

The Seattle Times Newspapers In Education presents

# Electing the President: *A Guide to the Election Process*

Learn how our president is elected and why voting counts. Articles appear every Wednesday through June 4 and again in the fall. In partnership with the League of Women Voters at [www.lwvwa.org](http://www.lwvwa.org).

## Unit Three The Candidates Where do they come from and how do they develop their strategies?

The candidates are, of course, the star players in the United States presidential election. They get all the attention, and they select the issues they'll focus on and the messages they'll convey to voters.

They also determine how their campaigns will be run — though their campaign managers, the pollsters and other advisers usually play major roles in these decisions. How they'll go about their fund-raising, how many debates they'll participate in, how they'll work the Internet, whether they'll "go negative" in their advertising and how much information they'll provide about their policy positions: these are all aspects of the campaign the candidate must address.

### Where Do They Come From?

Where do these people come from — these individuals who feel themselves qualified to lead their country? More often than not, they come from other

elective offices — governorships, the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives — where they have shown they are attractive to voters and where they have built a public record of decision-making and action on a variety of policy issues. To qualify for the presidency, a person must be a natural-born U.S. citizen and at least 35 years old.

Until this current election, women and minority candidates for the presidency had been few and far between. American politics had predominantly been the domain of white men. Notable exceptions in the past include Democrats Shirley Chisholm in 1972 and Jesse Jackson in 1984 and 1988, Republican Elizabeth Dole in 2000 and Democrats Reverend Al Sharpton and Carol Mosely-Braun in 2004. In 2008, we have Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama.

### Campaign Strategy: The Candidates and the Issues

Deciding what issues to focus on — and how to do that — is a major decision for the candidates as they weigh how best to connect with American voters. To be taken seriously by the media and

the public, candidates need to define in simple terms why they are running and project ideas that connect with key concerns of the electorate. Many candidates select just one or two high-profile issues that will differentiate them from their primary opponents. Standing out early is key as the candidates may face 10 or more possible competitors for the party's nomination.

### Campaign Strategy: Dividing the Electorate

Many candidates seek to differentiate themselves with direct appeals to specific segments of the party faithful, e.g., the conservative wing or the liberal wing. However, front-running candidates in both parties rarely propose controversial goals or policies that might alienate significant portions of their party's voters and prove a liability during the general election. By November, the front-runners' goal is to get the mainstream of the party behind them as consensus candidates and to demonstrate "electability," or the ability to attract the support of the majority of American voters who are Democrats, Republicans, independents, or belong to other parties.

## Learn More

- ◆ **Assessing the Candidates:**  
Find articles in the newspaper about the candidates. Analyze and evaluate their positions on issues that are important to you. Which candidate stands out? Why?
- ◆ **Candidate Quotes:**  
Develop a classroom portfolio of quotes by the presidential candidates. Sort the quotes by issues and then by what position the candidate took a stand on. Discuss the issues at various points during the election cycle. Take notice if the candidates' recent quotes show that they have altered their positions on an issue. Before the election, decide where you stand on the issues and choose the candidate that represents your stance.  
Write an editorial supporting your candidate.



Newspapers In Education

**The Seattle Times**

Inspiring Students To Learn

NIE offers FREE and engaging school programs. Chapter locations vary and are posted online each day at [seattletimes.com/nie](http://seattletimes.com/nie). To register, visit us online or call 206/652-6290.

*Next:*

**The Parties and Other  
Behind-the-Scenes Powers**

In partnership with:

