

Today, Moriguchi-san asked me about the American presidential elections which are coming up very soon in the United States, which gave me the idea to write about the elections this week. This is my first time voting in a presidential election because four years ago, I wasn't old enough.

Even though I'm living in Japan, I can vote in the American elections with an absentee ballot, and all I need to do is send it to my state's Board of Elections before Election Day. Election Day is always the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. When the laws of voting were established a long time ago, lawmakers wanted to make sure that Election Day never falls on the first of November since it was a busy day for businessmen. They were concerned that if it did fall on this day, that many people would be too busy to vote.

Maybe you heard a little bit about the American election system in the last election when there was a long process after Election Day figuring out who actually won. In the United States, the president is elected by the "Electoral College," a body of voters that represent the greater voting body of the American people. Each state has a certain number of "Electors" who sit on the Electoral College, and whichever candidate wins the state majority gets all the electoral votes. For example, even if only 51% of Ohio votes for George Bush, all of our Electors vote for Bush. Because of this system, a candidate could win the election with the majority of votes from the Electoral College but not from the American people as a whole. This is what happened in the 2000 election. Al Gore argued that because he won the majority of the American people's votes, he should be president. When the Supreme Court judged this case, they decided that George Bush had won because he had the majority of votes in the Electoral College. Many people think that because there are so many people in the United States, that their vote won't be able to make a difference. Four years ago, we saw that every vote does count and even just a few votes can change the outcome of the election. I will be interested to see if there is a greater voter turnout this year because of this.

American politics is divided into a two-party system, in which two parties dominate the political scene—the Republicans and the Democrats. The Republican Party, whose candidate is George Bush, is the right-wing, conservative party whereas the Democratic Party, whose candidate this year is John Kerry, is the left-wing, liberal party. While other political parties do exist, their following is so small that it is usually not enough to change the outcome of any election. This two-party system is complicated, because the two parties typically take opposing stands on various issues, so to me, they represent the two extremes of national politics. My opinions usually fall in the middle of the road, so sometimes I agree with one party and sometimes I agree

with the other. Usually, I think both parties are too extreme, and I wish I had a choice of a candidate that was more middle-of-the-road.

In the month leading up to the election, there are several debates between the two candidates, and also between the Vice-presidential candidates. Last night I listened to this year's first presidential debate about international relations over the internet and I was surprised at what I heard. Although I don't always agree with George Bush, I think that he has been a good president because I believe he has strong convictions and tries to do what's right. Whether or not I agree with his convictions is another story... In the debate, I thought that George Bush sounded flustered and didn't do a very good job defending himself or his decisions over the past four years. This was a particularly important debate because the most important issue in politics right now is the war in Iraq. Although he spoke eloquently, I am disappointed in John Kerry's approach to this issue. He attacks the president for his decision regarding this war, but Kerry himself voted FOR the war when he was presented with the same information in Congress. Americans who are against the war almost immediately support Kerry, but I don't understand why. The president didn't make the decision alone, he made it with the help of Senators like Kerry in Congress who voted for the war at the same time.

My mind is not made up about this election. On one hand, I think Bush should have handled some things differently in the past four years, but at the same time, I don't trust Kerry because of the way he has criticized the war. I think that Kerry is a good speaker, but he doesn't always speak honestly, and rather says what he thinks people want to hear. I am looking forward to hearing the vice-presidential debate which was held today and more debates in the next few weeks before I make my final decision and cast my vote.