

The Presidential Election in U.S., a Country of the Center of World Energy Order

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In the March 1 “Super Tuesday” primaries and caucuses that represented the first climax of U.S. presidential election campaigns, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump won landslide victories. In the Democratic and Republican Parties’ primaries and caucuses in eleven states on the day, Clinton and Trump each won seven states, expanding their respective leads in terms of delegates against rivals including Democrat Bernie Sanders and Republicans Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio. Clinton and Trump are thus in the lead to win the presidential candidate nominations at their respective parties’ national congresses in July.

Given earlier poll data, the primary results favorable for Clinton and Trump have met expectations. However, U.S. presidential primaries this year have attracted attention in the United States and the world with unprecedented developments, where mainstream candidates have faced uphill battles while dissident candidates have been spotlighted.

Within the Democratic Party, Clinton who has been viewed as a mainstream candidate has retained a leading position, as noted above. However, her rival Sanders won four of the 11 states in the Super Tuesday primaries, leading some analysts to see him as fighting well and patiently. Clinton has served as First Lady and secretary of state and has a dominant lead against anyone in the Democratic Party in terms of political experience and public awareness. In contrast, Sanders, a self-proclaimed socialist, had been viewed as a minor candidate earlier. Nevertheless, he has won popularity by calling for closing divides and condemning Wall Street greed, indicating his leftist stance in the free economy society.

The most attention-attracting candidate, however, is Republican Trump. Under the slogan “Make America Great Again,” Trump has gained popularity by asserting that he can realize the slogan because he is free from dysfunctional Washington politics and from various interest and lobbyist groups. However, Trump has repeatedly made controversial remarks in which he has condemned illegal immigrants from Mexico for taking U.S. jobs and vowed to build a wall on the border with Mexico to exclude illegal immigrants with the cost shouldered by Mexico.

Through the long U.S. presidential election campaigns, candidates are comprehensively assessed and selected, with some dropping out due to controversial or problematic remarks or scandals. Nevertheless, controversial, honest remarks by Trump have been analyzed as attracting attention and votes instead of negatively affecting his popularity among voters.

What may be the largest factor behind the great popularity of candidates with dissident stances is reportedly deep-rooted discontent or distrust in U.S. society, where distrust has grown in established politics while wealth gaps are expanding with wealth concentrating in a small number of wealthy people even amid economic growth. Trump and Sanders have taken advantage of such discontent or distrust to fight against rivals in presidential election campaigns. Trump has risen close to the position of the leading Republican candidate. Within the Republican Party, mainstream people have grown alert to Trump indicating opposition to basic Republican policies and begun to bash him. Nevertheless, multiple candidates have so far been making unsuccessful fighting efforts against Trump to field a unified candidate against him, allowing him to fish in troubled waters. Campaigns through the next climax of Republican presidential primaries on March 15, involving key states such as Florida, will attract attention.

It may be needless to say that the U.S. presidential election attracts global attention because the U.S. president can have and exercise the world's largest power. The characteristics, views and domestic and foreign policies of the U.S. president as the leader of the world's largest economy and international politics and the top commander of the world's strongest military forces are very significant for the United States and the rest of the world. Candidates have so far fallen short of discussing specific policies, with voters paying attention to their personal characteristics and views of the world. As campaigns deepen, they will discuss details of specific policies, increasing opportunities to assess the thoughts of the candidates for the next U.S. president. Not only voters in the United States but also people around the rest of the world will pay close attention to their policies. Particularly, Trump has not unveiled details of specific policies. I am highly interested in who his policy brains would be and what his specific policies would be.

The United States is the center of the world in regard to energy problems including the international energy order, as well as other areas. Although China has replaced the United States as the world's largest primary energy consumer, the United States is the world's largest consumer of oil and natural gas that account for the first and second largest shares of global energy trade. The shale revolution has boosted its position to the world's largest oil and natural gas producer. The start and expansion of liquefied natural gas exports from the United States, growing U.S. oil production and U.S. moves to lift a ban on crude oil exports have become key factors to ease the supply-demand balance in the international market, reduce oil prices and structurally change the market. The United States also has dominant influences on the mechanism for governance for international energy security and international negotiations on climate change problems. As a matter of fact, the U.S. energy market is primarily based on market principles and difficult for the government to directly manage or intervene in. Nevertheless, the United States has great tangible and intangible influences on the formation of the international energy order. A key point in this sense is its leader's global strategy. As U.S. presidential election campaigns go on, strategic views of the candidates for the next U.S. president about energy and environment problems will become an issue that China, Russia, the Middle East and Japan cannot overlook. Timely collection and analysis of correct information will grow more important along with the development of appropriate networks with those to be involved in the next U.S. administration.

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