

# The Interim

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### Curriculum Supplement For Schools

The *Interim Plus* is a periodical dedicated to educational matters and specifically designed to assist teachers in integrating relevant life issues in their lesson planning.

Editor  
Dan Di Rocco

Design & Production  
David Bolton

Editorial Board  
Dan Di Rocco, Alissa Golob, Matt Dineen

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interimplus@theinterim.com

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Last month we presented some material on the American political system. The topics concentrated on the nature of a republican system of government, key foundational principles, rise of the party system, structure of the federal government, system of checks and balances, presidential election system. As we approach the November election date for Americans, we are outlining the similarities and differences among the two main presidential candidates and the issues that help define them and their vision for America.

Modern elections retain some of the basic elements of traditional politics, voters have to be convinced in some fashion to register to vote and then actually show up at the poll station to cast their ballot. Voters want to know something about the candidates as persons, their abilities, preparedness, what they stand for, and how they are going to change things for the better.

There are many ways for candidates and parties to get their message across to the voters. Some means are more effective than others. But gaining the confidence of the voters is only the first step. Getting them out to vote is another crucial step. Very often, this is the difference in the outcome, which party or candidate can get his/her supporters out to vote.

Personal appearances by candidates at political rallies is an effective way to explain positions, speak to issues, make personal contacts and sway the public. But there are other methods for reaching the voters that are more important today – television debates, interviews with the press, appear-



ances on various television shows, using social media by self and by supporters, and television and radio ads.

We want students to look at each of these campaign strategies. This will help them to understand the election taking place in the United States. Modern electioneering is a complex process, extreme in cost, with numerous issues that unite and divide candidates and Americans, with an increasing role being played by media, and a questionable use of polling surveys.

### Television Debates

Television is believed to have played a major role in the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. Television was still in its infancy. Direct debates between candidates was a novelty and the broadcasts drew millions of viewers. The consensus was that the performance of Kennedy gave him a razor thin edge in winning the election.



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Twenty years later Ronald Reagan was considered to have been the winner in the televised debates, first against a sitting president in Jimmy Carter, and then his challenger in 1984, Walter Mondale.

Regarding televised debates, there are some political pundits who question their importance today. The audiences are smaller. They appear less interested. There are many more means for viewer distraction. The issues are complex and not given to short answers and explanations via the debate route.

### Research and Questions

1. Have students watch video clips of previous presidential debates, and then compare and contrast them with debate(s) between this year's election contenders.
2. Are such debates losing their importance in terms of having an impact on the electorate?
3. Who moderates or hosts the debates? How were these people chosen?
4. Where are the debates being held?
5. Are there any rules governing audience etiquette? What can they do or not do during the debate?
6. Are the questions and format fair?
7. What use is made of social media in connection to the televised debates?
8. Several networks have so-called neutral focus groups watching the debates. The group's reaction is then probed following the debates. How are the groups chosen? Are they truly neutral?

### General Questions

1. A big factor in running election campaigns is money, the need for big budgets. Why is this such a vital consideration?
2. How much will each candidate have spent on the election process? How much will each candidate for presidency have raised for their campaign? What are their sources of financial contributions? Are there any limits on election finances?
3. What are Super-Pacs? Are they a problem? Do they represent "soft money"?
4. A large challenge is to convince supporters to actually vote. What strategies are employed to do that?
5. How are the faithful energized? How are their spirit kept up?
6. Can campaign managers and friends in the media create momentum, a sense of inevitability about the election of their candidate?
7. Are the media cheerleaders for the respective candidate or are they neutral? Why might they take a stance in favour of one candidate or another?
8. Cartoons can have devastating impact on the fortunes of a presidential candidate. Have students search the internet for pro and anti-Obama and pro and anti-Romney cartoons
  - a) cartoons depicting a major issue
  - b) cartoons attacking the candidate
  - c) cartoons associated with any of the debates
  - d) explain the truthfulness or falsehood of the cartoon's content
  - e) explain the effectiveness of the cartoons in your opinion
9. Evaluate and compare the relative effectiveness of these strategies in the election process: political rallies; television debates; interviews with the press; appearance on various television shows; using social media; television and radio ads; endorsements by celebrities; manipulation of poll results

There are many issues that make up a campaign as complicated as a presidential election. The platforms of the main parties may contain some stances and policies, but the candidates themselves are often emphasizing only a few points, or ignoring some of the platform. Things happen during a campaign that calls on the candidates to respond effectively.

