

American Government:
Unit 1—Presidential Elections & The Electoral College

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Reciting those words, from Article II, Section 1, clause 8 of the Constitution, 42 different men have assumed the highest government office in the land, and, some would argue, the most powerful office in the world. Exactly how and why they got there is the focus of this unit.

Records from the Constitutional Convention show that there was much time and energy devoted to deciding how the chief of the executive branch would be selected. Despite that fact, there is very little in the Constitution that speaks directly to the election of the President, and many of the details that are included were soon afterward changed because of the problems they brought with them in the political climate of the new nation. Because of that, much of the current process used to elect our nation's highest elected official is dictated by sources other

than the Constitution, making for a confusing and changing "crazy quilt" process.

Despite these facts, the process of electing a President is an activity that occurs like clockwork every four years. Though Election Day is the focus of the time, energy, and money of those involved, the process of selecting our President begins long before the second Tuesday in November, and lasts a bit beyond that date as well, as election results are certified, and a cast of electors are sent to make the final, and official, vote for President.

Key Questions for the Unit:

What are the formal and informal requirements for the position?

What powers of the office are most important?

How are presidential candidates identified, nominated, and elected?

What does the Constitution dictate in terms of presidential election, and what does it leave up to political parties to decide?

What changes should we consider in terms of how our President is elected, and how he serves his term in office?

Assignment	Pages	?’s	Due	Pts	
1. President’s Job Description (13.1)	315-321	2-5	2/1	20	
2. Presidential Selection (13.3)	327-329	2-5	2/4	20	
3. Nominating Pres. Candidates (13.4)	330-335	1,2,3,5,8	2/5	25	
4. At the National Convention (13.5)	335-339	1-4	2/6	20	
Unit Project: Election of 2008	Website	In-Class	2/6	20	
5. The Election (13.6)	340-347	2,3,4,6	2/7	20	
6. The Election of 2000 / Video	Handout	In-Class	2/8	20	
★Week 1 Vocabulary Test	See packet		2/11	20	
Unit Test	All above		2/13	50	
Unit Essay	See below		2/14	50	

Unit Vocabulary – Terms to know as you complete this unit

caucus	delegate	elector	electorate
electoral college	incumbent	keynote address	partisan
presidential	primary	platform	winner-take-all

UNIT THREE ESSAY: DUE

CHOOSE ONE of the questions below relating to Presidential elections and the presidency. Write a brief, well-organized, academic essay (1 – 2 pages long double-spaced, typed, 1 inch margins) that takes a **persuasive** stance on one of the following questions:

- 1) The Constitution requires that the President must be a natural-born citizen of the United States. Some people would like to see that requirement changed to allow any citizen – natural-born or naturalized – who meets the other requirements to become president (see pg 317). What would you argue? Support your ideas with well-reasoned examples and persuasive facts.
- 2) The 22nd Amendment, adopted in 1951, prohibits anyone from serving more than two full terms in office. Some people, including some recent presidents, have argued that this places an undemocratic restraint on an otherwise democratic process, and that the 22nd Amendment should be repealed (see pg 321). What would you argue? Support your ideas with well-reasoned examples and persuasive facts.
- 3) The popular vote on Election Day does not technically end the election. That event comes several weeks later when the Electoral College meets to cast votes for the president. This is the vote that truly signals the end of the campaign, and the election of a president. Some people would argue that the Electoral College is a relic of the past, that it is no longer needed, and that a direct election would better serve the democratic ideals of our country. Others disagree, or offer modifications on the present system. (see pgs 340-347) What would you argue? Support your ideas with well-reasoned examples and persuasive facts.
- 4) Both major political parties use a complicated series of state primaries and caucuses to choose their presidential candidate. Traditionally, Iowa and New Hampshire have begun the process that ultimately names the candidate for each party, with other states following at various times afterward. But many feel the early focus on these two small states, along with the complex network of primaries that follow, makes the road to the White House a strange one, and not necessarily representative of the country as a whole. (see page 334). What would you suggest as a fair, effective, and meaningful method for choosing the major party candidates for future elections?

*Suggestion: Once you choose your question, re-read the appropriate section of the text to make sure you truly understand what the status of your chosen topic currently is, and to get some insight on some arguments for change. It is appropriate to look beyond the textbook to find information about your chosen civil right (a.k.a. "research") but the focus of the essay should be your own ideas, rather than a "report" of your findings. Use information from the text and other sources to better understand your chosen question and to collect evidence in support of your position, but spend the bulk of your essay **arguing for or against** the proposed change.