

Linkage Politics in U.S. Presidential Election and American Foreign Policy toward Asia-Pacific Region

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Abstract

In the past, the two-party politics in the United States has been known for its disagreements in domestic policy and consensus in foreign policy. Nevertheless, with the structural differences in the electoral politics, we find the two parties also approach foreign policy in different manners, both in the general understanding of international relations and in the nuanced policies reflecting domestic constituents' preferences.

This paper looks at the factors that contributed to Barack Obama's successful re-election bid and how a new coalition of liberals, minorities, women, and disadvantaged groups has emerged within the Democratic Party that will have implications for its foreign policy formulation and implementation. We argue that the linkage politics is the one that should receive greater attention in our efforts to appreciate Obama's foreign policy of the second term in general and towards Asia in particular.

Keywords: Barack Obama, Electoral Lock, Coalition of Minorities, Linkage Politics, Multilateralism

I. Introduction

U.S. President Barack Obama won re-election over Republican challenger Mitt Romney with close popular support but a decisive advantage in the electoral college votes on November 6, 2012. With his two predecessors already serving two consecutive terms, this marks the second time in American history that three presidents in a row have won a re-election campaign. Obviously, the prediction that when the unemployment rate went over 7.4%, no sitting president could return to office has been rejected. If the lackluster economy and high unemployment rate should have torpedoed Obama's attempt for a second term, he could not claim that voters actually approved of his economic performance. In other words, Obama won despite the poor state of U.S. economy. To use Bill Clinton's slogan in reverse, "it is not the economy, stupid!"

How do we explain Obama's victory? What are the implications for his overall policy orientation in the second term? How will Asia be configured in the grand scheme of U.S. foreign policy? If diplomacy is the extension of domestic politics, we should look into the factors that contributed to Obama's successful re-election and see whether there are links to his foreign policy approach in general, and towards Asia in particular.

II. Factors Contributing to Obama's Re-election

In the aftermath of a close competition that went in Obama's favor at the end, the following factors have been cited as contributing factors in Romney's defeat. Some of these are structural factors, some have historical relevance, and some are factors beyond control.

1. Electoral Advantage

The electoral college, once considered a Republican lock in the 1980s, now looks more favorable to the Democratic Party.¹ Even though the South, the Plains states, and the Mountain West are solidly Republican, the only big prize in these regions is Texas's 38 electoral votes. The Democratic Party has dominated the Pacific Coast and the Northeast, as well as maintaining advantage in the upper Midwest. California (55), New York (29), Pennsylvania (20), and Illinois (20) have voted Democrat consistently since 1992. A few swing states, such as Ohio (19), Colorado (9), New Mexico (5), Iowa (6), and Nevada (5), have begun a trend toward the Democratic Party in the last two elections. Florida (29) remains very competitive and the once Republican strong-holds of Virginia (13) and North Carolina (15) are no longer money in the bag for the Republicans.

Obama won a close race in the important swing states for a variety of reasons. In Ohio, he saved the auto industry with the bailout and created enough jobs to make the state's unemployment rate about half a percentage point lower than the national average. In Colorado and Nevada, the rising number of Hispanic voters separated him from Romney. The spread of federal government workers and their families into Virginia as well as the increase of African-Americans in this commonwealth have made the state competitive enough that Obama was able to squeeze out two victories in a row for the Democratic Party after more than forty years of Republican dominance.

In short, the Democratic Party begins a presidential race with

1. Dan Balz, "Republicans today can learn lessons from the Democrats' past. But will they?" *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/can-republicans-learn-from-the-democrats/2013/03/22/ed980f40-9312-11e2-ba5b-550c7abf6384_story.html>.

the support of more than 200 electoral college votes and simply needs to focus on a few swing states to cross the threshold of 270 and claim victory.² The Republican presidential candidate, on the other hand, starts his campaign in a distinctively disadvantaged position in the electoral college votes and a victory probably requires that all the cards fall into the right places.

2. Demographic Shift

Such a structural disadvantage has been further compounded by the evolving demographic change that witnesses the continuing decline in the proportion of the Caucasian population, which now constitutes the core of the Republican supporters. The Democratic Party always has an advantage among the African-American (over 90%) and Hispanic (60-70%) voters. The Republican Party appears to have given up on courting African-American votes. George W. Bush put together a concerted effort to win Latino support and got more than 40% of the votes from this group in 2004. Nevertheless, the number went back to 30% in the last two elections.

