

2010 New York State and U.S. Senate Elections Sourcebook

Introduction and Glossary for the Sourcebook for the 2010

Townsend Harris High School/Taft Institute for Government

New York State and US Senate Election Simulation Game

This sourcebook provides background information on the following topics related to the 2010 New York State Elections for Governor, Comptroller, Attorney General, and State Legislature, as well as the New York elections for United States Senate.

History and Background

Campaign Finance

Candidates for Governor

The Issues, including

Education, K-12

Higher Education

The state budget, taxes, and the economy

Reform of State Government

Interest Groups

The Role of the Media

Note on Non-issues: The section on issues deals only with those subjects that have come up in the campaign, but it's also useful to think about what political scientists call "non-issues"-- those subjects or policy options that have been excluded from the political arena. For New York State in 2010 that list might include meeting budget shortfalls by increasing income taxes on the rich, devoting significant resources to improving the economy of upstate New York, and giving public school parents substantial power in the governance of the schools their children attend.

GLOSSARY For the 2010 New York State Election Simulation Game

Attorney General—the state’s chief law enforcement officer, elected statewide for a four year term, who often gains considerable publicity and sets up a run for governor by conducting investigations of Wall Street malefactors or other prominent wrongdoers.

Charisma—a force of personality that attracts strong devotion from followers to a leader.

Coalition—a combination of interest groups, or ethnic, racial or religious groups, and individuals that unites for some common purpose. Political parties are sometimes considered to be an example of such a coalition

Comptroller—the chief financial officer of the state, elected statewide for a four year term, who invests the very large state pension funds and is supposed to serve as a fiscal watchdog over state government generally

Donkey—the symbol of the Democratic Party

Elephant—the symbol of the Republican Party

Faction—a group united by ideology or interest; the connotation is of an aggressive, contentious group.

Gerrymandering—named for one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence this term means drawing the boundaries of a legislative district—it could be for the U.S. Congress or the state legislature—in such a way as to favor one party. Gerrymanders ignore compactness and “natural” lines such as neighborhoods or towns and cities and thus produce oddly shaped districts. To see one in New York State, google, “Abe Lincoln riding on a vacuum cleaner.”

G.O.P.—Literally, “Grand Old Party,” a name for the Republican Party.

Governor—the chief executive officer of the state, elected statewide for a four year term. New York’s governor has considerable power both formal—derived

from the state constitution—and informal—derived from her/his position as a party leader.

Hard Money—money contributed to political campaigns that is limited by federal regulations, which control the amount that can be given to a particular campaign and require the publication of the sources of contributions as opposed to **Soft Money** which is given to political parties for “party-building” and is not limited in amounts and does not have to be disclosed. The recent **Citizens United** decision by the Supreme Court has lowered the restrictions on campaign donations by allowing corporations and labor unions to spend as much money as they want to spend to run their own campaign ads during elections. These ads may call for the election of one candidate or oppose the other, or both. Thus, corporations and labor unions are free to spend without limit as long as they operate “independently” of the official campaigns.

Ideology-- a set of doctrines concerning human nature, the good society, and how to achieve it.

*Left—an ideology or group or party favoring a greater degree of equality (social, economic, political). Leftists such as American liberals and socialists want to use the government to promote equality, while anarchists oppose governments in general.

*Right—an ideology or group or party favoring a system that emphasizes opportunity and individual responsibility and opposes the use of government to promote equality. American conservatives generally favor lower taxes and smaller government, though they often favor a larger military.

Interest Group—a group united by a common cause that tries to influence the government, other groups, and the general public. Groups can be ideological, like the Christian coalition, or based on material interest like labor unions or professional associations, or on a single issue such as gun control or same sex marriage.

Lieutenant Governor—elected in a ticket with the governor to a four year term, this person has little power, but does become governor if the governor resigns or is otherwise removed from office. This happened in the case of David Patterson, the incumbent governor, who became governor when Eliot Spitzer resigned after it was revealed that he had patronized prostitutes.

One-party district—an area such as a city or state in which most of the voters identify with one political party so that the other party has little chance of winning elections. Most of New York City is heavily Democratic. Other parts of the United States, such as Texas and Orange County, California, are heavily Republican.

PAC—Political Action Committee—a group formed to raise money to contribute to political campaigns. Sometimes criticized as representing concentrated economic power that undermines democracy.

Party Identification—The feeling of loyalty to a particular party that is the single most powerful influence on voting in the United States, though it has declined somewhat in recent years.

Patronage—the practice of providing jobs, contracts, or other material benefits in exchange for political support. Also referred to as the “spoils system,” as in the phrase, “to the victor belong the spoils.”

Political Machine—a strong party organization, dominated by one man or a small group of men, and based on patronage and other material rewards, that controls nominations and elections in a particular area such as a city or state. “Tammany Hall” was the name given to the machine that controlled New York City Politics during much of the 1800’s and early 1900’s.

Plank—Part of a party platform that refers to a specific issue.

Platform—The systematic statement of a party’s principles and policy proposals.

Redistricting—the process by which lines are drawn defining the districts for

the state senate and the state assembly and the U.S. Congress. This happens every ten years based on the U.S. Census data about population, which is the basis for apportioning members of Congress state by state and of distributing state senators and assembly members within New York State. In the present system redistricting is done by the Governor and Legislature and is very much a partisan process. One proposal for reform is to have it done by a bipartisan or nonpartisan commission. See also "**gerrymander.**"

Reformers—those fighting against machine control.

Smoke-filled room—a phrase used to denigrate the machine dominated nomination process. The smoke that filled the room was produced by the fat cigars of the party bosses who supposedly met to make corrupt deals in the backrooms of the hotels where national nominating conventions were held.

Voting bloc—a group of people with a common characteristic such as race, ethnicity, status, or religion who tend to vote strongly for one party or candidate. Since the 1960s, the most disciplined block in American politics has been African-Americans, who regularly vote 80-90% Democratic. Most of the groups in New York City—African-Americans, Jews, Latinos, and union members—tend to vote for the Democratic Party.

*Any definition of left and right, liberal and conservative, is subject to debate, and these labels often oversimplify a complex reality. For example, some people with right wing positions on taxes strongly support civil liberties and even gay marriage, positions more often associate with the left. For a more complex and detailed version of the political spectrum see the Teaching Resources section of this website.

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