

SCHOLASTIC BOOK OF
PRESIDENTS

GEORGE SULLIVAN



SCHOLASTIC INC.

O'Dile Kory and Tim Sullivan read the manuscript copy for the recent additions to this book, correcting errors and making solid suggestions for improvement. I'm very grateful to them both.

—George Sullivan

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ISBN-13: 978-1-338-03807-1
ISBN-10: 1-338-03807-9

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 16 17 18 19 20

Printed in the U.S.A. 40
First edition, December 2016
Book design by Maeve Norton

Since 1972, the state of Iowa has held the nation's first caucus each election year. There were close to 2,000 Iowa caucuses for each party in 2016, each a kind of mini nominating convention.

SUPER TUESDAY

On a Tuesday in February or March of each presidential election year, a large number of states hold primary contests, which makes that Tuesday of “super” importance to the candidates since it is the

Ronald Reagan on the campaign trail.



day when the highest number of delegates are awarded. On Super Tuesday in 2016, Republican Donald Trump won seven of the eleven states holding primaries. The large number of delegates awarded to Trump on that day made it mathematically impossible for any other candidate to catch up with him and get to the 1,237 delegates necessary to become the Republican nominee.

THE CONVENTIONS

In the summer before the presidential election in November, each major party holds its national convention. While each convention is a week-long political circus, with stirring speechmaking, wild cheering, and parading delegates, the process of choosing a candidate is the first order of business.

Senator John F. Kennedy, center, of Massachusetts stops in a diner in Nashua, New Hampshire, during the New Hampshire primary campaign.



Since conventions are nationally televised, each is an opportunity for a party to present its most notable members and possible candidates for the future. During the Democratic convention in 2004, little-known Barack Obama, then a candidate for senator from the state of Illinois, delivered the party's keynote address, summing up what the Democrats stood for. Obama dazzled both the convention delegates and TV viewers. In November, Obama was elected to the U.S. Senate and four years later was a presidential candidate himself.

In 2016, a total of 2,472 delegates were expected to attend the Republican convention. To win the nomination, a candidate had to receive at least 1,237 votes.

On the Democratic side, there were 4,765 delegates. To win, 2,383 were needed.

Among the Democratic delegates, 719 were designated super-delegates. Those named superdelegates were members of Congress, governors, former presidents, and party officials. President Obama was a superdelegate in 2016.

Superdelegates, which are typically only important on the Democratic side, are not pledged to follow the will of the voters. They are unbound, meaning they can vote for whoever they choose.

SMALL-PARTY CANDIDATES

Usually one or more of the smaller national parties offers candidates for president, too. In 1992, for example, H. Ross Perot of Texas, a billionaire businessman, ran as an independent candidate. He received more than 19 million votes, which amounted to about 19 percent of the total votes cast. But he failed to capture any electoral votes.

In the 2012 election, Gary Johnson, the presidential candidate of the Libertarian Party, attracted slightly less than 1 percent of the total votes cast.



THE CAMPAIGN

Once the national parties have chosen their candidates, the presidential race heats up. A campaign manager coordinates operations for each nominee. Political consultants conduct voter research and advise on strategy. Volunteers are organized and a huge network of supporters is put together.

The main points a candidate wants to impress upon the voters are crafted into a consistent message. Day in and day out, throughout his successful run for the presidency in 2008, Barack Obama delivered a constant message of “change” that had great voter appeal.

Each candidate crisscrosses the country, getting out the message at mass meetings, rallies, and other public forums. In reciting the message, the media gets special attention. The term “media” used to mean TV, radio, and print newspapers. Not anymore. Its role has deepened and broadened. Digital communication has expanded to social media and news media. Social media—like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram—is a free or low-cost and highly effective method of winning support, especially among younger voters.

The presidential debates play a vital role in the campaign. There are three of them, and they are televised. Doing well can give an important boost to one’s candidacy. Doing poorly can be fatal to victory.

On Election Day, everyone works to get people to vote. More than 130 million Americans vote for presidential candidates.

For the candidates, the campaign is a grueling experience. But getting elected does not provide much of a break. On January 20, about ten weeks after the election, the winner is sworn in as the next president.

SOCIAL MEDIA

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton’s team used Snapchat to share a 1965 photo of Hillary in high school and wished

