

Party Platforms

Past Practices

Communism and Civil Rights (1960-1964)

During the late 1950s and early 60s, the United States was finally escaping the terrible aftermath of the Second Great War; however, a new enemy was emerging, one with which it would battle for decades to come. Communism presented what was perceived as the most imminent threat to capitalist, and more specifically, American values. This collectively secular, regimented, and faceless machine, and America's quest to combat it, vaulted itself to the forefront of American policy and thus became a central focus of both Democratic and Republican platforms during election years. But if Communism was the country's international focus, the civil rights movement was the premier domestic concern. Demonstrations throughout the nation were gaining momentum, and in 1960, both parties let protesters know that they were taking notice. Despite the combative overtones that each side's platforms had, it should be noted that this was a period during which both sides had very similar goals, and even similar strategies, on a large number of policy issues.

Communism

The "growing vigor and thrust of Communist imperialism"¹ presented the United States with challenges that reached far beyond balancing checkbooks. The threat of nuclear weapons, political oppression, and national sovereignty loomed much larger than simple dollars and cents. American politicians were forced to make tough choices regarding disarmament, the fostering of foreign economic growth, and the protection of political independence in Berlin and Cuba. The incumbent Republican Party firmly believed that the United States had to spearhead the effort to contain communism and in 1960 pledged to stand behind the policies which had "seen no free nation [fall] victim behind the Iron Curtain" since 1954, and voiced its vehement opposition to Chinese membership at the United Nations. It sought to combat the threat of nuclear war with an

¹ Republican Party Platform of 1960.

aggressive pursuit of disarmament, and despite the recent reduction in military expansion under Eisenhower, the GOP also pledged to increase military might, albeit less emphatically than the Democrats.

In its own 1960 platform, in harmony with its conservative counterpart, the Democratic party pledged to oppose the spread of communism to “The Underdeveloped World,”² which referenced specifically “the non-communist nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America,”³ and staunchly opposed the admission of communist China to the United Nations. The party’s strategic response to the Soviets’ nuclear capacity, however, placed focus on increasing the United States’ “deterrent military power,” creating mutually assured destruction for both China and the Soviet Union, and scathingly criticizing “the errors of the past 7 ½ years,” during which Republicans made defense cuts in response to a faltering economy.⁴

Civil Rights

Although the topic of civil rights may have at the time been overshadowed by Communism—it was addressed last in both the 1960 Republican and Democratic platforms—it would play a major role in American politics in the upcoming presidential term. Democrats pledged to secure voting, employment, housing, and education rights for minorities in the upcoming term, while promising to increase enforcement of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960. While the resulting bill, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, was remembered most for being signed by Lyndon B. Johnson -- an act which reportedly spurred LBJ to muse that he had “lost the South for a generation” for the Democratic party⁵ -- it was John F. Kennedy who led the charge in 1963 for its passage, and his zealous support of the bill was ultimately used by LBJ as a means of garnering votes for it following JFK’s death.

² Democratic Party Platform of 1960.

³ Democratic Party Platform of 1960.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nicholas Dawidoff, “Race in the South in the Age of Obama,” The New York Times 10 Feb. 2010
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/magazine/28Alabama-t.html?pagewanted=all>.

Notwithstanding the fact that this momentous legislation would be signed into law by a Democratic president, support for the bill was not divided along party lines; rather, the proverbial line in the sand was drawn between the North and South. As such, it is unsurprising to discover that the 1960 Republican platform featured its own lengthy reaffirmation to civil rights in the areas of “voting...public schools...employment...housing...public facilities...and legislative procedure.”⁶ The strong commitment of both parties to the advancement of civil rights created a backlash. West Virginia senator Harry Byrd -- who openly opposed many civil rights actions, including school desegregation, tried to use this backlash to his advantage. He won electoral votes in the 1960 general election from delegates who were opposed to the civil rights movement.⁷

Fiscal and Social Issues

Throughout both sides’ discourses regarding various social and economic issues, the theme surrounding each seemed to be clear: aid minority groups. Whether it be the elderly, African Americans, or immigrants, both sides emphasized the need to help these groups in areas of housing, education, health care, and the like. However, that is not to say that the two sides were in harmony about everything. Even in 1960, the parties were in disagreement over how health care should be handled. The GOP was encouraging a privatized approach to health care, “a vital distinction between our approach and Democratic proposals.”⁸ In terms of the economy, Republicans had a much brighter outlook of the current situation than Democrats and even encouraged collective bargaining, provided it was free of “racketeering and gangster interference.”⁹ Democrats also voiced their plans to support unions and small businesses, but to an even greater degree than Republicans. Democrats made frequent references to the sorry state of the economy, emphasizing the two recessions that had occurred since 1953 and an economy whose growth had “slowed...to about

⁶ Republican Party Platform of 1960.

⁷ Russell D. Renka, “The 1960 Kennedy v. Nixon Election,” 1 March 2010, http://cstl-cla.semo.edu/renka/ui320-75/presidents/kennedy/1960_election.asp.

