

Controversial & Historically Important Elections

Suggested Questions for independent research, group discussion, essay, or debate

Grades 6-12

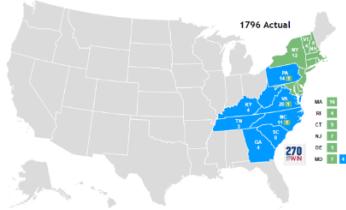
Prepared by Hank Bitten, NJCSS Executive Director (hb288@sasmail.rutgers.edu)

*Since there are over 50 elections in this activity, it is suggested to engage students in pairs of 2,3, or 4 students.
The first five questions are considered appropriate for middle school students as well as high school students.*

1. Identify five elections that resulted in challenges to our constitution and explain how they were decided. Do you agree or disagree with the final outcome?
2. Identify the elections where an incumbent president ran for re-election and lost. Explain one or more reasons why this happened.
3. Which previous election(s) in our history provide a lesson to be studied for the 2020 election? Why did you select this election(s)?
4. Both President Trump and Vice-President Biden have stated that the 2020 election is one of the most important in American history. Identify five previous elections that were also critically important to the future of democracy or America and explain why you selected them.
5. Identify the five most important elections in American history and explain with evidence why you consider them to be turning point elections.
6. America has a competitive democracy. Identify five elections that focused on clearly defined differences between the two political parties and explain how Americans voted. Do you agree or disagree with the results of these elections?
7. As a result of campaigns and elections, political parties were established, some lost support at the national level, and at times the focus and platforms of the Democratic Party and Republican Party changed. Identify three examples of elections where this happened and explain why Americans supported or rejected the new focus of the political party.
8. Sometimes the character or competency of the candidates for president becomes a factor in how the American people voted. Identify five elections where the personality or qualifications (or other personal issue) influenced the vote of the American people. Explain why these issues were considered important at the time.
9. Identify five elections that emphasized the importance of a specific population (the base) in the outcome of an election. Explain why you agree or disagree on the importance of the support of a specific demographic group of section of the United States.
10. Identify five elections where the popular vote and the electoral vote was very close (within 20 electoral votes of within 500,000 popular votes.) Identify the elections where a president was elected without a majority of the popular votes.

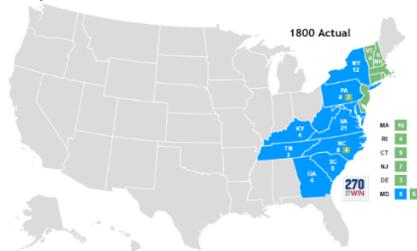
For additional research visit the [Miller Center](#) website and click on “Campaigns and Elections” for individual presidents.

1796 - John Adams v. Thomas Jefferson v. Thomas Pinckney v. Aaron Burr



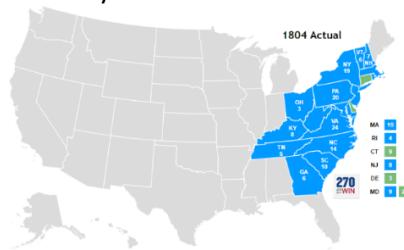
This election was important because President Washington announced that he would not seek re-election. Vice-President John Adams of Massachusetts sought election as a Federalist as did Governor Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina. Former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson from Virginia came out of retirement to run for president as a Democratic-Republican as did Aaron Burr from New York. Partisan Politics was important with Alexander Hamilton criticizing Aaron Burr as one not suited for the presidency, the unpopularity of the Jay Treaty, the radicalism of the French Revolution, and the future of America as an agrarian republic or a country supporting commerce and industry. Each candidate sought election as president and the candidate with the second highest number of votes in the Electoral College would be the Vice-President. The outcome resulted in the election of John Adams (Federalist) as President, Thomas Jefferson (Democratic Republican) as Vice-President, and the House of Representatives and Senate had a majority of members from the Federalist Party.

1800 - John Adams & Charles Pinckney v. Thomas Jefferson & Aaron Burr



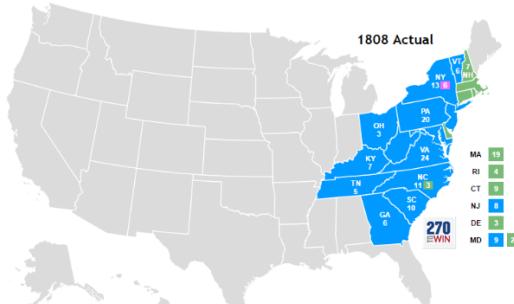
This election debated the issue between a strong or weak national government regarding the power of the Executive Branch v. the importance of individual states' rights. A two-party system developed reflecting the views of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists parties, regional differences between the northern and southern states, the volatile issues over the Alien & Sedition Acts and XYZ affair, our allegiance to Britain or France, and the character of the candidates. Thomas Jefferson was criticized as a Deist, John Adams as a monarch, and Aaron Burr for his arrogance. The outcome was a tie in the Electoral College as electors in Pennsylvania and North Carolina split their votes. It took 36 ballots in the House of Representatives with each state having one vote. After the House cast 19 identical tie ballots on February 11, 1801, Governor James Monroe of Virginia assured Jefferson that if a usurpation was attempted, he would call the Virginia Assembly into session, implying that they would discard any such result. After six days of uncertainty, Federalists in the tied delegations of Vermont and Maryland abstained, electing Jefferson, but without giving him open Federalist support.

1804 - Thomas Jefferson v. Charles Pinckney



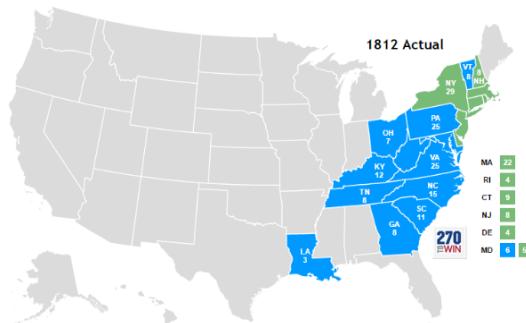
The Democratic Republican Party held the first caucus in our history to re-nominate Thomas Jefferson as President and Governor George Clinton (NY) as Vice-President. The Federalists informally agreed to support Charles C. Pinckney for President (candidate for Vice-President in 1800), and Senator Rufus King (NY) for Vice-President. The key issues were that the Louisiana Purchase was unconstitutional and Thomas Jefferson's alleged relationship with his slave, Sally Hemmings. Jefferson received 162 votes in the Electoral College to Pinckney's 14 votes from Connecticut and Delaware, and two votes from Maryland. This was the first election to implement the 12th Amendment.

1808 – James Madison v. Charles Pinckney



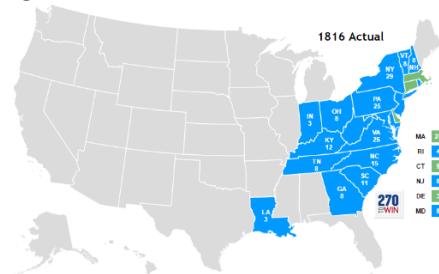
The Democratic-Republican, James Madison was challenged by members in his own political party for the nomination. (James Monroe and George Clinton) The Embargo Act was a defining issue in New England as was foreign policy with Britain and France. James Madison won 122 electoral votes cast to Federalist Charles C. Pinckney's 47 votes. Vice President George Clinton received six electoral votes for President from New York, and defeated Federalist Rufus King for Vice President, 113-47. The main issue of the election was the Embargo Act of 1807. The banning of exports had hurt merchants and other commercial interests, although ironically it encouraged domestic manufactures. These economic difficulties revived the Federalist opposition, especially in trade-dependent New England.

1812 – James Madison v. DeWitt Clinton



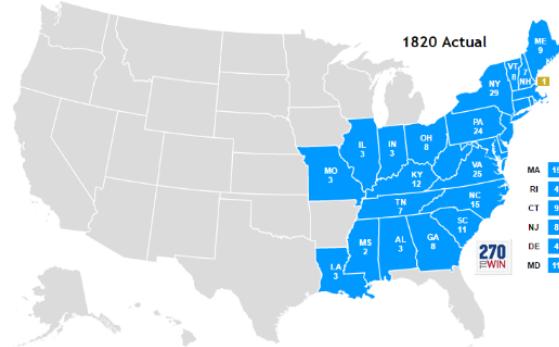
James Madison was re-elected President by the narrowest margin of any election since the Democratic Republican Party had come to power in 1800. He received 128 electoral votes to 89 for his Federalist opponent DeWitt Clinton, the Lieutenant Governor of New York. Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts became the Vice President with 131 votes to Jared Ingersoll's 86. The key issues were the War of 1812, which began five months earlier, national defense, the dominance of Virginia in national government (Washington, Jefferson, Madison), and the importance of new states. There was strong opposition to the war in the New England states.

