

The 2012 us presidential election politics essay



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With the 2012 United States presidential elections over, President Obama won a second term in office defeating Republican rival Governor Romney. The President won 332 electoral votes while the Governor won 206 (Huffington Post). This paper will look at why the election results occurred as they did. The key discussion will revolve on " subjective grounds" that take on a " candidate centric" approach as to why the votes fell as they did based on the candidates' demeanours and their ability to appeal to voters through integrity, sincerity and leadership skills (Pika and Maltese 150). This election was very centrally focused on repairing the economy. In August 2012, a Gallup poll showed that Obama was receiving a 60% disapproval rating regarding the economy. Similar polls were conducted by other outlets that showed similar results (LoGiurato). With this disapproval, Governor Romney felt that running on an " anti-Obama's economy" platform would win him votes. His strategy included criticizing Obama's handling of the economy and making himself appear as the better candidate for the handling of a fragmenting economy after Obama had four years to prove that he could mend it after the large deficit left by the Bush Administration (Gabriel). However, voters were incredibly suspicious of Romney. Despite his plea for votes based on a fragmenting economy, there were other factors that made him appear untrustworthy and unrelatable in the eyes of American voters, specifically the middle class and minority groups. This includes: shifting positions, constant gaffes that made voters question Romney's sincerity and a new and unprecedented GOP extremism that reflected poorly on the Governor (Weisberg). These factors all weighed against Romney and made Obama appear as the safer choice despite economy disapproval. In America's past, incumbent presidents lost the election because of poor

economic performance (Carter, Bush Sr.) (Abramson et al. 177). Although people were looking for economic and job change (Jones), they did not feel that Romney was a trusted and reliable candidate. American voters felt safer with Obama as the president.

Before discussing why Romney lost the 2012 election, it is also relevant to discuss factors as to why Obama won a second term in the 2012 election. In 2008, Obama won 365 electoral votes (Mayhew 200). Although the votes were less for the 2012 election, his victory then managed to carry on to another successful term, with similar demographics voting for the president again. These demographics include: African Americans, Hispanics, women and youth (Abramson 118). These are also the same groups that were least likely to vote for Governor Romney which will be discussed later on. These groups may not have entirely approved of Obama's record but did not feel that Romney was a better choice. The President won over 90% of the black vote in both the 2008 (ibid.) and 2012 election. History shows that most African Americans vote Democratic in elections however Romney appeared particularly unpopular amongst this group, more so than former Republican candidates like John McCain and George W. Bush. This may be due to the recent accusations of racism seen in the GOP. These accusations may be based on possibly racist statements that Republicans made throughout the election (Rosenberg). Such accusations are based on incidents like Republicans implying that the President was born in Kenya, Romney's Welfare Ad that appeared to attack poor black people and the proposal of voter ID laws that would require voters to show ID with an address on it, like a driver's licence. The Brennan Centre for Justice noted that " African

Americans have driver's licenses at half the rate of whites." This would make it easy to suppress African Americans from voting, likely for Obama (ibid). In fact, after the election was over, former and current Florida GOP leaders admitted that the voter ID laws were meant to suppress black voters from voting for the Democrats (Palm Beach Post).

Obama also captured about 70% of the Hispanic vote, nationwide. Two key issues that were important to Hispanics appeared to be the economy and immigration. Many did not approve of Obama's record on either but felt he was the safer choice. With regards to immigration, Obama deported a record number of illegal immigrants during his term (Preston). However, he also implemented DACA and vowed to continue to support the DREAM Act, both acts would provide amnesty for young illegal immigrants in school or in the military. The impreMedia and Latino Decisions polls showed that 60% of Hispanic-Obama supporters knew an illegal immigrant and felt Obama was the better choice for their road to legality (Foley). Romney appeared to be "severely conservative" towards the issue of illegal immigration during the Primaries. His statement regarding "self deportation" for illegal immigrants is something that tarnished his attempted image as an "immigrant-friendly" candidate along with vowing to veto the DREAM Act (ibid.). Although he tried to move away from the "self deportation" statement once he secured the nomination, it was not forgotten by both voters and the President (ex. Obama referenced this during the second presidential debate when a question was raised about illegal immigration reform) (Boroff and Planas). Hispanics cite this as a reason for why they did not vote for the Governor.

Another group that Obama overwhelmingly won over were women. Obama was extremely popular amongst this group, as he was seen as the "pro-woman" candidate. Romney was seen as being "out of touch" with women which made women back Obama even more. Romney's was anti-abortion, vowed to overturn Roe v. Wade and planned to cut insurance coverage to contraception (Brokes). Obama also spent time discussing equal pay for women and signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009 (White House Blog), an Act that Romney's running mate Paul Ryan rejected which may have also contributed to the lost women's vote. Governor Romney tried to appear as the "pro-woman" candidate during the second presidential debate by sharing an anecdote about the lack of women working in his cabinet in Massachusetts (despite that the question was regarding equal pay for women) and stating that he would not deny access to contraceptives for women (ABC News). These statements did not help the Governor gain much momentum as many pro-women groups, like We Are Woman and Planned Parenthood (WAW) were already latched onto re-electing Obama.

