

The Interim Plus + + ++ + +

Curriculum Learning Resource

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Welcome back and best wishes for a wonderful school year especially in these unusual circumstances coping with the pandemic. Our immediate southern neighbour is roiling with an election campaign. This fall edition of *The Interim Plus* supplement for schools contains ideas, resources and some guiding questions on the American political system and how that system is playing out in the current presidential campaign. This brief treatment helps to provide a context. How did the United States come into being and why did the founders choose a particular system to govern themselves?

The United States occupies a paramount position on the world stage. The reality is that, despite an "America First" approach of President Donald Trump, it is inevitable that the USA will continue to wield significant power and influence - whether cultural, political, economic or military in nature. We hope that this supplement helps the teachers of history, civics, politics, economics or law with their own lesson planning on this topic.



Part A

Founding Principles and Origins of the American System of Government

The United States of America was created when thirteen British colonies banded together to rebel against the British monarchy. Their revolution broke out in 1776 in the belief that the colonies should not be taxed without having real representation in the British Parliament. The latter was the central governing body and it made laws for its many colonies spread out around the globe. But these disparate colonies did not really have any direct role in the governing process and the passage of laws that seriously impacted the colonists' economic well being (such things as credit, trade restrictions/tariffs, money supply, regulations re manufacturing, etc.). When the American colonials had expressed their objections to the British monarch, the latter had sent armed forces to put down the protesters. A

significant section of the colonial population would not stand for such treatment. Their leaders led a rebellion against what they perceived to be an unjust system of government. According to them, the governed had not been asked for their consent, being treated as subjects, with virtually no political rights. In a new federal republic the founding fathers expected and wanted to have the status of citizens, people with political rights and a say in how they would be governed. One must also note that the violent revolution was not supported by 100% of the colonial population. Some chose not to resort to armed rebellion in order to obtain a fairer treatment from the home



government. Rejecting the revolutionary approach to redressing perceived injustices, these folks chose to remain loyal to the British crown. Eventually, many of these “loyalists” were either expelled or otherwise convinced to leave the thirteen colonies and to seek refuge in the British North American colonies like Nova Scotia, and Upper and Lower Canada.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The American revolution did not come out of the blue. It had been prepared intellectually by the writings of various colonists who had been agitating for a republican form of government. According to these publicists (some of whom were familiar with the writings of the **French philosophes**) a government should be constitutional in nature, with a written framework outlining the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of qualified citizens. The



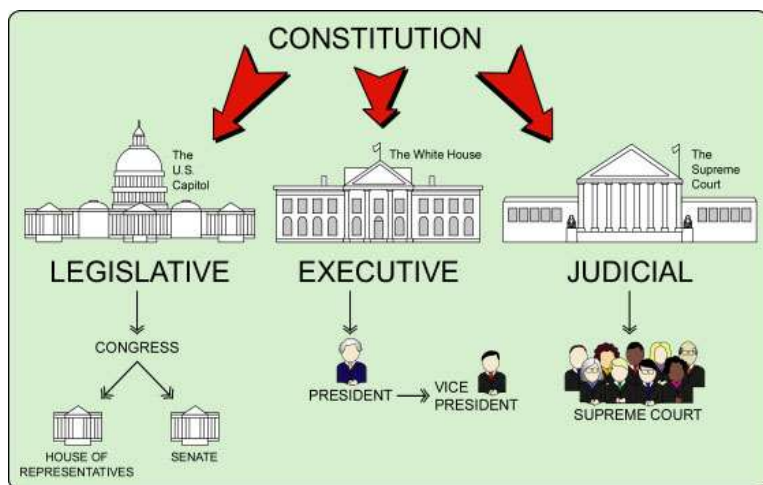
executive powers of government should be available to all citizens and not be hereditary. Simply put, government should be a public affair – *res publica* – something open to all, not something reserved to the few.

In the United States the political system was created bottom-up, with individual sovereign states (all former colonies) coming together to create a federal or national government to which was given certain limited powers. This was to be the unique American experiment. The opening of the *United States Declaration of Independence* written by Thomas Jefferson in 1776, states as follows:

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

One must take this founding statement into account in order to understand the nature of America’s **Constitution** and its republican system of government: human beings are created equal; they have certain basic human rights; they receive these rights from God, not the state. Moreover, governments exist to protect and promote those rights; and governments must enjoy the consent of the governed in order to be seen as just. The American political system is founded on the idea **that no individual or group should hold too much power**. There is the separation of

powers between the respective branches (judicial, executive and legislative). Each of the three branches of the governing apparatus has some authority to act on its own, some authority to regulate the other two branches, and has some of its own authority, in turn, regulated by the other branches.



This checks and balance approach is replicated at the state level because the United States is a **federal republic** and power is shared/exercised between different levels of government over the same territory and the same citizens. In most countries the federal or national government has all the powers not directly assigned to a lower level of government. The U.S.A. is unique in that it was formed by 13 self-proclaimed sovereign states who united to create a single state, leading to the federal government having **limited** powers while the individual states and their citizens have the **reserve** powers, those not explicitly assigned to the federal government. Thus, the federal government of the U.S.A.

constitutionally is supposed to exercise only those powers directly outlined in the Constitution. Some powers that are held by the federal government include the printing of money, regulating international trade, regulating the mail, raising armies and declaring war. The state governments can ratify amendments to the Constitution, issue various licenses, establish and fund education systems and regulate business. Some powers are held by both levels of government, such as the ability to build roads, collect taxes and regulate businesses. (Here are two short videos that are useful in explaining the division of powers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuFR5XBYLfU> , and another which gives a brief explanation of political systems in general, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT6koTFHnH0>).

According to the Constitution, where federal laws overlap with state laws, the laws of the higher level of government take precedence. Such was the case in 2015 when the United States Supreme Court required all states to recognize same-sex marriages as valid, something that several states (such as Texas, Alabama, and Ohio) had refused to do previous to this while others had already done so.

The manner in which the new nation was created and the division of government powers engendered an ongoing debate about federalism, with some arguing for a stronger role for the federal government and others wanting to place more power at the state level, although today it would appear that the federal or national government has expanded its powers so much that some observers decry this development, pointing out that the “federal government has become too dominant, too intrusive, and too profligate” in its spending. From the beginning, both founders and the ordinary citizens, held a certain distrust or skepticism of governments and hence the inclusion of the **2nd Amendment** guaranteeing citizens the right to bear arms. Another indication of distrust of government was that over time many states adopted the **referendum initiative**. This procedure enables a policy question to be put directly to the electorate pending the collection of a certain number of signatures or by the decision of the state legislature.

This referendum tradition has been strong and in each election cycle various referendum choices appear on state ballots. The debates on abortion and the question of gay marriage have appeared on the ballots recently. In the latter case, the proposal to legalize gay marriage was resoundly defeated at the ballot box in most states, but the Supreme Court effectively legislated by finding the laws banning it unconstitutional. This presents another complication and challenge within the American federal system. The role and composition of the Supreme Court is always an election issue, but with the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, it has become a truly high stakes gambit. Both major political parties and their supporters are very much aware of what is at stake, the opportunity to put a multiple generational stamp on that judicial body, and through it, shaping the future of the country.

The founders were aware of their own rebellion and wanted to create a system of government that would deter any chance of instability and collapse of the governing apparatus. So, a further provision, intended to avoid rapid political change, was to give each branch of the federal government a **different term of office**: the President, a

term of four years; the Senate, six years; and members of the House of Representatives, two years. Members of the Supreme Court were given the privilege of effectively serving for life.

The Three Branches of the American Federal Government
Congress (the equivalent of the Canadian parliament, House of Commons and Senate)

House of Representatives		The Senate
435, distributed proportionately according to the state's population (plus 3 for the District of Columbia)	How many	100, two for each State regardless of size or population (no Senators for District of Columbia)
Every seat is up for election every two years, individual representatives serve for two years at a time.	Terms	Roughly 1/3 of the seats are up for election every two years, but individual senators serve for six years at a time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25+ years old when sworn in • A citizen for 7+ years • Inhabits the state they represent 	Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30+ years old when sworn in • A citizen for 9+ years • Inhabits the state they represent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May actually choose the president when the country is in a deadlock • Can impeach officials • Initiates spending initiatives 	Specific powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratifies treaties • Approves nominations for the Supreme Court, Cabinet, etc. • Plays role in passage of legislation (bills can originate in either chamber)
President		Supreme Court Justices
One, elected by the entire country but not by direct popular vote, rather by an Electoral College of 538 members	How many	Nine, appointed by the president.
Up for re-election every four years for a maximum of two terms.	Terms	Serve a single term until death or retirement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35+ years old when sworn in • A resident for 14+ years • A "natural born citizen" 	Eligibility	No specific criteria exist in the Constitution.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene/adjourn Congress • Command armed forces • Grant pardons • Sign/veto legislation 	Specific powers	Has the final say on the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress or the executive actions taken by the President.

There is controversy over war-making powers, respectively, of the President and Congress. While the President conducts the actual war effort, the Congress has to approve a declaration of war and Congress is in charge of passing budgets needed to prosecute the war effectively. At times, the cost of a war may exceed hundreds of billions of dollars, even trillions, not to mention the loss of American lives and those of their opponents. This is a hotly debated part of government decision-making.

The passing of a bill into law can be a complex process, involving hundreds of people, **including the 538 elected members of Congress (100 in Senate and 438 in the House of Representatives)**, plus their hundreds of staffers and aides who do a lot of research, analysis, and writing of briefs and summaries for their respective Congressman or Senator. In addition, lobbyists and ordinary citizens can have a say by communicating with their Congressman or Senator. When the two houses are not in synch with the executive or vice-versa, gridlock can develop and nothing gets done, even when serious problems call for urgent attention. Here are a few examples of "gridlock" during the Trump administration: the attempt to reform Obamacare health program; building a wall to protect the southern border; passing a relief money bill to help small business and unemployed people hurt by the Covid-19 economic fallout.

The American Constitution

The Constitution itself has proved to be a very stable document and has served the country well, partially because its drafters made it a very difficult instrument to change. It stipulates the rules and responsibilities of government while serving as the “supreme law” in the United States. In its 231 years of existence, only twenty-seven amendments have been adopted, ten of them (known collectively as the Bill of Rights) being implemented at the same time the Constitution itself came into effect. For a proposed amendment to pass, it must secure 66% of the vote of Congress as well as 75% of state legislatures (38 of 50 states). A good short video on the American Bill of Rights can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmLosRzNRqA> A very important principle to remember is that the rights of the citizens are innate rights given by God the Creator, not by the state or government. A few notable amendments include:

1st Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

2ND Amendment: A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

8th Amendment: Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

9th Amendment The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

10th Amendment: The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

16th Amendment The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several States, and without regard to any census or enumeration.

