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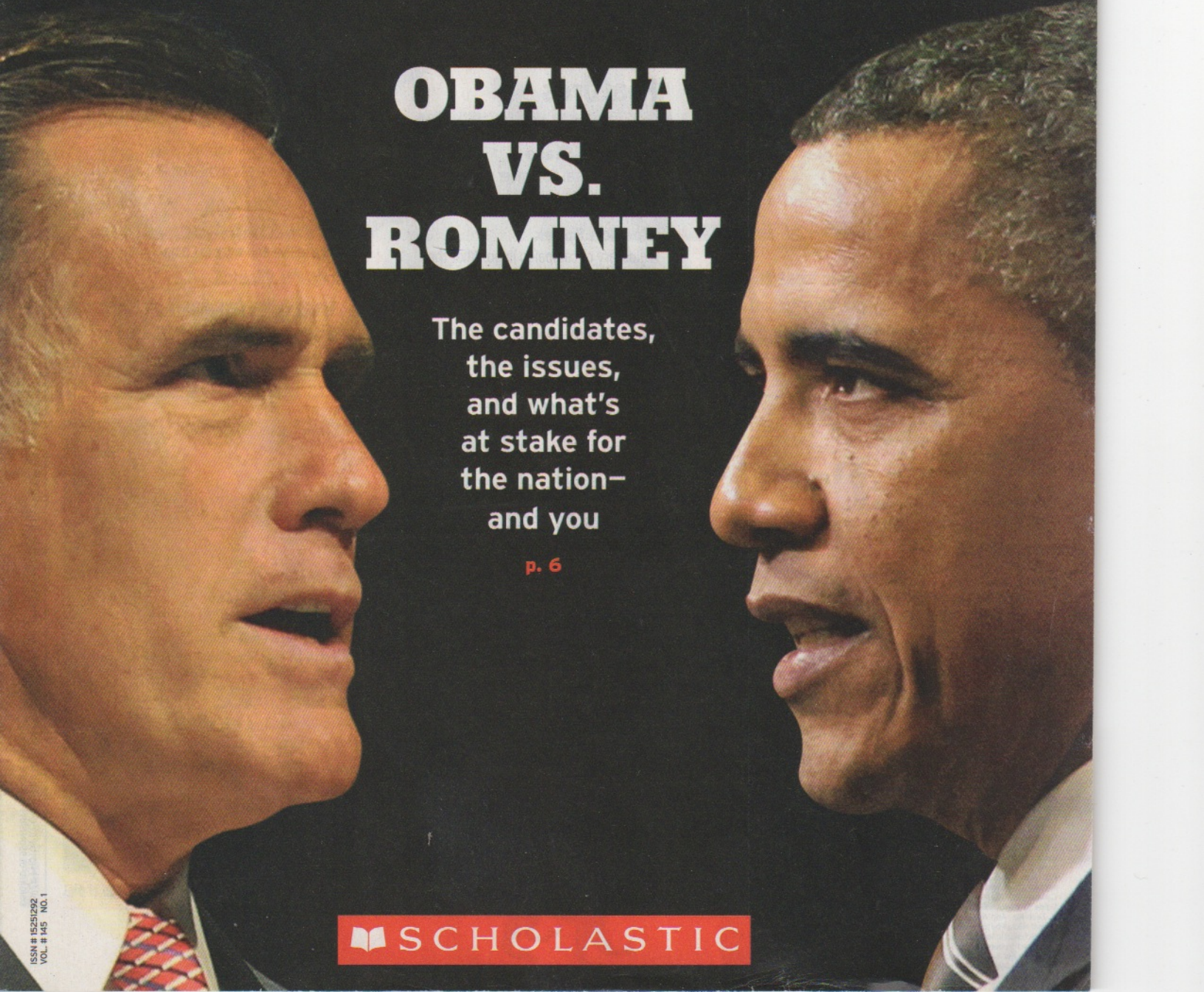
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THE NEWSMAGAZINE FOR TEENS



## OBAMA VS. ROMNEY

The candidates,  
the issues,  
and what's  
at stake for  
the nation—  
and you

p. 6



SCHOLASTIC

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## ELECTION 2012

## WHAT'S AT STAKE

Whoever wins the presidency in November will face enormous challenges at home and abroad

BY PATRICIA SMITH

**W**hen President Obama was elected in 2008, expectations were incredibly high.

It was a moment of national crisis—the country was suffering through the worst financial meltdown since the Great Depression and fighting two wars. Obama looked to many like a potential savior. As the first African-American to win the presidency, he seemed to represent a changing of the guard. And his message of “hope and change” resonated with many Americans.

