

# The Road to the White House: A Simulation of the Presidential Election Process

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## Critical Engagement Question

How do we select our President?

## Overview

The 2012 presidential race promises to be compelling, tightly-contested, and consequential given the monumental challenges facing the United States, including: staggering budget deficits, broken entitlement programs, access to affordable health care, a precipitous drop in home prices and high foreclosure rates, underfunded and poor performing schools, an immigration system that does not reflect the realities of a global workforce, and the ongoing threat of state-supported international terrorism.

An electorate alienated from the governing class and with a sense that our nation is on the wrong track turns its attention to the incumbent president's reelection bid and the contested nomination process to produce his challenger. This lesson serves to illuminate the nomination process while promoting media literacy, critical evaluation of candidates, and informed participation in this and future elections.

## Objectives

- To improve student understanding of how we as voters in the United States select presidential candidates and the winner of the general election.
- To illuminate the role that individual states play in the presidential nominating process.
- To encourage students to become active participants in the election process.
- To assist students in identifying and transcending political rhetoric employed by candidates and their supporters by applying critical thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and inference.
- To engage students in a civil discourse on candidates and their policy positions.

## Standards

NCHS: Era 3, Standard 3A; Era 10, Standard 1B

NCSS: Strands 5, 6, and 10

Illinois: Goal 14, Learning Standard A, B, and C; Goal 16, Learning Standard B; Goal 17, Learning Standard A

## Student Materials

Item A: Candidate Research Guide

Item B: Caucus and Primary Role Play

Item C: Super Tuesday Simulation

Item D: Counting to 270

## Teacher Materials

The Road to the White House Map and Timeline Poster

## Time and Grade Level

Two-and-a-half 90-minute or five 45-minute high school class periods with pre- and post-activity homework.

## Activities

*A Simulation of the Presidential Election Process*

- 1) Candidate Research Guide
- 2) Caucus and Primary Role Play
- 3) Super Tuesday Simulation
- 4) Counting to 270

## Warm-up Activity

Beyond Red vs. Blue 2011 Pew Research Political Typology  
<http://people-press.org/typology/quiz/>.

## Homework

The Candidate Research Guide and Counting to 270 can be completed at home assuming Internet access is available. The candidate research guide can be supplemented by media coverage of the candidates for president.

## Extensions

1. Ask students to track media coverage of their candidate or the entire field. Have them consult a variety of sources including television, newspapers and magazines.
2. After completing the Candidate Research Guide, conduct a role play with students serving as reporter(s) and candidates. Reporter(s) can ask questions of the candidates.
3. Compare the classroom results of the Caucus and Primary Role Play and the Super Tuesday Simulation. Help students clarify the differences between the classroom exercises and the actual process.
4. Ask students to watch a candidate debate and further analyze the connections between the candidates and their personal values and positions on critical issues.

# Candidate Research Guide

Name

## Directions

The following exercise will help you identify a presidential candidate who best reflects your personal values and political issue positions. In addition to President Barack Obama, a handful of Republican contenders is seeking their party's nomination to face the incumbent president this November.

1. Looking forward to the 2012 presidential election, what personal qualities should a candidate possess (or embody)?
  
2. What type of personal and professional experiences do you look for in a presidential candidate? What issues do you think are most important for a presidential candidate to address in the coming election?
  
3. Now, try to match your values and priorities with the individual candidates running for office. The easiest place to conduct your research is the Internet, where non-partisan organizations and media outlets (suggested list below) maintain biographies and fact check the statements of each candidate. Additionally, a simple Internet search will direct you to the personal Web pages of each candidate identified on these general sites:

<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2012/candidates.html>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/campaigns>

<http://www.factcheck.org/>

<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/elections/2012/us-president/>

[http://www.votesmart.org/election\\_president.php](http://www.votesmart.org/election_president.php)

- a. Based on your research, which candidate possesses the personal qualities that matter most to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Based on the personal and professional experiences of the candidates you examined, what candidate do you consider best qualified to serve as President?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. Based on the issues that matter most to you, what candidate comes closest to matching your personal preferences?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Finally, based on your preliminary research, what candidate will you support in the 2012 election? Why? To which party does he/she belong?

