

## Presidential Elections

### Overview

The US presidential election is seen as the election of the world's biggest super power. The presidential election takes place over a year long event in which voters start by having the chance to say who they would like to see as the major parties' candidates. Issues such as democracy, campaign finance and the role of the media are raised. There is also the question of how a system devised more than 2 centuries ago as an indirect election has been adapted to become a direct election and questions were also raised when in 2000 a candidate won the presidential election despite receiving less votes than their opponent.

#### 1. **When do presidential elections occur?**

▲ president serves for 4 years. This is a fixed term, meaning that the president serves for 4 years until the next election. ▲ president can serve a maximum of 2 terms. The fact that there is a presidential election every four years is laid down in article 2 of the constitution. But federal law goes even further and states the election shall be held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November every fourth year.

#### 2. **What are the requirements for presidential candidates?**

To run as a presidential candidate there are a number of requirements which include being a natural born ▲merican, being at least thirty-five years old. ▲fourteen year residency qualification and they also must not serve more than two terms in office as president. These are defined as absolute needs and does not include personality traits and experience and such which are highly important but not one hundred percent necessary.

#### 3. **How are presidential candidates selected?**

Presidential candidates are selected by their party's at the National Party Convention. These are held during July or ▲ugust of the election year and usually last four days. It is also traditional that the challenging party hold their convention first. The conventions are attended by delegates. In theory the conventions chose the party's presidential candidate in a roll call vote and in pre-reform days most delegates would make their mind up on the day of the conference however in modern times it is almost common practice that a delegate will turn up already supporting one particular candidate. To win the presidential nomination a candidate must receive an absolute majority. If no one candidate gains this majority then balloting continues until one does.

#### 4. **What roles do money and the media play?**

Money and the media play a massive role in the presidential elections and without sufficient campaign financing a candidate is almost

immediately doomed to failure. Nearly all candidates with Billionaires being the exception have to seek out finance in order to be successful. Usually candidates will get this funding from sources such as PAC's. The finances that surround the presidential elections were reformed after the Watergate scandal and it was the Federal Election Campaign Act (1974) that meant limits on donations were introduced and "Fat cats" could no longer have so much of an influence on the election. The media also has a massive effect on the outcome of the presidential election as America has a large culture of late night chat shows and if a candidate is introduced onto them or similar programs as a "front runner" or "possible presidential candidate" enough times then often possible consensus leads to them becoming one. Professor Thomas Patterson wrote in 1993 that America was the only country in the world to organize its national election campaign around the news media. This is evident by the huge news coverage of the American elections from all over the globe but especially in America where the main news papers run their own opinion-editorial pages regularly. Many TV programs run 24 hour a day news coverage on the elections as well as political comment programmes as well as the above mentioned chat show phenomenon. As well as this Americans are heavily influenced by things such as political commercials due to the TV culture that has developed in America, and lastly televised debates can have a large effect on the presidential elections they have however been criticized as often style is more important than substance in many of these debates.

##### 5. **What factors explain voting behaviour?**

50% of the American population that are eligible to vote, exercise this right and their votes are influenced by a number of factors.

- Party Affiliation – Despite all that has been said about the weakness of the US party system. Statistics show that it does have an influence on the overall election. "11 out of the 13 elections from 1952 to 2000 have been won by the party that managed to gain the highest level of support from its own identifiers"
- Gender – Statistics have shown that in nine out of the ten elections between 1964 and 2000 woman were significantly more supportive of the democrat candidate than men. This is referred to as "the gender gap" The reason for the gap is policy differences in major issues such as abortion which for example the democrats traditionally take a pro-choice view which according to the statistics gains more women votes.
- Race – The main minority groups in the American electorate are African Americans and Hispanics. Traditionally a large majority of African American votes are for the democrat party which is largely reported to be down to the fact Democrat presidents such as

Kennedy and Johnson persuaded congress to pass laws which protected the rights of African Americans

- Religion – Certain trends have appeared in voting according to religion. Protestant voters tend to vote republican and catholic voters have tended to vote democrat. However the voting habits of the catholic electorate have been effected by a similar issue as that mentioned in the “gender” section. As although traditionally democrat supporters. They do not agree with their policy of pro-choice as Catholics are traditionally pro-life.
- Wealth – Wealth has proved (Especially on the basis of the 2000 election data provided) to be less influential on how the electorate vote than many of the above mentioned factors. However it does show that the republicans led the highest earning group by 25% and the democrats led the lower earning group by nine percent.
- Geographic Region – In terms of geographic region the northeast is the new home of the democrat party and also the south has gone from being a solid territory for democrats to being supportive of republicans
- Policies – Policies also have an effect on voting trends and this is shown in 1988 when Bush broke his “No New Taxes pledge” which was central to his defeat in 1992. Policies however vary very widely and are often supported by different groups as mentioned in the sections above.

#### **6. How does the Electoral College System work?**

Each state is awarded a certain number of Electoral College votes. This number is equal to the states representation in congress (The number of senators plus the number of representatives. The most popular vote in each state receives all electoral college votes from that state except in the states of Maine and Nebraska.

Members of the college never meet all together, instead meeting in the state capital they send their votes to the Vice president who counts the votes and announces the winner.

#### **7. What happens if a president dies in office?**

If a president dies in office, then the vice president automatically takes over, for example, when President Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963, Vice President Lyndon Johnson automatically became president and completed the remaining of Kennedy's term, which was held in 1964.

#### **8. Presidential elections can be split into four stages;**

- Primaries and Caucuses – These allow people to show popular support for candidates and delegates are selected to attend National Party Conventions. They are usually held in Late January – early June
- National Party Conventions – These are held so that presidential and vice presidential candidates can be selected and a party platform can be decided upon. These are usually held in July/August and they last about 4 days.
- General Election Campaign – This is the campaign between the chosen candidates of various parties and lasts from September through to the first week of November.
- Election day and Electoral College – This is the election of the president and vice president and usually is held from November/December

Individuals vote for who should be president, which means they vote directly for their executive, unlike in Britain, where the leader of the party with a majority is put in charge. In America the Electoral College then rubber stamps this with delegates voting as well.