



THE ROAD AHEAD

OBAMA'S

DIVIDED AMERICA

AMERICAN PRESIDENT GETS FOUR MORE YEARS BUT INHERITS A COUNTRY SPLIT DOWN THE MIDDLE ON CLASS, RACE AND GENDER

By Rashmee Roshan Lall in Washington, D.C.

Presidential re-elections in America historically tend to be surly affairs, sadly lacking the passion of the first time. But Americans' convincing re-election of President Barack Hussein Obama, a visibly black man whose Kenyan-born father was never even a citizen of the United States, was less a dreary renewal of vows than a promissory note to which unborn generations will be heir. It throbbed with a love of self, a self-preserving self-love, perhaps even a yearning for an idealised idea of self. The 59,170,872 people whose vote, at the time of writing, is recorded in Obama's column were expressing, once again, the audacity of hope.

By re-electing a black president whose first term was marked by tepid economic growth, high unemployment and paralysing political war in their legislature—and whom 16 per cent of the population still erroneously and poisonously think of as Muslim—Americans demonstrated that they were able to consciously do what Martin Luther King dreamt. On that August day, 49 years ago, in an America where it was still legal to deny a black man a job, a house and the right to vote, King had expressed the hope his children would one day live in “a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”. In re-electing Obama despite everything, including a jobless rate of 7.9 per cent on election day, Americans showed that post-racial politics was finally a reality. It was a defining point in their nation's history and one that their President recognised in his victory speech with his trademark, pitch-perfect, soaring oratory: “We are not as divided as our politics suggests. We're not as cynical as the pundits believe. We are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions... We

“ WE ARE GREATER THAN THE SUM OF OUR INDIVIDUAL AMBITIONS. ”

Barack Obama

US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA STANDS ON STAGE WITH FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA AFTER HIS VICTORY SPEECH IN CHICAGO ON NOVEMBER 6

Barack Obama
DEMOCRAT
303

Mitt Romney
REPUBLICAN
206
(Votes polled in Electoral College)

believe in a generous America, in a compassionate America, in a tolerant America, open to the dreams of an immigrant's daughter who studies in our schools and pledges to our flag. What makes America exceptional are the bonds that hold together the most diverse nation on earth."

Obama's victory in seven of nine key battleground states proved that demography is destiny. He fashioned a new coalition of the willing from black, Hispanic and college-educated women voters. By ballot, not bullet, Americans imposed shock and awe on a wondering world. In 2012, it was 2008 all over again even though history could only be made once and surely, that was four years ago, when the first African-American president was installed in the White House. Yet, on TV, on radio and online, the world watched the richest, most militarily powerful nation on earth pledge itself to four more years of togetherness with a man who looked different from the conventional establishment and spoke of the "destructive power of a warming planet", sparking hope that an American president would finally speak the truth to the power of the energy lobby.

It was a soft-focus end to a sour 17-month slugfest of a campaign that cost the two sides nearly \$3 billion, making it the most expensive election in American history and arguably the most nasty, with a record two million negative political advertisements aired across the country. It was, says John Carroll, professor of mass communication at Boston University, "a post-truth presidential campaign". In the end, it was what Samuel Johnson, another canny wordsmith like Obama, said of Milton's *Paradise Lost* that became the epitaph of the bitter contest between the 51-year-old Obama and the 65-year-old Mitt Romney: No one ever wished it longer.

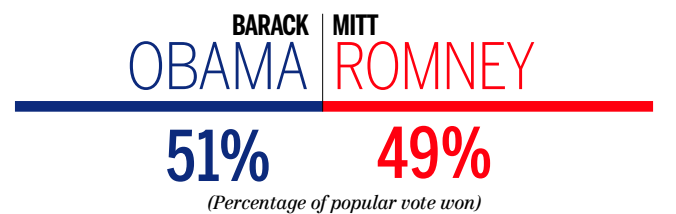
But what, if anything, does the outcome really change for anyone? "Not much," says John Gizzi, the veteran conservative Washington pundit, using a quote from Abraham Lincoln when he stubbed his toe to describe the morning-after feeling. "I'm too old to cry but it hurts too much to laugh."

The reference is to the ultimate irony of this election victory. It has produced a status quo outcome with a Democratic president still at the top of an executive structure that will remain in gridlock with the Republican Party controlling the House of Representatives and the Senate dominated by the Democrats. When Congress returns to Washington next week for a post-election legislative session, the re-elected President and policymakers will have just 49 days to reach consensus on what is fearfully being called America's "fiscal cliff".

