



Behind the Ballot

In a democracy like ours, voting isn't just a right—it's a responsibility. It's how you make your voice heard and make choices about how you think things should be done in government. In this badge, you'll explore the importance of voting and find out about the electoral process in the United States and around the world.

Steps

1. Find out more about elections
2. Investigate the ins and outs of voting
3. Get out the vote
4. Plan a campaign
5. Explore voting in other countries

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know the importance of voting and how people get elected to office.

“Our country needs women’s idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else.”

—Shirley Chisholm,
American politician,
educator, and author

Close Calls in History

Candidates might win the popular vote, but it's the electoral vote that counts.

1824: ANDREW JACKSON won the popular vote, but received less than 50 percent of the electoral votes, so the House of Representatives named John Quincy Adams as president.

1876: SAMUEL TILDEN won the popular vote, but Rutherford B. Hayes received 185 electoral votes to Tilden's 184.

1888: GROVER CLEVELAND won the popular vote, but Benjamin Harrison received 233 electoral votes to Cleveland's 168.

2000: AL GORE won the popular vote, but George Bush received 271 electoral votes to Gore's 266.

STEP 1

Find out more about elections

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

Elections are how we choose leaders and vote on how we want things done in our country. Find out the basics of how elections operate with one of the following choices.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Compare political platforms.** Compare the platforms of two of our country's earliest political parties, such as the Federalists, Anti-Federalists, and Whigs. Now select two parties from a recent election and compare their platforms. What changes or similarities do you see with the parties' beliefs from then to today?

OR

- Create an election flow chart.** What happens from the time a politician declares candidacy to Election Day? Focus on the most recent national election, and chart one campaign from the date of declaration to Election Day. If the candidate won, chart when they took office and what happened in between. Watch how power is transferred from the incumbent to the newly elected official.

OR

- Compare local, state, and national elections.** Research the basic processes for local, state, and national elections. For one you might be electing a mayor, another your governor or state senator, and for another, the president. How often do you vote for each elected position? What are the differences between the three elections? What is the difference between a primary and a general election? Make a chart for your research.

More to Explore

Understand the Electoral College. When Americans vote for a president and vice president, they're actually voting for presidential electors, known collectively as the Electoral College. It is these electors, chosen by the people, who then formally elect the chief executive. Find out more about the Electoral College and the electors. How many electors are assigned to each state? What is the origin of the system?



The Iowa Caucuses

When political party members gather to make policy decisions and select candidates, it is called a caucus. A caucus is held in Iowa every two years. On the years when a presidential election is being held, the Iowa caucus is a major political event. The state's caucus is the first in the country, and any Iowa voter who is a registered Democrat or Republican can participate. This means that the Iowa caucus is the first chance for politicians to see how voters will respond to a political candidate. Presidential hopefuls spend months campaigning throughout the state. If a politician does badly in the Iowa caucus, they may even drop out of the presidential race.



Why do we vote in November?

Federal elections are held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November in even-numbered years; presidential elections are held every four years. November was originally picked because the harvest was in and farmers could take time off to vote. Also, travel was easier throughout the North before winter set in.

STEP**2 Investigate the ins and outs of voting**

Discover details on the simple but very important process of voting by completing one of the choices below.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Visit a voter-registration office.** Find a place where you can get voter information, such as a voter-registration office, a government office, or the League of Women Voters. Ask a staff member what the qualifications are for voting in your state. Find out how to declare a party identity. Do you need to? What does declaring a party identity mean for your voting?

OR -----

- Visit a polling place.** Join someone who's eligible to vote, and go to a polling place to observe the process. Where are the ballots filled out? What type of ballots are they? Talk to a polling place staff member and get the full scope of where the ballots go and how they are counted—including write-in votes and absentee ballots.

OR -----

- Explore voter technology.** Find out how voting technology methods vary from state to state, from the manual punch-card system to an electronic ballot marker. What new technologies were used in the last election? How do people who are differently abled vote? Explore the movement toward voting on the Internet. What are the pros and cons? You might seek information about online voting on the Government Computer News site (GCN.com).