Asians used to lend greater support to the Republican Party. Nevertheless, they have moved towards the Democratic Party since 1992. That year, 30% of this ethnic group voted for Bill Clinton. Four years later, the proportion became 40%. In 2000, for the first time in history, their votes for the Democratic Party surpassed those for the Republican Party. Over 60% of Asians voted for Obama in 2008, and the figure became a direct opposite of that in 1992 when 73% of Asians chose Obama, compared to 27% for Romney. This

2. Nate Silver, "As Nation and Parties Change, Republicans Are at an Electoral College Disadvantage," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2012, <<http://five-thirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/as-nation-and-parties-change-republicans-are-at-an-electoral-college-disadvantage/>>.

figure is even higher than the Latino support for Obama.³

Both Hispanics and Asians are the fastest growing populations in America, the former with the pure number and the latter with the percentage. Such a demographic shift will eventually create a majority/minority (Caucasians becoming a minority in overall numbers) society by the middle of this century. If this trend continues and the support of the minority groups for the Democratic Party is not reversed, the Republican Party may become a permanent opposition party. Before that becomes a reality, the Republican Party needs to design a strategy to win back voters of these two groups if it intends to win an election at the national level.

Another structural disadvantage is the existence of a gender gap, *i.e.*, the Democratic Party always wins a higher percentage of support from female voters than their male counterparts. If the Democrats can split the male votes, they are destined to win. The Republican Party, on the other hand, needs to win greater margin of difference in the male votes to compensate for its disadvantage in the female votes in order to claim the victory. In 2008, 13% more women voted for the Democratic Party than the Republican Party while the advantage for men is only 1%. Obama lost the male votes by 8% to Romney but maintained the traditional Democratic advantage by outgaining his Republican rival by 12% in the female votes.⁴ This gender gap

3. Callum Borchers & Alan Wirzbicki, "Asian Americans back Obama overwhelmingly: Support by 73% surpasses that of Latinos, women," *The Boston Globe*, November 9, 2012, <<http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2012/11/09/asian-americans-voted-more-heavily-for-barack-obama-than/gdcKynV3Hq3OgSeOINEhHM/story.html>>; Shane Goldmacher, "Obama Overwhelmingly Won Asian-American Vote," *National Journal*, November 8, 2012, <<http://www.nationaljournal.com/politics/obama-overwhelmingly-won-asian-american-vote-20121108>>.

is bad news for the Republicans because women outnumber men in America as they simply live longer.

A similar structural problem is the appeal of the Democratic Party in the young electorate.⁵ Here, the Republican Party is losing by a ratio of 1 to 2. The good news is that young people usually do not turn out to vote as much as their older counterparts. The bad news is that loyalty to a party and continuing support of it for many voters go a long way before a change of heart takes place.

3. A Historical Perspective

For historical evidence, if no president since the Great Depression could win re-election when the unemployment rate exceeded 7.4%, Obama should have been defeated with a jobless rate hovering around 8%.⁶ The reality is that only two incumbents fit this scenario, Gerald Ford (7.7%) in 1976 and Jimmy Carter (7.5%) in 1980. In addition, George Bush lost a re-election bid in 1992 with a high unemployment rate of 7.3%, which is slightly below the aforementioned threshold. Nevertheless, a 7.4% jobless rate did not prevent Ronald Reagan from winning a second term in 1984. Other incumbents who were re-elected during this period had an unemployment rate between 5.1% and 5.6% just one month before the election. If a personally popular Reagan could get re-elected with a 7.4% unemployment rate, it is

4. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Gender Gap in 2012 Vote Is Largest in Gallup's History," *Gallup*, November 9, 2012, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/158588/gender-gap-2012-vote-largest-gallup-history.aspx>>.

5. Kevin Robillard, "Election 2012: Study: Youth vote was decisive," *Politico*, November 7, 2012, <<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83510.html>>.

6. Chris Cillizza, "President Obama's troubling trend line on jobs," *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/president-obamas-troubling-tend-line-on-jobs/2012/07/06/gJQAWDHhRW_blog.html>.

not unimaginable that a somewhat appealing Obama could duplicate the feat with the rate of 7.9%.