1816 – James Monroe v. Rufus King



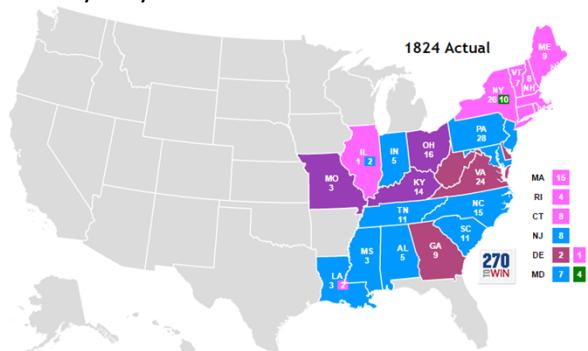
James Monroe (Democratic Republican Party) won the presidency with 183 electoral votes, carrying every state except Massachusetts, Connecticut and Delaware. Federalist Rufus King received the votes of the 34 Federalist electors. Daniel D. Tompkins of New York was elected Vice President with 183 electoral votes. The key issues were the re-chartering of the national bank and the domination of presidents from Virginia. It was considered unpatriotic to criticize the War of 1812 and the diplomatic failures of president Monroe. Historians have characterized this time as an "Era of Good Feelings" because of the limited criticisms by newspapers and the absence of a unified Federalist Party.

1820 – James Monroe (Unopposed)



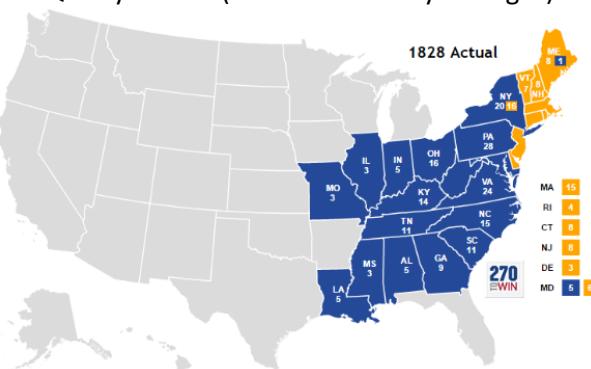
Although there were significant issues of the Panic of 1819, expansion of slavery into the Louisiana Territory, the Supreme Court decisions on Dartmouth College and the national bank. The Federalist Party no longer existed by 1820 which is why James Monroe did not face any opponent. The reason the electoral College vote was 231-1, was because William Plumer of New Hampshire cast his ballot for John Quincy Adams.

1824 - John Quincy Adams v. Henry Clay v. Andrew Jackson v. William Crawford



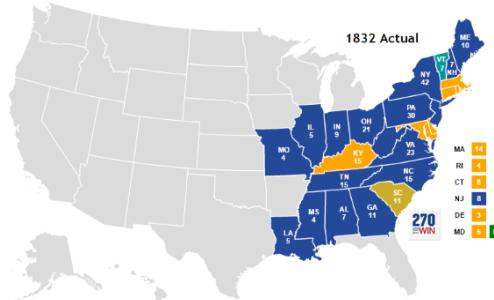
The Election was impacted by the health of William Crawford and regional support for the candidates. The outcome was determined by the House of Representatives. Henry Clay, who was the Speaker of the House, placed him in a position to influence the representatives making the final decision. Henry Clay pledged his supporters to vote for John Quincy Adams. The Democratic Republican Party collapsed.

1828 - Andrew Jackson v. John Quincy Adams (Democratic Party emerges)



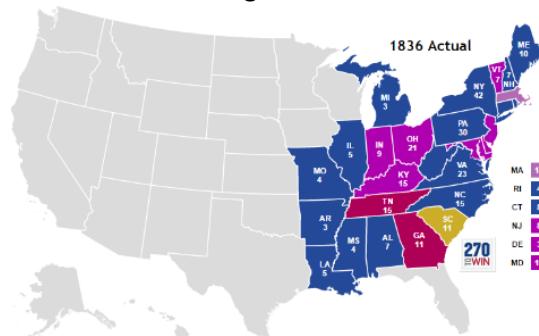
The Democrats had a national organization and campaigned in the communities (barbeques, parades, appearances at local events. The 'National Republicans' did not have the local network of the Democratic Party and supported policies of federal funds for infrastructure and high tariffs. The competency and character of Andrew Jackson was a major issue regarding his violent behavior in the army and as an adulterer and bigamist. Andrew Jackson was the first president elected who was not from Massachusetts or Virginia.

1832 – Andrew Jackson v. Henry Clay v. William Wirt v. John Floyd



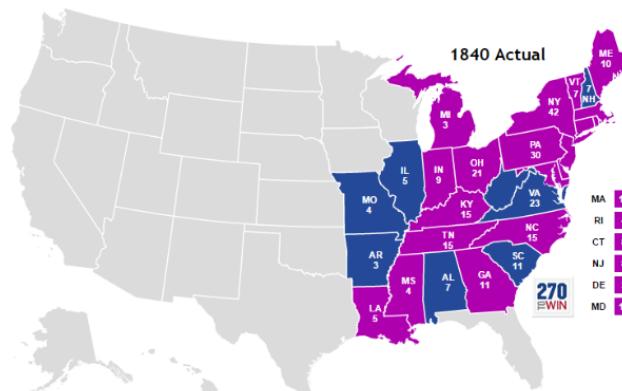
The Democratic Party (still an unofficial name) re-nominated Andrew Jackson for President and Martin Van Buren as his running mate. The National Republican Party nominated Henry Clay and Rep John Sergeant (PA and also a graduate of Princeton University). The Anti-Masonic Party formed to challenge both Jackson and Clay who were Masons. They feared a conspiracy to control America's government because the Masons were a secret group. They held a convention in Baltimore to nominate William Wirt. The Nullification Party nominated Rep. John Floyd (VA). The most controversial issues were Jackson's veto of the Bank of the United States, the spoils system of political patronage, and the use of federal funds for infrastructure.

1836 - Martin Van Buren v. Daniel Webster v. Hugh White



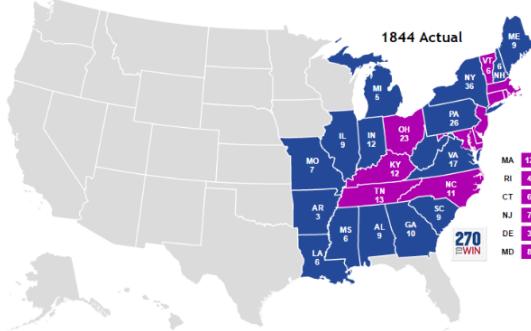
The Election of 1836 was largely a referendum on Andrew Jackson's policies but the Democratic Party was divided and the Whig Party nominated Daniel Webster, Hugh White, and Gen. William Henry Harrison. Martin Van Buren's choice of Col. Richard Johnson for Vice-President was controversial because of his intimate relationship with a black woman. Important issues were the national bank and the economy, sectional interests, abolition of slavery, and financing internal improvements. An interesting constitutional issue is that the decision for Vice-President was decided by the Senate with the selection of Col. Richard Johnson over Rep. Francis Granger (NY).

1840 – William Henry Harrison v. Martin Van Buren



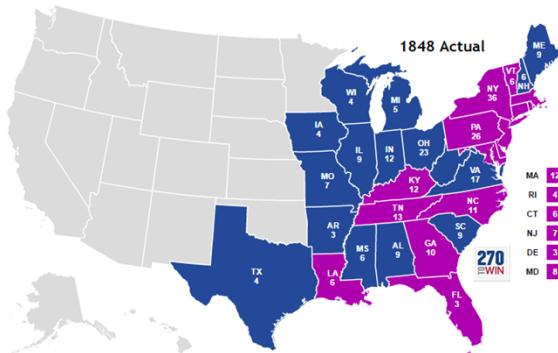
The campaign focused on the personalities of the candidates with William Henry Harrison's popular reputation as a war hero born in a log cabin and Martin Van Buren characterized as an out-of-touch politician. The importance of this election came one month after President Harrison's inauguration because of his unexpected death. His Vice-President, John Tyler, became the president.

1844 – James Polk v. Henry Clay v. James Birney



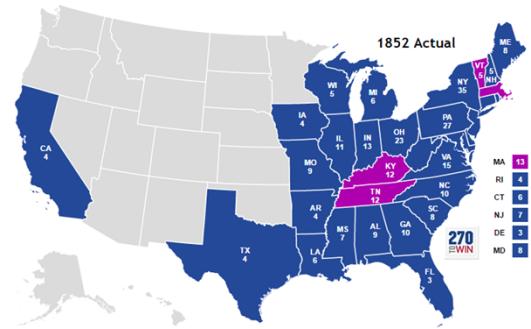
Westward expansion and slavery were the competitive political issues contributing to sectionalism. Martin Van Buren desired the presidency but angered southern Democrats by opposing the annexation of Texas. The first 'dark horse' candidate emerged from Tennessee, James Polk. The abolitionist Liberty Party nominated Michigan's James G. Birney. The Whigs nominated anti-annexationist Henry Clay of Kentucky and Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey for Vice-President. During the campaign, Henry Clay supported annexation to win the support of southerners at the expense of losing the confidence of the abolitionists.

