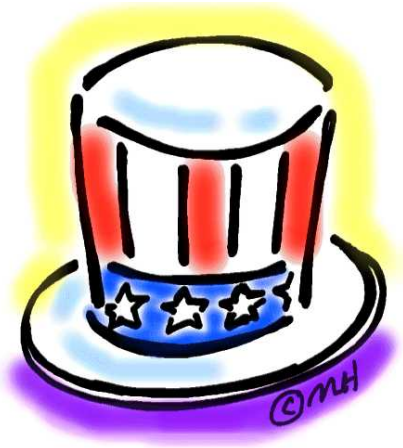
US Elections 2008

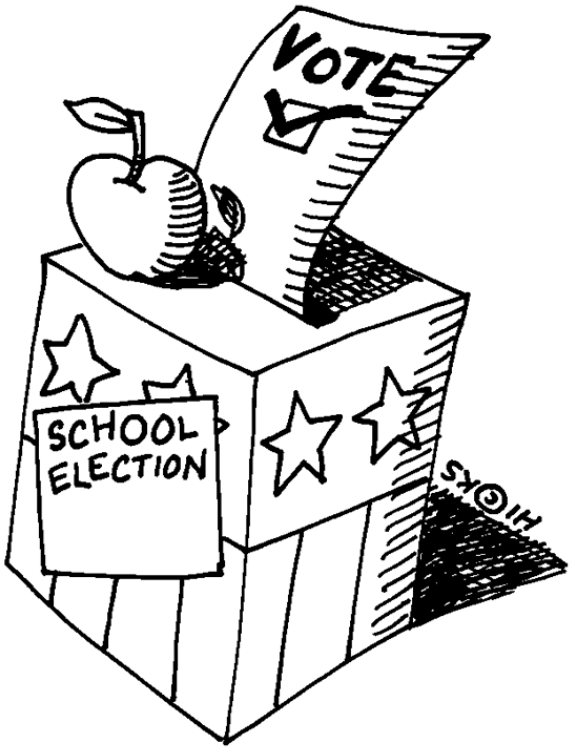
United States Politics are

Red, White, and Blue

An overview of the election process and the upcoming presidential election in 2008



Election Vocabulary



What do you know?

Election 2008

- November 4, 2008
- 55th consecutive quadrennial election
- 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives and for 34 members of the United States Senate

Timeline: Election 2008

2007

- Early stages and exploratory committees
- Fund-raising $$$ and PR

2008

- Official primaries, state caucuses, and state conventions
- February 5: Super Tuesday
- April – September 2008: National Conventions
- November 4: Popular election
- December 15: Members of the Electoral College cast their votes

2009

- January 6: Electoral votes officially tallied before Congress
- January 20: Inauguration Day

Primaries and Caucuses

Leading up to the Elections 2008

Democrats (need 2025 to win)

Obama 1275 Clinton 1220

Republicans (need 1191 to win)

McCain 843 Huckabee 242

The Constitution says…

The 44th president & 47th vice president =

the individuals who receive a majority of votes for president in the Electoral College (270 votes)

No majority =

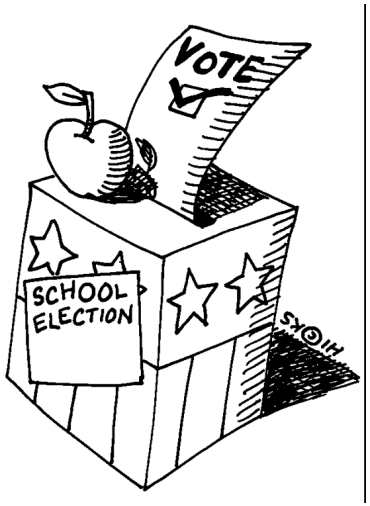
- president selected by the House of Representatives
- vice president selected by the Senate.
  - (not since 1825 and 1837)

