

American History: George W. Bush Re-elected in 2004



AP

President George W. Bush takes the oath of office for his second term, with his wife, Laura, at his side

STEVE EMBER: Welcome to THE MAKING OF A NATION – American history in VOA Special English. I'm Steve Ember.

This week in our series, we look at the presidential election of two thousand four.

(MUSIC)

GEORGE W. BUSH: "Freedom is on the march."

HOWARD DEAN: "I speak not only for my candidacy, I speak for a new American century."

JOHN KERRY: "America's best days are ahead of us."

JOHN EDWARDS: "Given a choice, the American people will stand where this president won't."

Every four years, American political parties nominate their candidates for president and vice president. In the summer of two thousand four, Republican Party delegates chose George W. Bush and Dick Cheney for a second four years in office.

(MUSIC)

During President Bush's first term, Islamic extremists attacked the United States. Almost three thousand people died in the September eleventh two thousand one attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon, across the Potomac from Washington, D.C. President Bush declared a war on terror and led the nation into wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

After the terrorist attacks, President Bush enjoyed record popularity. Public opinion studies showed that almost ninety percent of the American public approved of the way he was doing his job.

But the president's public approval rating decreased over time. One research group found that his average approval rating for two thousand four had fallen to just fifty percent.

(MUSIC)

Before a presidential election, the main parties use primary elections and caucuses to choose delegates to a nominating meeting or convention. The person winning the most delegates usually gets the party's presidential nomination.

In two thousand three, ten people were seeking to become the Democratic candidate for president. Among them was John Kerry, a senator from the state of Massachusetts. Another was Howard Dean, a doctor and former governor of Vermont. There was John Edwards, a lawyer and first-term senator from North Carolina. Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut also was seeking the nomination. In two thousand, Senator Lieberman had been the Democratic candidate for vice president.

Another senator and a former senator were also seeking the nomination. So were two members of the House of Representatives, a former general and a civil rights activist.

Former Vice President Al Gore was not among the candidates. He had lost the disputed election of two thousand to George W. Bush. Mister Gore announced he would not be a candidate in two thousand four.

HOWARD DEAN: "I want my country back ... "

Some political observers thought Howard Dean would win the Democratic nomination. The former governor actively opposed the war in Iraq.

HOWARD DEAN: " ... where we're all included. Thank you very much."

He won praise for the way he raised money for his election campaign. Supporters gave him millions of dollars in small gifts through the Internet.

Then came the Iowa caucuses -- the first step in the nominating process, in January of two thousand four. John Kerry won with thirty-eight percent of the state's delegates. John Edwards finished second with thirty-two percent. Howard Dean was third with just eighteen percent.

Senator Kerry continued to win delegates and gain support in other states. Several candidates, including former Governor Dean, withdrew from the campaign. In early March, Senator Edwards also withdrew. He did so after Senator Kerry won victories in nine state caucuses and primary elections that were held on the same day.

The Massachusetts senator named John Edwards as his choice for vice president. Senator Kerry officially received the Democratic Party nomination for president at the party's convention in Boston.

JOHN KERRY: "I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty. We have it in our power to change the world, but only if we're true to our ideals. And that starts by telling the truth to the American people. As president, that is my first pledge to you tonight. As president, I will restore trust and credibility to the White House."

The combination of John Kerry and John Edwards balanced the Democratic ticket in several ways. Senator Kerry was considered a liberal. He came from the Northeast. Senator Edwards was considered more moderate. He came from the South. Kerry was Roman Catholic. Edwards was Protestant.

(MUSIC)

John Kerry was born in Colorado in nineteen forty-three. Like George W. Bush, he studied and graduated from Yale University. He then joined the United States Navy. He was wounded and won honors for his service in the Vietnam War. He criticized the war after leaving the military. John Kerry graduated from the Boston College law school in nineteen seventy-six. He became a lawyer for the state government in Massachusetts.

