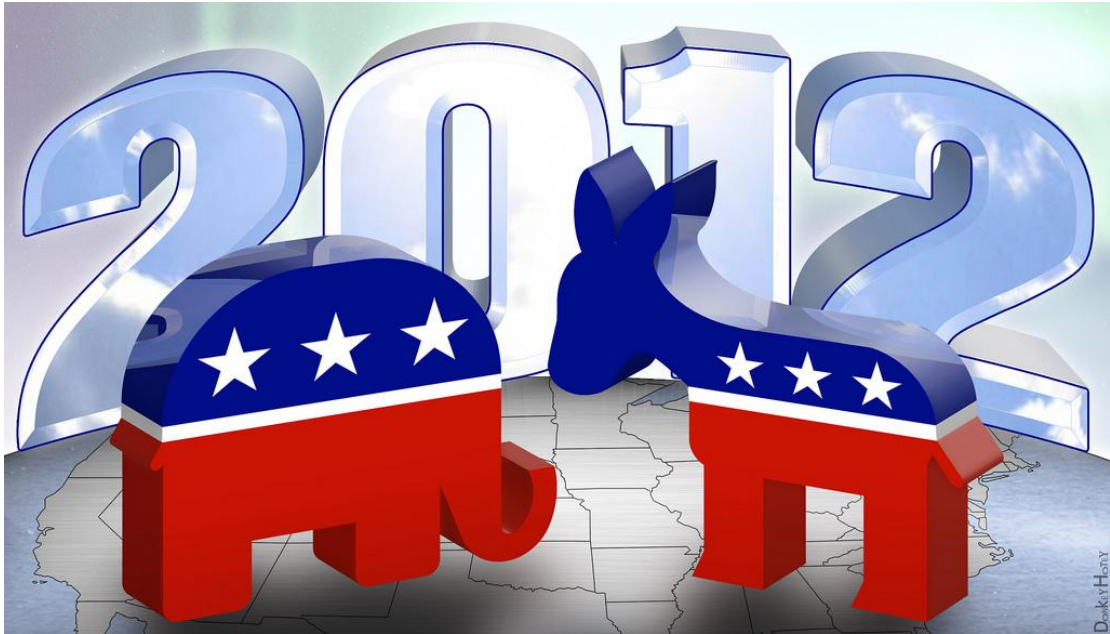


Your Complete 2012 USA Elections Dictionary



Every field has its own jargon, if you are not an insider- you may easily get lost within the specific words and terms and waiver the opportunity of fully understanding what it being discussed. Politics is the classic example to one of those fields.

With 2012 US elections coming up, we present you with the complete dictionary to help you understand what is going on! So if you can't locate the current pork, donkey or elephant, if you don't know the difference between hard money and public funding, if you don't know the difference between Medicare and Medicaid, and have no idea why dogs are blue and stars are red- this is the place for you to be!

A

- **Air War-** the term used to describe the battle between candidates to get as much radio and television advertising as possible. The "air" part of the term came about in recent years as broadcasted and aired advertising is now much cheaper than billboards battle.

B

- **Balancing the ticket-** When the presidential candidate chooses a vice-presidential candidate whose qualities balance out the nominee's perceived weaknesses. So for example, in 2008, Barack Obama, seen as young and relatively inexperienced, selected veteran Senator Joe Biden as his running mate.
- **Ballot Initiative-** A procedure allowed in a number of states under which citizens are able to propose a change in the law. If the initiative's backers can gather enough signatures, the proposed change is put to the voters in a referendum. If it is approved by the voters it then becomes law. Ballot initiatives are sometimes referred to as ballot measures or propositions. The word ballot originates in the Italian *palla* meaning ball, which used to represent a small ball used as counter in secret voting.
- **Battleground State-** A large state with an electorate split relatively evenly between Democrats and Republicans, so named because candidates spend a disproportionate amount of time and money campaigning there. Traditional battleground states include Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania, which have 29, 18 and 20 electoral votes, respectively.
- **Bellwether state-** A state that historically tends to vote for the winning candidate, perhaps because it is, demographically, a microcosm of the country as a whole.

Good examples are Missouri, which has voted for the winner in every US presidential election since 1904, except for 1956 and 2008, and Ohio, which in the same period picked the winner every election except 1944 and 1960. The term derives from the name for a sheep which shepherds would fit with a bell. By listening out for this sheep, the bellwether, shepherds were able to locate the position of the entire flock.

