Election 2020 Tool Kit

- Teachers Notes: Evergreen Election Activities
- Post Reprint: “How the electoral college works”
- Student Activity: How to Win the Popular Vote and Lose the Presidency
- Post Reprint: “At least 84% of American voters can cast ballots by mail in the fall”
- Student Activity: Mail in Ballots Stamped with Issues
- KidsPost Reprint: “Presidential election 2020: Meet the candidates”
- Student Activity: Your Candidates and the Issues
Campaign 2020 —
Like No Other

Every four years Americans go through the primary elections and party conventions to select the party candidates for president of the United States. Then the rigorous campaigning begins with the vice presidential candidates adding their voices. Always the same, but never the same — certainly in 2020.

In the month before Election Day, American deaths from the coronavirus reached more than 211,000 and positive tests hit more than 7 million. The rollercoaster ride of areas with low or dropping numbers and new hot spots resulted in very different campaign approaches. President Trump held large campaign rallies with no social distancing and few masks, even in red zone areas. Joe Biden from his home in Delaware held virtual fundraisers and online gatherings, then took a Rust Belt Amtrak tour, choosing to “campaign safely.” Students may discuss their reaction to the two different approaches, the impact of advertising and social media use.

Post reprints and activities include the electoral college — how it works and historic elections when a candidate won the popular vote but lost the presidency. Another topic of action is the increasing use of mail-in ballots. After reading and conducting interviews, students are asked to prepare informative brochures, podcasts, posters or student media to inform their communities, neighbors and families of the mail-in ballot requirements where they live.

KidsPost provides concise profiles of the Democrat and Republican candidates for top offices. Students are encouraged to also get to know who their candidates are for local and state offices. They may also chart the issues to do a comparison and contrast.

Campaign 2020 certainly has been like no other.
Evergreen Election Activities

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS
Every Four Years The Washington Post’s NIE program has developed curriculum guides with reprints of articles, features and opinion pieces. A number of the activities are evergreen — ready to be used with a new group of candidates. Below are ones we encourage you to review. They are all found at nie.washingtonpost.com.

November 23, 2004  |  Should the Electoral College Count?
   Graphic: “How the Electoral College Works”
   YOU & YOUR RIGHTS: The Electoral College: History, Present and Future

October 7, 2008  |  Historic Choices and New Approaches
   Government, Matching: Who Do You Know? (female world leaders)
   (compare the early use of the Internet with today’s use)

January 2009  |  Presidential Legacy and Language
   Quiz: What Do You Know About Presidential Inaugurals?
   Science: What the Weather? (on Inaugural Day)
   English: Annotate Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address
   English, Speech: Addressing the Inaugural Address
   (a guide to listening to an inaugural address)

October 7, 2010  |  Third Parties, Political Movements and Interest Groups
   U.S. History, Government: Political Impact
   (Third parties, political interest groups, movements and advocacy groups)
   Activity: Form a Third Party
   Activity: Running for Office is Complicated
The Presidential Elections continued

December 7, 2011 | The Road to Leadership
Art, Government: “Modern Memorabilia”
Word Study: “What’s a Gerrymander?”
e-Replica: Search | The Census and Redistricting

April 2016 | Campaigns, Candidates and Spin
Art: Create a Campaign Button
Crossword Puzzle: 2016 Electable Terms
Word Find: Race to the Voting Booth
Word Study: A Word About Candidates, Nominees and Polls
U.S. History, Government, Journalism: “5 Myths About Spin” + discussion questions
U.S. History, Government, Journalism: The Web of the Spin Doctor (techniques used)
Journalism/Media Studies: Think Like a Reporter | Be a Fact Checker

PRESIDENTS

The Washington Post created Presidential, a podcast series of 44 segments. Each president is featured. In this Post NIE curriculum guide activities are provided to focus on the presidents’ background and influences on them, approaches to tough decisions and unexpected challenges, and personal traits that helped or hurt their success as president of the United States. Review Presidential (https://nie.washingtonpost.com/node/465) that provides activities focused on George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln and John Tyler and other activities that will work with any of the presidents.
How the electoral college works

BY CRISTINA RIVERO AND CHQUI ESTEBAN

Originally Published August 24, 2020

The United States uses a system called the electoral college to elect presidents. Under this method, the candidate with the most votes nationwide doesn’t necessarily win the election, which was the case in 2016 with Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump and in 2000 with George W. Bush and Al Gore. (It also happened three times in the 19th century.)