Now President Obama is running for re-election, but he's no longer an upstart promising to shake things up. The economy, while no longer on the brink of disaster, is still on the mend.

In November, Americans will decide whether Obama is the best person to lead the country for the next four years, or whether his Republican challenger, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, would do a better job.

With almost 13 million people still unemployed, the sluggish economy is the No. 1 issue for most voters. How Americans feel about the economy—whether it shows real signs of improvement or still looks fragile—may be the deciding factor in the election.

Underlying that issue, and many others, is a key difference between Democrats and Republicans in how



they view the role of government.

“Much of this election boils down to one question: Do you believe that government should have a bigger or smaller role in the life you live on a daily basis?” says Bill Rosenberg, a political science professor at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

### Stark Differences

The two candidates have starkly different views on this question. President Obama sees government having a key role in stimulating economic growth and as the average American's protector. Romney, on the other hand, views government as a nuisance: Its excessive regulations endanger individual opportunity and the free market, he says. This philosophical divide

affects where the candidates stand on many issues (*see facing page*).

Many Americans are frustrated with everyone in Washington, including the president. For most of the last year, Obama's approval rating has been stuck below 50 percent—dangerous territory for a president seeking re-election.

“You can only run as a national savior once,” says E.J. Dionne, a columnist for *The Washington Post*. “One of the challenges for Obama is trying to re-motivate voters, particularly younger voters, who played such a key role in his election.”

In 2008, young voters were crucial to Obama's victory. A recent Wall Street Journal/NBC poll found that just 45 percent of 18- to 34-year-old voters

## ON THE ISSUES

### BARACK OBAMA

Party: Democrat

Age: 51

Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

Birthplace: Honolulu, Hawaii

Here's where Barack Obama and Mitt Romney stand on some key issues. Which candidate shares your views?

### MITT ROMNEY

Party: Republican

Age: 65

Hometown: Belmont, Massachusetts

Birthplace: Detroit, Michigan

#### ECONOMY

Obama says his economic stimulus and the rescue of Wall Street and the auto companies kept the U.S. from falling into a depression after the financial collapse of 2008.

Romney says the high unemployment rate is proof that the president has failed to get the economy growing again. He says he'll reduce government spending and regulations.

#### TAXES

Obama favors raising taxes on the wealthy as part of a deal to tackle the federal debt.

Romney favors lower taxes for both individuals and businesses to spur economic growth.

#### AFGHANISTAN

Obama promises to start bringing home U.S. troops this year and to have all troops out of Afghanistan in 2014.

Romney says any withdrawal of U.S. troops should depend on the conditions on the ground and the military's advice.

#### HEALTH CARE

Obama says his 2010 health-care reforms give many more people access to affordable health care.

Romney says he would repeal "Obamacare" and take a completely different approach.

#### ENERGY

Obama favors investments in renewable energy and increasing U.S. oil and gas production.

Romney says he'll streamline regulations to make it easier to increase domestic oil and gas production.

#### IMMIGRATION

Obama stopped deportations of illegal immigrants brought to the U.S. as kids and will let them get temporary work permits.

Romney wants to crack down on illegal immigrants and reform the legal immigration system.

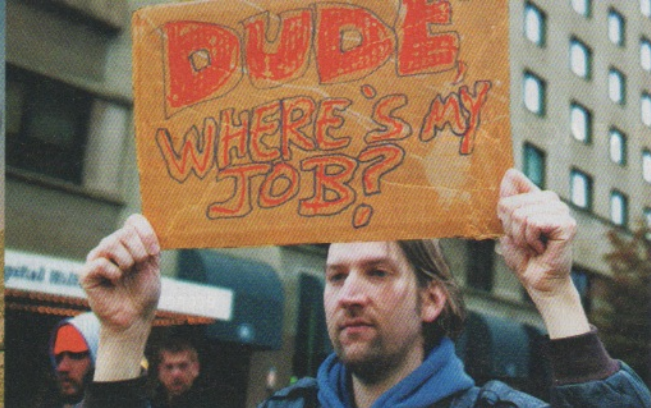
#### SOCIAL ISSUES

Obama supports the legalization of gay marriage.

Romney believes marriage should be only between a man and a woman.



**Abroad:** There are about 90,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. How quickly they come home will be up to the next president.



