

The American Election Process

Part 2 - Democrat vs. Republican

By Jenny Pettersson

In this article, focus will be on the two largest political parties in America, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Although it is worth mentioning that while other parties do exist, these two have dominated the political scene in America since the Civil War ended in 1865.

The Democratic Party

Thomas Jefferson founded the Democratic Party in 1792 to fight for the Bill of Rights and against the Federalist Party. He named it the "party of the common man" and that name remained until 1798, when it officially got the name "Democratic-Republican Party". In the election in 1800, Thomas Jefferson was elected the first Democratic president of United States.

In 1824, John Quincy Adams was elected president, but this election race led to a split among the Democratic-Republican Party, that ended in four different parties. As a result, Andrew Jackson became the national leader and together with Thomas Jefferson, he is considered to be the founder of the Democratic Party. He organized his supporters, created a convention process, the party platform, and reunified the Democratic Party during the next four years. The first National Convention was held in 1832 and in 1844, the National Convention simplified the name to the Democratic Party.

Since 1849, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) has been the national party organization. This makes the DNC the oldest continuing political committee in the world. The DNC main tasks are, planning nominating conventions, promoting election of candidates with technical and financial support, and administering the party on national, state and local levels.

Over the years, there have been several Democratic presidents. To mention a few there are Franklin Roosevelt (1932) who led the country during most of World War II and out of the Depression, Harry Truman (1945) who established the Truman Doctrine which speaks of the U.S.'s obligation to protect other nations against communism, and John F. Kennedy (1960) who took action for new civil rights legislation.

(Source: Democratic National Committee, www.democrats.org)

The Democratic Platform

The Democratic Party is more liberal than the Republican Party. This means, although they believe in the individuals' right and freedom of actions, they want, to a certain extent, to use the government to ensure equal rights and welfare.

Every four years the Democratic National Convention adopts a new platform. This platform is an official statement of the Democratic Party's position on various questions. The 2000 democratic platform was built around three words: prosperity, progress and peace.

Prosperity includes issues about how to get the U.S. back on its feet by the tax cuts, retirement security, and investments in education and innovation. *Progress* means making the U.S. safer, healthier, and more secure by creating new laws and regulations, taking care of the environment and by affordable healthcare. The Democratic Party believes in a strong military force in order to achieve and sustain *peace* in the country although they see it as the last option when all others have failed. Another important issue in order to achieve peace inside the country is winning the war on drugs.

(Source: The Democratic Party's Platform, www.democrats.org/about/platform.html)

John Kerry

John Kerry is the one democratic candidate who is most likely to become the party's national leader, and the candidate to run for president against George W Bush. He was born on December 11, 1943 in Denver Colorado. He has a Bachelor's degree from Yale University, 1966 and a law degree from Boston University, 1976. Under the Vietnam War he served in the navy (1966-1970) and was rewarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star with V, three Purple Heart awards, Combat Action Ribbon, Navy Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and the Vietnam Campaign Medal. Today he is married to Teresa Heinz Kerry. He has two daughters, Alexandra and Vanessa by a previous marriage, and they all live in Boston.

John Kerry is serving his fourth term in the U.S Senate and is currently campaigning to become the next Democratic presidential candidate. His promise, if he is elected as the new president, is to make "America safer, stronger and more secure". The following paragraphs describes Kerry's different opinions on various questions. (see pg 7)

One provocative question of today is same-sex marriage. Kerry is against it, but he backs benefits and rights for same-sex couples, including adoption. He is also in favor of allowing homosexuals to serve openly in the military. As a democratic representative he wants to increase governmental power by, for example, expanding federal legislation in order to assure equal justice all over the country. He also favors arms control and wants to create a government based nationalized health care system, which he plans to finance by reversing current tax cuts. He is against privatizing social security and wants to make federal financial help for state a priority in order to help them solve their critical problems.

Another big question this year is the Iraq War. He supports the war in Iraq but wants to involve other nations in the rebuilding of the country, and that he wants to expand the international efforts to secure peace and beat al Qaeda. On the question of America's own military force, he wants to increase the size of the Army by recruiting more service members and invest in new equipment and technology.

America's environmental issues are another question that is of international interest. Since Bush refused to sign the Kyoto agreement, several nations follow this debate with great interest. According to John Kerry's website, he has always been a leader in the environmental issues. For example, he opposes oil exploration in Arctic protected areas, and promotes alternative fuels. He thinks that America has fallen too far behind international goals concerning water quality and wants to help communities to catch up.

