**2016 Presidential Primary Info**

“Now more than ever before, the people are responsible for the character of their Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless, and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate ignorance, recklessness and corruption.” President James Garfield

Web Resources:

1. Go to [BING](https://www.bing.com/search?q=presidential+primaries&qs=HS&pq=pres&sc=8-4&sp=1&cvid=B35FF01F9660472A9DA82592AD9A90C8&FORM=QBLH). (I know, just trust me.) Type in ‘presidential primaries.’ They have a running list of which states have already decided, how their delegates were divided, plus who remains, when they vote, and how many delegates are up for grabs. Their prediction has been as good as anyone else’s, though that’s not saying much.
2. Go to [VOX](http://www.vox.com/a/presidential-primaries-2016-republican-democrat/more-vox).
3. Go to [Red State](http://www.redstate.com/).
4. Go to [538](http://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/).
5. Go to [Real Clear Politics](http://www.realclearpolitics.com), especially their [Polls](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/latest_polls/) page.
6. Congratulations, you have now thoroughly confused the search algorithms. They don’t know if you lean left or right, and you’ve gotten yourself a nice, well balanced set of information. Good job!

Useful Terms That Will Make you Look Smart, and Make Your Mama Proud

**What is Democracy?** In its purest form, everybody votes on every issue. That’s called Direct Democracy, and it’s something we don’t trust, so we have very little of it. Your founders were very afraid of mob rule, so they set up most institutions with you voting for someone to go make decisions with your best interest in mind. They wanted a Federal Republic with a Representative Democracy instead.

**What is Representative Democracy?** You elect a person who represents your area and your interest. That person then goes to a collegial body and votes on your behalf.

**What’s a party?** Another thing that George Washington was afraid of. It’s a bottom-up (county-state-national) organization that runs candidates for office under their brand/label and puts together a platform at their national convention every four years. That platform tells you what the party believes in and will pursue policy-wise. They make their own rules for how to run things in each county and state, and at the national level. They select candidates through primaries, caucuses and conventions.

**What’s a primary?** An election held to select the candidates for each party who will compete in the general election in November. We elect much more than just presidential candidates through primaries and caucuses (little things like candidates for governor and mayor) but for our purposes here, we are talking about the Presidential Primary system. Primaries are held by the parties each spring. They are one of many ways to select candidates. And much like with the Electoral College, where you are not voting directly for a candidate, you are actually voting for an elector, in a primary you are voting for a delegate to a convention who has pledged to support a particular candidate. Some states make this clear, some don’t. New Hampshire holds the first primary in the nation. Each state has different rules for how and when primaries happen. Like relationships on Facebook, It’s Complicated.

**What’s a caucus?** Another way for the party to select its candidate for the general election in November. This time you go in person, and you actually talk to people. There may be more than one vote before things get decided. These also happen in the spring, sometimes very early, and require a high level of dedication to actually tromp through the Iowa snow and argue politics with a real live neighbor. That means caucus results may lean more left or right than the rest of the nation, because the most fervent of supporters show up. Again, you are actually picking delegates.

**What’s a state or county convention?** In some states, after the caucus or primary picks delegates, they go to a state or county convention to pick more delegates who will get to go to the next level. In some states, there is no primary or caucus; the delegates are simply picked at the county or state convention. Because each state party is a private entity, it can make its own rules about how to pick delegates to the national convention.

**What’s a delegate?** Those people we’ve been picking in the primaries, caucuses or local conventions. They want to go to the national convention to vote on who will represent their party in November in the general election. They care a LOT about politics and the convention is their Super Bowl, March Madness, and Mardi Gras all rolled into one. To win the nomination outright, you need 1237 delegates at the Republican Convention, and 2383 at the Democratic Convention.

**What’s a super delegate?** No, they don’t get a cape, or even a tiara. Bummer, huh? After some disappointing (read: couldn’t get elected dog-catcher) candidates were picked through the standard majority rule process in the 60’s and 70’s, the Democratic National Committee came up with the idea of making sure that there would always be a large group of establishment, mainstream party voters in the delegate pool who could out-vote any suddenly internally popular, but nationally unelectable candidate once they reached the convention stage. Super Delegates are elected officials, longtime Democratic stalwarts, and anyone else the party wants to pick. Republicans do not have super delegates.

**What’s an unbound delegate?** As Donald Trump is learning, the rules vary from state to state. Generally, a delegate is bound to vote for the person who they ran to represent only on the first ballot at the convention. After that, they become unbound delegates, and can vote as they see fit on the second or third (or fifty-seventh, heaven forbid) ballots. We have not cared much about this since the mid 70’s and really since the mid 50’s. Candidates have come to convention with more than enough delegates to win on the first ballot, so it just hasn’t been an issue. Welcome to 2016, where all bets are OFF! On the positive side, you may get to watch history being made this summer!