The Electoral College

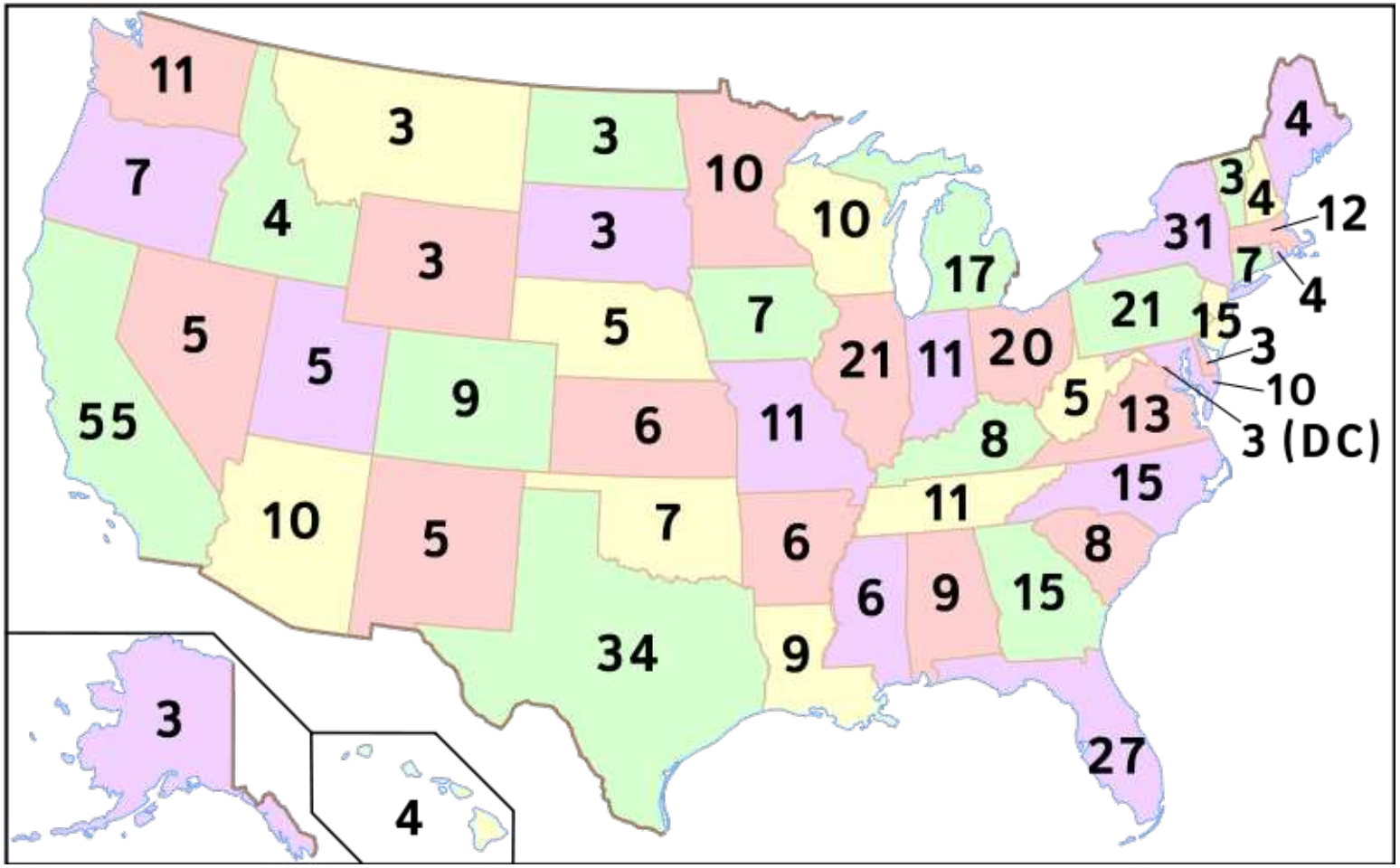
- 538 Electors meet every 4 years
- Most important component of the presidential election
- Presidential Electors meet in state capitol buildings 41 days after popular vote
- 51 meetings, on the same day, Electors cast electoral votes

Who are these “electors”?

- Chosen in state elections on election day
- The number of electoral votes = number of U.S. Senators (2) and U.S. Representatives
- The District of Columbia (3)
- The ballot
  - Election day
    - The short ballot
    - Maine method (ME, NE)



Electoral College Votes



Controversial system

Arguments against

- Unequal weight of voters
- Losing the popular vote
- Focus on large swing states
- Favors less populous states
- Disadvantage for third parties

Arguments for

- Requires a distribution of popular support
- Maintains the federal character of the nation
- Enhances status of minority groups
- Encourages stability through the two-party system
- Turnout-related issues

Characteristics of the 2008 election

- **First election without incumbents in the primaries since 1928**
- **Campaign costs**
  - $1 billion election (Michael Toner, Federal Election Commission Chairman)
- **Effect of the Internet**

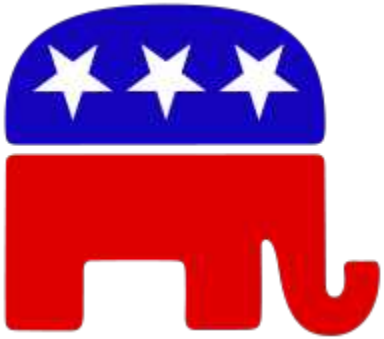
1952 Election

Q: Wasn’t the 1952 presidential election also without an incumbent?