President Obama (D) and his challenger Gov. Mitt Romney (R) will engage in a series of debates on television to discuss issues. Students can be given this assignment to help them understand the political system and the issues at stake in this American presidential election:

1. Over a three week period have them watch all 4 debates [three involving Obama and Romney, and one involving Joe Biden (D) and Paul Ryan (R)]
2. Keep a box score on what each candidate had to say about the key issues. Use the charts provided page 5 and following. In the additional column, students can record any other issue that was missing in the chart.
3. At the end of each debate, the student should rate the respective candidate's performance based on these criteria:
  - a) ability to articulate answers clearly and effectively

- b) engaging the viewers
  - c) persuasiveness of answers
  - d) avoiding of embarrassing moments or gaffes
  - e) command of facts
  - f) personal demeanour
4. The first debate between Romney and Obama created quite a stir. What happened and why did it happen? Did it impact the polls? How did the media handle the respective performances and the fallout?

## A different kind of media bias?

In an article available at <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/rich-noyes/2012/10/02/abcs-stephanopoulos-leads-post-debate-media-spin-democrats> Rich Noyes presents a serious analysis of the supposedly neutral network news people acting as spin doctors following debates. He uses the example of George Stephanopoulos of ABC television network. Noyes claims that [ABC's Stephanopoulos Leads Post-Debate Media Spin for Democrats](#). In the actual website page there is a video montage of Stephanopoulos' coverage of the various debates.

... But more undecided voters will be swayed by the media's post-debate spin about who won and who lost than by any pre-debate expectations. Reviewing the last several campaigns, MRC analysts have found a clear trend of network reporters fawning over the performance of liberal candidates, while harping on any perceived weaknesses or gaffes from conservatives.

One of the most reliable pro-Democratic pundits is none other than George Stephanopoulos ... MRC has documented how, in eight out of the last nine general election presidential debates (every one since he joined ABC News in 1997), Stephanopoulos has gone on his network's airwaves to claim victory for the Democratic candidate, all in the guise of offering impartial analysis.

# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 3, 2000): *I really think if you look at the totality of the questions, there wasn't a single issue, with perhaps the exception of the energy question, where Gore lost on points over the course of the 90 minutes. He was strong, he was detailed, he was specific, and he posed questions to Bush that Bush left on the table.*

# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 3, 2000): *Gore dominated the debate...Even the way that he would interrupt Jim Lehrer and say, 'Listen, I want one more word.' He looked like he was dominating and, then again, the issues that the time was spent on — prescription drugs, education, Social Security, even the RU-486 and abortion issue — all of those favor Gore.*

# Anchor PETER JENNINGS (October 17, 2000): *George, I think that Mr. Gore's campaign will be fairly happy at least with the fact that he performed tonight as they had wanted him to perform.*

STEPHANOPOULOS: *No question about it, Peter. A mix of drawing sharp contrasts on the issues, but also seeming loose and engaged and human, and talking directly to the cameras. I also think they're going to be very happy, Peter, with the fact that Gore seemed to know some of Bush's proposals and facts about his record better than Bush did himself.*

### 2004 Debates

# STEPHANOPOULOS (September 30, 2004): *Tonight was a big opportunity for Senator Kerry. He was up on the stage as an equal to the President. And over 90 minutes, he gave substantive responses to the charges that the President made. But I wonder if stylistically he helped himself even more than substantively. If by appearing calm and confident for the most part, during this debate, he answered the flip-flopper charge with his demeanor even more than with his words...*

# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 1, 2004): *I think the most important thing that Senator Kerry did stylistically last night is he showed strength in his demeanor. I guarantee you that if you didn't speak English, you walked in and watched the debate last night without the sound on, you would believe that John Kerry was the incumbent, was the president.*

# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 8, 2004): *My gut tells me that President Bush helped himself personally by having an improved performance but that Senator Kerry's campaign is helped more overall because the issues are turning in his direction. And he's the challenger and he's now had two debates where people have seen him as either a tie or a win. A credible alternative at a time when you've had job loss, when a majority of the country thinks we're going in the wrong direction, that's very good news for the challenger.*



# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 14, 2004): What this shows, basically, is that John Kerry, in three debates, had three wins even though last night was narrow. And I think that's the important point, to look at the debates as a whole. If you look at three presidential elections where the challengers come in behind going into the debates and left ahead, 1960, 1980, 2000, that person went on to win the presidency.

