Local, State and National Elections

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<th>Course</th>
<th>Local, State and National Elections</th>
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<td>Political Science I</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
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<td>Unit VI</td>
<td>Elections at the local, state, and national levels have a strong effect on public policy. GPA professionals need to understand elections at various levels and their potential effects.</td>
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<td>People and Politics</td>
<td><strong>Essential Question</strong></td>
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<td>How do local, state, and national elections operate?</td>
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**Objectives**
The students will be able to:
1. Analyze elections at the local, state, and national levels
2. Identify the positions into which officials are appointed rather than elected
3. Work as a volunteer for a local department of their choice
4. Write a 2-3-page research paper about the effect local elections have on national political parties

**Engage**
One of the major responsibilities of the US President when he or she is elected is to appoint secretaries as department heads. There is a line of succession in place in the event that the US President dies before leaving office. The line of succession is made up of the Vice-President, Speaker of the House and the 16 department heads. Place each department on a flash card and see if students can organize the flash cards in the correct order of succession. The teacher can lead a discussion about why appointments are a power of the Executive Branch. Use the Discussion Rubric for assessment.

**Key Points**
I. How do elections operate at the local level?
   A. Nonpartisan elections
      1. Most elections at the local level are considered non-partisan
         a) Candidates who are running for a position at the local level do not declare a political party
         b) Party identification of certain candidates might be known, but party labels are not used in most local elections
         c) Some of the most important local elections include elections for the Mayor, City-Council, Commissioners, and School Board
         d) Local elections occur in two forms
            (1) District-based elections: candidates run for an office that represents only the voters of a specific district within the jurisdiction
            (2) At-large elections: candidates for office must compete throughout the jurisdiction as a whole
      2. Issues with district-based and at-large elections

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a) At-large elections may keep minority representatives from being elected
   (1) Since voter turnout is usually very low for local elections, political scientists worry that at-large elections favor Caucasian candidates
b) District-based elections can also be racially or ethnically biased in local elections by the drawing of boundaries
c) In some cases, local governments draw districts that divide ethnic neighborhoods in order to give minority groups a disadvantage in local elections
d) A way to correct racial or ethnic bias in district-based elections is to draw districts in a manner that makes racial/ethnic groups a majority in a particular district
   (1) This would increase the probability for these groups to have representation on the city council or school board

B. Types of local elections
1. Mayoral elections
   a) Local residents elect a mayor as well as the city council members
      (1) The Mayor is the head of city government
   b) There are two types of mayoral systems in the US
      (1) Strong-mayor cities
          (a) The city council makes public policy and the policy is implemented by the Mayor
          (b) An example of a strong-mayor city is New York City
      (2) Weak-mayor cities
          (a) The city council directs the activities of the city and the mayor acts as the presiding officer for the city council
          (b) An example of a weak-mayor city is San Diego
   c) The mayor is elected in a non-partisan election, and, in most cities, the candidate must receive a majority of the votes in order to become elected mayor
d) This is considered to be an at-large election because it is eligible to voters from every district within the city limits
   (1) For example, the mayor of the city of Dallas is voted on by voters from Dallas, Rockwall, Kaufman, Collin, and Denton Counties
e) In most cases, mayors are elected to four-year terms and do not have any term limits
2. City Council Elections
   a) The members of a city council are voted on by citizens of that particular city
b) City council members represent a district or a ward of the city
   (1) City councils were extremely influential during the era of political machines
   (2) City councils currently set policy for the city

c) City councils during the era of political machines were very segregated because party bosses urged council members to create policy that would help individual districts/wards rather than the city as a whole
   (1) Therefore, many cities reverted to at-large elections so that they would begin to benefit the city rather than the districts

d) Many large cities use district-based elections, and smaller cities typically use at-large elections
   (1) Cities that use district-based elections most likely have a large minority population and want to ensure that they are represented equally on the city council
       (a) New York, Dallas, and Los Angeles have district-based elections
       (b) Seattle is one of the largest cities to have at-large city council elections

3. Commissioner Elections
   a) The commissioner form of government consists of three to nine members who have both legislative and executive powers
      (1) These public officials make public policy, just as the officials in the others forms of city government

   b) Commissioner elections are at-large elections elected on a nonpartisan ballot

   c) The commissioners are individually responsible for passing ordinances and controlling spending

   d) Each commissioner is also elected as a commissioner of a functional area of city government
      (1) Examples include: public safety, parks, police, fire, etc.

