



Teaching Things You Don't Learn in School

A Simplified Overview of Our Presidential Election Process for 2024

Since we have a presidential election coming up this year I thought it'd be a good idea to write out a simplified overview of how the whole election process works from primaries and delegates to the electoral vote and the general election.

Let's Define Some Terms

To truly understand how things work, one must first understand some of the words everyone is throwing around during the election year.

Here are a few of the more common words you'll be hearing. And these are critical to understanding the whole process.

Delegates and electors

These are people who are selected by the political parties to represent and vote based on who and what the general public votes for.

- **Delegates** vote in the primaries and caucuses
- **Electors** vote in the general election for president.

As far as being a delegate or an elector, there is a long process on how they get selected, not the least of which they must be active within their political party's activities.

Yes, you can be a delegate or an elector. Every state has its own rules as to how these people are selected and it's a long process. So, if you're serious about doing this, you really need to do some research.

General election

That's the big election in November where we're all voting for President. If you're into football analogies, that would be the Super Bowl.

Primary and Caucus

These are like the play offs when it comes to election events: Results of these elections decide which candidate will appear on the ballot for the general election in November.

RNC and the DNC

After the primaries (and caucuses) each political party has their own big conventions. .

- Republican National Convention, known as the RNC.
- Democratic National Convention, known as the DNC.

These are the really big meetings where the delegates and electors cast the final votes for their party candidate. Well, these days, the final primary and caucus tallies are generally known before the conventions are held, so it's just a big party where everyone has an opportunity to be on TV.

Electoral College:

This is not a physical building. It's a name for the process of selecting the president by using electoral votes.

Elector Vote

Remember, the electorates are the people who cast their votes for each state, based on the majority of votes in that state. So their votes are called the "electoral votes."

Popular Vote

This the actual number of votes cast for each candidate.

Yes, it's that simple.

Now lets dig in and see how all these pieces work together.

It's pretty cool that this is a presidential election year because everyone gets a front seat to the whole process.

Disclaimer

I'm going to boil down this process into the most basic of steps just to keep it simple and easier to understand for those who may not have any understanding of the process.

Before I get too far into it I want you to know that I am not a political analyst or historian and I've never run for political office of any kind, not even in high school.

Just know that every state has different methods and rules as to how all these processes work. My descriptions of them are intended to give a general idea of how they work. All the specific ins and outs for each state can be found in multiple places on the internet. If you seriously want to have a deeper understanding of how our election process works in your state, then please, do your homework.

A Short History of How the Use of Delegates and Electors Came About

So, the big question is, Why do we even have Delegates and Electors?

I hear a lot of people say that it's an "outdated system" or "its not fair," or "we should just go with the popular vote." Well, lets take a look back in history a little bit.

Take a moment and think to way back when our country was first founded in 1776. How do you suppose all election ballots across the US could be accurately gathered, counted and tallied, and then sent to Washington DC to get a grand total for all states?

Yes, we had a postal service ...it was started in 1753. But you have to remember even in 1776 there were only 13 colonies, so not a lot of real estate to cover. Even then, when I read up on the history of the US Postal Service, I learned that the fastest they could get a letter from Philadelphia to New York was 33 hours. I'm not sure how they did that, but I'm guessing that was if someone rode a horse or drove a carriage all thought the night. The US Postal Service did have that famous motto, so you never know.

(Just for the fun of it, here it is from 1914 when it was first written: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds")

Either way, after we became a country, the US started expanding in all directions and gained a lot of real estate. Now think about that: Up until the 20th century, there weren't a lot of roads crossing the country and not a lot of fast ways to get from one end to the other.

By the mid to late 1800's we finally had trains and there was the Pony express so things could finally get from point A to B a little faster but we're still talking weeks to get from east to west. We also didn't have cars till the early 1900's. Or airplanes till a bit later than that. And then computers didn't reach their stride till the late 1900's.

So, can you imagine what it was like back then, if say, 50,000 people cast votes in 50 cities scattered across, California, for instance, and then all those ballots had to be gathered up and sent to the state capitol for counting? And then from that central location, to Washington DC for a final tally. Each state had to do that. Texas must've been just as much as a challenge as California; those states are huge and so spread out.

Again, how long would that take? Probably weeks back then. Hmmm maybe Pony Express could do it in about 2 weeks or a train could do in a week. That's provided there was a Pony Express station or a train station in every city.

Then you've gotta hope that the train wasn't robbed or the Pony Express rider wasn't shot and killed. Oh, and heaven forbid, if someone drops a pouch full of 50,000 ballots and had to stand and watch the wind scatter them across the prairie.

