

The UConn Undergraduate Political Review

Edition Three

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Contents

Letter From the Editor Maye Henning	5
Together We Could've Colin Sullivan	6
Non-Interventionism and Its Predicaments Sam Rostow	9
The Obama Administration's Shadow Over Yemen Jess Kirchner	13
Diplomacy and Political Opportunism: Reflecting on the Iran Nuclear Deal Will Butler	17
The Obama Doctrine and Syria Zach Weingart	20
President Obama and Gender Based Policies Within the United States Castella Copeland	23
A Call to the American Left Lucas Bladen	25
Obama's Presidency: The Re-Emergence Of Black Political Activism Zach Mills	28
President Obama's Influence on the Progress of the LGBTQA Community Emily Coletta	32
An Analysis of the Iran Nuclear Deal Hannah Bissonette	35
Equality is the Best Policy: the Obama Administration and Civil Rights Sahar Iqbal	37
Mass Shootings Caio Goncalves	40
Obama's Presidency and Transparency in the Information Age Austin Beaudoin	43

President Obama: an LGBTQ+ Champion Christian Velez	47
Barack Obama in Political Time James Brakebill	51
Obamacare in Peril Darren Daughtry, Jr.	54
Iran Nuclear Deal Analysis Kyle Adams	57
President Obama's Impact on Sexual Assault and Violence Against Women Alisha Tousignant	59
Lasting Legacy: Will President Obama's Progress Remain? Evelyn Luchs	61

Letter From the Editor

Dear Readers,

It is an honor to write to you as Editor-in-Chief of the University of Connecticut Undergraduate Political Review. The theme of this third edition is *Reflecting on President Obama's Legacy*. For the past several months, our writers have worked to develop their ideas to produce an informed analysis of one aspect of President Obama's legacy. This theme is particularly salient in the wake of President-Elect Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton.

This edition features a remarkable diversity of topics, ranging from the impact of the recent election on President Obama's legacy to the role of the U.S. in the Middle East and Asia. We take pride in the nuance of our writers' ideas and the integrity with which they approach their writing. While this edition is in no way exhaustive of President Obama's eight years in office, we believe that it presents a useful overview detailing events and policies that our writers find particularly important.

I would like to alert you to our upcoming edition, to be released in late Spring 2017. The Undergraduate Political Review publishes one edition per semester. We accept new writers every semester, and encourage undergraduates who take an interest in political discourse to apply to be a writer by emailing a writing sample and resume to uconnpoliticalreview@gmail.com.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Undergraduate Political Review editors and writers for their hard work and the Political Science Department for unwavering support. I extend a special thanks to our adviser, Professor Oksan Bayulgen, and to the Political Science Department Head, Professor David Yalof, without whom the Undergraduate Political Review would not be possible.

Sincerely,

Maye L. Henning

Editor-in-Chief

Together We Could've

Colin Sullivan

On November 4, 2008, after campaigning on a platform of hope and progress through unity, Barack Obama and his supporters blazed their way into the Oval Office with their “Together We Can” banners held high. “Together We Can,” -a slogan whose message was aimed in equal measure to the American people and to Congress- that would serve as the crux of Obama’s agenda in his first term, stemming from his belief that “what makes America exceptional (is) the belief that our destiny is shared.”¹ The policy successes that followed as the years progressed speak for themselves: The passage of the Affordable Care Act, the Stimulus and Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Act, the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010, the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, as well as student debt relief legislation, just to name a few. With every victory, it seemed that President Obama took another step closer to his vision of a more inclusive, diverse America. The road to these successes was not an easy one, as a particular obstacle took its place on the road to Obama’s vision for the country: Enter the not-so -figurative Elephant in the Room (though perhaps “in the House” would be more accurate). The passage of many of the President’s most significant pieces of legislation came despite heavy resistance from Republicans, whose apparent refusal to compromise left a trail of filibusters, abandoned legislation and government shutdowns in their wake. It appears that for every step the President took towards his vision for the country’s future, the parties stepped further and further away from each other. Flash forward to the present: the parties and the country they represent are more divided than they have been in living memory. How did we get here?

This partisan divide, more accurately known as political polarization, is the political reality of our time. It is not exactly clear whether polarization originates from party elites or the party base, but it is alive and well in the heart of the American political system. Despite what many will say, polarization knows no party, as the Pew Research Center discovered that over 40% of Democrats and Republicans think that “the other party’s policies are so misguided that they pose a threat to the nation.”² Admittedly, the the GOP’s actions would suggest they are the more polarized party by far. Political Scientists Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, who study Congressional voting, have concluded that Republicans are now more conservative than ever. To use a sports analogy, the GOP “has moved from their 40 yard line to somewhere behind their goalposts.”³

¹ Obama, B. (2012, November 7). Empowerment Through Diversity. From <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/civil-rights/empowerment>.

² Achenbach, J., & Clement, S. (2016, July 16). America really is more divided than ever. From https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/america-really-is-more-divided-than-ever/2016/07/17/fbfebee6-49d8-11e6-90a8-fb84201e0645_story.html

³ Mann, T. E., & Ornstein, N. J. (2012, April 27). Let's just say it: The Republicans are the problem. From https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/lets-just-say-it-the-republicans-are-the-problem/2012/04/27/gIQAxCVUIT_story.html

Why does this polarization seem so lopsided? Simply put, it is because the liberal agenda has been on a winning streak over the past decade, specifically through the use of executive orders and the outcome of Supreme Court cases. For example, despite the Congress' inability to pass meaningful gun safety laws, the President has put 23 different executive orders into place to address the issue.¹ Advocates of the 2nd Amendment, as well as many members of the GOP, saw these measures as an egregious abuse of power and a heinous violation of the legislative process. The president being able to bypass his constitutional check in power (a.k.a. Congress) which, as it is controlled by the opposition party, was supposed to be able to obstruct the momentum of his agenda, is a scary situation for that party.

When the Office of the President seems to be omnipotent, shifts toward the opposite pole are to be expected. It just so happens that fear of the President and the direction of the country was significant enough to justify the GOP ending up "somewhere behind their goalposts" in the spectrum. Why haven't Democrats polarized the way Republicans have? In short, Democrats haven't faced an existential threat as the GOP did when faced with social progress and equal rights. Though, given the outcome of the recent Presidential election, it is highly possible that the Democrats will prove that the current state of the GOP is not a unique.

The success of Donald Trump's presidential campaign can certainly be attributed to many things, and the polarized state of the GOP is one of the more significant factors. Apart from his base of voters who feel as though the establishment on both sides of the aisle in Washington had forgotten them, Trump was elected in part due to two groups created by polarization under the Obama presidency: Conservative Value Voters and what will be referred to as the "Republican Faithful." Despite what could be seen as less than ideal traits, Value Voters backed Trump due to his promise to appoint Supreme Court justices who will represent and maintain their values in the nation's highest court, as CNN exit polls suggest that Supreme Court appointments were of significantly greater importance to Trump voters than for those of Secretary Clinton. On the other hand, the so-called Republican faithful are a slightly more complicated bunch. They are best characterized as anyone who votes Republican for no other reason than not to vote Democrat, despite 1) publicly raising complaints against or even denouncing statements made by the person they vote for, 2) having reservations about the ability of their candidate to carry out the duties of their office and 3) refusing to speak publicly about them. These two groups -Value Voters and the Republican faithful- fundamentally believe that Democratic party's ideals are so far off from their own that compromise is simply impossible, and accordingly have placed their support behind someone who has demonstrated that he does not possess many of the same values as his voters on more than one occasion, simply because he bears the Republican standard. The Trump presidency is not the solution to, but the simply the product of polarization.

¹ Fingerhut, H. (2016, June 22). Partisanship and Political Animosity in 2016. Retrieved November 10, 2016, from <http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>

Yes, we are a nation sorely divided, and the divisions run deep. Democrat/Republican, Liberal/Conservative, Blue/Red, we can label our factions in numerous ways. However, twelve long years ago, Senator Barack Obama reminded us of something very important. There are no “Red States” and “Blue States,” there is only the United States. We are Americans first, regardless of ideology, race, creed, sexuality or gender. Despite his many victories as in the Oval Office, from ObamaCare and the Stimulus to the assassination of Osama bin Laden and renewed relations with Cuba, the deep divides left by polarization continue to fester.

In reflecting on President Obama’s eight years in office, I found that, with the benefit of hindsight coupled with an idea where the country is headed over the course of the next four years, Barack Obama’s true legacy would not be his legislative victories -great though they were-. Neither would his legacy be the partisan polarization that plagued him throughout his time in office, the fallout of which would eventually lead to the election of his successor. The legacy of Barack Obama is a lesson, as we move forward -still divided- into an uncertain future. It is a lesson that, despite the efforts of those who would seek partisan goals at the expense of the nation’s integrity, has remained central to his message. A lesson that takes us back eight years to his campaign of hope and progress through unity. It is an answer to the question, “How can we come back from this?” *Together.*

Non-Interventionism and Its Predicaments

Samuel Rostow

In the words of the late Dr. Leo Strauss from the University of Chicago, “The contemporary rejection of natural rights leads to nihilism-nay, it is identical with nihilism.”¹ To be certain, I provide this statement due to its relevance in conducting the foreign policy of the United States. In the most essential Lockean standard of natural rights (which of course doesn’t explicate the subsequent niceties contained in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights), individuals have a right to life, liberty, and property.² This is fundamental to a free and stable world order. A mere conviction in this principle is not sufficient for one who is truly interested in its application. Over the past eight years, the Obama administration’s foreign policy has been distinguished by significant mistakes, inaction, and missed opportunities that have further entrenched the forces of philistinism and terror in both Iraq and Syria. I will examine the administration’s mistakes pertaining to these two nations. Rather than continuing the Obama White House’s practice of non-interventionism and indifference, the United States should return to the interventionist principles articulated by public intellectuals such as Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Robert Kagan, Paul Wolfowitz, and William Kristol.

In Khizr Khan’s positively captivating speech at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, he stated, “We were blessed to raise our three sons in a nation where they were free to be themselves and follow their dreams.”³ Indeed they were. But we as a nation are also profoundly blessed to have hosted them. Khizr’s son, United States Army Captain Humayun Khan, sacrificed his life for the United States during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Ironically, the very cause for which Captain Khan was fighting for is neither comprehended nor valued in the court of American public opinion.

Approximately two years after President Obama took office, in 2011, the United States withdrew the last combat troops from Iraq with the exception of the Baghdad Embassy guards. Before the Status of Forces Agreement pertaining to residual forces is analyzed, we must first look at the President’s previous stances on the military operation itself. President Obama was against the mission in Iraq as early as October 2002.⁴ His view on the intervention shaped his 2008 campaign and the way in which he subsequently conducted foreign policy. One should be absolutely clear about the historical record from the start. Saddam Hussein, along with his Ba’athist apparatus, massacred hundreds of thousands of people, used weapons of mass destruction against their own people and Iranian civilians during the Al-Anfal campaign, attempted to assassinate President George H.W. Bush, launched 39 Scud missiles into Israel, and illegally breached Kuwait’s sovereignty with repeated attacks culminating in a full-scale

¹ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 5.

² Locke, John. *Two Treatises on Government*. London: Awnsham Churchill, 1690

³ "FULL TEXT: Khizr Khan's Speech to the 2016 Democratic National Convention." August 1, 2016. ABC News. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/full-text-khizr-khans-speech-2016-democratic-national/story?id=41043609>.

⁴ "Transcript: Obama's Speech Against The Iraq War." *NPR*, January 20, 2009. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99591469>.

annexation.¹ This isn't arcane. Thus, Obama's claim that Iraq didn't pose any threat to the United States or the region is fatuous.

In order to convey the situation that occurred on the ground during Saddam's Ba'athist reign, the late Christopher Hitchens recalled his time witnessing the excavation of one of the mass graves in a Shi'a district close to Babylon in Southern Iraq, "If you want to feel dirtied up by the experience of fascism, try finding that you're twelve hours away from a shower and you can't get dead person out of your hair, or off your face."² Criminals must be held responsible for their actions, and the international community failed to act prior to U.S. liberation of Iraq in 2003 as Saddam remained in power. It needs to be stressed that the road for foreign nations transitioning from tyranny towards the American example of liberty is a lengthy one, but it is a compelling cause. As Secretary Condoleezza Rice wrote, "The United States should understand that the journey from freedom to stable democracy is a long one."³ This remains key in reminding the American people that our foreign endeavors should not be expected to be swift if we are to properly help set up sustainable institutions in locations of intervention.

Turning to the beginning of this administration, President Obama exhibited a decent responsibility pertaining to some aspects of foreign policy. He realized that ending military tribunals and closing Guantanamo Bay was infeasible. But on the issue of Iraq, he did advocate a definitive withdrawal date for troops engaged in combat operations, which was a manifestation of pure ideological hubris in itself. However, the critical aspect that has proved to be disastrous is the complete lack of a residual Coalition force on the ground. Max Boot, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, noted that the original figure of residual forces discussed by U.S. Central Command's General Lloyd Austin and the State Department ranged from 10,000 to 18,000.⁴ However, in a completely bizarre and dangerous move, the subsequent agreement handled by President Obama proposed a force of no more than 3000 contractors.

In order to demonstrate the rationale of invoking "bizarre" to describe the proposal, one only needs to look at the countless statements made by public officials prior to President Obama's failure to negotiate an agreement that included a legitimate residual force. For example, President Obama decided against the advice of Paul Wolfowitz, the former United States Deputy Secretary of Defense and visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Prior to President Obama's complete withdrawal from Iraq, Mr. Wolfowitz noted the existing vulnerabilities of the Iraqi government's security forces in 2010. He also drew upon the successful example of America's continued presence in Korea, writing, "Most important, abandoning South Korea would have risked squandering all that had been gained. There are still 28,500 American troops on the peninsula. Our continued commitment prevented another war and today South Korea is a remarkable economic success story."⁵

In another explicit warning, Secretary Condoleezza Rice stated, "If we were to precipitously leave Iraq and leave behind a government unable to defend itself, the extremists

¹ "List of Saddam's Crimes Is Long." *ABC News*.

² *Christopher Hitchens Recalls Mass Graves in Iraq*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xitlTUubMoA>.

³ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 731.

⁴ Boot, Max. "Losing Iraq?" *The Weekly Standard*, September 19, 2011

⁵ Wolfowitz, Paul. "In Korea, a Model for Iraq." *American Enterprise Institute*, August 30, 2010.

would have won a major battle in the war on terrorism, and you would start to see chaos throughout this whole region.”¹ This is precisely what has occurred. In fact, the most recent information informs us that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant now controls more territory than any terrorist group in history.²

Turning to the tumultuous situation in Syria, we have seen the effects of the absence of American leadership. Over 470,000 civilians have been killed since 2011 and an estimated 11 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes.³⁴ During the conflict in Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has massacred civilians, utilizing chemical weapons including (but not limited to) sarin and chlorine gas. In response to the situation at its developing stage, President Obama’s infamous red line remarks came on August 20th 2012 when he said, “We have been very clear to the Assad regime. That’s a red line for us and there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons.”⁵ After the Central Intelligence Agency and the United Nations confirmed numerous incidents of chemical weapons attacks, it’s important to note that the Obama administration was by no means *ad idem* on the response. Both Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security assistant Samantha Power (now Ambassador to the U.N.) distinguished themselves as they advocated for use of force against Assad.¹⁵ However, President Obama rejected their pleas and once snapped at Ambassador Power saying, “Samantha, enough, I’ve already read your book.”⁶ Samantha Power is famous for her scholarly publication on the Rwandan Genocide that excoriated the foreign policy of the Clinton administration. Instead of taking out Assad and learning from the dark lessons of history, the President has prolonged the conflict and sent the message that the United States will not act against those who have committed crimes against humanity.

Critics of intervention often cite the need to receive permission from the United Nations. In many conflicts, such as during Slobodan Milosevic’s genocidal campaign in the Balkans, individuals and groups opposing intervention asserted that the United States and NATO should specifically gain prior approval for military intervention from the United Nations Security Council. However, the result of toiling through this process becomes prohibitive due to the nature of the voting system. In other words, it is a pointless exercise. If any of the Permanent Member States (which consists of the Russian Federation, China, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States) casts a negative vote, the specific resolution or decision is defeated.⁷

¹ U.S. Department of State. May 23, 2007. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/may/85445.htm>

² Kagan, Robert, and Ivo Daalder. "The U.S. Can't Afford to End Its Global Leadership Role." *Brookings Institute*, April 25, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/25/the-u-s-cant-afford-to-end-its-global-leadership-role/>.

³ "Quantifying Carnage." *The Economist*, February 20, 2016.

⁴ "The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Its Repercussions for the EU." Migration Policy Centre. September 2016. <http://syrianrefugees.eu/>.

⁵ "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps." *Whitehouse.gov*. August 20, 2012. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>.

⁶ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic*, April 2016.

⁷ United Nations. <http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/voting.shtml>.