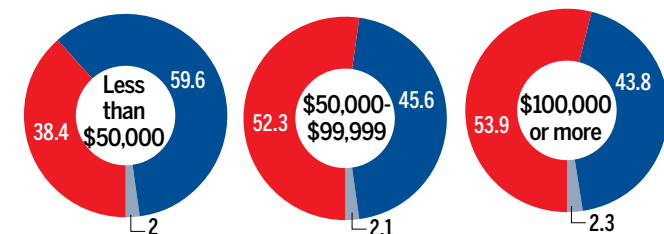
"What matters most to the rest of the world is what matters to Americans right now, a stronger economy and maintaining economic competitiveness as we dig our way out of the deepest recession in 80 years," emphasises Edward Alden, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Clearly then, Obama's first foreign policy priority of his second term needs to be getting a firm handhold on the domestic "fiscal cliff". Alden, who specialises in US immigration and trade policy, insists that "second-term Obama will be a continuation of first-term Obama" and there will be continued emphasis on efforts to force the Indian retail market and service sector open through the Trans Pacific Partnerships negotiations and World Trade Organisation plurilateral

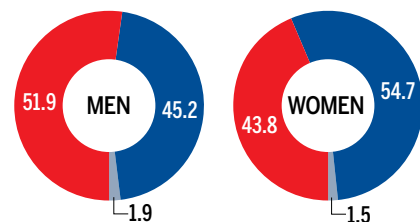
A FRACTURED MANDATE



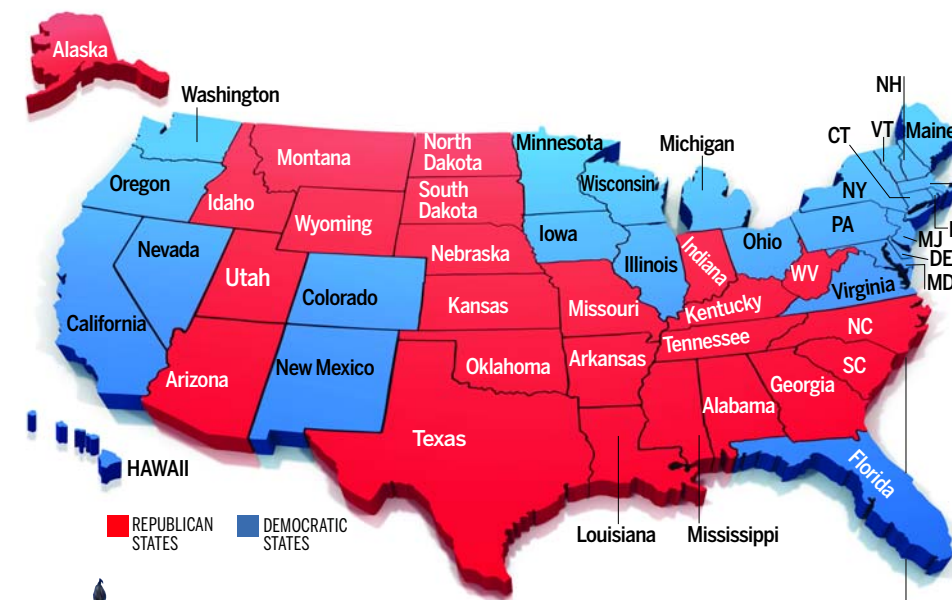
INCOME MOST LOWER INCOME GROUPS VOTED FOR OBAMA



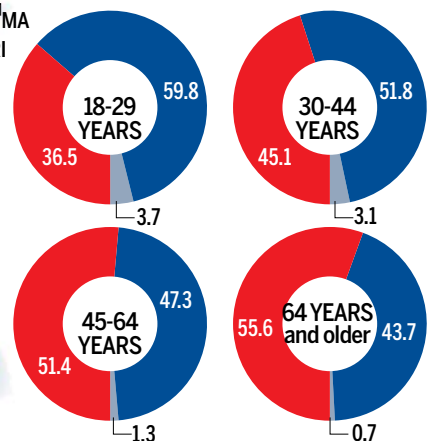
GENDER MORE WOMEN THAN MEN VOTED FOR OBAMA



ROMNEY OBAMA OTHERS



AGE A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BETWEEN 18 & 44 VOTED FOR OBAMA



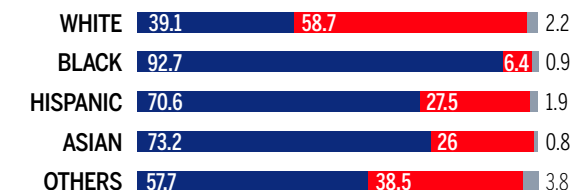
REPUBLICAN HOUSE

Obama may have swept the elections but Republicans continue to dominate the House of Representatives

SENATE 100 seats
47 Republican seats | 51 Democratic seats | 2 Other

House of Representatives 435 seats
240 Republican seats | 190 Democrats | 5 Vacant

RACE MOST WHITES VOTED FOR ROMNEY, BUT OBAMA WON HISTORIC NUMBERS OF MINORITY VOTES



Source: USA Today



MITT ROMNEY AND WIFE ANN AT THE BOSTON CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTER ON NOVEMBER 7

IT WAS A SOFT-FOCUS END TO A 17-MONTH SLUGFEST. NO ONE WISHED THE BITTER CONTEST BETWEEN OBAMA AND ROMNEY TO LAST ANY LONGER.

services agreement respectively.

Is that all India can expect of this second-term American president who famously displays a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi above his desk and wants to rebalance foreign policy by weighting it with an Asian "pivot"? Tanvi Madan, director of the India Project at the Brookings Institution, says the bilateral relationship is blessedly mature and on an even keel. "It says something that we've seen less negative rhetoric on outsourcing to India in the 2012 campaign than in the 2008 one," she points out, recalling Obama's infamous and hastily recalled swipe four years ago at Hillary Clinton. "He put out a press release saying Senator Clinton of Punjab."