19th Amendment: The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Some view the constitution as a living document, subject to change (by amendments and by judicial interpretation) as society progresses. It is the life-serving Supreme Court justices that are called upon to determine the constitutionality of an action or law. There continues to be two very different approaches to the interpretation of the Constitution; one strand known as *strict constructionists* or *originalism* (a conservative approach) and the other as the *loose constructionists* or *living/organic* Constitution (liberal approach). This very split is the source of the visceral battle over selection of a justice who retires or dies in office, like is happening right now over the nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett to replace Justice Ruth Ginsburg who died recently in office.

From the beginning there was a healthy distrust of government – any government. Given the loss of life in gun-related violence over the years, a robust debate constantly pops up regarding the 2nd Amendment. The “loose constitutionalists” feel that the second amendment should be changed/restricted or repealed as it has no relevancy in the modern world, in their opinion. The “strict constitutionalists” believe in preserving the original intentions of the founding fathers, that the right to keep and bear arms must be maintained at all times, it being one of the founding principles of the United States. The 2nd Amendment was intended to drive home the point that the people should have the right to resist and defend themselves against the tyranny of any government, including their own. People feel strongly pro and against the 2nd Amendment, and this makes it a very hot election issue.

The claim is often made that the freedom of the American people rests on respect for these principles that have largely fuelled the American democratic experiment. Elections can be seen as a periodic sounding of the governed to express their opinions as to who should govern them and based on what guiding principles. Elections are necessary for a peaceful struggle for power among Americans. At stake may be competing visions of America,

both its past and its future. Once again, as called for in their constitution, national and state elections will be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November. In 2020 that is November 3.

More recently the integrity of the election system itself has come under increased scrutiny. The opposing candidates and parties accuse their opponents of cheating, whether exceeding finance limits or worse, through fraud in the voting and counting of the ballots. Mail-in voting in particular offers great opportunities for such fraud. The final results may not be known or released until days or weeks following election day.

Questions for discussion of the American political system

1. What is a republic? What are some key principles of American “republican” government?
2. Who were the Loyalists and why did they not join in the rebellion?
3. Why is the American “Declaration of Independence” such an important document to Americans? Have other nations been influenced by it?
4. How and why is the American Constitution a stable document?
5. What is meant by the “separation of powers”?
6. Are the checks and balances in the American federal government too strong, leading to gridlock? Is there still a checks and balance in effect today or is one branch more powerful than the others? If so, how and why?
7. Should any of the criteria to being a Senator or Congressman, which were set in 1787, be updated? If so, how, in what way?
8. What are the differences between *originalism* and *organic approaches* to interpreting the meaning of the Constitution? Provide two examples of each approach in action.
9. How many members are there in the House of Representatives? How are they elected? How long is their term of office? Why is there this difference between the House and the Senate?
10. Is the United States in danger of becoming a nation ultimately ruled by its Supreme Court?
11. Should Justices of the Supreme Court have term limits? Should being of a certain age exclude one from making decisions on matters which they may not be familiar with, such as the internet?
12. Look at a list of amendments to the Constitution. Which do you think were the most important to reaffirming the American way of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness?”
13. “Peace, order, and good government.” Contrast this phrase, which appears in Canada’s constitution, with America’s “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Are there any notable differences in the duties of government that these phrases outline, or are the differences merely incidental? Why?

The American Electoral Process

Political Parties

In the early years after the thirteen colonies united to form the United States, although there were great debates over the constitution and the various arrangements concerning the division of powers, voting rights, qualifications for citizenship, rights of the people, etc. there were no formal political parties competing for the executive offices in the national or state governments. However, political factions began to develop very early as different groups and individuals vied for influence over the direction of public affairs at the state and federal levels. In fact, George Washington, the first American President, warned against the development of factions within the state as that would poison the political process of the republic.

During his own presidency disagreements over certain policies were already apparent between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, two of his Cabinet ministers. Eventually, two dominant parties came into being, the Republicans (who go back to 1854 and Abraham Lincoln) and the Democrats (who go back to 1824 and Andrew Jackson). The Democrat Party is sometimes represented as a donkey, while the Republican Party is sometimes featured as an elephant. (for explanation go to this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwZUHLcokn4>.) The love of competition and service is very strong among Americans. There are elections for all sorts of offices and



levels of government, athletic teams, school councils, prom queens, etc. To be elected to the House of Representatives or to the Senate in the United States, a candidate must gain a plurality, that is, more votes than any other candidate, but not necessarily more than 50% of the total votes cast. This is a first-past-the-post or winner-take-all system because there is no reward for the party or candidate that finishes second. As a result, two political parties usually dominate plurality electoral systems to the disadvantage of smaller third parties. Successful candidates inevitably belong to one or other of the two major parties. There are no legal restrictions that prevent third parties from forming and fielding their own candidates, but the plurality system itself usually hinders their efforts to win votes sufficient to establish a foothold in the political arena.

The Presidency

A good overview of the American system of government can be found at many youtube links. See list at the end of this resource dealing with an outline of the Constitution, the separation of powers, the presidency, the three branches of government etc.

For this supplement, we are concentrating on the process for electing the chief executive in the land, namely the office of President. Even though George Washington held the office as the first President, the position itself was relatively weak at the beginning. But, through a variety of circumstances the power of the office has been greatly enhanced since the 1850s. Among these factors were: the growth of the nation's power and standing in the world; the expansion of its territory through war and land purchases; the experiences of the Civil War; the growth in the federal bureaucracy and the military; the professionalization of government; modern industrialization of the economy, the increasing complexity of problems that governments have had to face.