⁸ Republican Party Platform of 1960.

⁹ Ibid.

one-third the rate of the Soviet Union,”⁸ citing “a failure of national leadership.”¹⁰

Reaganomics (1980-1988)

By 1980, the Republican Party described the nation as being in “a time of crisis.”¹¹ “Inflation skyrocketed to its highest levels in more than a decade,” “the economy plummeted,” and eight million people were “seeking employment.”¹² The GOP accused “Democratic politicians” as being “the chief architects of our decline,” and nominated Ronald Reagan to right the ship.¹³ The party ran on large tax cuts and bracket reforms (to account for inflation and cost of living increases), reforming the welfare system, and transportation and energy reforms (in response to the energy crisis occurring at the time).¹⁴ It encouraged increasing disposable income for families, so that they might save and invest more capital, which Republicans called “the keys to economic growth.”¹⁵ But most importantly, conservatives believed “inflation and its impact on jobs to be the greatest domestic threat facing our nation today.”¹⁶

In time, following Reagan’s election, these tax and fiscal policies came to be known as “Reaganomics” and have been hailed for the positive results they yielded during his eight years in office, which were marked by a perceived economic growth (due to families retaining more of their income) and a massive halt in inflation and recession.¹⁷ The policies espoused by the Reagan administration and platforms have been GOP standards ever since: it seemed that every Republican candidate in 2012 wanted to prove to the nation that they would be the most like Reagan. Opponents of the policies often criticize the lack of tangible economic growth that

¹⁰ Democratic Party Platform of 1960.

¹¹ Republican Party Platform of 1980.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bruce Bartlett, “Why the GOP Should Stop Invoking Reaganomics,” *The Washington Post* 3 Feb. 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-the-gop-should-stop-invoking-reaganomics/2012/01/31/g1QAQRb6mQ_story.html.

Reaganomics created; however, drafters of the original policies cite the dramatic reduction of inflation as the key to their success and suggest that it is not a viable fix in every economic downturn, including the present one.¹⁸ Still, it is unlikely that Reaganomics will be omitted from any GOP platform in the foreseeable future.

The War on Terror and Economic Recession (2004-2012)

Predictably, based on the pattern that party platforms are reflections of the major political, economic, and social battles of their eras, the platforms since September 11, 2001 have been deeply mired in two areas: national security and the economy. In fact, the Table of Contents of the 2004 Republican platform was extremely brief: “Winning the War on Terror; Ushering in an Ownership Era; Building an Innovative, Competitive Economy; Strengthening Our Communities; and Protecting Our Families.”¹⁹ The Republican “strategy for peace” entailed “taking the fight to the enemy,” eliminating the Taliban’s hold on Afghanistan and Pakistan, halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and “ending the violent regime of Saddam Hussein.”²⁰

Democrats have envisioned a policy dominated by diplomacy rather than force.²¹ This depends on improving intelligence and “preventing Afghanistan and other nations from becoming terrorist havens.”²² Nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation are also encouraged.²³ Criticism of Bush’s skipping of diplomacy and dismissal of the prospect of coalition forces is extensive.²⁴ Though they did not win the 2004 election, the Democrats kept the same policy in 2008, when Obama pledged to withdraw all troops from Iraq and end the war in Afghanistan, while maintaining a focus on diplomatic cooperation and nonproliferation.²⁵ This winding down of foreign conflicts would allow Obama to focus on his new

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Republican Party Platform of 2004.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Democratic Party Platform of 2004.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Democratic Party Platform of 2008.

primary goal: restoring the American Dream.²⁶ This would include reforming the tax code, making housing more affordable and accessible, and renewing strength in education, small businesses, and entrepreneurship.²⁷

Current Practices

The Democratic and Republican Party Platforms of 2012 will not be finalized until the conventions in Charlotte and Tampa Bay. However, voters can infer what these platforms will look like even before they are formally introduced, based on historic platforms, as well as the records of the presumptive nominees. Here is a glimpse of what the platforms will likely include:

Projected Democratic Party Platform of 2012

The incumbent Democratic platform will be easier to predict than its Republican counterpart, largely due to the simple fact that the public has four years of history of the current administration to base its predictions on. Based on current policy and plans from both the Obama administration and the Democratic Party at large, this is a projection of how the 2012 platform will shape up:

Social Issues

Obama's commitment to making headway in the realm of social issues has been the cornerstone of his debut term and will likely see as prominent, if not more so, a role in his upcoming reelection campaign. Touting his record of support for legislation granting equal pay for women -- best exemplified by the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act -- repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and passing the Affordable Care Act, Obama will seek to ride this momentum to another successful term of social reforms.²⁸

Obama, with the support of his party, will seek to preserve government funding for family-planning organizations such as Planned Parenthood.²⁹

Recently, the president made major waves when he publicly supported gay marriage, an announcement Congressman Barney Frank has confirmed

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Equal Rights," 15 Jun. 2012, <http://www.barackobama.com/record/equal-rights?source=issues-nav>.