The jobless rate of 7.9% in October 2012 was the highest for a president running for re-election since the depression. Yet, Obama was able to overcome this curse and reject the prediction that the economy was going to be the Achilles's heel for him. In addition, the average debt for American people as the percentage of GDP rose the fastest during Obama's administration since Herbert Hoover was president in the early 1930s. The number for those days was a historical high of 27% annually. Obama's figure of 10.8% in his first four years came in second. Again, such a poor performance did not send him packing.

Obama's victory, however, confirmed the validity of another factor in assessing the U.S. presidential election, *i.e.*, a president can win re-election easily if he is not challenged in his own party's primary. If there are challengers, he will lose the re-election bid, even if he survives the primary and gains the nomination.⁷ Sometimes, the existence of challengers will prompt the incumbent to withdraw from the race.

George Bush encountered the ambush of political commentator Pat Buchanan in 1992. Senator Edward Kennedy entered the primary against Carter when the latter was seeking re-election in 1980. Gerald Ford's nomination was challenged by Governor Reagan of California in 1976. In 1968, President Johnson faced multiple credible challengers, including Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota and former Attorney

7. Linton Weeks, "The Unthinkable: A Democratic Challenge to Obama," *National Public Radio (NPR)*, April 22, 2010, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125662980>>.

General Robert Kennedy.

All three (four, if you add Johnson) presidents did not win a second term. After realizing the anti-Vietnam War protest had become increasingly vocal and had gained momentum, Johnson, who won the New Hampshire primary over McCarthy with a 49% to 42% margin, was not sure he could win the nomination and announced his withdrawal at the end of March.

Ford carried the baggage of Watergate and also had the distinction of being the first non-elected president in U.S. history, which already made his nomination a difficult path. A strong challenge by Reagan compounded his problems. Even though he won the nomination at the National Convention, Ford did not recover enough for the general election and lost to Carter.

An economic recession and the presence of stagflation gave Edward Kenney the pretext to challenge a weakened incumbent in Carter. Even though Kennedy failed to unseat Carter, his refusal to drop out of the race until the National Convention seriously damaged Carter's campaign, and the latter lost badly to Reagan in the 1980 presidential election.

Bush also suffered from a poor economy when he was running for re-election in 1992. In addition, he violated his "Read my lips, no new taxes" pledge made in his 1988 campaign. These prompted the conservative candidate Pat Buchanan to make a good showing in the New Hampshire primary when he garnered 37% of the votes, compared to 53% for Bush. The president was forced to move to the right to block Buchanan's appeal, which cost him the moderate and independent votes. He was defeated easily by Clinton in a three-man race in 1992.

Over the past fifty years, only Nixon has faced token challenge in the primaries and gone on to win the (1972) presidential election. Other incumbents, such as Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush, without facing challenges in the primaries, easily defeated their opponents and won re-election. If this is an important reference for 2012 race, Obama's victory could have been expected when no Democratic politician was willing to put up a fight.

4. Opponent's Blunders

As to the factors that are uncontrollable, some could be prevented and one could not be prevented. Romney's 47% talk, part of his speech to a private fund-raising event that was secretly recorded and leaked by *Mother Jones*, could have been prevented. In this speech given in Boca Raton, Florida, Romney made the following remarks:

There are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what. All right, there are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you name it. That that's an entitlement. And the government should give it to them. And they will vote for this president no matter what... These are people who pay no income tax. Forty-seven percent of Americans pay no income tax... And so my job is not to worry about those people—I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.⁸

8. Mojo News Team, "Full Transcript of the Mitt Romney Secret Video," *Mother Jones*, September 19, 2012, <<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/full-transcript-mitt-romney-secret-video>>.

These remarks were considered arrogant and insensitive. After all, there are Americans who would like to pay tax if only they could enter the minimum tax bracket. They simply do not earn enough to pay tax. A candidate simply needs to be careful in playing the game of pitting one group against the other to win support. Music to the ears of one bloc of voters can be noise to the ears of other blocs. The 47% speech was divisive, and, when it came from a candidate that is a billionaire himself, voters of this bloc and others simply felt that Romney was totally out of touch with ordinary Americans and knew only the lives of the upper class with no empathy for the plight of lower classes.⁹

New York Times columnist David Brooks, a moderate Republican pointed out several of Romney's problems in his article entitled "Thurston Howell Romney," appearing on September 17, 2012.¹⁰ First, Romney "really doesn't know much about the country he inhabits." Brooks explained that veterans, students, and senior citizens on Social Security and Medicare all depend on the government. Second, Romney "doesn't know much about the culture of America" because, contrary to Romney's view, Americans are the hardest working people in the world with perhaps the longest working hours. 92% of Americans believe that "hard work is the key to success."