Each state is given a number of electors based on the size of its congressional delegation. The candidate who wins a majority of electors becomes president.
1. **Number of electors for each state determined**

Each state is allotted one elector for each U.S. representative and senator it has. Washington, D.C., doesn’t have representation in Congress, but it receives three electors, the same number as the least populous state.

# of representatives + 2 senators per state = Total electoral seats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Representations</th>
<th>Electoral Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WYOMING</td>
<td>1 representative</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARYLAND</td>
<td>8 representatives</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALIFORNIA</td>
<td>53 representatives</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of congressional seats each state gets is determined by the decennial census. The 2020 Census is happening right now, which means some states will have a different number of electoral votes for the next presidential election in 2024.

2. **Electors are nominated**

In most states, electors are nominated at party conventions and their names are given to the state’s election official.
3. **Voters select electors on Election Day**

   Electors’ names do not usually appear on the ballot, but when Americans in each state vote for their choice of president, they are technically casting their ballot for the slate of electors representing the ticket.

4. **Electoral votes are tallied for states/districts**

   Most states are winner-take-all for presidential elections. Whichever party’s slate of electors receives the most votes gets all of the electoral votes. There are two exceptions: Maine and Nebraska both give two at-large delegates to whoever wins the state overall, and then one to the winner of each individual congressional district.
5. **Majority of electoral votes determines the winner**

A candidate needs to win a majority of 538 electoral votes — 270 — to be elected president.

If no candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the Senate chooses the vice president and the House chooses the president. But the House decision doesn’t work like normal: Each state’s delegation gets to cast a single vote, meaning that large states have the same weight as small states, similar to the Senate.

6. **Electors ceremonially cast ballots for president**

In December, in a largely ceremonial gesture, the electors cast ballots for president and vice president and are expected to follow the vote of their state.

On rare occasions, some electors have decided to cast their votes for a different candidate. These are known as “faithless electors,” and the behavior is protected by the Constitution. But a recent ruling of the Supreme Court stated that a state is allowed to require presidential electors to support the winner of its popular vote and may punish or replace those who don’t.

The votes are counted at a joint session of Congress, and the president is officially elected and later inaugurated on Jan. 20.
How to Win the Popular Vote and Lose the Presidency

Electoral College

Few people think about the electoral college until a presidential election nears. Even then, it is not at the top of the list of considerations. “Electors” were established in Article II of the Constitution and duties were amended in the 12th Amendment. The electoral process is the result of a compromise of the 1787 Constitutional Convention between the Founding Fathers who wanted election of the president by Congress and those who wanted election by popular vote.

More details about the Electoral College — its history, roles of electors, legal provisions and state official duties — can be found on the National Archives website (https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/history).

Disputed Elections

Understanding the establishment of the electoral college and the determination of the number of electors per state and the District of Columbia provides the foundation for examining five disputed elections:

1824 The Corrupt Bargain
1876 A Constitutional Test
1888 A Front Porch Campaign and Back Door Tammany
2000 Hanging Chads and the Supreme Court
2016 A Glass Ceiling Cracked

For each of the disputed presidential elections, find the following information. Be sure to give the source of your information. Use a minimum of three sources to confirm the accuracy of your answers.

1. Name all candidates running for office and each person’s party affiliation.
2. What were the prominent issues of the time period? What was the position of each candidate?
3. What was the popular vote total for each candidate? What percent of the total votes cast did each candidate have?
4. What was the electoral vote secured by each candidate?
4. What circumstances influenced the determination of who would be president? Was the electoral college vote accepted without a challenge? Why or why not?

Debate: The Electoral College Should/Should Not Be Retained in a Democracy

Debaters need a knowledge of both sides of the debate topic. Use the information you have gathered to summarize the relevant and persuasive arguments of each point of view. Knowing these perspectives, debaters can attack the weaknesses of the opponent and can organize cogent arguments for their side.