²⁹ Women's Health, 15 Jun. 2012, <http://www.barackobama.com/record/womens-health?source=issues-nav>.

will be maintained in the upcoming platform, especially in light of the First Circuit of Appeals' recent decision to declare the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional.³⁰

Additionally, Obama will likely continue placing a strong emphasis on improving both elementary and collegiate education systems: making college more accessible and affordable by improving lending for students, increasing community college quality and attendance, and expanding loan forgiveness programs.³¹ He has worked to provide schools with the funding to retain quality teachers and meet the obligations of No Child Left Behind; still, he is also offering some relief from NCLB penalties to schools not meeting the goals through a waiver program.³² He does, however, oppose voucher programs for private schools, though he has recently eased off this position.³³ It should be noted that Obama is actually in favor of the expansion of charter schools, a value which should not be confused with his opposition to voucher programs.

While Obama has largely been coy regarding his stance on total immigration reform, he has committed to securing America's borders and has increased the resources available to do so. Outside of his administration, Democrats have voiced their support of a plan which would allow illegal immigrants to acquire citizenship if they "admit they broke the law, pay taxes and a penalty, [and] learn English."³⁴ They also seek to further improve border security, while making sure that "employers who exploit undocumented workers. . . [are] held accountable."³⁵ Whether Obama plans to include this proposal in his own campaign is yet to be seen; however, his June executive action, which would allow hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants to avoid deportation and obtain work and

³⁰ Sam Stein, "Obama Backs Gay Marriage," Huffington Post 9 May 2012,

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/09/obama-gay-marriage_n_1503245.html.

³¹ "Education," 15 Jun. 2012 <http://www.barackobama.com/record/education?source=primary-nav>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Joel Gehrke, "Obama Relents on DC School Choice Program," The Washington Examiner 18 June 2012

<http://washingtonexaminer.com/article/1355586>.

³⁴ "Immigration Reform," 15 Jun, 2012 http://www.democrats.org/issues/immigration_reform.

³⁵ Ibid.

documentation, may indicate where he will stand on a lasting immigration reform plan.³⁶

Perhaps most central to Obama's social campaign is his advocacy in favor of the Affordable Care Act, affectionately (or derisively, depending upon which side of the fence one lies) nicknamed "Obamacare," which seeks to fundamentally alter the structure and function of the health care system. Proposed changes would include eliminating discrimination against people with pre-existing conditions, adjusting flaws in Medicaid, and instituting a mandate on acquiring health care.³⁷ The recent decision by the Supreme Court to uphold the act in its entirety will certainly help Obama battle stiff Republican resistance to it and will help him to advance the policy should he win reelection.

Economics

While social issues have served as Obama's bread and butter, the current state of the economy and his proposed economic policies may very well serve as the deciding factor in his campaign for reelection. Facing an opponent who runs heavily on his extensive economic background as well as a population that continues to struggle for relief even after Obama's first three-plus years, the incumbent will likely have to make a number of strong commitments on the economic front, while promoting his two straight years of job creation, if he hopes to tip the scales of this subject in his favor.³⁸

On the broad spectrum, the president will likely seek to spread the tax burden more evenly across economic classes. He opposes the idea of saving to right the economy, instead espousing a "spend out of the recession" policy by providing citizens more money to spend in an effort to stimulate the economy. (The method behind the apparently contradictory madness is described as "consuming versus investing" and is explained

³⁶ John H. Cushman Jr. and Julia Preston, "Obama to Permit Young Migrants to Remain in U.S.," The New York Times 15 Jun. 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/16/us/us-to-stop-deporting-some-illegal-immigrants.html?pagewanted=all>.

³⁷ "Health Care That Works for Americans," 18 Jun. 2012 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/healthreform/healthcare-overview>.

³⁸ "Barack Obama's Record on Jobs," 18 Jun. 2012 <http://www.barackobama.com/jobsrecord>.

here.)³⁹ [<http://www.khanacademy.org/finance-economics/core-finance/v/investment-vs-consumption-1>]. Examples of this in his current term include his proposal of the “Buffett Rule,” which seeks to increase the minimum tax rate on individuals making more than \$1 million per year, and his tax cuts for the middle class and small businesses.^{40, 41} For the future, Obama has voiced his support of extending Bush-era tax cuts for the middle class, while allowing them to expire for the wealthy.⁴² Finally, he has proposed a simplification of the tax code, as well as closure of tax loopholes that corporations and the wealthy use to avoid paying their fair share.⁴³

In addition to the economic sector of taxation, Obama has committed himself to weaning the United States off of its dependence on foreign oil, promoting the “Above all Energy Strategy.”⁴⁴ The strategy includes an increase in the production of domestic oil, while improving alternative energy infrastructure, specifically natural gas, solar, nuclear, and biofuel energy.⁴⁵

On an issue that combines social, economic, and political themes, and one on which the president has been very outspoken,⁴⁶ Obama and Democrats as a whole will likely seek to amend the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling. While legislation has been proposed in the past including proposals to require campaigns and corporations to disclose where money is coming

³⁹ David Leonhardt, “To Spend or Save? Trick Question,” *The New York Times* 10 Feb. 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/11/business/economy/11leonhardt.html>.