# Candidate Research Guide

Candidate	Party Affiliation	Biography (Includes personal qualities and professional experiences)	Top Issues

# The Road to the White House: Caucus and Primary Role Plays

**Directions:** This simulation occurs in two parts and is meant to illustrate the differences between a caucus and a primary, the two means by which political parties select their presidential nominees. You will support the candidate you selected through your research. For the purpose of this exercise, you may want to select a Republican candidate for the caucus portion of the lesson given that the Democratic nomination is uncontested.

**Caucus:** A caucus is a meeting of party members to select candidates and elect delegates to party conventions. The caucus format is perhaps most famously employed in the State of Iowa, which holds the first-in-the-nation nominating event. On a cold night in January, Iowans of both parties caucus to begin the process of selecting a presidential candidate for their party. In the following steps, your class will simulate the process that occurs in Iowa and a handful of other states.

## Part 1: Republican Party Caucus

1. The Republican Party caucus is quite simple. As party faithful assemble on caucus night, a straw poll is taken at the outset to gauge support for Republican presidential candidates. Our class will now replicate a straw poll. As your teacher lists off the candidates, raise your hand for the one you support. Record the number of caucus-goers supporting each candidate. Divide this number by the total number of caucus-goers to determine the percentage of the vote awarded to each candidate. Record the results in the space below.

## Part 2: Democratic Party Caucus

2. The Democratic Party caucus is more complicated. Caucus-goers are to assemble in groups throughout the room by joining classmates who support the same Democratic candidate for President. Note that we will not simulate this portion of the process as President Obama is unopposed in his quest for the 2012 Democratic nomination.

3. The Democratic Party requires that all candidates have at least 15% of the vote in a given caucus. For candidates with less than 15% of the caucus vote, their supporters must choose a different candidate. Other members of the caucus may use subtle and not-so-subtle forms of persuasion during this stage. The process is repeated until all represented candidates have at least 15% of the vote.

4. Caucus members first assemble at the precinct level, electing delegates for later countywide and congressional district caucuses. Representatives from each level precinct/ county/ congressional district support the candidates through votes registered at the previous level. Delegates supporting individual candidates are ultimately awarded at a statewide convention. They will later travel to the party convention to nominate a candidate for President.

**Primary:** A primary is much like any other election where voters go to the polls on the day of the election and cast ballots for the candidate(s) of their choice. Delegates to national party conventions are then awarded on the basis of primary results at the state level. Some primaries, like the first-in-the-nation New Hampshire Primary, are considered **open**, meaning voters are given a single ballot with candidates listed from both parties. Other primaries, like the **closed** Illinois Primary, require voters to declare a party. Then, they are given a ballot listing only candidates from the party they selected.

5. Your teacher will provide you with ballots reflective of both open and closed primaries. You will receive only a Republican ballot in the second case. Your vote need not be identical in both instances. Your teacher or selected class representatives will tally and report the results. What is the outcome?

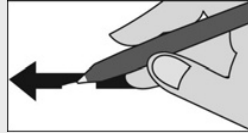
6. Finally, examine the results of the Republican Caucus, open primary, and closed primary alongside the Democratic Caucus description. How are they similar? How do they differ? Is one system better than the others? Is the process fool proof? Did you find it helpful to talk about the candidates with fellow voters?

# The Road to the White House

## Open Primary Ballot

### Instructions · Instrucciones

- To vote, connect the two parts of the arrow with a solid line.
- Vote for only one candidate per office, unless otherwise indicated.
- If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot.
- You may write in a candidate only where there is a write-in blank. Print the name in the blank and then connect the two parts of the arrow.

