race, voters are less hesitant to vote for a qualified African-American candidate of their party, as 92 percent of whites and 93 percent of nonwhites say that they would endorse such a candidate. Like gender, fewer voters doubt that the country is ready for an African-American president: Only 59 percent of white voters and 58 percent of nonwhite voters believe that the country would elect a black president. When responding to polls, voters can sometimes displace their attitudes and stereotypes onto their friends, family, and community members as a way to reaffirm their own position while simultaneously hiding what they believe or know to be an “unacceptable” or “unpopular” position. One caveat of this concept is that voters’ opinions could be influenced by the fact that in 2007 there is a prominent African-American and a prominent woman candidate. Any opposition to an “African-American” or a “woman” could well be the dislike of an individual candidate.



Twelve-year-old students load boxes with petitions onto their school bus. They

hope to get a referendum on the ballot providing additional funding for education in Seattle, Washington.

Whereas the contest for president is the most wide-open in decades (it is the first time in 80 years that neither a sitting president nor vice president is seeking the presidency), one thing is certain: Women, as they have since 1980, will be a majority of the electorate that decides who next occupies the Oval Office.

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.

YouTube Redefines Terms of Presidential Debates

Internet offers new forum for political campaigning

By Lea Terhune
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – Thanks to the Internet, the tide may be turning for young American voters who feel they have no say in politics.

YouTube, the “broadcast yourself” cyberspace phenomenon that allows anyone with a digital camera to post videos on the Internet for free, offered an unprecedented political platform in July: Democratic candidates were grilled by ordinary Americans via video questions.

Politicians accustomed to controlling discussions saw people in T-shirts pose cheeky, incisive questions from all over the country -- and the world. One question came from an aid worker surrounded by children at a refugee camp in Darfur, Sudan.

The eight Democrats on the dais vying for their party’s presidential nomination had to respond. Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, Christopher Dodd, John Edwards, Mike Gravel, Dennis Kucinich, Barack Obama and Bill Richardson fielded questions on topics ranging from civil rights to health care. Several of the 39 questions were about the war in Iraq, and nearly a third touched on foreign policy, including “How do we get beyond empty promises in Darfur?” and “How will your policies reduce energy consumption?”

Co-sponsor CNN, which broadcast the July 23 event on television, chose the questions from about 1,500 submissions. University of Iowa elections expert Bruce Gronbeck found this “fascinating.”

“Television maintained its position as the dominant framer,” he told *USINFO*. “It threw the YouTube questions up on the screen and took a picture of them with a camera rather than direct feeding into the



Democratic presidential hopefuls listen to a question from Reverend Reggie Long-crier of Hickory, North Carolina, as they participate in the debate sponsored by CNN, YouTube and Google at The Citadel military college in Charleston, South Carolina, July 23. (© AP Images)

broadcast. So the dominant medium tried to stay in control and they picked the questions.”

But are television and print the dominant media of the 21st century? It is debatable, as both strive to develop Internet components and advertisers see the Web as the worldwide ad space. Gronbeck says the Internet has had a major impact on the print and electronic media. “The Internet now is a source of stories, of political stories, and ... provides an amazing amount of material that then gets re-circulated on radio, television and print.” The

YouTube debate exemplifies that.

YouTube first emerged as an influence on voters in 2006, when the Republican senatorial candidate from Virginia, George Allen, verbally abused a young party worker of South Asian-American descent who was videotaping a speech for rival Democratic candidate Jim Webb. The clip of Allen’s remarks was posted on YouTube. Despite Allen’s attempts to apologize, this once front-runner and possible presidential candidate lost to Webb by several thousand votes. Analysts see the widespread circulation of this so-called “macaca” video in the media, including YouTube, as partly responsible for his defeat.

This lesson was not lost on politicians. Serious presidential candidates, Republicans and Democrats alike, have joined YouTube in the past year to establish a presence and post campaign videos there. Barack Obama announced on YouTube his intentions to explore a presidential bid a month before his official announcement.

Some candidates who receive little attention from the mainstream media are all over the Internet. Internet views of one such candidate, Republican Ron Paul, outstrip all others, according to TechPresident, which tracks candidates in online social media. Unauthorized political videos also are posted by candidates’ supporters and detractors.

