

## SECTION 4

# Presidential Nominations

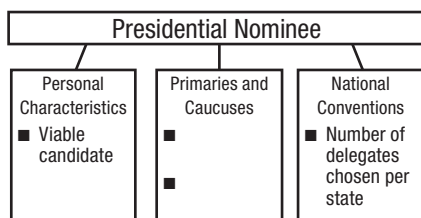


▲ Delegates cheer on a speaker at the 2008 Democratic National Convention.

### Guiding Question

**Does the nominating system allow Americans to choose the best candidates for President?**

Use a chart like the one below to keep track of the main ideas about the nomination process.



### Objectives:

- Explain the role of conventions in the nominating process.
- Evaluate the importance of presidential primaries.
- Understand the caucus-convention process.
- List the important events that happen during a national convention.
- Consider the typical characteristics of most presidential candidates.

The Constitution does not describe how presidential candidates should be chosen. Instead, the Framers designed the electoral college system. When political parties arose and affected the outcome of the election of 1800, however, that system changed forever. In this section, you will read about the way that presidential candidates are chosen today.

### How does the national convention work?

Political parties first used congressional caucuses to nominate their presidential candidates. That arrangement ended because it represented the views of too few people. By 1832, both major parties had begun to use national conventions to nominate presidential candidates. The national convention is still used today.

The convention was developed by the two major parties rather than federal or state law. In both parties, a committee decides on the place and date of the convention. The conventions are very large. In 2008, the Republicans had 2,380 delegates and the Democrats had 4,233.

Delegates from each state are chosen by the parties to attend the convention. The number of delegates from each state is based on that state's electoral vote. Both parties now award bonus delegates to some states. These are the states that have supported a party's candidate in the past.

The selection of delegates to the convention produces a struggle in each party. State laws and/or party rules set the procedures for picking delegates in each state. The Republican Party allows the individual state organizations to choose its delegates. The Democratic Party process is governed by national rules to include more people in the selection process.

## Presidential primary

An election in which a party's voters (1) choose the delegates to their national convention, and/or (2) vote for their party's presidential candidate

## Winner-take-all

A type of primary that is no longer used in which a winning presidential candidate automatically won the support of all the party's delegates

## Proportional representation

Rule applied in Democratic primaries that awards delegates based on the number of votes the candidate wins in the primary

## What is a presidential primary?

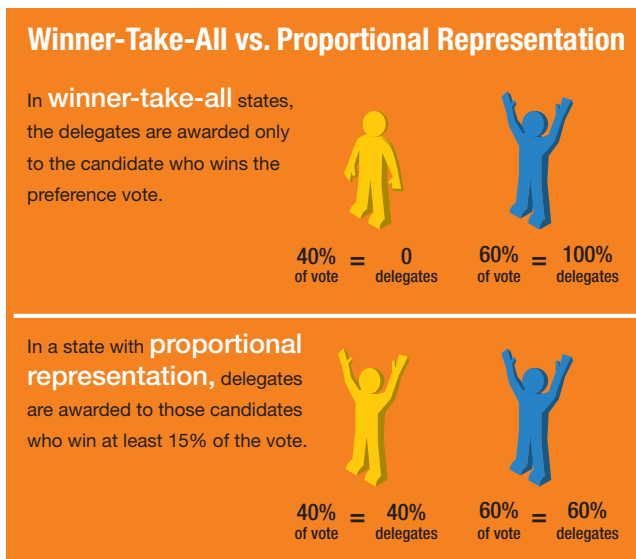
Many states use a **presidential primary** to select delegates for the national convention and/or to express a preference for their party's presidential nominee. The media pay close attention to these primaries. Any candidate who hopes to have a chance at his or her party's nomination must do well in the primaries.

The presidential primary began in the early 1900s. Corrupt party bosses had dominated the convention system. The process needed to be reformed. Primaries allowed more input from party members. Wisconsin passed the first law providing for the popular election of delegates to the national convention. By 1916, about half of the states had similar laws. Today, some form of the presidential primary is used in most states. For 2008, 40 states used the presidential primary system.