To mention a few other important issues, Kerry supports a woman's right to have an abortion and he is against the death penalty. He also wants to increase the police force in order to get the upper hand on drug related crimes, and he wants to make college affordable for all Americans.

(Source: John Kerry, www.johnkerry.com/about/;
CNN – The Issues, www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/)



The Republican Party

The initiative to form the Republican Party came from politicians from the westerner U.S in the early 1850s. The reason was to build an opposition against the Democratic Party as well as to try to make the federal government give funding for the infrastructure of the West. The first official Republican meeting took place

on July 6, 1854 in Jackson, Michigan. At this meeting, the new party adopted a platform and nominated candidates for office in Michigan. In 1856, the Republican Party held its first national convention and John C. Fremont was nominated for president. He lost the election but four years later in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the first Republican president. His mission was to outlaw slavery, ensure equal protection under the law, and to secure voting rights for African-Americans.

During the late nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, Republicans mostly held the president post. Although the Democratic president Franklin Roosevelt was the most popular during 1930's and 40's, the Republicans held the presidential post in 28 of the forty years from 1952 through 1992.

To mention a few Republican presidents during the twentieth century there are Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Nixon and Reagan. Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909) was widely appreciated and among other things, he ensured the construction of Panama Canal and got the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the Russo-Japanese War, reaching a Gentleman's Agreement on immigration with Japan, and sending the Great White Fleet on a goodwill tour of the world. Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) worked intensely to ease the tensions of the Cold War. Richard M. Nixon was president during 1969-1974 and he succeeded in ending the Vietnam War and improving the American relationship with the U.S. S.R. and China. The last one to mention is Ronald Reagan. This former actor was president during 1981-1989 and implemented an innovative program known as the Reagan Revolution. This program aimed to bring back more power, through privatizing, to the people.

As the Democratic Party, the national structure of the Republican Party starts with the Republican National Committee. Every state and city has its own Republican Committee, and even some neighborhoods have their own Republican organization. On the Election Day, a Republican precinct captain organizes the voters in his or her political area. Then he or she takes the results up to the next level and so on until it reaches the Republican National Committee who organizes all votes.

(Michigan State University, www.msu.edu/~stacey/GOP/index.htm)

The Republican Platform

The Republican Party is more conservative than the Democratic Party. They want to limit government

influence to a minimum and in their platform it is written, the “Republican Party has had a special calling — to advance the founding principles of freedom and limited government and the dignity and worth of every individual”. The Republican platform consists seven categories:

- The American Dream: Prosperity with a Purpose
- Education and Opportunity: Leave No American Behind
- Renewing Family and Community
- Retirement Security and Quality Health Care: Our Pledge to America
- American Partners in Conservation and Preservation: Stewardship of Our Natural Resources
- Government for the People
- Principled American Leadership

This platform’s purpose is to make it clear to the public what the party stands for and what their ideas are. Their vision is “the American Dream” where the government has very limited power. Their mission is to reform government and bring back timeless values such as the freedom of the individual through all seven categories mention above.

(Source: Republican National Committee, www.rnc.org)

George W. Bush

George Walker Bush was born on July 6, 1946 in New Haven, Connecticut. He has a bachelor’s degree from Yale University in 1968 and a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Harvard Business School in 1975. He was elected the 46th Governor of the State of Texas in 1994 and he served as governor for six years. He is married to Laura Welch Bush and they have two daughters, Barbra and Jenna. The family also includes their two dogs, Spot and Barney, and their cat, India.

A quick comparison of Democratic and Republican politics:

Question	Democratic Party	Republican Party
Right to abortion	Yes	No
Kyoto agreement	Different opinions	No
Iraq sanctions	Yes	Yes
States self-government	Less power	More power
Tax relief*	Opposes	Favors
Gun control	Yes	Different opinions
Death penalty	Yes	Yes
Private investments in health care	No	Yes
Government	More power	Less power
Constitution**	Loose interpretation	Strict interpretation
Bigger, stronger military	Different opinions	Favors

(Source: Sweden America Network (in Swedish) www.nknet.com/san/thema/regering/partier.htm)

** In general the Democratic Party believes that a government is needed to insure equal rights and welfare. In order to achieve this taxes are necessary and therefore they in general oppose tax relief. This doesn't mean that they don't want to decrease taxes in some areas.*

*** For both parties the constitution is important. The question is, if the constitution doesn't in exact words give the government the right to take certain action, can then the government do it any way? The Republican Party is in favor of strict interpretation, which implies that if it's not in writing then the government can't do it.*

Glossary

George W. Bush is the 43rd President of United States and he was sworn into office January 20, 2001. His vision is to make “a safer, stronger and better America” and his view on different political questions is presented in the following paragraphs.

