

## The New American President: How He Won— and What It Means

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In preparing my lecture for today, I faced a major problem. Namely, so much has been written about Barack Obama in the world press—how he won election, and what it will mean for the USA and the world—that there seems to be little left for me to say.

Much has especially been written about the election of the first African-American President. That is indeed an extremely significant occurrence. Election evening it felt good to be an American. Generations can come and go while injustices remain. Yet Barack Obama's election was confirmation that change can come. And that my own country can sometimes overcome the worst aspects of its history and live up to its own creed that "All men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."

As important as that milestone is, I do not want to focus on it. Instead, in preparing these remarks I decided to develop three topics that may offer some new insights. One is to look at certain voting patterns, compared to 2004, when Democrat John Kerry lost to Republican George W. Bush. Second, I will consider what I see as the revolutionary nature of the campaign for President that Obama ran and how it is likely to carry over into his presidency and change the American presidency in some important ways. And third I will discuss how President Obama is likely to change American public policies in certain areas from what they have been under George W. Bush.

First then, important voting patterns in the 2008 election. I am about to put up several slides that may threaten to drown you in a sea of numbers. But they all demonstrate two overriding facts: First, Barack Obama was not elected in a landslide, but by a fairly narrow margin, and secondly Obama won by increasing his vote total over that obtained by John Kerry four years before among almost all regional, demographic, and religious groups.

Overall, Obama won by increasing his vote over that which Kerry had received by 5 percentage points. Hardly a landslide! But the little-noticed, yet highly significant fact is that he increased his percentage of votes by about 4 to 8 percentage points among almost all population groups. This is the case when one looks at voters divided by gender, region, and race. As seen on this slide.

I should note that African-American voters supported Obama at a 95 percent level and whites at only a 43 percent level. In fact, only 41 percent of white men voted for Obama. This might lead one to conclude that Obama's race led to a racially polarized electorate. But this white-black division is more a reflection of traditional voting patterns in the United States than that of racial polarization caused by Obama's African heritage. Whites actually increased their support for Obama by 2 percentage points over what they had given Kerry four years before.

This next slide continues the story of Obama's broad appeal. It reveals the voting patterns by income and education, thereby getting at social class differences—or one can better say, the lack

of social class differences. Almost all of the groupings increased their support for Obama, as compared to Kerry, by three to six percentage points.

Next, we turn to age and religion. Considering age first, this is the one area where there were some differences. 66 percent of 18 to 29 year olds voted for him, a 12 percentage point increase over those in this age group who had voted for Kerry in 2004. Here we also come across our first grouping of voters who actually had a lower percentage of voters supporting Obama than Kerry: those who were over 65 years of age. There was a clear age differential in this election.

The lower part of the chart deals with voting by religion. I have found Europeans are often surprised at the level of religiosity in the United States. Thus, behind each of the religious categories I have added the percentage of voters in each category. Note that 41 percent of all the voters reported that they attend religious worship services weekly, a percentage that survey after survey has found to remain steady at approximately this level for the past 70 years. Here, as with almost all of the other categories of voters we have examined, Obama increased his vote by about 4 to 8 percentage points over that which Kerry had received. This was true across the board: for Jews, Catholics, Protestants, evangelicals, weekly church attendees, and those with no religious affiliation.

This may not appear especially noteworthy, but it demonstrates a significant achievement of Obama this year. There had been a steady rise in the percentage of evangelicals voting for the Republican candidates, going from 67 percent in 1996, to 76 percent in 2000, to 78 percent in 2004, as this chart shows. But this year Obama was able to reverse this trend, decreasing the percentage of the evangelical vote that John McCain received, compared to what George Bush had obtained both in 2000 and 2004. The difference is not large, but remember that evangelicals make up one of the largest voting groups in the American electorate, with 23 percent of the voters being white evangelicals. Of the 5 percentage points that Obama increased his votes over what Kerry had received, over 1 percentage point can be attributed to his increased support among white evangelicals. Another two percentage points came from his increased support among Catholics. Obama's greater support among religious voters than what Kerry had been able to achieve was a key reason for his success. And, I might add, the Obama campaign mounted a concerted, well organized effort to appeal to religious voters, more so than any other Democratic candidate in recent years.