1848 – Zachary Taylor v. Lewis Cass v. Martin Van Buren



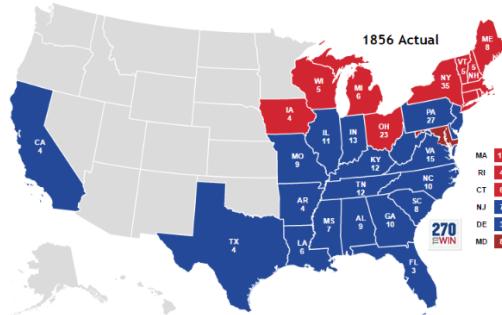
The issue of slavery dominated the debate in this election. Zachary Taylor was a moderate on slavery. He owned slaves but did not advocate for the expansion of slavery into the new territories. The Whigs celebrated General Taylor's military victories even though they opposed the war with Mexico. Martin Van Buren did not receive any electoral votes but his campaign will give birth to the Republican Party after the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Lewis Cass advocated a position of popular sovereignty on slavery in the recently annexed territories and in the upper Midwest.

1852 – Franklin Pierce v. Winfield Scott v. John Pitale



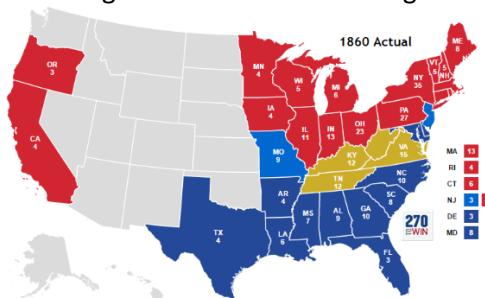
This election divided the Whig Party which resulted in its collapse after this election. They nominated Gen. Winfield Scott of Virginia instead of the incumbent Millard Fillmore, who became president after the death of President Taylor. General Scott selected Senator William Graham of New Jersey as his running mate. The Whig Party split because Gen. Scott supported the Fugitive Slave Act. The Democratic Party nominated Senator Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. There were several rising stars aspiring to be president in this election. (Stephen Douglas, James Buchanan, Daniel Webster, William Seward)

1856 – James Buchanan v. Millard Fillmore v. John C. Fremont. (Republican Party founded 1854)



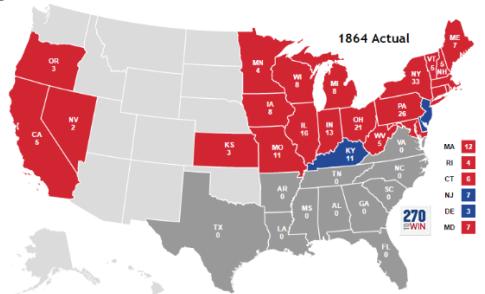
The 1856 election saw the development of new political coalitions over the issue of slavery. The Whig Party collapsed because of disunity but the Know-Nothing Party emerged over the issue of immigration and the Republican Party opposed the expansion of slavery in the new territories. The violence in Kansas and Nebraska ended the previous options favoring compromise. The Democratic Party was considered to be the 'national party' and they nominated James Buchanan for president and John C. Breckinridge for Vice-President. They supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and did not oppose slavery. The new Republican Party opposed the expansion of slavery into the new territories and economic opportunities for workers. John C. Fremont (CA) and William Dayton (NJ) were the Republican candidates for President and Vice-President.

1860 – Abraham Lincoln v. Stephen Douglas v. John C. Breckinridge v. John Bell



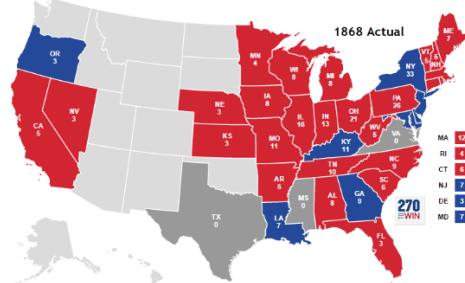
The Republican Party platform opposed slavery in the new territories, internal improvements, land grants through the Homestead Act, and a higher tariff. They nominated Abraham Lincoln for president and Senator Hannibal Hamlin of Maine for vice-president. William Seward (NY) was considered too radical. The Democratic Party was divided by three groups – northern Democrats, southern Democrats, and constitutional unity.

1864 -Abraham Lincoln v. George B. McClellan



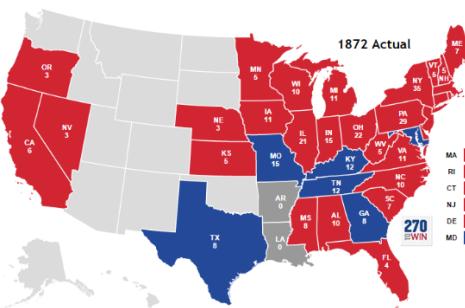
The election was during the Civil War. The Republican Party nominated President Abraham Lincoln and the Democratic Party General George McClellan. President Lincoln had removed Gen. George McClellan as commander-in-chief of the Army of the Potomac in 1862. The Radical Republicans favored Salmon Chase (Secretary of the Treasury) and Generals John C. Fremont and Benjamin Butler instead of Lincoln. The Democratic Party platform called for an end to the war and criticized Lincoln's handling of the war. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated shortly after his second inauguration and Andrew Johnson (TN) became the new president. This was the first election which allowed absentee ballots by mail for eligible male voters serving in the Union army.

1868 -Ulysses S. Grant v. Horace Seymour



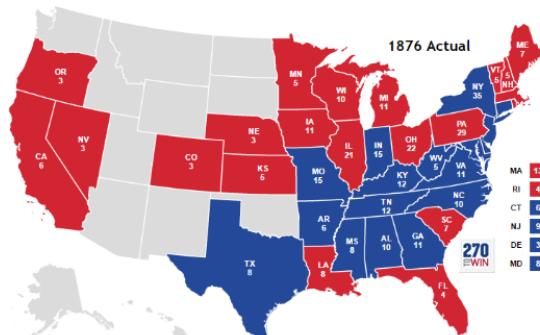
The issues in this election were on the Republican management of Reconstruction and black suffrage but it also focused on the character of the candidates. General Grant was a moderate on reconstruction but his views on military control and anti-Semitism were not popular. Horace Seymour was the Democratic governor of New York and supported greenback currency instead of gold. This was the first election where southern freedmen voted.

1872 – Ulysses S. Grant v. Horace Greeley



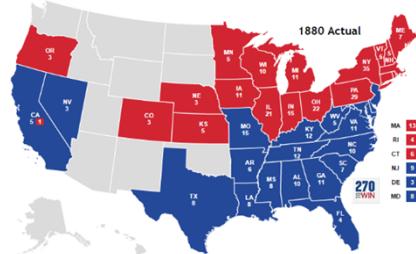
President Ulysses S. Grant ran against *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, the first businessman nominated to the presidency. The issues were related to the corruption scandals in Grant's administration, Reconstruction policies, utopian socialism vs. laissez-faire capitalism. Political cartoons were a new form of popular media in this campaign and they were effective in their criticism of Horace Greeley. The Republican Party received more than 3.5 million votes, the most any one political party received since 1789. On November 29, 1872, Horace Greeley died on November before the Electoral College votes were cast. This is the only election where a presidential candidate died during the election process. Although three electoral votes were cast for Horace Greeley, the majority of the votes by Democratic electors went to other candidates.

1876 – Rutherford B. Hayes v. Samuel Tilden



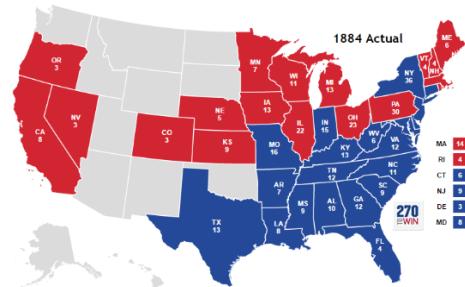
In 1876 the Republican Party nominated Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio for president and the Democratic Party nominated Samuel J. Tilden of New York. The Prohibition Party and the Greenback Party, also ran candidates. The country was divided over Reconstruction policies and the scandals in the Grant Administration. In 1874, the House of Representatives changed to a majority of members from the Democratic Party. Samuel Tilden won the popular vote over Rutherford B. Hayes by almost 250,000 votes. This election was challenged by a dispute over 20 electoral votes in South Carolina, Louisiana, Florida, and Oregon. The decision was rendered by a 'nonpartisan' committee of eight Republicans and seven Democrats. The House and Senate both accepted the decision by the committee to accept the Republican electoral votes in each state.