We have seen how a candidate might have the most popular votes nationwide but lose the presidential election. Should this happen in a democracy where citizens are urged to vote because every vote counts?
At least 84% of American voters can cast ballots by mail in the fall

The coronavirus pandemic is set to change the way millions of Americans can vote in November, as states expand access to mail-in voting as a safer alternative to in-person voting. As of now, over 198 million Americans who are eligible to vote would be able to cast a ballot by mail. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia already allowed anyone to vote absentee. But many of these places are making the process easier. 

NOTE: For the complete August 20, 2020 article by Kate Rabinowitz and Brittany Renee Mayes go online. Two additional graphs are available for statistical comparisons.

NOTE: To review the rules for voting in each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C., visit “How to vote in your state.”
Mail-in Ballots Stamped With Issues

The Secretary of State usually oversees state and local elections. According to Ballotpedia currently this is true in 38 states; another few have boards of elections and 18 have ethics commissions. It is this state authority that makes for a variety of policies and laws governing federal and local elections.

Thirty-four states and D.C. have allowed absentee voting. Many are making the process easier because of the health concerns related to the pandemic. Five states — Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington — conduct their elections almost entirely by mail. Other states require registered voters to apply and some of those require an excuse for not voting in person.

President Trump, who uses an absentee ballot in his Florida adopted state of residence, has claimed that mail-in ballots are susceptible to widespread fraud, they are a “scam,” and, perhaps, justification for his refusal to accept election results if he loses the November election.

Take a closer look at these diverse positions on the use of absentee and mail-in ballots, especially in 2020 during a period of continued positive COVID test results and deaths from the coronavirus.

LEARN ABOUT STATE ELECTION POLICIES AND LAWS
1. What policies and laws govern your state/D.C. elections? Include the answers to these questions:
   • Who may register to vote in local and national elections?
   • How and where do you register to vote? By what date?
   • Who is eligible to vote by mail?
   • What are legitimate reasons for not voting in person?
   • Is a government-issued ID required for mail voting?
   • If there is a problem with a mail-in ballot, how does your state notify the voter? Can voters fix it?
   • If the mail ballot does not arrive in time to return it by the required postmark date, what can the voter do?
   • Does a voter have the responsibility to notify someone of an address change? Who? By when does change of address and polling place need to be done?
   • What if a voter has become homeless recently because of loss of employment — what proof of residence/loss of permanent residence/change of address is required?
   • If you do not have a permanent residence address are you allowed to vote in person?

2. What are states and local polling places doing to maintain the integrity of each vote?
   • Registered voter
   • Authentic identification
   • Other:

3. What can states do to maintain the integrity of every mail-in ballot?
GATHER THE INFORMATION

1. What are the exact steps to be taken where you live to ensure your ballot will be counted?
   Include the following:
   • Obtaining an official absentee ballot
   • Availability of an official ballot in a language other than English
   • Steps to filling out the ballot correctly
   • Post box, drop box or other place to return the ballot properly in time to be counted

2. What are specific requirements to be followed: dates for each deadline, the use of “secrecy envelopes,” any witness signatures required and place for the voter’s signature. Be sure you have the accurate postmark deadline for ballots.

INFORM YOUR PUBLIC

1. Use the information you just gathered to prepare a mail-in ballot guide for students who are eligible to vote, faculty and staff of your school. This could also be shared with parents, friends and neighbors. See if your local election administrators will provide a sample absentee ballot and sample mail-in ballot for you to use.

2. Some students might visit the local post office for a tour of the facilities. Learn what happens to a ballot from the time it is put in a mailbox to the time it is given to election administrators to count.

3. Some students might interview election officials to learn where ballots are stored until they are counted. Absentee/mail-in ballots must be processed before they can be counted. What is the procedure in your jurisdiction? Will any mail-in ballots be counted before the polls close on Election Day? What security measures are in place? Are these ballots monitored or guarded? Where are these ballots stored after they are counted? How long are they kept, especially if voting results in litigation?

