

Think Critically

1. **Conclude** Why do you think only one-third of senators are up for election every two years?

2. **Compare** What is the difference between a primary election and a general election?

Mark the Text



3. Underline what voters can do in some states if they want to change the state constitution.

networks Read Chapter 11 Lesson 2 in your textbook or online.

Types of Elections

There are more than a half million elected officials in the United States today. All of these people had to run for office. To do so they had to understand the election process. The basic steps of that process are fairly simple.

The first step in most states is to win the primary election. A primary is usually held in the spring or summer. The purpose of the primary is to pick candidates for the general election in November.

There are times when none of the candidates wins a majority of votes in the primary. In this case, a runoff primary is held. The winner of the runoff goes on to run in the general election.

The general election is held on the same day across the country. This day is always the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. National elections are held in even-numbered years. Elections for the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate are held every two years. Elections for president are held every four years. State and local officials are usually elected at the same time.

During an election, people are often also asked to vote on issues. An **issue** is a matter of public interest. For example, if a city council wants to raise money to build a new school, the council may put the issue on a ballot. The voters decide if the money gets raised for the school or not.

There are two ways that voters can have a direct voice in government. The chart below explains these methods.

Initiative	process that lets voters propose new laws or amendments to state constitutions
Referendum	process that allows voters to accept or reject a law passed by the state legislature

In an initiative, a certain number of voters must sign a petition. The petition asks for a new law. If enough people sign the petition, the proposal is put on the ballot.

Some states also allow **recall** elections. These are special elections in which voters can remove a person from office. A recall begins with a petition. If enough people sign the petition, a recall vote is held. If the people vote to remove the official, another special election is held to find a replacement. Special elections may also be held to fill an office if an elected official has died or resigned.

Presidential Elections

The election of the president is different from other elections. The president is not elected directly by the people. When people vote for president, they are really voting for electors. These electors make up the **Electoral College**. The Electoral College actually chooses the president and vice president. The diagram will help you understand how this works.

1. The general election for president takes place in **November**. In most states, the candidate who wins the most popular votes in the general election wins all of that state's electoral votes.



2. In **December** the electors meet and cast their ballots. They send the results to the Senate.



3. In **January** the House and Senate meet in joint session to officially count the votes.



4. The candidate who wins a majority of the electoral votes (at least 270 of 538) wins the election.

Each state has the same number of electors in the Electoral College as it has members of Congress. The District of Columbia also has three electors. There are 538 in all. The purpose of the popular vote is to choose these electors. The **popular vote** is the vote cast by the people in the general election. The winning electors then choose the president. Because of this system, candidates for president spend most of their time and money in high-population states that have large numbers of electors.

Some people do not like the Electoral College system. They especially dislike that it is a **winner-take-all system**. The winner of the popular vote in each state gets all of that state's electoral votes. This is true even if the candidate wins by only a few votes.

It is possible for a person who wins the popular vote in a presidential election to not get enough electoral votes to become president. This has happened four times. It also means that it is hard for third-party candidates to win electoral votes even though they may have won millions of popular votes.

The Electoral College system was set up by the Constitution. The Framers settled on this system as a compromise. Some thought the people should have direct control of the

Mark the Text



4. Underline the sentence that tells who elects the president of the United States.

Think Critically

5. **Sequence** What happens between the general election and a candidate actually winning the election?

Show Your Skill

6. **Identify Cause and Effect**

How could a candidate for president win the popular vote but lose the election?

Take the Challenge

7. Do you think the Electoral College is a good way to elect the president? Make a colorful poster that expresses your opinion. Include your reasons for your opinion.