George Washington

The American President is both the **head of state** and the **head of government**, and the military commander-in-chief. The sheer size of the American federal government is enormous, employing around 5 million employees, including almost 500,000 active-duty military personnel. The President has vast executive powers including waging war and pardoning criminals. He may sign or veto legislation passed by Congress and he has the power to recommend bills to Congress. The latter body may override a presidential veto but only by a two-thirds majority in each house. One of the most controversial and important of his powers is that of appointing Supreme Court justices and federal judges (subject to the consent of the Senate). This last power generates tremendous debate and is one of the principal reasons why presidential elections are so crucial.



Abraham Lincoln

The President may be **impeached** by a majority in the House and removed from office by a two-thirds majority in the Senate for "treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors". Few presidents have faced the threat or reality of impeachment procedures. In fact, it has happened only three times in American history, Andrew Johnson in 1868, and the latest examples being President Bill Clinton in 1998 and President Donald Trump at the beginning of 2020. None of the three was convicted by the Senate.



Bill Clinton

Running for President

Today any politician that wants to run for the presidency would first form an exploratory committee to study the chances of winning the nomination of their party and the subsequent election. A large consideration even at this early stage is the ability or capacity to raise tons of \$\$\$\$ money for the very long, expensive and tortuous campaign to obtain the nomination of one of the two dominant political parties in the race for the White House. The would-be candidates have to wage a campaign in each of 50 states to win the preference of their party nationally. Registered members of the respective parties vote in the “primaries” or in the state “caucuses” to express their preference among the multiple party candidates.

Each state may have different rules for apportioning their delegates to the parties’ national convention where a candidate for the presidency is formally chosen by the gathered state delegates. Some states apportion the number of delegates according to the percentage of votes that the various candidates obtained, for example, 35% of the popular vote in that state’s primary would get that candidate some 35% of the delegates. But most states give all its delegates to the person who got the most popular votes regardless of whether that was 19%, 38%, 47% or 75% of the total. It’s winner take all. For the 2020 nomination the Democrat Party had over twenty candidates and eventually Joe Biden became their standard bearer. This election cycle, due to the restrictions put in place because of the pandemic, the presidential campaign has not been conducted with the same traditional hoopla and the razzle dazzle of culminating conventions was missing.



The Electoral College

The President is not elected directly by the voters but by an **Electoral College** representing each state on the basis of a combination of the number of members in the Senate (two for each state regardless of size) and the number of members in the House of Representatives (roughly proportional to population). The total of the Electoral College is



538, with a majority of 270 electoral votes required to elect the President. The states with the largest number of votes are California (55), Texas (38), New York (29) and Florida (29). The states with the smallest number of votes have only three votes, plus the District of Columbia, which has no voting representation in Congress, but has three electoral votes. In effect, therefore, the Presidential election is not one election but really

51 elections. This system of election means that in theory a candidate can win the largest number of popular or individual votes nationwide, but fail to win the largest number of votes in the Electoral College, and, therefore, fail to become President. In practice, this has happened four times in US history, most recently in 2016. This possibility in turn has led to efforts to reform or abolish the Electoral College system. It sounds unfair and undemocratic, but the explanation is that the ‘founding fathers’ who drafted the American Constitution did not wish to give too much power to the people. They also wanted to respect the importance of individual states and their distinct identity and hence they created a system of checks and balances, a compromise, among large populous states and smaller, less populated states.

The Constitution enables each state to determine how its members in the Electoral College are chosen, and since the 1820s, states have chosen their electors by a direct vote of the people. The United States is the only current example of an indirectly elected executive president. In a sense, this is a dual system combining both direct voting and indirect voting. Like in the pre-election primaries most states have a “winner-take-all” system that awards all electors to the winning presidential candidate. But, two states, Maine and Nebraska each have a variation of “proportional representation” thus. more than one presidential candidate can receive electoral votes in these states.

The meeting of the electors takes place on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December after the presidential election. The electors meet in their respective states, where they cast their votes for President and Vice-President on separate ballots. The state’s electors’ votes are recorded on a “Certificate of Vote,” which is prepared at the meeting by the electors. The state’s Certificates of Votes are sent to the Congress where they are counted in a joint session of Congress on the 6th of January in the year following the meeting of the electors. The Vice-President, as President of the Senate, presides over the count and announces the results of the vote. The President of the Senate then declares which persons, if any, have been elected President and Vice- President of the United States.

The President-Elect takes the oath of office and is sworn in as President of the United States on January 20th in the year following the Presidential election. This year there are possible complications in this system because of the method of voting in the general election, the counting of the ballots in each state and the possibility of great delays due of the volume of mail-in ballots. There are provisions in the American Constitution that attempts to deal with the possibility of there being a situation wherein no candidate receives the necessary 270 votes for the presidency. These arcane provions would come into play and the House of Representatives would decide the winner But it would not be a vote by 438 individual members but rather the 50 states represented by the 438, with each state having only one vote. The candidate receiving 26 of the 50 state votes would become the President.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the American system of government

The United States, actually has the longest surviving republican /constitutional government system in the world. It is not a perfect form of government, but it has served that nation extremely well and it does suggest stability and longevity. *(For a fuller consideration of the republican system of government have students assess its strengths and weaknesses by reading the full article found at <http://www.preservearticles.com/2012031026102/get-complete-information-on-the-strengths-and-weaknessesof-republicanism.html>.)* Among the **strengths** can be included:



protection of private property rights of all individuals under Natural Law; universal suffrage; checks and balances (between federal and state governments and between the three branches of government); rule by the majority but under written rules that also protect minority rights; safeguards guaranteeing certain individual freedoms through the Bill of Rights. Its governmental sytem has allowed the United Sates to progress and expand and become a world power. The American people have been proud of their country and its history, even when internal division and the challenge of racism and slavery threatened to dissolve the union. Given the polarized conditions of today there is now renewed threats to their system of government and their way of life. Some fear that the divisions run so deep

that the nation may break up under the pressure or suffer another violent catastrophe like a second civil war.