- **Beltway**- An American term for the orbital highway or ring-road that often surrounds major cities. In political reporting, the term refers to business undertaken inside the Interstate 495 highway surrounding Washington DC. A beltway issue is a political issue or debate considered to be of importance only to the political and media class and of little interest to the general public. Those considered to have a beltway mentality are seen as being out of touch with the ordinary voters.
- **Blue Dog**- A fiscally conservative Democrat, often from a Republican-leaning state. The name is a reference to the so-called "yellow dog Democrats" - fiercely loyal southern Democrats who would vote for the party's candidate even if it were a yellow dog.
- **Blue State**- A state where people tend to vote for the Democratic Party.
- **Bundler** A person who gathers ("bundles") campaign contributions to a candidate from his or her network of friends and business associates. Bundlers, who are often wealthy and well-connected, play a crucial role in contemporary campaign finance.

C

- **Capitol**- The seat of Congress in Washington DC. Constructed largely of white marble, it is home to both the Senate and House

of Representatives. The steps of the Capitol building are traditionally the stage for the inauguration of presidents on the 20 January following an election year.

- **Caucus-** A meeting of party members and activists at which they choose which candidate to back for the party nomination.
- **Citizens United-** A 2010 Supreme Court ruling that overturned restrictions on corporate spending in political campaigns. In the 5-4 decision, the court equated corporations' right to spend money to influence an election with the right to free speech held by individuals under the First Amendment to the US constitution. It overturned a ban on corporate and union spending on electioneering communications - that is, so-called issue ads broadcast within 60 days of a general election (or 30 days for primary elections) which explicitly mention the name of a candidate. It means unions and corporations will be able to directly advertise, right up until election day, as long as they haven't coordinated their advertisements with a candidate's campaign.
- **Commander in chief-** The constitutional role granted to the president as head of the United States' armed forces.
- **Congress-** The legislative branch of the US government as prescribed in article I of the US constitution. It is made up of two houses - the 435-member House of Representatives and 100-member Senate - each of which officially has equal power, if not prestige. A congressional period lasts two years (or sessions) and begins at noon on 3 January of odd-numbered years .
- **Congressman/woman-** A member of the House of Representatives, typically. The term can refer to a member of the Senate.
- **Constitution of the United States-** The fundamental and founding law of the US federal system of government. The US constitution and its 27 amendments establish the principal organs of government, their roles, and the basic rights of citizens. It is

upheld as the supreme law of the land, meaning all federal and state laws, executive actions and judicial decisions must be consistent with it. The US constitution was ratified in 1788, and was most recently amended in 1992. It is the oldest written national constitution in effect.

D

- **Delegates-** The party members whose votes at the national convention officially determine the two parties' presidential candidates.
- **Donkey (Democratic)-** The donkey has become the established - although unofficial - political symbol for the Democratic Party. Democratic Party historians say the symbol was first used during Andrew Jackson's presidential campaign in 1828. Labeled a jackass by his opponents, he adopted the donkey for his campaign posters and it stuck with him.

E

- **Electoral College** The collective term for the 538 electors who officially elect the president and vice-president of the United States. Presidential candidates require a majority of 270 college votes to win the presidency. The number of electors for each state is equal to the combined total of its senators and representatives in Congress.
- **Elephant (Republican)-** The traditional symbol for the Republican Party, believed first to have been used in that context by an Illinois newspaper during Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election. Thomas Nast popularized the image in a cartoon in a 1874 edition of Harper's Weekly, as pro-Democrat newspapers were accusing the Republican president of Caesarism for allegedly seeking a third term in office.

F

- **Federal Election Commission (FEC)**- In 1975, Congress created the Federal Election Commission as an independent regulatory agency to administer and enforce federal election law. The FEC discloses campaign finance information, enforces the law and oversees the public funding of presidential elections.
- **Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA)**- First implemented in 1971, the Federal Election Campaign Act is a US federal law that provides for the disclosure of financial contributions to federal campaigns and regulates contributions
- **Filibuster**- A parliamentary technique of delaying a vote to pass legislation by giving a long speech.
- **Founding fathers**- An imprecise term used most often to describe those involved in drafting the Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1776 and the framing and adoption of the constitution at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. The term is sometimes also used to include influential figures in the struggle for independence and those who fought the Revolutionary War.
- **Front-loading**- The tendency, which has become more marked in recent years, for states to move their primaries and caucuses forward, in an attempt to be among the first states holding a nominating contest.