1880 – James Garfield v. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock



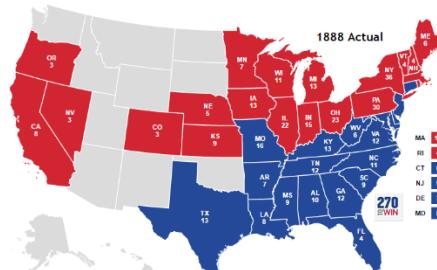
This election was partisan with the Republican Party casting 36 ballots before nominating Senator James Garfield for President. The Democratic Party candidate was General Winfield Scott Hancock. The main issues were the economy (currency), pensions for veterans, tariffs, immigration (exclusion of Chinese), and civil service reforms. James Garfield won the popular vote by less than 10,000 out of 9 million votes.

1884 – Grover Cleveland v. James Blaine



This election resulted in the first candidate of the Democratic Party being elected as president in 28 years. The Republican Party was divided into three groups: the Mugwumps, Stalwarts, and Moderates. The Republicans selected James Blaine, a former congressman from Maine, Speaker of the House, senator, and Secretary of State under President Garfield. The Democratic Party selected New York's Governor Grover Cleveland (born in NJ). The campaign involved the issue of the tariff, and the character of the candidates. James Blaine was associated with the Mulligan Letters (bribe) and Grover Cleveland, a bachelor, admitted to fathering a child out of wedlock. The Democratic Party was associated as the party of 'Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion. Grover Cleveland defeated James Blaine by only 63,000 votes and New York's 36 votes in the Electoral College gave Cleveland and the Democrats the presidency.

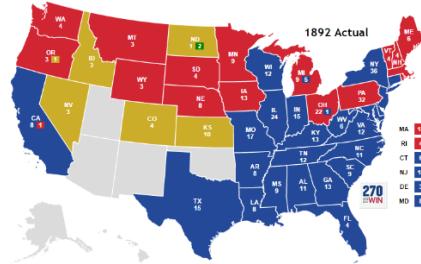
1888 – Grover Cleveland v. Benjamin Harrison



In this election the Democratic Party nominated incumbent Grover Cleveland for a second term and the Republican Party nominated Benjamin Harrison, senator from Indiana and grandson of former President William Henry Harrison. Grover Cleveland's running mate was Allen Thurman of Ohio, Thomas Hendricks, his Vice President died in office (1889) Benjamin Harrison selected Levi Morton as his Vice Presidential candidate. Levi Morton was from New York. He was an investment banker, ambassador to France during President Garfield's administration, and member of Congress. Grover Cleveland was born in Caldwell, NJ.

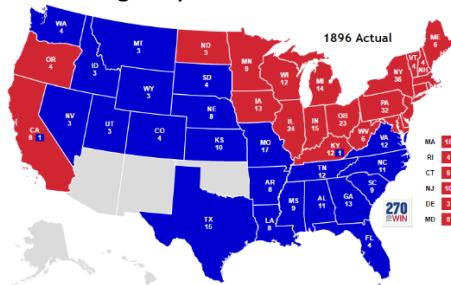
In the popular vote for President, Cleveland won with 5,540,050 votes to Harrison's 5,444,337 (less than 100,000) but Harrison received more votes in the Electoral College, 233 to Cleveland's 168. The campaign of 1888 helped establish the Republicans as the party of high tariffs, which most Democrats and farmers opposed. Civil War veterans (Grand Army of the Republic) disagreed with President Cleveland's veto of pension legislation and his support for returning Confederate battle flags captured during the Civil War.

1892 – Grover Cleveland v. Benjamin Harrison v. James Weaver



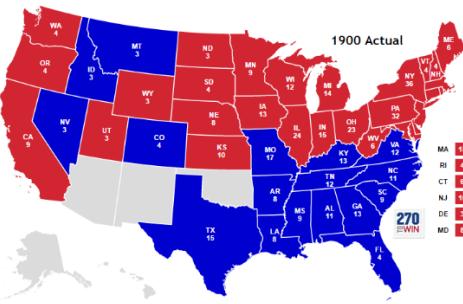
The Republican Party nominated incumbent Benjamin Harrison with Whitelaw Reid of New York as his running mate. The Democratic Party nominated former president Grover Cleveland and Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois as his running mate. The Populist Party nominated Gen. James B. Weaver of Iowa and James G. Field of Virginia for vice-president. The main issue was the tariff with the Republicans favoring a protective tariff and the Democratic Party a revenue tariff. The Populists called for government ownership of the railroads, a graduated income tax, silver currency, and an eight-hour day for workers. Cleveland received only 300,000 more popular votes than Harrison but James Weaver and the Populists received 1,027,329 votes.

1896 – William McKinley v. William Jennings Bryan v. Thomas Watson v. John Palmer



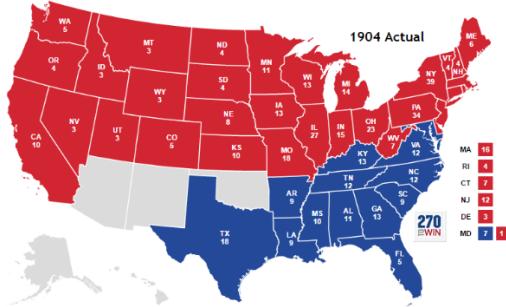
The Republican Party candidate was Congressman William McKinley who was known for his policies of a protective tariff and sound currency (gold). Garrett Hobart from Paterson, NJ was his running mate. (Garret Hobart will die in office) This position divided the Republican Party who supported Congressman William Jennings Bryan from Nebraska and silver currency. The Democratic Party was also divided and the Gold Democrats nominated John Palmer (IL). The Populists also supported Bryan but nominated Thomas Watson (GA) for Vice-President. McKinley campaigned locally and described the Democrats and Populists as radicals. The Republicans were supported by corporate and industrial interests.

1900 – William McKinley v. Adlai E. Stevenson



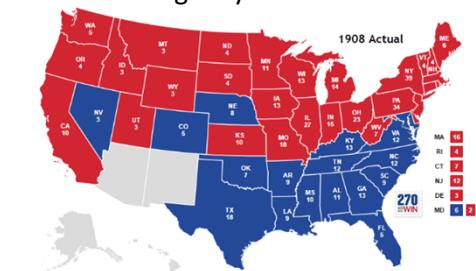
The Republicans nominated President William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt for Vice-President. The Democratic Party nominated William Jennings Bryan for President and Adlai E. Stevenson for Vice President. The issue was over the imperialistic foreign policy of William McKinley, especially America's involvement in the Philippines. William Jennings Bryan argued for the free coinage of silver while McKinley promised to continue the economic growth that occurred in his first term. William Jennings Bryan campaigned aggressively delivering over six hundred speeches. Most voters were more concerned with the economy than foreign policy issues and. McKinley was elected, receiving 7,219,530 popular votes to Bryan's 6,358,071. In the Electoral College the vote was 292 to 155.

1904 – Theodore Roosevelt v. Alton Parker



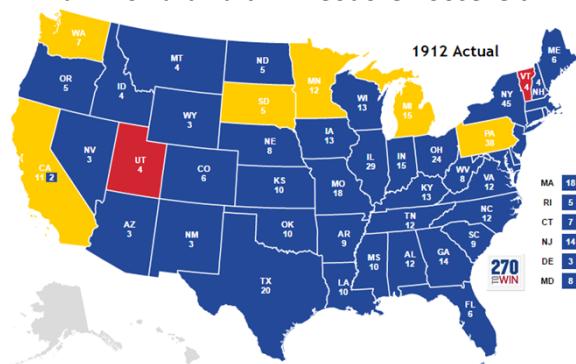
The Republican Party nominated the popular Theodore Roosevelt who became president after the assassination of William McKinley in September 1901. The Republican Party platform supported an anti-trust agenda. The Democratic Party platform supported moderate progressive reforms, gold currency, and attacked President Roosevelt's invitation of Booker T. Washington to the White House. Roosevelt won 7,628,461 popular votes to Parker's 5,084,223. He carried the Electoral College, 336 to 140, with only the South going Democratic.

1908 – William Howard Taft v. William Jennings Bryan



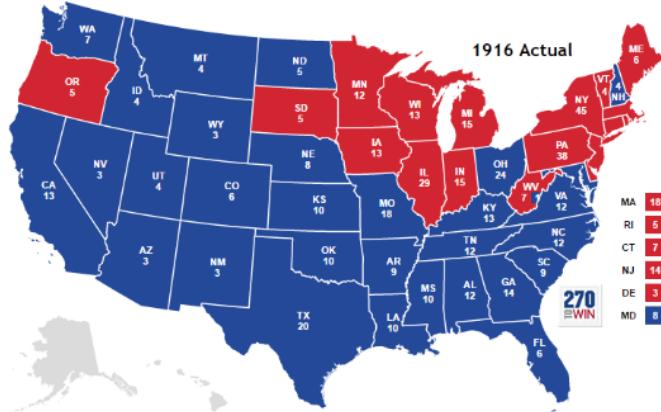
The Republican Party nominated Secretary of William Howard Taft for president and Representative James Schoolcraft Sherman of New York as his running mate. The Democratic Party chose William Jennings Bryan for President for the third time; his running mate was John Kern of Indiana. The issues focused on continuing the progressive reforms of President Roosevelt with business leaders endorsing Taft. Taft received 7,679,006 popular votes to Bryan's 6,409,106. Taft's margin in the Electoral College was 321 to 162.