YouTube was created in a California garage in 2005 by three young computer technicians who wanted to make video-file transfer easier. It became an instant success and spurred the growth of an online community of video sharers. Every topic, sublime to ridiculous, can be found on YouTube. In 2006, Web giant Google bought YouTube in a \$1.65 billion stock-for-stock transaction. YouTube remains an independent subsidiary of Google.

“The YouTube team has built an exciting and powerful media platform that complements Google’s mission to

organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," Google Chief Executive Officer Eric Schmidt said at the time.

Peter Leyden, a fellow at the progressive San Francisco-based New Politics Institute called the CNN-YouTube debate "a remarkable moment where new media finally takes its rightful place right alongside the old media."

Gronbeck says there are signs that political consciousness is developing in the tech-savvy younger generation, and there has been an increase in the size of the 18- to 24-year-old vote in recent elections.

Does YouTube play a role? "There were probably people who tuned in who hadn't tuned in to any other debate, and we know it was the largest portion of 18 to 20 year olds to ever watch a [presidential] debate," Gronbeck says.

Questions were asked not by journalists, but by individuals whose diversity embodied the issues: black, white, disabled, dying of cancer -- "We can see their faces."

"You are living out what a campaign ought to be, which is the leaders reaching down to the led and engaging in a serious kind of way," Gronbeck adds. This personalized encounter ensured that debate and commentary continued among the Internet community long after the actual event ended.

In November, Republican presidential candidates will have their turn at facing the nation on YouTube.

The debate may be viewed on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/democraticdebate>.

Young People Play Key Roles in Presidential Campaigns

Campaign staff, volunteers put in long hours for their candidates

By Michelle Austein
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- Working for a presidential campaign requires lots of time and energy, something America's young people have in abundance.

In the Republican and Democratic parties, much of a candidate's volunteer base is made up of students "who have the time and also the energy to do neighborhood walks and knock on doors and make phone calls," said Jordan Sekulow, who was 22 when he served as national youth director for the 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign.

Reaching out to college students, many of them first-time voters, is an opportunity to

"engage them in politics and to maximize their efforts and their energy into working for the campaign," Sekulow said. During a more than yearlong effort to engage college students in 2004, the Bush-Cheney campaign signed up about 158,000 new student volunteers.

Some young Americans volunteer for campaigns when they have free time, but others work as full-time staff members. Except top directors, most campaign workers tend to be in their 20s, especially in field offices -- offices other than the national headquarters -- where most of the staff members are recent college graduates, Sekulow said.

In the primary season, campaigns set up field offices in states where an early victory is important, such as Iowa or New Hampshire. During the general election, field offices, usually very small and run by young people, are established across the country.

Josh Alcorn, a regional field director for Democratic candidate Joe Biden's campaign, oversees a three-room storefront office in Waterloo, Iowa, at age 26. The other full-time staff member is a 21-year-old college student who is taking a break from school. Alcorn meets with local officials to build support for the Delaware senator. When Biden is in town, Alcorn arranges events at which Biden can meet potential caucus-goers in coffee shops and other venues.



Students in Iowa City, Iowa show their support for President Bush during his re-election campaign in 2004. (© AP Images)

Another responsibility is working with his campaign volunteers, who tend to be much older than Alcorn. The volunteers come to his office on a regular basis to make phone calls and stuff envelopes with campaign literature. On Tuesday nights they hold a potluck dinner and use the office's phones to call and encourage their neighbors to vote for Biden.

LONG HOURS ON THE ROAD

Working on a presidential campaign means long hours working, talking with voters and networking with supporters. "It's 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the entire campaign," Sekulow said.

Biden campaign workers are told their work hours are from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., "but if you're working nine to nine, you are not doing something right," Alcorn said. Usually the hours are longer.

Even before work, Alcorn, who is responsible for six Iowa counties, is reading newspapers. "People here know so much about what is going on. You have to be on top of all the issues nationally and internationally." He starts reading at about 7 or 7:30 a.m., and is usually at work until 10 p.m. Weekends are filled with campaign duties as well.

During the general election, campaign workers criss-cross the country. Sekulow spent the final six months of the 2004 campaign traveling to college campuses in battleground states. He would spend two or three days in a state, head back to the national headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, for a few days, then travel again. "Once the campaign really gets in full swing, you are working on the road the entire time."

The busy schedule does not end when the polls open on Election Day. Conference calls and voter outreach continue throughout the day.

"No one is overly confident going into Election Day. Everyone is nervous." Sekulow said. "I think everyone gets the butterflies in your stomach kind of feeling when you wake up and realize that everything you have been working on in the past 18 months comes down to this one day."



