

ELECTIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Two Party System	The system of government in the United States where candidates for elective offices in the state or federal legislature, governor, and president are selected from either of the two major political parties.
Primaries	A preliminary election sponsored by the major parties in a state in order to select candidates for the next general election of state and federal office holders.
Party Nominating Conventions	The gathering of party delegates and officers every four years by the political parties to select candidates for the office of President and Vice President. In addition to selecting the candidates, convention delegates also vote on the party platform, or proposed initiatives, which will be supported by all the party's candidates for political office during the upcoming election.
Voter Registration	The system of registering, or approving and authorizing, citizens of a state in order to vote in general elections for political office. Registration is an important safeguard against voter fraud by those seeking to deny a fair and open election process to the public.
Polling Place	The location where official voting takes place on election day in all states. Polling places are normally staffed by officials of the local government's election commission and representatives of the two major parties in order to insure an orderly and open election process.
Ballot	The document used by registered voters to select their preference among candidates for elected office. Historically, ballots were paper documents where votes for candidates were counted manually. However, that system has now been largely replaced by mechanical and electronic systems which record and count voter's choices immediately.
Write-in Candidate	The option available to all voters to physically write-in the name of candidates whose names do not appear on the official ballot, but who are still running for office sponsored by a minor party.
Party Chair	The chief executive selected by political leaders to manage that party's state and federal election campaign efforts.
Campaign Financing	The process whereby candidates gather money from voters, corporations, political interest groups and organizations in order to pay for campaign expenses. This activity is normally part of campaigns for gubernatorial, congressional, and presidential office by the major parties. Federal and state laws limit the amount of money which may be donated to campaigns by individuals, corporations, and political interest groups in order to avoid undue influence on the candidates.
Presidential Inauguration	The official ceremony during which the President is sworn into office after taking the oath of office, administered by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court at noon on January 20th every four years following the results of the general election. The ceremony takes place on the steps of the US Capitol, unless weather conditions make doing so impossible.

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Lame Duck	The term used to identify the final period of time following an election when the losing or retiring officials are still in office waiting for their terms to expire.
Congressional Districts	The geographic boundaries within the states which determine the area where voters will select a single candidate for the House of Representatives. The number of districts is based on an equal division of the population from around the state to insure fair representation of the voters. Nationally, there are 435 Congressional Districts each representing approximately 700,000 citizens. The boundaries of congressional districts are reviewed every ten years following the national census to insure fair representation.
Gerrymandering	The process of manipulating the boundaries of an election district to favor a political party or specific candidates; in some cases, this process has also been used to exclude certain portions of the voters in a district. Technically, gerrymandering is illegal, but contesting the drawing of districts as the population shifts in a given area is difficult.
Electoral College	The practice introduced in the Constitution to form a compromise between the direct election of members of the House and Senate by individual voters and the election of the President by members of Congress. Each state selects representatives, or electors, corresponding to that states' number of congressional districts and its two senators. Nationally, there are 538 electors representing the 435 members of the House, 3 delegates from the District of Columbia, and the 100 Senators. In order to be elected President, the winning candidate must receive 270 or more electoral votes.
Electors	The representatives selected by an individual state to represent it in the Electoral College. Each political party recommends its slate of potential electors during the campaign for federal office, but only the winning party's electors are counted in the final results of the election in the state.
Delegates	Delegates to the national political conventions are selected at the state level by party officials from among active party members and campaign organizers. Once selected, delegates are bound to support the party candidate who won the majority of votes in the state primary during the first round of the nomination process at the national convention. Following that round, delegates may be "released" to vote for another candidate as the nomination process continues.
Party Ticket	<p>The slate of candidates for political offices recommended by each party during an election campaign. Led by the candidates for President and Vice President, the slate, or party ticket, also includes party members seeking election in the House and Senate, as well as those running for state offices being contested during that election.</p> <p>Interestingly, while Hillary Clinton is on the Democratic Party Ticket as the presidential candidate in 2016, she is not the first woman to seek the nation's highest office. The first woman to run for President was Victoria Claflin Woodhull in 1872. She was a leader of the women's suffrage movement during the time before women had the right to vote. That right came with the 19th Amendment which became law in 1920.</p>