1912 – Woodrow Wilson v. William Howard Taft v. Theodore Roosevelt v. Eugene Debs



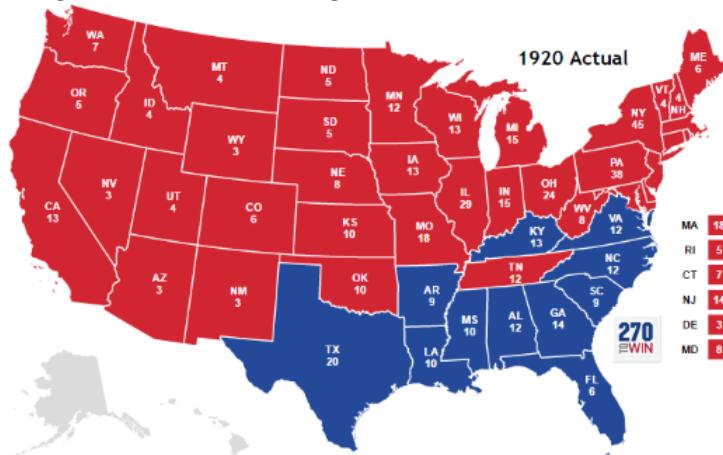
The Republicans were divided over the progressive reforms and nominated the incumbent William Howard Taft for a second term. Former President Theodore Roosevelt wanted the nomination and when it went to Taft, he formed the Bull Moose Party. The Democratic Party was also divided and nominated Gov. Woodrow Wilson (NJ) on the 46th ballot. The Socialist Party nominated Eugene V. Debs for president. The major issue was over the role of the federal government and progressivism. Wilson's New Freedom promoted regulations against monopolies and the support of smaller and independent businesses. Roosevelt's New Nationalism call for a strong federal government with regulatory powers. In the election Wilson received 6,293,120 to Roosevelt's 4,119,582, Taft's 3,485,082, and nearly 900,000 for Debs. In the Electoral College Wilson's victory was 435 to 88 for Roosevelt and 8 for Taft. If the Republican Party did not split, they would have likely won the presidency.

1916 – Woodrow Wilson v. Charles Evans Hughes



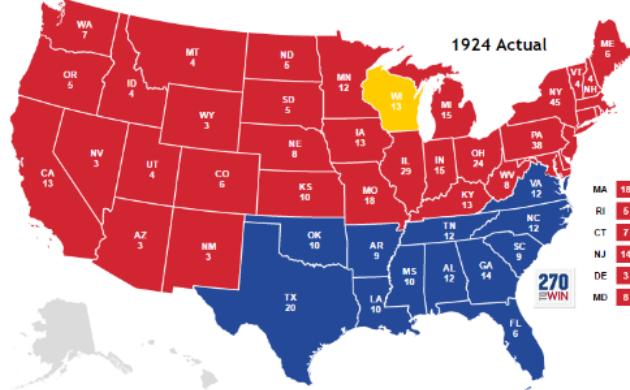
The Democratic Party nominated incumbent President Woodrow Wilson for a second term and Theodore Roosevelt supported the Republican Party candidate, Charles Evans Hughes. The major issue was World War I and the threat to the United States. President Wilson campaigned on American neutrality and his ability to keep us out of the war in Europe, although at times he was ambiguous. The election was close in both the popular and electoral vote. Wilson received 9,129,606 votes to Hughes's 8,538,221. Wilson also obtained a slim margin in the Electoral College, winning 277 to 254.

1920 – Warren G. Harding v. James M. Cox v. Eugene Debs



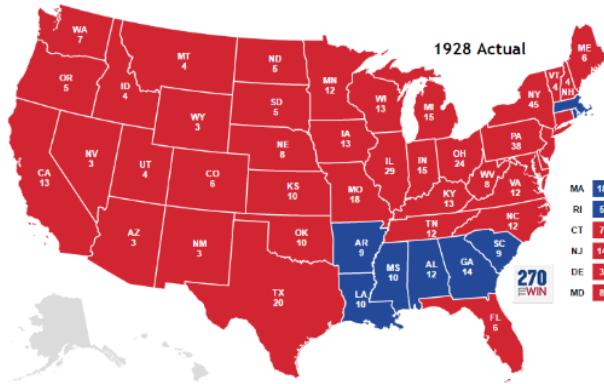
The Republican Party nominated Senator Warren G. Harding and adopted a conservative platform. Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge was nominated for vice-president based on his tough position of handling the Boston police strike of 1919. The Democratic Party nominated Governor James M. Cox, of Ohio, and Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York, Assistant Secretary of the Navy in the Wilson administration. The Socialist Party nominated Eugene V. Debs and Seymour Stedman of Ohio. Eugene Debs was serving a ten-year prison sentence for his June 16, 1918 speech against United States' involvement in World War 1. The issues were the health of President Woodrow Wilson, the flu pandemic, the League of Nations, and Harding's call for a 'return to normalcy' after World War 1. This was also the first election where women were eligible to vote. Harding's victory was decisive: 16,152,200 popular votes to Cox's 9,147,353. In the Electoral College Harding won by 404 to 127. Although in prison, Debs received more than 900,000 votes.

1924 – Calvin Coolidge v. Robert M. LaFollette v. John W. Davis



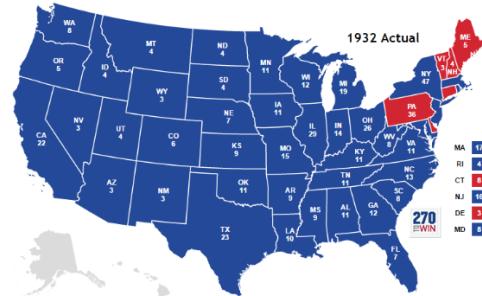
The Republican Party nominated incumbent President Calvin Coolidge who became president after the death of President Harding in 1923. Charles G. Dawes of Illinois was his running mate. The Republican Party was divided over the need for progressive reforms and nominated Senator Robert M LaFollette (age 69) and Senator Burton K Wheeler (MT) as his running mate. The issues were taxes, the direct election of the president by popular vote, and child labor. The Democratic Party nominated John W. Davis on the 103rd ballot and Charles W. Bryan, the younger brother of William Jennings Bryan as his running mate. John Davis is from West Virginia, served as ambassador to Great Britain under President Wilson, and is the adoptive father of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance under President Carter. Progressive Republicans nominated Robert M. La Follette (age 69) for president and chose Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana for Vice President. The issues were taxes on the wealthy, conservation, direct election of the president, and child labor laws. Coolidge's popular vote, 15,725,016, was greater than the combined votes for Davis and Lafollette.

1928 – Herbert Hoover v. Alfred E. Smith



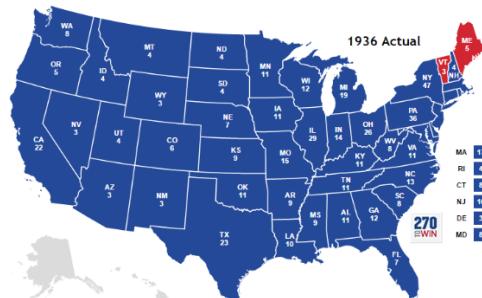
Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover of California was the candidate for the Republican party and Charles Curtis of Kansas was his running mate. The Democratic Party nominated Alfred E. Smith, Governor of New York, and Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas. The Eighteenth Amendment (Prohibition) and Roman Catholic faith of Al Smith were the major issues. Al Smith favored repeal of prohibition and Herbert Hoover favored conservative values and continued prosperity. Although Herbert Hoover's popular vote was substantial: 21,392,190 to Smith's 15,016,443, the Democratic Party dominated our twelve largest cities, representing a new trend in voting.

1932 – Herbert Hoover v. Franklin Delano Roosevelt



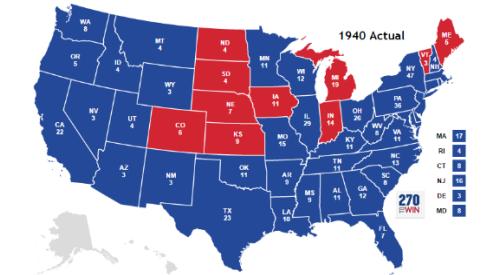
The United States was in its third year of the Great Depression in 1932 and the Democratic Party nominated Franklin D. Roosevelt, the governor of New York, for president and Senator John Nance Garner of Texas for Vice President. The platform called for the repeal of Prohibition and a reduction in federal spending. The Republican Party supported incumbent Herbert Hoover and a new Vice Presidential candidate, Charles Curtis. Hoover advocated for a balanced budget and the gold standard. However, FDR was a skilled campaigner expressing optimism. Roosevelt received 22,809,638 popular votes to 15,758,901 for President Hoover and took the Electoral College by 472 votes to 59. The Democratic Party won a majority in the House and Senate.