⁴⁰ Carrie Budoff Brown, “Obama’s ‘Buffett Rule’ to Call for Higher Tax Rate for Millionaires,” *Politico* 17 Sep. 2011 <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0911/63756.html>.

⁴¹ Mark S. Smith, “Obama Signs Payroll Tax Cut Extension Into Law,” *The Huffington Post* 22 Feb. 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/22/obama-signs-payroll-tax-cut-extension_n_1295208.html.

⁴² Julie Pace, “Obama: Bush Tax Cuts For Wealthy Will Not Be Extended, Period,” *The Huffington Post* 6 Jun. 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/06/obama-bush-tax-cuts-will-n_1574165.html.

⁴³ “Taxes,” 18 Jun. 2012 <http://www.barackobama.com/record/taxes?source=issues-nav>.

⁴⁴ “President Obama’s “all of the above” approach to cutting gas prices,” 19 Jun. 2012 <http://www.barackobama.com/energy-info>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Jesse Lee, “President Obama on Citizens United: “Imagine the Power This Will Give Special Interests Over Politicians,” *The White House Blog* 26 July 2010 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/07/26/president-obama-citizens-united-imagine-power-will-give-special-interests-over-polit>.

from and going to and a ban on the influence of foreign citizens and companies in elections, no bill has managed to escape Congress.⁴⁷ The issue remains highly contentious and is likely to play a role in the upcoming election, both at the White House and the Capitol Building.

National Defense and Foreign Policy

President Obama's successful execution of his promise to return all American troops from Iraq and his crucial leadership in the termination of Osama bin Laden could arguably be considered the most universally heralded achievements of his first term. These momentous accomplishments have provided a framework for America's exit from Afghanistan after over a decade of fighting, and Obama has pledged to end the combat mission in Afghanistan by the end of 2014.⁴⁸ In addition to bringing veterans home, Obama has also improved conditions for them once they return, including giving tax credits to businesses that hire veterans.⁴⁹

For the future, the president will likely campaign on a continued commitment to a stable Middle East, while minimizing American boots on the ground overseas. This includes recommitting American support to Israel and cooperating with other nations, as well as multinational organizations such as the United Nations, to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Obama has voiced his intent to shift foreign policy focus from Europe and the Middle East to Asia.⁵¹

Projected Republican Party Platform of 2012

⁴⁷ Paul Blumenthal, "Citizens United Amendment Urged by Grassroots, Federal Lawmakers," *The Huffington Post* 18 Apr. 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/18/citizens-united-amendment-grassroots-movement_n_1435369.html.

⁴⁸ "National Security," 19 Jun. 2012 <http://www.barackobama.com/record/national-security?source=issues-nav>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Kirit Radia, "Obama Pivots Foreign Policy Focus From Europe, Wars to East Asia," *ABC News* 11 Nov 2011 <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/11/obama-pivots-foreign-policy-focus-from-europe-wars-to-east-asia/>.

With Romney providing more issue overlap with Obama than Republicans as a whole with Democrats, here are the nominee and party's presumptive platforms:

Social Issues

While there is very little that Republicans and Democrats agree on 100 percent of the time, the distinction between the two parties is perhaps most clearly drawn in their starkly contrasting stances on pressing social issues. The prospect of government-run health care has very little to do with gay rights and the definition of marriage (outside of the shared health care benefits that married couples receive, which same-sex couples are seeking to receive as well), and both parties tend to take more drastic positions to appeal to their "base." Therefore, the social aspect of election often leaves political moderates without a party they call "home" on many issues.

According to his Web site, "Mitt Romney is pro-life...he believes that the right next step is for the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*,"⁵² an action which would allow states to enact their own policies regarding abortion, "and not have them dictated by judicial mandate."⁵³ In addition, Romney opposes the use of federal funding to support abortions and family planning organizations and supports the Hyde Amendment, which formally restricts federal funds for abortions.⁵⁴

Romney is also a supporter of the Defense of Marriage Act and would support a constitutional amendment "defining marriage as between one man and one woman."⁵⁵ He does, however, believe "it's fine for gay couples to adopt children," and also is in favor of civil unions for the purpose of couples receiving "domestic partnership benefits, hospital visitation rights and the like."⁵⁶

Unsurprisingly, the GOP very succinctly has described their view on health care as follows: "We oppose government-run health care, which won't

⁵² "Values," 19 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/values>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Tovia Smith, "Romney's Views on Gay Marriage: Also Evolving?" *National Public Radio* 10 May 2012 <http://www.npr.org/2012/05/10/152431577/romneys-views-on-gay-marriage-also-evolving>.