What emerges from all this is the very broad appeal of Obama that—for the most part—cut across racial, regional, age, educational, income, and religious divisions. Apart from the Obama victory itself this broad appeal of his is the most significance pattern that emerged from this election. The United States did not elect its first black president by his greatly increasing his support among certain racial, ethnic, regional, or economic groups, while other groups moved away from him. Instead, there was a very broad movement, cutting across many lines, towards him. This will make it easier for him to build support for his policies.

I now turn to my second key point, namely, the revolutionary nature of Obama's campaign for president and how it is likely to carry over into his presidency and forever change the American presidency in some important ways. This observation requires some explanation.

The Obama campaign made unprecedented use of the internet and other new-technology means of communication, often called the new media. (And that's how I will refer to them in this lecture.) His campaign, I believe, will thereby revolutionize how campaigns for the presidency are run and, in turn, will, in some fundamental ways, change how President Obama and future presidents will govern. These changes are also bound to influence how political campaigns are run in Europe and elsewhere. Much will be written about this in the future, and what Obama achieved is only beginning to be analyzed. But let me offer what I can now.

Obama's use of the new media can be broken down into four distinct and widely used techniques. Together, they enabled him to construct a network of millions of voters with whom he was able to communicate directly and seemingly personally. One was the use of the Internet and email as a means to raise money, recruit volunteers, and communicate information. Early in the campaign I made a modest contribution to the Obama campaign and thereby revealed my email address. Ever after on most days I received one, and sometimes two or three messages from Barack, Michelle, Joe (as in Joe Biden), or some top campaign aide. All these emails tended to clog my in-box but they had the advantage of giving me a front row seat to observe how the Obama campaign used email and the internet. There were, of course, regular appeals for money. These appeals enabled the Obama campaign to raise an astounding amount of money, even by American standards: some \$700 million.

But there was more, much more. Whenever Obama gave a major speech, I would be alerted ahead of time to watch it and afterwards I was given a link I could click on to watch the speech on my computer in case I had missed it. The campaign's email list was sorted by local area, so when there was to be a local event, such as the opening of a headquarters or the appearance of Obama, Biden, or some other spokesperson for the campaign, I would receive an email alert. In an almost scary display of organization and efficiency, on election day I received this email supposedly from Michelle Obama, reminding me to vote, telling me the location of my polling place, and giving me a list of 5 persons in my neighborhood, complete with phone numbers, who were Obama supporters, asking me to call them and urge to be sure to vote. The point is not, of course, that I received some special email. No doubt hundreds of thousands, even millions of these emails went out that day. The point is the unprecedented use of computer and email technology flawlessly to communicate with voters the campaign had identified as their supporters, and solicitating them to communicate with other voters.

Second, the Obama campaign made extensive use of Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, and host of other new media devices that most of us who are over 40 years of age either don't know they exist or, if we do, don't know how to navigate them. These were used to communicate and, probably most importantly, to allow supporters to comment and feel connected to the campaign.

Third, there was text messaging. At every Obama rally persons attending were encouraged to show their support by texting a message of hope and change, thereby revealing their cell phone number to the Obama campaign. Also, before the campaign announced Senator Joe Biden as the vice presidential pick, one could sign up to receive a text message announcing the selection. Again, the campaign obtained hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of cell phone numbers. I

fell for that one and periodically for the rest of the campaign received text messages. This is the message I received the day after the election, supposedly from Barack himself.

Fourth, the Obama campaign used a profusion of internet ads. Whenever one would log onto Google or CNN, there would be an ad pointing one to Obama's website. It was almost impossible to log onto any site on the Internet that carries paid advertisements without seeing a prominent ad for Obama, most of which directed persons to his campaign website.

In short, by these means the Obama campaign—while also using the traditional media such as television, newscasts, and newspapers—supplemented them by appealing directly to users of the Internet and other forms of the new media. Most importantly, these were used in an interactive manner: those using them were invited to become involved, to give their opinions, to post comments and pictures, to forward emails and campaign links to their neighbors and friends, to attend rallies, and, of course, to give money. The campaign worked hard—and to a large extent succeeded—in drawing persons into the campaign and making them feel a part of it, receiving supposedly inside information, making them feel they were a part of the campaign, assigning them tasks to do, and soliciting reactions and comments.