More to Explore

Volunteer to work with voter registration drives.



**Member of the
House of
Representatives**

ADDRESS:
The Honorable
Jane Jones

GREETING:
Dear Ms. Jones:

U.S. Senator

ADDRESS:
The Honorable
Mary Diaz

GREETING:
Dear Senator Diaz:

U.S. Judge

ADDRESS:
Madam Sandra
Day O'Conner

GREETING:
Dear Madam Justice:

Contacting Elected Officials

The contact information for all of your state's elected officials is available online. If there's an issue that concerns you, get in touch! If you decide to write a letter or e-mail, learn as much as you can about both sides of the issue—then start with the correct title and greeting for the official. Here are some examples.

Some tips to keep in mind as you're writing your letter:

- Give your name and the reason you're writing
- If you're writing about a specific bill, use its name or number
- Explain why you are concerned about the issue
- Keep your letter brief and polite
- Include your return address, and ask for a response

You may not receive a response right away—or it might be from an aide—but you'll know you did your part to have a voice in your government's decisions.

Women and the Vote

Suffrage is the right to vote—a right women earned on August 26, 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was finally ratified after an arduous 100-year battle. And it all came down to one man's vote.

Thirty-five of the necessary 36 states had ratified the amendment. The final vote was up to Harry Burn, a 24-year-old legislator from Nashville, Tennessee.

Although Burn was anti-suffrage, his mother urged him to vote for it. And mother knows best. Burn voted yes, and the rest is history.

STEP 3 Get out the vote

Voting is the most important right we have. If you're 18 or older, you're eligible to vote. Yet in the 2004 election, just over half of the approximately 44 million eligible young voters (under age 30) filled out a ballot. And in 2008, only 56.8 percent of all eligible voters turned up at the polls. That's a lot of voices going unheard!

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) provides statistics on voter turnout. Look at statistics for the last three elections in your area to help inform your work in this step. Target a demographic that needs encouragement in your area, and do one of the choices.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Research and create a poster.** On it, explain the "Motor Voter" legislation, which makes it easy for most Americans to register.
OR -----
- Make a voter reminder calendar showing when elections are held locally.** On the calendar, you might include nonpartisan websites and reference sites where new voters can get solid information about candidates and issues.
OR -----
- Educate!** Take a sample ballot from a recent election, and paste it up (either online or on a poster board) with callouts to indicate what people voted for. Highlight the winners, and include data about the number of people who voted for each candidate or issue.

The 26th Amendment

The 26th Amendment to the Constitution made 18 the legal voting age. One of the reasons it was passed was because, prior to 1971, 18-year-olds were being drafted to fight in the military, yet they couldn't vote.

STEP 4 Plan a campaign

Get an up-close look at what it's like to campaign for an elected office with one of the choices below.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

- Make a sample campaign budget.** Include travel costs, staff and polling costs, and potential contributors. Ask for advice from someone knowledgeable about campaign finance—or check out the Federal Election Commission website to see how much money your senator or representative raised and spent for his or her most recent campaign.
- OR -----
- Create a campaign ad.** First study campaign ads from three recent elections. Are they negative? Warm and fuzzy? Or a bit of both? Now develop your own print or video campaign ad—and make a campaign slogan!
- OR -----
- Find a platform and write a speech.** First read campaign speeches by three winning politicians. What is their core message? Do they use any catchphrases? Now write a campaign speech as though you were running for a local office or for student council.

More to Explore

Make a campaign song or a political cartoon. President Franklin Roosevelt's song was "Happy Days Are Here Again," and President Bill Clinton campaigned to the rock song "Don't Stop Thinkin' About Tomorrow" by Fleetwood Mac. You could write your own song or find an existing one that fits your campaign theme. Or what about a cartoon? Political cartoons can be an effective way to make a point about a candidate or party. Take a look at works by famous political cartoonists, such as Thomas Nast from the 1880s. Did you know that Dr. Seuss also drew political cartoons? Check out the differences between some of the older cartoons and the newer ones. If you're inspired, draw your own cartoon based on a current political issue.