protect the physician-patient relationship, won't promote competition, and won't promote health care quality and choice."⁵⁷ Individually, Romney has clearly stated that, since the Affordable Care Act escaped the Supreme Court intact, his first order of business as president would be to "work with Congress to repeal the full legislation as quickly as possible."⁵⁸ Romney, despite speculation that MassHealth -- a project which he supported during his time as governor of Massachusetts -- served as the framework for the ACA, has said that he would rather leave health care to the states and similarly allow individuals the right to choose where they get health insurance and whether they want to get it at all for that matter.⁵⁹ Still, Romney would seek to end "discrimination against individuals with pre-existing conditions who maintain continuous coverage."⁶⁰

Tangential to all three of these topics is the role of the judiciary in determining what is and what is not constitutional with respect to abortion, marriage, health care, and a host of other contentious campaign talking points. As they so often do in their platforms and campaigns, Republicans have made a point to promise that they will commit to appointing "true conservatives" to open judicial seats, who will "demonstrate fidelity to the U.S. Constitution."⁶¹ Just as George W. Bush pledged to nominate Supreme Court justices like [Antonin] Scalia and [Clarence] Thomas during his 2000 campaign, Romney has said he will "nominate judges in the mold of Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Scalia, Thomas, and Alito."⁶² Whether any justices will retire in the coming term is hazy, but with the court in its current state often ruling 5-4 in favor of conservatives, the replacement of a liberal Justice Breyer or Ginsburg with a Romney nominee would presumably cement the court as a conservative-leaning body, a nightmare situation for liberals.

⁵⁷ "Our Party," 8/2/2012 <http://gop.com/our-party/>.

⁵⁸ "Health Care," 19 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/health-care>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Our Party," 8/2/2012 <http://gop.com/our-party/>.

⁶² "Courts & The Constitution," 19 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/courts-constitution>.

As far as immigration is concerned, Romney is relatively clear on his stance. He seeks to attract “the best and brightest” immigrants to the nation through permanent residency, while reducing the benefits of illegal immigration. In addition to increasing border security, his plan includes implementing programs to prevent businesses from exploiting illegal workers, preventing illegals from “cut[ting] the line” in front of legal candidates, and opposing amnesty.⁶³

In addition to his marginal overlap with Obama on issues of gay marriage and health care, Romney is also in agreeance with the president on the expansion of charter school programs.⁶⁴ Although he is careful not to use the word “voucher” to describe his plans, he does promote what has been described as “a voucher-like system” which would “expand parental choice in an unprecedented way.”⁶⁵ But unlike the president, Romney plans to move away from the “school accountability” measures of No Child Left Behind, instead opting for a “market-based approach” that would encourage schools to compete in an effort to get the best students to attend their institution.⁶⁶

Economics

If nothing else, Romney campaigns as a businessman with the tools to right the economic ship. Touting his background as a venture capitalist with Bain Capital where he moved through the ranks to turn a start-up consulting firm into a “wildly successful” corporation, Romney believes that his fiscal aptitude is superior to that of his opponent. His plan varies significantly from Obama’s, in almost all of the key facets of the platform.

The most basic of all principles in economic discussion is determining where the money is coming from and where it is going. Romney believes

⁶³ “Immigration,” 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/immigration>.

⁶⁴ Trip Gabriel, “Romney, Dipping Into Education, Pushes School Choice,” *The New York Times*, 23 May 2012 <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/23/romney-dipping-into-education-pushes-school-choice/>.

⁶⁵ Trip Gabriel, “Vouchers Unspoken, Romney Hails School Choice,” 11 Jun. 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/12/us/politics/in-romneys-voucher-education-policy-a-return-to-gop-roots.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

an improvement in intake lies with improving America's standing in the global economy. He places an emphasis on establishing more trade agreements to expand the market, citing that George W. Bush's 11 trade agreements "led to the creation of 5.4 million jobs and support a total of nearly 18 million jobs."⁶⁷ This includes reducing both individual and corporate tax rates, a "save out of the recession" scheme that contrasts with Obama's approach. He also feels that improving the economy goes past monetary measurements, citing a need to better "human capital." This entails optimizing worker retraining programs, in addition to attracting promising foreigners to start businesses in the United States.⁶⁸

Presently, Romney states that too much money is dedicated to the bureaucracy. His solution: "Smaller, simpler, smarter government."⁶⁹ He plans to cut federal spending to 20 percent of gross domestic product, repeal Obamacare, and reduce federal aid.⁷⁰ In addition, proposed Social Security reforms include a gradual increase in the retirement age "to account for increases in longevity," and reducing benefits "for those with higher incomes."⁷¹

While Romney agrees with Obama that the nation needs to reduce its dependence on foreign oil, his strategy for doing so differs and admittedly seems less focused. What is clear is that Romney favors deregulation of the energy industry and a focus on harnessing domestic natural resources, which include both green and carbon-based sources.⁷²

National Defense and Foreign Policy

One of Romney's largest criticisms of the current administration is that it has significantly cut the budget of "a military in serious need of

⁶⁷ "Trade," 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/trade>.

⁶⁸ "Human Capital," 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/human-capital>.

⁶⁹ "Spending," 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/spending>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Social Security," 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/social-security>.