With a nation as large, populous and powerful as the United States it is difficult to keep in place all the original principles on which the nation was founded and that served it so well in its first 244 years. **Weaknesses** have crept in: the government is run by political parties, today, rather than by rules; a two party system is entrenched, with Democrats and Republicans having a stranglehold on the electoral process, with money, tradition and the media on their side; the huge cost of elections is prohibitive, limiting the range of candidates, increasing the influence of corporate interests and pressure groups; ad campaigns themselves tend to be extremely negative, even if often truthful; the lack of genuine turnover in the composition of the Congress due to the practice of *Gerry-mandering* of electoral districts; voter apathy is rampant with barely 50% bothering to vote even in national elections; growth of “*pork barrel*” politics; the political debate has been coarsened, becoming more “*partisan and bitter...more polarised and tribal*”.

Questions for further discussion

1. Why do two parties dominate American politics? Why haven't third parties made any inroads in the United States, whereas in Canada third parties have achieved power at the provincial level at least?
2. What is meant by the “first-past-the-post”? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this system?
4. What role does money or lack thereof play in the political system?
5. The current presidential candidates accuse one another of being unfit for the office of President. What do they mean? Provide examples for each candidate's claim about the other.
6. Why has the power of the Presidency increased so much in the United States? Is the office too powerful or is it too demanding for any one person?
7. Compare and contrast the position and powers of the American president with that of the Canadian prime minister. Which office has greater discretion in the use of the power?
8. Have students list 10 of the most important powers of the American president and have them assess and discuss the relative importance of those powers.
9. How difficult is it to remove a president from office other than by him/her losing an election?
10. What are primaries? What is their role in the selection of candidates for president? What do you think about this method of choosing a presidential candidate? What are some advantages? What are some serious drawbacks? Why is this system in operation?
11. What is the Electoral College? How many members does it have? What is its composition based upon? Is there any unfairness in this system?
12. Why are some political pundits critical of its composition and its role in the election process and want to eliminate it?
13. Why are elections so necessary in a free, representative, democratic republic?
14. Which aspects of the American system of government strike you as strengths and which as weaknesses?



PART B

The 2020 Presidential Campaign, Candidates, Issues

The battle for the American presidency garners attention world wide. Some of this interest is due to the role and importance of the United States in the world, but much is generated by the constant television cycle, with revelations, speeches, gaffes, rallies taking place round the clock it seems. No doubt there is also interest generated by the sheer amount of money spent on the campaigning process. The main protagonists and their platforms create yet another level of close scrutiny. The contrasting personalities of the candidates may also create a dramatic narrative that makes for compelling television watching or online reading. The two major contenders, President Donald Trump and his rival, Vice-President Joe Biden, also have surrogate speakers who appear on cable television shows all day long trying to spin events, news, gaffes,



"bombshell" surprises and revelations.

The race for the White House may last one to two years. Precisely because of the length of the



campaign and the physical size of the United States and the diversity of the electorate, it takes time to reach the voters and earn their vote. The candidates traditionally criss-cross the nation but inevitably end up spending the majority of their time and finances in repeated visits to the

so-called "battleground states". The campaigns are very complex and full of strategems and tactical moves. Operatives are always trying to take advantage of the slightest slip-up or verbal gaffe of the opponent. This also explains why hundreds of millions of dollars have to be raised in order to mount a serious presidential campaign. However, the campaigning has taken a different shape this year because of Covid-19. President Trump is making an effort to still have huge public rallies while his opponent, former Vice-President Joe Biden, has limited his presence on the hustings. Even the presidential debates promise to be different judging from the first, rather racous, no-holds-barred debate. There are ups and downs and lots of surprises, not the least of which is President Trump contracting the Covid-19 virus. It remains to be seen how this development will impact the whole style and substance of the campaigning.

Here are several suggested activities on how students can learn about the election campaign and the prospects for the respective candidates to achieve their ultimate objective. We offer some suggestions also for analyzing the process and evaluating the performance of the main candidates and their respective campaign teams.

Assessing the Candidates

Have students complete a template on Donald Trump and Joe Biden by comparing and contrasting them as persons and as candidates and what they stand for. The list below includes items that have already been much discussed by the leading candidates, and no doubt will form part of the scheduled debates that will be held during the months of September and October. Given the sheer volume of issues and information available, have students complete the assignment by working in groups of 3-4 students whereby they can each concentrate on perhaps one

item regarding the personality of the candidates and then four or five issues. The group's findings can then be shared with the rest of the class in written form, orally or via power point.

Item of comparison/contrast	DONALD TRUMP Republican Party	JOE BIDEN Democrat Party
Personal background and experience in business or government		
Personality, character, trustworthiness, temperament, truthfulness		
Personal health, energy, stamina, ability to serve out the term and handle the great pressures of the office		
On the Specific issues	TRUMP	BIDEN
Economy, jobs, employment		
Trade deals		
Income and corporate tax rates		
Handling of the pandemic		
Foreign affairs & National security		
Race relations, "critical race theory"		
Immigration, refugee crisis		
Law and order		
Respect for the Constitution		

Appointment of justices to the Supreme Court		
Abortion policy**** (see Part C)		
Planned Parenthood Federation		
Military preparedness		
American nationalism		
Environmental Concerns, Climate Change		
Health Care		
Public education, school choice		
The family unit, marriage, raising children, child care		
Privacy, internet security		
Technology, Innovation, Science		
Energy production		
Other issues?		