Over the border though, in Pakistan, it is a fair bet there will be deep disappointment at the re-election of Obama, the President who violated Pakistan's sovereignty by stealthily sending Seal Team Six into Abbottabad to take out Osama bin Laden. The day before the election, a BBC World Service opinion poll found that Pakistan was one of just two countries (Israel being the other) that favoured a Romney win. But, Pakistani pique cannot take away from the basic truth. Obama's re-election offers the best chance America has had to "lead from behind", as this President proudly described the collaborative coalition he fashioned with the United Nations to deal with Gaddafi's Libya.

Rashmee Roshan Lall is a journalist based in Washington, D.C.

Barack the Ladies Man

Mitt Romney's rigid views on abortion made women voters, who account for 52 per cent of the population, flock to the Obama camp

By T.S. Sudhir in Chicago

Hope is President Barack Obama's favourite word. Four years after he rode to power promising hope and change, Americans have given him another term to take it 'Forward', his slogan for 2012. At the McCormick Place in Chicago, Obama said in his acceptance speech, "I have never been more hopeful about our future and I ask you to sustain that hope."

Obama would draw hope from his victory in Election 2012, defying several of the "too close to call" forecasts. The vote of America's women voters—who are 52 per cent of the population—helped push Obama over the line. Exit poll data indicated that he had double digit leads over Mitt Romney among women voters. Clearly, while most successful men have an X-factor, President Obama has the XX factor. In his acceptance speech, Obama spoke about the woman in his life, Michelle Obama. He said, "I wouldn't be the man I am today without the woman who agreed to marry me 20 years ago. Let me say this publicly. Michelle, I have never loved you more. I have never been prouder to watch the rest of America fall in love with you too as our nation's First Lady."

Dr Wendy Smooth of the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Ohio State University in Columbus, says women voters usually like candidates who are "easy on the eye". At an election rally at the Ohio State University in October, a lady from the audience shouted, "I love you." "I love you too, but I need you voting," replied Obama. The woman voter in Election 2012 had twin concerns. The first was the spectre of job losses that affected entire families. Second, whether the government of the day would give her the dignity and right over her body. The Republican's strong anti-abortion stance put off many women voters.

At the end, the divide between Obama and Romney went down to the basics. About life and birth. Romney was on record saying he will immediately withdraw federal funding to Planned Parenthood, the country's largest abortion provider and one of Obama's pet projects. "I've said time and time again, I'm a pro-life candidate," Romney said in Delaware, Ohio, during the campaign. "I will be a pro-life President. The actions I will take immediately are to remove funding for Planned Parenthood. It will not be part of my budget." When Romney sits down to do his post-mortem, he would realise he shot his chances with this bullet. About 55 million unmarried women were eligible to vote in this election, and Romney's rigid views on abortion made them flock to the Obama camp. Ahead of voting day, an Investor's Business Daily/TIPP poll found that single women favoured

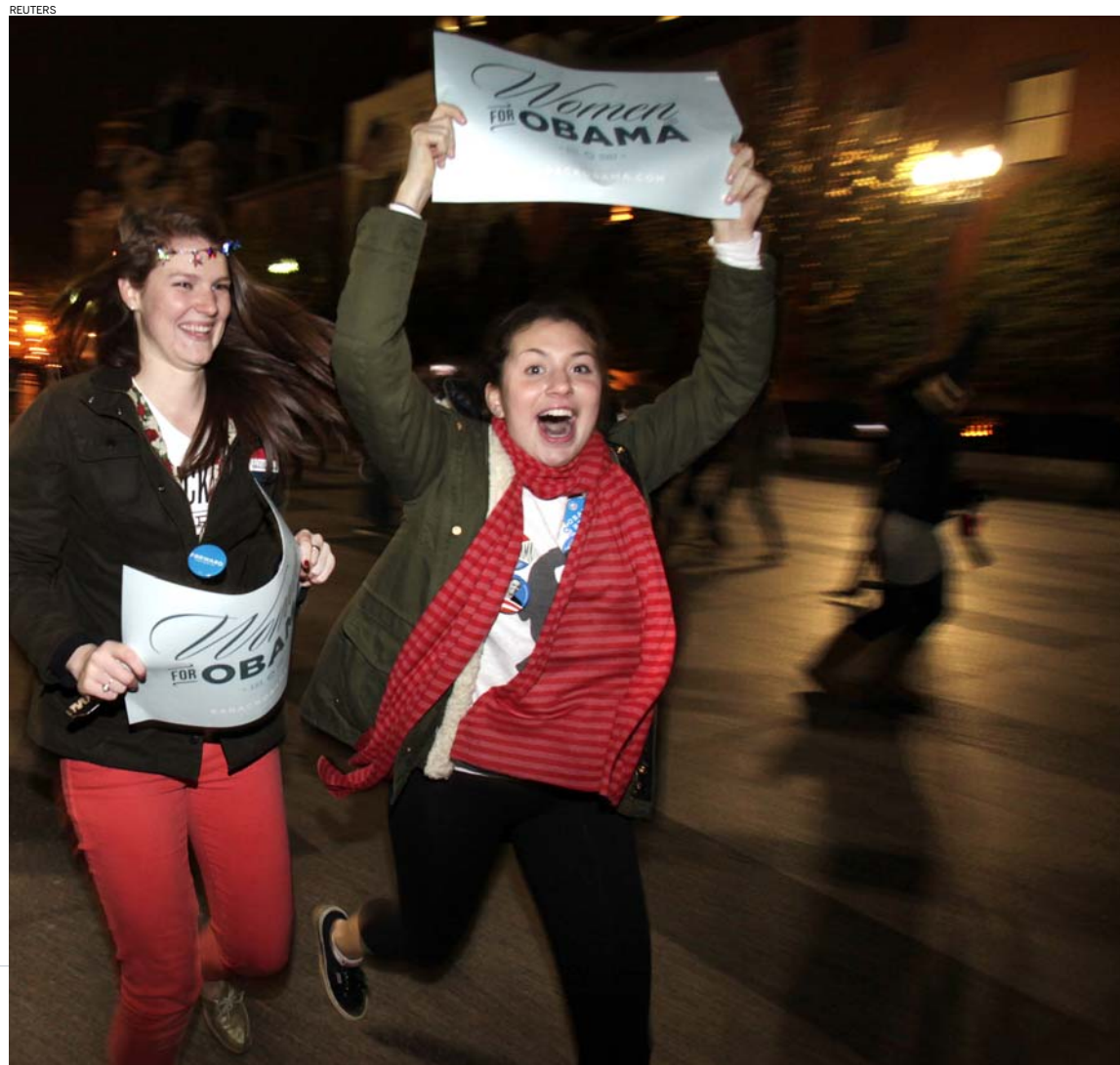
Obama 63 to 23 per cent. A CNN exit poll said 55 per cent of the women voted for Obama, while only 44 voted for Romney. At a polling station in Hyde Park in Chicago, 42-year-old Sherry Thomas, an Asian-American, said, "I was really concerned what would happen if Romney came into office. I do not think anyone else has the right to take a decision on what I should do with my body, except perhaps my husband."