The age differential in voting we saw earlier can, I strongly suspect, largely be attributed to younger persons being better acquainted with and making more use of these new media.

Obama's use of the new media is not going to end now that the election is over. I strongly suspect the new media Obama campaign is going to give way to the new media Obama presidency. The Obama presidency will in some significant ways remake the American presidency by its continued use of the new media I have just been discussing.

This slide shows an email I received from the Obama campaign election day evening, when it was clear Obama had won. I have put in bold and underlined the sentence that is most important: "We have a lot of work to do to get our country back on track, and I'll be in touch soon about what comes next." This one sentence sent a clear signal that Obama intends to continue to use the network of millions of persons his campaign had constructed to help him win the election.

The American political system is one of an extreme decentralization of power, with a variety of power centers competing for control over policy making. The presidency is only one of these power centers. In addition to it there is, of course, Congress, divided into a House and a Senate of equal power and groups of congresspersons based on region, ideology, or other shared interests that can frustrate the will of the President. Also, there are powerful lobbying organizations and powerful executive branch institutions that every President has expressed frustration in seeking to control. All this means the American President is seeking to steer a ship that has multiple rudders and he is at the control of only one of them.

Obama's extensive network of ordinary citizens, based on the new media, presents him with an opportunity that earlier Presidents have not had. He has already created a new website ([www.change.gov](http://www.change.gov)) where persons can read about and see key events from the transition. The overriding message is: "This was your campaign and this will be your presidency." Persons can

comment on the transition, can share stories from the campaign, and can even apply for a job in the Obama administration.

Once Obama is in office, I see targeted messages going out to persons in the district or state of a member of Congress who is key in winning passage of a certain bill, urging them to contact their member and to demand him or her to support that bill. I can see taped messages by a President Obama being posted on the Internet accompanied by emails and text messages urging persons to watch it and email it on to others. I can see the new media as a two-way means of communication, with persons urged to contact friends and neighbors in support of certain presidential initiatives and to post messages to the President and his advisors, thereby drawing persons into the presidency and giving them a feeling of being a part of it. The possibilities are endless. I expect them to be fully developed and utilized.

Both in campaigning and in governing I am certain that the Obama use of the new media will be studied by politicians and political parties around the world and, in time, widely copied. If the French thought McDonalds was bad, wait until French politicians figure out how to copy Obama's use of the new media! We are already beginning to see this. The November 15 *New York Times* carried a story of how Benjamin Netanyahu, in running for Israeli prime minister, has copied many features of the Obama campaign website.

This raises the interesting question of whether or not "new media" campaigns will be followed by businesses in their advertising or in communicating with their stockholders, or in broader efforts to influence public opinions. Obama's use of the new media could be copied by businesses, from small, local companies to huge multi-national corporations. I am almost certain it will and in fact to some degree it already is.

I am of two minds in regard to the question of whether or not the use of the new media by politicians will strengthen or weaken democracy. This is something you may want to discuss in a few minutes. There is an impersonality to the new media, even when attempts are made to make them appear personal. It cannot replace the discussion among friends, or even the large campaign rally where the candidate appears in person and family and friends attend together. Democracy involves shared values, discussion, and a seeking of compromise and common ground. Do the new media help or hinder in this process? I'm not sure. They certainly can never replace face-to-face discussions among family, friends, neighbors, fellow church members, and co-workers. But perhaps they can supplement in a positive manner such discussions, or they may stimulate such face-to-face discussions. But for good or for bad—or perhaps better, for good **and** for bad—the Obama campaign introduced on a massive scale the new media to political campaigning and is about to interject them into the democratic governing process itself.

The third topic I would like to consider is what Barack Obama's election will likely mean in terms of the United States' international policies. In the next few minutes, I will consider what I am confident will be three general marks or tendencies of his presidency in terms of international issues and policies. Next, I will consider how the Obama presidency is likely to differ from the Bush presidency in two more specific policy areas of international concern.