Democratic candidate Joe Biden greets students at New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire, October 6. (© AP Images)

Workers on the winning presidential campaign might get a chance to help plan the president-elect's inauguration. "It is a culmination of everything you have gotten to put together," Sekulow said. "It is a great way to re-engage everyone you have worked with and solidify those bonds for the future."

REWARDS INCLUDE NEW SKILLS, NEW FRIENDS

Campaign workers learn new skills on the job. Alcorn said he learned much about time management and organizing. "People are going to caucus for a candidate because they like the organizer. Being able to sell them on yourself before you sell them on a candidate is crucial," he said.

Working on a campaign is also an opportunity to build strong friendships and meet new people across the country, Sekulow said. He said he built a network of relationships that "are going to last a lifetime."

The 25-year-old now attends law school and works with many from his 2004 campaign network as he serves as a consultant to Republican candidate Mitt Romney's campaign. Sekulow has been organizing events for students and traveling when he can.

"I know this winter break will be a break from school but not a break from the campaign," he said.

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The Changing U.S. Voter

Recent election polls reveal the concerns, beliefs, and sentiments of U.S. citizens as they prepare to vote for president in 2008. Voters are expressing anxiety over terrorist threats, pessimism on domestic issues, and an interest in government reform. A Democratic pollster concludes that “the U.S. electorate — often reticent about fundamental change — is now more nervous about staying the course.” Daniel Gotoff is a partner with Lake Research Partners in Washington, D.C.

By Daniel Gotoff

As — the 2008 election for president approaches, the U.S. electorate finds itself in a unique — and tumultuous situation. Polls show that the country is engaged in a war that a majority of Americans now oppose. Nearly six years after September 11, 2001, fears of another terrorist attack still permeate the public consciousness. And voters’ outlook on a panoply of domestic matters is colored with intensifying concern.

This swirl of public discontent takes place against a backdrop of spreading cynicism toward our elected leaders, counterbalanced by a sense that only an institutional power as mighty as the U.S. government is equipped to help the country overcome the challenges it now faces. The shifting political tides over the past several years underscore the point that neither major party is able to boast a governing majority. Furthermore, for the first time in decades neither an incumbent president nor a sitting vice president is running for the highest office in the land.

Amid this turbulence, the U.S. electorate — often reticent about fundamental change — is now more nervous about maintaining the status quo. Currently, polls show only 19 percent of Americans believe the country is headed in the right direction — the lowest in a decade. (In July 1997, 44 percent of Americans felt the country was headed in the right direction and just 40 percent felt it was on the wrong track.) Now, fully 68 percent believe the country is off on the wrong track.



This political activist hopes to funnel money into Hispanic voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts in Colorado.

Voters’ widespread dissatisfaction has created a palpable desire for change in the United States on three key fronts: improved security abroad and at home, shared prosperity on domestic economic matters, and greater accountability on behalf of the government to the people it intends to serve.

PUBLIC ANXIETY OVER TERRORISM AND SECURITY

While the mood of the electorate has shifted dramatically over the last several months, certain political realities will remain true in 2008. Perhaps most prominent, the attacks of September 11, 2001 — and the aftermath of those attacks — still largely define our times and our politics. Voters’ instinctive anxieties have meant that each of the three federal elections since September 11 has rested principally, though not solely, on matters of security.

According to exit polls for the last two elections, concerns over terrorism figured prominently. In 2004, 19 percent of voters cited terrorism as their top concern

(second only to the economy at 20 percent). Similarly, in 2006, 72 percent of American voters considered terrorism an important issue in their voting decision. And as recently as September 2006, the last time ABC News asked the question, nearly three-quarters of Americans (74 percent) reported being concerned about the possibility that there will be more major terrorist attacks in the United States, including 29 percent who were worried a great deal. While the intensity of these fears has ebbed somewhat in the years since September

11, overall levels of concern have barely budged. In October 2001, less than one month after the attacks, 81 percent of Americans were concerned about the possibility

of additional terrorist attacks on U.S. soil (41 percent were very worried).

Since the invasion of Iraq and the growing public opposition to the war, dimensions of security and terrorism have grown more complex — and politically elusive. In October 2002, Americans saw Republicans as better able to handle the issue of terrorism than Democrats by

a 23-point margin: 47 percent to 24 percent. By October 2006, however, the ground on this key issue had shifted significantly, with the public preferring Democrats to Republicans, 44 percent to 37 percent. In 2008, U.S. voters will select the candidate they trust most to secure America's place in the world.