Russia and Syria are extremely close allies, and Russia's only Mediterranean naval base for its Black Sea Fleet is located in the Syrian port of Tartus.¹ Thus, on the current situation in Syria, relying on the United Nations Security Council is akin to Churchill asking Japanese Emperor Hirohito for permission to stop the advance of the Nazis. It is an infeasible system.

As the United Nations is essentially a paper tiger, the United States of America must act to protect vulnerable populations, promote democracy, and ensure regional stability. The manner in which we conduct our foreign policy should reflect the universal quest for freedom. I want to leave you with the prophetic words of the great Thomas Paine, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again."²

¹ Kramer, Andrew E. "Hips Said to Be Going to Naval Base in Syria." *New York Times*, June 18, 2012. <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/world/europe/russian-warships-said-to-be-going-to-naval-base-in-syria.html?referer=>.

² Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. Philadelphia. January, 1776.

The Obama Administration's Shadow Over Yemen

Jessica Kirchner

In March of 2015, Houthi militias in Yemen surged against President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi and sparked the beginning of one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent Middle Eastern history.¹ In the tumultuous year following the ousting of the American-backed president, Yemen has faced an unrelenting attack from a Saudi-led coalition aimed at keeping former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, out of power. Across the ocean, however, few Americans are aware of the chaos in Yemen. The pervasive nature of this blind spot is due to the continued silence, not only from the media, from the White House, as well. The Obama administration has been marked for its efforts to improve human rights both domestically and abroad, which is why it might seem surprising that there hasn't been more attention directed to Yemen. The lack of American coverage is much less peculiar, though, when the matter is considered not in a strictly humanitarian light, but a financial one. Americans aren't acknowledging the war in Yemen - instead, we're bankrolling it.

It's important to look at the motivation behind the funding to explain the American involvement, and how history and current events have melded into a complicated web of alliances. Among these pacts is the U.S.-Saudi relationship, and it's because of this alliance that the United States has been dragged into the conflict in Yemen. President Obama, in particular, has struggled to reconcile his larger foreign policy strategy and the United States' commitment to Saudi Arabia, and his unsteady compromise has contributed to the atrocities in Yemen.

The tensions that fostered the conflict in Yemen have existed since long before March 2015, resulting primarily from the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia for hegemony in the Middle East.² The decades-old rivalry has been referred to as the "Middle East Cold War" and has flared throughout the past century, especially in the years following the Iranian Revolution.³ This historic contention has led to a proxy war between a Saudi offensive and Shi'a Houthi rebels, backed by the Iranian regime. Iran and Saudi Arabia are in either corner, each coaching their fighter, while Yemen serves as a boxing ring. When Washington warmed to nuclear negotiations with Tehran in , the Saudis grew concerned that the U.S. was abandoning its traditional Gulf allies, and confidence in the U.S.-Saudi alliance weakened further with the passage of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015.⁴ The United States government is funding the Saudi campaign in Yemen primarily to abate the House of Saud's fears that America is abandoning its Middle Eastern allies.⁵ The Obama administration has long grappled with its obligation to please their friends among the Gulf States, and the United States'

¹ Browne, Ryan, and Jamie Crawford. "Yemen: Missiles Target US Warship, Pentagon Says." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 10 Oct. 2016. Web. 28 Nov. 2016.

² Davis, Kevin, and Dale Sprusansky. "Waging Peace: Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and the Devastating War in Yemen." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (2015): 50-51. *Waging Peace*. Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, Dec. 2015. Web. 15 Oct. 2016.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Oakford, Samuel, and Peter Salisbury. "Saudi Arabia's War in Yemen: The Graveyard of the Obama Doctrine." *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, 23 Sept. 2016. Web. 3 Nov. 2016.

⁵ Ibid.

involvement in Yemen is an indicator that the relationship between the Washington and Riyadh is a failing one.

President Obama himself has spoken about his apprehensions regarding the Saudi regime, and once referred to Saudi Arabia as “our ‘so-called’ allies in the Middle East.”⁶ The administration’s apparent disdain for the Saudi alliance isn’t enough to have kept the U.S. out of Yemen, though. According to the Washington Report of Middle East Affairs in November/December of 2016, since assuming office in 2009, President Obama and his administration have approved \$195 billion in foreign arms sales under the Pentagon’s Foreign Military Sales Program, which is the highest it’s been since WWII. Of the \$195 billion, Saudi Arabia has purchased more than any other country—about \$49 billion so far.⁷ The arms dealings have included cluster bombs, which are illegal under the U.N.’s Convention on Cluster Munitions, a treaty that neither Saudi Arabia nor the United States has signed onto.⁸ In fact, in September of 2016, the Senate rejected a proposal to block a \$1.15 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia, allowing the White House-backed transaction to move progress.⁹ It’s not that American weapons are supporting the Saudi coalition—they’re propping it up entirely. According to an article in the Atlantic on September 23rd, 2016, the support package that was authorized by President Obama at the advent of the Saudi offensive “has seen the United States deliver more than 40 million pounds of fuel to Saudi jets over the past 18 months, according to U.S. Central Command.”¹⁰ The article presses this claim, stating that “The Saudis would be crippled without direct U.S. military assistance, particularly aerial refueling, which continues unabated.”¹¹ There are other key clues highlighting Saudi Arabia’s reliance on American weapons: in August of 2016, the United States approved an arms sale of one hundred and fifty three tanks and twenty tank recovery vehicles to the House of Saud, with the fine-print condition that twenty of the tanks would go towards replacing those damaged in combat.¹² It’s important to note that the only place that Saudi tanks are in combat is along the Yemen border, meaning that the American tanks are likely to take their place among the battles in Yemen.¹³

American weapons are fundamental to the operations of the Saudi regime, which implicates the Obama Administration as a fundamental actor in one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent history. According to the 2015 Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, more than 80% of Yemen is in need of humanitarian aid, and the Saudi airstrikes have carelessly hit schools and hospitals on the ground. In fact, by the UN’s own count, more than 2,200 civilians have been hit by airstrikes since the start of the war.¹⁴ It’s the Yemeni children who shoulder

⁶ "Transcript: Obama's Speech Against The Iraq War." *NPR*. National Public Radio, 20 Jan. 2009. Web. 28 Nov. 2016.

⁷ Davis, Kevin, and Dale Sprusansky. "Waging Peace: Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and the Devastating War in Yemen." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (2015): 50-51. *Waging Peace*. Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, Dec. 2015. Web. 15 Oct. 2016.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Oakford, Samuel, and Peter Salisbury. "Saudi Arabia's War in Yemen: The Graveyard of the Obama Doctrine."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Riedel, Bruce. "Is Selling Tanks to Saudi Arabia Such a Good Idea?" *Brookings*. The Brookings Institution, 13 Aug. 2016. Web. 27 Nov. 2016.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Oakford, Samuel, and Peter Salisbury. "Saudi Arabia's War in Yemen: The Graveyard of the Obama Doctrine."

most of the burden, though, more than half of those in need of humanitarian aid are children, according to the Yemeni UNICEF representative, Meritxell Relano.¹⁵

Despite the support received from the Obama administration, the Saudis seem to be not only apathetic towards human rights concerns, but blatantly ignorant of U.S.-specific concerns, as well. In August of 2016, an airstrike destroyed a bridge that brought almost all UN aid into the Yemeni capital, Sanaa.¹⁶ The bridge was on the Pentagon's "no-strike" list; its destruction caused an even larger problem for an already desperate people.¹⁷ It was a bridge allowing the transport of civilian aid, not a structure hosting a military base or a rebel hideout. Despite this monumental demonstration of disrespect towards American demands, the Obama administration maintained an unsettling silence. The glaring absence of public condemnation of the bridge's destruction can only be explained by the desire to keep the human rights abuses by the House of Saud out of the light of the public domain.

Based on President Obama's own testimony, it's clear that his administration's hand in Yemen has been a reluctant one. According to an article by Jeffrey Goldberg with the Atlantic in April 2016, President Obama has been known to argue that "dropping bombs on someone to prove that you're willing to drop bombs on someone is just about the worst reason to use force."¹⁸ The President's words have an air of hypocrisy, seeing as thousands of people in Yemen are in the midst of a humanitarian crisis that was aided by American weapons—bombs that were dropped solely to prove U.S. loyalty to Saudi Arabia. President Obama's remark seems less disingenuous, however, if you look farther back into his political career; his distaste for frivolous warfare has always been a defining characteristic. In 2002, then-Senator Barack Obama gave a speech in which he spoke out against the use of unnecessary violence, stating:

*"That's what I'm opposed to. A dumb war. A rash war. A war based not on reason, but on passion, not on principle, but on politics."*¹⁹

It's hard to reconcile this man with the man now in the White House, the one who has accepted billions of dollars from arms deals with a nation running an indiscriminate bombing campaign.

The Obama Administration has built a legacy by protecting the unprotected within the U.S.—championing LGBTQ+ equality, women's rights, the rights of immigrants, and increasing healthcare access for Americans facing financial strife. In other instances, President Obama has done the same abroad, such as in his condemnation of the brutal Russian airstrikes in Syria.²⁰ In the face of a longstanding tradition of defending human rights, the conflict in Yemen, it seems, doesn't fit the mold. The U.S. support for the Saudi Arabian coalition is based on the need to secure an unsteady political alliance, meaning American weapons are being purchased at the expense of a massive humanitarian crisis. President Obama, who spoke so earnestly on behalf of

¹⁵ Almasmari, Hakim, and Angela Dewan. "Yemen: The 'forgotten War' in Syria's Shadow." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 9 Oct. 2016. Web. 28 Nov. 2016.

¹⁶ Oakford, Samuel, and Peter Salisbury. "Saudi Arabia's War in Yemen: The Graveyard of the Obama Doctrine."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Goldberg, Jeffrey. "The Obama Doctrine." *Atlantic* Apr. 2016: n. pag. *The Atlantic*. The Atlantic Monthly Group, Apr. 2016. Web. 30 Oct. 2016.

¹⁹ "Transcript: Obama's Speech Against The Iraq War." *NPR*. National Public Radio, 20 Jan. 2009. Web. 28 Nov. 2016.

²⁰ Baker, Peter. "Obama Condemns Russia's Role in Bombing Syria." *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 2 Oct. 2015. Web. 30 Oct. 2016.

human rights back in 2002, has made great strides in improving the quality of life for people across the globe, but remains deliberately silent on Yemen. It will leave a dark mark not only upon his own legacy, but also that of the United States as an advocate for human rights, something his successor will be forced to grapple with. President Obama has long fought to bring human rights abuses to light on the international stage, but as he steps out of power it remains to be seen whether his administration's facilitation of the atrocities in Yemen will be kept in the shadows, and whether the American public will remain in the dark, as well.

Diplomacy and Political Opportunism: Reflecting on the Iran Nuclear Deal

William Butler

On July 14, 2015 it became apparent that the world had narrowly averted a showdown between Iran and the West, at least for the foreseeable future. The P5+1 nations, collectively comprised of the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, France, and Germany, had successfully brokered a deal to put a lid on the Iranian nuclear program. The agreement finalized the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in which Iran agreed to shelve parts of its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of United Nations economic sanctions. Furthermore, it permitted The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor Iran's nuclear program to ensure that it was complying with all of the agreed-upon resolutions.¹ The agreement, which has drawn praise for its precision as a nuclear non-proliferation treaty, will serve as the cornerstone of President Obama's foreign policy legacy. In the following I will analyze the strategic diplomacy the US employed to drive Iran to the negotiation table as well as the internal dissent that was overcome by either sides in order to reach an agreement.

The sanctions leveled by the Obama Administration in 2009 were the first steps towards forcing Iran into serious negotiations.² The measures not only had detrimental effects on key Iranian exports, such as oil, but also effectively devastated the Iranian domestic economy. The adoption of Resolution 1929 struck Iran's financial sector particularly hard and signaled a strong opposition to Iran's nuclear program from the United Nations Security Council. The resolution included targeted asset freezing and provisions that limit Iran's access to foreign financial and banking systems. In addition, the measure was significant because it set standards for other nations dealing with Iranian financial institutions. Access to US foreign markets could be severed for foreign financial institutions if they were found to be doing business with Iranian individuals linked to the nuclear program, or if they aided Iran in acquiring nuclear weapons.³ This provision served to isolate Iranian financial and banking systems from the global market and was a major factor in driving Iran to the negotiating table. In addition to overt economic sanctions, the Obama Administration employed a sophisticated cyber attack, code-named "Operation Olympic Games." The newly developed method of intervention remotely stopped the enrichment of uranium in 1,000 of the 5,000 centrifuges Iran that had spinning at the time.⁴ The combination of sanctions and cyber assault left Iran weakened and gave the US and other western nations significant leverage.

¹ Katzman, Kenneth, and Paul K. Kerr. "Iran Nuclear Agreement." *Congressional Research Service* (2016): 1-36. Print.

² Ibid.

³ "Resource Center." *Iran Sanctions*. United States Treasury Department, 16 Jan. 2016. Web. 26 Nov. 2016.

⁴ Sanger, David E. "Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 31 May 2012. Web. 12 Nov. 2016

In order to achieve an understanding of how the agreement was accomplished it is important to understand the structure of Iranian leadership. Sitting atop the Iranian power structure is the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who wields unbridled power over the nation's domestic and foreign policy. The Ayatollah alone is responsible for declaring war and holds total control over intelligence and security operations. The second highest-ranking official in the Iranian Republic is President Hassan Rouhani, a former nuclear negotiator with a reformist agenda who was elected in 2013. Although the President is responsible for setting the economic agenda, his power is limited by the Constitution, which gives the Supreme Leader predominance over the executive branch. The fact that Iran is an Islamic theocracy, gives the ideologies of the Supreme Leader and his clerics prevailing power over the direction of the nation, allowing him to directly and indirectly preside over the judicial and legislative branches, as well.

Relations between The United States and Iran have been tenuous since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, primarily because of the Ayatollah's hardline stance against Zionist regimes, which support the state of Israel.¹ Iran's continued focus on its nuclear program despite sharp criticism from the United States characterized Iran's oppositional attitude towards the United States and the West. A nuclear-armed Iran posed a significant threat to Israel, and therefore the United States, which ultimately drove talks for a comprehensive agreement. Prior to the JCPA, the United States had attempted comprehensive talks with then-President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in 2009, but negotiations were cut short by the Ayatollah himself.⁵ Unlike Iran, the United States had remained open to talks about curbing Iran's nuclear program, but dissenting factions within the Iranian government, particularly between hardliners and western sympathizers, prevented a consensus from being established.

The election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 signaled a new direction in talks between the United States and Iran. Described by CIA director John Brennan as a man who "has a history of engaging with the West," and who, compared with former President Ahmadinejad, was a "much more practical and reasonable individual," Rouhani was more conciliatory towards the US and was open to negotiations regarding Iran's nuclear program.² President Rouhani took on the job of persuading the Ayatollah to support nuclear negotiations, a monumental task given the Supreme Leader's clear dissatisfaction with the new President's moderate stance towards the West. Over the course of two years, President Rouhani worked to dissuade the Ayatollah from his "resistance economy," a policy stance stemming from the belief that Iran could thrive through its opposition to the West. Rouhani insisted that the economic situation within Iran was dire and would only worsen if sanctions were not lifted.³ The Ayatollah carefully calculated the political risks of engaging in talks and concluded that if negotiations collapsed, members of Rouhani's government could be slapped with the blame, whereas Ayatollah Khomeini could personally claim to have driven any successful lifting of sanctions. Having gained the Ayatollah's permission, President Rouhani was able to finally begin formal negotiations with the United States and the other P5+1 nations in 2015. It's no exaggeration to acknowledge that the

¹ Gladstone, Rick. "Iran's Supreme Leader on America: Don't Trust, Don't Cooperate." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 03 June 2016. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

² Sanger, David E. "C.I.A. Director Says Iran's Economic Peril Helped Drive Nuclear Deal." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 08 Apr. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

³ Feliciano, Josemari. "Inspiration to Isolation: President Obama and Lessons in Delegation, Micromanagement, and Political Isolation." *Home*. Harvard University, 3 Aug. 2015. Web. 07 Nov. 2016.

internal dialogue about the potential economic repercussions of continued isolation that led to successful talks was ultimately possible because of the election of President Rouhani.

While debate opened within Iran, the United States experienced a similar discourse within key political institutions and among other Western nations. President Obama had been open to negotiations from the onset of his Presidency, explaining in 2008, “strong countries and strong presidents talk to their adversaries.”¹ This attitude persisted through his reelection victory in 2012, but until the Iranian presidential election the following year, the tentative talks between the two nations had proven futile. During this time, Republicans acknowledged that a nuclear Iran was a significant threat to US security, but took a more hard-lined approach, favoring tougher sanctions over any concessions that would empower Iran’s economy. The Republicans’ opposition lined up directly with Israel’s stance on the agreement, which was revealed when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke before Congress regarding the deal, saying “it doesn’t block Iran’s path to the bomb. It paves Iran’s path to the bomb.” President Obama dismissed Israel’s condemnation of the agreement, criticizing Prime Minister Netanyahu for “not offering any viable alternatives.”² The agreement passed in the senate without a single Republican vote, a result indicative of the deep divide between the Democrats and Republicans regarding diplomatic solutions to the possibility of a nuclear Iran.³ The agreement proved similarly divisive for the US and a long-standing ally Israel, which had consistently appealed to the US for support in past periods of regional tension. Furthermore, the passing of the agreement indicated the declining effectiveness of Israeli lobbying efforts in US politics.

