

## **Lincoln Wins Reelection**

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On Tuesday, November 8, 1864, Abraham Lincoln won reelection to the presidency with a strong majority in the Electoral College. In the summer of 1864, however, Lincoln's reelection had appeared anything but certain. The heavy losses of the Overland Campaign and the apparent stalemate before Petersburg contributed to a growing war weariness in the north and a belief among some that even a negotiated settlement and an independent Confederacy might be preferable to the continued bloodshed.

Several prominent Republicans such as Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase and former presidential candidate John C. Fremont had eyed the party's nomination, but when the Republican Convention met in Baltimore in June, Lincoln was able to easily win renomination. One major change took place when the convention nominated Andrew Johnson of Tennessee for vice-president, replacing Hannibal Hamlin of Maine. This was done to gain the support of War Democrats for the ticket; the party's name was also changed to the National Union Party for the same reason.

In August the Democratic Party awarded the presidential nomination to General George McClellan, who had sparred with Lincoln in 1861-1862 when he held the position of general-in-chief. The Democratic platform called for negotiations to end the war, as did McClellan's running mate, Congressman George Pendleton, but the candidate himself supported military victory and reunion. This difference of opinion divided and undoubtedly hurt the party at the polls. Fortunately for the Republicans, the military situation in the late summer and fall improved, and with it so did the president's chances for reelection. The Battle of Mobile Bay, William Sherman's capture of Atlanta, and Philip Sheridan's victories in the Shenandoah all brightened hopes for a Republican victory. To improve these chances,

the Lincoln Administration promoted absentee voting amongst soldiers in the army, and granted furloughs to many soldiers who hailed from states that did not allow absentee voting. The military vote strongly favored the administration and likely contributed to victory in several states.

The major issues of the campaign related to the administration's strategy and leadership in the prosecution of the war, as well as issues such as the Emancipation Proclamation, the draft, and Reconstruction. Several states held early elections in September and October, which indicated a Republican victory. That trend continued when the remaining states voted on November 8. When the final returns were tallied, Lincoln had won a resounding victory in the Electoral College, defeating McClellan 212 to 21. McClellan had only won the states of New Jersey, Kentucky, and Delaware, though the popular vote margin was much closer, with the president garnering just over 55% of the vote. The Election of 1864 was perhaps the Confederacy's final chance to avoid military defeat in the Civil War. The possibility of a negotiated peace resulting in southern independence essentially ended with the reelection of Abraham Lincoln, who was committed to reunification at almost any cost.

While the Federal election dominated the week's news, other events included the opening in Richmond of what would prove to be the final session of the Confederate Congress. In his message to legislators, President Jefferson Davis sounded an optimistic note despite recent military setbacks, and rejected an end to the fighting that did not include Confederate independence. The main military action took place in Tennessee, when Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest led a combined naval-land attack on the Union outpost at Johnsonville. Using two captured vessels to drive off several Union gunboats, Forrest then bombarded the base, inflicting nearly seven million dollars in damage. The raid led William Sherman to refer to the Confederate general as "That Devil Forrest."