The last demographic to add momentum to Obama's presidential victory were youth. This was a key demographic in helping Obama win his first term and it helped again. Obama's celebrity status may have helped with this group particularly because Obama was endorsed by many liberal Hollywood icons that youth may be familiar with and may be swayed by their opinion such as singers and actors. Obama's appearance in pop culture, like magazines and talk shows, made him popular amongst youth who saw him as a charismatic, young and cool Democrat who promised change and fresh ideas post-Bush (Pika and Maltese 189). Obama's ability to communicate and

relate with youth garnered him votes in both elections and this ability to entice an audience, like a room full of college students, was seen as Obama's biggest asset (ibid). Romney's commitment to creating more jobs is what may have gained him some popularity amongst youth who would be looking for jobs when they finish school but it was not enough to pull ahead of Obama's own promise of job creation, to keep student loan interest rates low and his ability to captivate an audience with the same factors as he did in 2008 (ABC News).

It is also important to cite Obama's achievements during his term for why he won a second term in the office. Some of Obama's biggest achievements include the following: signing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, bailing out the auto industry, sending out the order to kill Bin Laden, ended the war in Iraq, passing health care reform and passing the Stimulus (Glastris et al.). While many people felt Obama was merely the better choice over Romney, Obama's achievements are also credited for reasons he won a second term in office.

Romney's lost Presidential bid can be partially blamed on his inconsistencies and flip flops. When Romney was running for the Republican candidacy during the Primaries, he had to claim to be "severely Conservative" despite being a moderate governor in Massachusetts (Fahrenthold). This ability to appear "severely Conservative" won him the GOP nomination amongst a growing right wing extremism within the GOP (will be discussed later) but did not make him popular amongst the general voting population. Romney attempted to redefine himself as a moderate in order to please the general audience. However, in front of the GOP he would revert back to being very

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right wing on social and economic policies. Despite his attempts to move to the centre, especially during the debates, Obama and social media made this extremely difficult. Obama ran many ads that challenged Romney's flip flopping (ex. " Romnesia" speech) and a growing usage of social media made it difficult for people to forget Romney's changing positions. What would have otherwise been " yesterday's news" usually became a viral topic on the internet for weeks. Such flip flops that may have hurt Romney's image thus costing him the election include the following: including abortion legislation in his agenda (vowed to repeal Roe v. Wade and de-fund Planned Parenthood) but stated in a key swing state, Iowa, that " there's no legislation with regards to abortion that I'm familiar with that would become part of my agenda." He also changed positions on health care (from the time he was Governor to his run for president) (NY Times), and changed positions on immigration reform, support for gun control laws and his secretive tax plans from when he was running for the Republican nomination to when he was running for the President in order to appear more moderate (Westen). However, because people did not forget his statements, mostly due to the easy ability to circulate and find information on the internet, Romney appeared to be extremely insincere in his statements. These inconsistencies made it difficult for Americans to understand who Romney truly was thus he was seen as highly untrustworthy and Americans feared of what he would actually do if he got into office (NY Times).

Similar to the reasoning above regarding Romney's loss, his campaign was full of gaffes that weakened his image as a potential president and made it difficult for Americans to relate to him and imagine him as a sincere and

relatable president (ibid). Citizens saw Romney as a rich business man who was mostly concerned about the wealthiest 1% of the population and who did not seem interested in the rest of the population. Political strategist James Carville explains that Romney's gaffes were most damaging to him because they " confirmed who people thought he was" (Dickinson) He goes on to explain that this is the worst thing that can happen to a politician, to confirm negative popular beliefs about that politician thus hurting their image (ibid.). One gaffe that confirmed peoples' potentially negative beliefs about Romney was the " 47% comment" made in front of private donors. Romney essentially ruled out 47% of the voting population as potential voters and appeared apathetic towards their needs because he claimed that they were dependent on government and their services, something Romney did not support (ibid.). He felt that they would vote for Obama because he was seen as the president who supported dependency, according to Romney, thus did not feel he had to cater to them (Rosenberg). This comment, like his flip flops, went viral on the internet thus making it difficult for people to forget the statement. Like Carville explained, it confirmed peoples' belief that Romney was unrelatable and apathetic towards the middle class (Dickinson) therefore gaining more momentum for Obama, a candidate that people saw as more sincere and relatable than Romney. Obama's ability to charm and captivate an audience helped him win the presidency again. Romney's apathy and insincere behaviour towards the middle class, and especially minority groups, who found it particularly difficult to relate to him, lost him votes that likely went towards the President, the candidate who appeared more relatable to the average American.

