

# Elections A to Z

## Fifth Edition

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Fifth Edition

Updated by

Deborah Kalb

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>A</b>	
Absentee Voting	1
Absolute Majority	6
American Independent Party (1968–) and American Party (1972–)	7
Anti-Federalists (1789–1796)	9
Anti-Masonic Party (1832–1836)	10
Asian American and Pacific Islander Candidates	11
Asian American and Pacific Islander Voters	13
At-Large	15
<b>B</b>	
Ballot Access	17
Ballot Types	19
Bandwagon Effect	22
Bellwether	24
Bicameral	25
Bilingual Voters	27
Black Candidates	30
Black Voters	39
Blue Dog Democrats	44
Border States	46
Brokered Convention	47
Bundling	48
<b>C</b>	
Campaign Buttons	51
Campaign Finance	52

Campaign Slogans	69
Campaign Strategies	73
Campaign, Basic Stages of	80
Campaigning	86
Candidate-Centered Campaigns	96
Canvassing Board	103
Caucus	103
Census	108
Citizens Party (1979–1984)	116
Citizenship and Voting	117
Civil Rights Acts	120
Coalition	126
Coattails	128
Communist Party U.S.A. (1924–)	129
Congressional District	130
Congressional Elections	134
Constituency	145
Constitution Party (U.S. Taxpayers Party) (1992–)	146
Constitutional Union Party (1860)	147
Contested Elections	148
Crossover Voting	157
Cumulative Voting	157
<b>D</b>	
Dark Horse	159
Debates	160
Delegates	169
Democracy	175
Democratic Leadership Council	179
Democratic National Committee	180
Democratic Party (1832–)	182
Democratic Socialists	190
Democratic-Republican Party (1796–1828)	191
Direct Election	193
Disenfranchisement	195
District of Columbia	199
Districts, Wards, and Precincts	204

<b>E</b>	
Election Cycle	209
Election Day	212
Election Fraud	215
Election Violence	220
Electoral Anomalies	223
Electoral Behavior	229
Electoral College and Votes	232
Equal Time and Rebuttal Rules	242
Exit Polls	246
<b>F</b>	
Favorite Son	251
Federal Election Commission	252
Federal Workers' Political Activity	258
Federalist Party (1789–1816)	261
Forecasting Election Results	262
Foreign Interference in Elections	266
Franchise	268
Free Soil Party (1848–1852)	271
Freeholder	272
Front-Loading	273
Front-Runner	276
Fusionism	278
<b>G</b>	
Gerrymander	281
Get Out the Vote	287
Governor	290
Grandfather Clause	302
Green Party (1996–)	303
Greenback Party (1876–1884)	304
<b>H</b>	
Hard Money	307
Help America Vote Act of 2002	310
House of Representatives, Electing	312
House of Representatives, Qualifications	319

<b>I</b>	
Ideology	323
Impeachment	329
Incumbency	332
Independent	337
Initiatives and Referendums	340
Interest Group	343
Iowa Caucus	352
Issue Voting	355
<b>J</b>	
Judicial System	361
<b>K</b>	
Know Nothing (American) Party (1856)	369
<b>L</b>	
Lame Duck	373
Landslide	375
LaRouche Movement (U.S. Labor Party, 1973–)	377
Latino Candidates	378
Latino Voters	381
LGBTQ Candidates	383
LGBTQ Voters	385
Liberal Republican Party (1872)	386
Libertarian Party (1971–)	387
Liberty Party (1839–1848)	389
Lieutenant Governor	390
Literacy Tests	391
<b>M</b>	
Mandate	393
Media Coverage of Campaigns	396
Media Use by Campaigns	408
Mid-decade Redistricting	415
Midterm Election	419
Minority-Majority District	425



Misinformation Campaigns	427
Motor Voter Act	431
Multimember Districts	433
<b>N</b>	
National Democratic Party (1896)	437
National Election Studies	438
National Party Conventions	439
National Republican Party (1828–1832)	451
National Unity Party (1980–1988)	451
Native American Candidates	452
Native American Voters	454
Natural Law Party (1992–2004)	455
Nature of Representation	456
Negative Campaigning	461
New Hampshire Primary	468
<b>O</b>	
One Person, One Vote	471
<b>P</b>	
Party Endorsement of Candidates	475
Party Identification by Voters	476
Peace and Freedom Party (1967–)	480
People's Party (1970s)	481
Platform	482
Plurality	485
Pocketbook Voting	486
Political Action Committees	489
Political Advertising	495
Political Consultants	502
Political Culture in America	510
Political Party Development	516
Political Radicalization	527
Political Socialization of the Public	529
Poll Taxes	537
Polling	538

Popular Vote	544
Populism	547
Populist (People's) Party (1891–1908, 1984–)	552
Postconvention Bounce	554
President, Nominating and Electing	555
President, Qualifications	566
Presidential Draft	571
Presidential Elections Chronology	572
Presidential Primaries	596
Presidential Selection Reforms	606
Primary Types	617
Progressive Party (1924)	620
Progressive Party (1948)	621
Progressive Party–Bull Moose (1912)	623
Prohibition Party (1869–)	624
Proportional Representation	625
Public Financing of Campaigns	628
Public Opinion	634
Push Poll	641
<b>R</b>	
Racial Redistricting	643
Ranked-Choice Voting	648
Realignments and Dealignment	649
Reapportionment and Redistricting	653
Recall	664
Recount	667
Reform Party (1995–)	671
Republican Government	673
Republican Main Street Partnership	676
Republican National Committee	677
Republican Party (1854–)	679
Retrospective Voting	687
Right to Vote	689
Running Mate	694
Runoff and Preference Primary	699