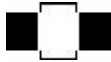


**!** DO NOT write in a candidate whose name is printed on the ballot  
DO NOT make any other marks on the ballot.

- Para votar, conecte las dos partes de la flecha con una línea sólida.
- Vote solamente por un candidato en cada puesto, al menos de que se indique lo contrario.
- Si usted cometió un error, pida una boleta nueva.
- Usted puede votar por un candidato por-escrito solamente adonde hay una línea en blanco provista para un voto por-escrito. Imprima el nombre en tal área en blanco y entonces conecte las dos partes de la flecha.

**!** NO escriba por un candidato cuyo nombre está en la boleta para ese puesto.  
No haga ninguna otra marca en la boleta.

Judge's initials  
Iniciales del Juez



### Candidates · Candidatos

Party Nominee for the  
President of the United States  
Presidente de los Estados Unidos

Vote for One · Vote por Uno

- |                   |            |   |   |
|-------------------|------------|---|---|
| (1) Barack Obama  | Democratic | ← | ■ |
| (2) Newt Gingrich | Republican | ← | ■ |
| (3) Ron Paul      | Republican | ← | ■ |
| (4) Mitt Romney   | Republican | ← | ■ |
| (5) Rick Santorum | Republican | ← | ■ |

write-in  
voto por escrito

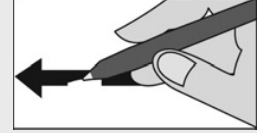


# The Road to the White House

## Closed Primary Ballot

### Instructions · Instrucciones

- To vote, connect the two parts of the arrow with a solid line.
- Vote for only one candidate per office, unless otherwise indicated.
- If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot.
- You may write in a candidate only where there is a write-in blank. Print the name in the blank and then connect the two parts of the arrow.



**!** DO NOT write in a candidate whose name is printed on the ballot  
DO NOT make any other marks on the ballot.

- Para votar, conecte las dos partes de la flecha con una línea sólida.
- Vote solamente por un candidato en cada puesto, al menos de que se indique lo contrario.
- Si usted cometió un error, pida una boleta nueva.
- Usted puede votar por un candidato por-escrito solamente adonde hay una línea en blanco provista para un voto por-escrito. Imprima el nombre en tal área en blanco y entonces conecte las dos partes de la flecha.

**!** NO escriba por un candidato cuyo nombre está en la boleta para ese puesto.  
No haga ninguna otra marca en la boleta.

Judge's initials  
Iniciales del Juez



### Candidates · Candidatos

Republican Nominee for the  
President of the United States  
Presidente de los Estados Unidos

Vote for One · Vote por Uno

- |                   |            |   |   |
|-------------------|------------|---|---|
| (1) Newt Gingrich | Republican | ← | ■ |
| (2) Ron Paul      | Republican | ← | ■ |
| (3) Mitt Romney   | Republican | ← | ■ |
| (4) Rick Santorum | Republican | ← | ■ |

write-in  
voto por escrito



# The Road to the White House: Super Tuesday Simulation

## Directions

Instead of acting as individual voters as we did in the simulation of the caucus and primary process, you will act as voters of an entire state in this exercise. This exercise is meant to reflect the high stakes of so-called "Super Tuesday." Once more, we will focus exclusively on the Republican side of the presidential contest as President Obama is running unopposed for the Democratic nod.

1. Each class member will be assigned a state scheduled to vote on **March 6, 2012**. Based on the number of students in your class, your teacher may assign more than one student to the larger states with more delegates. You will pledge your state's delegates to the candidate of your choice unless otherwise instructed. Please write the names of the candidates that you select for your assigned state in the spaces provided below.

State:	Republican (delegates)
Alaska	_____ (27)
Georgia	_____ (76)
Idaho	_____ (32)
Massachusetts	_____ (41)
North Dakota	_____ (28)
Ohio	_____ (66)
Oklahoma	_____ (43)
Tennessee	_____ (58)
Vermont	_____ (17)
Virginia	_____ (49)
Wyoming	_____ (29)

2. Next, report the winner of each state and write in the names of the candidates selected in other states as reported by your classmates.