Another reason that may explain Romney's inability to win the Presidency is that he was never truly the popular choice for the Republican nomination. Before election night, Westen stated that if Romney did lose the election, it would be because Romney was not very appealing to the base (Westen). Romney did not appear to be popular amongst Republicans. He ran for Republican nominee in 2008 and lost. In this election, his name was not mentioned early in the race as a popular choice for president the way other names were mentioned, like Mitch Daniels and Chris Christie. According to CBS, 58% of Republicans wanted more choices. This essentially means that 58% of Republicans likely were not satisfied with Governor Romney as the Republican nominee but wanted Obama out of office regardless of who the other option was (Montopoli). This dislike for Romney may be due to his moderate positions as a Governor. However, because of the GOP's extremism, Romney had to change positions and appear to be more conservative than he actually was in the past. James Carville explains that if Romney had run as a moderate, he would not have made it past the primaries (Dickinson). This conservatism may have gained him some popularity amongst very rightist Republicans however this popularity likely shrunk when he began to move to the centre. Romney's strategy to adapt to whatever the voters wanted him to be made him unfavourable amongst the GOP and amongst the general voting population. The GOP saw that he became a moderate and the general population saw what he was during the primaries and questioned his sincerity on his positions.

The last and possibly most critical reason that Romney lost the Presidency against incumbent Obama was because of the new and growing extremism

of the Republican Party and a general distaste for Republicans altogether. Political Scientist Renford Reese called this election one that was winnable for the Republicans. The economy was in bad shape and the unemployment rate is at 8%. Many who voted for Obama in 2008 were disappointed in his performance over the past 4 years in office. However, because of this growing conservative extremism of the party that got the best of Romney, he lost the election (Reese). The party is seen to be losing touch with the middle class. It continues to appear to cater to the wealthiest of the population and appears uninterested in minority groups. The primaries essentially consisted of a negative " anti-Obama" sentiment and discussions of being against various social issues in a context that seems outdated. This includes " anti-gay, anti-women's rights, anti-immigration, anti-minority, anti-welfare, anti-health care reform, anti-global warming, anti-unions, and anti-education" (Reese). This growing extremism of the GOP makes their voting population very narrow and makes them appear unelectable. In order to win the base, Romney had to have been in agreement with most of these named positions whether it was sincere or not (Dickinson). The candidates who did not take on such extreme positions, like Jon Huntsman and Ron Paul, did not stand a chance in winning the Republican nomination. Romney was not certain of his nomination early on, so his severe conservatism had to be dragged out long enough to ensure it which hurt his strategy of smoothly moving to the centre. Once he began to do it, it was too late as Obama had already latched onto his extreme statements and used them against Romney in ads and debates (Weisberg). Further hurting his transition to the middle were various Republicans who constantly made statements that made the GOP appear distasteful. This includes Missouri's Todd Akin and Indiana's <https://assignbuster.com/the-2012-us-presidential-election-politics-essay/>

Richard Mourdock whose statements on " legitimate rape" and pregnancy from rape being " God's will" continued to make the GOP appear anti-women's rights (ibid.). Both men lost their seats, reflecting what voters thought about their obscure statements. Moreover, Arizona's immigration laws that appeared to endorse racial profiling and the proposed voting laws that would suppress African American voters also reflected poorly on the GOP, making them appear racist (Reese). There will always be Americans who vote Democrat and Americans who always vote Republican. However, it is the swing voters who matter most. If the GOP hopes to win the 2016 election they must reassess their party and produce candidates who can relate to the general population and who do not take on such extreme (and often religious) positions. James Carville, who served as Bill Clinton's political strategist at the time of his Presidential bid, notes that the Democrats were losing the popular vote for 20 years. Clinton came along and ran as a centrist presidential candidate and won (Dickinson). This is what the Republicans need to do. They must step away from this growing extremism towards religion and social positions and take on moderate positions that can appeal to an ever growing diverse nation where white-males are no longer the only Americans they feel they need to appeal to (Reese). Only then may they have a chance at winning in 2016.

People were looking for change after Obama with a fragmenting economy, but they did not feel safe with Romney (Jones). Governor Romney may have had a chance at winning the Presidency had he initially ran as a moderate however he would have had no shot at winning the primaries. The growing disconnects between the GOP and the voting population is increasing and it

was responsible for Romney losing the election. Romney had to appear "severely conservative" (Fahrenthold) in order to win the nomination but attempted to appear moderate after that in order to win over the general population. However, Obama made this difficult for him when he and his staff latched onto obscure statements made by the governor, such as the 47% comment and his support for "self deportation" (Dickinson) and used them against him in debates and ads thus reminding the voters of what Romney was like during the primaries, someone unrelatable to the average American. On top of that, Obama used the same popularity and hype he received from the 2008 election to win over similar demographics in this election. This includes African Americans, Hispanics, women and youth (Abramson 118). These are the same groups that did not vote for Romney. They essentially all felt disconnected with Romney and were afraid of what his presidency would bring. They felt safer with Obama. Romney's constant flip flopping and gaffes made him look uninterested and distrusted to the population (NY Times). He did not come off as a sincere candidate rather he came off as a politician who would say anything to please voters. Now that Romney had led two unsuccessful presidential bids, the GOP must reorganize themselves and use the strategy that Clinton used to win the presidency as a Democrat: start and stay in the centre (Dickinson). Obama won a second term because of his charisma and his successes in his first term but most importantly because voters felt safer with him as President as opposed to a nominee who said anything to please the population and who came off as distrusted and unable to connect with the average American.

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