The US relied on calculated diplomacy as well as political opportunism to build one of the most comprehensive nuclear disarmament agreements to date. The success of President Obama and President Rouhani in overcoming internal dissent within their respective political systems in order to achieve this historic agreement would have been unthinkable in years past. Despite the significant political forces, in the form of opposing government leaders and dissenting allies, that were active on both sides, each President was able to use their respective institutions to alleviate responsibility from their opponents and to build a consensus large enough to forge the agreement. Although pundits continue to criticize the deal for its concessions, an accomplishment that cannot be discounted is the opening of a dialogue between the two nations that will provide tangible benefits to future negotiations. The influence of this dialogue should not be undervalued; especially considering the impact it could have on the ability of the United States to meet the expanding challenges in countries such as Syria and those threatened by global terrorism. Now more than ever, the United States should seek to preserve this hard-won cooperation with Iran.

¹ Ibid.

² Zezima, Katie. "Netanyahu Warns That Nuclear Deal ‘paves Iran’s Path’ to a Bomb." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 3 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Nov. 2016.

³ Steinhauer, Jennifer. "Democrats Hand Victory to Obama on Iran Nuclear Deal." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 10 Sept. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

The Obama Doctrine and Syria

Zach Weingart

When President Obama leaves office in January, the world will remember him for many reasons. Among these reasons is his foreign policy. This legacy may be overlooked by the American public, but is one of the most important aspects of the Obama administration to reflect on. The recent election cycle has sparked debate over many contentious issues, especially the question of whether the United States should take in Syrian refugees, and what strategy the U.S. should take to combat terrorism in the Middle East and Africa. The actions and non-actions taken by President Obama regarding Syria have had a profound impact on the future of Syria, the Middle East and United States foreign policy.

Syria is currently embroiled in a civil war that seemingly has no end. The regime of Bashar al-Assad remains in power, backed by Russia and Iran. A host of non-unified opposition groups, ranging from moderate to extremists, are in conflict with the Assad regime. These groups are supported by Arab Gulf States, Turkey, Israel, the United States and others. Despite losing ground in both Syria and Iraq, ISIS remains a major factor in the conflict, fighting both the regime and the opposition. Since 2011, roughly 470,000 Syrians have lost their lives. Over 11 million are internally displaced or have fled the country as refugees. 4.5 million Syrian refugees are hosted in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt.¹

When President Obama was elected to office in 2008, there were two issues at the forefront of American political thought: the economy, and the Middle East. The United States was deeply involved in Iraq and Afghanistan after invading these countries in 2001 and 2003. There was no clear end in sight to either of these interventions, and the American public was growing concerned that the costs of these conflicts outweighed the benefits of nation-building. In 2008, former President George Bush signed an agreement to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq by December 31, 2011.² President Obama pledged to the American people he would abide by this agreement, and that he would work to scale down these conflicts. U.S. troops were completely withdrawn from Iraq on December 18, 2011. 8,400 U.S. soldiers will remain in Afghanistan in 2016, in light of the Afghan security forces' struggle to maintain stability.³ Despite 8 years of U.S. presence in Iraq and 15 years in Afghanistan, it is difficult for any observer to declare success. In 2013, Iraq was nearly overrun by ISIS, a terrorist organization that had its roots in the 2003 invasion, and arose as a reaction to anti-Sunni sectarian violence in Iraq sponsored by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a close ally of the United States. In Afghanistan, the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS all maintain a presence to this day, and could take over the country if the U.S. were to fully withdraw. While neither of these situations arose due

¹ 2016. "Syria's Refugee Crisis in Numbers" Amnesty International.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>

² Fordham, Alice. 2015. "Fact Check: Did Obama Withdraw From Iraq Too Soon, Allowing ISIS To Grow?"

<http://www.npr.org/2015/12/19/459850716/fact-check-did-obama-withdraw-from-iraq-too-soon-allowing-isis-to-grow>

³ Shane III, Leo. 2016. "8400 Troops Will Remain in Afghanistan, Obama Says" Military Times.

<http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2016/07/06/obama-expected-leave-8400-troops-afghanistan/86746396/>

to actions taken by President Obama, the legacies of Iraq and Afghanistan have weighed heavily into his Syria strategy.

The closest the United States came to intervening in Syria was in 2013. President Obama stated that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would constitute a “red line” that would change the U.S. outlook on Syria.¹ Until that point in time, the United States had a policy of non-intervention, and the implication of a “changed outlook” was widely taken to mean a military intervention. President Obama’s red line was challenged in August 2013, when a rebel-held suburb of Damascus was attacked with sarin nerve gas, resulting in the deaths of 1,400 people. The White House asserted with a “high degree of confidence” that the regime of Bashar al-Assad was responsible.² This report would be later contradicted by other intelligence. Rather than using his executive power to initiate immediate military action, President Obama requested authorization from Congress for an airstrike on Syria, a request which was denied. Analysts debate on the motive behind President Obama’s request. Some argue that the President felt military action in Syria necessitated approval from the American people. Others hold that President Obama knew Congress would deny the request, which would enable him to back down from his red line threat. The situation became further complicated as conflicting reports arose about the origin of the chemical attack. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper reported to the President that the intelligence on the attack was “robust” but was not a “slam dunk” implicating the Assad regime.³ As a result, President Obama backed down from his red line stance.

The situation de-escalated as Assad was prompted by his Russian allies to destroy his chemical weapons stockpiles. Roughly 1,200 tons of chemical weapons were destroyed under the guidance of the United Nations.⁴ However, chemical weapons attacks in 2014 and 2015 have raised serious doubts in the international community about Assad’s trustworthiness regarding chemical weapons. Some analysts argue that U.S. non-intervention led to the rise of ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and other extremist groups in Syria, as they were able to offer protection for regime opponents where the U.S. could not.⁵ Additionally, observers felt that U.S. “credibility” was damaged, encouraging American opponents such as Russia and ISIS to become more assertive in the Syrian conflict.⁶

¹ Kessler, Glenn. 2013. “‘President Obama and the Red Line on Syria’s Chemical Weapons.’” The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/> (November 11, 2016).

² Taddonio, Patrice. 2015. “The President Blinkered: Why Obama Changed Course on the ‘Red Line’ in Syria.” Frontline. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/the-president-blinkered-why-obama-changed-course-on-the-red-line-in-syria/> (November 11, 2016).

³ Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2016. “The Obama Doctrine: The U.S. President talks through his hardest decisions about America’s role in the world.” The Atlantic. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>

⁴ Gladstone, Rick. 2014. “2 Companies to Destroy Chemicals in Syria’s Arsenal” New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/15/world/middleeast/2-companies-to-destroy-chemicals-in-syrias-arsenal>

⁵ Lister, Charles. 2016. “Obama’s Syria Strategy is the Definition of Insanity” Foreign Policy. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/21/obamas-syria-strategy-is-the-definition-of-insanity/> (November 10, 2016).

⁶ Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2016. “The Obama Doctrine: The U.S. President talks through his hardest decisions about America’s role in the world.” The Atlantic. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>

The United States became more involved in Syria as ISIS began to overrun northern and eastern Syria in 2014. The U.S. has launched airstrikes against the group, and upped its levels of military and financial support to the Kurds, the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups to counter ISIS. In choosing to focus its efforts on ISIS, the United States is fighting a symptom of the conflict, without working towards an effective solution. ISIS came to power in Syria due to the power vacuum left by the Assad regime, and because it offered protection to Syrians where the state and the opposition could not. If the Obama administration or any future administrations wish to bring an end to extremism in Syria, they must first bring an end to the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Thus far, these efforts have not been successful. On the United Nations Security Council, Russia has vetoed any serious action against Bashar al-Assad. The exception has been ceasefires that neither the regime nor Russia have respected. A full-scale military intervention similar to Operation Iraqi Freedom is not the best solution for a number of reasons, but the actions of the Obama administration thus far have not been enough. The best path to peace lies somewhere in the middle. After five years of military conflict, it is clear that Bashar al-Assad will not be forced out of power through war. The United States and the international community must be more aggressive in bringing pressure on Assad to either step down (an unlikely scenario), or agree to take part in a democratic political process in which he would be eligible for election. The inclusion of Assad in any political processes is certainly not an ideal scenario given his absolute brutality towards his own people in Syria. However, including Assad in elections would give him an exit strategy, which might make fighting to the death no longer the most viable option for the regime.

When Mr. Trump takes office in January, his administration will face a difficult situation in Syria. From a geopolitical perspective, there is no clear end to the conflict in sight, and Russia remains a major obstacle to peace. From a humanitarian perspective, Syria is a disaster. Syrian civilians are caught between multiple warring factions, and are not able to receive the international aid they desperately need. Based on his campaign rhetoric, is it likely that Trump will escalate military action against ISIS, and restrict the flow of Syrian refugees into the United States. This second policy is extremely problematic. There is no substantial evidence to support the claim that Syrian refugees pose any sort of security threat to the United States. A policy restricting or banning refugees from entering the United States would only serve to endorse Islamophobia, intolerance and stereotyping of Syrians. Additionally, restrictive refugee policies in the United States and in Europe have meant that Syria's neighbors have taken on massive numbers of refugees, many of whom have nowhere else to go. The way in which the future administration deals with the Assad regime and treats Syrian refugees will have lasting impacts on the world-wide image of the United States, and on the political landscape of the Middle East. A policy of international pressure on Bashar al-Assad and open arms towards refugees would serve to the interests of the United States, Syria and the international community.

President Obama and Gender Based Policies Within the United States

Castella Copland

The Policies

Throughout the course of American History, the issue of gender equality within the workplace, at home and within a larger society has always been a continuous struggle for women. Despite progressive legislation that was passed throughout the 1970s, the fact of the matter remains that women still do not have equal representation and opportunities within their communities. Recognizing this, President Obama has taken on multiple initiatives throughout his time as president including the Equal Pay Task Force, Birth Control coverage under Obamacare, Victim control over sexual assault and rape kit policies, and additional campaigns. Some of these campaigns include more research and development on women in STEM, leadership positions and accessibility to resources¹.

One of the first initiatives that President Obama took when going into office consisted of signing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act Bill. This bill allowed individuals to bring forth claims of pay discrimination based off of their gender, race, religion, sexuality and a variety of other identities². President Obama stated that this bill is a part of his economic initiative to lessen the pay gap in addition to standing true to the fundamental values of the United States in equal opportunity and pay.

The Triumphs

Two of the greatest policies that President Obama has signed into law include birth control under Obamacare and a new Bill of Rights for sexual assault victim's control over their own rape kits. Prior to these policies women would often have to go through illegal means or find alternative ways to solve their reproductive issues. Despite having access to resources such as Planned Parenthood and Women's Clinics, women have been harassed, attacked and killed for attempting to access reproductive healthcare³. One of the largest issues across the US includes a women's right to her own body when making the decision to have an abortion. Many people believe that women should not be allowed to have abortions due to religious and moral reasons. When President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law he guaranteed/mandated that women will have access to contraceptives and other forms of reproductive health care. This reignited the debate over whether the government should guarantee that women have access to this healthcare amenity⁴.

Many discussions on this were continued when he recently came out with a new Bill of Rights that gives sexual assault survivors the basic rights to have control over the evidence collected⁵. Prior to this Bill, sexual assault survivors were often blamed, manipulated by the

¹FACT SHEET: Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

² Understand the Basics

³Why You're Still Paying for Birth Control Even Though It's "Free" Now

⁴Free coverage of birth control will now be guaranteed for all women

⁵ Obama just did something groundbreaking to help sexual-assault survivors

system and further prosecuted for lying and false accusations. Although, this will still be a challenge for those who face sexual assault, this act allows survivors to finally have agency over their own evidence. More often than not this evidence includes genetic materials (DNA evidence) extracted from the crime scene. Prior to this bill genetic materials would ‘expire’, be thrown out with government officials stating that it is ‘no longer needed’, ‘applicable to the case’, or the evidence was not used because DNA testing did not exist at the time. With verdicts that often devalue victims’ experiences and then proceed to devalue the victim through the media and societal response, this Bill of Rights President Obama has passed has given victims the political power of key aspects of the evidence¹.

Gender Equality?

Considering the many issues regarding female representation in traditionally male dominated professions, President Obama has taken many initiatives and projects to assist women in entering fields like politics and higher education. Another problem in this regard is equal pay for equal work or pay equity. Though the pay equity gap has lessened over time, the fact of the matter remains that “women working full time in the United States typically were paid just 80 percent of what men were paid, a gap of 20 percent.”² This is a huge barrier to gender equality as it perpetuates the idea that men and women are not equal. To his credit, President Obama has taken significant steps to make equal pay for men and women a reality. However, much more effort is needed.

Despite these large scale issues that many critics argue are too tough to change, President Obama had initiatives that appeared to support women but continued to perpetuate many gender based issues. Gendercide, pay equity, sex trafficking, and abortion are just some of wide variety of issues with a continued message that everything a woman does a man can always do better. Under the Obama Administration the micromovements such as access to birth control and female control over DNA evidence in rape cases were some of the victories that gave some more human dignity to women. Despite the great progress made by the Obama Administration many are left wishing that his Administration did more.³

¹Obama just did something groundbreaking to help sexual-assault survivors

² The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap (Fall 2016)

³FACT SHEET: Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

A Call to the American Left

Lucas Bladen

Much has been said about the unexpected rise of Donald Trump and who is to blame for it. Articles blaming Democrats, Republicans, millennials, baby boomers, the two-party system, as well as third parties, among other groups, cover the Internet; in a nation in desperate need of unity, the outcome of our last election has proven more divisive than ever. Regardless of prior political affiliation, it is fair to say that not many Americans expected Trump to become their next president. In fact, his political downfall was all but assumed; in the days leading up to the election, the topic of debate was not so much whether he would win but rather how to repair a destroyed Republican party.¹

However, November 9th has presented America with a profoundly different question: what happened to the liberals? According to most polls and news outlets, Hillary Clinton was overwhelmingly predicted to win, her rallying cry had been the same optimistic call for change that boosted Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 and 2012.² Now, cries of gloom, doom, and fascism permeate the so-called "liberal bubble" which Democrats are often accused of inhabiting, but it is futile to point fingers with blanket statements pinning Donald Trump's election on white supremacy, lack of education, or the supposed mutation of the Republican Party. These are all important factors to debate, and make no mistake: one can engage in debate while being completely opposed to Trump's principles and policies. That being said, calls of insurrection against the government are unproductive at the moment; the Earth has not stopped turning since the election. Sympathizing with frustrated student protestors is understandable, but for the time being, progressives would benefit most by examining why the American left's message was not appealing enough to voters.

Most Democrats are undoubtedly concerned by the trend of extreme-right nationalism and populism sweeping through the West. American liberals tend to label Western Europe as a bastion of progressive ideas, but it is nonetheless clear that the Trump phenomenon is equally present there as well.³ As the United States is experiencing a political shift that falls short of being world-ending, the left must come to terms with the fact that it needs to undergo reform in order to maintain relevance. In the United States, quite simply, progressivism has gotten lazy. Younger millennials have grown up in a political culture largely dominated by liberal thought, marked by a huge skepticism of the decisions that led to the Iraq War and the Great Recession. At the same time, they have witnessed profound steps toward social equality; for the first time in American history, a generation of young citizens will be able to benefit from marriage equality no matter where in they live.

¹ Ball, Molly. 2016. "Saving Conservatism From Trump's GOP." *The Atlantic*.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/the-doomsayer/501137/> (November 16, 2016).

² Kettle, Martin. 2016. "Hillary Clinton Will Win. But What Kind of President Will She Be?" *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/27/hillary-clinton-will-win-what-kind-of-president-white-house-obama> (November 16, 2016).

³ Mammone, Andrea. 2016. "Welcome to the World of Europe's Far-Right." *Al Jazeera English*.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/06/world-europe-160605132634954.html> (November 16, 2016).

Unfortunately, though, those same college-aged, middle-class liberals are guilty of taking recent social progress for granted. Concentrated in places like college campuses, it is easy for them to become insulated, viewing those in dissimilar socioeconomic circumstances with contempt. Donald Trump promised economic change for areas left behind by globalization and post-industrialization, and no matter how empty or ridiculous his statements were, the best response the Democrats could produce a smug condemnation of the "deplorable" Trump supporters.¹ The white working-class that turned to Trump did so primarily out of economic disillusion² and minorities and political correctness made for easy scapegoats for desperate people to turn against.