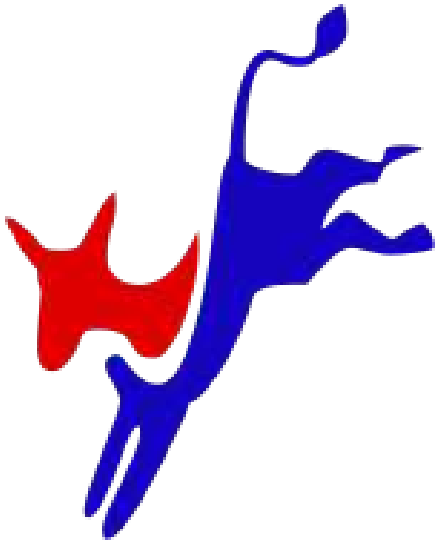
A: The 1952 election was contested between Dwight Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson. The incumbent Vice President in the previous administration was Alben Barkley and he did not win the nomination from the Democratic Party.

Candidates and potential candidates

Two Party System



Republicans



Democrats

Third parties?

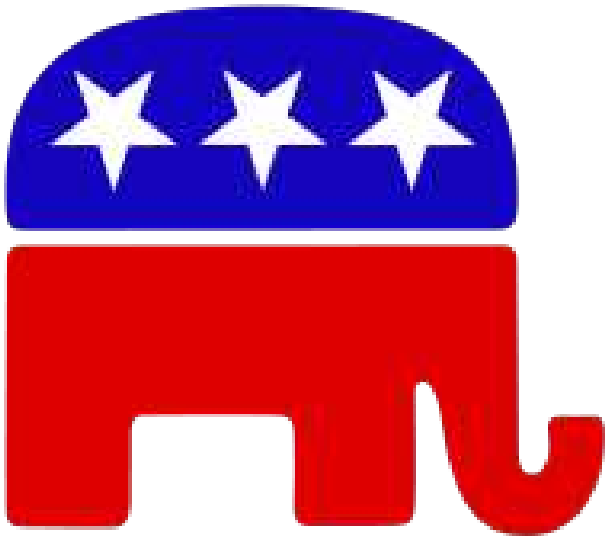
Party Symbols

Q: Why are elephants (Republican) and donkeys (Democrat) symbols of the two parties?

A: Here are some theories.

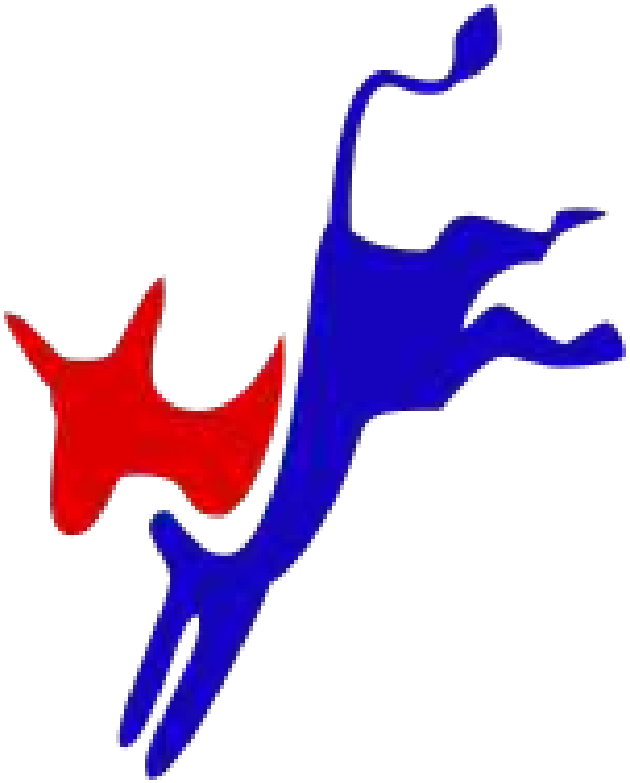
Republican elephant

- G.O.P. or Grand Old Party
- Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly*, November 7, 1874