This guide may be presented as a tri-fold brochure, poster, podcast or student media product.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

After learning more about the process of obtaining an official ballot and following specific instructions for marking and returning the mail-in ballot, do you think it is a beneficial and secure way to vote? Does it encourage more people to exercise their right to vote?
Presidential election 2020: Meet the candidates

BY MARYLOU TOUSIGNANT
September 29, 2020

Every four years in early November, Americans vote for their next president and vice president. The Democrats and the Republicans are the country’s major political parties. They each choose a two-person team, called a ticket, to run in the general election. Other parties, such as the Libertarians and the Green Party, may have enough support to get their nominees on the ballot in some or all states, but it has been more than 150 years since someone other than a Republican or a Democrat has won the presidency. Today, KidsPost is profiling the Democratic and Republican tickets for 2020. On the Republican side, President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence are seeking reelection to another four-year term. Challenging them on the Democratic side are presidential nominee Joe Biden (a former vice president) and vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris (a current United States senator).

REPUBLICAN PARTY

Donald Trump
Republican nominee for president

Of the 17 people who sought the Republican presidential nomination in 2016, Donald Trump had among the longest odds of success. Trump had no government or military experience, typical paths to becoming president. He was a wealthy New York businessman and real estate developer, an executive in a business his father had started years earlier. The younger Trump was better known for his 14 years hosting the reality television show “The Apprentice,” each episode of which ended with Trump dismissing one competitor by saying, “You’re fired!”

As a candidate, Trump tapped into the desire of some voters for a big change in government. His “Make America Great Again” campaign promised fewer government rules, lower taxes, more jobs and a crackdown on illegal immigration. He first won over Republican voters to get his party’s nomination.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Joe Biden
Democratic nominee for president

Joe Biden was a United States senator for 36 years and vice president for eight, but his political career nearly derailed before it began.

A few weeks after his first Senate election in 1972, Biden’s wife and 1-year-old daughter died in a car accident. His two young sons were badly injured in the accident. The widowed, single dad thought about giving up his Senate seat, representing Delaware, to stay at home with his sons. Instead, he decided to commute daily by train from Delaware to the nation’s capital, 90 minutes each way, and be at home with his sons during mornings and evenings.

The train trips continued after he remarried in 1977 and he and his wife, Jill, a teacher, had a daughter. After Biden was elected vice president in 2008, the couple moved into the official residence of the vice president in Washington. Having ridden more than
REPUBLICAN PARTY

Trump then defeated the Democratic nominee, former U.S. senator and secretary of state Hillary Clinton, in the general election.

Trump was sworn in as the nation’s 45th president in January 2017. At age 70, he was the oldest presidential candidate ever to be newly elected.

As president, Trump has often taken his message directly to the public through social media instead of granting interviews to journalists or holding news conferences. His favorite platform has been Twitter. (Some days he has posted more than 100 Twitter messages.) Journalists have routinely fact-checked his tweets and retweets to reveal untrue or misleading information. Trump admitted this summer that the retweets get him “into trouble.”

Trump kept his campaign promise to deliver tax cuts, which have assisted some low-income people, but critics say they have helped large businesses more. He is withdrawing the United States from the Paris agreement on climate change, a phenomenon that he has called both a hoax and a serious problem. He also plans to end the United States’ support for the World Health Organization, which he says has mishandled the coronavirus pandemic. He sometimes has downplayed the seriousness of the novel coronavirus. He also has promoted a treatment that many medical experts have said does not work.

Last year, Trump was charged by the House of Representatives with abuse of power and obstruction of Congress in a process known as impeachment. The United States Senate, acting as the jury in the case, cleared him of the charges. Trump is just the third U.S. president to be impeached. None was convicted.

Personal tidbit: When first lady Melania Trump and son Barron moved to Washington in 2017, 11-year-old Barron became the first boy to live in the White House in more than 50 years. The president also has four adult children from two previous marriages.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

2 million miles on the nation’s Amtrak train lines, he was given the nickname “Amtrak Joe.”

As Biden rose in the Senate’s Democratic Party ranks, he led major committees and championed issues, including the environment, health care and racial justice. Those are issues he still prioritizes. Biden’s years in Congress also included votes unpopular with some Democrats. One was his support in 2002 of the United States’ invasion of Iraq.