## What are primaries like today?

Primaries today are difficult to describe. Each state has a different way to choose its delegates. In addition, the Democratic Party has reformed its rules many times since 1968. Even the dates of the state primaries are confusing. New Hampshire holds its primaries first and has done so since 1920. It has a state law that says its primary is to be held at least a week before that of any other state. Most states want an early date for their primary. As a result, 16 states hold their primaries on "Super Tuesday" (February 5th). Three fourths of the primaries are held by mid-March.

Fig. 13.4



▲ **Analyzing Charts** As political parties' rules have changed, so has the manner in which primaries have been conducted. **Why do you think candidates who receive less than 15% of the vote are not assigned delegates?**

In the recent past, primaries were used both to select delegates and to show preference for a presidential candidate. Several primaries were **winner-take-all** contests. Candidates who won the preference vote also won the support of all the delegates chosen at that primary. These winner-take-all contests have almost all disappeared. The Democrats now have a **proportional representation** rule (Figure 13.4). A candidate who wins at least 15 percent of the primary votes gets the number of that state's delegates that matches his or her share of that primary vote. Most states had to change their primary laws to account for the Democrats proportional representation rule.

✓ **Checkpoint** What is proportional representation?

The presidential primary is very confusing, but also very important in our system of government. Presidential primaries allow the people to decide on candidates for President. In addition, they force potential nominees to test their abilities in real political action. In this way, the less capable candidates are eliminated. This does not often happen in the party in power, however, because that party may have the President running for reelection or giving his backing to someone he favors.

Some people believe the presidential primary process should be reformed again. One idea is for each of the major parties to hold one nationwide primary just to choose their presidential candidate. National conventions would be done away with. Others suggest a series of regional primaries, held by groups of states every two or three weeks. Hope for any of the plans is uncertain because both houses of Congress would have to work with the states and the major political parties. Neither party seems to have much interest in reform. They see the national convention as a way to promote party unity and strengthen party influence.

## What is a caucus?

Some states do not hold primaries. In these states, the delegates to the national convention are chosen in a system of local caucuses and district and/or state conventions. A caucus is a closed meeting of members of a political party who gather to select delegates to the national convention. Caucuses are meetings held locally, usually in a precinct (a local polling district). At this meeting, they choose delegates to a local convention. At this local convention, delegates to a state convention are chosen. At this state convention, delegates to the national convention are finally selected.

The caucus method is very old and has declined over the years. In 2008, less than one fourth of all delegates to both major party conventions were selected by the caucus-convention method.

The Iowa caucuses have been the first delegate-selection event in every presidential election since 1972. In the election of 2008, the Iowa caucus was held five days before the New Hampshire primary (**Figure 13.5**).

**Fig. 13.5**



▲ **Analyzing Political Cartoons** The first delegate-selection event in a presidential election by caucus is held in Iowa, followed afterward by the first scheduled primary in New Hampshire. **How does this cartoon illustrate the emphasis placed on the elections held in these two states?**

