American Government

Electing the President
Electing the President

• Establishing Candidacy
• National Campaign
  [THE CURRENT STAGE OF ’08 CONTEST]
• Primary Elections or Caucuses
  – January-April
• Nominating Convention
  – Late Summer
• General Election (Nov.)
Selecting Presidential Nominees

• A complex process:
  – Each state does it differently
  – Each party, within each state, has its own way

• Before 1972… things were simpler:
  – Nominees chosen by “party bosses”

• Reforms in 1970s
  – Process opened to the public
  – Most states adopted primary systems
Caucuses vs. Primaries

• Caucuses
  – Few states have these (Iowa, Washington)
  – Meeting of party members to select nominees
  – Viability threshold

• Primaries
  – Voters cast ballots
    • Closed primary
    • Open primary
    • Washington’s “top two” primary

• Winner of caucus or primary gets the delegates from that state.
This Year’s Primary Calendar


• POV discussion questions:
  – What’s wrong with the current primary system?
  – What are some of the reform proposals?
Small Group Activity

• Let’s evaluate 3 proposals:
  – National Primary (gr. 1)
  – Delaware Plan (gr. 2)
  – California Plan (gr. 3)

• For your proposal, answer the following questions:
  – What problem(s) does this proposal fix?
  – Who benefits?
  – Who loses?
How the Electoral College Works

• What the Constitution says:
  – Number of electors = # of Senators + Representatives
  – States determine how to appoint
  – Winner needs a majority of EC votes
  – If no majority, then election goes to House, with each state having 1 vote
Framers’ Intentions

• Leave decision with elites

• Electors chosen based on:
  – Knowledge of politics
  – Ability to exercise own judgment
  – *Not* preference for a particular candidate

• Most elections would be thrown to House of Representatives
How States Have Transformed Framers’ Intent

• Pledged electors who are popularly elected
  – Promise in advance to support a certain candidate
  – Electoral college vote echoes popular vote

• Plurality winner-take-all practice
  – Dominant party gets all electors for itself
  – Maximizes each states’ impact
Winner Take All: Consequences

• Distorts winning candidate’s margin
  – Kennedy/Nixon (1960)
    • EC vote: 303 to 219
    • Popular vote margin: 120,000
    • EC vote for Reagan: 525!

• Possible to win popular vote, but lose EC vote
  – Requires close popular vote
  – Where margin was $\leq 3\%$, 5/11 led to reversals
How You Can Win Popular Vote, but Lose Electoral College Vote

Assume there are 3 states of equal size, each with 100 voters and 7 electors in the EC.

A candidate needs 11+ electoral votes to win!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Popular Vote</th>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rep</td>
<td>Dem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State A</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State B</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State C</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>156</td>
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</table>
## Election of 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Popular Vote %</th>
<th>EC Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gore</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Distribution of “wasted votes” is crucial

- Blocs of wasted votes (millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gore</th>
<th>Bush</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NY</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>South 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>TX 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mount/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engl.</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Plains 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IL</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>Total = 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which States Are Advantaged?

• Small states over-represented in final tally
  – WY: 3 EC votes = 1 per 151,000
  – CA: 55 EC votes = 1 per 551,000
• Winner-take-all system advantages:
  – Large states
  – “Close” states
    • 15 closest states in 2000: 30% of nation’s population, 75% of all campaign appearances
Electoral College Vote in 2004

Also check out the animated map at www.electoral-vote.com