**At Home:** With the unemployment rate above 8 percent, the sluggish economy is the No. 1 issue for most Americans.

express “high interest” in this year’s election. That’s down 17 points from four years ago. If less enthusiasm translates to lower turnout among young people, it could have an impact in several swing states (*see map, facing page*).

The Obama campaign seems to recognize this: It kicked off the president’s re-election campaign in the spring with a tour of college campuses and an appearance on *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*.

### Conservative Base

Romney has an enthusiasm problem of his own. Many social conservatives and Tea Party members opposed Romney in the Republican primaries. Some Evangelical Christians were uncomfortable with the fact that he’s a Mormon. Now he’ll have to energize that conservative base without alienating independents, whose votes he’ll need to win in November.

“It’s no secret that the Tea Party’s first choice wasn’t Mitt Romney,” says Brendan Steinhauser of FreedomWorks, a conservative group. “But the one thing that unifies the Tea Party is that we want to replace Barack Obama.”

Most Americans already have a pretty good idea who Obama is. He’s the child of a white woman from Kansas and a black man from Kenya who left the family when Obama was very young. He spent much of his childhood with his maternal grandparents in Hawaii, where he was born. After graduating from Columbia University and Harvard Law School, Obama became a community organizer in Chicago. He was elected to

the Illinois State Senate in 1996 and to the U.S. Senate in 2004.

Romney grew up in Michigan, where his father was governor. After graduating from Brigham Young University in Utah, he earned degrees from Harvard Law and Harvard Business schools.

Aside from his four years as the governor of Massachusetts, Romney has spent most of his career in business. As the co-founder and onetime C.E.O. of Bain Capital, a Boston-based financial firm, Romney became a wealthy man. In 2002, Romney was credited with saving the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City from financial disaster.

But Romney has a history of changing his political opinions, opening him to the charge that he’s a flip-flopper who adjusts his positions to suit the political circumstances. For example, when he was

governor of Massachusetts, he supported health-care reform that requires everyone to buy insurance. Now, he rails against “Obamacare,” President Obama’s health-care-reform law, which was modeled after the Massachusetts law.

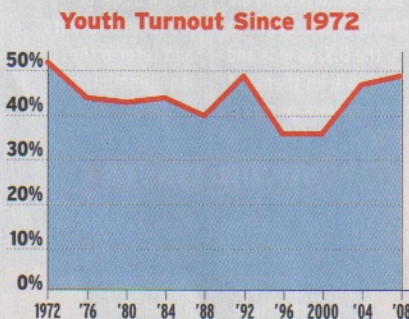
### ‘It’s the Economy, Stupid!’

Romney’s campaign will try to make the election about one issue: the economy. As a sign in Bill Clinton’s campaign headquarters reminded staffers in 1992, “It’s the economy, stupid!” That’s been the case in presidential contests since then, and certainly seems to be in 2012.

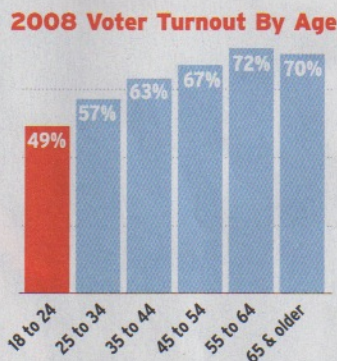
“President Obama’s policies have slowed the recovery and created misery for 24 million Americans who are unemployed or stuck in part-time jobs when what they really want is full-time work,” Romney said during the primaries.

## Will Young Voters Show Up?

In 2008, young people had their highest voter turnout since 1972 (*left*), a year after the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18. But turnout of 18- to 24-year-olds was still much lower than that of older Americans (*right*).



