Conclusion

A “Global Event” With Global Stakeholders: Obama’s Election and the “Idea” of America

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The previous chapters centered on a set of larger questions. First, did the 2008 US presidential election matter with respect to the various countries considered in this volume, and if so, how and why? The fact that the United States is globally too relevant for its major domestic political events to be ignored emerged quickly and repeatedly in the individual studies discussed in various chapters. The US continues to maintain a hegemonic position in the early twenty-first century, and hence there is a need for practically all countries across the globe to pay close attention to key events in Washington.

However, the global reach and the level of interdependence of the United States, mainly but not exclusively economic, have created a feedback mechanism. Today the United States must also be cognizant of how it is perceived abroad, because the image it has overseas constitutes part of the foreign policy environment in which any US administration has to work. Thus, the previous analyses of how countries worldwide viewed the US election do not only tell the story of why the US election gained such international prominence, but also begins to lay out part of the foreign policy context with which the Obama White House will have to deal with.

Second, and particularly if considered together, a picture emerged of how “globalized” the US presidential election, at least in 2008, had become. The world paid attention and felt it had a stake in the outcome. Such concern, however, was not simply the product of concrete bilateral relations different countries had with the United States, but also an expression of preference for a particular type of America. In fact, in many countries, one could sense that the people there wanted a particular “idea” of America to be reconfirmed in these US presidential elections.
In other words, many countries worldwide held the view that a particular notion of what the United States was or was supposed to be, even if this notion remains rather diffuse, was also on the ballot in 2008. The joy that was generally shown internationally over the outcome of the election was thus not only for the success of Obama the person and politician, but also for the type of America he seemed to represent.

Related to the ideational argument is, third, the confirmation of the overall claim that the US presidential election may in fact amount to a “global event,” as postulated in the Introduction. The international attention and sense of “being part” of the election was, by and large, so substantial and on such a high level as to warrant special consideration. This was in fact, in many ways, a “global election” with global “participation.” Moreover, given that only very few countries worldwide would have preferred to see McCain enter the White House, it was also an election with a general, even if not complete, international consensus.

Fourth, and finally, each chapter investigated the impact that the choice of Obama as the 44th President of the United States may have from the overseas perspectives. While there are significant individual differences, overall, one could detect a sense of relief and approval that the United States would now fundamentally reevaluate its foreign policies. This election offered the opportunity for the United States to rethink the substance and style of its foreign relations, and the world was glad that this opportunity was not missed.

**National Perspectives Because of National Priorities and Deficiencies**

As in domestic elections, the world as a whole did not reach a full consensus regarding the 2008 US Presidential election. Viewpoints differed across the globe in many respects. In all countries the perception was a mix of concrete policy concerns, mostly regarding bilateral issues, and an interest in, and sometimes fascination with, the person Obama, and whether this individual might be able to change some of today’s international and domestic political dynamics. Between these two foci, countries struck very different balances. However, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, both aspects formed part of the perceptions of practically all countries.

For a number of countries investigated here, US foreign policy plays a very critical role; for these countries a pragmatic view of the US Presidential candidates’ respective positions on certain bilateral issues dominated the way the US election was viewed. For Pakistan, Iran, Palestine, and, to a good degree, Israel, US policies in the Middle East and Southwest Asia are critical. Logically, their perception was shaped largely by the possible implication of the US election on America’s foreign policy toward