First, the Barack Obama presidency—in contrast to the George W. Bush presidency—will almost certainly mean less unilateralism and less emphasis on force and the threat of force, and a greater emphasis on consultation with allies and on diplomacy as a means to settle international disputes. Obama recognizes the importance of what is termed soft power, as contrasted with the hard power of force and the threat of force. Included in this “soft power” mindset is a sensitivity to the fact that acts of the United States have both symbolic and substantive aspects. He will be sensitive to other nation’s perceptions of the United States and will work to improve America’s image around the world. He will no doubt move quickly to ban “waterboarding” and other forms of torture. He is already sending signals he intends to close Guantanamo Bay prison.

Obama has also emphasized the importance, in his view, of the United Nations and, in a position for which he was heavily criticized during the campaign, stated his willingness to meet directly with regimes with which the United States is at odds, the foremost example being Iran. His speech in Berlin last July, was filled with statements of his commitment to diplomacy and working closely with the nations of Europe and around the world.

However, I also expect Obama, as president, may disappoint some of those millions from Paris to Berlin to Nairobi who—literally or figuratively—danced in the streets election night. This is because—and this my second observation concerning the direction Obama is likely to take as president—he will be a tough negotiator who will put American self-interest, as he views it, first. I have received the sense—and I may be wrong in this—I have received the sense that many European observers tend to view Obama as what could be called a “soft internationalist.” He indeed has a broad, world-wide perspective, he is highly intelligent, he is cool. But soft he is not. He will talk to friends and foes alike, but when you leave the room be sure to check that your billfold is still in your pocket—he just might have taken it without your even noticing it!

Let me give an example from his campaign: in his speech accepting the Democratic Party’s nomination for President, Obama called, in soaring rhetoric, for an end to bitter partisan divisions and “stale tactics to scare voters.” Only a few weeks later his campaign was airing television ads, claiming John McCain would undercut social security and cut retirees’ pensions—one of the oldest scare attacks in the Democrats’ playbook.

Obama cut his political teeth as a community organizer on the south side of Chicago, a classic example of an area marked by unemployed workers and economic devastation resulting from industries closing due to foreign competition. As a result, he is likely to be more protectionist than George Bush—and what many may now expect. During the campaign he called for a renegotiation of some provisions in NAFTA and opposed a free trade agreement the Bush administration has negotiated with Columbia. Since the election, he has come out in support of subsidies for the American automobile industry.

In short, Barack Obama will consult and negotiate more than George W. Bush did; he will be more sensitive to the image of the United States abroad and will seek to work with our friends and negotiate with our foes. And he will do so genuinely and openly. But he will also be a very tough negotiator with American self-interest in the forefront of his mind.

A third observation: There is reason to believe Obama—to the extent possible—is going to focus primarily on policy issues that are largely domestic, not international in nature. This too may disappoint some around the world who greeted his election with relief and joy. I said, “To the extent possible,” because international crises have a way of forcing themselves onto any President’s agenda. Also, there are some international issues that Obama is committed to pursuing. More on that in a moment.

But his first choice of priorities will be domestic: the huge financial crisis facing the United States, developing an energy policy that will reduce the United States’ dependence on imported oil, improving the American educational system, and enacting health care reform. The first two of these have, of course, strong international dimensions. Especially the world-wide economic crisis will require an international approach and President Obama will pursue the needed international lines of attack. But even here, the starting point for his work on the financial crisis will be the American economy and how to get it back on track.

But all this is rather general in nature. What about more specific issues? How is President Obama likely to change American policy as it relates to specific public policy issues? There are two more specific issue areas I would like to discuss briefly. The two areas are first, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan and then global climate change and energy policy. These comments of mine by necessity must be brief, but we can discuss them further later on in our discussion session.

First then, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan. In all three it is clear that Barack Obama will pursue quite different policies than has George Bush. In regard to Iraq, he will work to pull American combat forces out of Iraq in a careful, but timely manner. From many statements it is plain that he sees the United States’ invasion of Iraq to have been a mistake and its post-invasion occupation ill-thought out and ill-executed. Maintaining major military forces in Iraq and being deeply involved in nation-building there, requires huge sums of money and stretches the military to the breaking point. Thus Obama has frequently stated that what he sees as more important priorities both—domestic and international—will be impossible to achieve while the United States remains in Iraq in force. That is why I am confident he will push hard for a rapid withdrawal from Iraq.