The left, by nominating Hillary Clinton, did little to convince non-Democrats (and even some former party supporters) that it could better their economic situation. Both Donald Trump and Clinton's rival in the primaries, Bernie Sanders, ran on the message of bringing politics closer to the people and defying party elites with focuses on financial reform.³ When Sanders lost his party nomination, it signaled the full turn of the white working class towards Trump; many historically Democratic districts marked by high union participation went red for the first time in decades.⁴ In the aftermath of the election, it is easier to appreciate the potential draw of Sanders' message; while it is hard to jump to conclusions by claiming that "if Bernie had been nominated, Trump would have lost," it is likely that Democrats will have to move more towards his paradigm if they wish to remain relevant.

In our modern era of economic flux, the new Democratic Party will have to embrace a much more progressive fiscal stance. Resting on the political laurels of over eight years of social change, liberals thought that their message of continuous progressivism would persist unchallenged—clearly, they were wrong.⁵ Xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism, and sexism have gained renewed visibility as significant forces in American political thought, but it seems doubtful that over fifty percent of voters make their decisions based solely on these principles. The left must demonstrate to the American people that it promises more than just safe spaces and unilateral political correctness, it also needs to make its appeal to the working class voter.

In many ways, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal marked the traditional connection between the white working class and the Democratic Party, providing much-needed labor programs and union support to regions in distress, including predominantly immigrant

¹ Bruni, Frank. 2016. "The Democrats Screwed Up." *New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/13/opinion/the-democrats-screwed-up.html> (November 16, 2016).

² Cohn, Nate. 2016. "Why Trump Won: Working-Class Whites." *The New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/upshot/why-trump-won-working-class-whites.html> (November 16, 2016).

³ deBoer, Fredrik. 2016. "Hillary Clinton Lost. Bernie Sanders Could Have Won." *The Washington Post*.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/10/hillary-clinton-lost-bernie-sanders-could-have-won/?utm_term=.9dc9641b4e2e (November 16, 2016).

⁴ Sracic, Paul. 2016. "Why Trump Gets Backing of White Working Class." *CNN*.

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/06/opinions/trump-appeal-to-white-working-class-opinion-sracic/index.html> (November 16, 2016).

⁵ Ball, Molly. 2015. "Liberals Are Losing the Culture Wars." *The Atlantic*.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/liberals-are-losing-the-culture-war/414175/> (November 16, 2016).

communities.¹ It was this type of reform, controversial at the time of enactment, that brought the Democrats into a new area. Only when the modern party is able to reunify its coalition of immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities, the working class, the LGBT community, and yes, educated middle-class millennials, will it be able to effectively respond to the divisions that have propelled President-Elect Trump to power. Democrats must unite their fellow progressives in order to further their fight against bigotry, demagoguery, and political tribalism, but to do so a new ideological paradigm is needed.

The left must look inward to face the future; it must show voters that it always has been and always will be the party of change. If dark days are to come under a Trump presidency, political self-renewal is the only adequate response that we progressives can have. As demonstrated by past progressive struggle, the only way to face injustice and defeat is with hope, and that is exactly what the Democratic Party needs now more than ever if it wants to reclaim its identity as the party of change.

¹ Zito, Salena. 2016. "How the Democrats Lost the White Working Class." *Washington Examiner*. <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/how-the-democrats-lost-the-white-working-class/article/2607257> (November 16, 2016).

Obama's Presidency: The Re-Emergence Of Black Political Activism

Zach Mills

As Barack Obama's presidency comes to an end, we must assess the legacy left by his time in the Oval Office. He will be remembered for many initiatives, such as Obamacare and the removal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, looming larger over his presidency has been the issue of race. For many, Obama's presidency symbolized the progress our nation has made in its short history. In a mere century and half, the United States had transformed from a nation with black slaves to a country with an African-American president. With Obama at the helm, many hoped that he would lead an overhaul of racial relations that led to increased equality. Obama represented a voice African Americans had never had in the highest elected office; someone who understands their frustration with the systematic, pervasive racism that they face today.

For this reason, Obama is seen as more than just the first African American president; he represented the hope for racial equality. Some may argue that this has taken place, while others insist that racial tension under Obama greatly increased. In order to adjudicate among these positions and dissect Obama's actual legacy on race, we must consider how Obama handled racial issues in different moments as president of the United States. I argue that although Obama may have failed to reach his campaign goals of achieving progressive racial change, he succeeded in activating Black political engagement and activism that laid dormant before his presidency.

The most highlighted racial issue during Obama's presidency has been the controversial policing of African Americans. Specific cases, such as the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, ignited a firestorm of protest across the country.

As more and more people reacted to these racially charged events, movements such as "Black Lives Matter" formed and spread throughout the country. The Black Lives Matter Movement, which is against unwarranted police violence against African Americans, organized nationwide protesting across the country. As the organization gained traction, the media became increasingly involved in covering mass protests led by this and related groups. With the creation of Black Lives Matter as well as the increase of media attention on this issue, Obama faced great pressure to respond from both the police and African Americans. Although many who voted for him hoped he would be a progressive leader for African Americans, as president, Obama did not support one side, instead having to play the role of mediator. As the country's leader, he had no choice but to walk a fine line between the two opposing sides in an attempt to diffuse potentially escalating violence.

Importantly, Obama responded to these situations differently in distinct moments of his presidency. For example, following the death of Trayvon Martin Obama was quoted in *The Atlantic* saying: "But my main message is to the parents of Trayvon Martin. If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon. And I think they are right to expect that all of us as Americans are going to

take this with the seriousness it deserves, and that we're going to get to the bottom of exactly what happened."¹

Here, Obama personalizes his response, identifying with African American parents in this political situation. His stance in this situation emphasized his direct link with black Americans while in other quotes taken after controversial deaths of African Americans throughout his presidency he did not. This event took place in early 2012, mere months before his election bid for a second term.

By comparison, this is his response to a question from *The Washington Post* relating to the Black Lives Matter movement toward the end of his second term: "I'm constantly reminding young people, who are full of passion, that I want them to keep their passion," Obama said. "But they've got to gird for the fact that it takes a long time to get stuff done in this democracy."² When re-election loomed, at least some of the time, Obama seemed to take a more personal tone, leaning more toward the protesters with promises of finding a solution. But with the politics of re-election behind him, Obama takes a more neutral tone, rejecting the idea that protest and violence can bring about radical change.

Without the pressure of his own re-election, Obama leaned away from appealing to the protesters as he did in his election bids. Their support was critical for his election bids to be successful and he knew he had to appeal to the protesters and African Americans with promises of immediate change. Yet, with elections behind him, Obama backed away from more polarizing statements, hoping to appeal to both sides. Although Obama might seem to have fallen far below a bar set high in terms of racial progress, many good things have happened under his presidency that have been unfairly overlooked.

In terms of race, one of the most overlooked achievements of Obama's presidency has been the increase of black political engagement. With Obama in the Oval Office, there has also been a shift in the view of political activism within the African American community. Under Obama, a new generation of African American activism has taken root. Obama's presence in the Oval Office represented the ability for African American's finally to have their voices heard. This was shown in the historic voter turnout of African Americans during the 2008 election, Blacks had the highest turnout rate among this age group — 55 percent, or an 8 percentage point jump from 2004.³ This historic turnout was due to the fact that African American's finally had a candidate they could relate to.

Before the 2008 election, every presidential candidate throughout American history had two things in common; they were both white and male. Obama is the Jackie Robinson of the politics: he finally broke the color barrier of the executive branch. This excited African Americans, driving them to the polls in record numbers. As the living and breathing representation of the ability for African Americans to take part and affect the political process, African American's felt they would finally have their voice heard. The simple idea of a Black President ignited a spark of political activism that lay dormant in the African American community for decades. No longer would their pleas for equality fall on deaf ears due to a president who didn't understand their situation.

¹ Graham, David. 2012. "Quote of the Day: Obama: 'If I Had a Son, He'd Look Like Trayvon'." *The Atlantic*.

² Joseph, Peniel. 2016. "Obama's Effort to Heal Racial Divisions and Uplift Black America." *Washington Post*.

³ Mcguirt, Mary. 2009. "Young Black Turnout a Record in 2008 Election." *ABC News*.

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=8140030&page=1> (November 27, 2016).

Moreover, Obama's presence in the White House also allowed for black celebrities to become more comfortable in speaking out and having their voices heard. This is evident in a comment made by Georgetown professor Michael Eric Dyson: "There's no question that the Obama era, the age of Obama, has raised implicit expectations about black excellence and black representation among black elites."¹ The election of Obama has shown African Americans that they too have the ability to affect the political agenda. This has inspired other influential African Americans to use their platforms in having their voices heard. There have been many examples of African Americans speaking out. One of the most recent is Colin Kaepernick and his protest of kneeling during the National Anthem. Prior to Obama's presidency, perhaps out of fear of repercussions, whether public scrutiny or losing sponsorships, we rarely saw athletes or celebrities speaking critically about racial politics.

Although there still might be slight repercussions, these acts of peaceful protest have generally been supported by President Obama. He stated, "I want (the protesters) to listen to the pain that that may cause somebody who, for example, had a spouse or a child who was killed in combat and why it hurts them to see somebody not standing." Obama added, "But I also want people to think about the pain he may be expressing about somebody who's lost a loved one that they think was unfairly shot."² This quote shows that although Obama supports African Americans in their protests, he must still walk a fine line as Commander in Chief. Although he identifies with African Americans and is angered by these events, he is thrust into a difficult role of playing mediator due to his position of power. The political pressure he faces comes from both protesters and the counter protesters alike. He must balance his role as an advocate for the African American community as well as his role as representing the entire nation. This situation has forced him to take less progressive stances than the ones he campaigned for and has led many progressives and African Americans to become increasingly frustrated in Obama's job as president, especially when it comes to the most controversial issues of his presidency, race and police violence against African Americans.

When we evaluate Obama's presidency in terms of race, many African Americans will claim he did too little for them while in office. Yet they fail to realize that his presidency did achieve great progress. His simply being elected, united and inspired the African American community to take a larger role in voicing their issues and influencing the political agenda. Before Obama, millions of African Americans believed their issues and concerns fell on deaf ears. Although Obama did not achieve as much progress as even he hoped, his voice echoed their concerns. His election stimulated a new wave of optimism, one that will hopefully continue even after he leaves office. As Obama's days in the White House wind down we will remember his presidency for a variety of reasons. One of them will be how the raised expectations of his presidency, even when disappointed, nurtured in a new period of political activism in the African American community.

¹ Vardon, Joe. 2016. "LeBron James and President Obama Seem to Share a Burden to Speak out on Social Issues." *cleveland.com*. http://www.cleveland.com/cavs/index.ssf/2016/02/lebron_james_and_president_oba.html (November 23, 2016).

² Diaz, Daniella. 2016 "Obama Defends Kaepernick's Anthem Protest." <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/28/politics/obama-colin-kaepernick-nfl-national-anthem-pr esidential-town-hall-cnn/> (November 23, 2016).

President Obama's Influence on the Progress of the LGBTQA Community

Emily Coletta

Controversial topics tend to be avoided by politicians. They place being reelected or higher approval ratings over answering the hard questions that could help us move forward as a society. They strategically avoid topics that could marginalize a larger portion of potential supporters, such as the LGBTQA (lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, and asexual or ally) community, along with others like racial and religious minorities. With our past leaders skirting around the subject of the LGBTQA, progress was stunted. President Barack Obama broke this trend, beginning with the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. He was also the first president to openly support same-sex marriage equality while in office. The Democratic Party followed his progressive lead, which finally led to the Supreme Court decision that states could not ban same-sex marriage. He tops off his presidency with the recent announcement of the Stonewall National Monument for LGBTQA rights. President Obama, as the first sitting president to openly support marriage within the LGBTQA community, has pushed and allowed for incredible progress to be made in the community as a whole and in the individual lives of everyone connected to this struggle.

President Obama broke the mold when he beat the odds and became the leader of the United States. All of the past presidents of the U.S. have been incredibly homogenous. All were white, male, heterosexuals who mostly came from powerful, affluent families. With a leader who demonstrates all of these qualities, the qualities of the those who were never persecuted, the rights and liberties of minorities can easily be pushed aside. President Obama relates to the LGBTQA community because, as an African-American, he understands their struggle. He demonstrated this when he included LGBTQA rights into the civil rights movement for women and African-Americans in his second inaugural address.¹ President Obama has a perspective that is incredibly unique compared to former presidents of the United States.

The first major milestone for the LGBTQA community during President Obama's time in office was the bipartisan repeal of the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy that he signed in 2011. This was a monumental step forward because it gave freedom to those who put their lives on the line for the rest of their nation. It was a major contradiction for LGBTQA members to sacrifice so much for a country that would not even allow them to show themselves for who they truly are. On the fifth anniversary of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the president posted on his Facebook account reminiscing about the repeal and the impact that it made. He described, "Because of all we've accomplished together, a grieving widow can now receive her wife's flag at her funeral,"² as a representation of the forward move. He also makes the point that in order to

¹ Horsley, Scott. 2016. "Obama Names LGBT Landmark As National Monument." *NPR*. <http://www.npr.org/2016/06/24/483385747/obama-names-lgbt-landmark-as-national-monument> (October 23, 2016).

² Somanader, Tanya. 2015. "President Obama on the Five Years Since Repealing 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'." *The White House: President Barack Obama*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/12/22/president-obama-five-years-he-repealed-dont-ask-dont-tell> (October 23, 2016).

protect the United States in the most effective way possible, we need the best of the best to contribute, which includes members of the LGBTQA community. Marginalizing LGBTQA members marginalizes great protectors that want to serve their country. The president wisely ends with comments focused on the progress still to be made in this area. He focuses on the concept of celebrating the progress made without overshadowing what still needs to be done for much of the posting.

In an interview with ABC on May 9, 2012, President Obama courageously became the first sitting president to explicitly express support for marriage within the LGBTQA community. When he stated, “I think same-sex couples should be able to get married,”¹ he opened the door for him to lose the next presidential election. Previously, President Obama had not supported same-sex marriage citing that the word marriage had deeply religious and traditional roots for him. This was a scapegoat for many politicians like him who did not want to directly deny the LGBTQA community of anything but also wanted to please conservative voters. He also campaigned that civil unions should be enough for the LGBTQA community. The problem with this logic is that saying civil unions is good enough for LGBTQA members is equivalent to saying that 75% pay is good enough for African-Americans compared to the pay of a white person for the same job. Civil unions may be a step in the right direction, but most would consider them much less than marriage, and they kept the LGBTQA community in harsh inequality.

Fortunately, the fact that the president publicly changed his stance before his second term shows that he thought LGBTQA rights were important enough to risk reelection. This opened the door for the Democratic Party to do the same. Later in 2012, the Democratic Party became the first major party to support same-sex marriage. As President Obama’s party, many connections have been made to the president stating his support and the party beginning to move forward on the same topic only two months later. The Democratic platform used during the president’s first race to the White House claimed the goal of “equal responsibility, benefits and protections,”² for same-sex couples. It did not explicitly mention marriage. This was changed before the president’s second race for president. This change spiraled and permitted much more growth in the LGBTQA community.

Arguably the most important victory for the LGBTQA community in generations was the ruling by the Supreme Court that states could not ban same-sex marriage in June of 2015. President Obama did not have his hand directly in any part of this decision seeing as it was accomplished in the judicial branch of government. However, it is safe to say that the president’s support of any decision will help it come to life anywhere in the United States because the president has so much influence; this decision was no different. It is no coincidence that this ruling was finally made while President Obama was in office because he welcomed the decision as others would not have. He was quoted saying that the ruling, “affirms what millions of Americans already believe in their hearts.”³

¹ “Transcript: Robin Roberts ABC News Interview With President Obama.” 2012. *ABC News*. <http://abcnews.go.com/politics/transcript-robin-roberts-abc-news-interview-president-obama/story?id=16316043> (October 23, 2016).

² Peters, Jeremy W., and Michael D. Shear. 2012. “Democrats Draft Gay Marriage Platform.” *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/31/us/politics/democrats-draft-gay-marriage-platform.html?_r=0 (October 23, 2016).

³ Liptak, Adam. 2015. “Supreme Court Ruling Makes Same-Sex Marriage a Right Nationwide.” *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/27/us/supreme-court-same-sex-marriage.html> (October 23, 2016).

To finish off his presidency in style, President Obama recently announced the Stonewall National Monument: “our national parks should reflect the full story of our country, the richness and diversity and uniquely American spirit that has always defined us. That we are stronger together. That out of many, we are one.”¹ This will be the first national monument dedicated to the LGBTQA community and their fight for equality. It will commemorate the spark of the modern gay rights movement at the Stonewall Inn of Greenwich Village, New York, in 1969. Patrons of the inn clashed with police as they decided to no longer tolerate injustice against their community and persecution from police.² This announcement came less than two weeks after 49 people were killed in an Orlando, Florida, gay bar by a gunman.

To the benefit of many, President Barack Obama has pushed the United States into a future of equality for all. He not only led the fight by signing the repeal of the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy and stating overtly his support for the community, but his prestige enables his opinion to have sway over other governmental bodies including the Supreme Court and the Democratic Party as a whole. Presidents have a hold over their country much further than the governmental processes they are directly involved in because they set precedents for every inch of their country. President Obama set the precedent that no matter who you are, who you love, or who you identify as, you deserve to live your life as you see fit with the equality of any other United States citizen.

