

Election Day is next Tuesday, November 8th. Many Americans have voted early, but the majority of Americans will be heading to the polls on election day. Read and discuss.

What happens at the polling place?

You will be asked for an i.d. to prove your identity. You can use a voter certificate or a driver's license. The poll worker will ask you to verify your address. Then you will sign a form indicating you are who you say you are. From there, you go to another table where you will be given a code number.

When a voting booth is open, you enter and input your code number. Your code number is tied to your personal i.d. You then cast your votes for all the candidates. You can vote straight ticket, which means you click Democratic straight ticket or Republican straight ticket. That automatically casts your vote for all the Democrats running or all the Republicans running. After voting straight ticket, you will still have to scroll through all the candidates. This gives you an opportunity to change your vote for individuals who might be in another party. For example if you were voting a Democratic straight ticket, but wanted to vote for a couple of Republicans in the local election, you could do that. When you are finished, you enter "cast vote" and your vote is electronically recorded.

Is there a lot of voter fraud in the U.S.?

A comprehensive investigation into voter fraud found a very small (a fraction of a percent) of fraud cases. So the answer is no, voter fraud is not a significant problem in the United States.

What are swing states?

Swing states are states that sometimes vote Democratic and sometimes Republican. There are about an equal number of both parties supporters in those states. Sometimes people refer to them as battleground states because that is where candidates will fight the hardest to win.

What are red and blue states?

Red states are states that reliably vote Republican. Blue states reliably vote Democratic.

What is a third party?

In the U.S. we have two main parties, the Democrats and Republicans. We have several "third parties". The Libertarian and Green party are both running candidates for president this year. Neither of those parties has a chance of winning because the overwhelming majority of people will vote for one of the two main parties.

What do the terms "conservative" and "liberal" mean in this election?

Traditionally a conservative is a person who doesn't want a lot of change. They like the way things are. Liberals tend to be more willing to change and consider new ways of doing things.

Liberals traditionally have been more in favor of government solutions to problems where conservatives have traditionally favored private enterprise to solve problems.

However, this year those terms have been turned on their head. Many of the ideas of Donald Trump and the Republicans are not at all conservative. In fact he is running on the idea of changing everything about Washington. Get rid of "Washington insiders" and bring in outsiders who will change things up. Trump criticized Clinton during the debates for doing the same old thing.

The Democrats seem to be more in favor of the status quo. Republicans seem to feel that America is heading down and is no longer a great nation. They are angry and dissatisfied. Democrats, in general, feel more satisfied with the state of the nation. They feel things are going reasonably well and no massive changes are necessary.

Are American presidents elected based on the popular vote?

Technically the answer to this question is no. America has an electoral system. So when you cast your vote for a candidate, you are actually voting for the Republican or Democratic electors of your state. Each party appoints their own electors who are party loyalists and sworn to vote for their candidate. After the election, the popular vote will be counted by state. If the Republicans win a majority of the popular votes, then all of that state's electors will be Republicans. And vice versa if the Democrats win the popular vote of that state. The number of electors each state has is based on the number of senators and representatives. Texas has 38 electors, while Hawaii has only 4. On January 6th, the electors will meet and cast their vote for the president. Only then will he or she be officially elected.

It is possible to win the popular vote and lose the election. This happened in 2000 when Al Gore, the Democrat won more of the popular vote. However, because of the winner take all system of the electoral college, Bush won the election. It takes 270 electoral votes to win the presidency. If you watch election night coverage, you will see the newscasters forecasting which way a state will go, Democrat or Republican. As soon as one candidate reaches 270 electoral votes, they will announce who they think won the election. The vote counting will go on into the next day or two, but usually you can predict who won by late evening. This will be an interesting election to watch as it will probably be quite close. We may have to go to bed without knowing who our next president will be.

DISCUSS

1. Talk about elections in your country. How do they differ from what you see here?
2. Is corruption of elections a problem in your country? Do you think some of the elections are rigged?
3. What surprises you most about what you have heard about this presidential election?
4. This is a list of the issues in this presidential election. Are there any that you feel strongly about? Are these the same issues in your country's elections? free trade, involvement in foreign wars, affordable health insurance, gun control, immigration controls, treatment of gay, lesbian and transgender people.

