

Presidential Elections in the U.S.

Presidential elections, which require a national convention to nominate final candidates, must first undergo a process of selecting *delegates* to these conventions, which could happen through a *presidential preference primary* or *caucus* system. Districts hold elections or meetings to select county delegates, who then select state delegates that represent either the percentage of the vote a candidate received above a 15% threshold (Democratic) or the overall winner (Republican). The state delegates then go on to the national convention. *Superdelegates*, delegates that are either officeholders from a party or the party leaders of these states, are also invited to cast independent votes for candidates. Once they congregate at the convention, the delegates cast votes for the presidential candidate.

While nominating conventions used to be major political events with considerable wrangling between groups of delegates, superdelegates, and national party leaders to decide on a candidate, the primary season of presidential elections since the mid-1970s have tended to concentrate a sufficient number of delegates to nominate a candidate for president outright by the time of the conventions in the late summer before the election. This has made the *party national conventions* largely promotions for the presidential candidate, with speeches made to support the person and his/her chosen vice presidential candidate.

Once the party's convention ends, the final stretch for the presidential race begins. The popular election on the first Tuesday in November is not the actual election of the President; rather, it is the election for *electors* to decide on the President. Most states in the U.S. currently follow a winner-take-all system of choosing electors (Maine and Nebraska use a proportional system), with the candidate winning the highest percentage of votes gaining all of the delegates for that state. Out of the 538 electors currently available to win, getting at least 270 will virtually guarantee a presidential win. But – this does not mean a candidate has won!

The Electoral College meets in December to finalize the presidential election, with the electors “sworn” to vote for the candidate that won their state casting their ballots. The actual decision of who won the presidential race is announced to the Congress in early January, at least a week before the scheduled inauguration date of January 20th.