¹ “LGBT Rights Milestones Fast Facts.” 2016. *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/19/us/lgbt-rights-milestones-fast-facts/> (October 23, 2016).

² Horsley, Scott. 2016. “Obama Names LGBT Landmark As National Monument.” *NPR*. <http://www.npr.org/2016/06/24/483385747/obama-names-lgbt-landmark-as-national-monument> (October 23, 2016).

An Analysis of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Hannah Bissonnette

A particularly impressive achievement of President Barack Obama's eight years in office is the Iran Nuclear Deal, referred to as "arguably the most significant foreign policy achievement of Barack Obama's presidency."¹ Passed in 2015, the Iran Nuclear Deal is a deal between Iran and the P5+1, a coalition of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia, plus Germany. This historic deal is the product of twelve years of international negotiations, and establishes the effective end of the development of Iran's nuclear program in exchange for leniency on various sanctions imposed on Iran related to their nuclear program. The Iran Nuclear Deal proves that diplomatic effort can bring about positive change, setting an example for international communication and collaboration. Its success may be if not the most significant achievement in foreign policy, an extremely important one, with the potential to enact long-lasting positive change.

The goal of the deal is to "verifiably prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."² This goal is achieved by ensuring that Iran's nuclear program will be solely peaceful through many restrictions on the program, while still allowing for minimal nuclear enrichment. The deal blocks the four pathways to a nuclear weapon, including highly enriched uranium at the Natanz facility and Fordow, weapons-grade plutonium and covert attempts to produce fissile materials. The agreement also limits enrichment to 3.7 percent and caps the stockpile of low-enriched uranium at 300 kilograms for 15 years. Iran has also agreed not to build any additional heavy water reactors for 15 years.

The agreement furthermore includes a number of efforts to ensure that Iran complies with the established terms. Inspectors will have access to the supply chain that supports the nuclear program, and there will be continuous surveillance of centrifuge manufacturing and storage facilities conducted. This constant surveillance prevents Iran from engaging in any other nuclear activity, other than that outlined in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in the Iran Nuclear Deal. The Deal also set a timeline, requiring Iran to reduce the current stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98% and limits the enrichment capacity, research, and development for 15 years. So, while the deal does not completely put an end to nuclear production in Iran, it will effectively halt the process for the next fifteen years; while allowing Iran to rebuild economically and introducing the possibility for Iran to re-engage the international community.

The benefits of this deal are numerous. The Deal relieves Iran of all UN Security Council and U.S. sanctions related to their nuclear program. Iran is able to continue with their nuclear program in a limited capacity and can look forward to rebuilding their economy as an international player. On the other hand, the United States and other nations can be assured that Iran will never develop nuclear weapons and that any sort of nuclear progress will be very closely monitored for years to come.

¹ Borger, Julian, and Saeed Kamali Dehghan. "Iran Seals Nuclear Deal with West in Return for Sanctions Relief." *The Guardian*. November 24, 2013. Accessed November 08, 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/24/iran-nuclear-deal-west-sanctions-relief>.

² House, The White. "The Iran Deal: Introduction." *Medium*. August 04, 2015. Accessed November 08, 2016.

<https://medium.com/the-iran-deal/introduction-fcb13560dfb9#.iewczm6q2>.

The Iran Nuclear Deal was not popular with all public figures, however, most noticeably the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and major Republicans in the U.S. Congress. Many leaders referred to the agreement as a “Bad Deal”, because it failed to dismantle Iran’s nuclear program completely, and that it would “likely fuel nuclear arms race around the world” as Speaker of the House John Boehner stated¹. While the deal fails to fully dismantle Iran’s nuclear program, it succeeds in postponing nuclear development in Iran for at least a decade, and as a diplomatic agreement, furthers international communication between Iran and the rest of the global community. The sanctions that have crippled the Iranian economy can always be re-imposed on Iran if they fail to comply, giving other countries leverage over their actions.

Another argument against the deal postulated that all of the money from sanctions relief would go to straight to support terrorist activity in the region. The United States, however only removed the sanctions for Iran’s nuclear program, while maintaining sanctions for terrorism, human right violations and other reasons. In addition, most of the sanction money will go directly to more pressing problems, such as economic needs.

The Iran Nuclear Deal was passed by Congress in September 2015. Since its implementation, the deal has unfolded as predicted, with Iran beginning to decrease their nuclear program, and U.S. and U.N. sanctions subsequently being gradually lifted. For President Obama to have negotiated a deal that was controversial both in his country and abroad, at a time when air strikes and nuclear war were being considered as alternatives, is indeed an impressive feat. This is an international issue that was resolved peacefully, and though it took many years, has so far only experienced success. It is inspiring to see a deal such as this succeed; for so many countries to collaborate and engage in negotiation about an issue that had the prospect of exploding into war, and do so in a way that makes the majority of participants happy proves to show that successful collaboration and agreement on a global scale is possible. With Barack Obama leaving office next year, the Iran Nuclear Deal is a long-lasting and impactful legacy.

In the future, the Iran Nuclear Deal will hopefully open more channels of communication between Iran and the U.S., and integrate Iran more fully into the international community. This will only improve relations between U.S. and Iran in the future, as communication is the key to successful foreign policy and international relations. There are many that doubt that two countries with such a complicated history will be able to improve their relations, but I argue that the passage of the deal is already a step in the right direction. The Iran Nuclear Deal will put more pressure on Iran from the international community to comply with the terms, and to consequently moderate Iran’s terrorism. The deal will also remain as proof that a successful agreement on this scale can, and should, be accomplished in contemporary politics, especially considering that the alternative could result in nuclear war. The Iran Nuclear Deal that was championed and pushed through by President Obama is indeed a historic achievement that will hopefully set a precedent for future international relations.

¹ Wong, Scott. "Boehner: Iran Deal Will 'fuel a Nuclear Arms Race'" The Hill. July 14, 2015. <http://thehill.com/homenews/house/247794-boehner-iran-deal-will-fuel-a-nuclear-arms-race>.

Equality is the Best Policy: the Obama Administration and Civil Rights

Sahar Iqbal

A whirlwind of emotions were evoked in 2008 when the United States of America elected its first African American president, Barak Obama. Many Americans were excited that a minority was running for President, which made this election specifically unique due to high minority turnout compared to other elections. Excitement stemmed from the sentiment that the past elections generally involved the same old moderately mundane white males repeatedly butting heads with each other. It was clear the public yearned for a different, refreshing figure that accurately reflected the marginalized portion of America. When Barack Obama won the election against Senator John McCain, it conveyed the American people were ready for a change, establishing a sturdy stepping stone for all minorities to gradually receive representation. Under the Obama administration, minority turnout increased significantly, allowing marginalized individuals to be incorporated within government, and leading to the establishment of various progressive policies. President Obama has left a profound mark on American history by catalyzing progression within the United States.

When President Obama campaigned for his second term within 2012, the minority turnout rate was historically the highest than ever before due to the appeal of his campaign. Within the 2004 election, it was palpable to see that minorities could not relate to either presidential candidate regardless of the party. As a result, the election experienced the lowest black American voter turnout rate¹. But eight years later, an alarming rate of minorities were vocal about criticizing Governor Romney's inability to accommodate to minorities. Lauren Howie, an employee at Case Western Reserve University's medical school, believes that President Obama's previous campaigns were more appealing when compared to his Republican counterparts. She comments, "Romney couldn't care less about [her] fellow African Americans" since he was "a white Mormon swimming in money...Romney was not someone [she] was willing to trust with [her] future"². Howie's comment reflects how many minorities felt about Governor Romney's campaigns. President Obama, on the other hand, was successful in attracting minorities due to his own status as an African American. However, not all of America was in favor of the President's candidacy. His position as a candidate raised controversy among a different group of Americans who questioned his citizenship and demanded to see his birth certificate. Due to this belligerent demand, many immigrants sympathized with President Obama's situation, which is another factor that contributed to his appeal. His gregarious allure was even dubbed the "Obama Effect" by Andra Gillespie, a political science professor at Emory University. This effect explains that minorities possessed a heightened sense of motivation to

¹ Fox News

² Fox News

vote and support a fellow minority's campaign¹. However, it should be noted that during the 2008 elections, black Americans had surpassed turnout rates in comparison to white Americans and even other minority groups. When black Americans had recognized that it was possible for a minority to win during the 2008 elections, it had motivated them to venture outside their homes in order to cast their vote once again. Gillespie noted that “2012 turnout is a milestone for blacks” since the possibility of other minorities running for president was looming in the air². Obama successfully yielded minority voters due to his own status as an African American, reflecting to the American people that progress is tangible within the upcoming decades.

Progress within American history is strongly reflected under the Obama administration, as more marginalized individuals are able to hold government positions. Robert Raben, a Democratic consultant works on diversity issues within the White House. He states that the Obama administration has “settled for the fact that diversity is a permanent part of the federal government”³. The most notable feature of his presidency regards the position of women and minorities as the top policy appointments within the Executive branch⁴. Anne Joseph O’Connell, a Berkeley law school professor within the University of California, arranged a database of government appointees confirmed by the Senate encompassing 80 important policy positions between January 1977 and August 2015. The research conducted conveys that President Obama had placed women and minorities in 53.5 percent of these governmental posts, which is 27.9 percent higher than President George W. Bush⁵. President Obama’s staff focuses on employing African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, women, disabled individuals, and members from the LGBTQ+ community. So far, there are five transgender men and women serving in the federal agencies, six openly gay ambassadors, a full time transgender employee within the White House, and a gay man serving as a specialized envoy to promote LGBTQ+ rights globally⁶. For women, Latinos, and Asian Americans, employment has also increased within top policy jobs. The amount of women in positions rose from 23.3 percent to 35.5 percent from Clinton’s presidency to Obama's presidency respectively. Employment of Latinos and Asian Americans in these jobs has risen from 4.6 percent to 8.5 percent. The Obama administration articulates the importance of diversity within government, encouraging governmental employment positions for minorities in order for their voices to be regarded within the policy making process.

The Obama administration has been beneficial for minorities, as they have been placed within government in order to positively affect policies pertaining to human rights. The biggest turning point was when President Obama endorsed same sex marriage within 2012 and then declared the legalization of same sex marriage on June 26, 2015⁷. Although this solicited a multitude of emotions nationwide, it marked yet another milestone under the Obama presidency. The installation of minorities within government has an external, positive effect as well upon the public. President Obama has passed several policies that support marginalized individuals such as, but not limited to, women, immigrants, LGBTQ+ members, and ethnic minorities. By introducing the “JumpStart Our Business Startups” (JOBS) Act, it allowed the emancipation of capital for women and minority owned business since they are more susceptible to hardships

¹ Fox News

² Fox News

³ Washington Post

⁴ Washington Post

⁵ Washington Post

⁶ Washington Post

⁷ Washington Post

accessing capital. Fortunately, minorities and individuals who made lower net worth are enabled to receive investments that contributes more wealth within their communities¹. President Obama has helped the African American community by introducing My Brother's Keeper, which places an emphasis on improving the lives of black American males. Its main goal is to encourage non-profit organizations to raise \$200 million dollars within 5 years². He has also supported numerous bills pertaining to improving the lives of undocumented immigrants, most notably by enacting the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. This act had placed hope within undocumented immigrants since it enables them to pursue a higher education and contribute to the U.S armed forces³. By placing minorities within governmental positions, the Obama administration has made equality a priority, thereby increasing the amount of policies and programs catered towards marginalized individuals.

The United States had to come face to face with progression as soon as Barack Obama was elected as the first African American President within the 2008 election. Many minorities began to adopt the mentality that progression is an actual possibility that will ensue within America. Even after civil rights were obtained, minority groups still faced oppression and were underrepresented within the government. When President Obama was elected, it had validated the claim that America is a beacon for hope and a symbol that change in the face of prejudice was possible. The 2008 and 2012 election had produced the highest turnout rate amongst minority voters within history. President Obama successfully delivered on his promise to make diversity a priority by having women, ethnic minorities, and well as a record number of 250 LGBTQ+ appointments within the federal government⁴. As a result, many programs and policies concerning minorities have been enacted such as the DREAM Act, same sex marriage, My Brother's Keeper, and several other policies aimed at advocating basic human rights. The Obama administration was notable for passing laws like these that accommodated oppressed groups, thus leaving a permanent mark in American human rights history.

¹ Black Enterprise

² Black Enterprise

³ Washington.gov

⁴ Human Rights Campaign

Mass Shootings

Caio Goncalves

In the aftermath of the Umpqua Community College shooting in 2015, which claimed the lives of nine people, President Obama's speech had a noticeably different tone than similar speeches he had made in the past following other mass shootings. Over the course of his presidency, we heard President Obama imagine his daughters in that Aurora movie theater, we saw him weep for the families of the children of Sandy Hook and we heard him tell us how heartbroken he was that another shooting had occurred in Fort Hood. But this speech on October 1, 2015, was different. Obama appeared not just solemn, but frustrated and dare I say it, angry. "Somehow this has become routine. The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine. The conversation in the aftermath of it. We've become numb to this."¹

And since then, mass shootings have continued to happen. President Obama has continued to be forced to speak in front of cameras about it, the constant coverage for days has continued to happen, and sadly, we have continued to forget about those tragedies when our attention spans give out. There is the impression, and it isn't an unfair one, that Obama's presidency has been plagued with mass shootings - more than the four previous presidents combined. A closer look at the numbers reveal that this is simply not true.² It is true however, that more and more shootings have occurred under the Obama administration than any other president.

Let's unpack the term *mass shooting* for a moment. A mass shooting is typically defined as an incident in which 4 or more people are killed, though there are some discrepancies in ways different agencies define the term.³ So, why is it that the trend for mass shootings in America has spiked over the recent years, and America's 3 deadliest shootings have occurred in the last 10 years?

There is not necessarily one sure reason why our nation is seeing more and more mass shootings. What we can do however, is take a look at the numbers, which could certainly serve to explain why we as a country face so much carnage in gun related violent episodes in comparison to the rest of the developed world. "The number of gun murders per capita in the US in 2012 - the most recent year for comparable statistics - was nearly 30 times that in the UK, at 2.9 per 100,000 compared with just 0.1," according to the BBC.⁴

The fact is, America is obsessed with guns, and although there is no sure statistic, it is estimated that there are roughly 300 million guns in the country - that is nearly one gun per every individual American. While some unenlightened proponents of NRA rhetoric would blame Hollywood, the video game industry, or states' defunding of mental health budgets on these tragedies, guns and their accessibility to those who should not have them, is most often the

¹ The White House. "Statement by the President on the Shootings at Umpqua Community College, Roseburg, Oregon." 01 Oct. 2015. Web. 25 Oct. 2016.

² Snopes. Daniel Evon. "FALSE: Mass Shootings Under Obama." 04 Dec. 2015. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <<http://www.snopes.com/mass-shootings-obama/>>.

³ CNN. "A Visual Guide: Mass Shootings in America." 21 June 2016. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <<http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/13/health/mass-shootings-in-america-in-charts-and-graphs-trnd/>>.

⁴ BBC News. "Guns in the US: The Statistics behind the Violence." *BBC News*. N.p., 5 Jan. 2016. Web. 14 Nov. 2016. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34996604>>.

common denominator in these cases. There are exceptions - as in the case of Adam Lanza, the Sandy Hook shooter, who used his mother's guns which were obtained legally, to commit his crime. But as President Obama said, "We know we can't stop every act of violence, every act of evil in the world. But maybe we could try to stop one act of evil."

In that same speech in 2016, Obama announced new gun legislation in the form of an executive orders, which unsurprisingly received immediate push back from Republicans. What's curious about Obama's fight against Congress on this issue is that it has nothing to do with voters and everything to do with lobbyists. As a matter of fact, this is perhaps the one issue that crosses party lines as Americans are overwhelmingly in favor of stricter gun reform. A Quinnipiac poll conducted in June of 2016, found that 86% of respondents supported a ban on gun sales for those on terrorist watch lists and 90% supported stricter background checks.¹

One of the loudest voices in favor of gun control legislation, has been Connecticut United States Senator Chris Murphy (D). In a statement to The UConn Political Review², Sen. Murphy wrote about how the tragedy at Sandy Hook changed the course of his political career dramatically and that since then, he has been waging a fight against the Republican majority in Congress.

"Despite numerous common-sense legislative options that could help prevent these tragedies in the future, in the past four years Congress has refused to pass a single measure that would significantly reduce gun violence. On June 15, 2016--three days after the worst mass shooting in American history--I had had enough with Congress's inaction, and took the floor of the Senate to demand votes on measures that would help keep guns out of the hands of would-be terrorists, gun traffickers, and criminals," the statement read. "I held the floor for nearly 15 hours in an attempt to force action, and was able to announce at 2:00 a.m. that Republicans had agreed to hold votes on two critical reforms: a measure to prohibit those on the terrorist watch list from purchasing guns and a measure to ensure universal background checks for every commercial gun sale. These measures are supported by more than 80% of Americans--Republicans and Democrats--and represent simple, reasonable steps we can take to keep guns away from dangerous individuals, while respecting the rights of law-abiding gun owners."