### 2008 Debates

# STEPHANOPOULOS (September 26, 2008): *Let's take Obama first.... He comes in at a significant disadvantage on commander-in-chief. People wonder whether he has this experience to be President, to handle national security and I think on answer after answer after answer, he showed confidence, he showed toughness and he showed he belonged on that stage.... Bottom line, the winner is Barack Obama.*

# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 7, 2008): *Obama is two for two.*

Nightline anchor TERRY MORAN: *He's two for two because you had him winning the first one.*

STEPHANOPOULOS: *He definitely won tonight. I think, again, he showed over the course of this debate, over the course of the two debates, he is answering the number one question Americans have about him. Does he have the experience it takes to serve effectively as President? Over the course now of three hours of debates, he is answering that question minute by minute.*

# STEPHANOPOULOS (October 15, 2008): *But, look, Barack Obama handled this all very, very well. He was cool under attack. He explained away every attack, responded well....*

TERRY MORAN: *All right, so, bottom line, who won the third and final debate here, George?*

STEPHANOPOULOS: *Clean sweep for Barack Obama. He has won every debate. He won tonight by staying cool under pressure. He won tonight by parrying the attacks of John McCain. The only thing that John McCain could have really done tonight to change the tenor of this campaign was to get under Obama's skin, to force him into an error. That did not happen tonight. Another win for Barack Obama.*

The classic case proving the influence of the news media's post-debate spin was after the second presidential debate in 1976, when overnight polls showed most viewers thought Gerald Ford beat Jimmy Carter. But post-debate news coverage fixated on Ford's statement that Poland was free from Soviet domination, and subsequent surveys showed the public shifting to the view that Carter had won.

That year, political scientist Doris Graber conducted a long-term panel study of voters to track how their opinions were influenced by news coverage. After that debate, a woman in her survey group confessed: **"I thought that Ford had won, but the papers say it was Carter. So it must be Carter."**

The news media's post-debate spin matters. If reporters want to show that a candidate has "won," news coverage will re-play their best statements and portray them as surging in support. If the media line is that a candidate has "lost," the replay loop will feature gaffes or misstatements, and they'll be portrayed as on the ropes. For viewers/voters who haven't made up their minds, the media spin may be a crucial factor.

With friendly umpires like Stephanopoulos calling the balls and strikes, the Obama campaign will have an easier time managing the post-debate spin. If the media were really as centrist as they claim, Stephanopoulos' bias would stick out like a sore thumb. But at ABC, CBS and NBC, his predictable spin on behalf of the Democrats is, sadly, business as usual.

Read more: <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/rich-noyes/2012/10/02/abcs-stephanopoulos-leads-post-debate-media-spin-democrats#ixzz28HX6JcmY>

### Questions

Following the debates each party has its strategists and "spin doctors" participating in discussion of the debate on the major networks.

1. What is the role of these "spin doctors"?
2. Based on what you observed personally and the article above, which is more important, the debate or the commentary following?
3. Can the numbers be trusted re: polls, level of unemployment, size of deficit, impact of tax cuts, projected revenues, amount of job creation?

## The Issues

One of the best sites dealing with the American presidential election issues is <http://2012election.procon.org/view.source-summary-chart.php>. Not all the issues have equal weight or importance in all parts of the country or among all constitu-

encies. Some of the issues may be of significance in one region but not in others, to some ethnic/racial/cultural group and not to another, to some religious denomination but not to others. In the chart below outlining main issues: Which issues grab the most attention from the presidential candidates? Are they of equal importance from a media viewpoint?

## Economy



Most political commentators predicted that the economy would be the big issue in the election, with government spending at an all-time high, the national debt exceeding 16 trillion dollars, unemployment hovering above 8 percent, only 51% of Americans actually paying taxes, and 46 million Americans dependent on food stamps to keep them fed. Many also point to the growing income gap between the rich and the poor. Others like to concentrate on the too high tax policy. There is much blame and charges flying back and forth as to who or what is to blame for the sorry state of the American economy. In the past 4 years housing prices/value has dropped drastically and income levels have gone down on the average by more than \$4,000 for American households. They are looking for answers and a way out of the mess. But then again, others paint a rosy picture, stating that things could be much worse and that the economy is moving in the right direction.

Issue	Obama	Romney	your score
Unemployment/Job Creation			
Welfare reform			
Housing Industry			
Energy Independence			
Tax system and rate of taxation			
The Middle Class			

## Foreign policy



Relations with other nations is extremely important to the well being of most nations, and in the case of the United States it becomes an imperative. It is a large military, economic, and cultural presence around the world (military bases, navy, trade, economic interests, movies, third world aid). It has alliances with regional groups and with individual nations. It has many friends and allies, but also many enemies and rivals. Inevitably it has a foreign policy that creates fear, respect, hatred, envy, and genuine admiration.