Five Steps

Well, it got to be a pain in the rear way back in the 1800's even, so our government officials came up with a more efficient process. This is what it looks like now, generally speaking:

1. Votes are cast by all registered voters.
2. All ballots are gathered and sent to a central location for counting and validation.
3. Then totals get assigned to the delegates and/or electors for that area.
4. And then the delegates or electors attend their respective conventions (RNC or DNC) to cast their votes.
5. Delegate totals will be announced at their respective conventions; electorate totals for the presidential election are counted and sent to OFR in Washington DC, and the new president is announced.

Now lets dig a bit deeper into each step in the process so you can see how everything ties together.

Some Details

Step 1

It all begins with YOUR vote at a primary or caucus election event. The purpose, or the end game, of these events is to decide which candidates' names are going to be on the general election ballot for each political party.

Next question: What's the difference between a primary and caucus?

- **A primary vote is just that:** Ballots will be sent to all the registered voters in each party, in each state. Each voter will cast a vote for who they want on the final ballot in the general election in November.
- **A caucus is a meeting** where all the voters get together to cast their votes. Afterwards, the voters will have a precinct meeting where they elect precinct captains and discuss what needs to be done before the general election.

Each state's political party leaders decide who's going to do which, not the state governments. Most states use primary elections, but there are still a few states and territories that use caucuses (*or a form of them*):

- Maine
- Kansas
- Nevada
- North Dakota
- Hawaii
- Kentucky
- Wyoming,
- Iowa
- Virgin Islands
- Norther Marianas Islands (think Guam)

All these events - whether they're a primary or a caucus - are held between January 15 - June 4th.

At the end of each of these events, the votes are then counted and delegates are pledged. In most cases the state's delegates must then cast their vote for the state, based on those totals.

However, each state has their own rules on which type of event they're going to offer up to the voters: a primary or a caucus. And if that's not crazy enough, there are a multitude of different types of primaries, and a few different methods for assigning delegates. Here are just three examples of the different types of primaries. I strongly suggest you do some research for your state because it may or may not be one of these three types.

Open Primary

That means that voters can vote for the nominee of any party, regardless of whether they are registered with that party. For instance, a Republican in Texas could vote for the Democratic presidential nominee.

Closed Primary

- This means that if you're a registered democrat, your ballot only shows you the democrat candidates' names.
- If you're a registered republican, your ballot only shows you the republican candidates' names.
- Sadly, in most cases, if you are registered as an Independent, you cannot vote in a closed primary.

Just so you know, Nevada has closed primaries which means that registered Independents cannot vote in them.

Jungle Primary

In this system, the ballot has all the candidates names on it, not separated by party. (Washington and California have jungle primaries.)

The top two vote-getters in this primary run against each other in the general election in November, regardless of what party they are from.

Now I lived in CA for 40 years, and I remember seeing my ballots look like this. And naturally when I left CA and moved to WA, I saw the same type of ballot. Now that I'm in NV, it was interesting to learn that I'd be getting a smaller ballot.

So What Does Nevada Do?

We have a closed primary and a caucus. As I mentioned earlier, having a primary election or a caucus election is determined by a state's party representatives, not the state. So apparently the state of Nevada didn't get that memo and they passed a law (in 2020, I believe) that we must have a Primary election for both parties.

But, shortly after that, the Republican party leaders, said, nope, "we want a caucus." So Nevada ended up with one of each for the Republicans. And just a finishing touch, the party will only award delegates to the candidate who wins in the caucus, not the primary. This basically renders the state-run presidential primary as nothing more than a symbolic gesture.

Democrats are keeping it simple with just the primary election.

Our Constitutional Republic processes can be messy, as the primary and caucus systems make clear. However, the more people who participate in these two events across the country, the better our delegates and our electorates can reflect the will of the people.

It makes me think of how the whole football thing works:

You have all these teams in the leagues battling against each other to see who wins the most games. Then the top four teams got to go to the playoffs. The playoffs are like the primaries:

Basically, we had 4 teams that got to the primaries, or the playoffs:

- Detroit and SF on one ticket... per say You could say this is the Democrat ticket, if we were comparing to the primary.
- Kansas City and Baltimore, I believe, on the other ticket, per say. And this might be the Republican ticket for the primary.

Then SF and Baltimore won each of their play off games, or their “primaries,” and now they’re both on their respective “tickets, or ballots” for the biggest football event ever, the Super Bowl or, similar to the presidential election. Both are pretty exciting.

So what happens to your vote in the primary, once you cast it?

And again, to keep things simple, I’m going to use nice small, rounded numbers and I’ll probably still bring in a comparison to football and the playoffs since the primary is similar.

Step Two

All your votes get gathered up and sent to a central location for counting and validation. Yes, it’s that simple.

