

November 5th, 2024

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More than 3 months have passed since my lecture at IFRI on the coming American elections of November 2024.

The debacle of Biden facing a Trump not particularly performing during the June 27th debate triggered for the political bosses of the Democratic Party a “coup de force” against a President willing to stand for re-election, in spite of his frail appearance, of his incoherences, and repeated confusions.

Biden was elected in November 2020 in spite of a lack of campaign primarily by the clumsiness of his opponent. In spite of his age, and ignoring his pledge to be a President of transition with a new generation, he announced in the Spring of 2024 that he would seek a new mandate implying that he would again be the only democrat able to beat Trump.

Pushed by his own close family, wife and son, plus some long standing political advisers, he speedily won the primaries of his own party, without any real challenger, , then reconducted the choice of a contested vice president and was expecting to be formally invested at the democratic national convention in Chicago mid August.

The polls were predicting a close election, but in the 6 or 7 so called “purple States”, Trump was more or less leading while staying in the margin of errors of 2 to 3%.

At this stage, it may be useful to look back at the constitutional framework of the presidential election every 4 years.

Since the Constitutional Convention of Philadelphia , May till September 1787, the United States are a “federal democratic republic”.

“Republic” meaning a hurdle to the domination of a majority, and a protection of the rights of individuals but also of States against an abusive central power. The system provides the election of the President with an indirect voting mechanism by delegates themselves chosen directly at the State level , with an imperative mandate - only exceptions being Maine and Nebraska - , the winner otherwise getting

all the State delegates, “winner takes all”.

This explains why the candidate getting the majority of the popular vote nationwide is not always the elected President.

Recently that’s what happened in 2000 between Bush 43 and Al Gore.

Again in 2016 between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

The Electoral College is made of 538 delegates, corresponding to 435 members of the House of Representatives , plus 2 Senators for each of the 100 States, and 3 delegates for the District of Columbia, ie Washington DC.

Accordingly, to be elected, the President must receive at least a minimum of 270 votes, at the level of the electoral college, beginning of January, about 2 months after the popular vote.

This is the period when the going administration is qualified "lame duck", and the President elected chose his cabinet members and other people filling in key positions.

This process, long and complex, starts typically after the mid mandate has passed, ie the midterm elections.

Potential candidates for the main parties, start campaigning in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina...

Then at the beginning the 4th year, election year, start primaries and caucuses for each party at State level.

Primaries are said to be open, if accessible without requirement of party affiliation, or closed if restricted to members.

In both situations, one can only vote once.

Primaries and caucuses elect delegates who will gather later in the year, in July or August, at their respective Conventions.

They have the obligation to vote for the candidate they represent, at least for the first round.

Once the nominee of the main parties are confirmed with the VP they have selected, the official campaign can start with massive spending, rallies, meetings and a number of official debates.

The November election does not only produces a President, but also one third of the Senate every other year, the whole House of Representatives, 13 State Governors, and a number of various officials at State and County levels, including law enforcement personnel and judges.

Going beyond the process, the presidential election de facto is decided upon at the level of a limited number of States called "purple", meaning neither "red" (Republican) nor "blue" (Democratic).

Or "Swing".

In fact and unless there is a tidal wave, very exceptional, one can divide the country in two solid blocks, which tend to vote the same way election after election:

- democratic block, of 196 delegates, California (55), New York(28), Illinois(19), New Jersey(14)..
- republican block, of 188 delegates, Texas(40), Florida(30)..
- "Swing States" delegates: Nevada(6), Arizona(11), Pennsylvania(19), Wisconsin(10), Michigan(15), Georgia(16).

If we assume that the blocks are stable, the democrats can elect their candidate if they win all Swing States, ie $196 + 77 = 273$.

On the other hand, the republicans must win more than all Swing States, ie $188+77=265$.

It might be helpful to review the most recent results with Trump on the ballot.

2016

Trump 62984828 46,09% 304 delegates

Clinton 65853514 48,18% 227 delegates

Others about 7 millions, 7 delegates

2020

Biden 81284666 51,3% 306 delegates

Trump 74224319 46,9%. 232 delegates

Others about 2,3 millions. no delegate

One sees the very relative importance of third party candidates.

They must register in every State, are never elected nor de facto eligible.

But can be spoilers such as Ross Perot with 18,9% of popular votes in 1992, thus securing Bush 41 defeat against Bill Clinton.

End of June 2024, the expectation was a very unusual election:

- Age of the candidates, the oldest, and the second oldest, in the whole American history.
- The multiplicity of legal and judiciary situations, for Trump with 91 different charges, the criminal procedures against the Biden son, the affairism of the extended family of the current President, receiving \$20M from various foreign entities and dignitaries, even if no evidence has been presented of wrong doing by Biden himself.
- Biden with low approval ratings, and a Vice President unknown or heavily criticised, even among the democrats ranks.
- Trump leading the polls in most of the Swing States.

- Middle class and “blue collars” no longer supporting a party which clientele is more and more wokist, and Atlantic and Pacific costs elites representing.
- Ethnic minorities , Latinos, African Americans, switching in large numbers their allegiance to the Great Old Party.

This party itself being deeply changing from the Reagan era, free market, free international trade, private sector champion, pro limited government, civil liberties supporter, with an interventionist foreign policy “Peace by strength”, to become a Trump family cult, nativist, protectionist, populist and isolationist.

Endorsing industrial policies..

This shift explaining the clear defeat of Governor Nikki Haley against Trump at the republican primary.

The Trumpism is not just an aberration in the history of the party.

Trump and his fan club hid jacked the RNC, then the local infrastructure at every level , blackmailing the candidates who expressed criticism and disagreement with the Chief.

They built on the past populists who had failed such as Pat Buchanan, Ross Perot, more recently Rush Limbaugh and Tucker Carlson ex Fox News.

From the Reagan free enterprise to MAGA (Make America Great Again) illiberalism..

After the presidential debate end of June 2024, a wave of panic ran through the de facto leaders of the Democratic Party, Nancy Pelosi, former Speaker of the House, Chuck Schumer, Senate Majority Leader, Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Leader in the House, plus the Black Caucus, traditional support of Biden, and first and foremost the billionaires of Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood.

Who almost immediately stop funding the Biden campaign.

Their fear was not just a possible election of Trump, but also a ripple effect on Congress, where the democrats have a tiny majority of one seat, without the casting vote of Harris.

Panic, threat, pressure, blackmail, Biden is constrained to withdraw, and Kamala Harris, ignored, viewed as weak, considered ineligible, becomes almost magically by the choice of a few - Pelosi, Obama, Clinton -the candidate who can save the election for the democrats.

Through a totally opaque process, with lips service support by Biden,

Harris is invested without a single vote through the primary process where she was not candidate.

In July, at the Republican Convention of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Trump is formally chosen with the Junior Senator from Ohio, JD Vance.

Born in the Appalachians, heart of America, in a family destroyed by poverty, unemployment, and drugs, but rescued by his grand mother, JD studies at the prestigious Yale Law School, attended by the Clinton couple, works in the venture capital space, notably under the libertarian billionaire Peter Thiel.

And becomes famous by his autobiography, "Hillbilly Elegy, a memoir of a family and culture crisis".

From an execrable choice Biden Trump, rejected by 2/3 of the electors, we are now facing a very binary alternative:

- two white men, one being the oldest candidate, detested and feared by more than 50% of the citizens, and the other, JD Vance, who vilified Trump in 2016, then became his potential successor, even more isolationist and protectionist.
- A woman who defines herself as "black", although half Indian of Brahmin origin by her mother. Former Prosecutor in California, briefly Senator classified as the most leftist / progressive in 2019, after Elizabeth Warren, but ahead of Bernie Sanders. Pro abortion, anti fracking for natural gas..She selected as candidate VP a Governor from the Midwest, former high school teacher and Congressman, very progressive, Tim Walz.

The polls in the Swing States almost immediately become more favorable for the democrats, but not decisively.

The relative youth of Harris / Walz - 60y- has totally destabilized the Trump campaign originally laser focused on Biden age and health problems.

Both sides are opposed on many issues, not just domestic.

Harris as she stood in the 2019 primary is very left wing for the America in 2024. She refuses town halls and interviews, tries to move

towards the center, but remains hard to decipher ..

She is accused of flip flopping...even on her ethnic origin and background.

Hence she is irritating part of the Indian American community, very influential in the business circles which had enthusiastically endorsed her in 2019.

Trump himself campaigns without discipline, and does not try to expand his electoral base. A minority of 15 to 20% of republicans has still not rallied his camp, and could be missing in November, abstaining or even voting for Harris.

The independents who originally were leaning in his favor are now more or less equally divided.

They, together with educated women, will decide the outcome of the race in the Swing States.

At this stage, I am still hesitant to make a prediction.

Harris Walz have reenergized the Democratic supporters but they very marginally regained part of the Latinos and African American communities who had moved to Trump.

Trump Vance are not gaining new voters and expanding their base,

but they lead on security, immigration, inflation, and economic policies.

Harris Walz by staying away from the issues let some voters hesitant on what they stand for.

Recently the two candidates for the vice presidency, Walz and Vance, debated in New York, in a very civil way, with many agreements on isolationism and protectionist.

And policies promised by both main candidates will contribute to the aggravation of the deficit, according to independent sources.

Very exceptionally foreign affairs could play a meaningful role in the confrontation .States like Michigan, marginally won by Biden in 2020, may this time give a victory to Trump by the defection of part of the Arab and Muslim communities from Harris, viewed as not sufficiently engaged on the Palestinian side.

Abortion , which was a determinant factor in 2022 for the mid term election, could also play a significant role next month.

Finally, dramatic events can change the election .

Trump escaped an assassination attempt by turning his head when a bullet was shot.

And again faced a new attempt on a golf course in Florida.