**What’s a convention?** Every four years the parties meet to 1) Develop a platform that tells the voters exactly where the party stands on each and every policy issue we care about, and 2) Select a Presidential and Vice Presidential candidate to carry the name and brand of the party forward into the general election in November. They also plan statewide and Congressional race strategies, mix and mingle, and generally wear silly hats, lots of buttons and hang with their people. For the last 50+ years, conventions have generally been coronations, with the winner known weeks, if not months, in advance. Not so this year! The Democrats are meeting in Philadelphia, July 25-28, and the Republicans are meeting in Cleveland, July 18-21.

**What’s an open or contested convention?** Depending on the next few weeks of Republican races, this is a very likely outcome for their convention this summer. If no one comes to the convention with the necessary 1237 delegates, then after the first round of balloting, there will not be a clear winner and an additional ballot will be necessary. Many states release some or all of their delegates (again, the rules vary, and are very complex) after the first ballot. That means that a second-place finisher (I’m looking at you, Ted Cruz) could cobble together enough delegates who are willing to switch their allegiance after the first vote to give them the necessary 1237 on the second vote. Or it may take a few more rounds of voting and horse trading in order to get a candidate to the magic number. This is old-school politics, so horse-trading and rules and procedures (parliamentary process) could prove to be very important.

**What’s Rule 40?** This is super technical, but it may come up, so here goes. Rule 40(b) is a Republican rule that requires that any eventual nominee must have won at least 8 states in the primary/caucus season. Under that rule, only Cruz or Trump are viable options. But there is an older tradition of nominating a candidate who was not part of the down and dirty fighting of the primaries, who is no one’s favorite, but is also no one’s arch enemy. (For example, Garfield.) We haven’t done that in ages, mostly because we haven’t needed to. As far as Rule 40 goes, it was adopted by the delegates, and it can be changed by the delegates. So if you’re trying to figure out why Paul Ryan is saying he won’t run for president, this is why.

**What’s a general election?** This is the election where we choose from among the candidates the party has chosen to put before the voters.There are two kinds of general elections:Every four years, on the first Tuesday in November, we have Presidential Elections. (We are actually voting for Electoral College electors.) We also vote during those same general elections for very important things like ALL of the House of Representatives, one third of Congress, your state legislature, your Governor, your city and county government, and often state Constitutional Amendments. Two years after Presidential Elections we have Congressional (or off-year) Elections, where we vote on everything on the list above, except for the president. Turn-out for American elections is embarrassing. The percentage of eligible voters who bothered to show up in 2014 was 36.4%, the worst in 70 years. The last Presidential election was 57.5%. (This is the right spot for me to beg you: If you don’t like your party’s eventual candidate for president, PLEASE don’t stay home and just not vote. There are too many other very important issues on the ballot to just not vote. You can go vote and simply skip the Presidential question. That is perfectly legal. But PLEASE, go vote. OK, I’m done.)

**What’s an Electoral College Elector?** Remember that we have Representative, not Direct Democracy – even in the picking of the President! When you vote in the general election, you are actually voting for an Elector, pledged to a particular candidate. The parties pick their own Electors. Each state gets a number of Electors equivalent to the number of Senators plus the number of House members for that state. Therefore, just like in Congress, the interests of both large and small population states are protected. The Electors meet at their state capitol in December to cast their votes. Things can get tricky because each state gets to decide how to apportion their EC votes based on election results. Every state except Maine and Nebraska has a winner take all system. That means that you could win 100% of the state of California’s 55 electors with less than 50% of the vote. This usually happens when there is a third party candidate in the mix. Candidate A gets 7% of the vote, Candidate B gets 40% of the vote, and Candidate C wins with 43% of the vote and gets 100% of the electors! (This is how you can have one person win the popular vote and another win the Electoral College vote, as happened in 2000, with Bush and Gore.) When this happens, people tend to go nuts, threaten to blow up the system, then they calm down, figure out why the system is the way it is, and the Republic rocks along. And I get LOTS of emails about how Floridians can’t count, and pictures of Fisher Price Florida Voting Machines.

**What happens if there’s a tie in the Electoral College?** If there’s a tie in the Electoral College, the vote goes into the House of Representatives, where each state gets one vote. Ways this could go wrong and freak out your favorite government teacher (because instability in government is BAD): 1) What if your House delegation is evenly split, will they be able to come to a conclusion and vote? 2) What if the states split 25/25? 3) What if somebody stands up and makes a brave speech, and a few years later Aaron Burr just shoots him, even though he was trying to be a gentleman and wasted his shot?!?

The Senate, BTW, will pick the Vice President, since he is constitutionally their leader. If the House can’t get its act together, the VP could act as president until it does. Unless of course the Senate ends up in a 50/50 tie. Dun Dun!

**Bonus question to terrify the government teacher: What happens if we have an issue like the 2000 Bush v Gore case, but we still don’t have a replacement for Justice Scalia on the Supreme Court?** TheSupreme Court is an appeals court. In appeals cases that tie, the case then reverts back down to the decision of the last court that heard the case.

If you’re thinking this is all crazy and complicated, and you’re tempted to just throw in a bomb or burn it all down, this is worth remembering:

Chesterton’s Fence (GK Chesterton):

In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, “I don’t see the use of this; let us clear it away.” To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: “If you don’t see the use of it, I certainly won’t let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.