3. Then, use the boxes provided in the Super Tuesday Delegate Tallies worksheet to summarize the overall delegate accumulations of each candidate by party. Delegate totals are listed above, by party, in each state. Delegates are allotted to states by the parties reflective of the strength of each party in the state.

4. Party nominations: Both parties will meet late in the summer of

2012 to formally nominate their candidate for President. The Democrats will meet in **Charlotte, NC**, and the Republicans in **Tampa Bay, FL**. Both locations were selected strategically as **swing states**. The Republican candidate will need an estimated 1,144 delegates to capture the nomination and the President Obama, who is uncontested in his bid for the Democratic nomination, roughly 2,778. Both figures represent a majority of delegate votes. Overall, Democrats award more delegates than Republicans, thus the smaller number of delegates for Republicans in most states and the lower total required to clinch the nomination.

5. If no candidate has enough delegates to secure the nomination outright, the party conventions will be asked to select the candidates through a series of votes. Such an outcome was common before the rise of the current primary process, but Unlikely to occur in 2012.

As many as 11 states flock to the polls on the same day, March 6, 2012, and the massive number of delegates (20% of those available nationally) awarded on this day could go a long way in selecting the Republican presidential nominee.

# The Road to the White House: Super Tuesday Delegate Tallies

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Republican Candidates				
State	Newt Gingrich	Ron Paul	Mitt Romney	Rick Santorum
AL				
GA				
ID				
MA				
ND				
OH				
OK				
TN				
VT				
VA				
WY				

### Directions

After the primary process and the party conventions conclude, the general election begins. What transpires is a state-by-state campaign where the party nominees attempt to win the 270 electoral votes necessary to be elected president.

Here's how it works.  
Each state receives two electoral votes for their U.S. Senators, and one additional electoral vote for each member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

For example, Illinois has two senators and 18 house members, giving it 20 electoral votes. The minimum number of electoral votes any state can hold is three, and the District of Columbia can have no more electoral votes than the smallest state (currently three).

Electoral votes are awarded in a winner-takes-all fashion; meaning the winner of a statewide popular vote is awarded all of the state's electoral votes. There are, however, two exceptions, Maine and Nebraska, who allocate votes by congressional district.

All told, there are 538 electoral votes allotted to the states every ten years as part of the census to reflect relative changes in state populations (435 members of the house + 100 senators + 3 D.C. electors). In order to win the White House, a candidate must win half of these votes plus one ( $538/2 = 269 + 1$ ), or 270.

1. Access the Web site [www.270toWin.com](http://www.270toWin.com). Notice the large number of states identified in red. In 2012, these states currently lean Republican. Turn next to the blue states. These states traditionally vote Democratic. Despite the preponderance of red on the current map, more than a dozen states are truly competitive for candidates of each party. Please click on the following fourteen swing states, making them tan in color: NV, AZ, CO, NM, IA, MO, WI, MI, OH, NH, PA, VA, NC, and FL. Note the tally beneath the map. What are the electoral vote totals by party? Does either party have enough electoral votes to win the White House?

2. Place your cursor on one of the tan states. Notice that by clicking on this state and others you can change its color and add to the electoral vote tally of each respective party nominee. Make all of the tan states red. What is the outcome?

3. Then, make all of the formerly tan states blue by clicking on them once more. Does the outcome change? How?

4. Color the following swing states red: Arizona, Iowa, Missouri, Michigan, Ohio, Virginia, and North Carolina. Color these swing states blue: Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire. Leave only Florida tan. Notice how the tally beneath the map fails to give either party nominee enough votes to become president. The controversial 2000 outcome centered here as Vice President Gore won the national popular vote, but lost narrowly in Florida, ceding the state's electoral votes and the presidency to George W. Bush. Make Florida red and then blue, and observe the winning tally for each outcome.

5. Return to the map one final time. Let's assume that President Obama wins Florida in 2012. Changing only the color of the swing states identified in step 1 currently colored blue, under what scenarios can the Republican candidate still win the 270 electoral votes required to become president? Find at least three outcomes favorable to the Republican candidate.