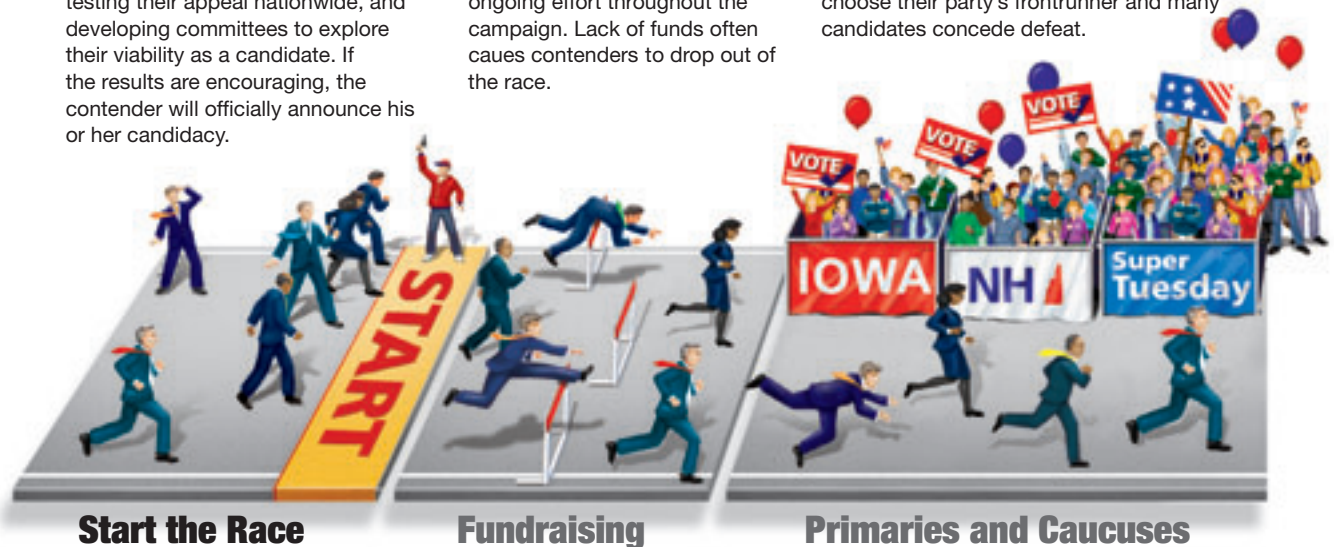
# The Race for the Presidency

The race begins as presidential contenders compete to become their party's nominee. As the pace intensifies, the field dwindles to a contest between two contenders for the ultimate prize—the presidency. *How does the contest for the White House reflect the American democratic ideal?*

**1-4 Years Before Election** The first steps for potential candidates include broadening their visibility, testing their appeal nationwide, and developing committees to explore their viability as a candidate. If the results are encouraging, the contender will officially announce his or her candidacy.

**1-4 Years Before Election** The costs of running for office are huge and raising funds is an ongoing effort throughout the campaign. Lack of funds often causes contenders to drop out of the race.

**January–June of the Election Year** Primaries and caucuses help determine the party's nominee. At this stage, voters choose their party's frontrunner and many candidates concede defeat.



## National convention

Meeting at which a party's delegates pick the presidential and vice-presidential candidates

## Platform

A political party's formal statement of basic principles, stands on major issues, and objectives

## Keynote address

Speech given at a party convention to set the tone for the convention and the campaign to come

## How is the presidential candidate chosen at the national convention?

After all the primaries and caucuses are over, it is time for each major party to hold its **national convention**. The convention is just one step in the very long race to the presidency (**Figure 13.6**). The convention has three main goals: 1) naming the party's presidential and vice presidential candidates, 2) promoting party unity, and 3) adopting the party's **platform**.

During the first days of the convention, many important party leaders make speeches. The most important is the **keynote address**. The keynote address is a speech given to set the tone for the convention and campaign to come. It prompts loud demonstrations and an enthusiastic show of support for the party.

