

# Example of barack obama and the election of 2012 research paper

[Politics](#), [President](#)



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## **Biography of Obama**

Barack Obama was virtually unknown to the general public before the Democratic primaries of 2008, and had served briefly in the Illinois state senate and then a single term in the U. S. Senate before running for president. His background is absolutely unique among U. S. presidents, who have all been white men, while his mother was a white woman and his father an African from Kenya. He was also unusual in that he spent a great deal of his early life overseas, including with his mother and stepfather in Indonesia, where they were possibly involved in intelligence work. Later, he was educated at elite institutions like Columbia University and Harvard Law School before working as a community organizer, and his color, ethnic background and religion have been frequently attacked by his opponents (Balz and Johnson, 137). Certainly he would not have been electable to any higher office in the U. S. prior to the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and particularly not in a Democratic Party that had always been dominated by white Southerners until fairly recent times. All the early polls in the

Democratic primaries showed that Hillary Clinton was going to be the victor, who was overwhelmingly favored even among blacks, as well as women, white Southerners and the working class (Newport 223). She had far more experience in politics and government, and ran on that basis, as did John McCain in the general election of 2008. All of his opponents, including Mitt Romney in 2012, turned out to be flawed candidates, however, and far less charismatic than Obama. In style and rhetoric at least, if not necessarily in substance, he was always the most appealing choice. In the end, the majority of voters simply liked him better than the robotic, elitist Romney or the doddering McCain, particularly because the country was in the worst depression since the 1930s. Obama claimed to be a “transformative” leader like Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, which also left him open to mockery by Hillary Clinton (and others) who asserted that he was very naïve in saying “let’s get everybody together, let’s get unified, the sky will open, the light will come down, celestial choirs will be singing” (Logan 60).

## **Brief History of the Democratic Party**

There have been as many as six political party systems in U. S. history, beginning with the Federalists and Democratic Republicans the period 1789-1828, and the present Democratic and Republican Parties can trace their ancestry back to that era. From the start, the Federalist-Whig-Republican parties were associated with industry, commerce, banking and the rise of American capitalism, while the Democratic Party represented agriculture, small farmers, Southern planters and rural areas (Shi and Marer 2009). This was true throughout the 19th Century and well into the 20th, although in the

Progressive Era of 1900-20 and the New Deal of 1933-40, organized labor in the big cities also became a vital part of the Democratic coalition (Morone and Kersh Chapter 11). As Southern planters and slaveholders, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson were particularly hostile to the nascent American capitalism, and also believed in white supremacy and denial of citizenship rights to minorities, and this meant that into the 20th Century the Democrats really were a 'whites only' party (Main 221). When this began to change in the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s, many Southern, rural and working class whites fell away from the Democratic Party, and this shift marked the Sixth Political Party era that began in the late-1960s and early-1970s.

Since the 1964 election, no Democratic Party candidate has ever obtained the majority of the white vote, and Obama was no exception. Once the party became associated with civil rights for blacks and other minorities, it lost the white South forever. Hillary Clinton did better with older white voters, gun owners and blue-collar whites than Obama, including in industrial states like Ohio and Pennsylvania, while Obama did better among younger and more educated white voters as well as minorities (McMahon 8-9). Hillary Clinton was the first to raise the issue of Obama's race and the rumor that he had been born in Kenya and was not eligible to become president, which the Republicans also used in the 2008 and 2012 elections and indeed throughout his presidency. This backfired against Clinton with minorities, though, and "alienated her from voters who might otherwise have come to her defense" (Logan 52). As for the Republicans, they long ago gave up attempting to win the black vote, but their perceived racism and Southern Strategy also cost

them badly with Hispanic and Asian voters. With about 40% of the white vote and overwhelming support from minorities, Obama was able to assemble winning coalitions in 2008 and 2012, if not exactly overwhelming landslide victories of the kind won by Roosevelt in 1932 and 1936 or Lyndon Johnson in 1964 (Silver 2012).

## **Democratic Party Platform of 2012**

In the 2012 platform, Obama and the Democrats promised to defend Social Security, Medicare and the new Affordable Care Act (Obama Care) from Republican attempts to abolish or privatize them, and also to lower taxes on the middle class and working class while raising them on the wealthy. In this respect, the platform was a both a defense and continuation of the standard social democratic and welfare state policies that had been at the core of Democratic message since the New Deal of the 1930s and Great Society of the 1960s. Obama's support for increased spending on education, research and infrastructure were also well within this tradition, while the Republicans emphasized limited government, low taxes and free market capitalism as they have since the 19th Century. Obama promised to increase the number of university graduates and provide more funding for Head Start, public school teachers, community colleges and vocational schools. He had passed a \$10, 000 tax credit for higher education and blocked private banks from issuing student loans, which saved college students about \$60 billion (Democratic Platform 2012).