Third, Romney "doesn't know much about the political culture" of the United States where "worshippers of big government" are not

9. Peter Grier, "Mitt Romney's 'Victim' remarks: a game changer? (+video)," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 18, 2012, <<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/DC-Decoder/Decoder-Wire/2012/0918/Mitt-Romney-victim-remarks-a-game-changer-video>>.

10. David Brooks, "Thurston Howell Romney," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/18/opinion/brooks-thurston-howell-romney.html?_r=0>.

dominating, “trust in government has declined,” and “the number of people who think government spending promotes social mobility has fallen.” In other words, there is no need for Romney to reiterate what the Americans already know about their government.

Fourth, Romney does not really know much about who constitute the beneficiaries of the entitlement programs. Mr. Brooks said that “the people who receive the disproportionate share of government spending” are Republicans, senior citizens, Caucasian men with high school diplomas, and middle-class workers, instead of the dependent poor.

Fifth, Romney’s remarks revealed that “he has lost any sense of the social compact.” Government indeed, has a “responsibility to help those who can’t help themselves.” When a Republican President Reagan was still in power in 1987, 62% of the Republicans agreed with this assumption. Now, only 40% of Republicans believe it.

Sixth, Romney has “shifted over toward a much more hyper-individualistic and atomistic social view” with which “Reaganesque language of common citizenship gave way to the libertarian language of makers and takers.”

If the Republican Party “doesn’t have a basic commitment to provide a safety net for those who suffer for no fault of their own,” Americans will not trust the party to reform the welfare state.

Finally, Romney “knows nothing about ambition and motivation.” According to Brooks, people are motivated “when they feel competent” and “when they have more opportunities.” Brooks insisted that ambition “is fired by possibility, not by deprivation.” Romney’s remarks would only reinforce his image of a wealthy businessman

from the country club. This kind of remarks was detrimental to his campaign.

If Romney was out of touch with the middle, lower classes, and probably the majority of Americans on the income tax issue as well as the role of government in providing a social safety net, two Republican Senate candidates simply did not understand the feelings of women on the issue of rape. Missouri Congressman Todd Akin won the Republican Senate nomination and the right to unseat Democratic incumbent Claire McCaskill. He had been projected to win the race handily until he made the remarks that “[i]f it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.” Akin was responding to a question about why he opposes abortion even in the case of rape when he made the terribly insensitive remarks on August 19, 2012.¹¹

Two months later, just two weeks ahead of the election, Indiana Senate candidate Richard Mourdock made a similar blunder when he argued that “even if life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen.”¹² Though both apologized immediately and Romney as well as the Republican Party quickly denounced the comments, the damage was done. Not only did the two candidates who were sure to win their respective contests to give the party a chance to crack at the majority lost the election,

11. Aaron Blake, “Todd Akin, GOP Senate candidate: ‘Legitimate rape’ rarely causes pregnancy,” *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2012, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/08/19/todd-akin-gop-senate-candidate-legitimate-rape-rarely-causes-pregnancy/>>.

12. Francis X. Clines, “Richard Mourdock on God’s Intentions,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2012, <<http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/24/richard-murdock-on-gods-intentions/>>.

the Republican's gender gap in the presidential election can also be attributed to these insensitive remarks.

These incidents also reminded voters that Romney had been flip-flopping on the issue and was deemed as an opportunist on abortion. Voters from Massachusetts could recall the label Edward Kennedy gave to Romney when the latter challenged his Senate seat in 1994: "He's not pro-choice, he's not anti-choice, he's multiple choice."¹³ In addition to abortion, Romney also had to deal with issues where his position changed over the years, including gay rights, the healthcare mandate, and global warming.

