**5.1 Campaigns and Elections**

**SSCG7d: Identify how amendments extend the right to vote**

In a democracy the most important right is the right to vote. Without this right, your political voice is not heard by politicians and the likelihood that political figures will do things in your best interest will recede. When our country first started, the only people that could vote were white males that owned property and were over the age of 21. This was because they were seen as the only group of people responsible enough help choose representative. However, over the course of our history we have increased the number of people that have been given the right to vote. The right to vote is often called **Suffrage**. There has been several significant changes to whom has been given suffrage since our founding. After the Civil War the **15th amendment** provided the right to vote to people of color. Voting rights cannot be denied on the basis of race, color, or previous enslavement. This amendment was passed in 1870. However, southern states found other ways to limit the right to vote for people of color, such as poll taxes, which required the payment of a tax to vote. Since many people of color didn’t have money in the South at that time, they were denied the right to vote.

Later, after the End of World War One the **19th amendment** was passed in 1920 and gave women the right to vote. Additionally, as a result of the Civil Right Movement the **24th amendment** was passed in 1964. This amendment banned poll taxes as a condition of voter qualification. Another group of people that gained the right to vote were young people. During the 1960s the Vietnam War raged in Southeast Asia. Hundreds of thousands of young men were drafted into the military, and thousands of them never returned. The controversy was that a young person could be drafted to fight and die for his country at 18 years old, but could elect the person that was sending them to their fate. Hence, the **26th amendment** lowered the voting age to 18; this amendment was passed in 1971.

**SSCG15: Demonstrate knowledge of local, state, and national elections.**

**SSCG15a: Describe the historical development, organization, role, and constituencies of political parties.**

When it comes to voting in elections, most Americans vote for Candidates that are affiliated with one of the two major political parties. A **political party** is a group of persons who seek to control government through the winning of elections and holding public office. Members of a political party share similar ideological principles. Political parties are essential to a democratic government. Political parties are the major mechanisms behind the development of policy and serve as the link between the people and their government. The United States has a **two-party system**, which means that two political parties dominate politics. The two dominant political parties are the Republicans and the Democrats. The Republican Party (sometimes called the GOP) tends to take a more conservative stance on issues, while the Democratic Party usually supports more liberal policy issues.

However, not everyone votes for, or belong to, one of the two major parties. There are many minor parties in the United States. A **minor party** typically does not have widespread public support and is often created to focus on a single issue. Minor parties do have the potential to take voters away from one of the two dominant parties in an election and serve a spoiler role. The spoiler role can change the outcome of an election by pulling voters away from one party or the other.

The history of the two-party system of the United States can be traced back to differing ideas in Washington’s Cabinet. The opposing sides that arose were the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. Alexander Hamilton led the Federalists, and Thomas Jefferson led the Democratic-Republicans. The Federalists worked to create a stronger national government and pushed for a broader interpretation of the Constitution. The Democratic-Republicans wanted a less powerful national government and thought that Congress, not the executive branch, should dominate the new government. The Democratic-Republicans thought that the Constitution should be interpreted strictly.

Later, the Federalists would disband and the Democratic-Republicans would choose the much less confusing name of the Democrats. Soon after, the Republican Party was formed in the years just prior to the Civil War. These two parties continue to this day as the two major parties. However, what they believe in, and who their membership is made up of has changed many times over the years.

Political parties in the United States are organized like a giant pyramid. At the top of the pyramid is the **national committee**. This committee is typically run by a party chairperson and is made up of party leaders, elected officials, and the chairs of the state party organizations. The main jobs of the national committee is to assist state parties in local elections, conduct fundraising for candidates, and put on their party’s national convention. State level political parties are organized the same as the national party and conduct much of the same tasks, however on a state wide level. At the local level, political parties are typically made up of volunteers. Their main tasks including identifying and mobilizing potential voters and donors, identifying and training potential candidates for public office, and recruiting new members for the party. County organizations are also often responsible for finding local members to serve as volunteers on Election Day, either as officials responsible for operating the polls or as monitors responsible for ensuring that elections are conducted honestly and fairly.

Membership in a political party is voluntary. Certain members of the population have tended to align more closely with one party or the other, and over time, some groups have shifted their support from one party to the other; these trends can be seen throughout American history. For example, African-Americans, Catholics, Jews, and union members have voted more for Democrats, while Protestants, males, and business owners have voted more for Republicans. Geographically, the West Coast and North Eastern states consistently vote for Democratic candidates, while Southern and Mid-Western states usually support Republican candidates.

How do we decide which party we will support? Typically, we gain our **party identification** based on our parent’s party allegiance. In addition, teachers, peers, economic status, level of education, and major events impact our identification with a political party. Historically, business owners and low income whites tend to support the Republican Party, while those with advanced college educations and lower income minorities tend to align with the Democratic Party.

**SSCG15b: Describe the nomination and election process.**

A critical first step in an election is the nomination process. **Nomination** is the naming of those who will seek to run for public office. The nominating process narrows down the field of possible candidates. At the local and state levels, most candidates ‘self-announce’, or decide that they want to seek office. They file required paperwork at the local or state level to make sure they meet all of the requirements, and then they begin the campaign process. Regardless of what office a candidate is running for, it is important to have the support of their political party. The nomination process is more detailed and complex at the national level.

Almost all elections follow the same general pattern. Generally, it doesn’t matter if the election is a local election for a school board official, a Senator, or the President of the United States. The first step is typically called a primary, though in some cases it can be called a caucus. In this step, members of the same political party face off against each other. So democrats face off against other democrats. There are two types of Primaries, Open and Closed. **Open Primaries** allow for anyone to go vote, where in **closed primar**ies only allow for members of that particular political party to go vote. A third type is called a **caucus**. This works in a similar fashion to a closed primary. But instead of people going to vote privately, voting is done publically in a large meeting of party members. After the primaries, each party puts their top candidate against each other in what is called the **General Election**.