Most Americans believe that planned parenthood for women is not merely a moral issue, it is also a healthcare and economic issue. "It is also linked to the ability to work and move up the professional ladder. For single women, access to contraceptives and abortion is part of the overall framework of healthcare," says Dr Wendy Smooth.

To make matters worse for Romney, his Republican colleagues seemed determined to lose the women vote. Todd

Akin of Missouri and Richard Mourdock of Indiana shocked everyone with their "insensitive" views on rape. Incidentally, both lost the elections to the US Senate, suggesting a backlash from women voters. Romney's gaffe during the second presidential debate, when he said he had in his private business career employed "binders full of women", hurt his cause.

However, it wasn't just the women voters who paved the way for the President's re-election. In 2008, Obama was ushered into office riding high on the votes of women, youth, African-American, Latinos and Asian-Americans. Keeping this rainbow coalition intact in 2012 was difficult, given that his slogan of hope didn't square up with the harsh economic realities. Obama's impressive electoral machinery managed to do an encore. In 2008, 95 per cent of African-Americans and 66 per cent of Latinos and Asian Americans had voted



SUPPORTERS OF BARACK OBAMA CELEBRATE PROJECTIONS OF HIS VICTORY IN THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OUTSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE IN WASHINGTON ON NOVEMBER 6

MOST AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT PLANNED PARENTHOOD FOR WOMEN IS NOT MERELY A MORAL ISSUE, IT IS ALSO A HEALTHCARE AND ECONOMIC ISSUE.

HARD TIMES

A series of challenges at home and abroad will test the President's vision

FISCAL CLIFF A series of spending cuts and tax raises worth \$7 trillion over 10 years will come into effect on January 1, 2013. This is Obama's first challenge. Bush-era tax cuts end, payroll tax exemptions expire and huge cuts in defence spending and unemployment benefits, under the Debt Ceiling Act, 2011, take effect. The measures could halve US fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP in a year, but the \$500 billion sucked out of the economy will send the US into a recession. The President and Congress need to decide whether to allow the measures in full, in part, or not at all.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND GROWTH The unemployment rate in October 2012 was 7.9 per cent, significantly higher than the 5.8 per cent average between 1948 and 2012, and higher than the 6.8 per cent when Obama won in 2008. The economy has had an average growth of just over 2 per cent since early 2009. For sustained recovery, it needs to rise to around 4 per cent.

MIDDLE EAST AND IRAN The assassination of the US ambassador in Benghazi highlights the fragility of security and growth of anti-Americanism in Libya. The continued Syrian civil war will need Obama to decide whether to support military action to oust Bashar al-Assad. Iran continues to get closer to a deliverable nuclear weapon. Obama needs to decide, quickly, how to stop Iran. An intervention would, however, send global oil prices soaring.

WAR ON TERROR Obama achieved a major victory with the assassination of Osama bin Laden. He needs to draw a plan on how to tackle terror from Afghanistan, once US troops leave in 2014. Obama is aggressive with Pakistan, but it is yet to yield results.

IMMIGRATION Mitt Romney's tough anti-immigration rhetoric cost him crucial votes, particularly among Latinos. But the US immigration system is broken and needs reform. It need to address the issue of illegal immigrants, while allowing the world's best talent to continue to enter the US.

