

United States 2008 Elections

Attendees (without distinction):

- From The American Consulate: Micaela A. Schweitzer-Bluhm, Stacy Barrios Kayler Kronmiller, Suzan Nammari, Jacqueline Deley.
- Palestinian Civil Society Representatives: Raed Sadeq, Osama Abu Karsh, Rami Mehdawi, Haitham Arar, Maysoun Qawasmi, Ambar Penova, Shahenaz Jubran, Sahar Qawasmi, Khalil Shaheen, Margo Sabella, Arnan Bashir, Benaz Batrawi, Fadwa Al-Shaer.
- From MIFTAH: Lily Feidy, Reem Wahdan, Shadi Abu Ayyash, Caelum Moffatt, Yasmin Abou Amer, Arwa Jaber.

Latest on Primaries

There were exciting results on April 22, 2008 in Pennsylvania, where Senator Hillary Clinton of New York won 55% of the votes versus 45% of the votes to Senator Barack Obama of Illinois. The results of democratic primaries did not come as surprise and the 10 % split between both candidates was not that unexpected.

These results will give Clinton's Campaign a boom, having the victory in Pennsylvania to be a key success that Clinton's campaign definitely needed so it can acquire more momentum and energy. In Pennsylvania, 1.2 million people voted for Clinton against 1 million for Obama. The number of voters in the state was double the number of voters in past primaries and is usually reprehensive of the final turn-out and not a primary, since a quarter a million new democrats recently registered so they can vote in the primaries. It was obvious that Obama dominated in rural areas, while Clinton won urban constituencies. With only two weeks until the next round of primaries in North Carolina and Indiana, if Hillary does not win Indiana, she will probably withdraw from the race. This year, the campaign started early, and has already witnessed about 65 debates

Looking into United States domestic concerns: the economy is very poorly shaped, the US troops still fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, the crash of the housing market forcing many Americans to lose their homes, with high prices of gas. Therefore, economy is on top of the voters' minds and the voters are passionate about who the next president will be. In such a situation, it is hard to foresee how the foreign policy of the US will be in the next presidential term. There have been a few talks on foreign policy issues, for example, Obama said President Carter's latest visit to the region was "ill-advised", while all candidates declared that they will continue to support Israel as the main ally in the region. Still, the majority of Americans will not look into the Palestinian –Israeli conflict as a key issue, but will rather be concerned about domestic policies.

According to recent public polls, 50% of Americans say the economy is their main issue of concern, over 25% said their main concern was about health care, and Iraq was also a concern for most Americans who see Iraq rather as a domestic issue in essence. The three presidential candidates are similar and are slightly different in domestic policy, but of course Democrats Clinton and Obama have different mind sets from Republican McCain.

Now, the race is mainly coming down to proving who the best individual is: Americans are looking for the best character and the American press is also looking towards the same thing –character. Hillary Clinton described the presidential campaign as the longest job interview ever. Senator Clinton was questioned about her credibility and was accused of exaggerating her experience and credentials. Senator Obama, on the other hand has had a tough time, being portrayed as a Muslim terrorist, and accused of being un patriotic. McCain is still being questioned about his character and whether he was true to himself, and whether he has changed positions to satisfy the left wing republicans and his campaign's finances.

Character is of so much importance that during the debate on April 16th, there passed 45 minutes before any substantive issues were actually raised. Obama has labeled this level of media interest in character as “manufactured political distractions”.

Democratic Nomination

The race for democratic nomination has been heated lately between Obama and Clinton, while McCain has no competition, and his campaign is sailing smoothly. Some studies show that the more the candidates are proved and tested, the better they come out to be capable of winning at the ultimate elections.

Obama has been raising the slogan of change, and said he would work on changing Washington politics. The slogan has worked well for a lot of people but some people are not going for change. Clinton on the other hand, has been seen as a known commodity, and was most likely linked to Bill Clinton's economic boom when it was the only time in American history when US treasury had a surplus.

He had been successful in collecting \$40 million for his campaign, from a wide range of contributors, and he has been extremely successful in using his website to get online donations. Clinton, on the other hand, collected \$20 million, and McCain \$15 million, but from a limited number big-money donors, which brought to him a lot of criticism on being double standard, since he originally advocated against receiving campaign money from lobbying groups, and his “ Real McCain Bus Tour” did not attract very much press coverage, but was met with sarcasm.

There have not been any official statistics about the number of registered democrats or republicans, and the available numbers are not consistent and may fluctuate from time to time. In general, there is so much passion among Americans towards the upcoming Democratic August Convention and the General elections of November. But the

challenge facing the Democratic Party is being able to keep the enthusiasm up after the democratic candidate is decided.

Role of Super Delegates

Also, there have been many questions raised on how the super delegates would vote. At first, many of them said they would vote for Hillary (259), but many of them then defected from her side to the benefit of Obama (226). Still, others have not decided on their preferences. Yet, Hillary's victory in Pennsylvania will probably sway more super delegates

US elections remain to be democratic; more debate among candidates will involve and engage more people in the process. Candidates are holding meetings everyday to convince people so as to engage with American public. However, since the year 1984, this is probably the second time the super delegates have a significant role in deciding the presidential candidate. The aim of this system was to make sure that the people would not elect unelectable candidates who do not have good chances to the white house. There is still a debate on how the super delegates will vote and upon what.

Between Gender and Color

Candidates have been trying to downplay the Gender and color issues, but these issues will definitely affect some people's judgment. The cross section has been black women. At first, most of them supported Clinton but later they defected towards Obama. In California, Obama gave a significant speech about race in America, which was a brilliant display of Obama's rhetoric skills. After the speech, the issue went to bed.

Typically, US presidents have been white protestant men, the entry of any of the candidates into the white house will not instigate any kind of revolution, since the new president will have to commit to previous treatments and continue the general approach. Towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a general recognition in the United States that the Middle East is on top of the agenda, and engagement in the area will continue.

In case the democrats win, they will probably focus on social services and finance, and if republicans, win they will probably focus on US troops abroad, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nowadays, Iraq is the most focused issue of foreign policy, and future engagement in the Middle East will depend on the progress of negotiations.