G

- **Gerrymandering**- The practice of drawing political constituency maps to increase a particular candidate's or party's advantage in a subsequent election.
- **Governor**- The elected official of a state who is responsible for the effective and efficient workings of its government. A governor's

term of office lasts for four years. The number of times a governor can be re-elected varies from state to state.

- **Grand Old Party (GOP)**- The traditional nickname for the Republican Party widely used in American political reporting.

H

- **Hard money**- Money contributed by an individual directly to a particular campaign. Individuals can currently contribute \$2,500 to a candidate's primary campaign, and an additional \$2,500 to a candidate's general election campaign. They can make these donations to multiple candidates. The first \$250 an individual donates to a candidate's primary campaign can be matched dollar-for-dollar from federal matching funds. Limits on state-wide elections vary according to state laws.
- **The House of Representatives**- The House is the larger of the two houses of Congress which are the law-making branches of government. The 435 members of the House - generally known as Congressmen and Congresswomen - serve two-year terms.
- **House Majority Leader**- The House Majority Leader is the second most powerful member of the majority party in the House of Representatives. Unlike the speaker, he or she has no responsibility for the House as a whole, and focuses purely on advancing the interests of his or her party - for example, by organizing members to support the party's policy agenda.
- **House Minority Leader**- The leader of the minority party in the House of Representatives. He or she acts as a spokesperson for the minority party's policy position and organizes its legislative strategy. In practice, the minority leader has very little legislative influence, because the House rules essentially allow the majority party to pass bills unilaterally.

I

- **Independent-** Registered voters who have not declared a party affiliation. Because most voters registered for a particular party will vote for that party's candidate, general election campaigns have tended to focus on winning over these groups.

L

- **Libertarian-** A voter whose concerns are driven by belief in a small government, fierce support for fiscal conservative ideas and notions of individual liberty. US libertarians tend to vote Republican, attracted to the party's advocacy for lower taxes and government spending and opposition to regulation of business and to the welfare state.
- **Lobbyist-** A person hired to represent the interests of a company, industry, political cause or foreign government in the Congress, regulatory agencies or other parts of the US government.

M

- **McCain-Feingold-** A 2002 campaign finance reform law named after its main sponsors, Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona and Wisconsin Democrat Russ Feingold. The law was designed to limit the system of fundraising and corporate spending in federal election campaigns that existed outside the highly regulated infrastructure of public funding and hard money contributions to political candidates.
- **Medicaid-** A health insurance program for the poor and some disabled people that is funded jointly by the states and the federal government and administered at the state level. It is up to states

to determine matters of coverage, eligibility and the administration of the programme, but they must conform to broad federal guidelines.

- **Medicare-** The national health insurance programme designed to help protect people aged 65 and over from the high costs of healthcare. It also provides coverage for patients with permanent kidney failure and people with certain disabilities.

N

- **National convention-** The party assembly held every four years at which state delegates from across the country gather to nominate the party's candidates for president and vice-president.

O

- **Oval Office-** The office traditionally occupied by the president in the West Wing of the White House. The term is often used to describe the presidency itself, and the physical proximity of aides to the Oval Office is seen as reflecting the extent of their influence. In addition to the Oval Office, the president keeps a private study next door.

P

- **Political Action Committee (Pac)-** An organization formed to promote its members' views on selected issues, usually by raising money that is used to fund candidates who support the group's position. Pacs monitor candidates' voting records and question them on their beliefs on issues of interest to their membership.
- **Pork barrel politics-** The appropriation of government spending - or pork - pursued by a lawmaker for projects that benefit his or her constituents or campaign contributors.