Since Obama Care was the president's signature legislation in the first term, despite numerous Republican attempts to repeal it in Congress or have it

declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the platform devoted placed emphasis on defending it. Affordable Health Care meant that no one could lose their health insurance because of preexisting conditions and that young people could still be covered by their parent's policies up to age 25. Medicare and Medicaid would be expanded to cover more of the working poor and older people, and there would be more funding overall for medical care in rural and inner city areas that were not well-served by the present system. Obama had also reduced Medicare subsidies to large insurance and pharmaceutical companies that would save seniors an average of \$4, 000 per year (Democratic Platform 2012). While Obama agreed that " the biggest driver of our long-term debt is the rising cost of health care for an aging population", he did not intend to shift more of the healthcare burden on working class and middle class families but to increase taxes and reduce Medicare benefits for the wealthy (Obama 2013).

### **Criticism of Obama as a Candidate and President**

Obama is an inspiring public speaker, although over the last four years his actual policy achievements have fallen far short of his transformational rhetoric. He is only partially to blame for this, given that the Republican attacks against him have been hysterical and relentless, very often based on his race and ethnic background, or allegations that he is a Muslim who was not born in the United States. From the very first he has had virtually no cooperation from the Republicans in Congress, particularly after they took control of the House in 2010 and obtained enough votes in the Senate to filibuster every presidential nomination or new piece of legislation. After the

first two years, Obama's domestic program was stalled in Congress, and the Republicans continued to block it after his reelection in 2010. At the moment, it is also obvious that they are continuing to stall all legislation until the midterm elections in 2014, when they hope to take control of the Senate. Throughout his time in office, the global economy has been very weak and fragile, and On the other hand, "austerity and a weakening European outlook, may hit demand, thereby leading to rising unemployment and falling prices" (Economist 2011).

Obama inherited the worst economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and his policies to deal with this problem have been only partially effective, indeed where they have not been completely blocked by the Republicans. He inherited the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) from the Republicans, which provided nearly \$1 trillion in relief to banks, which also received trillions more from the Federal Reserve. Congress also passed stricter regulations of banks and consumer protections to prevent another crash like 2008-09, although the relief program for home mortgage foreclosures was not a success (Krugman 2010). His \$800 billion economic stimulus in 2009 was too small to have a major impact on unemployment, in part because he hoped to obtain some Republican support for it. Like all Democratic presidents since the 1930s, he is clearly a Keynesian and believes that high budget deficits are necessary to stimulate the economy in a depression (Minsky 160). Obama and the Democrats always thought that the country did better under these policies in the period 1945-70 than in the Republican era that followed, since "full employment was maintained, real wages rose constantly, economies were relatively stable, and wealth and

income inequalities were reduced” (Skidelsky 164). He has stated many times that the Republican social and economic policies are highly regressive and would turn back the clock to the 1920s or the 19th, when there were no labor unions or social safety net, and very few rights for women or minorities. In this he is quite correct, but his power to prevent this is very limited because so many whites continue to vote against their own class interests because of issues like race and religion. As long as he is president, he has a veto of the worst of the Republican policies, but as long as they have power in Congress he will simply not be able to pass any of the policies that he and his party desire. In the past four years, for example, Senate Republicans have used the filibuster more times than in the entire history of the country going back to 1790.

For the most part, foreign policy has not been a major preoccupation with Obama or the American public at this time, although there have been important events such as the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011, the overthrow in the Kadaffi regime in Libya, and the end of the Iraq War. Obama has proved to be a realist and pragmatist in global affairs rather than an idealist or globalist, and seems to have no vision of the U. S. as a planetary hegemon or model for all other nations (Cameron 189-90). He has continued the alliances with NATO, Japan and South Korea and also negotiated reductions in nuclear arms with Russia, all in a generally low-key manner in which he avoids “lecturing other governments, using threatening language, and tirelessly bragging of the power and virtue of her country” (Johnson 216). In his first term, he escalated the war in Afghanistan and the use of drones and assassinations of Al Qaeda leaders, but seems to be



deemphasizing these policies in the second term, as well as promising to remove most U. S. troops from Afghanistan by 2014. Overall, his plans for military spending and basic foreign policy posture have been far less aggressive than his predecessor or his Republican opponents in 2008 and 2012.

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