INCREASED PESSIMISM ON THE DOMESTIC FRONT

While Iraq and terrorism often steal the headlines, voters' concerns on the domestic front are equally intense. In fact, in 2006, exit polls showed concerns over the economy on a par with concerns over national security, Iraq, and ethics. When asked about the importance of various issues in determining their vote for Congress, 82 percent of Americans said the economy was either extremely important (39 percent) or very important (43 percent). By comparison, 74 percent identified corruption and ethics as important (41 percent "extremely"), 67 percent identified Iraq as important (35 percent "extremely"), and 72 percent identified terrorism as important (39 percent "extremely").

Since the 2006 election, voters concerns over the economy have grown more pointed. Two-thirds (66 percent) of Americans rate economic conditions in the country as only fair (43 percent) or poor (23 percent). Just 5 percent rate the economy as excellent and 29 percent rate it as good. Moreover, a 55 percent majority of Americans believe the national economy is getting worse. Another 28 percent say the economy is staying the same — hardly a positive diagnosis — and just 16 percent say the economy is getting better. Americans' economic concerns have changed over time. Well-paying, secure jobs are still central, but in an environment where U.S. workers are finding it increasingly difficult to keep pace with the rising cost of living, the affordability of health care now ranks as voters' top economic concern. Asked to choose the economic issue they are personally most worried about, a 29 percent plurality of voters pick the rising cost of health care, higher than the number who choose higher taxes (24 percent), a secure retirement (16 percent), losing one's job (11 percent), or expenses like child care and tuition (10 percent). Americans, who describe affordable health care as one of the pillars of the American Dream, now regard surging health care costs as a direct threat to their families' ability to stay in the middle class and achieve that dream. Voters also believe that health care costs are a major impediment to starting one's own business, a significant finding in an entrepreneurial society in which 48 percent aspire to do just that.

Additionally, as globalization forces U.S. workers to compete against low-wage workers in countries that may not protect basic rights, they have become quite skeptical about its benefits. Fully 65 percent of Americans view increased trade between the United States and other countries as mostly hurting U.S. workers. And underscoring a shift in attitudes from the end of the last decade, when a 56 percent majority saw increased trade as mostly helping U.S. companies, fully half of Americans (50 percent) now view trade as mostly hurting U.S. companies.

More fundamentally, there is a growing sense among the public that the middle class is no longer sharing in the nation's prosperity, but actually losing ground while an elite few reap gargantuan profits. The exit polls speak to this erosion of voters' faith in the American Dream in the century. Fully half of voters said they had just enough to get by and another 17 percent said they were falling behind. Less than one-third of voters (31 percent) said they were getting ahead financially. Even more startling is the extent to which Americans have grown pessimistic in their outlook for their children's future. A 40 percent plurality said they expected life for the next generation of Americans to be worse than life today, 28 percent said about the same, and just 30 percent expected life for the next generation of Americans to be better than life today. In 2008, American voters will select the candidate they trust most to ensure the promise of the American Dream — namely, shared economic prosperity and the opportunity for workers to provide better opportunities for their children.

THE INCREASING DESIRE FOR CHANGE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Buttons urging veterans to vote are displayed at the Vietnam Veterans of America leadership conference in Nashville, Tennessee.



The gathering storm of public anxiety on issues both foreign and domestic is feeding an appetite for fundamental reform of the U.S. government. The 2006 election was in many ways a public cry for greater accountability. Three-quarters of voters identified corruption and ethics as important to their vote in Congress, and with considerable intensity (41 percent "extremely important").

While the Iraq war may help explain the current president's low job approval ratings, it does not explain why the new Congress, controlled by the opposition party, is also held in such poor esteem by the voters. President Bush's job approval rating sits at just 31 percent, though Congress' job approval rating — at 21 percent — is even more critical. In short, the public is demanding change and holding all elected leaders accountable for effecting that change. To wit, a 56 percent majority of Americans now agree that "the federal government needs to be transformed — that is, undergo major and fundamental changes." Just 34 percent believe "the federal government needs to undergo small changes but does not need to be transformed," and only 3 percent believe "the federal government does not need to undergo any changes."