- **Primary-** A state-level election held to nominate a party's candidate for office.
- **Pro-choice-** The term used for those who support a woman's right to choose abortion if she so wishes. Most pro-choice politicians will usually seek to avoid the emotive issue of abortion itself, following instead the libertarian line that government has no place interfering in what should be a private decision. The Democratic Party has been broadly supportive of the pro-choice movement. President Bill Clinton summed up his party's stance by saying abortions should be "safe, legal and rare".
- **Pro-life-** The term used to describe politicians and pressure groups opposed to abortion or allowing women to opt for abortion. Some American advocates of the pro-life position believe abortion should only be allowed in cases where a pregnancy results from rape or incest. Others believe that abortion should be ruled out altogether.
- **Public Funding-** Money supplied to campaigns from government coffers and administered by the Federal Election Commission. This includes primary election matching funds, which match the money candidates have raised privately, and a grant for the general election, and grants to fund the major parties' conventions.
- **Purple state-** Another term for a swing state. A state which could vote Democratic (blue) or Republican (red).
- **Push polling-** The controversial practice where voters are contacted over the telephone by people who are ostensibly taking a poll, but who talk up their own candidate and rubbish opponents.

R

- **Reagan Democrat-** Working-class Democratic voter who defected from the party to vote for Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in

the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections. The term is also used these days to denote moderate Democrats who are more conservative than other Democrats on issues such as national security or immigration.

- **Red state-** A state where people tend to vote for the Republican Party.
- **Roe v Wade-** The landmark 1973 Supreme Court judgment that prohibited states from banning abortion. The court's ruling was based on the concept that a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy came under the freedom of personal choice in family matters as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. The decision remains one of the most controversial ever made by the Supreme Court.
- **Running Mate-** The presidential nominee's candidate for the vice-presidency.

S

- **Second Amendment-** The so-called right to bear arms amendment to the US constitution, ratified in 1791. The text reads: "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the protection of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."
- **Senate-** The upper house of Congress, although members of the other house - the House of Representatives - traditionally regard it as an equal body.
- **Senate Majority Leader-** The leader of the majority party in the Senate, and the most powerful member of the upper house of Congress.
- **Senate Minority Leader-** The leader of the minority party in the Senate.
- **Senator-** Member of the Senate, the upper house of Congress. Each US state has two (a junior and a senior senator,

distinguished by length of service). Before Barack Obama, the last time a senator was directly elected to the White House was in 1960, when John F Kennedy won the presidency.

- **Speaker of the House-** The leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives - not to be confused with the House Majority Leader.
- **Stump speech-** A candidate's routine speech outlining his or her core campaign message. The speech can be tailored to suit specific audiences and may evolve over the course of the campaign. The phrase stems from the days when candidates would make speeches standing on tree stumps. Campaigning politicians are still said to be on the stump.
- **Supermajority-** The vote margin of two-thirds or three-quarters of the quorum, as opposed to a simple majority of 50% plus one. For example, for an amendment to be added to the US constitution, it must be approved by a supermajority of two-thirds in both houses of Congress and the legislatures of three fourths of the states.
- **SuperPac-** A category of independent political action group established by the **Citizens United Supreme Court decision** that is allowed to accept and spend unlimited amounts of corporate, individual or union cash on behalf of a candidate, often without disclosing its sources.
- **Super Tuesday-** The day in the campaign calendar, usually in February or early March of an election year, when a large number of states hold primary elections. In 2012, Super Tuesday will be on 6 March.
- **Swift-boating-** The name given by Democrats to the tactic of unfairly attacking or smearing a candidate, often with half-truths.
- **Swing states-** States in which the electorate is relatively evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, making them targets for aggressive campaigning by both sides. In recent elections, the most important swing states were Florida, Ohio and

Pennsylvania. Those have a high number of electoral votes, making them prime battlegrounds during the election.

T

- **Tea Party-** A populist conservative movement known for its uncompromising stance on fiscal issues, its disdain for Mr Obama, and the stridency of its rhetoric. The Tea Party movement arose in spring 2009 in opposition to Mr Obama's agenda, in particular his struggle to reform the US healthcare system.
- **Third-party candidate-** A candidate who does not belong to one of the two main US political parties, the Republicans or the Democrats. Examples of third-party candidates who ran in 2008 were independent Ralph Nader and Bob Barr, the Libertarian candidate.

V

- **Vice-President** The presiding officer of the US Senate and the person who assumes the office of the president in the event of the resignation, removal, incapacitation or death of the incumbent president. Dick Cheney, who served under George W Bush, is considered the most powerful vice-president in US history.

W

- **Wedge issue-** An issue on which a candidate campaigns in order to divide factions within his opponent's supporter base.

Watching the news now would be far more interesting!