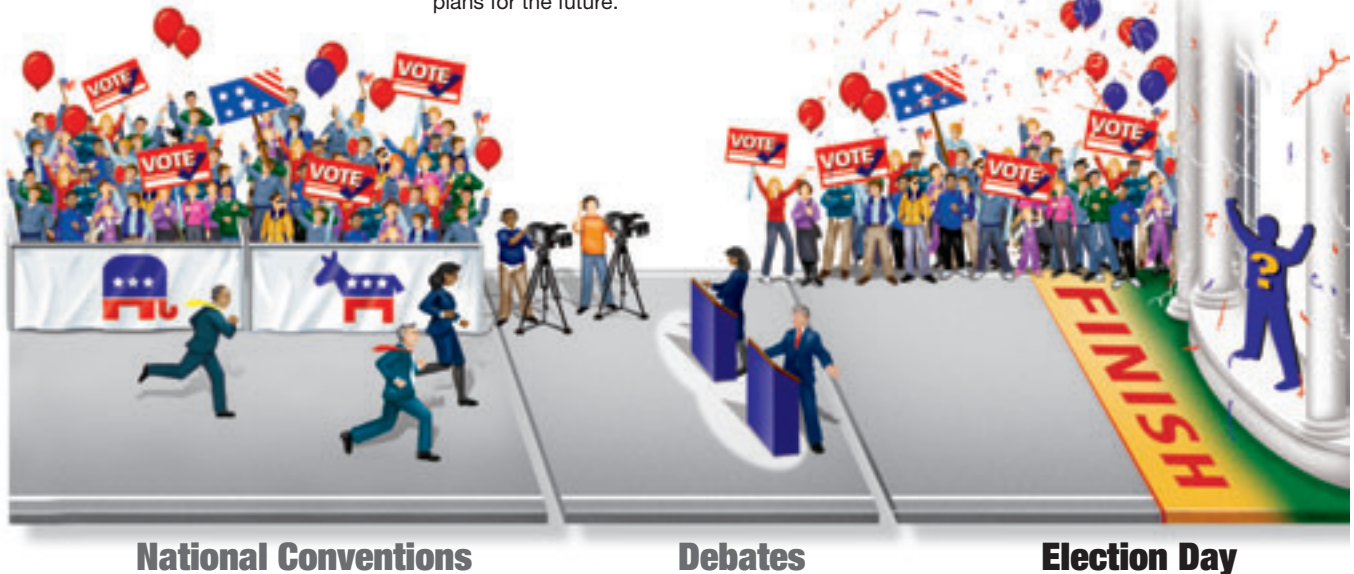




**August–September of the Election Year** Delegates to each party's convention adopt the party platform, nominate their party's presidential candidate, and ratify his or her choice of vice-presidential running mate.

**September–November of the Election Year** Following the conventions, each candidate focuses on his or her opponent. Debates provide opportunities to compare and contrast each candidate's qualifications and plans for the future.

**November on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November**, the voters cast their ballots and the president-elect is determined.



On the last two days of the convention, delegates choose the party's vice-presidential and presidential candidates. Delegates first choose the vice presidential candidate. The nominee then gives an acceptance speech meant to get the party ready for the next big event: The vote for the presidential candidate. As the convention chairperson calls the states in alphabetical order, each state announces its choice. Each complete roll call of states is called a ballot. Usually a candidate wins the party's nomination on the first ballot. If no candidate receives a majority of votes on the first ballot, the chairperson calls for a second ballot.

All of the excitement at the convention leads up to the presidential candidate's acceptance speech. This speech, and the convention that precedes it, are meant to inspire voters and win support for the party. The convention ends and the party's general election campaign is launched.



### **Reading Strategy** **Visualizing**

How does the illustration on these pages help you better understand the race for the presidency?



**Checkpoint** What is the keynote address?

## Who is nominated for President?

A President who has only served one term usually runs for a second term. In this case the nomination is easy for the party in power. When a President is not eligible to run again, as in the 2008 election, many people may try for the nomination. Usually only two or three become serious candidates at convention time.

The candidate nominated by a party is usually someone who the party believes can win. This person has usually held other elective office and has won elections in the past. The person is often well known, with a good public record free of controversy. Governors of larger states are often chosen. In the past, candidates were usually from the more populated states. Television and the Internet have allowed several personalities from smaller states to win nominations in recent years, however.

In 2008, Senator Hillary Clinton of New York became the first woman to be seriously considered for nomination as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate. She competed against the Democratic Party's chosen candidate, Barack Obama, who was born to a white mother from Kansas and an African father from Kenya. When he was elected, the racial barrier to the presidency was broken. The Republicans also broke a historical record. John McCain, at 72, was the oldest candidate ever to run for President.

## SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

### Essential Questions Journal

Go to your **Essential Questions Journal** to work on this chapter's Essential Question.

1. **Guiding Question** Use your completed chart to answer this question: Does the nominating system allow Americans to choose the best candidates for President?

### Key Terms and Comprehension

On a sheet of paper, write the answer to each question. Use complete sentences.

2. What is a caucus?
3. What is one of the goals of the national convention?
4. What is a platform?
5. What happens on "Super Tuesday"?

### Critical Thinking

6. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think there is such a desire for a state to hold its primary as early as possible?
7. **Demonstrate Reasoned Judgment** What characteristics would you like to see in a presidential candidate? Explain.