Issue	Obama	Romney	your score
National security/War on terror			
Trade			
Arms agreements			
Middle East			
Israel-Palestinian problem			
Climate change and international agreements			

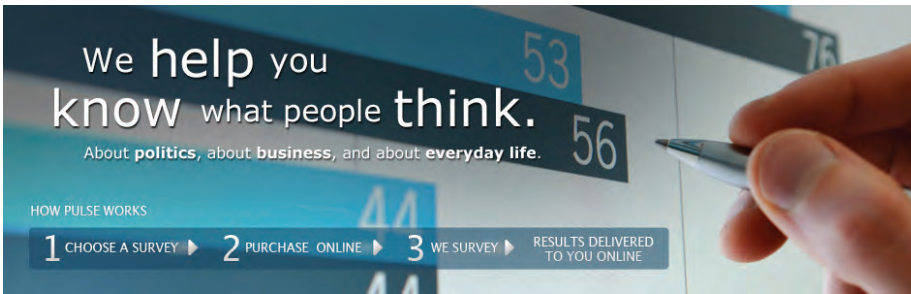
**Social issues**



This category of issues can make the ultimate difference to many voters when they cast their ballot. The issues are considered to be “hot button” issues. They speak to the kind of society that people want to have or not have. It may touch on their sense of freedom, sense of identity, sense of patriotism, sense of morality, sense of personal security. The issues call forth passionate debate and reflection about the nature of society and the rights of individuals in that society. Compare and contrast Obama and Romney’s views on these issues, and what these say about their respective vision of America and the role of government in everyday life.

Issue	Obama	Romney	your score
Abortion/Euthanasia/ Same-sex marriage			
Pornography/ Censorship/ Freedom of speech			
Stem Cells			
Religious freedom			
GMO foods			
Education			
Illegal Immigration			
Health Care Laws			
Social Security Reform			
Race Relations			
War on drugs			

## Influence of Polls



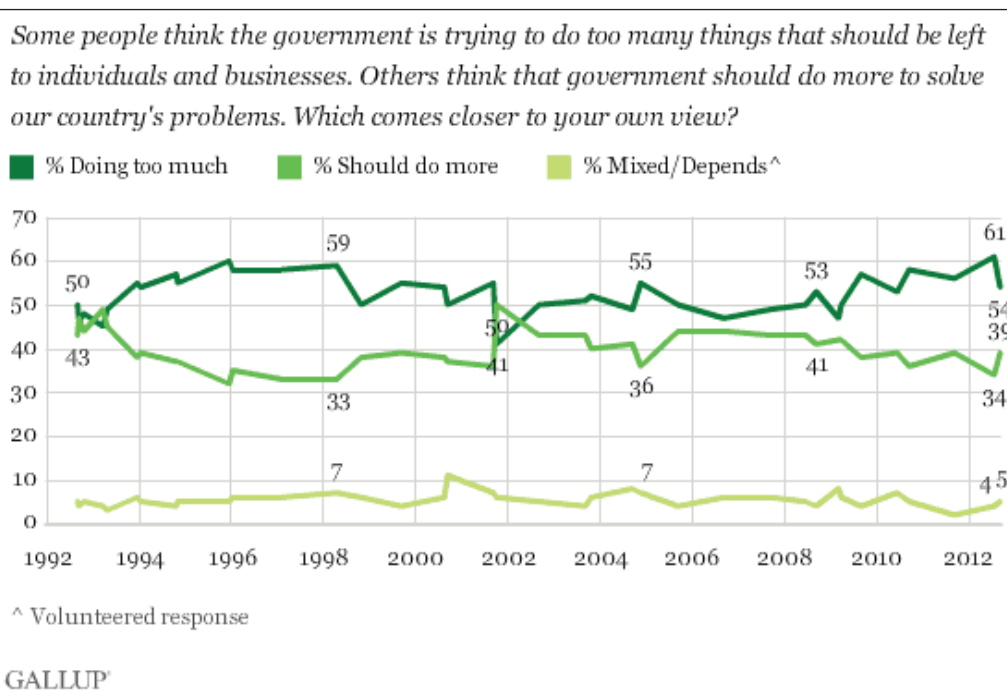
Polling, prior and during election campaigns, can be very revealing as to what different sections of a nation is thinking about certain issues in a moment in time. Polls can be very tricky. The question asked of people being polled must be clear. The people being asked the question(s) must be representative of the full electorate. Below is a survey taken by the Gallup organization released on September 17, 2012. Have the students read the report and then address these questions:

1. What is the Gallup organization?
2. What kind of track record does it have in the polling industry?
3. What was the topic or issue being polled in this particular survey?
4. How does the question relate to the election campaign?
5. What did the poll results suggest about American opinion on the matter?
6. Were the results clear or did they create confusion?
7. Which political party or party's group of supporters commissioned the survey? Which party would be pleased with the results? Why?
8. Study carefully the methodology of poll surveys and list the factors that are considered.
  - a) Which are most important?
  - b) How is bias reduced or kept to a minimum?
  - c) How much trust should voters place in polls results?
  - d) Discuss whether polling should be eliminated during election campaigns. Give reasons for and against polls. Should there be a cut-off point prior to the voting day?

