

# The 2016 U.S. Election – A TALC Primer

## Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands . . .

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

## Constitution, ratified June 21, 1788

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

The constitution established a system of government with three branches, including a separation of powers with checks and balances.

- **Executive** (President, elected to a maximum of two four-year terms. To be eligible, one must be at least 35 years old and “a natural born citizen.” President can be removed from office by impeachment by Congress for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.”)
- **Legislative** (Congress: House of Representatives – by population, 435 members, elected to two-year terms; and Senate – two from each state = 100 Senators, elected to six-year terms)
- **Judicial** (Supreme Court – up to nine justices who serve life terms, nominated by President with “advice and consent” of the Senate)

The constitution can be amended. The first 10 amendments were passed right away and make up the “Bill of Rights,” including:

### First Amendment:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

### Second Amendment:

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

# **The American “Mystic Chords of Memory”**

**Thomas Jefferson:**

## **Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776**

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**Abraham Lincoln:**

## **First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861**

“The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

## **Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863**

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

. . . we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

## **Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865**

“ . . . Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword . . .

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

**Martin Luther King Jr.:**

## **“I Have a Dream” Speech, August 28, 1963**

“And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . .

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

## **Some Differences Between the U.S. and Canada:**

**PRESIDENT of the U.S.** – elected to lead the executive branch of government for a four-year term. Both the head of government and head of state.

**PRIME MINISTER of Canada** – elected as one Member of Parliament, but becomes the leader of both the executive and legislative parts of government. Serves for indefinite length of time. Head of government only. (Question: who is Canada's head of state?)

**PRIMARIES** – rules differ by state, but voters in general elect delegates to convention that chooses each party's nominee for president. (A U.S. nomination convention is comparable to a Canadian party leadership convention. But only party members elect delegates to a leadership convention.)

**ELECTORAL COLLEGE** – in the election, voters choose electors who meet later ("electoral college") to officially pick president. In general, each state's electors are winner-take-all, so presidential campaigning concentrates on a few "swing" or "battleground" states where the outcome is less certain, e.g. Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio, and North Carolina.

**U.S. ELECTIONS ARE COMPLICATED** – voters choose not only the president, but also all members of the House of Representatives, one-third of senators, plus some governors and state legislatures, and other government and court officials – including positions like judge and the proverbial "dog catcher." State referendums, like legalizing marijuana in that state, can also be on the ballot.

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## LOCAL VIEWPOINT

# What the heck is going on with the U.S. election?

Only a week to go before the U.S. election. Whatever happens on Tuesday, Nov. 8, we are in a whole new world.

Here are five things that have changed forever:

### BABY BOOMERS

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are likely the last baby boomers to run for president. Boomers are on the way out. Already, millennials (those aged 18 to 34) outnumber the boomers.

Clinton and Trump speak to their boomer cohort. So, there is little mention of vital issues that affect younger people, such as climate change or new technologies like genetics, robotics and artificial intelligence.

Younger voters can hardly wait for their turn. A recent op-ed by a Gen-Xer in the Washington Post said it all: "Baby Boomers Have Been A Disaster For America," the headline read, "And Trump Is Their Biggest Mistake Yet."

David McConkey



**CITIZEN  
ACTIVE**

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### SEX AND SEX ROLES

What can we say? Both Clinton and Trump represent the climax of the baby boomer sexual revolution. With this campaign, we have seen the boomers' sexual hopes, hypocrisies and hang-ups — laid bare.

Maybe enduring such a nasty mess of an election can purify U.S. politics. Maybe Hillary can break the last glass ceiling,

maybe Bill can restrain himself, and maybe the dirty-old-man Donald can go away. Then, maybe future elections can inhabit a better place.

### RELIGION

This could be the last American election where religion plays such an important role.

Religion in U.S. politics — revolving around restricting women's and gay rights — won't be as significant in the future. Younger generations are comfortable with women's and gay rights. They seek a broader secular morality of dignity, fairness and environmental sustainability.

Also, this could be the end of an implied "religious test" for U.S. politicians. Until now, politicians had to belong to a religion to get elected. But today, many leaders in business, science, the arts and other fields are people with no religious affiliation.

### MEDIA

We are in a new media landscape. One example: more citizens now watch a presidential debate as assorted clips on YouTube than as a continuous TV program. Another example: leaks, "hot mics," and hacked emails are here to stay — look out!

Trump's grip on the media is a wonder to behold. Just as earlier politicians used newspapers, radio and TV, Trump dominates today's scene. Already a reality TV star, Trump moves with ease to and from giant rallies, various interviews and social media like Facebook and Twitter.

Trump embodies today's distracted, attention-deficit society. Too unfocused to read books or to think deeply, Trump throws out fragments of disjointed thoughts. But Trump is effective: big league! As "Dilbert" cartoonist Scott Adams says, Trump is a "master persuader."

What is the responsibility of the media? Earlier on: too much free publicity for Trump? Now: too critical of him? Rolling Stone magazine writer Matt Taibbi reminds journalists to scrutinize Clinton, too. Trump won't win just "because the New York Times allowed a few reporters to investigate the Clinton Foundation," Taibbi writes, "It'll be because we're a nation of idiots."

### REALITY

Trump takes credit for blasting apart "political correctness" and for "telling it like it is." But Trump is just being rude, not advancing political discourse. And Trump is not "telling it like it is." Instead, he is spinning a worldview of make-believe. As Clinton told Trump: "You live in your own reality."

Before his presidential run, Trump promoted the "birther" myth that President Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and was not a Christian. The

result? Seventy per cent of Republicans have doubts about Obama's birthplace. Forty per cent think Obama is a Muslim.

A Trump win on Nov. 8 would be scary. But a Trump loss is also scary. If Trump does not become president, he is expected to do something else — big time. Bigger than "The Apprentice!" Maybe as big as Trump's ego! Trump could create an entertaining alternative reality and lead millions of Americans to ... what? Stay tuned!

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Are you in the "third age" of your life (i.e. retired or semi-retired) and would like to discuss the U.S. election? Join me on Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Room 113 of the Brandon University education building for a session hosted by the Third Age Learning Co-operative. More info is at [talcb Brandon.weebly.com](http://talcb Brandon.weebly.com). Free of charge and open to all.