4. School Board Elections
   a) Independent school districts are run as independent local governments
      (1) School districts are responsible for educating children within their district

   b) In a school-district election, voters within geographically defined areas are responsible for electing a board of education
      (1) This means that school-board elections are considered district-based elections
c) Although states are ultimately responsible for education, such as mandating standards, local governments and the school board deliver education services to the students
d) The school board is responsible for building/operating schools, running education programs, and raising revenues for schools
   (1) Most of these decisions are also voted on by the district voters
   (2) Voters can authorize the school board to pass a bond for school building, or they can authorize the local government to increase taxes for raising teacher salaries

C. Although they have the lowest voter turnout compared to state and national elections, local elections can affect citizens more directly

II. How do elections operate at the state level?
   A. Partisan Elections
      1. Power of state elections
         a) At the state level voters usually have far more power to determine who governs them
         b) Most top-level state policymakers are elected to office by voters
            (1) Top level policymakers include governor, treasurer, and lieutenant governor
         c) Voters in some states are authorized to make law directly through the ballot
         d) State elections historically have reflected the general political mood of the country
            (1) State elections do differ from national elections in the sense that state executives are elected directly
            (2) In national elections, the executive is elected by the Electoral College and the Judiciary is appointed by the executive
         e) State elections also tend to represent accurately the ideology and demographics of their states
            (1) State elections are also a good indicator of how the states vote in national elections
   B. Types of State Elections
      1. Gubernatorial Elections
         a) Gubernatorial elections have become more focused on the individual candidate and less focused on party affiliations
            (1) Political scientists call this the “presidentialization” of gubernatorial elections because they resemble
campaigns run by presidential candidates

(2) For example, in 2009 New Jersey elected Republican Chris Christie to the governorship even though registered Democrats far outnumber registered Republicans.

b) In most states, gubernatorial elections occur every four years.

(1) 11 states have their gubernatorial elections during the same year as the presidential elections.

c) Gubernatorial elections have become high profile and many gubernatorial candidates have to rely heavily on television to reach voters.

d) Gubernatorial campaigns often hire national political advisors to develop ad campaigns.

e) Campaigns can be extremely expensive, so candidates rely on fundraising and funding from state political parties.

(1) Because gubernatorial candidates must win a primary election to get on the ballot in the general election, most fundraising occurs to fund a primary campaign.

(2) Once the candidates are elected in the primary election, the state political parties supplement funds for the candidates.

2. State Legislative Elections

a) State legislative elections are very similar to national congressional elections; however, they typically represent a much smaller portion of the population.

(1) In Texas the average number of constituents for a state legislator is 167,637 people (National State Legislators Board, 2010).

(2) The US Congressional districts typically represent close to 700,000 constituents.

b) State legislators in most states are up for re-election every two years

(1) The difference between state and national congressional elections is many state legislative elections have term limits.

(2) For example, in California, state legislators are restricted to serving six years (two three-year terms) (Edwards, Wattenberg and Lineberry, 2011, p. 617).

c) State congressional districts are also redrawn when the US Congressional districts are redrawn, every 10 years.

III. How do elections operate at the national level?
A. Presidential Elections

1. The Nomination Process
   a) No US election compares to the presidential election that occurs every four years
      (1) This election is for the highest ranking political position in the US
   b) Before a candidate can be chosen to participate in the presidential election, he or she must be selected by the delegates of the party’s national convention
      (1) Delegates usually vote based on the results of the primaries and caucuses in their states
   c) Primaries and caucuses usually begin in February of the presidential election year
   d) The role of the primaries and the caucuses in the presidential election has been altered by front-loading
      (1) Front-loading: the tendency of states to choose an early date on the nomination calendar in order to make their state more important during the nomination process
      (2) Currently the first caucus in the US is in Iowa and the first primary is in New Hampshire
   e) The conclusion of the primary and caucus elections usually occurs in June; however, the presidential nominee for the party is usually determined after “Super Tuesday”
      (1) Super Tuesday: the day in March when several states hold their primaries/caucuses and the day that the highest amount of delegates are at stake