### Majority in U.S. Still Say Government Doing Too Much But fewer Americans now say government has too much power

by Frank Newport

PRINCETON, NJ -- A majority of Americans (54%) continue to believe the government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses, although that is down from the record high of 61% earlier this summer. About four in 10 Americans (39%) say the government should do more to solve the nation's problems.





Only a few times in Gallup's 20-year history of asking this question has a higher percentage of Americans said the government should do more to solve the nation's problems than said the government is doing too much... in the fall of 1992 and again in early 1993, as Bill Clinton ran for and took office as president... Another was in October 2001, just after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and at a time when Americans were especially supportive of government and its efforts to help the nation recover from the attacks and retaliate against those who were responsible.

**Major Partisan Divide on Appropriate Role of Government**

The appropriate role of government in addressing the nation's problems is one of the most divisive issues in this year's presidential election. President Barack Obama tends to support the idea that government should do more to address the country's problems, while Mitt Romney generally takes the opposite view.

It is thus no surprise to find large partisan differences in Americans' views on the appropriate role of government. Two-thirds of Democrats think government should do more, while an even larger percentage of Republicans say government is doing too much that should be left to individuals and businesses. More than six in 10 independents agree that the government is doing too much.

*Some people think the government is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and businesses. Others think that government should do more to solve our country's problems. Which comes closer to your own view?*

	% Doing too much	% Government should do more	% Mixed/Depends <sup>^</sup>
Republicans	82	15	1
Independents	62	29	7
Democrats	24	67	7

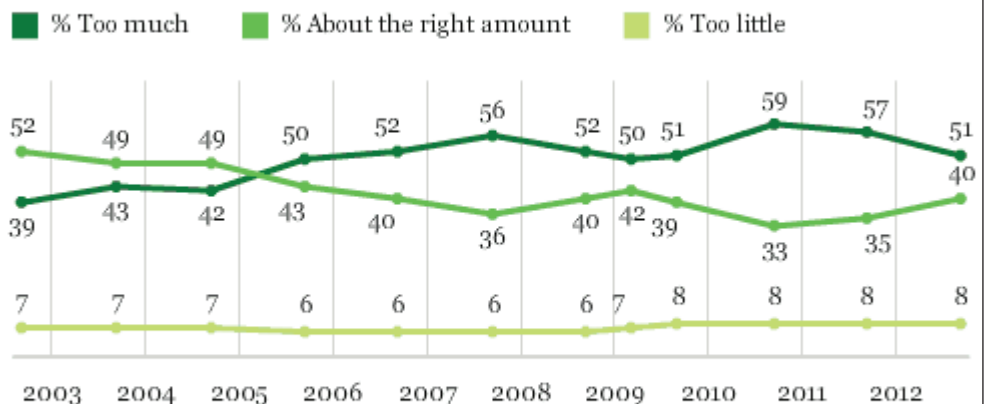
<sup>^</sup> Volunteered response  
Sept. 6-9, 2012

GALLUP<sup>®</sup>

**Fewer Say Government Has Too Much Power**

A separate question in the Sept. 6-9 poll asked Americans to characterize the scope of government power. Americans are now basically split between those who say the federal government has too much power and those who say it has either the right amount of or too little power. This marks a change from the last two years; 57% last year and 59% in 2010 said the government has too much power.

*Do you think the federal government today has too much power, has about the right amount of power, or has too little power?*