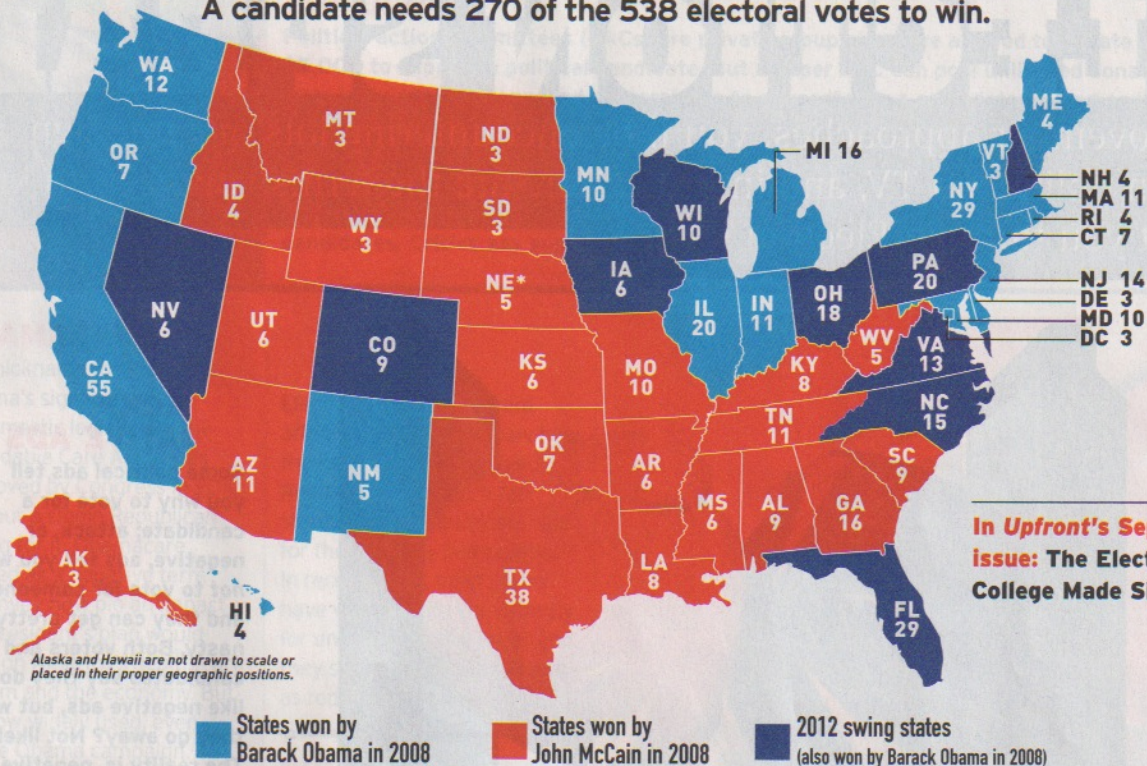
SOURCE: CIRCLE'S ANALYSIS OF CENSUS DATA ON 18- TO 24-YEAR-OLDS, 1972-2008



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

# THE ELECTORAL MAP

The 50 states and their votes in the Electoral College. A candidate needs 270 of the 538 electoral votes to win.



In *Upfront's* Sept. 17 issue: The Electoral College Made Simple.

\*Nebraska is one of two states that divides its electoral votes. McCain won four and Obama one.

SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE WASHINGTON POST. STATE ELECTORAL VOTES ARE FOR THE 2012 ELECTION.

The Romney campaign has also been critical of Obama's record on a variety of national security issues, including blocking Iran's nuclear ambitions and dealing with China.

Obama has fulfilled his 2008 campaign promise to end the U.S. role in the war in Iraq. After almost 4,500 U.S. deaths, the last American troops left the country in 2011. He ordered the May 2011 raid that resulted in the death of terrorist leader Osama bin Laden. Now, after increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan, Obama is trying to wind down the U.S. role in that war as well.

## Most Expensive Election Ever

In a recent speech, Obama said his foreign policy is based on the belief that "there's no contradiction between being tough and strong and protecting the American people, but also abiding by those values that make America great."

On the home front, the economy isn't the only issue on voters' minds. There are

four Supreme Court Justices older than 70, so it seems likely the next president will have a chance to fill one or more vacancies. Any changes in the Court's makeup could influence the lives of Americans for decades to come.

The 2012 election is expected to be the most expensive ever, costing \$11 billion, according to Federal Election Commission estimates. A good chunk of that will come from outside groups known as super PACs (see "Election Speak," p. 10), which can accept unlimited individual, corporate or union donations. Most of that super PAC money will go to attack ads.

Much of the ad blitz will focus on 10 swing states: Ohio, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Colorado, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Obama won them all in 2008, but this year they seem to be up for grabs.

**The next president will likely have a chance to appoint at least one Supreme Court Justice.**

The proportion of Hispanic voters is growing in these swing states, so both candidates will be vying for their support. In June, Obama issued an executive order halting the deportation of illegal immigrants brought here as children and allowing them to have temporary work permits. Romney has not said whether he would reverse the measure.

With the nation so polarized, voters seem to have a clear choice in November.