2. The National Convention
   a) Every year each party holds a national convention to nominate its presidential and vice presidential candidate
   b) Delegates are elected to attend the conventions for each party, and they are supposed to represent the demographic makeup of the American population
      (1) Delegates from each state are based upon the state’s population
   c) The number of delegates are different from the Republican and Democratic conventions because Democrats allow for “superdelegates”
      (1) Superdelegates: delegates to the Democratic Party’s national convention that are reserved for a party official and whose vote at the convention is unpledged to a candidate
   d) Delegates usually vote for the presidential candidate who won their state’s primary or caucus
   e) Each party is responsible for conducting state primaries
and caucuses, and for electing their candidates for the Presidential election
(1) State election laws mandate how the parties run elections

B. Congressional Elections
1. House of Representatives
   a) Each state elects members to the national House of Representatives
   b) The number of representatives per state is based upon a state’s population
   c) Members in the House of Representatives are elected to two-year terms and then must run for re-election
      (1) There are no term limits for members in the House of Representatives

2. Senate
   a) Two senators per state are elected to make up the 100-member US Senate
   b) Senators are elected every six years and there are no term limits on US Senators

IV. Which officials are appointed in the US?
A. The National Level
1. National Supreme Court
   a) As part of the checks and balances principle in the US, Supreme Court justices are appointed by the Executive Branch (the President of the US)
      (1) The Legislative Branch ratifies the appointment made by the president
   b) Once appointed by the president and confirmed by Congress, Supreme Court justices have life tenure
      (1) The president can also appoint federal judges who serve over cases in the federal district courts
   c) Supreme Court justices are the highest ranking in the judicial system in the US

2. Presidential Cabinet
   a) Once elected to the Office of the President, the president is responsible for selecting officials to the Presidential Cabinet
   b) The Presidential Cabinet consists of 15 different departments that are administered by cabinet members called secretaries
      (1) The only cabinet department that is not headed by a secretary is the Department of Justice (DOJ)
      (2) The DOJ is headed by the Attorney General
   c) Other appointed cabinet members include: US Ambassadors, Ambassadors to the United Nations (UN),
d) The fifteen major cabinet departments include
   (1) Agriculture
   (2) Commerce
   (3) Defense
   (4) Education
   (5) Energy
   (6) Health and Human Services
   (7) Homeland Security
   (8) Housing and Urban Development
   (9) Interior
   (10) Labor
   (11) State
   (12) Transportation
   (13) Treasury
   (14) Veterans Affairs
   (15) Justice

e) Cabinet secretaries must also be confirmed by the Legislative Branch

B. The State Level
   1. Governor
      a) Governors often act as the president does when it comes to official appointments
         (1) Governors can appoint heads of departments, such as education, treasury, etc.
         (2) In seven states, the governor can appoint the attorney general of the state (O’Conner, Sabato & Yanus, 2011, p. 124)
      b) In three states (Hawaii, Maine, and New Jersey), the governor is also allowed to select state Supreme Court justices

C. The Local Level
   1. Mayors
      a) Mayors are often responsible for making department appointments as well
      b) These departments include
         (1) Parks
         (2) Sanitation
         (3) Public Works
         (4) City Manager

Activities
Volunteering for a local department. Ask the students to volunteer at a local department of their choice. The students should volunteer a minimum of three hours for the department and record what their responsibilities were during their experience. Following the volunteering
experience, have the students provide an explanation of the responsibilities of the department as a whole and the components of its operation on a daily basis, including how the head of the department is chosen/elected. Use the Individual Work Rubric for assessment.

**Assessments**
Local, State and National Elections Quiz and Key
Discussion Rubric
Individual Work Rubric
Research Rubric

**Materials**
Local, State and National Elections computer-based presentation
Local, State and National Elections Key Terms
Notecards with the names of the US Cabinet Departments

**Resources**
National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)
https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/cabinet

**Accommodations for Learning Differences**
For reinforcement, the students will organize a flow chart in which they identify the process of elections, beginning with local elections and ending with the national presidential election. Use the Individual Work Rubric for assessment.

For enrichment, the students will write a 2-3-page research paper about the effect local elections have on national political parties. Use the Research Rubric for assessment.