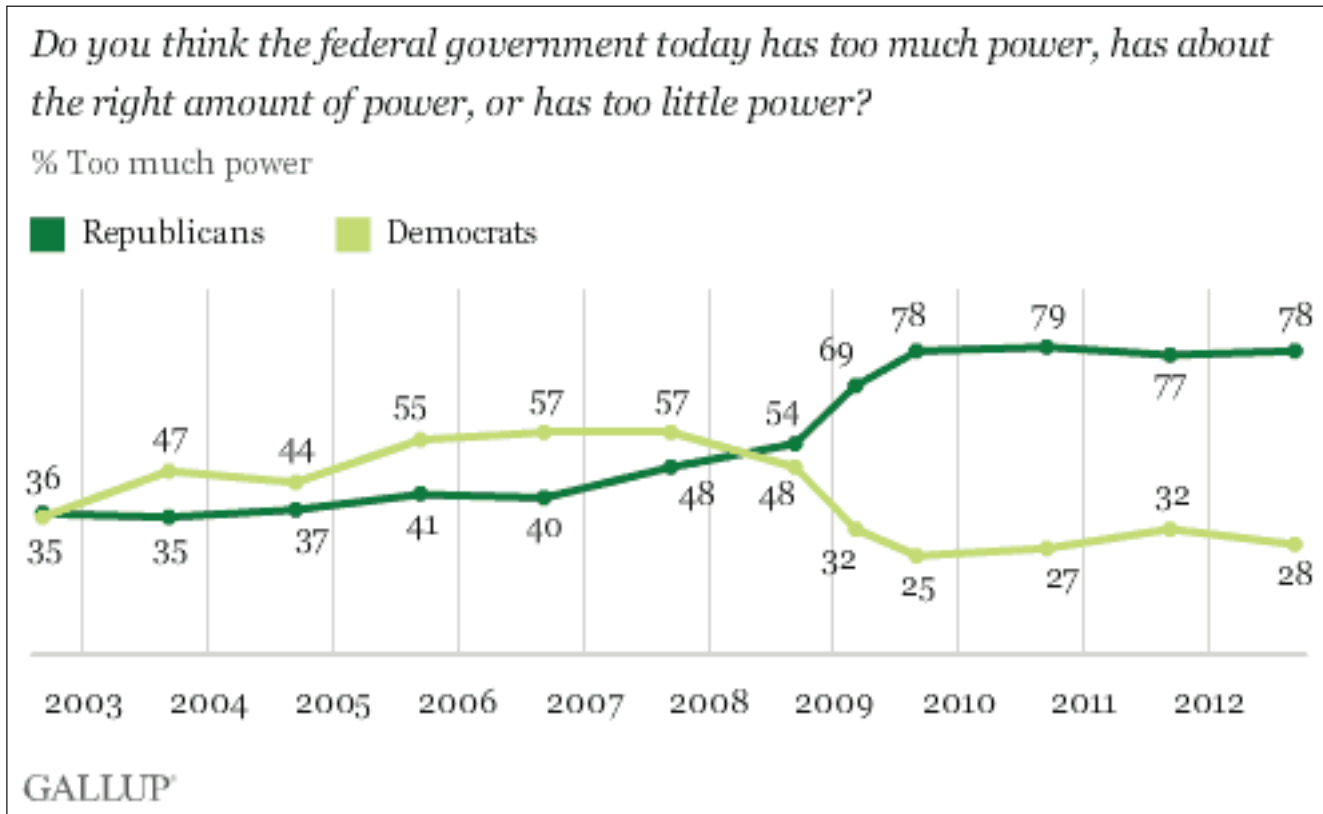


Note: responses rotated; March 5-8, 2009, question asked of a half sample

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Gallup first asked this question in September 2002, and found a majority of Americans saying the government had about the right amount of power -- no doubt a legacy of the strong support the government and government institutions received after the 9/11 terrorist attacks of the previous year. By September 2005, however, these views had flipped, and more Americans said the government had too much power than felt its power was about right -- and this has been the case each year since.

Partisans' views on the government's power are related to which party is in power. Republicans have been much more likely to agree that government has too much power since 2009, under a Democratic president, while they were comparatively less likely to say the government had too much power from 2002 through 2008, under a Republican president.



The fact that Democrats for most of the Bush administration were more likely than Republicans to say the government had too much power probably reflected Democrats' negative views on government power in the Bush years in terms of fighting terrorism, the Patriot Act, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Once Obama took office, however, these partisan views changed, and Republicans' concern about government power overtook Democrats'. This partly reflects Republicans' views on the role of government spending and government power in domestic and economic affairs.

**Bottom Line**

Americans continue to say the government is attempting to do too much that should be left to individuals and businesses, and about half say the government has too much power, while the rest say that its power is about right or that it has too little power. These views have moderated somewhat compared with prior surveys, most likely as a result of the apparently successful Democratic convention, which resulted in changes in a number of Gallup trends.

Republicans are much more likely to say the government is doing too much and has too much power than are Democrats, underscoring one of the most meaningful partisan and ideological divides facing the country today -- and one that will continue to play out in the presidential campaign this fall.

**Survey Methods**

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted Sept. 6-9, 2012, with a random sample of 1,017 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ±4 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents by region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com).