And despite reduced trust in government, more than half of Americans want an increased role for the institution in addressing the challenges facing the country. Fifty-two percent agree that "government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people," compared to just 40 percent who believe that "government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals." It is worth noting that

these numbers are virtually the mirror opposite of the sentiment recorded nearly a decade ago (41 percent "government should do more" to 51 percent "government is doing too much").

In conclusion, the U.S. voter is indeed changing — becoming more cynical, more anxious, and less secure. At the same time, the U.S. voter remains guardedly hopeful about the future. Voters are seeking a leader who has the demonstrated ability to recognize and resolve the challenges facing the United States in the century and, in so doing, secure the United States' place in the world. Countering this inclination toward an experienced, steady hand is a strong desire for a leader who represents the change that an overwhelming majority of Americans now demand. The candidate who can convincingly reconcile these seemingly contradictory dimensions of leadership is the candidate who will win the presidency in 2008 — and with it the ability to transform the nation, both in the eyes of U.S. citizens and, just as important, in the eyes of the world.

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Frequently Asked Questions

TYPES OF ELECTIONS

What types of elections are held in the United States?

There are two basic types of elections – primary and general. In addition to the primaries and general elections held in even-numbered years, which include political races for the U.S. Congress, some states and local jurisdictions also hold “off-year” elections (both primary and general) in odd-numbered years for their elected officials.

A primary election is a nominating election in which the field of candidates who will run in the general election is chosen. Victory in a primary usually results in a candidate being nominated or endorsed by a political party for the general election.

A general election is an election held to choose among candidates nominated in a primary (or by convention, caucus or petition) for federal, state and/or local office. The purpose of a general election is to make a final choice among the various candidates who have been nominated by parties or who are running as independents (not affiliated with a major political party) or, in some cases, write-in candidates. Measures such as proposed legislation (referendums), bond issues (approving the borrowing of money for public projects) and other mandates on government also can be placed on the ballot.

In addition, many states provide for special elections, which can be called at any time, to serve a specific purpose, such as filling an unexpected vacancy in an elected office.

What are midterm elections?

The elections in which Americans vote for their congressional representatives but not for their president are known as midterm elections. Every two years Americans elect members of the U.S. House of Representatives to two-year terms and about one-third of their U.S. senators, who serve six-year terms. Voters also will select officials to state and local government posts.

What is a convention?

Conventions are meetings sponsored by political parties for members of the party to discuss issues, candidates and campaign strategies. These meetings can last several days.

In presidential elections, after state primaries are concluded, each party holds a national convention to formally select the presidential nominee – usually the candidate who secured the support of the most con-

vention delegates, based on victories in primary elections. Typically, the presidential nominee then chooses a running mate to be the party’s candidate for vice president.

Political parties hold national conventions only in presidential election years. The parties usually hold smaller, state-level conventions in other years. The Democratic National Convention will be in Denver on August 25-28, 2008. The Republican National Convention will be in St. Paul, Minnesota, September 1-4, 2008.

What is a caucus?

A caucus is a meeting at the local level in which registered members of a political party in a city, town or county gather to express support for a candidate. For statewide or national offices, those recommendations are combined to determine the state party nominee. Caucuses, unlike conventions, involve many separate meetings held simultaneously at multiple locations. Both the Democratic and Republican parties have their own rules governing caucuses. Those rules vary from state to state.

REQUIREMENTS FOR VOTING, RUNNING FOR OFFICE

Who can vote?

American citizens ages 18 and older can register to vote. To register, voters must meet the residency requirements of their states, which vary, and comply with voter-registration deadlines.

What are the requirements for running for elected office in the United States?

Each federal elected office has different requirements, which are laid out in Articles I and II of the [U.S. Constitution](#).

A candidate for president of the United States must be a natural-born citizen of the United States, be at least 35 years old, and have been a resident of the United States for at least 14 years. A vice president must meet the same qualifications. Under the 12th Amendment to the Constitution, the vice president cannot be from the same state as the president.

U.S. House of Representatives candidates must be at least 25 years old, have been U.S. citizens for seven years and be legal residents of the state in which they seek election.

U.S. Senate candidates must be at least 30 years old, have been a U.S. citizen for nine years, and be legal residents of the state in which they seek election.

Officials seeking state or local office must meet the requirements established by those jurisdictions.

SCHEDULING ELECTIONS

When are general elections held?

They are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November. The 2008 general election will be held on November 4.

Why are general elections held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November?

