

US Elections 2008: The World is Watching

Ridwan Karim

3rd Year, Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA)

Institute of Business Administration (IBA)

University of Dhaka

Why is it that the US Elections garner so much public interest throughout the globe and receive worldwide coverage like no other election? Maybe it's because this election will crown the next leader of the free world. Maybe because the global economy hangs on the balance and world peace is at stake. But for me, the ultimate significance of the US elections lies in what it stands for: people eager to make their voices heard, and bring about reform and change. The polls, the debates, the long cues in front of the voting-booths – all of these events bring about a desire within me to not let the next Bangladesh national elections, scheduled to be held on December, pass me by.

The stage was set for a historic US election once it became apparent that Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were going to be the front-runners from the Democrat Party for the presidential nomination. But the Republican Party had a surprise up their sleeves as well. John McCain chose Sarah Palin as his running mate, perhaps encouraged by the cracks left in the glass ceiling by Senator Clinton's campaign. The emergence of viable presidential and vice-presidential candidates irrespective of race and gender possibly reflects the deep need for meaningful change felt by the American people. In that respect, there are significant similarities between the upcoming US and Bangladesh elections. Both are marked by a yearning for change by the general public and both have enormous potential of initiating a new era in their respective domestic political scenarios.

Recently I have been reading Fareed Zakaria's book "The Post-American World" with much interest, in which he puts forward compelling arguments to show that the rest of the world are now shifting to a stage of indifference regarding US and its politics. Going through the news media, you would not think that is the case. The dominance of US politics in the media is a glowing testament of the contribution of diversity and different point-of-views to their strength. I feel that this election will have far-reaching consequences throughout the globe, the impact of which will resonate even here in Bangladesh. Firstly, the economic

policies undertaken by the next president will have a direct bearing on the growth of the RMG sector of our country, which is highly responsive to the global market. Secondly, effective foreign policies regarding the war on terror can help stem the rise of fundamentalism even in the backwaters of North Bengal.

There are major differences between the two candidates on domestic issues like legalization of abortion and gay marriage, tax policies, healthcare etc. But, for the rest of the world, the only relevant parameters by which the two candidates are judged are their foreign policies. That is why many people in our country who are conservative in nature want the liberal Senator Obama to be the winner, because they prefer what Obama stands for. Still, many others have deep respect for John McCain, a true maverick who had to go through unspeakable suffering during war-time, not unlike the valiant freedom fighters of Bengal.

But what do the two candidates stand for? Barack Obama wants to divert resources from the Iraq War to fighting the Al-Qaeda militants in the tribal regions of Pakistan, while McCain believes that operations in Iraq should be the central focus in the war on terror. Although there appears to be a wide gulf in the two approaches advocated by the candidates - I feel that the ground realities will dictate the eventual foreign policies, as both the men have shown a willingness to learn from the mistakes of the past. My belief is that both Iraq and Pakistan will receive equal attention in the upcoming years. I also doubt whether the US and its allies will militarily intervene in Iran. The disenchantment of the American people over the Iraq war and greater emphasis on diplomatic processes will act as strong deterrents to the initiation of another war.

At this crucial juncture in the history of mankind, the world waits with bated breath to witness the outcome of the elections. Let the strength and will of the American people arising from their diversity be the eventual winner.