1936: Franklin D. Roosevelt v. Alfred M. Landon



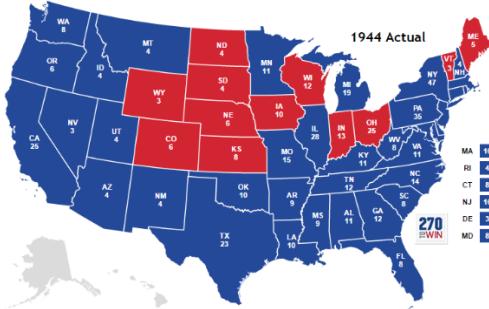
In 1936 the Democratic Party nominated President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Vice President John Nance Garner. The Republican Party, strongly opposed to the New Deal and “big government,” chose Governor Alfred M. Landon of Kansas and Fred Knox of Illinois. This election appealed to different groups of voters (the base) more than previous elections. The Republicans received the endorsement of the majority of newspapers and accused President Roosevelt of threatening democracy, and imposing a centralized state economy with the New Deal. President Roosevelt appealed to rural farmers, industrial laborers, urban voters, and Black Americans. President Roosevelt won in a landslide—27,751,612 popular votes to only 16,681,913 for Alfred Landon. The Republicans carried only Maine and Vermont with eight electoral votes; Roosevelt received the remaining 523.

1940 – Franklin D. Roosevelt v. Wendell Wilkie



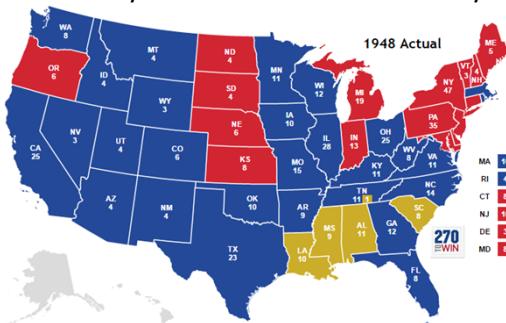
President Franklin D. Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term by a margin of nearly five million: 27,244,160 popular votes to Republican Wendell L. Willkie's 22,305,198. The President carried the Electoral College, 449 to 82. The new Vice President was Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace, who replaced John Nance Garner who disagreed with FDR's policies. Charles A. McNary was the Republican candidate for Vice President. The major issues were World War II and President Roosevelt seeking an unprecedented third term. The Republican Party's foreign policy position favored isolationism.

1944 – Franklin D. Roosevelt v. Thomas E. Dewey



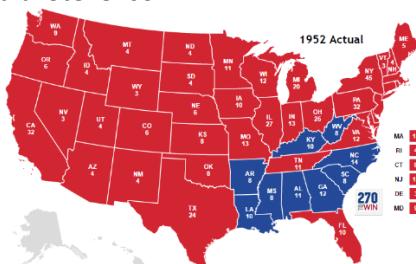
President Roosevelt won reelection to an unprecedented fourth term in the middle of World War 2. He selected Harry Truman as his running mate. The issues were the war, FDR's health (heart disease & blood pressure), his tolerance of communism, and seeking a fourth term. The strategy of FDR 'to not change horses in midstream' was effective and he received 25,602,504 votes to 22,006,285 for Thomas Dewey. The electoral vote was 432 to 99.

1948 – Harry Truman v. Thomas E. Dewey v. Strom Thurmond v. Henry Wallace



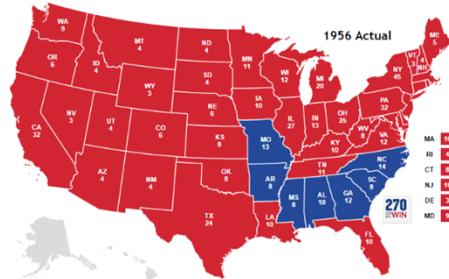
President Harry S. Truman, who had succeeded President Roosevelt after his death in 1945, stood for reelection on the Democratic ticket with Alben Barkley of Kentucky as his running mate. The major issues were civil rights and the new world order. The Democratic Party split over civil rights and formed the Dixiecrats. They nominated Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. A new Progressive party nominated FDR's former Vice-President Henry A. Wallace. The Republicans nominated two prominent governors: Thomas E. Dewey of NY for President and Earl Warren of California as Vice President. Harry Truman used the train for his famous 'whistle-stop' tour and although he was considered behind in the polls, he received 24,105,812 popular votes. Dewey received 21,970,065 and Thurmond and Wallace each received about 1.2 million votes. The Democratic victory in the Electoral College was more substantial: Truman beat Dewey 303 to 189; Strom Thurmond received 39 votes and Henry Wallace none.

1952 – Dwight D. Eisenhower v. Adlai Stevenson



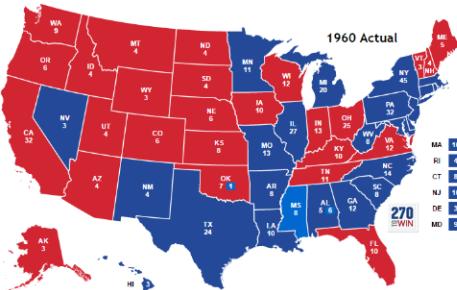
The Democratic Party nominated Governor Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois for president and Senator John Sparkman of Alabama as his running mate. The Republican Party nominated General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then president of Columbia University. Senator Richard M. Nixon (CA) was his running mate. The issues focused on the Korean War, communism, and the economy. President Eisenhower was popular and people had confidence in his ability to end the conflict in Korea. A scandal was publicized about Richard Nixon's use of campaign funds but an emotional and personal speech (Checkers speech) on television with his wife and dog worked in his favor. Eisenhower's victory was the largest in American political history with 33,936,234 popular votes and 442 electoral votes to Stevenson's 27,314,992 popular votes and 89 electoral votes.

1956 – Dwight D. Eisenhower v. Adlai E. Stevenson



The candidates were similar to the 1952 election even though President Eisenhower suffered a heart attack and had abdominal surgery during his first term. Former Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson selected Estes Kefauver (TN) as his running mate. The Cold War dominated the issues in the campaign, especially the fear of communism, Suez crisis, and the testing of nuclear weapons. The country was in a period of prosperity and relative peace.

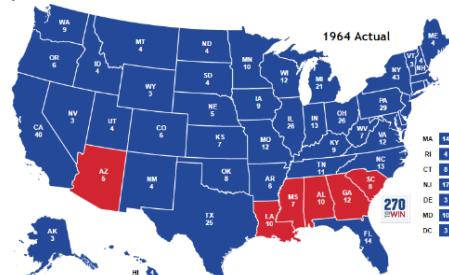
1960 – John F. Kennedy v. Richard M. Nixon



The Democratic Party nominated John F. Kennedy, a young (age 43) senator from Massachusetts, for President and Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas as his running mate. The Republicans nominated Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge as his running mate. The campaign was influenced by television and the presidential debates. Kennedy stressed what he claimed was a "missile gap" between the United States and the Soviet Union and civil rights issues. Kennedy was Roman Catholic which influenced many voters.

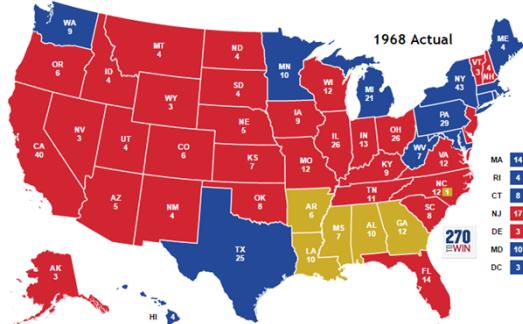
Kennedy won the presidency by a popular margin of less than 120,000, receiving 34,227,096 votes to Nixon's 34,107,646. Kennedy's victory in Illinois was only 9,000 votes and in Texas it was only 46,00 votes. Although Kennedy got 303 votes to Nixon's 219 in the Electoral College, if Nixon won Texas and Illinois, he would have been president. Kennedy was the first Roman Catholic and the youngest person to be elected President.

1964 – Lyndon B. Johnson v. Barry Goldwater



The Democratic Party nominated Lyndon B. Johnson who had succeeded to the presidency upon the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Johnson, the first president from the South since Andrew Johnson. Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota, was his running mate. The Republicans chose Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona for president and Congressman William E. Miller of New York for Vice President. The campaign focused on the escalating Vietnam War. Barry Goldwater, an ultraconservative, called for the bombing of North Vietnam and implied that the Social Security system should be dismantled. President Johnson campaigned for social reforms and a continuation of Kennedy's New Frontier. A television advertisement, the Daisy Ad, influenced many voters against Goldwater. Johnson won a decisive victory, polling 43,128,958 popular votes to 27,176,873 for Goldwater. In the Electoral College, he received 486 votes to Goldwater's 52.

