



Fantasy Politics: Predict the 2008 Electoral Outcome Game

by
Fran O'Malley and Brian Gearin

Many students have played Fantasy Football. Now it's time to play Fantasy Politics. In this activity, students will analyze data from recent presidential elections and media sources in order to predict the 2008 Electoral College outcome. Students should have a basic understanding of the functions of the Electoral College and how it operates before engaging in this lesson.

Audience: grades 4-12

Time Needed: approximately 90 minutes

Materials Needed

- Handout 1: List of States and the Number of Electoral Votes that Each Has
- Handout 2: Chart of state-by-state Electoral College trends 1996-2004
- Handout 3: Maps of state-by-state Electoral College trends 1996-2004
- Handout 4: Media Predictions – Electoral College Count
- Handout 5: Blank map of United States
- Colored pencils (blue for Democrat and red for Republican recommended)

Procedures

1. Begin class with the following questions as a way of tapping prior knowledge, stimulating interest in the lesson, and filling in content gaps:
 - a. Who are the major party candidates for President and Vice-President in the election of 2008 and from which states do they come? [[John McCain – Arizona](#), [Sarah Palin – Alaska](#); [Barack Obama – Illinois](#), [Joe Biden – Delaware](#)]
 - b. Who will elect the president of the United States in 2008? [[the Electoral College unless no candidate gets a majority of electoral votes](#)]
 - c. How many votes does each state get in the Electoral College? [[determined by number of U.S. Representatives and Senators each state has](#)]
 - d. How many votes does a candidate need in the Electoral College to win the Presidency? [[at least 270](#)]
 - e. Whom do you predict will be elected President on November 4th – the Republican John McCain, or the Democrat Barack Obama? On what are you basing your prediction?
2. Tell students that, in today's lesson, they are going to play the game of Fantasy Politics. The game is based loosely on the game Fantasy Football. Students will be given data used by election specialists to predict who will win the Presidency in 2008. To win, you have to make the best predictions about which candidate will win which states and, in the end, win the election.

3. Distribute copies of **Handout 1: List of States and the Number of Electoral Votes Each Has** (available at www.ipa.udel.edu/democracy/mockelection/States-Number_of_Votes-2008.pdf). Explain that the chart shows how many votes each state gets in the Electoral College. Ask the students what stands out in their minds as they look at the data. Then ask...
 - a. In which states does it appear that the presidential candidates will spend the most time campaigning? Why? *[Those with most electoral votes.]*
 - b. How likely is it that a presidential candidate will campaign in Delaware? Why? *[This is usually not likely, but Biden's presence on the ticket makes it more likely.]*
 - c. what is the minimum number of states a candidate would have to win to be elected President? Would most people view this as fair or unfair? Explain. *[There is no requirement that a candidate win a minimum number of states, but a candidate can be elected with the electoral votes from the 11 most populated states.]*
 - d. How might this chart help you predict who will win in 2008? *[There is really not enough information on this handout.]*
 - e. Can you suggest any other data that might enable someone to generate an informed prediction about the probable winner of the Presidential contest in 2008? *[Students may come up with a range of possibilities.]*

4. Distribute copies of **Handout 2: Chart of state-by-state Electoral College trends 1996-2004** (available at www.ipa.udel.edu/democracy/mockelection/ElectoralTrends1996-2004.pdf). Ask students to look at the chart and explain what it is trying to show. Clarify if needed: the chart shows which party won the electoral votes in each state over the last 3 presidential elections. Ask students why this information might be useful in predicting the winner of the Presidential Election in 2008? *[It suggests which party may have the most support in the individual states.]*

5. Distribute copies of **Handout 3: Maps of state-by-state Electoral College results 1996-2004** (available at www.ipa.udel.edu/democracy/mockelection/ElectoralResults1996-2004.pdf). Ask students to look at the maps and explain any geographic patterns that emerge. Then ask them how this data might be useful in predicting the Electoral College results in 2008? *[It also suggests which party may have the most support in the individual states.]*

6. Distribute copies of **Handout 4: Media Predictions - Electoral College Count** (available at www.ipa.udel.edu/democracy/mockelection/PresidElectionPred2008.pdf). Tell students that the chart on Handout 4 contains the Electoral College projections of four major media organizations. This chart differs from Handouts 2 & 3 in that it offers predictions for the upcoming Presidential election rather than results for previous Presidential elections. Ask the students...
 - a. Do you think that the four media organizations' predictions will be the same? Why or why not? *[Yes in many states, but get students to think about bias, use of various sources of information by various media organizations, etc.]*

- b. According to each of the four media organizations, which candidate is currently winning the electoral race? [PBS = McCain: 227-222; Fox = McCain: 189-183; NYTimes = Obama 238-227; Washington Post = McCain 174-168]
 - c. “Battleground states” are states where the election is still believed to be too close to call and where the parties/candidates are competing intensely. Ask students...
 - i. Which states are battleground states in the 2008 election? [There are at least ten depending on how one defines “battleground” e.g., does everyone have to agree that the state is a toss up?]
 - ii. Which battleground states seem most important? Why? [States like Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio, Virginia have many electoral votes.]
 - iii. Why are these battleground states receiving so much attention? [Many experts think that these states will determine the outcome of the election.]
 - iv. Have you any second thoughts about where (states) the candidates are likely to spend most of their time campaigning? Why? [Battleground states are likely to receive a lot of campaign resources. Candidates may write off some states, even large ones, if they don’t think they have a chance of winning those states.]
7. Start the Game: Distribute copies of **Handout 5: Blank U.S. Map** (available at www.ipa.udel.edu/democracy/mockelection/BlankUSmap.pdf). Ask students to use the data that they have received and any other information they have researched or believe is relevant in order to...
- a. Create their own map showing which candidate they believe will win each state. Maps should include a legend showing one color (red?) for the McCain/Palin ticket, and another color (blue?) for Obama/Biden.
 - b. Explain why they think one candidate will win over another in a given state, especially the battleground states.
 - c. Suggest the total number of Electoral College votes each candidate will receive and predict who will win the election. Offer a reward to whomever wins the Fantasy Politics game in your classroom by most accurately predicting which candidate will win each state, how many electoral votes each candidate will win, and who will become the next President and Vice-President of the United States.

Extension: Encourage students to engage their parents/guardians in the same activities so that they can come up with their own predictions. Tell them to watch the results together on Election Night to see who wins the election and their home version of Fantasy Politics.

NOTE: The Democracy Project will be sponsoring a “Predict the 2008 Electoral Winner” contest. Stay tuned for details.