5. An Unexpected Favorable Event

The factor that could not be prevented, but ultimately might have affected the final vote count was Hurricane Sandy.¹⁴ First, this "October Surprise" landed on the East Coast of the United States just one week before the election, forcing President Obama to suspend his campaign for a while. Romney had no choice but to follow suit. He could have campaigned more in some of the swing states to rally his supporters to show up at the booth. Instead, all he could do was to watch Obama looking presidential and acting as Commander-in-Chief in the rescue efforts.

Second, Obama's proactive instead of responsive handling of the rescue effort and bipartisanship in federal-state coordination won

13. Jonathan Cohn, "Daily Deadline: The Return of Multiple Choice Mitt," *New Republic*, October 27, 2011, <<http://www.newrepublic.com/blog/jonathan-cohn/96803/daily-deadline-the-return-multiple-choice-mitt>>.

14. Nate Silver, "Nov. 4: Did Hurricane Sandy Blow Romney Off Course?" *The New York Times*, November 5, 2012, <<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/nov-4-did-hurricane-sandy-blow-romney-off-course/>>.

praise from unlikely sources just before the election. New Jersey Governor Chris Christie had nothing but kind words for the President, saying that Obama's response had been "outstanding," that coordinating with the administration had been "wonderful," and that "the president has been all over this and he deserves great credit."¹⁵

Chris Christie is not just the Governor of New Jersey. He is a Republican and was the keynote speaker of the party's National Convention that nominated Romney as the presidential candidate. As governor, Christie needed the assistance of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) for the rescue efforts. The Federal government would also play an indispensable role in providing relief and reconstructing the communities in the aftermath of the disaster. Thus, in order to have an efficient disaster relief and speedy recovery, it was imperative that Governor Christie maintains a close relationship with President Obama to secure the necessary resources for these efforts. Nevertheless, there should be a distinction between respectful courtesy and flattery, especially from someone who was the keynote speaker of the nomination convention, on the short list of vice presidential candidates in 2012, and a possible presidential candidate himself in 2016.

The support of Obama vs. Hurricane Sandy also came from an unlikely source, that of Republican-turned-Independent Mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg. He went even further by endorsing Obama for president, citing that "Hurricane Sandy has reshaped his thinking about the presidential campaign" and the President was "the better candidate to tackle the global climate change that he believes

15. Jena McGregor, "In superstorm Sandy, Gov. Chris Christie praises Obama's crisis leadership," *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2012, <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-10-30/national/35499529_1_storm-relief-event-chris-christie-presidential-politics>.

might have contributed to the violent storm.”¹⁶

The political background of Bloomberg and his position as the mayor of the leading city in the U.S. made his endorsement carry special bipartisan implications. The more important part of his endorsement, however, was his belief in the relevance of Hurricane Sandy and global climate change. Such a belief not only makes the Republican Party’s refusal to acknowledge the link appear to be out of touch with scientific findings, it also exposes once again Romney’s flip-flopping on the issue.

New Jersey and New York are both Democratic states, where the Democratic Party holds a significant electoral advantage over the Republican Party. Even without these two heavyweight politicians’ friendly gestures and endorsements, Obama still would have carried them easily. Hurricane Sandy might have disrupted the daily routine of many residents and prevented some of them from going to the voting booths. In a swing state, it would definitely be a concern for the Democratic Party, but not in New Jersey and New York. In short, Hurricane Sandy did not prevent Obama from winning these two states but gave his campaign a boost nationwide.

Obama won the presidential election of 2012 in spite of poor performance in the economy. Thus, his victory could be attributed to the structural advantage, demographic shift, re-aligning of the party coalition, the opponent’s own blunders, and an unforeseeable favorable event.

16. Raymond Hernandez, “Bloomberg Backs Obama, Citing Fallout from Storm,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/02/nyregion/bloomberg-endorses-obama-saying-hurricane-sandy-affected-decision.html?pagewanted=all>>.

III. Implications of Obama's Victory on U.S. Foreign Policy

After having these factors in mind, we can proceed to look at possible U.S. foreign policy, especially its approach towards Asia, in the second Obama administration.