For much of U.S. history, America was a predominantly agrarian society. Lawmakers considered their convenience when choosing a November date for elections – after harvest time but before winter weather made travel difficult – as the easiest month for farmers and rural workers to go to the polls. Because many rural residents lived a significant distance from the polls, Tuesday, rather than Monday, was selected to allow those who attended Sunday church services to begin travel after worship and still reach their destinations in time to cast their votes. Lawmakers wanted to prevent Election Day from falling on the first of November for two reasons. First, November 1 is All Saints Day, a day on which Roman Catholics are obligated to attend Mass. Also, merchants typically balanced the accounts from the preceding month on the first of each month.

When are primary elections held?

State and local governments determine the dates on which primary elections or caucuses are held. These dates, and the amount of time between a primary and general election, significantly influence how early candidates begin campaigning and the choices they make about how and when campaign funds are spent. In the run-up to presidential elections, victories in primaries held very early in the election year, such as that in New Hampshire, can influence the outcome of later state primaries.

ELECTORAL COLLEGE

What is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College is the group of citizens designated by the states to cast votes for the president and vice president on behalf of state citizens. The process for selecting electors varies from state to state, but usually the political parties nominate electors at state party conventions or by a vote of the party's central committee. The voters in each state, by casting votes for president and vice president, choose the electors on the day of the general election. The Electoral College, not the popular vote, elects the president, but the two votes are tied closely.

The Electoral College system gives each state the same number of electoral votes as it has members of

How does the Electoral College elect the president?

Congress. The District of Columbia is allocated three electoral votes. There are a total of 538 votes in the Electoral College; a candidate for president must get 270 to win (a simple majority). All but two states have a winner-take-all system, in which the candidate who gets the most popular votes in the state is allocated all of the state's electoral votes.

The electors usually gather in their state capitals in December to cast their votes. The electoral votes are then sent to Washington, where they are counted in the presence of a joint session of Congress in January.

If no presidential candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the 12th Amendment to the Constitution provides for the presidential election to be decided by the House of Representatives. In such situations, the House selects the president by majority vote, choosing from the three candidates who received the greatest number of electoral votes. Each state would cast one vote.

If no vice presidential candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the Senate selects the vice president by majority vote, with each senator choosing from the two candidates who received the greatest number of electoral votes.

For which races is the Electoral College used?

The Electoral College is used only to select the president and vice president.

Has any president been elected without a majority of the popular vote? There have been 17 presidential elections in which the winner did not receive a majority of the popular vote cast. The first of these was John Quincy Adams in the election of 1824, and the most recent was George W. Bush in 2000.

The founders of the nation devised the Electoral College system as part of their plan to share power between the states and the national government. Under the federal system adopted in the U.S. Constitution, the nationwide popular vote has no legal significance. As a result, it is possible that the electoral votes awarded on the basis of state elections could produce a different result than the nationwide popular vote. Nevertheless, the individual citizen's vote is important to the outcome of each election.

OTHER QUESTIONS

Why is voter turnout sometimes low in the United States?

Several factors seem to influence voter turnout, which was approximately 41 percent of eligible voters in 2006 and 61 percent in 2004. Many observers believe that current registration laws hinder voter turnout. The demographic composition of the electorate, long periods

of political or economic stability, predictable outcomes in many races and some candidates' lack of popular appeal are other factors affecting voter turnout. Turnout tends to be higher in general elections than in primary elections. Turnout also tends to be higher in years in which the president is elected than in midterm elections.

What are the symbols of the U.S. political parties



The elephant represents the Republican Party, and the donkey represents the Democratic Party. Political cartoonist Thomas Nast created both images for the publication Harper's Weekly in 1874.

Nast created a marauding elephant to represent the "Republican vote." Republicans quickly embraced the symbol as their party's own.

In a separate cartoon, Nast criticized the Democrats for posthumously maligning a Republican by picturing the Democratic Party as a donkey or mule demonstrating a sense of humor, accepted the animal as its symbol, observing that it has many fine qualities, such as not giving up easily.

Do organizations tell people how to vote? What does it mean when a union or newspaper "endorses" a candidate?

Voting in U.S. elections is conducted by secret ballot, and a voter's choice is private. The "endorsement" of a candidate by an organization means the organization publicly supports the candidate and approves the candidate's stand on issues. Although organizations can encourage members to join in that support, it is unlawful for to coerce a member to vote against his or her own judgment.