The presidential primary is an election where the voters express a preference for their Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates to represent their party in the general election. The primary elections typically start in February and run through April or May. In recent years, some states have started earlier to capitalize on media coverage.

For the nomination of the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates every four years, each party holds a **national convention**. Both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party hold their national convention in the summer months preceding the general election. The national conventions are held in different major cities within two to three weeks of each other. Prior to the national conventions, it is basically known who will be the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates for each party. The convention is when the nominees are formally announced. Other important party business is conducted at the national conventions. Each party seeks three major goals to accomplish at the convention: 1) naming the party’s Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates, 2) bringing the various factions and the leading personalities of the party together to unite for a common purpose, and 3) create and adopt the party’s **platform** for the next four years. The platform is the party’s formal statement of basic principles, viewpoints on major policy issues, and objectives for the campaign and next four years.

The Presidential general elections are regularly scheduled elections at which voters make the final selection of officeholders. For the Presidential election, the general election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November every four years. To become the President, a person needs to acquire 271 votes in **The Electoral College**. The Electoral College is one of the least understood parts of the American political process. When voters cast their vote in the general election for President, they are not casting their vote directly for one of the nominees. Instead, they vote to elect presidential electors. In theory, these electors are to vote for the nominee who wins the majority of the popular vote (but this is not a requirement). Each state has as many electors as it does members in Congress. Originally, the Founders created the Electoral College because they felt that the common man would not know enough about the candidates, politics, or the economy, to make an informed decision.

The Constitution sets out how electoral votes will be counted and the timing for those counts. The **12th Amendment** sets out this process. The electors for each state meet at their state capitol on the Monday after the second Wednesday in December. Congress has the authority to change the dates for this process. Each electoral delegate casts his or her vote, the votes are totaled, signed and sealed, and sent to the president of the Senate in Washington, D.C.

**SSCG15c: Examine campaign funding and spending and the influence of special interest groups on elections.**

Running for office is very expensive. Presidential campaigns currently cost in the billions. According to a December, 2016, article in the Washington Post, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump alone raised over $2.5 billion dollars. Total money spent by all candidates running for office in a Presidential election year is estimated at over $5 billion.

Campaign spending typically focuses on radio and television time, professional campaign managers, consultants, newspaper and online advertising, posters, bumper stickers, office rental space, polling, mass mailings, websites, travel, and paid campaign staffers.

Campaign funding sources include: private contributors and the public treasury. Private donors are the major source of campaign funds in the United States. Candidates rely on small contributors, wealthy individuals, the candidate’s own money, and **Political Action Committees** (PACs). PACs are organizations that pools campaign contributions from members and then donates those pooled funds to campaign for or against a candidate. PACs usually have a vested (personal) interest in the outcome of the election; they may represent special interest groups or other groups who want to influence legislation.

**SSCG15d: Examine how recent policy changes and Supreme Court rulings have impacted the campaign finance process.**

After the 2010 Court Case **Citizens United** a new type of way to finance political campaigns emerged called **Super PACs**. A Super PAC does not make any contributions to candidates or political parties. Instead, Super PACs make expenditures in federal races for running campaign ads for or against a candidate. Their messages specifically advocate for the election or defeat of a particular candidate. There are no limits or restrictions on the use of funds spent by Super PACs.

**SSCG15e: Analyze the influence of media coverage, campaign advertising, and public opinion polls.**

**Media** includes any type of mass communication, such as the Internet, television, newspapers, and radio. From a political standpoint, the media helps shape our ideas about politics. There are three primary ways that the media shapes politics and political opinions:

* Influencing the political opinions of voters – the media can sway the opinions and votes of people who are not totally committed to one political party or candidate. Individuals who are highly partisan, or who strongly identify with a political party, choose to listen to media sources that support their personal points of view; the media is unlikely to change the votes of these individuals. However, since many voters make their decisions of who to vote for by listening to the media, the power of the media in elections is considered substantial.
* Determining the behavior of candidates – many politicians have mastered the art of learning how to use the media to their benefit. The media can help a candidate get elected and gain support for policy, and on the flip side, the media can spell disaster for a candidate’s campaign.
* Setting the public agenda – most Americans learn about social and policy issues from the media. When the media focuses on a particular issue, that issue tends to get more attention from key policymakers in government.

**Campaign advertisin**g in politics is designed to influence voter behavior. Advertising is accomplished through the media: television and radio ads, emails, and websites. Social media has become a huge part of campaign advertising, particularly when targeting younger generations. In recent campaigns, attack ads have become the focal point of campaign advertising; instead of candidates using the media to advertise their platforms and qualifications, the ads often concentrate on negative characteristics of opponents.

Another import aspect of campaigns and elections are public **opinion polls**. Public opinion polls are human research surveys often used in politics. Polls can be via telephone, online, or in person. During presidential and congressional campaigns, candidates often have their campaign staff or consultants perform weekly public opinion polls to see how they are trending with voter support. They use the results to guide future campaigning and advertising activities. The published results of public opinion polls can influence voters; if a voter is not sure of which candidate to vote for, he or she may rely on polling results to help make a decision.

Polls are useful in helping candidates determine what their main policy agenda should be, based on what American voters feel is most important. When a candidate is deciding on his or her platform, they may use polls to find out which issues matter most to voters and then build the platform around those particular issues.