In Iran Obama has frequently said he will work hard to stop Iran’s development of nuclear weapons. And I suspect America’s traditional, close ties to Israel and other strategic interests will in fact move him in this direction. But he will differ from Bush in that he is likely to pursue a very aggressive diplomatic approach. This is where his multilateral, diplomacy-first tendencies I mentioned earlier will come into full play. He will work with NATO and EU countries and other allies to develop an attractive package of incentives if Iran gives up its nuclear program and a tough package of sanctions if it does not. Here our allies may feel pressure to go further than what they might be inclined to go. Remember my point that Obama is hard-nosed and tough. Also, he will pursue direct talks with Iranian officials, something George Bush has sought to avoid.

In regard to Afghanistan, Obama is likely to give more attention and to put a greater emphasis on military force than what George Bush has done. Obama sees Afghanistan as a key—perhaps even **the** key—in efforts to defeat extremist Islamic terrorism. Here again, NATO allies may

feel more pressure than they will welcome—pressure designed to persuade them to send more combat forces than they have thus far. These military efforts will be combined with efforts to deal with underlying needs of Afghanistan, such as fighting corruption, more education, and alternatives to the cultivation of poppies.

In all three of these Middle Eastern, international issues, I strongly suspect one will soon see Obama's internationalism and commitment to diplomacy, but also his toughness and thinking in terms of American self-interest.

Next, I will consider global climate change and energy policy together, since they are closely linked. The big change between Barack and Obama and George Bush is that Obama sees climate change as an immediate problem in need of urgent action. Also, from his many statements it is unmistakable that he sees American over-dependence on oil for its energy needs and, in turn, its over-dependence on oil from foreign suppliers, as pressing problems. I cannot be certain of the extent to which Obama will be successful, but I am certain he will make an early and urgent attempt to move American policy in sharply new directions.

Based on his past actions and campaign statements, I predict that Obama will work to move the United States into four new directions:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050, by instituting a strong cap-and-trade program for carbon emissions.
- Negotiate agreements with other countries that place binding limits on carbon emissions.
- Increase energy efficiency standards, including requiring the automobile industry to increase the fuel efficiency of their cars and to develop plug-in hybrid cars.
- Develop alternative, renewal energy resources. Example: Strive to have ten percent of American electricity come from renewable sources by 2012 and 25 percent by 2025.

The first two of these are aimed at responding directly to the global climate change threat. The cap-and-trade program is the key means by which Obama will seek to reduce American carbon emissions by 80 percent under 1990 levels by 2050. There will be no grandfathering in of existing carbon emitters and all cap-and-trade credits will be auctioned off. Obama will also engage other nations through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to negotiate binding, international agreements limiting carbon emissions. He has said such agreements must include not only the developed economies of Europe and North American, but developing countries such as China, India, and Brazil.

The next two initiatives are designed to reduce American dependence on oil, and foreign oil in particular.

But will Obama succeed in these various initiatives I have just described? That no one, of course, can know for certain. My prediction is that he will succeed to a large degree. He will face opposition in Congress and among powerful lobbying groups in achieving a strong cap-and-trade program. Developing alternative energy sources and increasing energy efficiency in cars and elsewhere will require the overcoming of organized opposition and the dead hand of inertia. His original proposals are likely to be weakened as they move through the policy making process, but I have high hopes that they indeed will be enacted and move American energy and climate change policies in some major new directions.

There are three forces coming together that, I believe, will enable Obama to succeed to a large degree. One is his own force of personality, political skills, and his likelihood of making these initiatives one of his highest priorities. Second, is the current economic crisis. It will give the Obama administration leverage with auto makers and other businesses and industries. In a crisis atmosphere it is often possible to win public support for policy changes that otherwise would not be possible. Also helping is the sharp increase of fuel prices earlier this year—up to over four dollars for a gallon of gasoline last summer, which had a profound impact on Americans, who previously had assumed continuing cheap energy. Even though the cost of oil, and gasoline, has now gone down—thereby not helping the efforts for major policy changes—there is a continuing concern by the American public over energy costs and a realization that cheap gas prices can suddenly disappear.

These are some of my thoughts on where the Obama presidency is likely to take the United States—and, to a degree, the rest of the world. I now welcome your thoughts and questions.