1. Differences between the Two Parties

First, Romney's defeat and the Republican Party's lackluster performance in the congressional race (losing 2 seats in the Senate and 8 seats in the House) indicated that the Grand Old Party's focus on the economy, especially on the free market mechanism, de-regulation, and tax cuts failed to resonate with voters. Rather than dealing with the deficit by compromising on which program cuts could be made, Obama is likely to be emboldened by the electoral result to push for his own economic agenda of raising taxes and regulation. Obama also won the contest of ideas on the trust of government, *i.e.*, the majority of American voters still believe in the role and function of government in the economy.

Translating these fundamental differences of the two parties to the realm of foreign policy, the Republican Party shows little trust in international organizations or multilateralism whereas the Democratic Party tends to accept norms agreed upon in international conventions and regimes. The Republican Party favors a unilateral approach in dealing with international conflicts, believing affairs vital to American national interests should not be solved through multilateral forums as the latter lack efficiency and are likely to see such interests get compromised.

The Democratic Party, on the other hand, is more willing to go through international organizations on conflicts among nations. It is less likely to resort to a unilateral approach of trying to solve the

problems by the U.S. itself. From the theories of international relations, the Democratic Party's ideas and approach parallel those of the Neo-liberal Institutionalism and the Republican Party epitomizes the Realist school of the discipline.

2. Possible Asia-Pacific Policy of the Obama Administration

In terms of how such a different approach might affect its policies toward Asia, we can assume that Obama would like to refer conflicts to international organizations and apply multilateralism in dealing with the crisis on the Korean Peninsula, Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and South China Sea. The Six-Party Talks is the likely forum for dealing with a nuclear North Korea; the existing security pact and the historical transfer of the administration rights are the foundations for Japanese rule over the disputed islands in the East China Sea, while the sovereignty issue should be shelved; and the U.S. positions of South China Sea are concerns with the free navigation of water and the belief that territorial disputes should be resolved through diplomacy instead of coercion, intimidation, threats, and use of force.

The 47% remarks of Romney and the Republican Party's insensitivity towards those not belonging to their camp are indications that they are more likely to hold a self-righteous attitude towards countries of different cultural traditions and values. President Bush's famous remark on fighting terrorism that "you're either with us or against us" exemplified such a typical Republican attitude.

The Democratic Party, on the other hand, is a coalition of various interest groups, including ethnic minorities, women, environmentalists, youth, gay rights supporters, *etc.* and is inclined to have greater sensitivity to diverse cultures and values in approaching international conflicts, although some universal values would not be compromised.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. would continue to promote democracy and human rights, but in a more subtle way. For example, Washington would like to see Burma's authoritarian rule give way to political pluralism but will refrain from criticizing the incumbent military government. The Obama administration will not ignore the violation of human rights but is unlikely to use this problem of China as leverage in dealing with Beijing.

Since Romney lost the election, the argument that he would name China as a "currency manipulator" the first day he took office has become moot. Obama's government is unlikely to employ such a label openly in dealing with China, although applying pressure for the Renminbi to appreciate cannot be excluded. The importance of this was demonstrated by the visit of Jack Lew, the new Secretary of the Treasury, who became the first senior foreign guest of Xi Jinping after his election as President by China's National People's Congress.¹⁷

Even though the architect of "re-balancing Asia," Hillary Clinton has resigned from the post of Secretary of State, her successor, John Kerry, is not going to change the course of strengthening ties with the traditional allies of Japan and South Korea, although interests and needs in other parts of the world are likely to take time away from the chief U.S. diplomat.

The endorsement of Bloomberg for Obama's candidacy based on the former's concern of global climate change suggests that, in the second administration of Obama, the United States will be more

17. Daniel Paletta, "China's Xi Meets with Treasury's Lew; A First for Both," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2013, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323415304578369383617171770.html>>.

serious in approaching carbon emissions. In the first State of the Union address of his second term, Obama did exactly that by “threatening” Congress to pass a market-based climate-change plan.¹⁸

Obama’s seriousness in combating carbon emissions is also evidenced by his appointment of Ernest Moniz, an MIT nuclear physicist and a supporter of nuclear power as the next Secretary of Energy.¹⁹ This justifies U.S. lobbying for General Electric to participate in the building of more nuclear power plants in China. Whether Taiwan will see pressure by the U.S. to finish its 4th nuclear power plant remains to be seen. Amidst Taiwan’s anti-nuclear power protests, the American factor is rarely mentioned but should not be ignored.