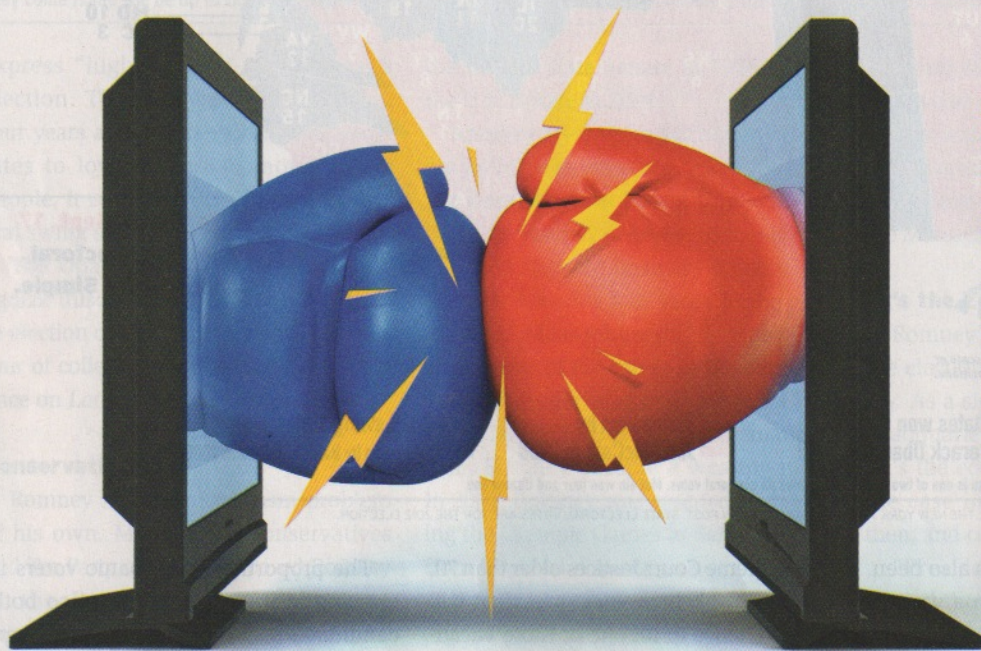
Dionne, the *Washington Post* columnist, says the difference between the two parties is so stark today that it feels like the nation is at a tipping point in terms of what direction it heads in.

"In every election, there's this habit of commentators saying this is the most important election ever," he says, "but this is one case where I actually think it's not hype." •

# ELECTION SPEAK

As November approaches, you'll be encountering lots of campaign jargon online, on TV, and in print. Here are the terms you need to know to get you through Election Day.

► For more election lingo, go to [WWW.UPFRONTMAGAZINE.COM](http://WWW.UPFRONTMAGAZINE.COM)



## ATTACK/ NEGATIVE ADS

Some political ads tell you why to vote for a candidate; attack, or negative, ads tell you why *not* to vote for someone—and they can get pretty nasty. Both voters and candidates say they don't like negative ads, but will they go away? **Not likely:** The reality is, negative ads often work.

## AIR WAR

The battle between candidates to get as much advertising on TV, radio, and the Internet as possible. The competition to get the Obama and Romney messages out is what's driving the fierce "money race"—another term you should know. This election will likely be the most expensive ever, with a total of about \$11 billion in spending by the two campaigns combined, according to the Federal Election Commission.

## LAME DUCK

An elected official who sees his or her power wane after being defeated for re-election, deciding not to run again, or because term limits prevent the official from running again. **Why a lame duck? Because it's weak and can't keep up with the rest of the flock.**



## LOBBYISTS

Paid "influencers" who try to convince legislators and government officials to support their agendas. Lobbyists for, say, colleges, might try to convince Congress to give more money to, you guessed it, colleges. Corporations and unions, liberal and conservative groups, each of the 50 states, and foreign countries—all have lobbyists advancing their interests in Washington and state capitals. The term originated in London in the 1800s, when people would corner members of Parliament in the lobby of the House of Commons.

## MUDSLINGING

Particularly negative—and often nasty and very personal—campaigning. But watch out for candidates who accuse their opponents of mudslinging, when in reality they just don't like what's been said about them and hope to minimize its impact.

## 99 (AND 1) PERCENT

These terms sprouted from the Occupy Wall Street protests that began in New York last fall: The "1 percent" has become shorthand for the wealthy and powerful, especially Wall Street bankers. The "99 percent" is supposed to be everyone else.



## SUPER PACs

Political action committees (PACs) are private groups that are allowed to donate up to \$5,000 to support a political candidate. But a super PAC can pool unlimited donations from individuals, unions, and corporations to advocate for a candidate as long as it doesn't coordinate with the candidate's campaign staff. Super PACs grew out of the Supreme Court's 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. It said that under the First Amendment, corporations and unions have the same free speech rights as individuals, and so the government can't restrict the money they spend to support political candidates. Critics say super PACs give wealthy groups and donors too much influence.