CLIMATE CHANGE Hurricane Sandy, which brought destruction to New York and New Jersey days before the election, has put global warming back on top of the policy agenda. To act, Obama will have to persuade skeptics in the Republican Party.



GETTY IMAGES

for Obama. According to a *New York Times* exit poll, in 2012, 93 per cent African-Americans voted for Obama and over 70 per cent Hispanics and Asian Americans reaffirmed their faith in the President. The real change from 2008 was the steep drop in the white working-class male vote for Obama, down from 41 per cent in 2008 to 36 per cent this time. Significantly though, Obama held his own in Ohio, where his government's \$85 billion bailout for the auto sector saved over one million jobs held mostly by white men.

Where does America go from here? Nicholas Barcelona, a 25-year-old law student, who voted for Obama four years ago but turned an 'Obama defector' this year, says, "I voted for Romney because I thought the country needs him at the moment. The country is clearly divided on ideological lines, so the real issues that matter, like jobs, get sidelined," he says.

Obama's slogan of 'Yes we can' inspired an entire generation of first-time voters in 2008. The youth vote largely stayed with Obama, even though many of the professionals, analysts suspect, would have moved away to Romney, attracted by his promise to create 12 million jobs. The challenge before Obama will now be to ensure against a sense of listlessness and weariness among young voters, fearing a status quo administration. But despite Romney's message focusing on job creation, exit polls showed that three in every four voters said Obama's policies would favour the middle class or the poor, while 54 per cent felt Romney's policies would tilt towards the rich. In many senses, this election was as if two different Americas had voted, and one had triumphed over the other.

The one big block that Obama will have to woo back is industry, which largely backed Mitt Romney, one of their own. Despite the goodwill Obama generated with the auto bailout, some CEOs even wrote letters to their employees advising that putting Romney in the White House is in the best interests of the workers of the companies. In fact, Wall Street firms organised a fundraiser for Romney in October and contributed \$61 million to his campaign. According to Centre for Responsive Politics figures, they gave just \$8.7 million to Obama. Industry hopes that Obama will induct businessmen and business professionals into his new administration. Alex Fischer, CEO of Columbus 2020 in Ohio, says, "Business leaders are needed in administration. At the moment, only academicians fill his administration."

By giving him a second term, the people of America have renewed faith in Obama's ability to turn the economy around. The re-elected President would not want to disappoint the women, youth, African-Americans and Latinos, who gave America's first black President a second chance.

T.S. Sudhir was covering the US presidential elections at the invitation of the Foreign Press Centre, US Department of State.

Read "The meanest US elections ever" at:
www.indiatoday.in/uspoll



THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

Retreat of the Reconciler

An anxious America gives Obama one more chance to redeem his first pledge

By S. Prasannarajan

On election night in Chicago, as Barack Hussein Obama renewed his covenant with America, history was not the choreographer. Another night four years ago, it was a different narrative, of redemption and catharsis, and it was history that showered confetti on the first African-American president of the United States as he stood there facing a nation in thrall, invoking the unrealised dream of Martin Luther King Jr. Then America was romancing "change", and he was the Chosen One in the New World of "hope". His biography, with its back story of growing up in the mean streets of distant lands, was his manifesto, for it was a testament of cultural inclusiveness, of the desirability of otherness—indeed, a celebration of the American Dream. His life story became one with national destiny. That was then.

On election night 2012, the victory speech, in its soaring cadence and inspirational resonance, in playing out the ideal of unity and reaching out, was vintage Obama. But the man and the America he addressed with such statesmanlike elegance were so distant from 2008. Change could not have had a more paradoxical outcome. The president himself, on his re-election day, was a parody of Candidate Obama who once swayed the mind and heart of America. The last four years were a negation of everything the ideal Obama stood for: National reconciliation and an end to politics-as-usual. The abiding stump song then was: "There are no red states and blue states but only the United States of America... there is no conservative America and there is no liberal America but the United States of America." President Obama Part Two inherits a Disunited States of America, and it is mostly his own making. In 2008, Obama won America; in 2012, he merely defeated Mitt Romney.

All the confetti that coloured the night sky of Chicago could not have covered the fault lines of a polarised America. President Obama was not the Great Reconciler he promised he would be. Today there is a red America and there is a blue America; there is an America of the Latinos and an America of the blacks; there is an America of the rich and an America of the poor. The division is ideological as well as cultural; it is starker than

ever and it is bitter. The middle ground, the vital centre of moderation, the natural habitat of Obama ideal, has shrunk. In power, Obama moved farther into the left, and the conservatives, no matter Tea Partying or not, strayed back to the far right. There was a time when conservatism instinctively sought the adjective of "compassionate", and the New Democrat stole the best ideas of the right (think of Bill Clinton). Even as the conservatives were losing the culture war, Obama conceded the economic war by turning the White House into the last refuge of the socialist.

