

The Scouting Report – Lead With Confidence
Live Web Chat with *Politico* Senior Editor David Mark and Brookings Vice President Darrell West
November 4, 12:30 PM

12:29 David Mark:
Greetings Everyone,

Happy Election Day! Welcome to the first Brookings-Politico live chat. The two organizations will be joining forces throughout the presidential transition to draw upon the expertise of our scholars and journalists.

I'm pleased to be chatting today with Darrell M. West, Vice President and Director of Governance Studies at Brookings.

12:30 David Mark:
Let's get started on the questions.

12:30 [Comment from John (D.C.)]
What are biggest challenges either candidate will face in the first 100 days?

12:30 Darrell West: The biggest challenge facing the next president clearly is the bad economy and the meltdown of leading financial institutions. That will take a lot of money to address and require the new president to delay implementation of some of his own initiatives.

12:31 David Mark: Before the economy became a central issue in the presidential campaign, much of the debate had also centered around Iraq. Obama has said he aims to withdraw troops within 16 months of taking office, and liberal Democrats in Congress will no doubt press him to follow through.

12:33 Darrell West: Obama's Democratic base both in Congress and in the country at large will want him to follow through on his commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq. If he does this, it will make sense politically but also help him scale back the cost of the war. That will help him have money to address some of his domestic initiatives.

12:34 [Comment from James]
Did you already vote? How were the lines where you were? Glitches?

12:34 Darrell West: I did vote in DC. I was in line for an hour and 15 minutes. But people were in surprisingly good moods despite the wait. Everyone was excited to be participating in a historic election.

12:35 [Comment from Bill in Virginia]

Hi, I voted this morning in northern Virginia (Fairfax co.) and the line wasn't very long. I thought there would be many more people. Is it possible that the same number of people will vote in 2008 as in 2004, but just spread over a few days this year? Could this hurt Obama and help McCain?

12:35 David Mark: I waited a little more than an hour this morning to vote in my home precinct in Maryland. The state's Electoral College votes will no doubt go to Obama. Nonetheless, participation was robust.

12:36 Darrell West: By every indication, it looks like turnout will be up substantially over 2004. Thirty-three million watched Obama's infomercial, and there were record viewerships of all of the debates.

12:37 David Mark: Early and absentee voting is becoming increasingly popular, so that could also account for the shorter-than-expected lines.

12:37 [Comment from Chuck (Arlington, VA)]

Regardless of who is elected, will any of this "change" that is being promised actually come to fruition, or is it one empty campaign promise after another? Which prescribed changes are we most likely to see in the new administration?

12:37 Darrell West: I think there will be real change following this election. If the winner turns out to be Obama, he should have substantial majorities in Congress, and this will help break the partisan gridlock that has paralyzed Congress in recent years.

12:39 [Comment from Karen Wallace]

since there was unprecedented Early voting, can they say which way those states with the most early voting are leaning?

12:39 Darrell West: Most of the states with early voting are showing more Democrats than Republicans voting early. We also are seeing lots of first time voters who are casting their votes early. Most analysts believe this will boost Obama's vote margin.

12:41 [Comment from Joe P. in DC]

Congressional Republicans are staring down some losses in today's election. If Obama wins, what will their tactics be as the minority party for the next two years?

12:41 Darrell West: If congressional Republicans end up with losses today, the party will have to do serious soul-searching on its future direction. There probably will be a big battle between those who argue the GOP lost because it "wasn't conservative enough" versus those who feel the party needs to become more moderate and attract centrist voters. This is a debate that always happens in parties after an election loss.

12:42 David Mark: On a day-to-day tactical level, a diminished number of congressional Republicans makes it even more difficult for the minority party lawmakers to affect legislation. In the House, the majority has near-absolute rule. But in the Senate if Republicans don't have enough members to mount filibusters against legislation they're effectively shut out.

12:43 [Comment from Susan]

What will be your first words of advice to the president-elect?

12:43 Darrell West: My advice to the president-elect would be to focus on some areas like alternative energy renewal, stem cell research, and an economic stimulus package that are likely to get bipartisan support and therefore be easy to pass. Once the new president has a few victories under his belt, he can move to tackle some of the tougher issues.

12:46 [Comment from Jason in DC]

Can you talk about the challenge of bringing the country back together after the election? The next president will need input and cooperation from "both sides of the aisle". How would each administration address that?

12:46 Darrell West: It will be tough to bring the country together after a bruising campaign and a period of sharp polarization. But our nation's economic emergency hopefully will bring out the best in our leaders and people will work together. The next president can facilitate that kind of bipartisanship by appointing a few people from the other party into cabinet or subcabinet positions and also by having his initial legislative agenda emphasize issues that can draw support across the political aisle.

12:48 [Comment from Amy]

what about the concept of a balance of power that John McCain has mentioned recently?