Bush’s view on homosexuality is that he supports a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, is against gay adoption, and supports the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for gay people in the military. As a Republican, he wants to limit the government’s power. He doesn’t want a government based National health care system. Instead, he wants to improve the current system, and he wants private companies to compete in order to reduce the costs for both the National health care system and the Medicare system. Medicare is a governmental service that allows people who are 65 years of aged or older to receive medical treatment. He does support reducing drug (medicine) costs for low-income patients. On the issue of gun control, he wants to protect gun makers from lawsuits.

His international policy on the Iraq war is widely known. Although the war on terrorism is still going on and several nations through out the world oppose this, his resistance to letting other nations take part in the rebuilding of the country has started to loosen up. He believes in a strong army and wants to increase the military spending by 4.2 percent to \$380 billion, and he has supported a limited National Missile Defense (NMD) system. He supports labeling U.S citizens as “enemy combatants” and he wants to increase the budget to enforce immigration laws. A combatant is a person who fights in a war and an enemy combatant is a person who is on the opposite side in the war.

On the questions of environment and energy, Bush is in favor of opening up protected areas for gas and oil exploration and drilling, and at the same time, he wants to increase budget for developing alternative fuels. He refuses to sign the Kyoto agreement since he believes in letting the market decide how to improve air quality instead of government regulations. He opposes abortion except if there is a need to save the woman’s life, or the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, and he supports the death penalty.

(Source: George W. Bush, www.georgebush.com;
CNN – The Issues, www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/)

Capitalism: This is an economic system with minimal governmental regulation. The individual can produce, exchange, and own goods, garments, or services. Another definition could be that the basic premise of capitalism is that markets are efficient and should function without interference from the government.

Caucus: A caucus is a group of people with common goals or characteristics. In a political sense, a caucus is a meeting where voters come together to choose nominees to represent their political party in a general election.

Congress: The congress is made up of U.S Senate and the House of Representatives. The Congress has, among other issues, has the power to make Federal laws but the president has to sign them. In very rare cases, the President can veto this laws and the congress, with a super-majority, can override him.

Conservatism: This is a political philosophy where the national government does not interfere in the economy and regulate social life. In this philosophy, the state and local governments have the power to make decisions. Another definition could be that conservatism is a political philosophy or attitude emphasizing respect for traditional institutions, distrust of government activism, and opposition to sudden change in the established order.

Constitution: This is the structure and fundamental principles of a government. It is usually in written form, and in the USA, all other laws, regulations, and executive actions must be consistent with it.

Democracy: Democracy is a form of government where people votes on different issues and the majority decide the outcome.

Electoral College: Each state has a number of electoral votes equal to the number of members each state sends to the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Together these electoral votes constitute the Electoral College.

Federalism: In this political system, powers are divided and shared between national, state, and local levels.

Liberalism: Liberalism is a political view that emphasizes individuals’ freedom of actions. Modern day liberalism rests on the positive use of government to promote individual rights and equality.

Majority party: This party has the majority of seats in the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Minority party: This party has the minority of seats in the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Mission: A mission is the series of steps you will take to achieve your vision.

National convention: A national convention is a meeting of party delegates that is held every four years. The delegates are elected in state primaries and caucuses, and the conventions’ primary purpose is to nominate the presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

Primary: In a primary election, party members choose their delegates through election. They go to the poll and indicate their top choice for nominee.

Privatizing: Privatizing implies reducing the governments’ influence by selling different government owned infrastructure such as telephone, energy, or roadways, to the private sector.

Republic: This is a form of democracy in which representatives who are chosen by the people make decisions.

Socialism: This is a philosophy where the governmental authority should be used to make equal socioeconomic outcomes in terms of education, welfare, and health.

Vision: In a political context, a vision is the mental image of where, in terms of leadership, a political party and their politicians want the country to be. A vision is a dynamic dream that in reality is impossible to fulfill. It shows the place you are aiming for and is meant to encourage you to try harder.