***Critically read the following and answer the questions at the end.***

**Bush v Gore: 2000 Presidential Election**

The 2000 presidential election pitted Republican George W. Bush, governor of Texas and son of former US president George H.W. Bush, against Democrat Al Gore, former senator from Tennessee and vice president in the administration of Bill Clinton.

Because Clinton had been such a popular president, Gore had no difficulty securing the Democratic nomination, though he sought to distance himself from the Monica Lewinsky scandal and Clinton’s impeachment trial.

Bush won the Republican nomination after a heated battle against Arizona Senator John McCain in the primaries. He chose former Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney as his running mate.

In their presidential campaigns, both candidates focused primarily on domestic issues, such as economic growth, the federal budget surplus, health care, tax relief, and reform of social insurance and welfare programs, particularly Social Security and Medicare. (Khan Academy)

Despite the continued [economic growth](https://www.britannica.com/topic/economic-growth) that Gore could attribute to his economic [stewardship](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship) with Clinton, early in the general election campaign it appeared that Bush might easily defeat Gore, who appeared wooden and dismissive of Bush in the campaign’s debates and who was criticized repeatedly by the Bush campaign as an exaggerator. In late October, however, the gap in the polls between Bush and Gore narrowed dramatically.

On election night, no clear winner emerged. Print and broadcast media cited often contradictory exit-polling numbers, and the races in [Oregon](https://www.britannica.com/place/Oregon-state) and [New Mexico](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-Mexico) would remain too close to call for some days. Ultimately, the contest focused on [Florida](https://www.britannica.com/place/Florida). Networks initially projected Gore the winner in Florida, but later they declared that Bush had opened an insurmountable lead. Gore called Bush to concede the election, but in the early hours of the following morning it became apparent that the Florida race was much closer than Gore’s staff had originally believed. Fewer than 600 votes separated the candidates, and that margin appeared to be narrowing. About 3:00 am Gore called a stunned Bush to retract his [concession](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concession).

Florida state election law required a mandatory statewide machine recount. By November 10 the machine recount was complete, and Bush’s lead stood at 327 votes out of six million cast. As court challenges were issued over the legality of hand recounts in select counties, news stories were filled with the [arcane](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/arcane) vocabulary of the election judge. County officials tried to discern voter intent through a cloud of “hanging chads” (incompletely punched paper ballots) and “pregnant chads” (paper ballots that were dimpled, but not pierced, during the voting process), as well as “overvotes” (ballots that recorded multiple votes for the same office) and “undervotes” (ballots that recorded no vote for a given office). Also at issue was the so-called butterfly ballot design used in [Palm Beach](https://www.britannica.com/place/Palm-Beach-Florida) county, which caused confusion among some Gore voters—prompting them to inadvertently cast their votes for third-party candidate [Pat Buchanan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Patrick-J-Buchanan), who received some 3,400 (some 20 percent of his total votes statewide).

By late November the Florida state canvassing board certified Bush the winner by 537 votes, but the election still was unresolved, as legal battles remained. Eventually, the Florida Supreme Court decided (4–3) to order a statewide manual recount of the approximately 45,000 undervotes—ballots that machines recorded as not clearly expressing a presidential vote—and accepted some previously uncertified results in both Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties, reducing Bush’s lead to a mere 154 votes. The Bush campaign quickly filed an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court, asking it to delay the recounts until it could hear the case; a stay was issued by the court on December 9. Three days later, concluding (7–2) that a fair statewide recount could not be performed in time to meet the December 18 deadline for certifying the state’s electors, the court issued a controversial 5–4 decision to reverse the Florida Supreme Court’s recount order, effectively awarding the presidency to Bush. (Britannica)

The Supreme Court decision in *Bush v. Gore* was controversial because the 5-4 vote was along partisan lines, meaning the justices appointed by Republican presidents (with the exception of Justice David Souter) ruled in favor of Bush, and the justices appointed by Democratic presidents argued in favor of Gore. Another point of controversy in the 2000 election was the fact that George W. Bush’s brother, Jeb Bush, was the governor of Florida at the time of the recount, although no evidence of wrongdoing surfaced. Al Gore conceded the election to Bush, but disagreed with the US Supreme Court’s ruling.

The 2000 presidential election was the closest in the history of the US Electoral College and the first ever to be decided by the US Supreme Court. [George W. Bush](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-modern-era/us-after-2000/a/george-w-bush-as-president) entered office as an embattled president, with many questioning his legitimacy. Although Bush worked to unite the country in the wake of the [September 11th](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-us-history/period-9/apush-1990s-america/a/humanities/us-history/modern-us/us-after-2000/a/september-11th) terrorist attacks, he proved a polarizing figure during his presidency. (Khan Academy)

**What do you think?**

How does the election of 2000 compare to other presidential elections? What was different/new?

Do you think the Supreme Court was right to halt the recount in Florida? Why or why not?

What were the long-term consequences of the 2000 election?