## OBAMACARE

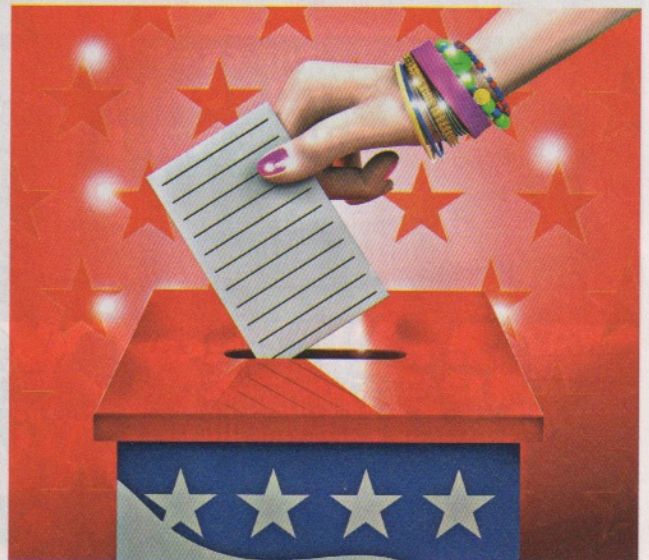
The nickname for President Obama's signature piece of domestic legislation, the Affordable Care Act. It was approved by Congress in 2010 without a single Republican voting for it. Obamacare started as a negative term to convey how big an impact the president's plan would have on America's health-care system and the economy. But it's now widely used, even by the Obama campaign. The most controversial part of the law is the "individual mandate," which requires all Americans to have health insurance or pay a penalty. Twenty-six states challenged the law, but in June, the Supreme Court upheld its key provisions, including the insurance requirement.

## RED & BLUE STATES

Election maps on TV were often color-coded to show how the two parties were doing: Red became standard for states voting Republican, blue for those voting Democratic. In recent years, most states have voted pretty consistently for one party or the other, and they started becoming known as red or blue states.

## SPIN

Sometimes candidates say things they regret, or things happen that make them look bad. That's where spin comes in: Campaign aides and supporters seek out reporters to interpret, or "spin," the event in question in as positive a light as possible. The real pros are known as spin doctors.

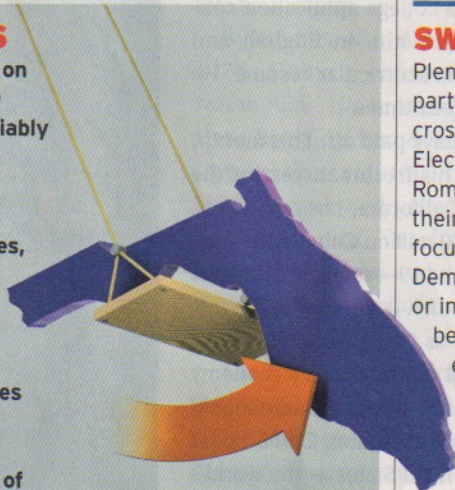


## YOUTH VOTE

The 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18 in 1971, but 18- to 24-year-olds have a spotty voting record. The 2008 presidential election was better than usual: Forty-nine percent of young voters turned out to vote. Will they return to the polls this November? Stay tuned.

## SWING STATES

It's pretty clear, based on recent history, how 40 or so reliably red or reliably blue states will vote in November. That leaves 10 or so swing states (aka battleground states, or purple states, because they're neither red nor blue), which could go either way. And those 10 states are likely to decide the election. Swing states can expect to see a lot of Obama and Romney this fall, in the flesh or on TV.



## SWING VOTERS

Plenty of voters brag about party loyalty and never crossing party lines on Election Day. Obama and Romney aren't wasting their time on them. They're focusing on swing voters—Democrats, Republicans, or independents who can be persuaded to vote for either party depending on the candidates and issues involved.

## TEA PARTY

A grassroots political movement that formed in 2009 and favors small government. They've exerted a lot of influence on the Republican Party, pressuring candidates and Republicans in Congress not to compromise with President Obama and the Democrats on spending and tax issues. Tea Partiers are unlikely to vote for Obama. Romney's challenge is to convince them that he's conservative enough—without alienating the more-moderate swing voters he needs to win the White House. ●