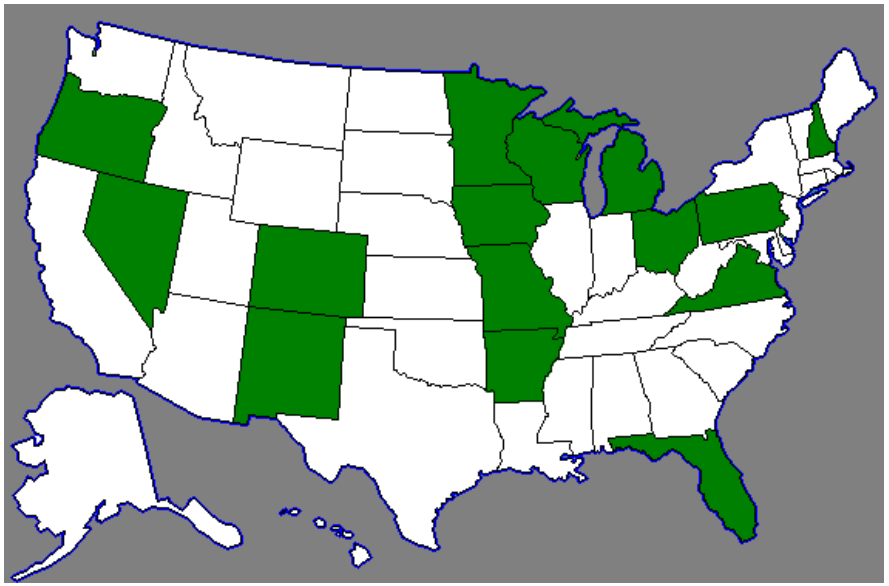


Democratic Donkeys

- Federalists used as an insult against the Jeffersonians in 1790s
- Used as an insult against Andrew Jackson (1828)



Potential battleground states



Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Wisconsin

One Nation, Slightly Divisible

by David Brookes

The Atlantic Monthly, December 2001

Nation Indivisible?