⁷² "Energy," 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/energy>.

modernization.”⁷³ To counter this, Romney plans to begin the modernization process, which will require “reversing Obama-era defense cuts” and optimizing a Department of Defense staff that “is ripe for being pared.”⁷⁴ Perceived benefits include the prevention of future wars and also increased security and reliability for troops.⁷⁵

In terms of specific foreign policy partnerships, the continuing mission in Afghanistan will remain a hot topic in the upcoming election. Romney has committed to basing troop withdrawal on “conditions on the ground” as opposed to imposed deadlines.⁷⁶ His plan will also rely heavily on getting Afghanistan and Pakistan to do their part to combat al Qaeda at both the political and military levels.⁷⁷

Regarding the vital strategic ally of Israel, “Mitt’s policy will differ sharply from President Obama’s.”⁷⁸ Romney’s policy revolves around discouraging anti-Israeli sentiments in the Middle East, specifically Turkey and Egypt.⁷⁹ It also emphasizes the need to exact as much pressure on Palestine as Israel in regards to facilitating peace talks, while discouraging and condemning the inclusion of Hamas in Palestinian politics.⁸⁰

On the Middle East as a whole, Romney has emphasized his opposition to a nuclear Iran. To underscore this position, he proposes building off of the sanctions imposed by George W. Bush and Obama on both the economic and diplomatic fronts, while simultaneously promoting defense by creating a missile defense shield, which would include building on the dialogue that President Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin have maintained regarding such plans.⁸¹

⁷³ “National Defense,” 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/national-defense>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Afghanistan & Pakistan,” 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/afghanistan-pakistan>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Israel,” 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/israel>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Iran,” 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/iran>.

Romney also provides a preliminary plan regarding Asia, specifically China. His policy involves containing China, implementing policies that prevent it “from attempting to intimidate or dominate neighboring states.”⁸² To do so, Romney encourages a strong military presence in the Pacific to prevent Chinese aggression, while strengthening ties with Asian allies.⁸³ One element of this cooperation would be the creation of the “Reagan Economic Zone,” a regional free trade agreement which would encourage China to participate, but would function without it, easing the imbalance of trade in the area and “limiting China’s ability to coerce other countries.”⁸⁴

Snapshot of America

When attempting to assess the political, economic, and social concerns most pertinent to a time period, one needs to look no further than each party’s political platforms from each election cycle. Within the text of each platform lies a prioritized catalog of the significant issues of the time, updated every four years -- a snapshot of each era, if you will. What is intriguing about each era’s platform is observing whether each party’s campaign influenced movements of the future or conformed to the popular consensus of the nation. In other words, did the platform lead, or did it follow?

To cite a recent example of policy following protest, in anticipation of his incumbent run in the 2012 election, President Obama voiced his support of same-sex marriage. The first president to do so, Obama is also addressing the changing public opinion of the nation (and especially that of a significant part of his constituency, youths and liberals, who statistically hold a much more favorable view of gay rights than older and more conservative citizens)⁸⁵ and tailoring his policy to mirror that of his supporters. How closely his policy on the matter will mirror their opinions

⁸² “China & East Asia,” 20 Jun. 2012 <http://www.mittromney.com/issues/china-east-asia>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ “Poll: Age and Partisanship Continue to Mark Divide Over Gay Marriage,” *The New York Times* 14 May 2012 <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/14/poll-age-and-partisanship-mark-divide-over-gay-marriage/>.

and desires in the upcoming term is still up in the air, but the fact that he is the first president to openly reveal his support for gay marriage is a testament to the phenomenon that public opinion can be a vital factor in how a political platform is shaped.

But in some cases, candidates serve as trailblazers, supporting and fostering policy that is poorly received initially but gradually comes to be accepted. Admittedly, this happens less frequently than opinion-driven policy, though it may be a good sign that generally politicians' policies are designed to appease the nation's sentiments as a whole. Still, there are examples that exist, one of which is the initial introduction of civil rights in the 1960s. Despite passage of laws compelling desegregation and equality between races, these changes were met with heavy resistance, even in the North. Riots erupted in northern cities such as Boston in an attempt to resist busing of minority students and the desegregation of schools. In response, the government countered by sending National Guard corps across the country to ensure the desegregation was completed. As is clear by the state of the nation today, these policies gradually came to be accepted by the population until the value of equality between races became a canonized symbol of American society.

In other cases, government policies can unify and divide the American public at the same time. One example that may fit this description is the conflict in Afghanistan – although many wars, including Vietnam and even the World Wars, fall into the same category. In 2001, shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center occurred, a relatively green President Bush made a rallying call to the nation: to unite against terrorism. He aggressively pursued the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan and “his job approval reached 86% by late September [2001].”⁸⁶ Support for the war in Afghanistan slowly declined, however, and less than a year after the start of the war, public support for Bush's foreign policy dropped 24 points.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ “Bush and Public Opinion,” Pew Research Center 18 Dec. 2008 <http://www.people-press.org/2008/12/18/bush-and-public-opinion/>.

