

What Makes a Good Vice President

By MICHELLE AUSTEIN

Geography, experience, gender, politics and personality are considered when U.S. presidential nominees choose their running mates.

During the 2008 primaries and caucuses, record numbers of Americans cast ballots for the presidential nominees. But only one person's vote mattered when vice presidential candidates were being considered.

U.S. vice presidential candidates are selected by the presidential nominees of the political parties. The nominee might get help from others, but ultimately he makes a political and personal decision. Often, the choice and the reasons for it give voters their first concrete insight into the way the candidate thinks in making important decisions, and this may factor

into the decision on whom to elect.

"This gives us a bit of a window [on the presidential candidates'] thinking and the types of judgments they have about people," says Leonard Steinhorn, professor of communication at American University in Washington, D.C.

Is the choice a big surprise, risky or predictable? Did the candidate take others into confidence or go it alone? Do voters react: "Why did he pick that guy?" or "Wow, what an innovative choice!"

The factors in selecting a running mate include how a candidate can help the campaign and how he or she would handle running the country if the president could not.

The main constitutional purpose of a vice president is to temporarily or permanently take on the duties, or the office, of the presidency should the president become incapacitated mentally or physically, or die in office, resign or be ousted by impeachment.

In U.S. history, nine vice presidents have ascended to the presidency during their term, while others have taken on presidential duties temporarily. For example, Vice President Dick Cheney assumed presidential powers in 2002 and 2007 when President George W. Bush was under anesthesia for a medical procedure. While Steinhorn is among experts who feel the vice presidential choice does not matter

Joe Biden Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate

U.S. Senator Joe Biden, 65, has represented the small east coast state of Delaware since 1972, when he was elected to the U.S. Senate at the age of 29. Best known for his international relations and national security experience, Biden chairs the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, which has a powerful role in shaping U.S. foreign policy. He has traveled to many countries, most recently to Georgia. He was in India in February. Biden sought the presidency in 1988 and again in 2008, but withdrew from the race after the Iowa caucuses. In a presidential campaign first, thousands of supporters learned of Barack Obama's selection of Biden via text message.



CHRIS CARLSON © AP/WIDEWORLD

Sarah Palin Republican Vice Presidential Candidate

Sarah Palin, 44, is the governor of Alaska and the first woman to run on a Republican presidential ticket. 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. Prior to serving as governor, Palin was the mayor of Wasilla, Alaska, for six years and chairwoman of the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission. As governor, Palin created Alaska's Petroleum Systems Integrity Office to provide oversight and maintenance of oil and gas equipment, facilities and infrastructure, and the Climate Change Subcabinet to prepare a climate change strategy for Alaska. She also helped revise Alaska's ethics laws.



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The Electoral College is the group that actually elects the president and vice president. The Electors are chosen on a state-by-state basis, according to how many U.S. Congress members the states have. More populous states have more members. If a presidential candidate wins most of the ballots cast in a state, he gets all of the Electoral votes from that state. This is why a candidate can win more popular votes across the United States, but can lose the election to an opponent who does better in more populous states.

that much when voters are marking their ballots, others feel that the electorate must be able to visualize the vice presidential candidate as being capable of carrying out presidential responsibilities should the need arise. Otherwise, they may be nervous about voting for that team, or “ticket.”

Often candidates consider how a vice presidential nominee from a region or background different from that of the presidential nominee could attract voters by “balancing the ticket.” Running mates with political viewpoints that differ somewhat from the presidential nominee can balance a ticket as well. A vice presidential candidate who is popular in his home state can help the ticket win if his state is populous and has a lot of Electoral College votes.

In 2004, John Kerry, a New Englander from Massachusetts, and John Edwards,

from the southern state of North Carolina, ran as the Democratic presidential and vice presidential nominees. Edwards had sought the presidency, and Kerry’s campaign hoped adding Edwards to the ticket would bring in Edwards’ supporters.

“But there are always exceptions to the rule,” Steinhorn says. In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton of Arkansas selected Al Gore, a senator from Tennessee, who was “another southern moderate.”

Sometimes party leaders pressure the presumed presidential nominee to pick a running mate who they feel can offset a nominee’s weaknesses. For example, a presidential candidate with little foreign policy expertise might be encouraged to select a running mate who has done extensive work overseas.

Despite these pressures, “a lot really depends on the individual candidates, and who they want as one of their top persons in their administrations,” Steinhorn says. But the Constitution does not actually provide a role for the vice president in the administration, and some presidents have simply ignored their teammates after the election. Aside from being ready to ascend to the presidency, the vice president’s other constitutional duty is to preside over the Senate, the upper house of the U.S. Congress, and cast a vote in case of a tie.

As the candidate ponders his options, he will get help from a team that develops a list of candidates, conducts preliminary interviews and completes exhaustive background checks to identify weaknesses that

could hurt the campaign.

