

THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL RACE: A GENERATIONAL BATTLE

Dole's Victory in the Republican Primaries

After some tough battles during the Republican primaries, Bob Dole, the current Senate Majority Leader, has finally emerged as the Republican presidential candidate. Though a heavy favorite initially, he faced some unexpectedly stiff challenges from other contenders, such as Steve Forbes, Lamar Alexander, and Pat Buchanan. There were moments when Dole's candidacy appeared to be in serious jeopardy, particularly after he was defeated by Buchanan in the New Hampshire primary, but he finally came through in early March, winning the State of New York and most Southern states on the "Super Tuesday." While waiting patiently for the official nomination at the Republican Party Convention to be held on August 12-15, in San Diego, California, he is quietly preparing himself for a fight with Bill Clinton in November.

Bob Dole is a seasoned politician. After entering politics in 1960 as a Congressman from Kansas, he has had varied political career, including two unsuccessful attempts at the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1980 and 1988. Ideologically, he is a mainstream conservative with moderate views and an uncanny ability to compromise and make deals behind the scenes. With this experience and political moderation, it is no wonder that Bob Dole is highly respected by his Congressional colleagues, both Republican and Democratic.

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Comparing Dole and Clinton: Policies, Characters, and Generations

In terms of policies and issues, Bob Dole and Bill Clinton have more similarities than differences. Both are middle-men with similar ideas about what government should do, and both are committed to change only at the margins. Neither of the two has such an ideological fervor as to defy political compromises for a single cause. In fact, both are known to be deal-makers. As can be seen in <Table 1>, the two candidates' positions on most issues differ only in relative emphases, not in basic directions.

Given the insignificant differences between the two candidates' policy positions and the lack of impending issues, the focus of this election will be on their personalities and characters. Of course, there are some commonalities between the two: both are from small towns, emphasizing the values of family and community, and both have politically active wives, Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Dole. Yet Dole and Clinton also have quite contrasting backgrounds and personalities. One man (Dole) is a World War II veteran who was wounded in Italy, while the other objected to the Vietnam War and did not enlist. More to the point in terms of personalities is the fact that one man (Dole) cannot say the word 'I', while the other cannot stop saying it.

According to psychoanalysts, this contrast of personalities is a reflection, in large part, of the generational difference. Dole is the last species of the World War II generation, and Clinton is the prototype of the baby boomers. Commonly regarded as the most heroic American generation of the century, the former generation shares a series of unifying experiences that were commu

<Table 1> Clinton and Dole's Stands on Major Issues

	Clinton	Dole
Budget	support for balanced budget (but opposes a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget)	strong support for balanced budget (favors a constitutional amendment)
Immigrants	no need for further regulations	only modest and temporary restraints
Welfare	no cuts	modest cuts
Abortion	no need for constitutional ban on abortion	support for constitutional ban (allowing exceptions)
Trade	support for WTO and NAFTA, emphasis on fair trade	support for WTO and NAFTA
The U.S. Role in the World	active role	active role

nal and sacrificial: they suffered through the Depression, most of them served in World War II, and they experienced the sudden, surprising post-War affluence together. The baby boomers, on the other hand, are the most self-indulgent group in history. Partly because of their numbers, they have defined every moment of their lives around themselves.

In this respect, the coming election is a battle of the two distinct generations as much as it is a battle of the two characters. From Dole's point of view, it is a choice between experience and callowness, between sacrifice and self-indulgence, between the Comeback Adult and the Comeback Kid. Having never really known apprehension, the baby boomers are careless, unsure of themselves, and know so little of what life is really like. Quite contrastingly, the older generation emerged from the Depression and the war with a sense of moral superiority and a sense of certainty about life. So Dole says repeatedly, "I've been tested and tested and tested, and won't lead you off a cliff."

Clinton side's counter-arguments are equally plausible. The older generation might have the virtue of simplicity and certainty, but in these

times of ambiguity and uncertainties about the future, the younger generation is more apt to provide the required leadership. Growing up under affluence, the baby boomers have had to make so many difficult choices: on drugs, on personal morality, and on whether to go to Vietnam. Choices want discussing and breed ambiguity, both of which are so essential for the future leadership. It is no wonder that Clinton talks smoother and articulates his vision for America more clearly than Dole.

Other Influencing Factors

Besides the generational factor, many other factors could come into play during the course of the campaign. It is simply too early to make a reasonable prediction on the outcome. Although most current polls indicate that Clinton has a comfortable lead over Dole (see Table 2), one should not attach too much significance to the numbers at this early stage. One may recall the fact that four years ago, Bush once led Clinton by 16%, only to be defeated in November.

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For one thing, Dole's running mate (that is, the Vice-Presidential candidate) has not been decided upon. Three candidates are most often mentioned: Colin Powell (the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), John Engler (Michigan Governor), and Christine Todd Whitman (New Jersey Governor). Colin Powell insists that he has no interest in the ticket, but the Dole camp does have interest in him. If he becomes the Republican running mate, the latest Time/CNN poll suggests that the Dole/Powell ticket has an advantage over Clinton/Gore, 47% to 45%.

The possibility of a third candidate also exists. Buchanan keeps hinting at his own candidacy, although the possibility is very low. Ross Perot, a Texan billionaire who grabbed 19% of the vote in the last Presidential election as an independent candidate, seems more serious about taking another run at it. This time, he is likely to run as the candidate of Reform Party, a third party he has founded.

If Perot does enter the race, it will work presumably in favor of Clinton. According to the latest Time/CNN poll, in a three-way race Perot would get 14% of the vote, Clinton 46%, and Dole 33%, suggesting that his presence would draw more votes from Dole than from Clinton. Nevertheless, White House strategists are worried about the Perot candidacy, in part because he aimed most of

his fire at the incumbent President in 1992, and in part because such an interruption could create great complications, and thus steer the campaign in a totally unforeseen direction.

A Generational Battle

Putting aside all these external factors, this election will come down to a battle between the two contrasting generations. It will be a rematch, of course, of the 1992 fight between Clinton and George Bush. The last fight was more familiar and thus more predictable in that the youthful upstart (Clinton) challenged the political establishment (Bush) in the midst of an economic recession, promising a more vigorous future. This year is different, however, and the election is more likely to be a judgment on the past four years, on the quality of Clinton's leadership. The biggest challenge ahead for Clinton, therefore, is to convince a skeptical public that he has suffered and grown enough over the past four years that he can now overcome the many frailties of the baby boom generation. If he fails to do so, the almost double-digit lead he now enjoys over Dole may soon evaporate. VIP

(Wook Kim)

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<Table 2> Recent Opinion Polls on the Upcoming Presidential Election

1. Two Way Race
Clinton 52, Dole 44, Pew Poll
Clinton 49, Dole 40, Time/CNN
2. Three Way Race
Clinton 46, Dole 33, Perot 14, Time/CNN
3. With Running Mates
Clinton/Gore 45, Dole/Powell 47, Time/CNN
Clinton/Gore 50, Dole/Engler 38, Time/CNN
Clinton/Gore 51, Dole/Whitman 40, Time/CNN