## Abortion and the American Election

*The Interim* newspaper publishes this curriculum supplement as a free service to its readers and as a means of helping pro-life minded teachers to have appropriate materials available to them for integration in their regular lesson planning where applicable. The October edition of the paper carried an article on the issue of abortion and its impact on the American election. Unlike Canada, where the three main political parties and their respective leaders pretend that the issue has been resolved for all time and therefore there is no need to discuss it or debate it, or permit any motion or private member's bill to be brought up in the House of Commons (the defeat of Motion 312 on September 25, being the latest unsuccessful effort to reopen the debate officially), in the United States the issue draws real passion and engages a large segment of American society and in all parts of the country.

One important part of a presidential campaign is the party convention when the candidate and the party platform are highlighted. The choice of speakers for these three day conventions, which incidentally receive a lot of television and other media coverage, reveals what the people in charge of the campaign and the party platform consider important for winning the election itself. The following abbreviated article, appearing in the October issue of *The Interim* newspaper. It explains how and why abortion was embraced by the Democrat Party in the American election to an extent never seen before.

### Abortion becomes major issue in 2012 election

Paul Tuns

Pro-lifers labelled the Democrat National Convention "Abortion-Palooza" after Barack Obama and numerous speakers highlighted "abortion," "choice," and "reproductive rights" in their speeches. After four years in power, Obama presides over an economy that remains in shambles and a world as unstable as dangerous as he inherited (if not more), so Dem-

ocrats had to find something – anything – to talk about other than the president's obvious failure to address the United States' most immediate problems. Talking endlessly about abortion changes the channel from high unemployment, rising fuel and food prices, and overall economic uncertainty.

The move, which pleases the left-wing base of the party – a May 2012 Gallup poll shows that a third of Democrats are pro-life -- risks alienating independent voters. Gallup's annual poll of attitudes about abortion show most people think abortion should be banned all or most of the time and a (slight) majority of Americans describe themselves as pro-life. Political observers say the strident pro-abortion strategy is a calculated risk to shore up support among the Democratic base, especially single women, those with graduate degrees, and people who do not attend church. Those groups tend to be more liberal than most Americans, especially on moral issues. ... ..Married women are evenly split, backing Barack Obama and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney in roughly equal numbers. But about two-thirds of single women vote Democrat, and Obama wants to keep those numbers up by talking about abortion.

At the DNC, Obama was not the only speaker to highlight abortion. First Lady Michelle Obama, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick and San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro made mention of abortion, as did former Republican Maria





Ciano, who listed “the right to choose” as among her considerations for switching parties. Actress Kerry Washington mentioned abortion in her speech and Caroline Kennedy, the daughter of president John F. Kennedy talked about being Catholic and concerned with “reproductive health care.”

Most telling, however, was the inclusion of pro-abortion activists on the stage. Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood, Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, and student activist Sandra Fluke, who plumps for taxpayer funding of birth control.

Michelle Obama said the campaign was about “women making our own choices about our bodies and our health care.” Fluke said if the Republicans won, there would be, “an America in which you have a new vice president who co-sponsored a bill that would allow pregnant women to die preventable deaths in our emergency rooms.”

...The Democrats have run on a pro-abortion plank since 1980, but the prominence of the issue is new. Keenan, Richards, and Fluke were all given prime time speaking spots. As Ramesh Ponnuru stated in a *National Review* cover story, “what has changed is that the Democrats of 2012 are expressing their support of abortion with a degree of rhetorical aggressiveness that they have in the past shied away from. President Obama is running for re-election with the most strongly pro-abortion message of any national campaign in history.”

Daniel McConchie of Americans United for Life wrote in the *Daily Caller*, “If you tuned into the Democratic National Convention earlier this month and were momentarily confused as to whether C-SPAN was actually covering a huge abortion rally, you are not alone.”...

Jay Cost explains in his new book, *Spoiled Rotten: How the Politics of Patronage Corrupted a Once Noble Democratic Party and Now Threatens the American Republic* that Democrats have become a collection of special interest groups that feed at the public trough. Among those special interest groups are pro-abortion feminists. Cost describes how the pro-abortion wing of the party ensured that pro-life language that would have won over Democrats worried about how Obamacare would fund abortion, was ultimately nixed from the law...Cost says pro-abortion feminists are clients of the Democratic Party, and the party is beholden to the activists. ...

Obamacare’s mandate that private insurance plans pay for contraception (including abortifacient drugs) is only one of a plethora of pro-abortion policies Obama supports. As an Illinois senator, Obama opposed a Born-Alive Infants Protection Act three times. As a candidate for president in 2008, he vowed to sign a Freedom to Choose Act as his first act if elected president (it never passed in Congress). As President, Obama signed executive orders permitting U.S. taxpayer funds for international abortion organizations, fought for more funding for Planned Parenthood, and opposed a ban on sex-selection abortion. Rich Lowry wrote in Politico.com that “President Obama is an extremist on abortion,”

noting “he has never supported any meaningful restriction on it.”