RED states

Third person: They

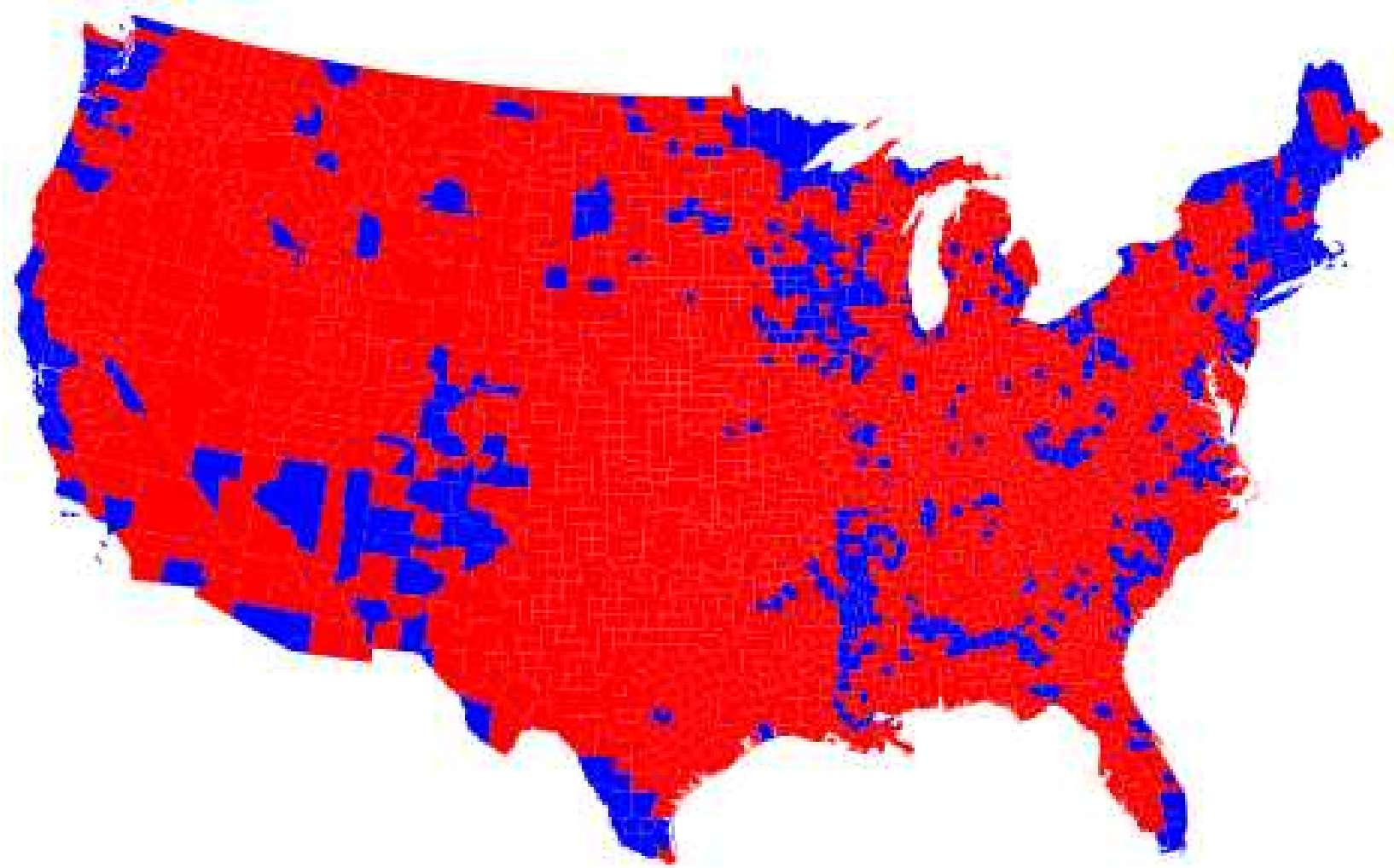
Franklin County

BLUE states

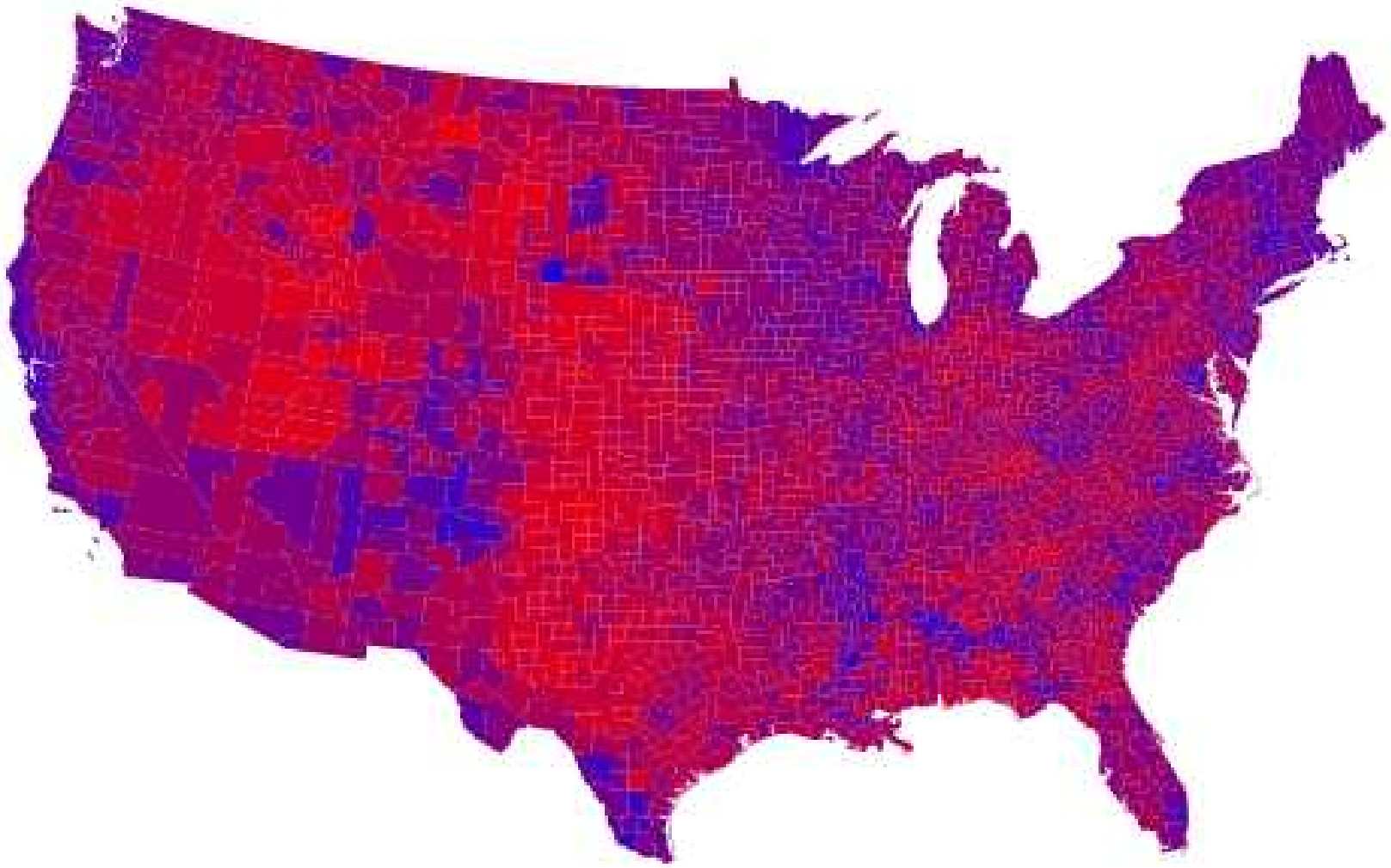
First person: I/we/us

Montgomery County

Election results by county



A Purple Nation?



From the author…

What unites the two Americas, then, is our mutual commitment to this way of life…

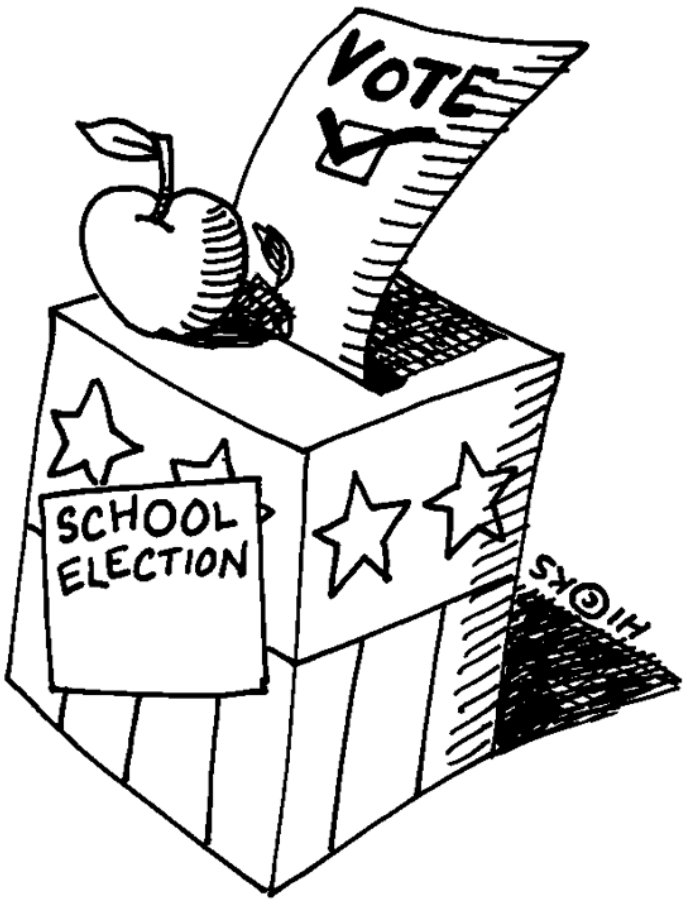
…We are participants in the same striving process, the same experimental journey

The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. The people don't acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, instead.

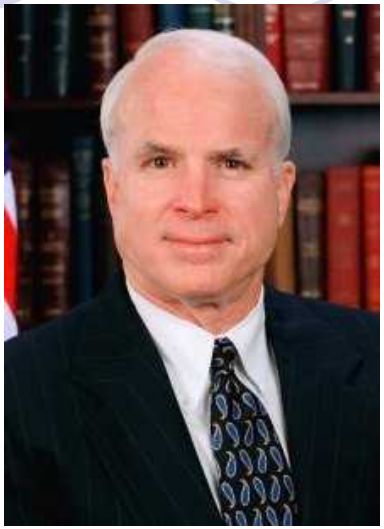
– Kurt Vonnegut

Presidential Elections 2008

If you (as Estonians, as educators, as global citizens) could interview potential US presidential candidates, what questions might you ask?



Get to know some of the candidates



Candid interviews