

## Presidential Campaigns

Campaigns can be very simple or very complex. Running for the local school board is relatively simple. Candidates may just be required to file their names, answer a few questions from the local newspaper, and sit back and wait for the election. Running for President is altogether different. Today it is almost impossible to mount a campaign for the presidency in less than two years. How much money does it take? It certainly involves millions of dollars.



The Nixon-Kennedy debate in 1960 was the first televised debate between nominees from the major parties. This debate is still studied by scholars interested in the effect of the media on presidential politics.

Even the decision to run can be an expensive process. Potential candidates typically launch "**EXPLORATORY COMMITTEES**" that involve extensive polling and fund-raising activities. Once potential candidates announce their candidacy, they must campaign for the primaries. Because primaries are conducted by states over several months in the spring before the election, candidates must crisscross the country, spending lots of time and money in the process. By tradition, the first primaries (Republican and Democratic) are held in New Hampshire in February, and the winners usually get a great deal of attention. As they mount their next campaigns, the winners often get more contributions than the losers, and so a phenomenon known as front-loading is created. The candidates who win the first few primaries almost always tend to win the later ones.

**PARTY ACTIVISTS** gather at the **PARTY CONVENTIONS** held in the summer to nominate their candidates formally. In the days before primaries, the party's selection was often uncertain going in to the convention. Today, however, the primaries make the decision. The candidates also announce their vice-presidential running mates at the summer conventions.

After the conventions, the race for the general election begins. Since most American voters identify themselves as **MODERATES**, candidates often shift their messages to "capture the middle." Presidential and vice-presidential **DEBATES**, usually held in October, have become an important part of recent campaigns.

As campaigns become more expensive across the country, candidates, government officials, and outside agencies have called for limits on where money can come from. The intent of these limits would be to return power to the **ELECTORATE** and take it out of the hands of **SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS**. Others believe that to limit campaign contributions in any way would take away the first amendment rights of individuals and groups to express their opinion on issues and candidates.

The expense and length of modern American elections and campaigns has become one of the biggest issues in politics today. Some recommend that political party spending be more closely monitored, and others believe that overall spending caps must be set. Still others advocate national, not state, control of the primary process in order to reduce the length and expense of campaigns. Whatever the criticisms, American elections and campaigns represent a dynamic and vital link between citizen and government.