Careers to Explore

Elected official
Lobbyist
Lawyer
Judge
Speechwriter
Campaign manager
Political or opinion writer
Editor for online political journal
White House press secretary
White House press correspondent
Political correspondent
Political science professor
Advocate, activist, or organizer
Policy analyst
Legislative analyst
Public-affairs specialist
Congressional office staff member
Community-relations director
Fund-raiser
Events planner
Communications director
Foreign-service officer
High school government teacher
Political commentator
Pollster





TOP OFFICE CONTENDERS

These women have made a run for U.S. president or vice president. We haven't seen a woman in the Oval Office yet—but it's only a matter of time!

Victoria Woodhull

was a well-known feminist and the first woman (along with her sister) to work as a Wall Street broker. In 1872, the Equal Rights Party nominated her for president. She is considered by many to be the first woman to run for president, despite the fact that she was under 35 and the government did not print her name on the ballot.

Margaret Chase Smith

was the first woman to be elected to both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. In 1964, at the Republican National Convention, she became the first woman to have her name placed in nomination for the U.S. Presidency by a major political party. She lost the nomination to Barry Goldwater.

Shirley Chisholm

was the first African American woman elected to Congress. In 1972, she made history again, declaring her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for president. She got her name on 12 primary ballots, making her the first African American on the ballot as a major-party presidential candidate. She was also the first woman to run for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Pat LaMarche

is a politician, writer, and radio host from Maine. She was the vice presidential nominee for the United States Green Party in 2004. She ran with presidential candidate David Cobb.



Geraldine Ferraro

was the first woman—and the first Italian American—to be nominated by a major political party as its candidate for vice president. She ran on the Democratic ticket with Walter Mondale in 1984, but lost the election to Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.

Elizabeth Dole

ran for the Republican nomination for president in the 2000 election. Though she pulled out of the race before any of the election primaries, in 2003 she became the first woman to serve as a senator from North Carolina. She served until 2009.

Sarah Palin

made history as the first female vice-presidential nominee of the Republican Party. She ran with presidential candidate John McCain in 2008. McCain lost the election to Barack Obama.

Hillary Clinton

has come closer than any other woman to winning the presidential nomination of a major U.S. political party. She came in second in the 2008 Democratic primaries, losing to Barack Obama in one of the closest primary races in history.

STEP 5 Explore voting in other countries

The U.S. isn't the only country that elects its leaders by popular vote. But elections have different rules and procedures all over the world. Check out how citizens in other countries vote with one of the choices below.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

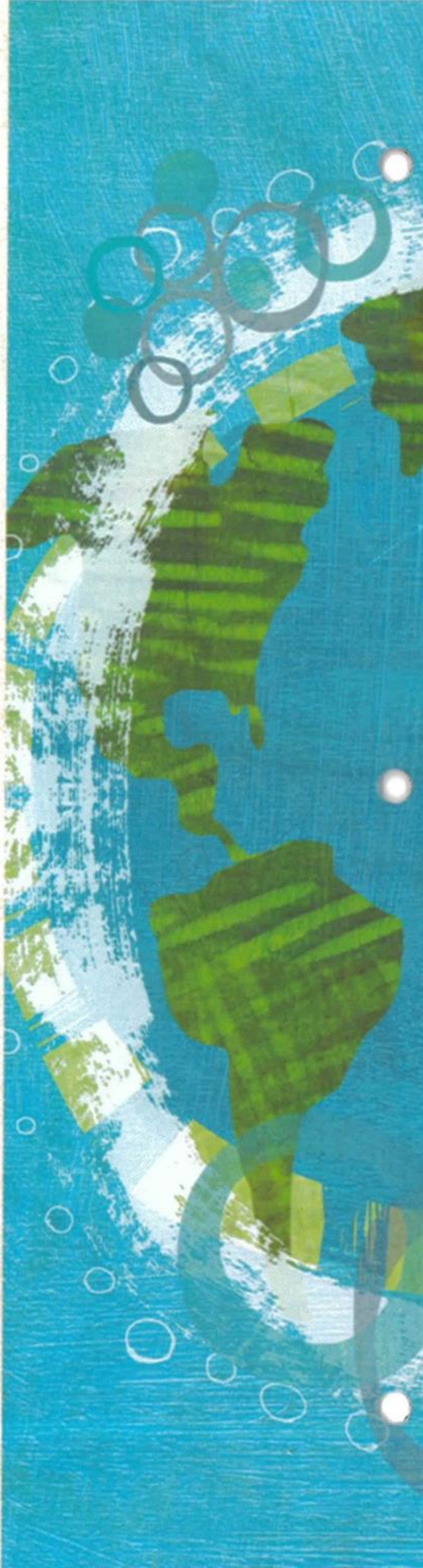
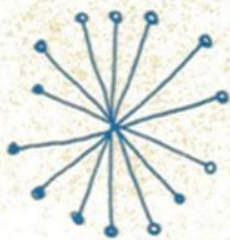
- Explore voting procedures abroad.** Pick three countries from different regions, and describe their voting procedures. What type of voting technology do they use? Where are their polling places, and how are they regulated? Who is eligible to vote?