## S

Scandals	703
Second Midterm Elections (“The Six-Year Itch”)	723
Senate, Electing	728
Senate, Qualifications	737
Single-Issue Voting	741
Single-Member Districts	742
Social Media and Elections	742
Socialist Labor Party (1874–)	744
Socialist Party (1901–)	745
Socialist Workers Party (1938–)	746
Soft Money	747
Sore Loser Laws	748
Southern Democrats (1860)	751
Special Elections	752
Split-Ticket and Straight-Ticket Voting	753
State and Federal Election Responsibilities	754
State Legislatures	758
States’ Rights Democratic Party (1948)	764
Straw Vote	765
Super Tuesday	767
Superdelegate	770
Supreme Court and Campaign Finance	771
Supreme Court and Political Speech	775
Supreme Court and Reapportionment and Redistricting	777
Supreme Court and Recounts	784
Supreme Court and the Electoral College	785
Supreme Court and Voter Registration	787
Supreme Court and Voting Rights	790
<h2>T</h2>	
Term Limits	795
Third Parties	800
Threshold Rules	806
Two-Party System	807
Two-Thirds Rule	808

<b>U</b>	
Unicameral	811
Union Party (1936)	812
Unit Rule	813
United We Stand America (1992–1995)	813
<b>V</b>	
Vice President	815
Voter Apathy	827
Voter Identification	830
Voter Registration	831
Voter Turnout	834
Voting Age	840
Voting Machines	841
Voting Rights Act	843
<b>W</b>	
Watershed Elections	849
Whig Party (1834–1856)	850
Whistle Stop	852
Winner Take All	854
Women Candidates	855
Women Voters	859
Workers World Party (1959–)	863
Write-In Vote	864
<b>Y</b>	
Youth Voters	867
<b>Index</b>	<b>873</b>

# Introduction

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On January 6, 2021, supporters of defeated president Donald Trump, believing his lie that he had won the 2020 election, attacked the U.S. Capitol as lawmakers sought to certify the election results. The insurrectionists broke into the building, bringing a Confederate flag and a variety of weapons, and called for the death of top leaders, including Vice President Mike Pence. As the insurrectionists surged into the building, police officers fought them in hand-to-hand combat. Several people died as a result of the events of that day. It was the first time the Capitol had been invaded since the War of 1812 against the British.

The refusal of a sitting president who had lost his bid for reelection to concede to his rival marked a low point for American democracy. Trump, a Republican, urged his supporters to march to the Capitol that day and continued to insist falsely that he had won the election in the months following the attack. He and his aides filed numerous lawsuits challenging aspects of the election results and called for investigations into the results in states his rival, Democrat Joseph R. Biden, had narrowly won. In doing so, Trump undermined trust in the entire U.S. election system. A year after the attack on the Capitol, most Republicans questioned whether Biden, who had defeated Trump, was the legitimate president of the United States.

The attack, and the rhetoric surrounding it, demonstrates the seismic shifts in U.S. elections since the last edition of *Elections A to Z* was published in 2012. The past decade has been tumultuous. It began with the reelection of the country's first Black president, Barack Obama, in 2012. Obama, a Democrat, faced ongoing political partisanship as the House, and after 2014, the Senate, were controlled by Republicans. When Trump jumped into the 2016 GOP presidential nomination contest, few believed the wealthy businessman and TV personality could win the nomination, much less the presidency; he espoused a nationalistic form of populism that initially repelled many establishment Republicans. But his tone appealed to many other Republicans who felt ignored by the traditional GOP, and he swept to victory in 2016, upsetting Democrat Hillary Clinton, who most political prognosticators thought would become the first woman president.

Trump's presidency led to further partisanship, as he viciously attacked Democrats as well as Republicans who had crossed him. He railed against immigration and winked and nodded at white supremacists. He was impeached twice, first for actions related to his efforts to get the country of Ukraine to investigate Biden, his political rival, and second for his role in the January 6 insurgency.

In the 2018 midterms, Democrats were able to win control of the House. In 2020, Trump lost the election, and Republicans lost control of the Senate, giving Democrats razor-thin margins in both houses of Congress. Turnout in recent elections, particularly in 2020, was high, demonstrating that people felt their vote was important.

Elections in the United States were also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020 and had a major impact on how elections were conducted that year. Because many people feared gathering in crowded polling places, the use of mail-in ballots or early voting became more prevalent.

This new edition of *Elections A to Z* features a number of new entries. Some of them focus on the important contributions of candidates and voters of color. Others look in greater depth at how the Supreme Court has affected elections. And still others address the issues that have emerged in the past decade, such as the impact of social media and misinformation campaigns on elections in this country.

The original edition of *Elections A to Z* was planned and in large part written by John L. Moore. Subsequent editions were updated by many CQ reporters and editors, including Bob Benenson and Dave Tarr, and most recently by Deborah Kalb, a former CQ reporter who is the editor of the most recent edition of *Guide to U.S. Elections*. This edition was updated under the supervision of SAGE editor Laura Notton.

The entries in *Elections A to Z* and its companion volumes on the presidency, Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Constitution, are extensively cross-referenced to guide readers to related information elsewhere in each book. Many entries contain a list of further readings to enhance continuation of the research and reading journey, and in which a deliberate focus has been made to include books published over the last two decades. Each volume is also available as an online edition.

Readers who need more extensive, in-depth explanations of Congress as an institution may wish to consult CQ Press's *Guide to U.S. Elections, Seventh Edition*, after reading the appropriate entries in *Elections A to Z*.

We hope that this volume, and the others that make up the American Government A to Z series, will achieve the simple goal underpinning all the books: to provide readers with easily understood, accurate information about Congress, the presidency, the Supreme Court, the elections that so dramatically influence these institutions, and the Constitution of the United States.