Questions

1. Which issues are of primary importance according to the most recent polls?
2. How do each student group reporting rank the issues in terms of priority to them? Have them explain their rationale for the ranked priorities.
3. Are there any social issues that are not receiving the kind of attention they have received in the past three election cycles? Why or why not?
4. Religious groups have certain concerns with the direction that America has taken over the past 10 years or so, what are their concerns and which candidate(s) would be considered more dangerous to their interests or concerns?

5. Personal health seems to be an issue with the reported decline and increasingly fragile state of health and aging of Joe Biden and now the virus infection for Trump. What type of health issue would or should disqualify a candidate running for high office? Cite several examples of candidates who withdrew from the race because of such medical concerns (since 1964).
6. Should all candidates for the presidency (or in Canada, for position of political party leaders) be obliged to disclose their medical records, or are such demands a real imposition on a person's right to privacy?
7. What about a candidate's financial health, business interests, and tax returns? Should these aspects also be made transparent so voters have a full understanding of the candidate's financial well being? Or should any of this matter?
8. Should it be mandatory for candidates to fully disclose the names of all donors to their campaign and amounts donated, whether a private individual or a business corporation or other institution?
9. Should there be a limit on the amount that can be donated to an individual candidate or their campaign?
10. Make a list of special interest groups in the United States (e.g. tech giants like Google, Facebook, Amazon, rich athletes and celebrities, unions, defense contractors, educational organizations, large media outlets) that play a significant role in supporting the rival campaigns.
11. Which party has more "special interest" supporters? Provide examples.
12. Which party appears to have organized protest groups acting on its behalf? Provide examples.

Media Coverage of the Candidates and their Respective Campaigns

1. Have the students monitor the media coverage of the campaign on a regular basis for one week, perhaps for a half hour each evening if possible. Alternatively, the teacher could prepare a 15 minute montage summary from the three main American cable networks, Fox, CNN and MSNBC. The monitoring could also be done online and by groups of three students who would rotate their viewing so each member of the trio got to see how each of the networks cover the campaigns. Students should be able to note whether the media are neutral or decidedly in favour of one candidate or another based on the commentary, film footage and the content selected for reporting. Some other aspects they might consider is the relative amount of time each candidate receives and whether the tone is positive or negative toward the respective candidates. Are there any issues that are either ignored or downplayed by the media in favour of or against Trump? Ditto re Biden?
2. What renders the tone of the current presidential campaign unusual? How is it characterized in
 - a. Political cartoons (analysis of such could be a revealing assignment)
 - b. Opinion pieces and editorials in newspapers
 - c. Ad campaigns of the candidates
3. Have students watch at least one presidential debate and have them analyze and comment on the debate by addressing these points:
 - a) Does the candidate explain clearly why he/she wants to be elected president?
 - b) Were major issues clarified during the debate?
 - c) Do the candidates offer a compelling, clear vision for their country?
 - d) Are the candidates able to highlight their own strengths and the shortcomings of their opponent?
 - e) Is the debate moderator fair and balanced in his/her role as moderator?



- f) Did either of the candidates surprise them by their performance in the debate? If so, how?
- g) Are debates truly important? Do they serve a genuine purpose or are they just one more media controlled event designed to ramp up television ratings?

Other aspects for research and discussion that could be assigned as essay topics;

1. Nature and Tone of Political Ads, Costs, Advertising and Politics
2. Numbers and Politics, Data Collection, Polling
3. Careers for People with Math Skills in Politics
4. Low Voter Turnout: A Problem? Solutions?
5. Media Bias
6. Special Interest Groups and their Influence
7. Role of Celebrities
8. Use of Social Media: help or hindrance?
9. Novel ideas for reforming the political system.
10. What are the dangers for rigging the presidential election through technological manipulation?

Part C

Because of fortuitous and unfortunate events that have occurred in the month of September and October and likely to drag on into November and beyond, abortion appears to be a significant component in the American election. This section considers the impact of this issue on the election.

American Election and the Abortion Debate

According to a July, 2020 Gallup poll the number of Americans who consider themselves “pro-life” vs. “pro-choice” continues to be virtually the same as previous years (46% pro-life or antiabortion -48% pro-choice or pro-abortion) but it affects the way they vote quite differently. In that poll 47% of respondents indicated that abortion is one of many “major factors” in how they will vote, while just 25% do not consider it a major issue at all. But importantly, 24% of those surveyed indicated that they will vote only for a candidate who shares their views on the issue. Pro-lifers are more likely to be single-issue voters, by a margin of 30% to 19%. This difference in single-issue voters seems to favour pro-life candidates.



Amy Coney Barrett

One must also note that judging from comments from all sides on the issue, abortion is still a hot election political topic, if not more so with the impending confirmation hearings for Judge Amy Coney Barrett, the nominee of President Trump for the Supreme Court.

According to another poll, Pew Research Center, when ranking the important issues in the 2020 election, the polls taken before the death of Justice Ginsburg showed that only 40% believe that abortion is a top issue in the election. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/08/13/important-issues-in-the-2020-election/>.) But spokespersons on either side of the political divide disagree and consider the issue as of primary importance. For example, in an *Open Letter to the Pastors of the United States* Priests for Life’s Fr. Frank Pavone explains that priests and other religious leaders



Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

should consider abortion a crucial issue that should unite voters towards building a culture of life. In Pavone’s view, religious minded people should view the abortion issue as a moral demand. Other Americans would agree with his sentiment, believing that the Democrat Party has abandoned the principle of the God-given right to life and the freedom to practice their faith in their public life. The Democrats are seen as a party intent to write into the laws and into the Courts a worldview completely devoid of those first principles, and instead are willing to embrace the destruction of innocent human life.

