

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Some key terms in the U.S. elections

WASHINGTON: Some esoteric terms related to U.S. political conventions, which are held every four years by the Democratic and Republican parties to nominate their candidates for president and vice president:

Party platform — A document drafted by special platform committees before the election to put on record each party's positions on various issues. Approving the platform, with any changes agreed at the convention, is the most important job of the convention after nominating the presidential and vice presidential candidates.

Primaries — The primaries, or in some states party caucuses, occur in the months leading up to the conventions and constitute the selection process for convention delegates.

Public financing — Public financing of election campaigns dates from 1976 and is funded through a \$3 checkoff system on Americans' annual tax returns. In this election cycle, the law provides a candidate with just over \$84 million, with restrictions on private fundraising. Democrat Barack Obama is opting out of the system in favor of private fundraising, but Republican John McCain is using public financing.

Roll-call vote — A convention's final work, and its climax, comes with a roll-call vote — a state-by-state accounting of the candidate's vote totals. In recent decades only one roll call has been required because the nomination has been won in the primary campaign.

Running mate — The running mate is a presidential candidate's selection to be the vice presidential candidate in the coming election. While technically nominated by the convention, the vice president in modern times has been the choice of the candidate who emerges from the primary elections campaign with the greatest support.

Superdelegate — Superdelegates are party and elected officials who automatically attend conventions; they are not restricted by their state's primary elections but, instead, are free to support any candidate for nomination. About 820 superdelegates will be at the Democratic convention. The roughly 120 superdelegates at the Republican convention are called "unbound delegates."

Swing state — A major state in which control is uncertain for either party is known as a "swing state," possibly capable of swinging the election to the winning candidate.

Veepstakes — On the model of "sweepstakes," journalists have created the word "veepstakes" to describe the process by which a presumed presidential candidate selects his running mate.

Electoral College — The president is chosen by "electors" who emerge from the presidential election, scheduled Nov. 4 this year. Each state is allotted "electors" based roughly on its population, and they meet in an "Electoral College" in December to choose the president. Electors normally vote as their states' voters do, but they are not required to.