Step Three

So lets say that during the primaries, in a little town of 1,000 registered Democratic voters, all votes were counted and 650 of them voted to put Williamson on the final Democratic ballot in November. And the other 350 went to Biden.

Those totals then get assigned, or pledged, to the Democrat delegates and/or electors for that town. The same process will happen for the Republican votes. I’m just going to stick with one party in order to keep this explanation simple.

Now, there are two methods use for assigning votes to delegates (or electors in the general election),

1. Winner takes all, or
2. Proportional.

Most states use one of these two basic methods for doing this part of the process:

- **In “winner takes all” state**, all the delegate votes for that state would go to Williamson. Lets say there are 10 Democrat delegate votes for the state, then all ten go to the final national tally for that person.
- **In a “proportional” state, only 65%** of the delegate votes for the state would go to that person, and 35% would go to Biden in the national tally. Which, if you round it up, means that 7 delegate votes go to Williamson, and 3 go to Biden.
- **However, there is a “hybrid” option used by some states.** They use a combination of both methods which can be divided up by districts.

Again, all 50 states have a different number of delegates for each party they will all go through this process.

Step Four

All delegates or electors meet in a central location to cast their votes for the candidate to which they've been assigned. This meeting is called a convention. I'm sure you've heard of the Republican National Convention (RNC) and the Democratic National Convention (DNC).

This year the RNC will be held in Milwaukee, WI between July 15 – July 18 and the DNC will be held in Chicago, between August 19 – 22. These dates are when we'll all learn who's going to be on the presidential ballots for each party.

By the way, you need to understand that there are two methods by which delegates can cast their votes:

- **“Bound” aka “Pledged”**: These delegates must vote based on the results of the state’s primary or caucus.
- **“Proportional” aka “Unbound”**: These delegates are *not* obligated to vote based on the results of the primary or caucus. They are generally free to vote their conscience.

There are quite a few websites that break down which states use which methods; be sure to look that up if you’re curious. Here in Nevada, we have a “winner take all” process with “bound” delegates.

Remember, the ultimate idea is that the delegate votes are a representation of the total numbers of your votes.

Step Five

The delegate ballots are counted for each candidate and then the final numbers from each convention are then totaled up and announced.

In the case of the presidential election, electorate votes go to the OFR-Office of the Federal Register a division of NARA – National Archives and Records Administration to be recorded.

A Quick Review of The 5 Basic Steps

1. Votes are cast by all registered voters.
2. All ballots are gathered and sent to a central location for counting and validation.
3. Then totals get assigned to the delegates and/or electors for that area.
4. And then the delegates or electors attend their respective conventions (RNC or DNC) to cast their votes.

5. Delegate totals will be announced at their respective conventions; electorate totals for the presidential election are counted and sent to OFR in Washington DC, and the new president is announced.

Either way, when you think back on how this whole process used to be done before planes, trains and automobiles, it's much easier, physically, to get 10 delegate or electorate votes to the convention, and then those totals forwarded to Washington DC, than trying to get all 1,000 of the original votes there from one town.

The Real Numbers

Now here are the real numbers for Delegates in the state of Nevada:

26 Republican and 49 Democrat

Remember, these numbers are determined based on how many registered voters we have in the state and they can change as the population changes.

In the entire US and it's territories there are currently:

- 2429 Republican Delegates
- 3936 Democrat Delegates.

In the final Superbowl election, aka, the presidential election, the electoral voters play the same role across the country as the delegate voters, but there are fewer electors: just 538 total. And a candidate must get 270 to win the election/ Superbowl.

I strongly suggest doing a search on the internet and see how many delegates and electorates are assigned to your state and whether or not they are bound or unbound. I say that so you can get a better idea for how much your vote really matters.

Even though we no longer have to rely on horse and carriage, I still think it's much easier and more efficient to move 6365 delegate ballots or 538 electoral ballots to Washington DC, than it is to move 100 million ballots (that's just my guess as to how many registered voters we have in the USA).

So that's how the whole system of using delegates in the primary and electors in the Presidential election came about and that's why it's still used.

It All Really Does Begins with Your Vote

I hope this helps you to understand that this entire process still begins with your vote.

Consider this: if you decided not to vote, and the results for the delegates is off by one vote, say 501 to 499 against the candidate that you wanted to see on the November ballot, wouldn't you feel awful knowing that just one vote and the other team would have won? I mean it could be the Lions instead of the 49ers in the Superbowl, or Haley instead of Trump in the general election.

Then when it comes to the Superbowl, or basically the presidential election in November, again, your one vote is huge. Remember, just like delegates, the electorates cast their votes based on the majority of the votes that were cast by the general public. ONE vote can make the difference on how their ballot is cast.

Please share this article with all your friends or relatives who may not believe that their vote can make a difference.

And get out and vote!