12:48 Darrell West: McCain has talked about the need for voters to balance a Democratic Congress with a Republican president. This is an argument that has worked at the gubernatorial level in states with overwhelmingly Democratic legislatures. Whether it works nationally is the \$64,000 question of this election.

12:50 David Mark: There's also another aspect of balance of power to consider - the relationship between the executive branch (the president) and the legislative (Congress). The Bush Administration has aimed to move the center of power far in the direction of the president, and it will be interesting to see how much the next Congress works to reverse this trend, no matter who is living at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

12:50 [Comment from Jim (TX)]

I'm interested in the Senate results and how it will alter the effectiveness of either candidate?

12:50 Darrell West: The number of Democrats in the Senate will have huge ramifications for a new president moving legislation through Congress. The minority party can stop legislation by threatening a filibuster and it takes 60 votes to shut off debate. Even if it is a Democratic year this time, the thing to watch will be how many Democrats get elected to the Senate. If Democrats fall under 60 votes, Republicans will have greater leverage than if Dems hit the magic number of 60.

12:53 [Comment from Frank]

What do you think about Sarah Palin? Is she a plus or a minus for McCain?

12:53 David Mark:

Palin won support for the McCain ticket with the Republican Party's conservative base, but seems to have come up short in getting backing from independents and moderates. On that basis, it would seem she did more harm than good - but we'll know the answer much more clearly when votes are tallied tonight.

12:53 Darrell West:

Despite her poor performance in initial press interviews, I think Sarah Palin has a bright future in the Republican party. She is smart and articulate and if you give her four years to bone up on national and international issues, she will be more formidable in 2012 than she was this year. She will be well-liked and well-funded by conservative activists, and should be one of the GOP's top tier candidates in 2012.

12:55 Darrell West: The other candidates to watch in 2012 will be Bobby Jindal of Louisiana. He clearly got a big boost out of the way he handled the hurricane of a couple of months ago. He represents a new face for the Republican party in the same way that Obama does for Democrats.

12:57 POLL Assuming Barack Obama wins the presidency, how many electoral votes will he get? (270 votes are required to win.)

Less than 270 (3%)

270-330 (76%)

More than 330 (21%)

12:59 [Comment from Gwydion]

If Obama wins in a landslide, as many predict, will it be an indictment of conservatism in general, or just the last eight years of the Bush administration?

12:59 Darrell West: If Obama wins big, he will have the same opportunity for Democrats that Reagan had for Republicans in 1980. He will have an opportunity to redefine the national agenda. But whether he succeeds depends

on how effective Dems are at solving problems. Bush nose-dived through bad performance so Dems have to do much better to have any hope of long-term change.

1:02 [Comment from Bill (Silver Spring)]

The transition time is one where a lame duck president often pushes last-minute legislation, often times to set up his successor to look bad. Do you think that GW Bush will do that to a presumptive President-elect Obama, and if so, what legislation will the current administration forward before January?

1:02 Darrell West: Sometimes, lame duck administrations try to "set up" incoming administrations with complicated problems that are difficult to handle. I think it will be hard for Bush to do that because the economy and Iraq already are on the agenda and it is going to be nearly impossible for any other issue to push those items off the agenda.

1:04 David Mark: The outgoing Bush Administration does have several tools to affect policy without the consent of Congress, including executive orders and making regulations through federal agencies. Many of these can be difficult for the new president to undo.

1:06 David Mark:

Readers, what was your favorite campaign ad of the 2008 election cycle - television, radio, Internet or otherwise?

1:08 [Comment from Dana (DC)]

The "Yes, We Can" song/video by will.i.am

1:08 [Comment from Liz]

I got hooked on the one about Obama and his mother--although 4:30 in the morning seems very early to get anyone out of bed to tackle homework...

1:08 [Comment from Gwydion from DC]

Sarah Silverman's "The Big Schlep" was, to my mind, the funniest non-candidate-sponsored campaign ad, though I doubt it had much effect on the electorate.

1:09 [Comment from Karen Wallace]

my favorite Positive ad, was Obama talking about how his Mother would wake him up at

4:30 in the morning to go over his lessons, and she would say, "This isnt a picnic for me either Buster!" My most startling negative ad was when the McCain camp said "You wouldnt leave your kids with someone who has never babysat before, and this would be Obama's first crisis... in this chair"

1:09 [Comment from Jason in DC]

my favorite TV ad was the recent silent anti-Palin

1:10 [Comment from Bill (Silver Spring)]

Conservatives for change - both the video clip and the whole site. Very well done.

1:11 [Comment from Steve]

<http://taxcut.barackobama.com/> I thought it was an innovative and direct way to show the differences in policies.

1:11 [Comment from Leslie Thompkins]

You're an expert on ads. Does the candidate who spends the most on ads always win?

1:11 Darrell West: The candidate who spends the most on advertising does not always triumph. If we take a look at this year's primary elections, Barack Obama outspent Hillary Clinton in nearly every primary and caucus state and won the nomination. However, on the Republican side, Mitt Romney outspent McCain by a huge margin, yet still lost the nomination.