Then he served two years as lieutenant governor of the state. He was first elected to the Senate in nineteen eighty-four. His wife, Teresa Heinz Kerry, led a family foundation that gives money to important causes.

(MUSIC)

Senator Kerry and President Bush debated three times on national television. They campaigned hard across the country. Foreign policy was the major issue during the campaign. Mister Bush centered his campaign on national security. He said he was the best candidate to keep America safe from terrorists. He said Americans could trust him to be strong against terrorism. He presented himself as a decisive leader. He said Senator Kerry had changed positions on issues and would be unsure in the face of danger.

In two thousand two, the Senator had voted to give President Bush the power to use force against Iraq. But Mister Kerry now criticized the way the Iraqi conflict was being fought. By autumn of two thousand four, more than one thousand Americans had died in Iraq since the war started in March, two thousand three. Thousands of Iraqi civilians also had been killed. Senator Kerry talked about the war in Iraq:

JOHN KERRY: "You've got to be able to look in the eyes of families and say to those parents, 'I tried to do everything in my power to prevent the loss of your son and daughter.' I don't believe the United States did that. And we pushed our allies aside."

Senator Kerry said his goal for the United States was "stronger at home, respected in the world." He believed that the United States had lost respect from many of its allies because of President Bush's foreign policy in Iraq.

The president defended American actions in Iraq. He said the war was needed to fight terrorism. He also expressed satisfaction that, because of the war effort, Iraqis were free of a cruel dictator.

In the United States, economic growth had slowed before George W. Bush became president. The economy got worse after the terrorist attacks in two thousand one. Mister Kerry said the economy should be expanding at a faster rate. And, he denounced the growth of the national debt under Bush's leadership. The president praised his administration's actions in difficult economic times.

GEORGE W. BUSH: "Six months prior to my arrival, the stock market started to go down. And it was one of the largest declines in our history. And then we had a recession and we got attacked, which cost us one million jobs. But we acted. I led the Congress. We passed tax relief. And now this economy is growing. We added one point nine million new jobs over the last thirteen months."

(MUSIC)

President Bush suggested a plan for younger workers to place some of their pay in private retirement accounts. Senator Kerry opposed this idea. The president

opposed most operations to end unwanted pregnancies. The senator supported a woman's right to have an abortion. His position disagreed with that of the Roman Catholic church.

Early in the campaign, opponents of John Kerry's candidacy formed a group called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. Its leader was a military veteran who, like Mister Kerry, fought in the Vietnam War. The group argued that the senator was unfit to serve as president because of comments he made about his military service and his activism in the anti-Vietnam war movement.

TV COMMERCIAL: "John Kerry gave the enemy for free what I and many of my comrades in North Vietnam in the prison camps took torture to avoid saying."

The group even questioned the combat medals awarded to Mister Kerry.

Other Vietnam veterans, including several who had served with Kerry, denounced the charges against him as completely false. Some people believed the accusations and his campaign's delay in answering them had an important effect on the results of the election.

(MUSIC)

Americans voted on November second, two thousand four. As in the election of two thousand, there were questions about voting problems during and after the election. The vote was especially close in the state of Ohio. Kerry supporters reported problems with voting machines. They also said many people were illegally prevented from voting. The state had enough electoral votes to decide the winner of the presidential election.

But the day after the voting, Senator Kerry decided not to question President Bush's win in Ohio. The final results showed that Mister Bush won about fifty-one percent of the popular vote nationwide. Mister Kerry won about forty-eight percent.

George W. Bush would serve four more years as president of the United States.

Bush's second term included a military surge in Iraq, a storm that devastated New Orleans, and a housing market that had many American homes underwater financially with shaky mortgages. That will be our story next week.

(MUSIC)

You can find our series online with transcripts, MP3s, podcasts and pictures at voaspecialenglish.com. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter at VOA

Learning English. I'm Steve Ember, inviting you to join us again next week for THE MAKING OF A NATION -- American history in VOA Special English.

Contributing: Jerilyn Watson