Both amendments proposed by Sen. Murphy were ultimately defeated.

"I am deeply disappointed by this result, but far from surprised; breaking the stranglehold that the gun lobby has over this Congress is going to be a long, uphill climb. But the simple fact remains that Americans want a background check system that prevents dangerous people and terrorists from getting their hands on guns. It will take time, but this country is rising up to demand stronger, safer gun laws, and in the face of unspeakable tragedy, our movement for change continues to grow," Sen. Murphy concluded.

One would think it wouldn't have taken so many cases of highly publicized gun violence before President Obama got really tough on Congress and on the NRA. It seems as though the President, and far too many other high standing figures in both parties, are way too afraid of politicizing tragedy. Even in his remarks after the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting, the deadliest in the country's history, Obama's remarks focused heavily on support for the survivors

¹Quinnipiac University. "QU Poll Release Detail." N.p., 30 June 2016. Web. 25 Oct. 2016. <<https://poll.qu.edu/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=2364>>.

² Sen. Chris Murphy's statement to the UConn Political Review, November 4th, 2016

and the families of the fallen,¹ and failed to hammer the point that these tragedies will continue to happen in higher and higher numbers if we fail to put pressure on our legislators. Some on the opposite side of the argument may say it is insensitive to use lives lost as props for a political movement or agenda. I happen to agree with former Attorney General Eric Holder when he said about Sandy Hook, “If the American people, legislators, members of Congress, had had the ability to be with me on that day, to walk through those classrooms and see the caked blood, if people had seen the crime scene search pictures of those little angels, I suspect that the outcome of our – that effort that we mounted last year would have been different.”²

¹ Slate Magazine. Waldman, Katy. "A Brief, Inglorious History of “Not Politicizing Tragedy”." *Slate Magazine*. N.p., 12 June 2016. Web. 25 Oct. 2016.
<http://www.slate.com/blogs/lexicon_valley/2016/06/12/the_orlando_shootings_and_politicizing_tragedy.html>.

² US Senator Richard Blumenthal. N.p., 29 Jan. 2014. Web. 14 Nov. 2016.
<<https://www.blumenthal.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/holder-to-blumenthal-obama-administration-remains-committed-to-comprehensive-effort-to-reduce-gun-violence-expand-mental-health-access>>.

Obama's Presidency and Transparency in the Information Age

Austin Beaudoin

Regardless of his efficacy as an executive while serving as the 44th President of the United States of America, Barack Obama wielded the power and prestige of the office with a dignity that will be missed as the transitional power process begins. Like so many heads of state that came before him, I believe Barack Obama to be an idealistic man of strong convictions constrained by the political climate of his time. Chief among the issues demonstrating this contentious dichotomy lies transparency, the perpetual struggle between privacy and security. Obama acknowledged the need for an emphasis on transparency reform and a deviation from the previous Bush administration, making a consistent campaign promise to lead the 'most transparent administration ever'. Holding the President accountable for the sprawling bureaucratic structure that the Executive branch has become is a complex process, yet certain trends in information dissemination and policy cannot be ignored.

One can easily diagnose the chronic lack of transparency of the Bush administration as indicative of the devastating impact 9/11 left on the American psyche; in reality, initiatives stifling public access to the federal government were set in motion before the horrific acts of terrorism during George W. Bush's tenure as President. Early legal struggles by the administration resisted the Advisory Committee Act in the interest of blocking departmental data from being dissected by the public, as well as Bush's executive order essentially negating the 1978 Presidential Records Act and greatly enhancing the powers of executive privilege.¹ September 11th, 2001 gave the Bush administration the chance they had been waiting for in greatly enhancing the powers of the executive without a significant presence of organized opposition. Clint Hendler of the Columbia Journalism Review explains, "The Justice Department invoked a state-secrets privilege in an extraordinarily wide range of cases. The administration and its conservative allies waged a rhetorical war on journalists who worked to learn and disclose the government's secrets. Legal justifications for the administration's detainee and warrantless wiretapping policies remain shrouded in secrecy today."² The Bush administration faced a time of political crisis and rapidly expanding modes of instantaneous electronic communication, prompting a "draconian crackdown on the free flow of government information to the public."³ President Obama entered office with a pledge to reverse these practices, leading to a sense of collective hope among journalists that this new administration would usher in a new age of government accountability.

President Obama ascended to the White House at a time where government black sites, opaque intelligence agencies and private contractors were discretely utilized in the name of

¹ Hendler, Clint. 2009. "What We Didn't Know Has Hurt Us". February. http://www.cjr.org/feature/what_we_didnt_know_has_hurt_us.php. (October 30, 2016).

² Ibid.

³ Hendler, Clint. 2009. "What We Didn't Know Has Hurt Us".

fighting terrorism around the globe.¹ An astute politician, Barack Obama immediately called attention to the need for additional government transparency. The first full day of office was marked by a Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government, as well as an analogous memorandum on Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), directing all executive departments and agencies to operate on principles of ‘openness and transparency’.² A direct reversal to the Bush administration’s policy of resisting FOIA requests based on a ‘sound legal basis’, Obama immediately established the integral ‘presumption of openness’ essential to government transparency. A subsequent Executive Order (EO) repealed Bush’s EO 13233 allowing for current and former executives to delay the release of documents based on the principle of executive privilege. An additional EO (13526) was enacted to better classify, store, and declassify government information through the establishment of the National Declassification Center within the National Archives. President Obama has empirically initiated government programs to advance the interests of accountability, leading the White House to champion the campaign promise of “the most transparency administration in history” as a mission accomplished.

Obama’s transparency initiatives have been centered on increased departmental centralization of data, improving methods of declassification and response to document requests, particularly regarding FOIA. The Obama administration broke precedent by publishing the White House visitor logs, as well as increasing emphasis on the declassification of documents of historical value from the National Archives.³ The Open Government Initiative brought about new government mediums for information sharing, such as Ethics.gov and Data.gov, providing both clear outlines of transparency policy and a huge volume of government data collected to administer coherent policy regarding energy, land management, and even some intelligence gathering.⁴ Much of these programs were enacted through unilateral executive action, making the FOIA Improvement Acts of 2014 and 2016 significant pieces of legislation in the interest of transparency. Establishing a Chief FOIA Officers Council, in addition to the FOIA Advisory Committee, supervises the compliance of requests throughout the federal government as well as the DOJ pilot program to create a centralized ‘FOIA.gov’ request website all furthered the interest of open government. These amendments to existing policy certainly worked towards coherent transparency policy and departmental compliance, particularly former Attorney General Eric Holder’s 2009 “release to one is a release to all” proposition to encourage a wider spread of declassified government information.⁵ All progress made during Obama’s tenure signifies promise, yet the process of transforming a powerful and secretive government takes nearly universal compliance. Without forcefully advocating for these initiatives to be strictly enforced through the force of law, executive departments are given the autonomy to manage transparency as they see fit. President Obama has shown proficiency in managing the innovations in telecommunications and data collection, molding the new age of information to his benefit.

¹ Downie Jr., Leonard and Rafsky, Sara. 2013. “The Obama Administration and the Press: Leak investigations and surveillance in post 9/11 America”. October 10, 2016.

² White, Lee. 2012. “Transparency, Declassification, and the Obama Presidency” September 2016.

³ White House. 2016. “Fact Sheet: New Steps Towards Ensuring Openness and Transparency in Government”. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/30/fact-sheet-new-steps-toward-ensuring-openness-and-transparency>. (October 30, 2016).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ White House. 2016. “Fact Sheet: New Steps Towards Ensuring Openness and Transparency in Government”.

With a lengthy and public record of transparency initiatives, Obama's legacy as a champion of open government seems outwardly impeccable. Lamentably, subsequent Presidential and departmental actions have demonstrated an aversion to the press and dedication to withhold information for reasons that go beyond immediate national security. The advent of social media has allowed President Obama to subvert the press almost entirely, choosing to appeal to the public via mediums such as Youtube or Facebook, while posting policy on government websites largely on his own terms. These practices allow the administration to claim transparency by publishing large amounts of information to the public while limiting exposure.¹

The contradictory behavior of the administration symbolizes the struggle to achieve security of national interests while maintaining a transparent government, "This [Obama's] administration has made unprecedented releases of data with a measurable impact on many sectors of society at the same time that the White House and agencies have stonewalled the press asking tough questions."² While the lesser of the administrations aggressions towards the press, stifling journalists ability to participate in coverage of important executive decisions only maintains the façade of transparency. The fierce resistance of Washington towards meaningful transparency reform is notable, yet a President campaigning with transparency and accountability as a core tenant of his platform must have the resolve to mount a full-throated defense of these initiatives. Alex Howard of the Sunlight Foundation notes Obama's quiet support of the Data Act as well as the absence of his opposition to the National Defense Authorization Act, a piece of legislation that would essentially exempt the DoD from FOIA, as damning examples of the Presidents true dedication to transparency.³ 2015 saw a record number of FOIA requests and denials, with departments largely operating based on their own internal standards and policies.⁴ Obama's failure in demanding open government has allowed departments such as the DOJ and CIA to resist meaningful document publications, making the administration's claim of a 91% FOIA fulfillment rate ring hollow due to its inclusion of partially released documents, many with no relevant information, to be considered releases.⁵ Government resistance in a largely hostile political climate is expected, as well as Obama's tepid enforcement of executive policy for those same political reasons. What makes this administration a failure in securing its professed aims of transparency is found in direct action to stifle the spread of information to the public, as well as the perpetuation of policies from the Bush era.

The Obama administration has employed both a negligent attitude towards the activities of its executive departments and coherent initiatives aimed at reducing public accessibility to the inner workings of the White House. Obama's administration has employed the contradictory stance of seemingly embracing the dissemination of electronic data while using archaic legislation such as 1917's Espionage Act to aggressively prosecute whistleblowers. The availability of tracking leaks via electronic footprints, coupled with the revelations of sites such as Wikileaks utilizing un-redacted government documents for publication, has produced a

¹ Downie Jr., Leonard and Rafsky, Sara. 2013. "The Obama Administration and the Press: Leak investigations and surveillance in post 9/11 America"

² Howard, Alex. 2016. "How should history measure the Obama administration's record on transparency?" September 2. <https://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2016/09/02/how-should-history-measure-the-obama-administrations-record-on-transparency/>. (October 30, 2016).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Downie Jr., Leonard and Rafsky, Sara. 2013. "The Obama Administration and the Press: Leak investigations and surveillance in post 9/11 America."

political climate at odds with journalists and government whistleblowers. Legislative efforts such as the 2012 Whistleblower Act are indicative of the tendency of Obama's Presidency to exalt the virtues of open government, yet lend these efforts little other than vocal support. Under Obama, six government employees and two government contractors (including Snowden) have been aggressively pursued by the DOJ under the Espionage Act.¹ Snowden's revelations in particular revealed the need to aggressively monitor the activities of executive departments, particularly those involving the collection of metadata and intelligence. The DOJ's legal prosecutions of whistleblowers have both increased in volume and the obtrusiveness of their surveillance methods, illegally monitoring and subpoenaing private phone calls and records of private citizens to build their cases for prosecution.² Obama's own initiatives to stifle true investigative journalism regarding the activities of the federal government stands as his most enduring legacy in the struggle over transparency.

In a direct contrast to previous unilateral executive action, Obama's memorandum requiring all departments to establish an 'Insider Threat Program,' a process of government accountability in reporting or monitoring their colleagues, encourages conformity and punishes dissent. Even in the Bush era, journalists and government officials had an open dialogue on topics of grave national significance, a conduit for public accountability that has been shrinking under Obama.³ Counterterrorism methods, data gathering, and foreign military campaigns dominate our news cycles without any real insight into the government policies and methods for finding solutions to the fundamental issues of our time. The grey area between classified and public information has been so blurred under Obama's leadership that many government officials have simply severed ties with their old contacts, a reality that could not be more damning towards Obama's record as a champion of transparency. Without a strong President firmly committed to the ideals of transparency divorced from the realities of politics, it is unlikely the precedent established by Obama of symbolic gestures with little institutional reform will be subject to change. Sadly, I believe this is the most enduring legacy Obama will leave on the bureaucratic processes of the federal government.

¹ Downie Jr., Leonard and Rafsky, Sara. 2013. "The Obama Administration and the Press: Leak investigations and surveillance in post 9/11 America."

² Howard, Alex. 2016. "How should history measure the Obama administration's record on transparency?"

³ Ibid.

President Obama: an LGBTQ+ Champion

Christian Velez

The LGBTQ community has been subjected to persecution and chastisement throughout history. Over the past few decades, the United States has been slowly progressing towards becoming a more inclusive and LGBTQ-friendly nation. The Obama Administration will likely be remembered as a catalyst for increasing exposure, acceptance, and rights amongst the LGBTQ community. Throughout his eight years in office, President Obama was able to aid in the advancement of LGBTQ rights like no other president before him. While there is undeniably more progress to be made, the Obama Administration has laid the groundwork needed to move forward.

Before President Obama was sworn into office in January of 2009, the LGBTQ community faced a constant fight for marriage equality along with all of its federal benefits. On October 11, 2008, Connecticut had become only the third state to legalize same-sex marriage.¹ Connecticut, Massachusetts, and California were the only states that legally permitted same-sex marriages—three out of fifty states. On November 4, 2008, the very day Barack Obama got elected to his first term, three states voted to ban same-sex marriages: Florida, Arizona, and California.² That's right - California, one of the three states that had previously recognized same-sex marriages, had overturned its stance on same-sex marriage with the passage of Proposition 8. President Obama inherited a nation that, for the most part, excluded same-sex couples from legally being wed.

President Obama began fighting for the LGBTQ community from the very beginning of his administration in 2009. In Mid-June of his first year, President Obama signed a memorandum that allowed for same-sex partners of federal employees to share certain extended benefits.³ While this action undoubtedly paved the way for LGBTQ rights to progress, it didn't set many gay rights advocates at ease as it only affected a small number of people. It was President Obama's other actions during his first year that began to solidify him as a champion for the LGBTQ community.

In October of 2009, President Obama signed the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act, which "provide[s] critical health services to uninsured and underinsured people living with HIV."⁴ While people outside the LGBTQ community also contract HIV/AIDS, people of the LGBTQ community are affected by a much higher percentage. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 83% of HIV diagnoses among males are from gay or bisexual men.⁵ In addition to the Ryan White Act, the Obama Administration

¹ Altimari, Daniela. 2008. "State Supreme Court Legalizes Same-Sex Marriage." Hartford Courant. <http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-gaymarriage1011.artoct11-story.html> (November 1, 2016).

² McKinley, Jesse, and Laurie Goodstein. 2008. "Bans in 3 States on Gay Marriage." The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/06/us/politics/06marriage.html> (November 1, 2016).

³ Montopoli, Brian. 2009. "Obama Signs Same Sex Benefits Memorandum." CBS News. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-signs-same-sex-benefits-memorandum/> (November 1, 2016).

⁴ "Obama Administration Record for the LGBT Community." The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/lgbt_record.pdf (November 5, 2016).

⁵ "HIV in the United States: At a Glance." 2014. AIDS.gov. <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/statistics/#footnotec> (November 5, 2016).

implemented a \$50 million increase in funds towards the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) in the 2011 Fiscal Year.¹ In the 2012 Fiscal Year, the Administration announced another \$35 million that would be set-aside for the ADAP.² President Obama actually released “the Nation’s first comprehensive plan for responding to the domestic HIV epidemic.”³ It’s safe to say that President Obama has done more for the HIV/AIDS epidemic than any other President since it began in the 1980s.

In October of 2009, the Obama Administration passed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. This Act provides federal funding to state and local jurisdictions to aid in investigating hate crimes.⁴ Before this act, hate crimes based on race, color, or religion were investigated by federal funding, but hate crimes based on gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity weren’t.⁵ With this Act, the Obama Administration took a very clear stance that he and his administration would have zero tolerance towards hate crimes against anyone, including the LGBTQ community.

In December of 2010, President Obama signed a bill that repealed Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, which banned gays and lesbians from serving in the Armed Forces. President Obama, speaking at the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) 15th Annual National Dinner, poignantly stated, “All around the world, you’ve got gays and lesbians who are serving, and the only difference is now they can put up a family photo. No one has to live a lie to serve the country they love.”⁶ Although repealing Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was a tremendous step towards a more LGBTQ-inclusive nation, it was what President Obama did on May 9th, 2012 that established him as a true champion for the LGBTQ community: President Obama became the first sitting president to support same-sex marriage.⁷ The LGBTQ community was used to seeing their president support the states’ right to decide whether same-sex marriage would be legal. President Obama, once again, took a stance—this time, during the campaign season that saw his reelection—and supported the equal marriage rights of the LGBTQ community.