⁸⁷ “Americans and Europeans Differ Widely on Foreign Policy Issues,” Pew Research Center 17 April 2002 <http://www.pewglobal.org/2002/04/17/americans-and-europeans-differ-widely-on-foreign-policy-issues/>.

Upon his decision to invade Iraq, however, his approval ratings jumped from the mid-50s to nearly 75 percent.⁸⁸ But again, the honeymoon was short lived, and by the 2004 election, Bush's approval rating had bottomed out at around 45 percent.⁸⁹ These recent examples bear striking resemblances to the sentiments expressed about war in general,⁹⁰ and set the stage for a consistent pattern. Support for military action is generally high at the inception of a conflict -- just consider the discrepancy in the prevalence of yellow "Support our Troops" ribbon stickers and magnets in 2003 versus 2012 -- and wanes as the war persists. Discontent with war is then reflected in platforms that occur in the middle of conflict. One need only look at Obama's platform in 2008, and perhaps more importantly, at the 2012 Republican candidates' opinions on Afghanistan. In 2008, Obama promised to shift focus to Afghanistan by ending the war in Iraq, which resulted in the termination of the combat mission there.⁹¹ After refocusing on Afghanistan, Obama gave the American public what it so badly desired: an end date to the conflict, specifically the end of 2014. In 2012, even the Republicans -- a group which has favored the war until recently⁹² -- are backing off from the mission: Newt Gingrich declared that the wars in the region are "counterproductive,"⁹³ and Rick Santorum noted that the country needs to "decide to get out and probably get out sooner given the president's decision to get out in 2014."⁹⁴ Elections depend on winning the approval of the public; as such, when popular support -- or in

⁸⁸ "Bush and Public Opinion," Pew Research Center 18 Dec. 2008 <http://www.people-press.org/2008/12/18/bush-and-public-opinion/>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Joseph Carroll, "The Iraq-Vietnam Comparison," Gallup Poll 15 Jun. 2004 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/11998/iraqvietnam-comparison.aspx>.

⁹¹ John McCain and Barack Obama, "McCain and Obama on Afghanistan," Time 17 Jul. 2008 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1823945,00.html>.

⁹² John Cohen and Scott Wilson, "Post-ABC News Poll Shows Drop in Republican Support for Afghan War," The Washington Post 12 Apr. 2012 http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/post-abc-news-poll-shows-drop-in-republican-support-for-afghan-war/2012/04/11/gIQAfl5oBT_story.html.

⁹³ "'Face the Nation' Transcript: March 11, 2012," CBS News 11 Mar. 2012 http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3460_162-57395026/face-the-nation-transcript-march-11-2012/?pageNum=2&tag=contentMain:contentBody.

⁹⁴ Luke Johnson, "Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum Question Afghan Mission Following Massacre," The Huffington Post 12 Mar. 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/12/gop-afghanistan-massacre_n_1339269.html.

this case, dissent -- for a cause rises high enough, parties must adjust their platforms to give themselves a chance to win the race resulting in a popularly influenced platform.

Another nuance of the lead versus follow debate is the creation of backlash movements. Just because a platform leads the nation, the implication is not necessarily that it is leading the nation in the direction that the platform intended. Indeed, a shining example of this is the response to the 1964 platform on Vietnam. While Vietnam itself was hardly mentioned specifically, the Democrats had taken a hardline stance on the containment of communism in their 1964 platform. As a result, President Johnson escalated the conflict to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam, an action which would spark protests that would gain tremendous momentum over the four years of his presidency. Over Johnson's encouragement of continuity and perseverance in the war, the 1968 Democrats were beginning to acquiesce to the pressure, stating in that year's platform (amidst violent anti-Vietnam protests outside of the convention) that in the future, "U.S. military and economic assistance in Asia will be selective," and that following the war there would be "no continued military presence and no role in Vietnamese affairs."⁹⁵ Both parties committed to "progressive de-Americanization of the war."⁹⁶ Although there were certainly other variables acting on American policy on the war, it is equally evident that from 1964 to 1968, the American public had emphatically responded to the first platform in a way that significantly altered the second, from a heavy-handed policy of intervention and containment, to one of de-Americanization abroad, and a renewed focus on domestic issues.

Key Players/Do these players follow through?

A popular view to hold, especially in the present gloom-inducing state of American politics, is that presidential candidates very seldom follow through on their campaign and platform promises and that they are hollow,

⁹⁵ Democratic Party Platform of 1968.

⁹⁶ Republican Party Platform of 1968.

rhetorical ploys used to gather support for the general election, and once in office the president will cater to his “true constituents” and leave the rest of the population at the altar clutching empty vows. However, studies show that most presidents make a concerted effort to enact the policies they commit to in the primary and general elections. Yet, even though there are a number of fallacies in regards to the perception that presidents discard their promises upon election, it remains a prevalent view for many. So, why do people often feel that presidents never follow through?