It was not that the president was the prisoner of his inheritance. The point was that he won the mandate to turn despondency into hope, stagnation into rejuvenation. He was the transformative figure and America circa 2008 was for him to seize—and change. What an America still recovering from the ideological extremism of the neocons wanted most was a blast of ideas and Obama was the choice, but his government and his relationship with the market only brought out the ideological urgency of the president. He was not exactly FDR redux as America tottered on the brink of another Depression. Obama Part One was president of the big, intrusive state, and in the motherland of capitalism, it was not glorious to be rich for the last four years. His Republican challenger, who once ran a successful business, was all about "salesmanship" in the president's lofty rhetoric on the stump. Not just ideas, idealism of the Free World too failed him whenever the president dealt with the baddies of the world, be it the mullah in Tehran or the despot elsewhere in the Middle East. The moral imperatives of American exceptionalism did not animate him as un-freedom flourished elsewhere in the world. His first term was a four-year project in repudiating the very spirit of *Obama* that swayed America once.

On election night 2012, the president who regained the poetry of change did not win on what he had achieved or on what he would do. He won by selling the fear of the bogeyman-plutocrat. It was politics as usual all over again. In David Remnick's *Bridge*, the president tells his biographer: "I tend to be fairly forgiving about the anxiety that people feel about change because I think, if you are human, you recognise that in yourself." An anxious America has forgiven him. History won't if Barack Hussein Obama retreats further from his original mandate of change. ■

SAURABH SINGH/www.indiatodayimages.com



IN 2008, OBAMA WON AMERICA; IN 2012, HE MERELY DEFEATED MITT ROMNEY.

A New Turn in The Great Game

The President is likely to push for greater engagement with India to contain the excesses of Pakistan Army as US forces pull out of Afghanistan

By Bruce Riedel in Washington, D.C.

President Barack Hussein Obama's re-election ensures that fighting terrorism will remain the top priority of American foreign policy. Obama will continue the drone wars in Pakistan and Yemen, and perhaps take on new battlefields in North Africa. Pakistan will remain the most difficult bilateral relationship Obama must manage; he will probably move more toward containment. US-India relations will become closer with greater cooperation on Afghanistan.

Obama has made counter terrorism the top priority of his foreign policy since his election in 2008. He has relentlessly attacked the global jihad even as he banned torture and tried to close Guantanamo. I chaired his review of policy toward Afghanistan, Pakistan and al Qaeda in early 2009 and we made the goal of American policy to "dismantle, disrupt and defeat" al Qaeda in Pakistan and prevent its return to Afghanistan. Although much progress has been made to achieving that end state, the job is far from finished.

America's relationship with Pakistan is tortured and complex. On the one hand, Washington has been very generous to Pakistan this century. Since 9/11, the US has disbursed over \$25 billion in military and economic aid to Islamabad. The military aid includes 18 F16 jet fighters, 500 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM), six C130 transport aircraft, 20 Cobra attack helicopters and a Perry class frigate. According to the Congressional Research Service, about half the aid was delivered during George Bush's presidency and about half by Obama. No other country except Israel has received so much American aid since 2001.

On the other hand, Pakistan and America are adversaries in Afghanistan. In many ways, we are fighting a proxy war in Afghanistan. The US, the United Nations, NATO and troops from over 40 countries back the legitimately elected Kabul government led by Hamid Karzai. So does India. Pakistan pays lip service to the Karzai government but provides key assistance to its enemy, the Afghan Taliban. The ISI shelters the Taliban leadership in Quetta, Karachi and Waziristan, trains its fighters and helps it plan attacks on Afghan government and NATO targets. Interrogations of thousands of captured Taliban fighters by NATO show that Pakistan's support is essential to the success of the insurgency.

America is also fighting a drone war against terrorist targets from al Qaeda and associated movement inside Pakistani territory despite the explicit request of the



BARACK OBAMA (LEFT) GREETES MANMOHAN SINGH AT THE SEOUL NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT ON MARCH 26, 2012

OBAMA WAS RELUCTANT IN HIS FIRST TERM TO ASK FOR INDIA'S HELP IN AFGHANISTAN. THAT WILL PROBABLY CHANGE IN THE SECOND TERM.

Pakistani parliament and foreign ministry that they cease flying. Every day, American drones monitor potential targets inside Pakistan. From 2004 to September 30, 2012, the drones carried out 346 attacks in Pakistan, almost 300 on Obama's watch. The drones have decimated al Qaeda's leadership but have become an anti-American rallying cry for Lashkar-e-Toiba and Pakistani politicians including Imran Khan.

Finally, there is the shadow of Abbottabad. How did Osama bin Laden, high value target number one, hide for five-plus years less than 800 yards from Pakistan's premier military academy? One senior Pakistani official told me it was just a "freak coincidence" but is that credible? A Pakistani journalist wrote days after the SEAL raid that killed the al Qaeda leader that "of course the generals knew and they knew they could get away with it". It was either ISI incompetence or complicity and neither is comforting.

The coming transition in Afghanistan from NATO to Afghan leadership in the war in 2014 will be a major challenge for American-Pakistani relations with big implications for India. Obama is committed to a long-term strategic partnership with Afghanistan including keeping a residual force of perhaps 20,000 troops and advisers behind to protect drone bases and help the Afghan Army. If Pakistan encourages the Taliban to step up the pressure on the Kabul government and they recover territory hard won by NATO forces in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, it will be a sign that Pakistan is determined to push America out of South Asia. Many Americans will blame Pakistan for any American defeat in Afghanistan and they will have good reason to do so.

