

■ TEXT SUMMARY

While the election process is largely governed by State law, federal law regulates the dates and some other aspects of both presidential and congressional elections.

Most States hold elections for State offices on the same day Congress has set for national elections: the Tuesday after the first Monday in November of even-numbered years. **Absentee voting**, or voting by those

unable to get to their regular polling places, is usually allowed. Some States allow early voting—casting ballots over a period of days before an election.

A **precinct** is a voting district. A **polling place**, the place where voters

actually vote, is located somewhere in or near a precinct. A **ballot** is the device by which voters register their choices in an election. States require that ballots be secret—that no one may see them but the voter.

Most States use a form called the Australian ballot. It is printed at public expense; lists the names of all candidates in an election; is given out only at the polls, one to each voter; and is marked in secret. An office-group ballot lists candidates in a group by office, while a party-column ballot lists them by party. The **coattail effect** occurs when a strong candidate running for an office at the top of a ballot attracts voters to other candidates on the party's ticket.

THE BIG IDEA

The detailed procedures that govern the casting of votes for elected officials help ensure a democratic way of life.

■ GRAPHIC SUMMARY: *Election Procedures*

The Basics of Election Procedure

- Elections are largely governed by State law.
- Aspects of national elections such as dates are governed by federal law.
- Voting takes place in voting districts called precincts.
- Within the precincts, voters cast their votes at polling places.
- A ballot is used to register a person's votes.
- Most States use a form of the Australian ballot—either an office-group ballot or a party-column ballot.

Election procedures are clearly established by State law and, in some regards, federal law as well.

■ REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a ballot?

2. **Diagram Skills** Which division of government controls most aspects of elections?