After reelection, the second Obama Administration sought to continue progress for LGBTQ citizens. In February of 2013, President Obama directed the Department of Health and Human Services to require that all hospitals who receive Medicaid or Medicare funding to allow

¹ “Obama Administration Record for the LGBT Community.” The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/lgbt_record.pdf (November 5, 2016).

² “Obama Administration Record for the LGBT Community.” The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/lgbt_record.pdf (November 5, 2016).

³ “Obama Administration Record for the LGBT Community.” The White House. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/lgbt_record.pdf (November 5, 2016).

⁴ “The Matthew Shepard And James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act Of 2009.” 2015. The Matthew Shepard And James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act Of 2009 | CRT | Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/crt/matthew-shepard-and-james-byrd-jr-hate-crimes-prevention-act-2009-0> (November 5, 2016).

⁵ “The Matthew Shepard And James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act Of 2009.” 2015. The Matthew Shepard And James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act Of 2009 | CRT | Department of Justice. <https://www.justice.gov/crt/matthew-shepard-and-james-byrd-jr-hate-crimes-prevention-act-2009-0> (November 5, 2016).

⁶ Cocco, Kasie. 2011. “President Obama at the Human Rights Campaign’s 15th Annual National Dinner.” WhiteHouse.gov. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/10/02/president-obama-human-rights-campaigns-15th-annual-national-dinner> (November 5, 2016).

⁷ Gast, Phil. 2012. “Obama Announces He Supports Same-Sex Marriage.” CNN. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/09/politics/obama-same-sex-marriage/index.html> (November 5, 2016).

visitation rights for loved ones of LGBTQ patients.¹ President Obama's Affordable Care Act also made it so that LGBTQ patients could have a secure health insurance option since it outlawed discrimination against anyone with a pre-existing condition. Yes—being anything but a cisgender, straight person was considered a pre-existing condition, which health insurance companies could reject coverage for.

In July of 2014, President Obama and his administration moved on to protect the rights of LGBTQ workers with Executive Order 13672. This executive order prohibits federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.² Once again, President Obama took steps that no other president has taken to ensure that the lives of all Americans are fulfilled. It is, frankly, bewildering that it took until 2014 for a President to address the growing practice of discriminating against LGBTQ persons in the workplace, but President Obama took that important and necessary step toward equality.

The Obama Administration took another huge step with the 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS sets the goals and objectives of the administration as they relate to national security measures. For the first time in United States history, the 2015 NSS directly called for the protection of LGBTQ citizens as an objective of national security. The document states that the administration will “be a champion for communities that are too frequently vulnerable to violence, abuse, and neglect—such as ethnic and religious minorities; people with disabilities; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals; displaced persons; and migrant workers.”³ It is momentous that a presidential administration has directly called for the protection of a group of people who have been neglected and hidden for decades.

President Obama's administration has also made history by hiring Raffi Freedman-Gurspan as the first openly transgender White House official. Freedman-Gurspan was appointed in August 2015 to serve as an outreach and recruitment officer.⁴ The transgender community has come a long way: for decades, people in power have ignored them, but now they sit beside them in the White House. This appointment comes after Obama Administration sent a letter to all schools in the nation that required them to allow transgender students to be able to use the bathroom of the gender they identify with. This was a highly controversial directive and caused some states to even try to sue President Obama.⁵

President Barack Obama will go down as the first President to address numerous, crucial rights for the LGBTQ community. Throughout his two terms, President Obama has made it undoubtedly clear that members of the LGBTQ community deserve protection, respect, and

¹ “Obama Administration Record for the LGBT Community.” The White House.

https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/lgbt_record.pdf (November 10, 2016).

² “U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) - Amendment to EO 11246 and EO 11478: Equal Employment Opportunity.” U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) - Amendment to EO 11246 and EO 11478: Equal Employment Opportunity. <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/LGBT.html> (November 10, 2016).

³ Campaign, Human Rights. 2015. “2015 National Security Strategy Makes History by Including LGBT Rights | Human Rights Campaign.” Human Rights Campaign. <http://www.hrc.org/blog/2015-national-security-strategy-makes-history-by-including-lgbt-rights> (November 10, 2016).

⁴ Holmes, Kristen. 2015. “Obama Appoints 1st Transgender White House Staff Member.” CNN. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/18/politics/transgender-white-house-obama-first-staff/index.html> (November 11, 2016).

⁵ Emma, Caitlin. 2016. “Obama Administration Releases Directive on Transgender Rights to School Bathrooms.” POLITICO. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/05/obama-administration-title-ix-transgender-student-rights-223149> (November 11, 2016).

equality. Although constantly faced with challenges from the Republican Party in an attempt to halt any progress on LGBTQ rights, President Obama was able to accomplish more for the community than any other president before him. With the recent election of Donald Trump to succeed President Obama, the progress that the LGBTQ community has seen is all in jeopardy. It would be a shame if all of President Obama's hard work towards equality is short-lived, but his legacy remains. President Obama spent his eight years in office working to ensure equality for the LGBTQ community.

Barack Obama in Political Time

James R. Brakebill

A President's legacy is often shaped more by the circumstances in which they were elected rather than their individual agency. Throughout American history there have been clear political shifts corresponding to major events and electoral realignments. The political time thesis says these periodic shifts cause a disruption in politics that provides the President with the opportunity to fundamentally alter the direction of the country[1]. The longstanding political order eventually loses direction and fails to address national changes. Its disintegration then opens up the opportunity for a new regime to take over, bringing with it a new set of interests, goals, and support. This change in leadership is not merely a change in party but is instead a fundamental transformation of the government.

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected under conditions many might consider perfect for yet another transformation. Then-Senator Obama acknowledged how the circumstances would play a role in his ability to create change. He said,

“I think part of what's different are the times. I do think that, for example, the 1980 election was different. I think Ronald Reagan changed the trajectory of America in a way that, you know, Richard Nixon did not and in a way that Bill Clinton did not.”[2]

What President Obama means is that some leaders leave a lasting effect on the office and the country as a whole. President Reagan shifted the conversation in 1980 in a way that allowed the conservative movement to continue to gain strength even after his time in office. For better or worse, the country was different after that election due to his influence. President Nixon did not do that and neither did Bill Clinton because they lacked the circumstances that would have supported it.

The modern presidency began with the first transformation of the 20th century ushered in by President Franklin Roosevelt. The Great Depression caused Americans to reject the laissez-faire policies of President Hoover, become more accepting of an expanded federal role and gave Roosevelt the opportunity to pass his reconstructive New Deal agenda with the help of a Democratic Congress[3]. The massive increase in government spending and regulation represented an upheaval in the political order that rejected the free-market ideology that ruled the 1920s.

The second shift of the century took a slightly different form as it was more of a reinvigoration within the established order rather than a reconstruction[4]. Under President John F. Kennedy, the nation once again saw a shift towards even more progressive economic policies but with a new push towards equality. Kennedy's New Frontier program formed the basis of President Johnson's Great Society in the effort to eradicate poverty and racial inequality. This time, the event sparking progress would not be purely economic. The growing civil rights movement became a driving force and Kennedy's death renewed support for the measures both in and out of Congress[5].

After hitting the highpoint of American Liberalism in the 1960s and 1970s, the third shift was a reversal. A failing economy sick with inflation and soaring energy prices made the public ready for change. President Jimmy Carter was in the unfortunate position of being on the

backend of a disintegrating order. The so-called Conservative Revolution led by Ronald Reagan ushered in an effort to deregulate business, cut taxes, and slow the growth of the federal government. This was the last major transformation of the 20th century[6].

By 2008, the U.S. economy was on the brink of an economic collapse. Major financial institutions were declaring bankruptcy, foreclosures were skyrocketing, and the economy was hemorrhaging hundreds of thousands of jobs per month. Consequently, the electorate doubted the policies of George W. Bush and was clearly ready for change. It had all the hallmarks of yet another major shift. Regardless of who took office, the next president would have the opportunity of a lifetime: to fundamentally change the trajectory of the country.

President Obama walked into office with a huge crisis to fix, a Democratic Congress that had grown more progressive, and a public that was largely behind him. The formula was all there for a historic shift in political time. In some ways that is exactly what happened. He repudiated the economic policies of the Bush administration and promised to revamp the American government to suit new interests[7]. The 2009 stimulus package was the largest test of Keynesian economics to date. The Affordable Care Act accomplished something that Presidents have tried to do for decades and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Act was the largest financial regulatory bill since the 1930s[8].

Unfortunately, some of these policies fell short. The stimulus package was a \$787 billion plug for a \$2.9 trillion hole and actually placed doubts on the government's ability to stimulate the economy with deficit spending[9]. The Affordable Care Act, a.k.a. Obamacare, is still plagued with problems that failed to deal with the real cost of healthcare. Dodd-Frank has been largely forgotten by the public and failed to prevent banks from growing "too-big-to-fail." This has led many popular liberals such as Senator Elizabeth Warren and Senator Bernie Sanders to call for even more progressive action.

That doesn't, however, mean that President Obama hasn't been transformational. Perhaps Obamacare should have included a Public Option and Dodd-Frank should have included a new version of Glass-Steagall. Regardless of the possible faults, these were dramatic policy changes. There are many presidents who were great policy makers yet failed to transform the political order. Likewise, many transformative presidents made questionable decisions. One might argue that Clinton or Nixon were better presidents than Reagan but, as Obama said, neither one changed America in any fundamental way. All transformative presidents, be it Roosevelt, Kennedy, or Reagan, make policy mistakes. Japanese internment, Bay of Pigs, Iran-Contra, etc. were all failures of those administrations. What makes them transformative isn't perfection but rather their ability to alter the course of the nation[10].

Obama may be in a similar situation. Despite the shortcomings of some of his policies, they still represent a monumental shift in American politics. The mere fact that Elizabeth Warren, a well-known Wall St. antagonist, and Bernie Sanders, a self-described democratic socialist, would have significant influence on the Democratic party shows how far left the party, as well as America, has shifted. The previous Democratic president, Bill Clinton, once declared "the era of big government is over." [11]. Within a decade Obama expanded its role in a way not seen since Lyndon Johnson's Great Society of the 1960s.

Other presidents have made many of the same policy attempts as President Obama but what they lacked was the right moment in political time. As Obama said in 2008, "I think we are in one of those fundamentally different times right now where people think that things, the way

they are going, just aren't working.”[12] It took the culmination of an economic crisis and an electorate begging for change for him to achieve his agenda.

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- [1] Skowronek, Stephen. 2011. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas), 28.
- [2] “In Their Own Words: Obama on Reagan.” 2008. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/us/politics/21seelye-text.html>
- [3] Milkis, Sidney M. and Michael Nelson. 2012. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2011*. 6th Edition (Washington: CQ Press), 289-296
- [4] Skowronek, Stephen. 2011. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas), 53.
- [5] Milkis, Sidney M. and Michael Nelson. 2012. *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-2011*. 6th Edition (Washington: CQ Press), 334-347
- [6] Skowronek, Stephen. 2011. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas), 105.
- [7] Skowronek, Stephen. 2011. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas), 167-172.
- [8] Gosling, James J. and Marc Allen Eisner. 2015. *Economics, Politics, and American Public Policy*. 2nd Edition. (New York: Routledge), 204.
- [9] Gosling, James J. and Marc Allen Eisner. 2015. *Economics, Politics, and American Public Policy*. 2nd Edition. (New York: Routledge), 206.
- [10] Skowronek, Stephen. 2011. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas), 170.
- [11] “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union.” *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=53091>.
- [12] “In Their Own Words: Obama on Reagan.” 2008. *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/us/politics/21seelye-text.html>

Obamacare in Peril

Darren Daughtry Jr.

President Barack Obama's tenure as President of the United States of America has seen several grand achievements. The Iran Nuclear Deal, the resumption of diplomatic relations with Cuba, ending combat operations in Iraq, the Paris Climate Change Deal, and perhaps most importantly, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (often referred to as the affordable care act or Obamacare). Obamacare was the first major piece of legislation President Obama pushed through Congress after he assumed office in 2009. It is also (arguably) the centerpiece of President Obama's legacy. However, with the election of President Donald Trump—a man who has promised to repeal Obamacare—the future of this important law is in jeopardy.

When President Obama signed Obamacare into law it marked one of the largest healthcare reform initiatives in decades. It addressed several serious issues in the health insurance market. Chief among them the rising cost of healthcare insurance. This left tens of millions of people unable to afford health insurance¹. That being said, there were many other issues Obamacare fixed as well. Prior to Obamacare, people with preexisting conditions could be denied health insurance simply because of they had a preexisting condition. In many cases these were the people who needed health insurance the most given the cost of treating their preexisting condition². Those with preexisting conditions were denied health insurance or had to constantly worry that they may lose their insurance. Prior to Obamacare, insurance companies could remove children from their parents health insurance after they turned 21³. Women could be charged more for men for the same insurance plan. Furthermore, some people who had health insurance that was woefully inadequate. In other words, it either didn't cover basic health care procedures or people were charged too much for basic health care. These are some of the reasons why the U.S. spends more money on healthcare than any other developed nation⁴. All of this left many Americans (especially those with lower and middle incomes) in a terrible position. Many had to choose between paying for health insurance, their mortgage/rent, food, etc. This is a position no one should ever have to be in.

In a nutshell, Obamacare had one main goal, drastically reduce (or eliminate) the number of Americans without health insurance⁵. To date around twenty million Americans who did not have health insurance before Obamacare are now covered. Obamacare accomplished this by correcting several of the flaws outlined above. Men and women have to be charged the same amount for the same insurance plans. Children are now allowed to stay on their parents health

¹ Niraj Chokshi. 2014. "Historians take note: What America looked like before Obamacare." March 26. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2014/03/26/historians-take-note-what-america-looked-like-before-obamacare/> (accessed November 22, 2016).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Al Jazeera America. "The pros and cons of Affordable Care Act [Infographic]." October 3. <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/the-stream/the-stream-multimedia/2013/10/3/the-pros-and-cons-of-the-affordable-care-act-infographic.html> (accessed November 22, 2016).

insurance plans until they're 26¹². This has led to a drastic rise in the amount of young adults who have health insurance. This is important because young people are generally healthier than their more elderly counterparts. Meaning they would use their insurance less than older people but they still pay for it³. This supposed to offset the health care costs of elderly people. Who, tend to be less healthy and use their insurance more. This is supposed to help keep healthcare costs down making health insurance more affordable. Also, everyone is required to either buy health insurance or pay a fine. This provides an extra monetary incentive to buying health insurance. To ensure that the health insurance Americans are now required to buy is decent, there are a set of minimum standards that all health insurance must meet. Insurance plans can't have annual or lifetime dollar limits, must have free preventative services, limit out of pocket maximums, and more. All of this makes sure Americans are covered by quality health insurance that is actually worth paying for. Plus, people can no longer be denied, or lose their health insurance because they have a preexisting condition. Lastly, to reduce the number of poorer people without health insurance, states could choose to expand medicaid⁴. This would give large numbers of lower and middle class adults, children, and disabled people health care at basically no cost to the states. To date thirty one states and the District of Columbia have accepted the medicaid expansion⁵.

While Obamacare may seem like the perfect way to expand the number of Americans covered by health insurance, it does have several problems. In the nineteen states that chose not to expand medicaid, health insurance prices are likely to go up⁶. This makes places a heavier burden on the people who do have health insurance, as they have to pay more for their insurance plans. Also, if those who do not have health insurance go to the emergency room (for example) they aren't charged for their visit. Instead the cost of that visit is passed on to health insurance companies who pass it on to people with health insurance. There is also the problem of not having enough healthy people get health insurance. Without a large enough pool of healthy people to offset the costs of less healthy people, health care costs will rise. The most common critique of Obamacare is that it has failed to prevent health insurance costs from rising⁷⁸. However, for many people these rising health insurance costs are offset because they qualify for subsidies. These subsidies reduce the price of health insurance to make it more affordable.

The reason Obamacare is so important is because I have an extremely rare (and incurable) disability called narcolepsy. A year's supply of one of my medications costs about \$64,000 if you don't have health insurance or your insurance plan doesn't cover narcolepsy (most don't). To put that in perspective the median household income in the U.S. is about \$50,000. Which means if I did not have health insurance I would have to pay over \$64,000

¹ Glenn Kessler. 2015. "Fact Checking the Obamacare rhetoric, pro and con."

² Al Jazeera America. "The pros and cons of Affordable Care Act [Infographic]" (accessed November 22, 2016).

³ U.S. Department for Health and Human Services. 2013. "Young Adult Coverage." March 12. <http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/about-the-law/young-adult-coverage/index.html> (accessed November 22, 2016).

⁴ Dan Mangan. 2016. "Obama's Medicaid expansion leading to health insurance boom in some states." July 20. <http://www.cnbc.com/2016/07/20/obamacares-medicare-expansion-leading-to-health-insurance-boom-in-some-states.html> (accessed November 22, 2016).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Al Jazeera America. "The pros and cons of Affordable Care Act [Infographic]."