India is likely to be drawn deeper into the Afghan conflict. Already it is a major supporter of Kabul having disbursed over \$2 billion in aid since 2001. India is likely to become the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance's major regional ally. An American-Pakistan proxy war could become an Indo-American-Pakistan proxy war as well. Obama was reluctant in his first term to ask for Indian help in Afghanistan. That will probably change in the second term.

There is a better alternative. Pakistan could unambiguously use its influence with the Taliban to encourage them to engage in a serious political process with Kabul while breaking definitively with al Qaeda. The choice is Pakistan's.

If not, then America and India will need to work more closely on how to engage Pakistan and contain its army's excesses. There are signs the two are already engaging more on Afghanistan's future. The last Indo-US strategic dialogue session spent considerable time on the future of Afghanistan judging by the joint statement. Expect more from Obama Two.

Bruce Riedel is a former CIA analyst and a senior fellow in foreign policy at Brookings Institution



OBAMA AND ROMNEY AT THE FINAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE IN FLORIDA ON OCTOBER 22

Why Money Can't Buy an Election

Obama's re-election ran counter to the wishes of 57 million Americans, almost half the voters. They will now have to come to terms with the sheer force of minorities.

OBAMA WILL HAVE TO MAKE THE COUNTRY COME TO TERMS WITH THE DISMAL REALITY THAT THE ERA OF AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM IS OVER.

By Suketu Mehta in New York |

The courtship was dazzling but the marriage was pedestrian. He didn't break our hearts, exactly, but when it came time to renew our vows, we no longer burned with passion for him. In 2008, I did a reading along with a group of Indian writers including Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, and Manil Suri to raise \$85,000 for Barack Obama's election. This year, we stayed home.

In 2008, when I went out into the streets of New York the midnight of Obama's victory, everybody was dancing on the streets. This week, I watched the results on television with another group of writers who had dutifully voted for him; people were barely twitching.

That is because his first term disappointed the people who fought for him. He has deported more immigrants than any other president. He personally approves assassinations of people he considers to be terrorists, including American citizens—and does not consider it necessary to submit this death list for judicial review. The torture chambers of Guantanamo

are still open, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process remains comatose. He backed off on immigration, climate change legislation, gun control. He should have fought harder for the things he believed in, fought for them earlier in his term. He tried to compromise with a group of Congressmen who put ideology above the interests of the nation, and they almost drove him out of office. Almost.

For me, the most heartening realisation from this election was: Money can't buy you love, or an election. All the super-pacs in the world couldn't give Romney the presidency or the Republicans the Senate. But it's still troubling. No other country spends as much on lobbying or elections. The presidential and congressional elections cost \$6 billion. The vast majority of this money is cash that corporations and their owners put into campaigns for politicians that will do their bidding. In a healthy democracy, corporations as well as people are allowed to petition their legislators on matters that concern them. The First Amendment guarantees this freedom of speech. But there is no real freedom of speech when one side can buy a megaphone and the other side has to shout into the wind till they're hoarse.

The biggest consequence of Obama's victory is that the Supreme Court won't become an extension of the Republican Party, as it would have if one more Republican-appointed justice had joined the court's five-vote conservative majority. It will not overturn *Roe vs Wade*, the decision legalising abortion, or take another crack at throwing out Obama's healthcare legislation. The court is safe for four more years—and maybe longer, depending on when Republicans finally start taking Spanish lessons.

The Republicans are currently the party of 'angry white guys', in the words of one of their own senators, in a country in which the majority of babies born this year are non-white. You can hear them raging right now on Fox News and talk radio. I went to high school with these angry white guys, in

Jackson Heights, Queens, when I first got to the country in 1977. On my second day, an angry white boy came up to me and said, "Lincoln shoulda never let 'em off the plantations." I was teased and bullied, because I wasn't white; I was in the vanguard of the demographic shifts to come in Jackson Heights, now the most diverse neighbourhood in the USA. But if you go to this school now, you'll find that it's full of South Asians and Latinos; we won through sheer force of numbers. As we did, this week, in the country as a whole.

If I really wanted to get ahead in American politics, I should join the Republican Party. At least, that's the message that Bobby (Piyush) Jindal and Nikki (Nimrata) Haley, both Republican governors, might have for their fellow *desis*. No Indians have comparable positions in the Democratic Party, even though 70 per cent of Indian-Americans voted for Obama. The Republicans are looking high and low for qualified minorities that they might present as the new face of the party (even as the brain, heart, torso, and limbs remain lily-white).

Obama's re-election ran counter to the wishes of 57 million Americans—almost half the electorate. Many of them are indeed angry—angry at their own marginalisation at home; angry that they earn less than their parents; angry that their country no longer dominates the twenty-first century as it did the twentieth. But at the same time, only 5 per cent of voters cited foreign policy as the issue most important to them. Neither of the candidates spent any time talking about India—or Latin America, or Australia, or most of the world except the Middle East and, occasionally, China. In his second term, Obama will have to make the country come to terms with the dismal reality that the age of American exceptionalism is over. It's still a great country, but it's not the only great country.

