

US Presidential elections 2008: the countdown has started

The complex process leading to the US Presidential elections started in Iowa in early January 2008. In this primary season, the supporters of the two main parties, the **Democrats** and the **Republicans**, choose their candidate in each of the fifty states of the union. Depending on the state, there are two different processes to choose the candidates who will finally be chosen during the national conventions of the parties, at the end of the summer 2008.

Iowa: the first caucus

A caucus is a system based on private meetings. The procedures of caucuses vary depending on the laws of each state. In Iowa, supporters meet in private homes, schools or other public buildings to discuss the issues and to choose their favourite potential candidate. They do so by gathering in the different corners of the room for the Democrats or in a secret ballot for the Republicans. The delegates to the national conventions, to be held in the late summer, will vote according to the results of the caucus.

New Hampshire: the first primary election

In some states, like New Hampshire, all the voters of the state will be asked to vote for their favourite candidate.

Here are the dates of the caucuses and primaries elections to be held in 2008:

3 Jan: Iowa caucuses

8 Jan: New Hampshire primary

15 Jan: Michigan primary

19 Jan: Nevada caucuses; South Carolina primary (Rep)

26 Jan: South Carolina primary (Dem)

29 Jan: Florida primary

5 Feb: some 20 states including California, New York, New Jersey

Super Tuesday

On 5 February 2008, at least 22 states will take part in “Super-Duper Tuesday”, including California, Illinois, New York and New Jersey, some of the biggest states of the union.

The party conventions

These conventions will be held at the end of the summer. The official candidate of each party will be chosen there, just a few months before the presidential election. Each of them will choose a running-mate, who will become vice-president if he is elected.

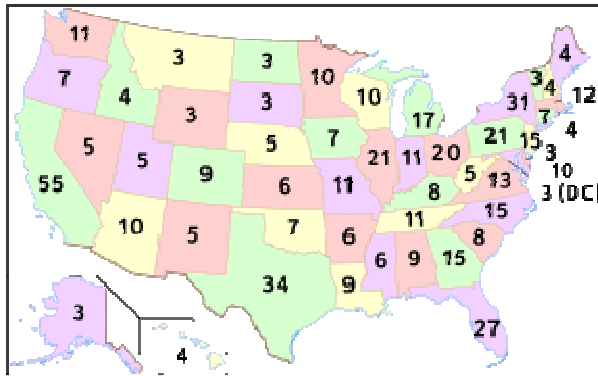
In some states, the choice made during the primary elections is not quite clear, that's why each candidate fights so hard until the end, to try and win the final contest at their party's convention.

The presidential elections

American presidential elections are always held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

Surprisingly, voters don't actually vote for their favourite candidate: they chose the "electors" of their state, who will vote for one of the candidates. Each state has a number of "electors" which depends more or less on the size of the population. The electors of all the states form what is called The Electoral College. It is in fact only the members of this college who vote for the president. The "electors" of each state are expected to vote for a single candidate, the one who came first in the popular vote of their state. Such a system allowed George Bush to be elected in 2000, even if he got less popular votes in the whole country than his rival, Al Gore.

Here is a map showing the number of "electors" in each state.



Here are the candidates for the Democratic Party:

Hillary Clinton
John Edwards
Mike Gravel
Dennis Kucinich
Barack Obama
Bill Richardson

Here are the candidates for the Republican Party:

Rudy Giuliani
Mike Huckabee
Duncan Hunter
John McCain
Ron Paul
Mitt Romney
Fred Thompson