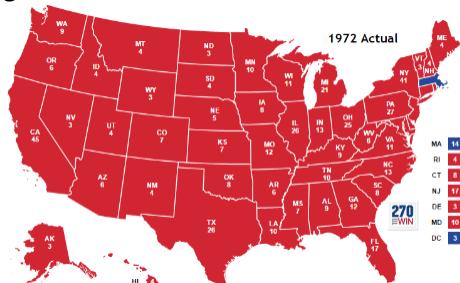
1968 – Richard M. Nixon v. Hubert H. Humphrey



1968 was a tumultuous year in both the United States and the world. The Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, space race, and protests dominated the issues. Opposition to the Vietnam war moved Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota to enter the Democratic race, followed by Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York. On March 31, 1968 President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. This prompted Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey to announce his candidacy. Kennedy assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan.

The Democratic Party nominated for president with Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine for vice president. The Republican Party nominated former vice president Richard M. Nixon for President and Spiro Agnew of Maryland as his running mate. The conservative American Independent Party nominated Governor George Wallace of Alabama, a segregationist, for president, and Air Force General Curtis LeMay of Ohio, who advocated using nuclear weapons in Vietnam, for Vice President. Nixon campaigned for law and order and said he had a "secret plan" to end the war. Wallace was highly critical of Supreme Court decisions that had broadened the Bill of Rights and civil rights for blacks. Humphrey supported most of Johnson's policies, including defeating the communists in Vietnam, but just before the election he said he would end American involvement in Vietnam. Nixon received 31,710,470 popular votes to 30,898,055 for Humphrey and 9,466,167 for Wallace. Nixon's received 302 votes in the Electoral College to 191 for Humphrey and 46 for Wallace.

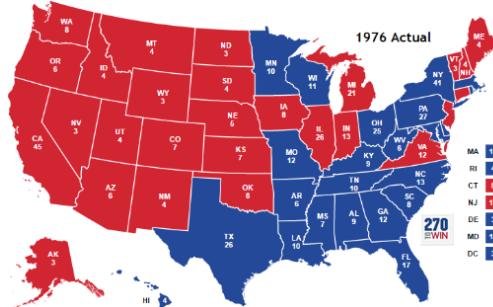
1972 – Richard M. Nixon v. George McGovern



In 1972 the Republicans nominated President Richard M. Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew. The Democrats, were divided over the war in Vietnam, and chose Senator George McGovern from South Dakota. Senator Thomas F. Eagleton of Missouri was the Vice Presidential candidate, but after it was reported that he received psychiatric treatments, he resigned from the ticket. McGovern named Sargent Shriver, Director of the Peace Corps, as his running mate.

The issues focused on Vietnam and the economy. Unemployment had leveled off and the inflation rate was declining. Two weeks before the November election, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger predicted inaccurately that the war in Vietnam would soon be over. During the campaign, a break-in occurred at Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., but it had little impact until after the election. The campaign ended in one of the greatest landslides in the nation's history. Nixon's popular vote was 47,169,911 to McGovern's 29,170,383, and the Republican victory in the Electoral College 520 to 17. Only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia voted for McGovern.

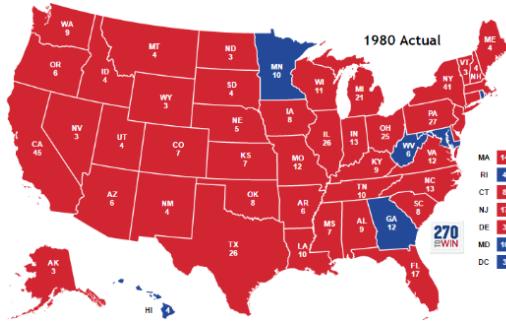
1976 – Jimmy Carter v. Gerald Ford



In 1976 the Democratic Party nominated former governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia for president and Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota for vice president. The Republicans chose President Gerald Ford and Senator Robert Dole of Kansas. Richard M. Nixon had appointed Ford, a congressman from Michigan, as vice president to replace Spiro Agnew, who had resigned amid charges of corruption. Ford became President when Nixon resigned in August 1974.

In the campaign, Carter ran as an outsider who would bring change (decency, trust, integrity) to Washington. Ford tried to justify his pardoning Nixon as well as to overcome the disgrace many thought the Republicans had brought to the presidency. The issue of Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe and the economy, which was just coming out of a recession, were other issues. The 1976 election had only 54% of eligible voters casting votes at the polls. This was the lowest turnout since the end of World War II. Carter and Mondale won a narrow victory, 40,828,587 popular votes to 39,147,613 and 297 electoral votes to 241. The Democratic Party controlled both the White House and Congress.

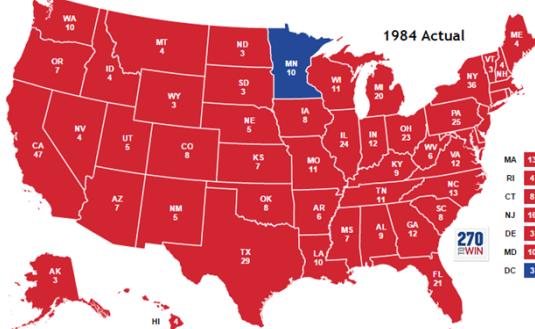
1980 – Ronald Reagan v. Jimmy Carter v. John Anderson



The Democratic Party re-nominated President Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale for a second term. Ronald Reagan, former governor of California, received the Republican nomination, and his chief challenger, George Bush, became the vice-presidential nominee. Representative John B. Anderson of Illinois ran as an independent with Patrick J. Lucey, former Democratic governor of Wisconsin, as his running mate. The two major issues of the campaign were the economy and the Iran Hostage Crisis. President Carter seemed unable to control inflation (12.5%), lower the high unemployment rate of 7% and had not succeeded in obtaining the release of American hostages in Tehran.

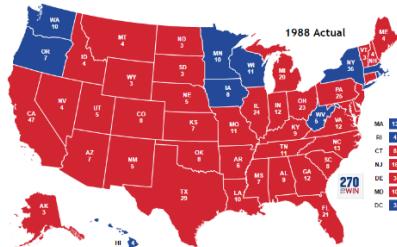
Reagan won a landslide victory, and Republicans gained control of the Senate for the first time in twenty-five years. Reagan received 43,904,153 popular votes in the election, and Carter, 35,483,883. Reagan won 489 votes in the Electoral College to Carter's 49. John Anderson won no electoral votes, but got 5,720,060 popular votes.

1984 – Ronald Reagan v. Walter Mondale



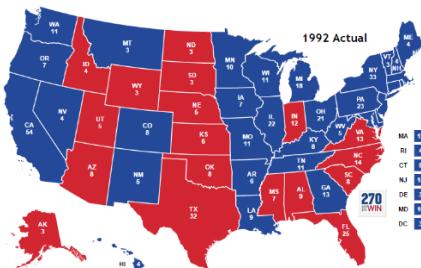
In 1984 the Republicans re-nominated Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Former Vice President Walter Mondale was the Democratic choice, having turned aside challenges from Senator Gary Hart of Colorado and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Mondale chose Representative Geraldine Ferraro of New York for his running mate. This was the first time a major party nominated a woman. The major issues were the economy and the arms race. 56% of the women voted for Ronald Reagan rather than Geraldine Ferraro. nomination did not overcome a perceived gender gap, as 56 percent of voting women chose Reagan. Reagan won a decisive victory, carrying all states except Minnesota, Mondale's home state, and the District of Columbia. He received 54,455,074 popular votes to Mondale's total of 37,577,185. In the Electoral College the count was Reagan, 525 and Mondale, 13.

1988 – George H.W. Bush v. Michael Dukakis



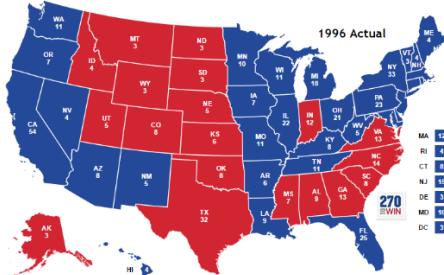
The Republican party nominated Vice-President George H.W. Bush and he selected Senator Dan Quayle (IN) as his running mate. The Democratic Party nominated Governor Michael Dukakis (MA) and Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas for Vice President. The major issues were continuing the patriotism, a promise of no new taxes, trade, opposition to abortion, criminal justice reforms, and education. Bush and Quayle won 48,886,097 popular votes to 41,809,074 for Dukakis and Bentsen and carried the Electoral College, 426 to 111.