Such a team might make surprising recommendations; alternatively, a candidate can choose someone the team did not consider. In 2000, Bush surprised many when he selected Dick Cheney, the head of his vice presidential search team, to be his running mate.

The vice presidential candidate’s role on the campaign trail varies, but there is often a “good cop, bad cop” routine the running mates play, Steinhorn says. The vice presidential candidate can attack the opponent while the presidential nominee remains above the fray. “If you want to attack presidential...you don’t want to sound negative,” he says. When Ronald Reagan was running for president, his vice presidential teammate, George H.W. Bush, was tough on the Democratic vice presidential nominee, Geraldine Ferraro, questioning her experience, ability and positions, while Reagan maintained the gentlemanly stance of not attacking a woman.

In the months between the primaries and the national conventions, U.S. news media were filled with speculation over who the presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama would pick to be their running mates. For the first time, an Indian American, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, was among those mentioned as a possible candidate for vice president of the United States.

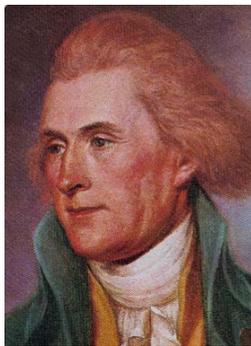
The process of selecting vice presidential candidates has evolved over the last 232 years; America’s earliest running mates were often competitors rather than partners.

Imagine what would happen if, in November, Americans selected a Democratic president and a Republican vice president. With top executives from two different parties, it could be difficult for the White House to present a unified message and political battles could slow progress. The founders of the American Republic learned this after watching the process unfold. Now a vice president of a different party can be elected only if the winning presidential candidate specifically selects him or her as a running mate.

Originally, the candidate who finished second in Electoral College votes was



U.S. President George W. Bush (left) and Vice President Dick Cheney at an event in Washington, D.C.



Far left: America's first vice president, and second president, John Adams.

Left: A portrait of the third president, Thomas Jefferson.

Below left: Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, and Vice President Walter Mondale (right) during a fundraiser in Washington, D.C. in 1979.



Angry with Jefferson, Burr, as vice president, cast tie-breaking votes in the Senate that went against the president's wishes.

To avoid these types of problems in the future, Jefferson led the effort to pass the 12th Amendment to the Constitution in 1804. It required presidential and vice presidential candidates to run together on a ticket. The amendment also specified the qualifications for vice president, which are the same as for president: a natural-born U.S. citizen, at least 35 years old, with at least 14 years of residency in the United States.

Forming tickets became tricky political business. As party leaders met at conventions to nominate their candidates, leaders realized they could please party members by selecting a presidential nominee from one faction of the party and a vice presidential nominee from another. As a result, nominees often disagreed and vice presidents typically were relegated to minor roles. They also were often replaced when the president sought re-election.

The modern era of selecting vice presidents began in 1940, when president Franklin D. Roosevelt refused to run for a third term unless vice president John Nance Garner was replaced with secretary of agriculture Henry Wallace. Party leaders agreed, nominating and voting for Wallace at the Democratic National Convention.

Only once since then has a presidential nominee left the decision on the vice presidential candidate to the national party convention. In 1956, Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson let delegates decide between Senators Estes Kefauver and John F. Kennedy. Although Kefauver won in the party, the ticket lost the election. Meanwhile, Kennedy gained valuable exposure that helped him win the presidency four years later.

While party leaders try to influence the choice, presidential candidates now tend to pick their running mates themselves,

quietly inviting potential vice presidential nominees for informal discussions and choosing the person with whom they feel most comfortable. In 1968, Republican candidate Richard Nixon let his stunned staff know of his decision to ask Maryland Governor Spiro Agnew to be his running mate just minutes before making his announcement to the country. It may have been a better idea to have allowed his team to vet the choice: In 1973, Agnew resigned because of criminal charges stemming from activities before his election.

Agnew is only the second vice president to resign. The first was John C. Calhoun, who, after being elected with president Andrew Jackson, decided to run for a vacant seat in the U.S. Senate, the upper house of Congress. He won, and gave up the vice presidency in 1832.



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Vice Presidents Who Became President



Nine sitting vice presidents have had to succeed to the presidency during America's 232-year history:

- John Tyler stepped in for William Henry Harrison, who died of pneumonia in 1841;
- Millard Fillmore, for Zachary Taylor, who died suddenly in 1850;
- Andrew Johnson, for Abraham Lincoln, assassinated in 1865;
- Chester Arthur, for James Garfield, assassinated in 1881;
- Theodore Roosevelt, for William McKinley, assassinated in 1901;
- Calvin Coolidge, for Warren Harding, who died of a heart attack in 1923;
- Harry Truman, for Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1945;
- Lyndon B. Johnson, for John F. Kennedy, assassinated in 1963;
- Gerald R. Ford for Richard M. Nixon, who resigned in 1974.

—Y.M.

For more information:

Vice president of the United States

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Vice_President.htm

12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html