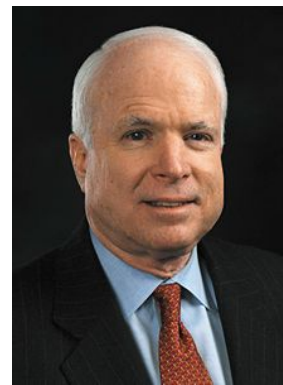


This is Part II in our series of US election analysis. Part I can be seen [here](#).

Palestine in the 2008 US Presidential Elections

The Democratic and Republican presidential primaries are in full swing in the United States, yet there is little discussion coming out of Palestinian society on the possible implications the elections may have here. There is little dispute that unwavering American support puts Israel in a formidable position when it comes to negotiating with the Palestinians, and that the American influence is most visibly manifested in the actions and comments of the president. The 2008 election, then, should be of central concern to Palestinians and should be present in the overall political discourse, whether in the media or on the streets of the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem.

With that in mind, PASSIA has decided to very briefly summarize the key terms, events, and personalities that will play a role in the upcoming elections, including what could be one of the most hard-fought primary campaigns in modern American history. Perhaps a better understanding of these issues - especially as they pertain to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - will allow for more attention and debate among Palestinians.



Part II: The Race After March 4th

What transpired on March 4th, and where do we stand today?

On March 4th, four states - Texas, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Vermont - went to the polls to have their say in who becomes the Democratic and Republican nominees for president. As expected, Arizona Senator John McCain sewed up the Republican race. His only remaining competition, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, dropped out and left McCain as the last man standing. He can now get his campaign geared toward the general election in November. He will continue sharpening his attacks against both Democratic contenders, and he can take his time selecting a vice-presidential running mate.

The Democratic race only got more complicated, however. New York Senator Hillary

Clinton came into the day with her future in the race looking grim; Illinois Senator Barack Obama was looking to effectively put an end to a long and hard-fought primary process. But when the dust settled on March 4th, the picture had not gotten any clearer: Clinton managed to end a demoralizing streak of losses, and Obama kept her from gaining any real ground in the delegate count.

The day started with Obama extending his string of victories in eleven consecutive states to twelve thanks to a win in the small state of Vermont. Clinton quickly matched him with a small victory of her own in Rhode Island. But it was Texas and Ohio that were the big prizes of the day, and pre-election analysts were in agreement that each race would be relatively close. As many of us expected, Ohio Democrats favored Clinton, picking her by a margin of almost ten percent. It was an important win that kept Clinton in the race and proved she is viable in a state that will almost certainly be a contentious one when the general election returns in November.

The race got even more interesting - and confusing - as results started coming in from Texas. On the surface, Clinton can claim victory because she won the state's primary election. In reality, though, the convoluted primary process that Texas Democrats must go through obscured the results a bit. The primaries in Texas are in fact a two-step process, and Clinton was the victor in one part, while Obama came out ahead in the other. The result is that the two ended up almost even in the state.

When all the votes are counted in these four states, little will have changed in the Democratic primary race. The two candidates emerged with delegate counts from the day that were almost identical, allowing Obama to maintain his comfortable overall lead. For Clinton, the day was a success in that it allows her to claim a few victories and continue her campaign. The momentum and media coverage that will result from her victory will be beneficial as the country waits for the next major primary, which does not come until late April in the state of Pennsylvania. Under the surface, though, she moved no closer to Obama in the delegate count, and her window for closing the gap continues to grow smaller. Two more primaries are on the horizon before the big match up in Pennsylvania, and preliminary polling shows both of those to be certain victories for Obama. Still, he missed an opportunity to put Clinton away for good in this race, and it looks like we will all have to wait a while longer to find out who the Democratic nominee for President will be.

With little being decided between Clinton and Obama so far, what will be the determining factors between now and the general election?

The goal for both candidates is to accumulate just over half of the delegates that are up for grabs. At this point, it is clear that neither of them will reach that threshold, so it may come down to a number of factors that rarely play a role in the primary process. The first issue that has been on the lips of pundits nationwide is that of the "superdelegates". These are the Democratic figures - Congressmen, party leaders, governors, and even former presidents and vice presidents - who make up nearly 800 of the roughly 4,000 delegates in play. While the proportional delegates of each state are allotted to the

candidates according to popular vote, the superdelegates are untethered to any primary outcomes. The candidates, then, must rely on their own powers of persuasion to sway superdelegates to their side.

The Other Players in the Race

How will the superdelegates factor going forward?

Though Obama is winning overall in the delegate count, the almost 800 superdelegates have yet to be factored in, and Hillary has held a consistent lead in pledged support from superdelegates. After the March 4th primaries, only about half of the superdelegates had pledged their support: 238 of them had sided with Clinton, 194 with Obama. The battle for the rest of those precious votes will go on largely in the shadows away from public view, with each candidate doing their best politicking to gain support. Philosophies on how superdelegates should act are varied, and each is entitled to make up his own mind. Many of them will follow the lead of their own constituents and pledge their support to the candidate that won the primary in their state. Others will hold out until one of the candidates personally wins them over. Still others will wait until the last possible moment and support whichever candidate is in the lead - after all, we know that politicians like to be on the winning side. The superdelegates make up an important chunk of the delegate count, especially in such a tight race, but there is little way for us to know how the process will shake out behind the scenes.

What other factors could play a role?

Much has been made of the role that former Senator John Edwards could play in choosing a victor. He was another strong contender in the race early on, but he dropped out after his campaign failed to gain momentum. When he left the race, he had performed well in a few early primaries and had earned 23 delegates. In theory, he will be obliged to pass those delegates on to one of the remaining candidates. Yet Edwards has been reluctant to endorse either Clinton or Obama, and he may wait until the race resolves itself one way or another before pledging his support.

Endorsements from leading figures in the party are an integral part of any political campaign. Garnering the public support of an elected official, party leader, or even a celebrity can be a coup for any campaign from a public relations standpoint. Yet in this race, the endorsements that Clinton and Obama have garnered have yet to change the tide of the race. Obama gained quite a bit of momentum from Oprah Winfrey, but most of her influence was felt in states that Obama most likely would have won anyway. The most coveted endorsements - Al Gore, for example, or the other Democrat presidential candidates like Bill Richardson and John Edwards - have not come for either Obama or Clinton. Most of these big names have stayed on the sidelines, most likely waiting for a winner to emerge before getting behind that person for the general election.