1992 – Bill Clinton v. George H.W. Bush v. H. Ross Perot



In 1991 incumbent President George H. W. Bush's approval ratings reached 88 percent, the highest in presidential history up to that point. But his approval rating declined sharply as the election came closer. The Republican Party re-nominated George H.W. Bush and Dan Quayle for a second term. The Democratic Party nominated former Governor Bill Clinton for President and as his running mate. The key issues were the economy, budget deficit, trade, and the soul of America. Ross Perot and Ralph Nader ran as independent candidates. Although Perot came in a distant third, he was still the most successful third-party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. President Bush ran a lackluster campaign (in one of the national debates he was caught looking at his watch) and Bill Clinton proved to be a talented campaigner appearing on numerous television talk shows. Bill Clinton won the popular vote 44,908,254 (Clinton) to 39,102,343 (Bush) and the Electoral College vote was 370 (Clinton) to 168 (Bush)

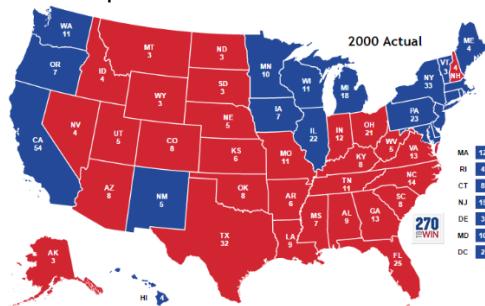
1996 – Bill Clinton v. Robert Dole. V. H. Ross Perot v. Ralph Nader



Although Clinton won a decisive victory, he only won four Southern states, signaling a decline in Southern support for Democrats. In the elections of 2000 and 2004, Democrats did not carry any Southern states. The 1996 election was the most lavishly funded up to that point. The combined amount spent by the two major parties for all federal candidates topped \$2 billion, which was 33 percent more than what was spent in 1992. The Democratic National Committee was accused of accepting donations from Chinese contributors and 17 people were later convicted for this illegal activity. The Republicans nominated Senator Robert Dole (age 73) and Jack Kemp (NY) as his running mate.

The key issues were the Contract with America agenda that was influential in the Republican party winning a majority in both houses of Congress in 1994. However, an improving economy, Clinton's appeal to suburban voters (soccer Moms), and fear that the conservative Republicans would cut Medicare and federal funding for education. Bill Clinton was defined as the "Comeback Kid!" Bill Clinton won the popular Vote: 45,590,703 (Clinton) to 37,816,307 (Dole) and the Electoral College vote was 379 (Clinton) to 159 (Dole). This was the first election since FDR where the Democratic Party candidate for President won a second term in the White House. (In 1960, Johnson was the V.P. candidate although he was elected in 1964)

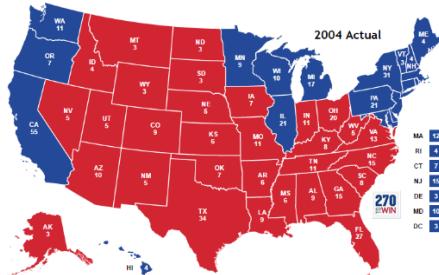
2000 – George W. Bush v. Al Gore v. Ralph Nader



The 2000 election was the fourth election in U.S. history in which the winner of the electoral votes did not carry the popular vote. It was the first such election since 1888, when Benjamin Harrison became president after winning more electoral votes but losing the popular vote to Grover Cleveland. The Republican Party nominated Gov. George W. Bush (TX) and Senator Dick Cheney (WY) was his running mate. The Democratic Party nominated Vice President Al Gore for President and Senator Joe Lieberman (CT) as his running mate. Al Gore conceded on election night but retracted his concession the next day when he learned that the vote in Florida was too close to call. At the time the recount was stopped by the Florida Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court, Bush led by 537 votes.

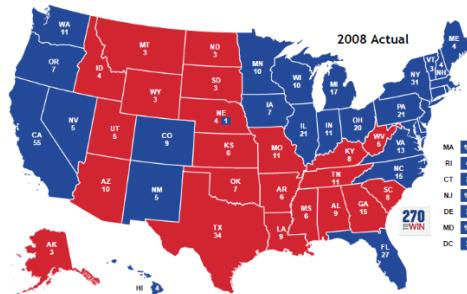
Although the key issues were the environment and education, the character and qualifications of both candidates became major issues. Gore criticized the lack of national experience of George W. Bush and a report was published a few days before the election that Gov. Bush was fined for a DUI charge years ago. Bush criticized Al Gore as someone who had his chance for eight years to implement reforms and his body language in the national debates was a distraction. Political activist Ralph Nader ran on the Green Party ticket and captured 2.7 percent of the vote. Al Gore won the popular Vote by only 531,520 votes. 50,996,582 (Gore) to 50,465,062 (Bush). George W. Bush won the Electoral College by one vote, after the Supreme Court ruled the recount of votes unconstitutional! 271 (Bush) to 266 (Gore). Voter turnout was low.

2004 – George W. Bush v. John Kerry



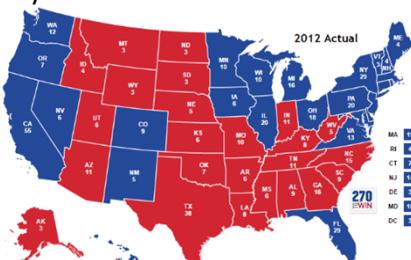
Total voter turnout for the 2004 presidential election numbered at about 120 million, an impressive 15 million increase from the 2000 vote. The Republican Party re-nominated George W. Bush with Dick Cheney as his running mate. The Democratic Party nominated Senator John Kerry (MA) for president with Senator John Edwards (NC) as his running mate. The key issues were the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the war on terror following 9/11, immigration and education issues, and Social Security and Medicare. President Bush won the popular vote with 60,693,281 (Bush) to 57,355,978 (Kerry). Electoral College: 286 (Bush) to 251 (Kerry)

2008 – Barack Obama v. John McCain



In this historic election, Senator Barack Obama became the first African-American to become president and Joe Biden became the first Roman Catholic Vice President. The primary race was a close contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Clinton advocated her experience in government and Obama as the candidate who could bring needed changes. The Republican Party nominated Senator John McCain (also a Vietnam POW) for President and Governor Sarah Palin (Alaska) as his running mate. The key issues were health care insurance for all Americans, the economic crisis (Great Recession), tax reforms for people in the lower and middle classes, the environment, and ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Barack Obama won the popular vote with 69,297,997 to 59,597,520 for McCain. In the Electoral College Obama received 365 votes to 173 for McCain.

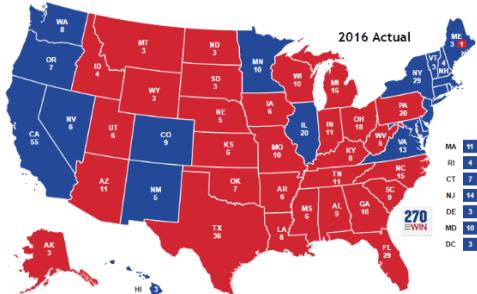
2012 – Barack Obama v. Mitt Romney



Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, the first Mormon to receive a major party's nomination, fought off a number of Republican challengers in the primary, while the incumbent Obama faced no challengers. The election, the first waged following the "Citizens United" Supreme Court decision that allowed for increased political contributions. The Vice-Presidential candidates were Joe Biden (D) and Representative Paul Ryan (WI). Although the issues of higher taxes on the wealthy, the government's response to handling the devastating effects of Hurricane Sandy, immigration and the improving economy (Unemployment dropped below 8% for the first time), the campaign focused on the performance of the candidates in the televised debates and personal attacks.

President Obama received 65,915,795 votes to 60,933,504 for Senator Romney). In the Electoral College President Obama received 332 to 206 for Romney.

2016 – Donald J. Trump v. Hillary Clinton



The 2016 election was unconventional in its level of divisiveness. Former first lady, New York Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton became the first woman to be nominated by a major party in a U.S. presidential election. Donald Trump, a New York real estate businessman and reality TV star, was quick to mock fellow Republicans running for the nomination and the mistakes made by Hillary Clinton in using her private computer for government emails and her mishandling of the terror attack on the U.S. embassy in Libya. Although Donald Trump lost the popular vote by 2.8 million votes, he won in Electoral College with 306 votes to 232 for Hillary Clinton.

2020 – Donald J. Trump v. Joe Biden

The Republican Party re-nominated incumbent President Donald Trump and Vice President Michael Pence. The Democratic Party nominated former Vice President Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as his running mate. Kamala Harris is the first Asian American (India) nominated as Vice President. The key issues in this election are the handling of the global pandemic, taxes and the high unemployment rate due to the pandemic, law and order, systemic racism and social justice for minorities, and the leadership of President Trump. Related issues are on the environment, education, health care insurance, student debt, and a living wage. This will be an unconventional election because the pandemic has restricted campaign rallies and events and a significant number of voters will likely cast their ballots by mail.

Surprise or Unpredictable Events and Issues in America's Elections:

Kansas Nebraska Act in 1954 and popularity of the Republican Party

Demand for Free Silver by the Populists

Johnson's withdrawal to seek re-election in 1968

Great Recession 2008

Pandemic 2020

Additional Resources:

[Interactive Time Map of how the Electoral College voted since 1824](#) (Time)

[Historical Elections Timeline and Historical Summary](#) (270 to Win)

[Presidential Elections](#) (History.com)

[U.S. Supreme Court: *Chiafalo v. Washington*](#) (2020)