1:13 David Mark: What made Barack Obama's campaign this year so effective was that with his huge financial advantage over McCain he did not have to pick his spots the way past Democratic nominees have. He could advertise in red and blue states alike, keeping McCain on defense.

1:15 [Comment from Bill (Silver Spring)]

What's your opinion on the effectiveness of Obama's infomercial? Have we seen the future of political advertising, or was he just showing off how much money he had in his war chest?

1:15 Darrell West:

Obama's infomercial was very effective. It attracted an audience of more than 33 million and generally received positive reviews in the press. It actually is rather extraordinary for that many people to watch anyone's 30 minute infomercial. We generally think of American voters as having a short attention span.

1:16 David Mark: I had a similar reaction - that so many viewers stuck with a 30 minute political ad, particularly with a World Series game awaiting.

1:17 [Comment from Frank]

what do you consider to be the definition of a "landslide" in a presidential election? is there a baseline of electoral votes that need to go to one side, or does it differ with the expectations of each campaign?

1:17 POLL Did you already vote today?

Yes (92%)

No (8%)

1:17 Darrell West: The classic definition of a landslide is getting 60 percent of the popular vote. However, if one of the candidates went by more than 10 points, the media will probably treat the election as a rather one-sided result since the last few elections have been so close.

1:19 David Mark: The last four presidential elections have been so narrowly divided that a five- or six-point spread might count as a landslide this year. If the winner gets 300 electoral votes or more that would be a solid victory. A total of 330 or more could be a landslide.

1:19 [Comment from Liz]

How could tonight's winning candidate use the loser most effectively, to the benefit of the country, and the world

1:19 Darrell West: I think the winner tonight should attempt to use the losing candidate in formulating policy solutions for the next administration. It would be great to have the one consult the other and enlist his aid in building a more bipartisan spirit in the country.

1:20 David Mark: There's a historical precedent from the 1940 presidential campaign, when FDR enlisted vanquished Republican challenger Wendell Wilkie in a world tour to drum up support for the Lend-Lease program, as World War II was breaking out.

1:21 [Comment from george]

if obama wins, what steps do you think the republicans will need take to win back the minds of young people in america who have limited opportunities?

1:21 Darrell West: Republicans can do one of two things. They can wait for Democrats to mess something up and then present themselves as the alternative. Or (something that is more difficult), they can think seriously about how to reformulate their agenda to appeal to a broader array of Americans. This would involve doing outreach to Latinos, suburban women, and young people.

1:23 [Comment from LPaul (DC)]

In your opinion, how will the Republican party engage with George Bush post election (and, what will Bush's legacy be to the Republican party)?

1:23 Darrell West: It will be interesting to see how Republicans use Bush after the election. This time around, he largely was a fundraiser for the party, but was kept away from active campaigning with McCain. I think his legacy will depend

largely on how quickly the economy comes back. If we have a sustained downturn, he starts to look like Herbert Hoover.

1:24 [Comment from Mila]

With the financial crisis and the Iraq war, is there a transition in history as equally challenging as this one will be for a President Obama or McCain?

1:24 Darrell West: This will be the most challenging transition since 1933. The United States is fighting two wars and is experiencing rising unemployment. The country is having to redo its governing philosophy in favor of stronger government regulation. It will be a trying time for whoever wins tonight.

1:25 David Mark: The Hoover-to-FDR transition in 1933 came amid a worsening bank crisis, in the depths of the Great Depression. And back then transitions lasted four months! In 1860-61 Abraham Lincoln watched several Southern states secede but was helpless to do anything before taking office.

1:26 [Comment from Liz]

Whither Hillary?

1:26 Darrell West: Hillary Clinton retains her NY Senate seat and will remain a very strong national voice. She probably has lost her best opportunity to become president. But she may turn out like Ted Kennedy, someone who leaves a major impact on national policymaking in the Senate.

1:26 David Mark: Hillary proved herself a team player in supporting Obama enthusiastically in public. She earned a lot of goodwill from her party after a bruising nomination fight.

1:27 David Mark: Hi folks, we've got time for one more question.

1:27 [Comment from Megan]

Everyone is assuming Obama is going to win. But what if he loses? What will this tell us about what is really going on in the minds of Americans?

1:27 Darrell West: If Obama surprises people and loses tonight, it will mean that over 160 national surveys conducted over the past six weeks have been wrong. McCain has not let in hardly any of these surveys so that is the basis for people believing it will be Obama's night tonight.

1:28 Darrell West: Thank you all for participating in this web chat. Great questions!

1:31 David Mark: We look forward to hearing more great questions in next week's chat, Wednesday at 12:30. Next week's chat will focus on energy and climate change, and will feature William Antholis from Brookings. You can also

check back here to see the transcript from today's chat, which will be posted later this afternoon. Thanks for joining us!