These same pro-life people view the Republican Party favourably, praising them for impressive accomplishments to protect religious freedom and freedom of speech on college campus. They praise President Trump as a keeper of his pro-life promises during the first term of his presidency. They point to various actions and executive decisions taken: protect unborn children by reinstating the Mexio Policy; prevent American taxpayers from paying for abortions around the globe; intention to defund International Planned Parenthood; addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September of 2019 and declaring that every child – born and unborn – is a sacred gift from God; becoming the first sitting president to speak at the national March for Life in Washington; rewriting the rules for federal funding of fetal tissue research, over the objections of some of his health advisers.

Even more importantly, Trump is also committed to appointing judges (e.g. Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh) who will interpret the Constitution as the Framers intended and uphold the dignity it confers upon every human being. “Our Constitution and our laws contain many protections for innocent life, and I have worked hard for the confirmation and appointment of judges - including two outstanding Supreme Court justices - committed to the rule of law.” His choice of Amy Coney Barrett is along this same line, wanting for a Justice someone who respects the constitution and stands in the *originalist* or *strict constructionist* tradition.

The US Catholic bishops’ conference praised the Trump administration for its pro-life policies and for promoting health and human rights and religious freedom. Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas (who also serves as chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Pro-Life Activities) said that “Killing innocent and defenseless unborn children through abortion is not health care. . . . Abortion violates an unborn child’s most basic human right, the right to life, and it also can wound the mother emotionally and physically.”



Franklin Graham

In addition to these Catholic leaders, there are many evangelicals who likewise support the Republican platform on abortion. Franklin Graham, (son of famous evangelist Billy Graham) for example, decried the Biden-Harris ticket as the ‘most pro-abortion presidential ticket in history’ (**Washington examiner**). The Rev. Graham said California Sen. Kamala Harris’ vocal support of Planned Parenthood and abortion rights should disqualify Democrat presidential nominee Joe Biden from consideration among Christian voters.



Nancy Pelosi

Democrat Party leaders have taken a different approach. Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi has helped push the Democrat Party to adopt an increasingly radical pro-abortion agenda, one that calls for unrestricted abortions up to birth and taxpayer funding for them. She has led Democrats in blocking a measure to protect newborns from infanticide. In fact, she claimed Democrats are empowering women by advocating for abortion on demand. Pelosi promised that they will push to expand abortions across America if the Democrats win.

But what do polls say regarding abortion? Polls consistently show that Americans oppose abortion on demand and want laws that protect unborn babies. A 2019 Harvard CAPS/Harris poll found that only 6% of Americans said abortion should be allowed up until birth while only 8% said they should be permitted up to the third trimester. Gallup polls found that 55% of Americans take a pro-life position on abortion wanting all (21%) or almost all (39%) abortions made illegal. The poll found just 43% of Americans take a pro-abortion position wanting all (29%) or almost all (14%) abortions legal. If these polls are credible it proves that abortion is an important issue and plays a vital role

in the election. Yet, pro-abortion, pro-choice advocates believe that these polls proves that the issue will help decide the election at the presidential level, Senate majority, and outcome for House of Representatives in their favour.



Joe Biden

Biden claims he will work to codify Roe v. Wade, and that his Justice Department will do everything in its power to stop the rash of state laws that in his opinion “blatantly violate Roe v. Wade.” Biden wants to repeal the Hyde Amendment by reissuing “guidance specifying that states cannot refuse Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood and other providers and reverse the

Trump Administration’s rule preventing these organizations from obtaining Title X funds. Biden’s plan would, accordingly, enable women to abort their babies using taxpayer money.

Kamala Harris, the Democrat Vice-Presidential candidate has advocated for expanding women’s “reproductive rights” and supports termination of life in the womb for the entire term of pregnancy, including at the moment of birth. Harris explained: “There are states that have passed laws that will virtually prevent women from having access to reproductive health care. And it is not an exaggeration to say women will die. Poor women, women of color will die because these Republican legislatures in these various states who are out of touch with America are telling women what to do with their bodies.”



Sen. Kamala Harris

As attorney general of California, Kamala Harris prosecuted pro-life journalists from the Center for Medical Progress who investigated Planned Parenthood and its selling of aborted baby body parts, leading to a House investigation and hearing. In 2015, in her capacity as California attorney general, Harris helped shape legislation known as the “Reproductive Facts Act” that would force licensed crisis-pregnancy centers to post information that explains they do not provide abortions and that the state of California provides free or low-cost abortions. She was sued and lost in the Supreme Court three years later. As a senator on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Harris questioned judicial nominees who happen to be anti-abortion and Catholic.

Democrats are not monolithic in their support for an ever more radical approach taken by party leaders and are somewhat divided as to whether to support the Biden-Harris ticket. This applies especially to the **Democrats for Life**. They share many if not all of the Democrat party platform, but feel that they have not been given any voice in the party and have been ignored. Biden’s extreme views on abortion have made them threaten to not vote for him in the upcoming election if he does not use friendlier language and back down on what they consider to be his new extreme views. They urged Democrat leadership to end the explicit support in their platform for abortion extremism, such as taxpayer-funded abortion in America and overseas, opposed by 60%-70% of voters. They also

stated that 79% of voters oppose elective abortion on demand, including, but not limited to, many people of faith who deserve a home in the Democratic Party.

