

On Electing a President

An Onlooker's Guide to The U.S. Elections

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The office of President of the United States of America has long been one of great power and influence. Events in recent years, particularly, have combined to extend the direct effects of the President's influence to every corner of the earth. Canadians and people around the world will follow this year's presidential election with keen interest; but, to the mechanics of the United States electoral procedure are something of a mystery.

The sole intention of this review is to describe the sequence of events which culminate in the election of the Chief Executive of the United States of America, in order to assist readers in following developments in this presidential election year.

The Electoral College
It is important to bear in mind from the outset that in 1964, the President will be elected, not directly by some 115 million United States citizens of voting age, nor by the 70 million or more expected to go to the polls in November, but by 538 persons who, though they never meet as a body, are known as the Electoral College.

The Constitution of the United States provides for each state to "appoint" a number of Electors equal to the total number of Senators and Representatives which that state sends to Congress. There are now 435 Representatives and 100 Senators in Congress. But this year, for the first time, residents of the District of Columbia will be permitted to vote in the presidential election, following the ratification of the 23rd amendment to the Constitution of the United States in 1961.

The nation's capital, although not sending representatives to Congress, will vote for three electors. Thus, there will be 538 members of the Electoral College, with 270 electoral votes required for a presidential candidate to achieve victory.

Elect the Electors
The method of choosing these Electors has changed since 1789, largely as a result of the evolution of political parties. In practice, state legislatures have directed that the Electors be chosen by popular vote within the state. The slates of candidates for Electors are nominated through various procedures, by the party organizations within each state.

When a voter goes to the polls on Election Day, he does not vote for just one Elector. Instead, he indicates on the ballot which slate of Electors within his state he wishes to support. A simple majority of the popular votes cast in a state will carry all that state's electoral votes for the candidate of one party. Although the name of the winning presidential candidate is usually known by the end of Election Day, he is not then legally elected.

The number of electoral votes for each state changes every 10 years as the number of congressional Representatives to which each state is entitled is reapportioned according to the decennial census. The number of electoral votes of 25 states has changed since the last presidential election with states in the mid-west and north-east losing Representatives, principally to California and Florida. California, for instance, has 40 electors this year, eight more than in 1960, since it is now entitled to elect 38 Representatives, in addition to the two Senators to which all states are equally entitled.

Count in January
Those chosen Electors by popular vote in November meet on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December in their respective states to cast their ballots for President and Vice-President. The Constitution requires that each elector must vote for at least one presidential or vice-presidential candidate who is not a resident of the Elector's state. Certified copies of the Electors' ballots are mailed to the President of the Senate and to various other officials.

Early in January, the Senate and the House of Representatives will sit as one body to witness the counting of the ballots and the candidate who obtains a simple majority of the electoral votes is legally elected President of the United States. If no candidate for President should receive a majority of the electoral votes, the election would be referred to the House of Representatives, a constitutional provision that has been used only once, in 1824.

It is customary, although not constitutionally required, for each slate of Electors to vote en bloc for the presidential candidate nominated by the national convention of its party and, since 1820, only seven Electors have failed to vote for the can-

didate whom they had been pledged to support. The most recent deviation was in 1960 when one Oklahoma Elector refused to vote for the Republican candidate.

Minority Victory
As a result of the traditional procedure of the slate of Electors from each state voting en bloc, the successful candidate need not receive a majority of the national popular votes in order to obtain a majority of the electoral votes. There have been several "minority" Presidents in American history. For example, in 1888, Harrison received 100,000 fewer popular votes than Cleveland, but 65 more electoral votes. The most recent such occurrence was in 1948 when Mr. Truman received just under 50 per cent of the popular votes, but secured 57 per cent of the votes of the Electoral College.

Prior to and during the sequence of events described above, there are other stages in choosing the President, notably the primaries, the national conventions and the campaign.

State Primaries
Presidential primary elections emerged shortly after the beginning of the century. Like other features of the American election system, these primaries are, in effect, largely controlled at the state level by party organizations and regulated by state legislation. In about one-third of the states, party voters are given the opportunity to choose delegates to the national nominating conventions and, in some states, to express their preference among party aspirants for presidential nomination. The results of these direct primaries do not as a rule influence the decisions of the national conventions as much as they affect the choice of party candidates for state and local offices.

The national party nominating conventions, first held in the 1830's, have evolved outside the United States Constitution. The size of each delegation fluctuates from convention to convention but is weighted roughly according to the population and the number of party supporters in each state. The selection of delegates and alternates is made by state party organizations through the use of primaries, as mentioned above, or by other means such as state conventions.

Candidate's Choice
The three main purposes of a national convention are to write the party platform, to organize the party for the election cam-

aign to follow and, most important, to choose the party's presidential candidate. It is on this last item of business that the attention of several thousand delegates and alternatives at the public is centred in the summer of a presidential election year.

The Constitution requires only that the President of the United States shall be a natural-born citizen, at least 35 years of age, and resident within the United States for 14 years. It goes without saying, however, that the personal and political requirements for a presidential candidate are many and varied. Apart from the obvious criteria of character and ability, it is perhaps significant that, with one or two exceptions, certain traditional "background qualifications" appear to apply. For instance of the eleven presidential candidates elected since 1900, it is noteworthy that nine have been Governors or Senators, and six have hailed from states with more than 20 Electoral College votes.

The Principal Task
Usually by the third day the national convention has completed its other business, and takes up its principal task — the nomination of presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The secretary of the convention begins a roll-call of states to place names in nomination. Often a state list-

ed at the beginning of the alphabet will "yield" its nominating position to a state listed after, so that a candidate may have the advantage of being nominated by a key state early in the proceedings.

The qualifications of each candidate are extolled in the nominating and seconding speeches, and these speeches are usually followed by noisy colorful demonstrations. This procedure, frequently lengthy, is followed by a second roll-call by state when delegations cast their votes for particular candidates. When there are a number of candidates it may be necessary to take several roll-calls of the states on the convention floor — often a dramatic procedure — until one candidate achieves a majority of the votes. As a rule, state delegations vote as a unit although delegates from many states are free to vote as individuals if they wish.

The rules covering the Republican and Democratic national conventions differ considerably, but both now require a simple majority of the delegates' votes to select a presidential candidate. This candidate assumes the leadership of his party for at least the duration of the election campaign and serves as its national standard-bearer.

The Vice President
One of the first tasks of a candidate, once he has received the nomination of his party, is to indicate his choice for running mate — the party's nominee for Vice President, whose name will be coupled with that of the presidential candidate. The Vice Pre-

sident, who must meet the same constitutional qualifications as the President, succeeds to the "powers and duties" of the presidency in the event "of the removal of the President from office, or of his death, resignation, or inability to discharge the powers and duties of said office . . ."

The American voter has an unusually heavy responsibility on Election Day. Not only does he choose the Electors for President and Vice President, but he also votes for his Representative to Congress, often for a senator and usually for a number of state officials. The ballot which he uses to record these choices may include over 100 names and may be over 500 square inches in size.

Voting Machines
The voting machine, which was introduced in New York State in 1892, is now used in a number of states and facilitates the recording and counting of votes. Unlike Canadian ballots, American ballots usually carry political party designations in the form of a symbol or party name. Like most

other regulations governing elections in the United States, the type of ballot used is determined by each state. In summary, the major events which lead to the choice of a Chief Executive begin with the presidential primary elections in several states, held through June.

In the summer of a presidential election year, the major political parties hold their national nominating conventions to choose their candidates for President and Vice President. This year the Republicans met at San Francisco in mid-July, and the Democrats convened at Atlantic City starting August 24.

Vote on Nov. 3
Active election campaigning usually begins after Labor Day and continues to just before Election Day, which this year falls on November 3.

The members of the Electoral College will meet in their several state capitals on December 14, 1964, to cast their ballots for President and Vice President.

On January 6, 1965, the 538 Electoral ballots will be counted before the new Congress and, in compliance with the Constitution, the candidate who receives a

simple majority will be legally elected President of the United States of America.

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