No presidential election has seen the prioritization of moral issues to this level since Patrick Buchanan forced them into the political discussion in 1992 (much to the chagrin of President George H.W. Bush).

For their part, the Republicans are remaining focused on the economy. Romney has described issues such as abortion and same-sex “marriage” as distractions. Indeed, Romney has an uneasy relationship with social conservatives, especially evangelicals concerned about his Mormon faith.

The National Right to Life Committee called Mitt Romney and his running mate Paul Ryan, “a solid pro-life ticket for a pro-life America.” That may be a stretch. As a Congressman, Paul Ryan has a 100 per cent voting record, but Romney’s history is not so clear cut. As Phil Lawler of Catholic Culture wrote, “Romney’s pro-life credentials are shaky.” Indeed, in his own convention address, Romney gave the pro-life cause just nine words in a 38-minute speech: “As president, I will protect the sanctity of life.” It had no specifics and Romney’s other comments and history raise flags.

The Republican platform opposes all abortions, but Romney told CBS “I’m in favor of abortion being legal in the case of rape and incest, and the health and life of the mother.” That might not help him with those who recall that when he challenged Senator Ted Kennedy in Massachusetts in 1994 and ran for governor in 2002 he vowed to uphold Roe v. Wade. That is not quite the same as saying he supported abortion, but it has the same effect.

As governor, Romney was presumed to be pro-abortion and admits a conversion on the issue when he studied the embryonic stem cell issue. In 2005, he vetoed a bill making the morning-after pill widely available and began to declare himself pro-life. Dr. Jack Willke, founder of the Life Issues Institute, said he believes Romney’s conversion was sincere as it credibly followed from conversations he had with pro-life physician William B. Hurlbut about fetal development and the beginning of life.

While Romney’s record is mixed (but improving), Ryan has always been a dedicated pro-lifer, including co-sponsoring legislation that would outlaw taxpayer-funding of abortion. The NRLC said Ryan, “has a deep, abiding respect for all human life, including unborn children and their mothers,” and has a perfect pro-life voting record since joining the House of Representatives in 1999.

Whatever the particulars of Romney’s current beliefs, the Republican ticket is obviously preferable to four more years of Obama, with his support of expanding abortion, paying for it, and opposing any and every measure that would make abortion a little rarer.

Lowry in his Politico article said, “abortion is at the heart of contemporary liberalism,” and Obama has made it central to his re-election campaign. Polls suggest it will not be an election winner, but if Obama does somehow win on Nov.



6, the media will surely credit his stand on abortion and declare America a “pro-choice” country. But if Romney wins do not expect the media to blame Obama’s defeat on his abortion gambit.

### Questions

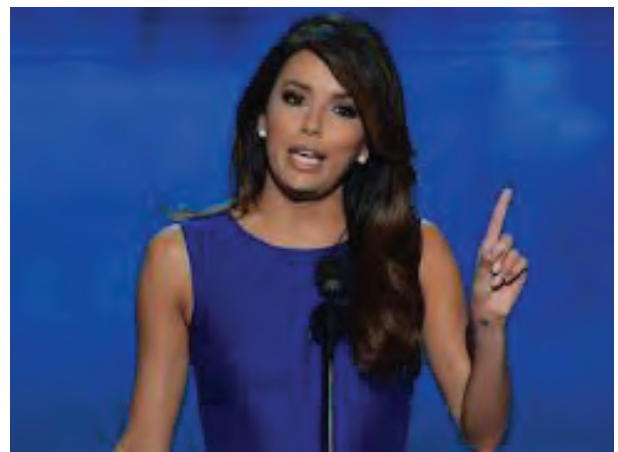
1. According to Tuns why did the Democrats opt for making abortion a key plank in their campaign platform? How was this displayed at their convention?
2. Which three groups were they trying to please? Why would those groups welcome a pro-abortion stance?
3. Are the Republican candidates greatly different in their stance on abortion?
4. Is the issue becoming more heated or less important to the outcome of elections in the United States?
  - a) There is another piece of writing in the same October edition of *The Interim* that develops the same theme: the editorial entitled *The Party of Death*. Have students read it online and answer these suggested questions, and from the point of view of America’s decline in the world.
  - b) What three points does the editor make?
  - c) Do you agree or disagree with the editor’s points



Hawaii candidate for the US House of Representatives Tulsi Gabbard along with serving Democrat Congresswomen



Sandra Fluke



Eva Longoria