Polling has shown that 60% of Americans believe their taxes should not be used to pay for abortions. Even many abortion supporters realize that forcing people with strong moral objections to fund abortion on demand is a terrible policy. If elected, Biden will try to use his administration to reshape the federal judiciary and expand abortion rights. Biden and Harris promise to ensure that all their judges will uphold and strengthen *Roe v. Wade*. Planned Parenthood congratulated Harris in a statement after Biden announced her as his running mate. "Throughout her career, she has been a steadfast champion for reproductive rights and health care".

The death of Justice Ruth Ginsburg on September 18 threw the issue into the top tier of the election pile, re-energizing supporters and opponents of the two campaigns. It unleashed both hope and fear in both camps. They know what is at stake with the selection of a new Supreme Court Justice given the present composition of the court. The outcome of the current national election may have to be decided by the Supreme Court. They also recognize that the legacy of the court may last 40-50 years, strongly influencing the development of American society.

Questions for discussion

1. How does the abortion issue play a vital role in the election campaign?
2. How important is the issue?
3. What does it reveal about the basic values of the two major parties?
4. Which groups of voters consider abortion a crucial issue for them?
5. How does the issue unite or divide voters?
6. Can it help decide the election at the presidential level, Senate majority, and outcome for House of Representatives?
7. What exactly did *Roe vs Wade* decision establish?
8. What is the Hyde Amendment?
9. What are Title X funds?
10. Why is the selection of a Supreme Court Justice of such great consequence?
11. Is Amy Coney Barrett a qualified candidate for the nomination?
12. How and why is the present process so complicated, bitter and perhaps even dangerous for the well being of the United States?
13. How do the two cartoons below demonstrate the political polarization of Americans on this issue? Provide the context for the cartoons and offer your own analysis of the intent of the cartoons respectively and the fairness of the portrayal.



Here is a list of useful websites for the material presented in this supplement.

Structure of government and election materials

<http://www.mediamonitors.net/stanmoore40.html>

<http://www.rogerdarlington.me.uk/Americanpoliticalsystem.html>

http://www.ehow.com/info_8216763_advantages-disadvantages-parliamentary-government.html

<http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/08/17/does-america-need-a-prime-minister/>

<http://news.firedoglake.com/2011/08/26/the-weakness-of-the-american-governmental-system/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmPchuXI>

<http://www.antiessays.com/free-essays/81712.html>

<http://www.preservearticles.com/2012031026102/get-complete-information-on-the-strengths-and-weaknesses-of-republicanism.Html>

<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/about.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcSnZw8jTTw> and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6QhP1tHXU4&feature>

<http://www.sparknotes.com/us-government-and-politics/american-government/political-parties/section2.rhtml>

<http://www.history.com/news/ask-history/how-did-the-republican-and-democratic-parties-get-their-animal-symbols>

<http://constitution.findlaw.com/amendments.html#sthash.ELHzrVpR.dpuf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmLosRzNRqA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuFR5XBYLfU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT6koTFHnH0>

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/US-election-teaching-resources-matt-davis><http://www.teachhub.com/12-ways-use-presidential-election-your-classroom><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrk4oY7UxpQ> Introduction:

Crash Course U.S. Government and Politics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bf3CwYCxXw> Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances: Crash Course Government and Politics #3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGvx5UEwgtA> Structure of the Court System: Crash Course Government and Politics #19

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTuh5m_23SU The American Court System Explained

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily-videos/how-do-party-delegates-and-the-electoral-college-work/> H How do party delegates and the Electoral College work?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFqPmzb9_5M The American Political System Explained in 10 Minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oU5gasRxYdU> Constitution 101 | Lecture 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGGx7sTDnMY> Lesson One | The Connection Between the Constitution and the Declaration

Abortion Segment Sources

<https://www.lifenews.com/2020/02/28/nancy-pelosi-and-democrats-defeat-bill-to-stop-infanticide-care-for-babies-born-alive-after-abortions/>

<https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/kamala-harriss-anti-catholic-bigotry/>

https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/joe-biden-dem-nominee?utm_content=buffera99cf&utm_medium=LSN%2Bbuffer&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=LSN

<https://catholicleader.com.au/news/presidential-election-whats-the-catholic-way-to-vote>

<https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com/gallup-poll-says-abortion-is-a-major-factor-in-elections-with-pro-life-candidates-more-likely-to-gain-americans-votes/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yjTEdZ81II> **Hesburgh Lecture 2016: Professor Amy Barrett at the JU Public Policy Institute**

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/08/13/important-issues-in-the-2020-election/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/23/politics/abortion-attitude-poll-roe-v-wade-anniversary-trnd/index.html>

<https://thefederalist.com/2020/02/07/why-abortion-wont-make-a-difference-to-the-presidential-election/>

<https://wjla.com/news/nation-world/why-abortion-could-impact-how-people-vote-in-2020>

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/08/26/donald-trump-abortion-election-2020-pro-life>

<https://thehayride.com/2020/08/mcclung-yes-abortion-is-on-the-2020-ballot/>

<https://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2020/08/27/does-kamala-harris-support-abortion/>

<https://www.usnews.com/elections/abortion-2020>

<http://www.nrlpac.org/pdf/2020%20POTUS%20comparison.pdf>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-at-rnc-nun-lauds-trump-for-being-anti-abortion>

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/02/democrats-diverge-on-outreach-to-pro-life-swing-voters/><https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/30/conservative-groups-abortion-trump-345241>

<https://www.democratsforlife.org/index.php/articles-and-op-eds /1064-read-dfla-s-letter-to-the-platform-committee>