OR

- Follow a foreign election.** Identify a country currently undergoing campaigns and elections. Follow the candidates up through election day. Track the front-runners and their platforms. What was the election outcome? Was it expected?

OR

- Explore women voting or female leaders abroad.** Track female presidents, prime ministers, and heads of state in countries worldwide. How many female leaders are there? What are their roles? Historically, which countries are most likely to have female leaders? Or take a look at female voting. Which countries still prevent women from voting, and why? Which countries have the highest female voter turnout? The lowest? (You might want to check www.accuratedemocracy.com/d_datac.htm for information.)



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN IN POWER

In 1960, Sirivamo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka became the world's first female elected prime minister. In 1974, Argentina elected Isabel Perón as the first female president. Each of the following women held the highest political position in her country for the years listed. Some were elected, and some were appointed. How many of these names are familiar to you?

Corazon Aquino
PHILIPPINES
President, 1986–1992

Agatha Barbara
MALTA
President, 1982–1987

Gro Harlem Brundtland
NORWAY
Prime Minister, 1981,
1986–1989, 1990–1996

Benazir Bhutto
PAKISTAN
Prime Minister, 1988–1990,
1993–1996

Helen Clark
NEW ZEALAND
Prime Minister, 1999–2008

Dame Eugenia Charles
DOMINICA
Prime Minister, 1980–1995

Mireya Elisa Moscoso de Arias
PANAMA
President, 1999–2004

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir
ICELAND
President, 1980–1996

Indira Gandhi
INDIA
Prime Minister, 1966–1977,
1980–1984

Tara Kaarina Halonen
FINLAND
President, 2000–present

Maria Liberia-Peters
NETHERLANDS ANTILLES
Prime Minister, 1984–1986,
1988–1993

Golda Meir
ISRAEL
Prime Minister, 1969–1974

Mary Robinson
IRELAND
President, 1990–1997



Margaret Thatcher
GREAT BRITAIN
Prime Minister, 1979–1990

Mary McAleese
IRELAND
President, 2007–present

Angela Merkel
GERMANY
Chancellor, 2005–present

Jennifer Smith
BERMUDA
Prime Minister, 1998–2003

Vaira Vike-Freiberga
LATVIA
President, 1999–2007

Sheikh Hasina Wajed
BANGLADESH
Prime Minister, 1996–2001,
2009–present





Add the Badge to Your Journeys

Keep your eyes and ears open for the obstacles that may get in the way of adults in your community voting. Is there enough transportation? Child care? Are new citizens intimidated by the process? What else might keep people from voting? Keep an idea bank for potential Take Action projects.

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Running for office at my school or on a committee
- Working on a campaign
- Helping a younger girl understand the importance of voting



I'm inspired to: