

U.S. ELECTIONS 2008



NEWSLETTER

U.S. EMBASSY HELSINKI
AMERICAN RESOURCE CENTER

OCTOBER 2008

AMBASSADOR'S GREETINGS

YOU HAVE BEFORE you the first of three newsletters on the U.S. elections from the American Resource Center in Helsinki. This one will address the candidates and the election process. The second, later in November, will focus on the results of the elections (Presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, etc.) and what they suggest about the next four years. The third newsletter will come out late in January (after the inauguration of the new President) and will look at the members of the new Cabinet and the policy initiatives that the new administration plans to address.

Most media focuses on the presidential campaign between Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama, and this newsletter does contain bios of both candidates. However, Americans will also be voting on November 4 on one third of Senate positions, all of the House of Representatives, about a third of state governors, and many state and local legislators and mayors. The outcomes of these elections can have even a more profound effect on the lives of Americans than the Presiden-

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tial election, as the newly elected (or re-elected) officials deal with issues and problems much closer to their constituents' homes. We hope the articles in this newsletter will give you a broader, more whole picture and more insight into U.S. elections from top to bottom, from the national President to the local mayor.

BARBARA M. BARRETT
U.S. AMBASSADOR



ABOUT AMBASSADOR

BARBARA BARRETT WAS nominated on March 13, 2008 by President George W. Bush as Ambassador of the United States to the Republic of Finland. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on April 29th.

Ambassador Barrett earned her bachelor, master and law degrees at Arizona State University. Honorary doctorates have been conferred upon her by ASU,

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Thunderbird School of Global Management and the University of South Carolina. Ambassador Barrett has been recognized with the Horatio Alger Award, Woodrow Wilson Award for Corporate Citizenship and the Sandra Day O'Connor Excellence Award from the American Bar Association.

Candidates 2008



JOHN MCCAIN

*Republican
Presidential Nominee*

JOHN MCCAIN, currently a senator representing Arizona, would be the oldest president of the United States if elected. Serving in the Senate since 1986, he is known for passing legislation reforming election financing and lobbying laws.

McCain, whose father and grandfather served in the U.S. Navy, had a 22-year naval career. He served in Vietnam, where he was a prisoner of war for more than five years, and received many naval honors for his service. McCain was also a presidential candidate in 2000, but lost the nomination to George W. Bush.

McCain was born August 29, 1936, in the Panama Canal Zone, where his father was serving in the U.S. Navy.

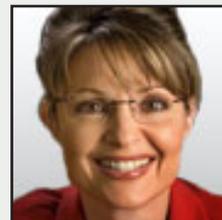
BARACK OBAMA

*Democratic
Presidential Nominee*

BARACK OBAMA, a first-term senator from Illinois, would be the first African-American president of the United States if elected. Serving in the Senate since 2004, Obama introduced a bipartisan law allowing Americans to learn online how their tax dollars are spent. He also serves on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, which helps oversee the care of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Previously, Obama worked as a community organizer in Chicago and as a civil rights attorney. He served for eight years in the Illinois State Senate.

Obama was born on August 4, 1961, in Hawaii and has lived in many places, including Indonesia. His mother was from Kansas and his father from Kenya. Obama attended Columbia University in New York.



SARAH
PALIN

*Republican Vice
Presidential Nominee*

SARAH PALIN is the governor of Alaska and would be the first female vice president if the Republican ticket is victorious in November. She was elected governor in 2006, defeating the incumbent governor in a Republican primary, and became the youngest and the first female leader of Alaska.



JOE
BIDEN

*Democratic Vice
Presidential Nominee*

JOE BIDEN is a six-term senator from Delaware. First elected to the Senate in 1972 at age 29, Biden currently is the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, which reviews matters related to foreign policy including treaties, national security initiatives and humanitarian assistance.

State and Local Elections

STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

ON NOVEMBER 4, 2008, Americans will elect not only their next president, but also thousands of local, state and federal representatives. During the coming month campaigns will become more and more visible around the United States, but besides the Presidential campaign the issues and topics will vary greatly state by state. There are 435 U.S. congressional districts that will choose a representative to the Congress; 35 senators and eleven governors will be elected. And many of these campaigns and districts differ in size, geography, demographics, economics and priority issues for local voters. Each offers a different prism through which to view U.S. politics, showing the common American experience and illustrating the U.S. motto "E Pluribus Unum" - "From Many, One."

DID YOU KNOW

THE 50 U.S. states are divided into 3,141 counties with about 30,000 cities and 85,000 townships. The 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution grants state and local governments all powers not specifically reserved for the federal government. Consequently, states and communities adopt laws and forms of government that suit their needs, resulting in a diverse patchwork of governmental practices.

MAGIC 60

ON ELECTION DAY, most of the attention, especially abroad, will be on the Presidential candidates. However, this year we will also witness very important Congressional elections, where the Democratic Party will push hard to achieve a filibuster-proof Senate majority.

A brief look at the numbers: Republicans must defend 23 seats, compared to 12 for the Democrats. Of those 23 seats that the Republicans must defend 10 are at potential risk: Virginia, New Mexico, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Oregon, Colorado, Alaska, Mississippi, Maine and

North Carolina. At the same time the Democrats have only one vulnerable seat. Depending on how well the Democrats do on Election Day, it is at least possible that they would gain nine seats and achieve the 'magic' 60 seats.

In the United States there are historical precedents for the almighty Senate, so this doesn't make these elections historical. However, a filibuster-proof senate would make Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid arguably more powerful than the President, whether it will be President McCain or President Obama. Such is the power of a strong Senate to control the agenda in Washington.

NUMBER CRUNCH

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ELECTIONS, 2008

- All 435 seats are up for election.
- Currently the Democratic Party has 233 seats and the Republican Party 202.
- 32 incumbents are voluntarily retiring from the House:
 - 6 members from the Democratic Party
 - 26 members from the Republican Party

SENATE ELECTIONS, 2008

- 35 seats of the 100 in the Senate are being contested.
- Currently the Democrats and the Republicans have 49 seats each; plus 2 independents who both caucus with the Democrats.
- Of the 65 not contested seats, 39 are Democratic and 26 Republican.
- Of the 35 seats contested, 9 are considered safe for Democrats and 6 for the Republicans.
- This leaves 21 seats to be under contest on the Election Day.

GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS, 2008

- 11 states hold gubernatorial elections on November 4th.
- 6 of the seats are held by Democrats and 5 by Republicans.

Battleground States

WHAT IS A BATTLEGROUND STATE

MANY STATES HAVE a history of their voters consistently favoring one party, but voters in battleground states, also called swing states, are so evenly divided in their political allegiances that majority voting results can switch from one party to the other from one election to the next. Presidential candidates will focus much of their campaign efforts on winning those states. There likely will be about a dozen swing states in the 2008 election.



2008 BATTLEGROUND STATES

POLITICAL EXPERTS AND pollsters have differing opinions over which states should be considered battlegrounds, but Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin are all thought to be too close to be called for either candidate in advance in 2008.

It is also notable that there are many different definitions for the battleground state itself. How small a percentage difference is needed? Is some percentage required for a state to be called safe? And on top of that,

there are many different methods that pollsters and political experts use that all give different numbers. In many cases, it is just too close to be called before Election Day. But if we look at two very widely used and highly regarded pollsters, Zogby and Rasmussen, we quickly notice the similarities too.

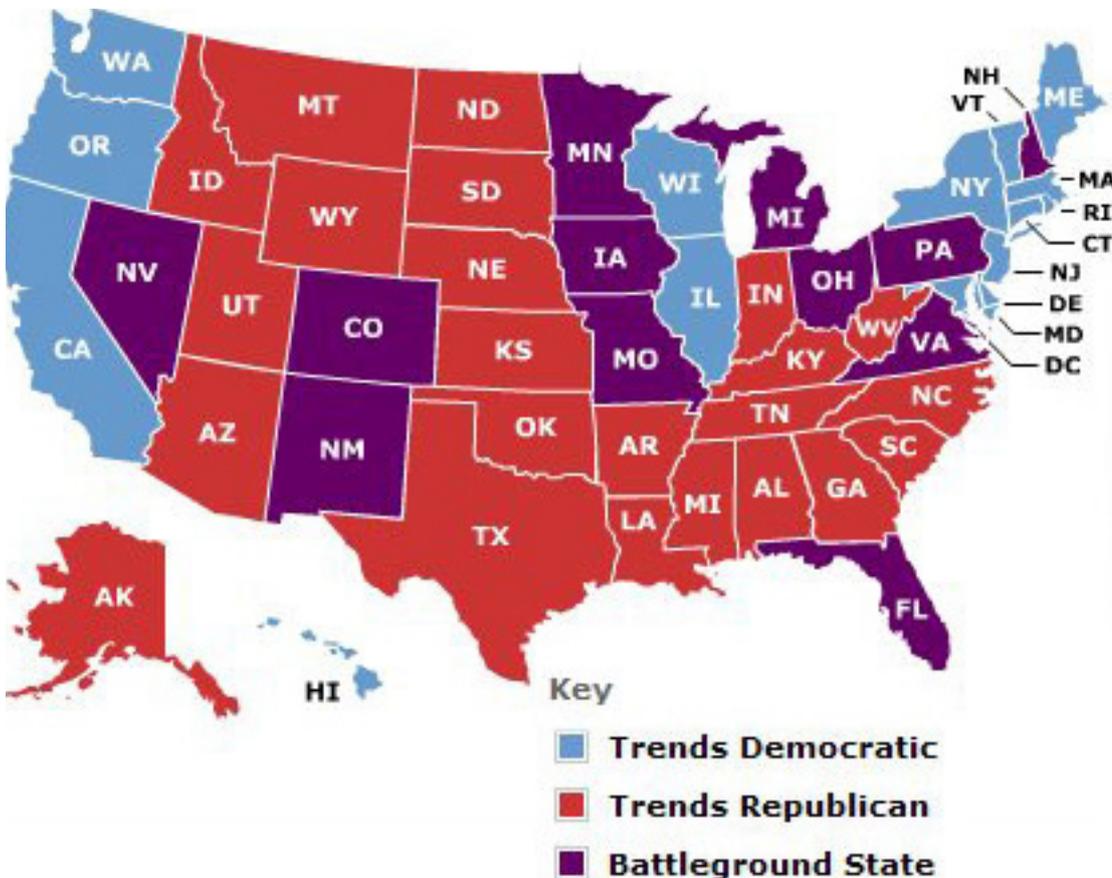
Zogby considers Colorado, New Mexico, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and New Hampshire to be the battleground states; while Rasmussen adds Nevada, Michigan, Oregon and Wisconsin to the list. So we can quite comfortably consider those nine states to be very closely contested and decisive for the eventual election outcome.

Even though the definition of a battleground state may be

unclear, one thing is certain, these thirteen states will get a lion's share of public attention on Election Day, and millions of dollars, from both candidates, will be poured into the campaigns in these states.

<http://www.rasmussenreports.com/>

<http://www.zogby.com/>



Electoral College

ELECTORAL COLLEGE IN BRIEF

AS PRESCRIBED IN the U.S. Constitution, U.S. presidents are not elected directly by the people but by a group of designated citizens known as electors. This group of electors makes up the Electoral College. The process for selecting electors varies from state to state, but usually the political parties nominate electors at state party conventions or by a vote of the party's central committee. On Election Day the voters in each state, by casting votes for president and vice president, actually are voting for the set of electors who will vote for the voters' preferred candidate. The electors cast their votes in their states on December 15, and Congress officially counts the results in January.

HARD MONEY/SOFT MONEY

Hard money and soft money are terms used to differentiate between campaign funding that is, and is not, regulated under federal campaign finance law. Hard money describes donations by individuals and groups made directly to political candidates running for federal office. Such contributions are restricted by law. Soft money refers to donations not regulated by law that can be spent only on civic activities such as voter-registration drives, party-building activities, administrative costs and in support of state and local candidates. "Soft money" contributions, by law, may not be used to directly support a candidate for federal office.

HOW DOES THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE WORK?

EACH STATE ELECTS the number of representatives to the Electoral College that is equal to its number of Senators – two from each state – plus its number of delegates in the House of Representatives. The District of Columbia, which has no voting representation in Congress, has three Electoral College votes. There are 538 electors in the Electoral College; 270 votes are needed to win the presidential election. If no presidential candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the 12th Amendment to the Constitution provides for the presidential election to be decided by the House of Representatives. In such situations, the House selects the president by majority vote, choosing from the three candidates who received the greatest number of electoral votes. Each state casts one vote.



DID YOU KNOW

The number of votes each state has in the Electoral College is equal to the number of representatives the state has in the U.S. Congress. Large states like California have significantly more votes than small states like Delaware.

DID YOU KNOW

For the first time ever in U.S. history, the candidates for president have raised more than \$1 billion. At the same time the Center for Responsive Politics celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2008. It is the U.S.'s premier research group tracking money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. From their website anyone can see how much has been donated to the campaigns and by whom.

<http://www.opensecrets.org/>

Public Affairs Office

THE WISE MEN - THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE

SO, HOW DO you wisely choose the man who will have king-like powers? How do you make sure that the people are still represented democratically in this process? The writers of the Constitution chose an electoral college. They took the idea from the Holy Roman empire, in which a collegium, or college, of electors chose each new emperor. Those electors were mostly princes. In the new American system, the electors were to be wise men chosen by the vote of the people in each state. The number of electors for each state was made equal to their representation in Congress. So, a state with a small population, such as Alaska, has three electors, which comes from the state having two Senators in the Senate, and one Representative in the House of Representatives. Florida has 27 electors, because it has two Senators and 25 Representatives, and California has 55 electors. Today, the U.S. Electoral College is made up of 538 electors. The candidate who wins the voting in a state gets all of its electors, even if he only won half the vote in the state. The candidate who wins 270 or more electoral votes wins the election and becomes the next president.

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president. The man who got the majority of votes would be president. The man who came in second would be vice president.

This system worked fine for George Washington's two terms. But in the campaign to succeed Washington, two political parties sprang up. The first place winner, and second president, was John Adams. The second place finisher, and new vice president, was Thomas Jefferson, leader of the opposition party. With the development of political parties, the idea of a college of wise men choosing the president by themselves was no longer practical. Instead, the political parties came to choose the candidates and campaign for them. Representatives of the party organizations from each state gathered together in nominating conventions to choose their candidates. In the beginning, these were the leaders of the state party organizations. But with time, the process became more democratic. The state organizations set up their own state-level elections to choose the delegates who would go to the nominating conventions. And from this the present system of primary elections developed.



ASSISTANT PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
KIMBERLY HARGAN

THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION is responsible for media, cultural, and educational affairs for the U.S. Embassy in Finland.

The Public Affairs Section provides official public statements about U.S. policies in the daily America.gov File and Electronic Journals. Through its homepage, its programs, and the American Resource Center (ARC), it offers background information on the issues that affect those policies.

The Public Affairs Section assists in bringing U.S. experts to Finland as speakers and promoting cultural programs with U.S. artists and performers. Assistance to Finnish organizations in arranging specialized study tours in the U.S. is also an essential part of Public Affairs Section programs in Finland.

National Conventions

CONVENTIONS IN BRIEF

THE DEMOCRATIC AND Republican National Conventions are presidential nominating conventions, where the Democratic and Republican National Committees nominate the official candidates for the upcoming U.S. presidential election. The convention signifies the end of the presidential primary season and the start of the general election campaign. The conventions are held after people and party members cast their votes in caucuses and primary elections

Historically the conventions have had more significance, because they have been the final determinant for the nomination. However, during the later part of the 20th century the primary election has been almost universally accepted to select the candidates. As also in 2008, the conventions most important task was to bring unity inside the parties and set up a party platform.

In 2008 the Democratic National Convention was held in Denver, Colorado, August 25 through 28, and the Republican National convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, September 1 through 4.



Nominees John McCain and Sarah Palin wave to supporters at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, September 4.

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

OBAMA RECEIVED HIS party's official nomination during the Democratic National Convention, held August 25-28 in Denver, Colorado. Delegates nominated him by a voice vote, with the help of his former rival during the primaries, Hillary Clinton. ("Democrats Formally Nominate Barack Obama for U.S. Presidency.")

Obama accepted the nomination before a crowd of more than 76,000, saying he would "keep the American promise alive" if elected. ("Barack Obama Accepts Presidential Nomination.")

Republicans held their convention September 1-4 in St. Paul, Minnesota, but it got off to a slow start. Party leaders cancelled most of the first day's scheduled events and encouraged delegates to instead help hurricane relief efforts. ("Republicans Encouraged to Aid Those Affected by Hurricane

Gustav.")

McCain accepted the Republican nomination in a speech September 4, in which he described himself as an experienced leader who will bring change. ("John McCain Tells Republican Convention 'Change Is Coming.'")

But the highlight for many Republican delegates was a speech given by vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin, her first on a national stage. ("Republicans Nominate John McCain for President.")

All articles in parenthesis can be found from www.America.Gov



Vice presidential nominee Joe Biden and presidential nominee Barack Obama at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado, August 27

INCUMBENT

An individual currently holding a position is the incumbent. Historically, incumbents have enjoyed a better-than-average chance of being re-elected.

How to Follow the Elections

DEBATES



SEPTEMBER 26, 2008

Presidential Debate in Oxford, Mississippi

OCTOBER 2, 2008 Vice-

Presidential Debate in St. Louis, Missouri

OCTOBER 7, 2008 Presidential Debate in Nashville, TN

OCTOBER 15, 2008

Presidential Debate

in Hempstead, New

York



Watch the debates from New York Times Elections page.

LINKS AND RESOURCES TO FOLLOW ELECTIONS

www.America.Gov - Telling America's story.

www.BarackObama.com - Official Candidate webpage.

www.JohnMcCain.com - Official Candidate webpage.

www.cfr.org/campaign2008 - Council on Foreign Relations' section for 2008 Elections.

edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/ - Videos and stories about the elections. Also, all the debates are here in video format.

elections.nytimes.com/2008/ - New York Times' Election Guide 2008.

DISTRIBUTION OF 2004 AND 2008 ELECTORAL VOTES

Votes are allocated based on the 2000 Census.

Total Electoral Vote: 538;

Majority Needed to Elect: 270

AMERICAN RESOURCE CENTER

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Hours: Mon-Fri 9-20, Sat 9-16
(Reference services: Mon-Fri 9-17)

The American Resource Center (ARC) is an authoritative source for information about American government and politics, foreign policy and international relations, U.S. economy and foreign trade, the environment, history, society, and culture.

The ARC serves the academic world, media, government officials and non-governmental organizations, research institutions, teachers and students, and individuals interested in the United States.

The ARC is operated jointly by the American Embassy in Helsinki and the National Library of Finland.

ELECTION'S RELATED TITLES AT THE ARC:

BOOKS:

McCain, John; Faith of My Fathers (1999).

Obama, Barack; Dreams of My Father (2004).

Obama, Barack; Audacity of Hope (2006).

DVDS:

Barack Obama by the Biography Channel (2008).

John McCain by the Biography Channel (2008).

PERIODICALS :

Among many titles, you can find National Journal, Commentary, The Nation, and daily editions of the New York Times and Wall Street Journal from the American Resource Center.

Full list of available periodicals: <http://finland.usembassy.gov/periodicals.html>