3. Influences from Different Ethnic Interest Groups

In addition to the traditional bases of support, like blacks, liberals, Hispanics, and environmentalists, the coalition of minorities in the Democratic Party now includes Asian-Americans. In the past, we have seen the Congressional Black Caucus demonstrate its interests and influence over U.S. policy toward Africa. The Congressional Hispanic Conference (Republicans) and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (Democrats) also have their eyes on how Washington handles affairs of Latin America.

18. Stephen Stromberg, “In State of the Union, Obama threatens Congress on climate change,” *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2013, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2013/02/13/obama-state-of-the-union-climate-change-sotu/>>.

19. Steven Mufson, “Ernest Moniz, MIT physicist, nominated as energy secretary,” *The Washington Post*, March 4, 2013, <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-03-04/business/37419806_1_mit-energy-initiative-renewable-energy-energy-secretary>.

Since very few blacks elected to U.S. Congress in the past 30 years have been Republicans, the mostly Democratic Congressional Black Caucus can come up with concerted view on Africa, which is treated more or less as an ancestral land but without the strong sentiment of their Latin American or Asian counterparts, as the majority of the latter can clearly identify their homelands and may still have relatives there.

As to the Asians in Congress, the death of Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii and his successor being white mean that the 15-member Congressional Asia-Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) only has 14 members now. This includes the newly-elected first Asian female Senator, Maize Keiko Hirono of Hawaii, and three other Japanese-Americans in the House — Doris Matsui, Mike Honda, and Colleen Hanabusa. New York's Grace Meng, whose parents came from Taiwan, was the second Chinese-American congresswoman, after Judy Chu of California. Most of the CAPAC members are from California and Hawaii, followed by New York, Illinois, and Virginia. Nevertheless, some members of CAPAC are not what we usually consider Asians: they are people from the Pacific Islands or non-Asian members representing significantly Asian constituents. Compared to the powerful Congressional Black Caucus and the influential two Hispanic caucuses, CAPAC wields very little power.

In addition, the Asians are not a homogeneous group. Just like the Cubans, Mexicans, and Central Americans of the Hispanics, who hold different political views and split their support between the Democratic and Republican parties (more for the former), Chinese/Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indians, Filipinos, and Indochinese are quite a diverse group with various political philosophies and social values.

The majority of first-generation Chinese/Taiwanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indians are either professionals or small entrepreneurs, who tend to agree with major tenets of the Republican Party. Other Asians are more receptive to Democratic Party's social welfare programs and accommodation of minorities. The shift of the former group of Asians toward the Democratic Party is a generational phenomenon, as the second and third generations of young Asian Americans who were born and grew up in the U.S. and are familiar with the ethnic relations in American history choose to support the party that is more accommodative of them.

The pluralistic nature of the group and the complexity of historical and current political and economic relations among their motherlands may prevent it from formulating a unified voice on U.S. policy toward the Asia-Pacific region should conflict arise. It would, nevertheless, prompt a more balanced approach in dealing with such crises.

Finally, since a small portion of the electorate in a swing state can make a difference in the presidential election, the two parties will try to woo the independent voters critical in deciding which party can carry that state. Obama's successes in Iowa, Colorado, Nevada, and even Virginia in 2012 were examples of such a strategy.

As Taiwan is engaging in the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) talk with the U.S., we have already heard about how Iowa's Republican Senator Charles Grassley has tried to put pressure on the office of the U.S. Trade Representative to open up Taiwan's pork market. From the Senator's point of view, helping Iowan hog farmers open up an overseas market is simply a matter of constituency service. Nevertheless, for the two parties, Iowa remains a very competitive state, so a party that appears to be not fighting for the interests of Iowans will certainly suffer an electoral

setback in the next election. The Obama administration may ignore or overlook similar concerns from neighboring Kansas because of its nature of being a strongly Republican state, but not in the case of Iowa.

IV. Conclusion

This paper is aimed at linking the American electoral politics with its Asian policies. There are fundamental differences of approach international conflicts between a Democratic and a Republican administration. These can be seen in how Washington manages its relations with Beijing, as well as those with its allies. Nevertheless, the more nuanced ones also should be heeded, especially when those are seen as reflections of the structural elements of electoral politics.

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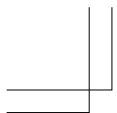
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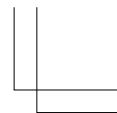
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