

**The US Presidential Election
- Behind the Confusion
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The Democratic and Republican Parties, America's two major parties, have finally selected their presidential candidates and completed their national conventions. Mercifully, the end is near for the world's most confusing, expensive and lengthiest political campaign. For two years, American politicians have competed to raise money, argued over issues, waved a million American flags, and challenged their opponents' intelligence and honesty. Between now and the presidential election early in November, the contest finally will concentrate on two men, President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, their personalities and their visions of how best to promote America's security, prosperity and supremacy power around the world.

This is the first in a series of commentaries aimed at explaining the American peoples' chaotic and bewildering selection of their president. First we will look at how they selected their candidates. Understanding this will enable us to comprehend the political pressures on the candidates and the obligations they acquired while striving to win their political party's support at the local, state and national levels. Next we will examine the issues and assess each candidate's policy priorities and preferences. On election eve, we will look at who is leading and why. Then we will study the election's outcome and the role regionalism, gender, race, education and socio-economic status played the determining America's next president. Finally we will critic the new administration, its key players and policy priorities.

The Electoral College

Arguably the most bewildering aspect of the US presidential election system is that the American people do not elect their president. The Constitution provides that every four years in November, American voters elect so-called "elector" who then go to Washington in January, are sworn in as members of the Electoral College, and then actually elect the president.

Each state's population, according to the US Constitution, determines how many "electors" a state can elect in the November election and send to the Electoral College in January. Some states' laws require that all of its "electors" must vote in the Electoral College for the candidate who won the majority of votes in the November election. In other words, if 60 percent of a state's voters cast their ballots for Republican electors in November, then all of that state's electors must vote in the Electoral College for the Republican candidate. In other states, however, laws permit the "electoral" to be split in proportion to the number of votes a candidate's party won in the November election. This means that if 50 % of the people voted for Republican electors and 50% for Democratic electors, then each party would win half of that state's electoral votes.

This complex system enabled President George W. Bush to win the 2000 election to the presidency although his opponent former Vice President Al Gore won more popular votes.

This process was designed to give political party organizations in each state a very important role in the selection of each presidential candidate. But early in American history, powerful politicians and wealthy individuals exploited the system to their advantage. To shift power from these privileged individuals and political cliques back to the average American citizen, primary elections were instituted.

Primary Elections

Earlier this year most of the 50 states in the United States held so-called “primaries.” Their purpose is give the “ordinary voter” more direct influence in the selection of candidates for public office, both at the local and national levels. Most states now hold “primaries” at least every four years. To participate in them, a voter must be must be 18 years of age or older, a resident of the state where they wish to vote and a registered voter. Once the “primaries” has been held, political parties then convene conventions, first at the state and then national levels.

State Political Party Conventions

The Democratic and Republican parties hold state conventions to confirm each party’s selection of presidential and other candidates according to the results of the primary election, and to select delegates to their respective party’s national convention. The leadership of each state party consists of persons previously elected to office in the Congress or local government. These officials then select delegates to the national convention according to which individuals have contributed the most money and volunteer work to the state’s political party organization.

The National Convention

Primaries and television have transformed the purpose American national political conventions. Before the 1960 presidential election, national conventions were held to select a party’s presidential candidate, but now that process is completed before the national convention convenes. Instead, the national convention serves two very different functions – one is largely ceremonial but the other is vital for national unity.

While the world watches the highly colorful and raucous display of American patriotism and political partisanship on television, behind the scenes state politicians and party organizations transfer their power in the form of political allegiance and financial resources to their party’s national committees and presidential candidates.

Candidly speaking, this process is rather feudal. It has similarities to medieval Japan’s Tokugawa Shogunate or *Bakufu*. The US presidential candidate plays a role similar to the Shogun. Each derives their power the allegiance and tribute of loyal local officials, state politicians in the case of the US or “daimyo” in Tokugawa Japan. There are,

however, fundamental differences. In the US system, power is transferred every four years according to popular preference. Neither was true in Tokugawa Japan.

Many average Americans find the politics of this transfer undemocratic and corrupt because it allows a minority of powerful and wealthy Americans to convert their prestige and wealth into political power. While the world watches the noisy display of partisan patriotism on television, the presidential candidates' key advisers make promises to his financial supporters regarding new policies, legislation and personnel appointments if the candidate wins the election. So long as the candidates and their advisers maintain a balance between the nation's best interests and individual preferences, the welfare of the majority will be well served and national unity will prevail.

In our next look at the American presidential election, we will study both candidates' perception of America's national interests, the American people's aspiration and how each candidate intends to deal with these expectations.