**State Education Standards**
§130.183. Political Science I (One to Two Credits).

(9) The student explores the processes for filling public offices in the US system of government. The student is expected to:
(A) compare different methods of filling public offices such as elected and appointed offices at the local, state, and national levels;

(10) The student examines the role of political parties in the US system of government. The student is expected to:
(C) recognize the role of political parties in the electoral process at the local, state, and national levels;

College and Career Readiness Standards
Cross-Disciplinary Standards
I. Key Cognitive Skills
D. Academic behaviors
   1. Self-monitor learning needs and seek assistance when needed.
   2. Use study habits necessary to manage academic pursuits and requirements.
   3. Strive for accuracy and precision.
   4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.
Local, State and National Elections Key Terms

At-Large Elections – elections in which candidates for office must compete throughout the jurisdiction as a whole

District-Based Elections – elections in which candidates run for an office that represents only the voters of a specific district within the jurisdiction

Front-Loading – the tendency of states to choose an early date on the nomination calendar in order to make their state more important during the nomination process

National Convention – the meeting of party delegates every four years to choose a presidential ticket and write the party’s platform

Nonpartisan Elections – candidates who are running for a position, typically at the local level, that do not declare a political party

Partisan Elections – elections in which candidates run as a candidate from one of the two major political parties

Presidential Cabinet – the formal body of presidential advisers who head the fifteen executive departments; presidents often add others to this body of formal advisers

Super Tuesday – the day in March when several states hold their primaries/caucuses and the day that the highest amount of delegates are at stake

Superdelegates – delegates to the Democratic Party’s national convention that are reserved for a party official and whose vote at the convention is unpledged to a candidate
Local, State and National Elections Quiz

1. _____ Most elections at the local level are considered to be which of the following types of elections?
   A  Partisan Elections
   B  Non-Partisan Elections
   C  Winner-Take-All Elections
   D  Majority Elections

2. _____ Which of the following is considered a criticism of at-large elections?
   A  They may keep women from getting elected
   B  They may keep a certain political party from getting elected
   C  They may keep minorities from getting elected
   D  They may keep incumbents from getting elected

3. _____ “Super Tuesday” is known as which of the following?
   A  They day in March when the highest amount of delegates are at stake
   B  They day in November that presidential elections are held
   C  They day in which political parties select their presidential candidate
   D  They day when the President of the US is inaugurated

4. _____ The first primary election is held in which of the following states?
   A  Iowa
   B  Texas
   C  South Carolina
   D  New Hampshire

5. _____ Which of the following positions is not filled by presidential appointment?
   A  Supreme Court
   B  Secretary of the Defense
   C  Federal Judge
   D  Speaker of the House

6. _____ Presidential appointments must be confirmed by which of the following?
   A  The House of Representatives
   B  The Senate
   C  Both houses of Congress
   D  The Supreme Court
7. _____ The concept of “front-loading” is best described by which of the following?
   A States try to choose early dates to hold primary/caucus elections
   B Candidates hold fundraising events before they are even elected
   C A presidential candidate for a major party is selected before the candidate from the opposing party
   D A primary election in which the highest amount of delegates are at stake

8. _____ Which of the following are “superdelegates”?
   A Delegates from the Republican Party
   B Delegates from the Democratic Party
   C Delegates from the Democratic Party who are party officials
   D Delegates from the Republican Party who are party officials

9. _____ Which of the following is responsible for selecting the candidate to represent the political party in a presidential election?
   A The National Convention
   B The National Committee
   C The National Party Chairman
   D The National Party Election

10. _____ Which of the following statements does not apply to state elections?
    A State elections allow voters to make laws through the voting ballot
    B State elections directly elect state executives
    C State elections are funded by the national parties
    D State elections tend to represent the ideologies and demographics of the state
Local, State and National Elections Quiz Key

1. B
2. C
3. A
4. D
5. D
6. B
7. A
8. C
9. A
10. C
# Discussion Rubric

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<td>Shares thoughts actively while offering helpful recommendations to others</td>
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<td>Gives credit to others for their ideas</td>
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**Total Points (32 pts.)**

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Individual Work Rubric

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Comments:
## Research Rubric

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<td><strong>Question/goal</strong>&lt;br&gt;Student identified and communicated a question or goal of the research</td>
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<td><strong>Research/Gathering information (if relevant)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Student used a variety of methods and sources to gather information. Student took notes while gathering information</td>
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<td><strong>Conclusion/Summary</strong>&lt;br&gt;Student drew insightful conclusions and observations from the information gathered. Information is organized in a logical manner</td>
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<td><strong>Communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;Student communicated the information gathered and summary or conclusions persuasively. Student demonstrated skill in the use of media used to communicate the results of research</td>
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<td><strong>Reflection</strong>&lt;br&gt;Student reflected on the importance of the research and its potential application</td>
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**Total Points (20 pts.)**

**Comments:**

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