A strong speaker and debater, he was also known for slip-ups and offhand remarks that sometimes got him into trouble.

Biden had run for president twice before becoming President Barack Obama’s vice president. Obama once compared Biden’s contribution as vice president to that of a basketball player “who does a bunch of things that don’t show up in the stat sheet.” A few days before leaving office, Obama awarded Biden the Presidential Medal of Freedom with Distinction, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

As vice president, Biden would have been a solid contender for president during the 2016 election. But he skipped that race because he and his family were grieving the loss of his son Beau, who had died of brain cancer the year before.

Joe Biden will turn 78 years old in November. One of the youngest men ever elected to the U.S. Senate, he could become the oldest man elected president.

Personal tidbit: As a youth, Biden struggled to overcome a stutter. He worked on it by reciting poetry before a mirror, watching his facial movements. A high school baseball and football player, he was elected class president in his junior and senior years.
Mike Pence
Republican nominee for vice president

Mike Pence had spent 12 years in the United States House of Representatives and four years as governor of Indiana when presidential candidate Donald Trump picked him as his running mate in 2016.

Pence grew up in Columbus, Indiana, where his father helped manage an oil and gas company. As an elementary school student, the younger Pence won a local speech contest, and he won a national debating prize as a high-schooler.

Pence became a Republican when he was in his mid-20s. Eventually his embrace of strict conservative (traditional) values put him at odds with some members of his own party. As a congressman, he introduced 63 bills, none of which passed. And when he ran for the top Republican post in the House in 2006, he got 27 votes out of 196 cast.

But Pence remained committed to his principles on social and economic issues, which made him popular with the most conservative members of the political party — a plus when Trump was looking for a running mate four years ago.

Like other vice presidents, Pence, now 61, has been a loyal deputy, filling in at ceremonial occasions such as the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea. In February, he was tapped to head the White House’s national response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Pence’s closest adviser may be his wife of 35 years, Karen, a painter and an elementary-middle school art

Kamala Harris
Democratic nominee for vice president

Kamala Harris has a background of “firsts”: first female and first Black elected attorney general in California; first South Asian American to serve in the United States Senate; and first Asian American or Black woman nominated for vice president by a major U.S. political party.

“I describe myself as a proud American,” Harris, 55, says when asked about her multicultural roots.

Her parents were immigrants — her mother from India, her father from Jamaica — who came to the United States to further their education. Harris was born in Oakland, California, and lived in nearby Berkeley during the 1960s civil rights movement. She was among the first Black children bused to better-off neighborhoods to fully integrate Berkeley’s public schools.

Harris’s mother cooked Indian food and took her two daughters to a Hindu temple and to visit family in India. But she embraced her adopted homeland and the African American culture in which she was raising her girls. Harris and her sister sang in the children’s choir at an African American church.

Harris said her mother understood “very well” that she was raising two Black daughters, and when it came time for college, Harris attended Howard University, a historically Black school.

Her election track record includes seven years as San Francisco district attorney and six as California attorney general, the top legal official for that city and
teacher. The couple has three children.

Karen Pence says her husband enjoys thin-crust pizza, likes to draw cartoons and would love to own a horse someday.

**Personal tidbit:** In 2018, the Pence family’s pet rabbit “wrote” a book for young readers titled “Marlon Bundo’s A Day in the Life of the Vice President.” The book’s actual author was Pence’s daughter Charlotte. His wife, Karen, drew the illustrations. The money they earned went to charity.

**DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

state. Since police killings of Black people have led to nationwide protests this year, Harris has called for an overhaul of the criminal justice system. But some critics have said she didn’t push for those reforms in California when she could have.

Harris is serving a six-year term representing California in the Senate, a seat that she will give up two years early if the Democrats win in November and she becomes vice president. A female vice president would be — you guessed it — another first.

**Personal tidbit:** “Kamala” (pronounced COMMA-lah) means “lotus” or “pale red” in Sanskrit, an ancient language used by scholars in India. Harris says that her husband Douglas Emhoff’s two children call her “Mamala.”
### Your Candidates and the Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Joe Biden</th>
<th>Donald J. Trump</th>
<th>Local Candidate</th>
<th>Local Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>