The president still has time, now that we've pledged our love for him all over again, to make our hearts race again. He could take on the plutocrats who're robbing the country blind; he could stand up for the rights he taught as a Constitutional law professor; he could increase America's standing, and yes, power, in the world by making it admired again for its principles from Cairo to Caracas. He can take the lead in negotiating a new treaty on global warming and push it through Congress, taking on the oil companies and their lobbyists, because—as Hurricane Sandy's devastation all around me so savagely demonstrates—our very survival depends on it. He doesn't have to run for re-election ever again; he can now be bolder, in deed as well as in thought. And then he'll be our hearththrob again; he will be the change we can believe in.

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DEFICIT ECONOMY |

'OCCUPY WALL STREET' PROTESTERS
IN NEW YORK IN SEPTEMBER

Numbers Don't Tell the Human Story

Obama needs to be inclusive as he attempts to fix the economy and create more jobs

By Arun Maira

"It is the economy, stupid," Bill Clinton memorably said when asked what matters to people while choosing their president. The economy was also supposed to be the principal issue in the US elections this year. But what is 'the economy' and why does the economy matter to people? Many economists would judge the health of the US economy principally by the size of its fiscal deficit, its trade balance, and the rate of growth of GDP. The US economy has been doing very poorly on these counts (*see box*). Indeed, if America's trading partners, especially China and Japan, did not keep investing in it, the US economy would be broke. Therefore economists are rightly alarmed and want political leaders to fix these macro-economic problems.

But to the majority of citizens, it is jobs that matter. They want secure employment and steady incomes. For them anecdotal evidence of job losses among their acquaintances

(and employment numbers) are the most important indicators of the condition of their nation's economy. They want a leader who understands this. Therefore both candidates in the election talked about what they had done in their varied careers to create jobs—and what the other had done to destroy them. While they tried to convince people's minds with numbers, both also tried to reach people's hearts with anecdotes—an ability Clinton has par excellence, and showed again in this campaign. What Clinton knew very well was, "The economy is not the numbers, stupid: It is the people."

The problem with good macro-economic policies is that while they are good for the long run, they can create immediate pain. Budgets must be balanced. However budget balancing by reducing government expenditures can throw people out of work and also reduce their medical and other social benefits. And balancing the budget by increasing taxes depletes wallets too. Similarly, while everyone is expected to be a winner with open markets in the long run,



Photographs by GETTY IMAGES



THE GENERAL MOTORS PLANT IN MICHIGAN, US

BALANCING ACT

Budget tightening has to go hand in hand with job creation

- GDP **\$15.7 trillion**
- PUBLIC DEBT **\$16.2 trillion**
- FISCAL DEFICIT **7% of GDP**
- GDP GROWTH RATE **2%**
- INFLATION **0.6%**
- UNEMPLOYMENT RATE **7.9%**
- AVERAGE HOURLY EARNINGS **\$23.58**

COMPOSITION OF US GDP

- PRIVATE CONSUMPTION **70%**
- GOVERNMENT SPENDING **20%**
- PRIVATE INVESTMENT **20%**
- NET EXPORTS **-10%***

*The US runs a huge trade deficit.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labour Statistics, US Federal Government

there will be winners and losers in the short run when job opportunities shift between countries.

As much as jobs, the question of fairness also weighs on people's minds. Who bears more pain and who gets bailed out when times are tough? Austerity programmes during economic downturns require reduction of social security costs to balance budgets just when bread-earners in families are losing jobs. Often, at the same time, an economic prescription is to give more tax incentives to capitalists to induce them to invest. Thus those who already have less get lesser and those who already have more are given even more.

Ronald Reagan's fixes for the US economy were to stamp out unions, reduce the role of government in the economy, and let the free market find solutions. The economy grew: Though, as longer term historical comparisons now reveal, less than it had in earlier eras. At the same time those reforms created another structural weakness in the economy, that of rising inequality. Since the 1970s, most of the gains of economic growth have gone to the richest 10 per cent and among them, to the very richest 1 per cent of the people. The bottom 10 per cent has become relatively much poorer. Robert Reich writes in *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life* that something must be structurally wrong in the economy when the wealth of only two persons, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, is equal to the wealth of the 100 million poorest Americans.

Egregious inequality is morally repugnant to some, while their opponents label their repugnance as dangerous socialist tendencies that will sap animal spirits in the economy. An increasing body of economic evidence, marshalled by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett in *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* and by

Joseph Stiglitz in *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, shows that inequality impedes economic growth. But this evidence too is dismissed by other economists who viscerally believe that private is good and government is bad.

Though Obama won easily with more Electoral College votes, the popular vote was evenly divided between the two candidates. President Obama, in his acceptance speech, called on Americans to unite as one to build their country. This is much easier said than done because the divisions among Americans are not simply political but ideological too. To unite, people must listen and seek to understand others' points of view. Society is suffering an acute 'attention deficit disorder'. Citizens choose some channels to see, some tweets to follow, and some media to read whose ideological leanings they are aligned with. Thus they get locked into their intellectually and ideologically gated communities. The possibilities and limitations, and costs, of modern communication formats are challenges for leaders. They feel compelled to spend more on communications than their opponents, which is the principal reason for the escalating costs of US elections, with as much as \$6 billion spent in the recent presidential and Congressional elections.

In the ultimate analysis, it is not only how much a politician spends that will determine what people are inspired by. They need a message that touches their hearts. A shared vision of the good society it wants to be and that citizens will unite and strive for, is required to break the US out of the policy logjams it is stuck in.

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