First, the president does not have *carte blanche* to pass whatever policy he sees fit. He must collaborate with Congress in order to advance his legislation. Oftentimes, this becomes a battle, even if he is working with a “friendly” Congress, as only 40 members of the opposition party are theoretically required in the Senate to stall progress on a bill due to current filibuster rules. Thus, even if attempts are being made by the president to fulfill his campaign promises, it may appear to the public that he is simply failing to act on them; when in reality, they are simply stalled in Congress. Studies have suggested that “the main reason some pledges are not redeemed is congressional opposition, not presidential flip-flopping.”^{97,98}

A perfect example of this would be George H.W. Bush, who during his speech accepting the Republican nomination at the 1988 RNC famously said, “Read my lips: no new taxes.” But in 1990, he “renege[d] on his campaign promise not to raise taxes and agreed to an increase as part of a compromise with Congress.”⁹⁹ Of course, what is often disregarded is that the concession came only after a bitter struggle between Bush and Congress, which ultimately resulted in a three-day government shutdown (though the shutdown occurred over a three-day holiday weekend).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Jonathan Bernstein, “Campaign Promises,” *Washington Monthly* Jan./Feb. 2012

http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/january_february_2012/features/campaign_promises034471.php.

⁹⁸ Ezra Klein, “Presidents Keep Their Campaign Promises,” *The Washington Post* 20 Jan. 2012

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/presidents-keep-their-campaign-promises/2011/08/25/gIQAwCA9DQ_blog.html.

⁹⁹ James Gerstenzang and Art Pine, “Made a Mistake With Tax Hike in 1990, Bush Says,” *The Los Angeles Times* 4 Mar. 1992 http://articles.latimes.com/1992-03-04/news/mn-3132_1_tax-increase.

¹⁰⁰ James Risén, “Shutdown Would Cost More Than Business as Usual: Budget: A 1990 study found that a three-day closing of the federal government could be \$600 million more expensive than staying open,” *The*

This phenomenon brings up a point about basic human nature: failure to keep a promise receives “a lot more attention than do the ones that are redeemed.”¹⁰¹ Reneging on a promise is far more newsworthy than a kept promise, perhaps because of the perception that promises are meant to be kept. Thus, when the president follows through, he was simply doing what was expected of him. This discrepancy in both reaction and publicity give the appearance that presidents break far more promises than they keep, when in reality, “presidents invariably try to carry out their promises.”^{102, 103} Why is this important? Because for the most part, what candidates promise on the campaign trail is very representative of what they will try to do if they are elected.

Still, the pessimistic view is occasionally right, and the president flat-out discards some of his campaign promises. But “high profile broken pledges like George H.W. Bush’s are the exception, not the rule.”¹⁰⁴ One broken campaign promise which has received a large share of recent publicity is President Obama’s pledge to close the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility. But in 2011, the president signed an executive order that would “create a formal system of indefinite detention” at the facility and would allow military trials to resume.¹⁰⁵ Reasons given for the abandonment are varied, from a preoccupation with advancing his health care policy, to desertion by Congressional Democrats, to a perception that Obama simply

Los Angeles Times 13 Nov. 1995 http://articles.latimes.com/1995-11-13/news/mn-2631_1_government-shutdown.

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Bernstein, “Campaign Promises,” Washington Monthly Jan./Feb. 2012 http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/january_february_2012/features/campaign_promises034471.php.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ezra Klein, “Presidents Keep Their Campaign Promises,” The Washington Post 20 Jan. 2012 http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/presidents-keep-their-campaign-promises/2011/08/25/gIQAwCA9DQ_blog.html.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Bernstein, “Campaign Promises,” Washington Monthly Jan./Feb. 2012 http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/january_february_2012/features/campaign_promises034471.php.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Finn and Anne E. Kornblut, “Obama Creates Indefinite Detention System for Prisoners at Guantanamo Bay,” The Washington Post 8 Mar. 2011 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/07/AR2011030704871.html?hpid=topnews&sid=ST2011030705000>.

didn't push Congress hard enough.¹⁰⁶ But to reinforce the preceding notion, while it is certainly an about-face from his previous stance, failure to close Gitmo is the exception to Obama's presidency, not the rule.

In a way, Obama's presidency serves as a contemporary microcosm of presidential tendency: according to Politifact's "Obameter," only 14 percent of Obama's specific campaign promises have been rated as "broken promises," compared to 37 percent of them being rated as "promises kept."¹⁰⁷ A quarter of his promises have ended in a compromise or have been stalled -- another example of how Congress can significantly alter a president's agenda -- and the remaining quarter remain "in the works."¹⁰⁸ Put simply, the president has attempted to act on, or is planning to act on, 86 percent of his promises in the manner that he said he would.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Finn and Anne E. Kornblut, "Guantanamo Bay: Why Obama Hasn't Fulfilled His Promise to Close the Facility," *The Washington Post* 23 Apr. 2011 http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/guantanamo-bay-how-the-white-house-lost-the-fight-to-close-it/2011/04/14/AFTxR5XE_story.html.

¹⁰⁷ "The Obameter: Tracking Obama's Campaign Promises," *Politifact* 21 Jun. 2012 <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.