⁸ Glenn Kessler. 2015. "Fact Checking the Obamacare rhetoric, pro and con."

a year for my medication. Obviously, if this was the case, I wouldn't be able to afford it. This would harm my overall quality of life. The only reason I can afford this medication is because I have health insurance and it can't be taken away. Without Obamacare I and countless other Americans might not be able to afford their medications.

Overall no one can argue the implementation of Obamacare ushered a massive change in the American health insurance industry. Never before had the government tried to address the affordability of health insurance in this manner. It has cracked down on some of the practices of the health insurance industry. Obamacare has led to around 20 million people gaining affordable, quality health insurance¹. This is an important step in lowering health care costs in the U.S. Although not all people have necessarily benefitted from these lower health insurance prices. This is especially true in the nineteen states that did not accept the medicaid expansion. This would have extended medicaid to those with a lower income.

¹ Al Jazeera America. "The pros and cons of Affordable Care Act [Infographic]."

An Analysis of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Kyle Adams

The Iran nuclear deal is undoubtedly one of the most significant and controversial foreign policy actions taken by the United States during Barack Obama's presidency. Iran's nuclear program has long been a concern of much of the world as many nations suspect Iran intends to develop a nuclear bomb. While Iran has repeatedly denied having any intentions to develop nuclear weapons, at the time of the deal it "had developed a range of technologies, including uranium enrichment, warhead design, and delivery systems, that would give it this option in a relatively short time frame."¹ Many view the nuclear deal as a crowning achievement of Obama's presidency citing the fact that the United States had been negotiating with Iran for nearly a decade with little success as Iran continued to inch closer to nuclear capacity. Critics see the nuclear deal as a legitimization of Iran's nuclear program that failed to permanently eliminate Iran's pathway to a nuclear weapon. Both proponents and opponents of this deal have several legitimate arguments, and it is only through consideration of these arguments that one can determine whether the benefits of this deal are great enough to overcome the imperfections.

The Obama administration initially defended the Iran nuclear deal by asserting that the Islamic republic was just months away from obtaining a nuclear weapon before the deal put their ability to achieve nuclear capacity on hold. According to the Obama administration, Iran had four possible paths to creating a nuclear bomb: highly enriched uranium at the Natanz facility, highly enriched uranium at the Fordow facility, weapons-grade plutonium, and covert attempts to produce fissile material.² They claim that those are all now blocked since the deal mandates that Iran reduce its uranium stockpile by 98%, keep its level of uranium enrichment below 3.67%, reduce its number of centrifuges from 20,000 to 6,000, redesign the Arak reactor to prevent the production of weapons grade plutonium, and submit to international inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.³ Over a year after the signing of the landmark agreement, many foreign policy analysts contend that this deal is working. They argue that, contrary to the fears of critics of the Iran deal, the Islamic republic has followed the key points of the deal making necessary reductions to their uranium enrichment such that it would now take Iran at least one year rather than two months to develop a nuclear bomb.⁴ Iran's willingness to abide by the terms of this deal allows supporters to conclude that those who wish to repeal the deal would be repealing great progress in Iranian-American relations and putting the United States on a path towards an inevitable war.

While the Obama administration argues that the Iran deal has been beneficial for American national security, many members of both political parties have expressed concerns with it. The Senate voted 56-42 and the House of Representatives voted 269-162 to pass a

¹ Davenport, Kelsey. 2016. "Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran." August.

<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran> (November 15, 2016).

² The White House. 2016. "The Historic Deal that Will Prevent Iran from Acquiring a Nuclear Weapon." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal> (November 15, 2016).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Collina, Tom Z. 2016. "The Iran Deal is Working. Don't Mess with Success." July 14.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/287662-the-iran-deal-is-working-dont-mess-with-success> (November 15, 2016).

resolution of disapproval of the Iran deal in 2015, but this was ultimately not a large enough margin of support to clear a Senate filibuster and get the resolution to President Obama's desk.¹ Critics of the Iran deal offer a variety of reasons for their opposition with some like former Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) citing Iran's status as a state-sponsor of terrorism and sworn enemy of Israel as a motive to oppose a deal that allowed Iran \$7 billion dollars in immediate sanction relief.² Senators Lindsay Graham (R-SC) and Charles Schumer (D-NY) echoed Lieberman's concerns noting that the United States was removing sanctions that have effectively pressured the Iranian economy in exchange for only a temporary freeze rather than a permanent freeze on the Iranian nuclear program.³ In addition to concerns over the removal of sanctions, some have also criticized this deal for its legitimization of Iran's nuclear program. Although the deal does not directly acknowledge Iran's right to enrich uranium, recognition of this right appears to be implied by the willingness of the United States to form an agreement that pushes discussion on this issue into the future. This legitimization of Iran's nuclear program concerns many who believe that the secrecy of their program and their historic violation of United Nations resolutions should disqualify them from having any sort of right to uranium enrichment.⁴ Critics further argue that their initial concerns of the deal empowering Iran through sanctions relief and recognition of their nuclear program have been proven accurate. Since the nuclear deal, Iran has demonstrated what many see as increased regional aggression by "illegally testing ballistic missiles, enhancing support for terrorist groups, increasing the regional presence of its IRGC forces, and heightening its human rights violations at home."⁵

Overall, the American people remain skeptical of the Iranian nuclear deal and President Obama's handling of relations with Iran. A Gallup survey from February 2016, showed that despite the Obama administration's best efforts to convince the American public that the Iran deal was beneficial for national security, only 30% approve of the deal compared to 57% who disapprove.⁶ Additionally, the deal appears to have created a general distrust among Americans towards Obama's handling of relations with Iran as an August 2016 Pew Research survey found that just 37% of Americans approve of how Obama is dealing with the Islamic republic.⁷ Diplomacy is always imperfect and the Iran deal is no different. However, it appears that as Obama's eight years in office near an end, the majority of Americans still feel that this deal is just too imperfect to accept.

¹ United States Institute of Peace. 2015. "The Final Tally: How Congress Voted on Iran." September 17. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2015/sep/11/congress-votes-deal> (November 15, 2016).

² Cohen, Tom. 2013. "5 Reasons Diverse Critics Oppose Iran Nuclear Deal." November 25. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/25/politics/iran-deal-opponents-5-things/> (November 15, 2016).

³ Ibid

⁴ AIPAC. 2013. "Iran Has No 'Inalienable' Right to Uranium Enrichment." October 17. <http://www.aipac.org/~media/Publications/Policy%20and%20Politics/AIPAC%20Analyses/Issue%20Memos/2013/10/AIPAC%20Memo%20Iran%20Has%20No%20Inalienable%20Right%20to%20Uranium%20Enrichment.pdf> (November 15, 2016).

⁵ AIPAC. 2016. "Reauthorize the Iran Sanctions Act." <http://www.aipac.org/learn/legislative-agenda/agenda-display?agendaId=%7B109F35BE-5BAA-4B28-A16F-CD0C01E50BE0%7D> (November 15, 2016).

⁶ Richardson, Bradford. 2016. "Poll: Americans Oppose Iran Nuclear Deal 2-1." February 17. <http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/269667-americans-oppose-iran-nuclear-deal-2-1-poll> (November 15, 2016).

⁷ Pew Research Center. 2016. "Do You Approve or Disapprove of the Way Obama is...Dealing with Iran." April 19. <http://www.people-press.org/question-search/?qid=1879646&pid=51&ccid=51#top> (November 15, 2016).

President Obama's Impact on Sexual Assault and Violence Against Women

Alisha Tousignant

The Obama Administration has proven to be progressive in plenty of facets. One way in particular that President Barack Obama has advanced American life is through advocating for women, their safety, and their importance in society. A particular instance of President Obama's positive influence was initiated in 2014 and known as the "It's on Us" campaign, to help reduce sexual assault on college campuses. Through "It's On Us," as well as other calls to action, President Obama made significant strides to decrease instances of domestic violence and sexual assault in not only America, but globally as well.

Violence against women, specifically sexual assault, is an epidemic affecting women throughout America every day. The Obama Administration has made an incredible effort to minimize these and like occurrences. Through an abundance of policies and the addition of various administration positions pertaining to women and violence, President Obama has been successful in guiding America in the right direction.

During a time of transition, it is imperative to reflect upon the progress that has been made in the past eight years. America should be proud of what has been accomplished, and as Americans, we should do our very best to preserve the growth that has taken place under the Obama Administration. Regardless of who our President will be on January 20th, it is important for us all to stand up for these important political breakthroughs and fight for what is right and what you believe in, whatever those beliefs may be.

Shortly after Obama took office, he made it a priority to reform the way violence against women and sexual assault was dealt with. In March of 2009, the then new President signed an Executive Order which initiated the White House Council on Women and Girls. This set the precedent for the administration's emphasis on equal opportunities for women and girls. One important aspect of this Executive Order is that it demonstrated the administration's mission to solidify the importance of moving towards equality for women.¹

In September of 2011, under the Obama Administration, the Department of Justice held the first round table discussion on sexual assault. The discussion took place between the Office on Violence against Women (OVW) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ.) The purpose of this round table discussion was to provide a foundation for experts on sexual violence, victim advocacy, healthcare, as well as victims and law enforcement, to convene and brainstorm ideas which could potentially close the gap between research and practice regarding justice and preventative measures for victims as well as looking for strategies to decrease discrepancies in reporting.²

President Obama added a ground-breaking position which would aim at addressing women's issues worldwide, especially the obstacles regarding violence and sexual assault. The

¹ "The White House Council on Women and Girls" <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/cwg> (November 20th 2016.)

² Reese, Diana. 2014. "Round Table Reveals Problems of Reporting, Prosecuting Campus Sexual Assault." *The Washington Post*

appointed position, known as the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, was conceived in September of 2013 and has since been an advocate for females and their rights as humans. No similar position existed prior to President Obama taking office. John Kerry said it best: "No country can get ahead if it leaves half of its people behind. This is why the United States believes gender equality is critical to our shared goals of prosperity, stability, and peace, and why investing in women and girls worldwide is critical to U.S. foreign policy."¹

Additionally, in March of 2013, President Obama updated the Violence Against Women Act, or VAWA, which provided funding for sexual assault nurse examiners, which are intensely trained medical persons specializing in sexual assault. Education on sexual assault coupled with tactics for dealing with victims for law enforcement were funded through VAWA, making authorities more qualified to assist survivors.²

2014 proved to be an influential year in the Obama Administration in regards to sexual assault. The President demonstrated that institutions such as colleges which choose to partake in federal student financial assistance programs are subject to federal laws which hold them accountable for providing programs aimed at relaying information about preventing and reporting sexual assault along with support services for victims. While these programs were put into action, evidence exhibited that the compliance with these programs was often insufficient. As such, the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault was established in January of 2014 by President Obama. The Task Force aims at enforcing compliance among schools as well as providing these institutions with tools and strategies to combat campus sexual assault.³

The "It's On Us" campaign was launched in September of 2014. The campaign is an effort to put an end to sexual assault, with a particular focus on sexual assaults that occur on college campuses. "It's On Us" urges Americans to take a pledge to choose not to be bystanders, but instead be a part of the solution. Because so many cases go unreported, copious amounts of offenders are not prosecuted. "It's On Us" seeks to increase support for reporting of incidents and decrease sexual assault cases through awareness. Assisting schools in how to respond when sexual assault does take place, as well as fostering transparency within the government's enforcement strategies are two additional points of focus for the campaign. Americans are urged to take the initiative to protect one another. Since "It's On Us" was put into action, there have been campaigns at upwards of 300 Universities, and 350,000 people have taken the pledge, which has helped to raise tremendous awareness on the topic.⁴

President Obama has done a great job of advocating for victims of sexual assault and modernizing the way that it is dealt with. Moving forward, it is important that Americans realize that this obstacle truly is "on us," and without support on the individual level, the issue of sexual assault will remain an obstacle in American society for years to come. Nonetheless, President Obama's progress in dealing with violence against women and sexual assaults has left a lasting impact on these issues facing American women.

¹ "Office of Global Women's Issues." <http://www.state.gov/s/gwi/> (November 20th 2016.)

² Henderson, Nia-Malika. 2013. "Obama Signs a Strengthened Violence Against Women Act." *The Washington Post*.

³ "Memorandum--Establishing a White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/22/memorandum-establishing-white-house-task-force-protect-students-sexual-a> (November 16th 2016.)

⁴ "It's On Us." <http://itsonus.org/>

Lasting Legacy: Will President Obama's Progress Remain?

Evelyn Luchs

Though his presidency has not yet ended, the legacy of President Obama is on many of our minds. In the lead-up to the election, the Clinton campaign often suggested that Hillary Clinton would carry on the policies and legacy of President Obama. The President himself explicitly reinforced this idea in speeches supporting Clinton's candidacy¹. Indeed, as President, Hillary Clinton likely would not have made major changes to the overall majority of President Obama's policies, leaving his lasting legacy intact. But with the impending presidency of Donald Trump, who has different policy positions on just about every topic, what will happen to the groundwork President Obama laid?

Much has been made of Donald Trump's plan for his first one hundred days. So far, Donald Trump has claimed that he will make a variety of changes from foreign policy to domestic issues. The plan is split into four sections based on theme: corruption in Washington, protection of American workers, security and the rule of law, and broader legislative measures². The plan, which was released this fall, shows that Trump intends to make major changes from the policies of the Obama administration. In particular, the sections on American workers and rule of law show the most dramatic differences between the new administration and its predecessor.

Donald Trump planned seven actions to "protect American workers", nearly all of which include deviations from President Obama's policy³. One of the biggest changes in this section is to reverse the Obama Administration's progress on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal⁴. Backing out of the TPP would significantly detract from President Obama's legacy, as the TPP would have been the largest regional trade deal in history⁵. While the TPP is controversial, if the United States backs out it will undo President Obama's steps toward economic involvement in Asia. This points to a larger theme: Donald Trump is notably more protectionist than President Obama. According to CNN Money, the President-elect has threatened to place tariffs on China as high as 45% during his campaign⁶. Claims like these indicate that the Trump Administration is going to take a vastly different tack on trade than the Obama Administration did, keeping in line with the Trump campaign's protectionist rhetoric. Trump also plans to move forward with the

¹ "Obama Ties His Legacy to Hillary Clinton's Candidacy in Powerful New Video." Daily Kos. <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/10/12/1581510/-Obama-ties-his-legacy-to-Hillary-Clinton-s-candidacy-in-powerful-new-video> (December 3, 2016).

² "Here Is What Donald Trump Wants To Do In His First 100 Days." NPR. <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/09/501451368/here-is-what-donald-trump-wants-to-do-in-his-first-100-days> (December 3, 2016).

³ *ibid*

⁴ "Donald Trump Outlines Policy Plan for First 100 Days." *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/21/politics/donald-trump-outlines-policy-plan-for-first-100-days/> (November 29, 2016).

⁵ Mullen, Jethro. "China Is Ready to Pounce If Trump Axes Pacific Trade Deal." *CNNMoney*. <http://money.cnn.com/2016/11/18/news/economy/trump-china-tpp-trade/> (November 29, 2016).

⁶ *ibid*

Keystone pipeline by undoing what he refers to in his plan as President Obama's "roadblocks"¹, directly indicating that he wants to undo the President's policy while also demonstrating a shift in environmental policy. Where President Obama attempted to protect the environment, President elect Trump claims he will lift restrictions on production of oil².

Donald Trump emphasizes "rule of law" in another section of his plan that shows great divergence from President Obama's positions. In this section, he again directly references President Obama, promising to "cancel every unconstitutional executive action, memorandum and order issued by President Obama"³. Donald Trump also discusses immigration in this section. While President Obama passed the DREAM Act and hoped to leave behind a policy of inclusion and pathways to citizenship, President elect Trump plans to implement "extreme vetting", suspend immigration in "terror-prone regions", and remove illegal immigrants from the country⁴. During the campaign, Donald Trump said many things about minorities, women, and other marginalized groups that led Americans to fear his presidency would be restrictive of civil rights and liberties. The inclusion of these anti-immigration policies in the 100 Day Plan shows that these fears were not unrealistic. Already, Donald Trump is planning to undo President Obama's plans for social progress. These specific issues - immigration, equality, and inclusion in the American Dream - were the underlying vision of President Obama's campaigns and eight years in office, making this the area in which Donald Trump could do the most damage to President Obama's legacy. The President is currently known for hope, change and progress, and the fact that the strides he has made toward these ends could be undone puts the lasting impact of his legacy in peril.

Despite the great strides he achieved during his administration, President Obama's legacy may be undone by the next occupant of the White House. In fact, the President described the 2016 election as a choice between "whether we continue this journey of progress, or whether it all goes out the window,"⁵ showing a clear belief that Donald Trump's election would mean undoing the steps that the Obama administration tried to take towards what he describes as progress. Looking at Donald Trump's plan for just his first one hundred days in power, it's confirmed that Donald Trump will attempt to undo the TPP, alter environmental and foreign relations policy, and restrict immigration into the United States.

What will this leave for President Obama's legacy? Donald Trump has his sights set on healthcare and immigration, trade and the environment, policy areas in which President Obama hoped to leave a lasting impact. While Donald Trump will most assuredly target this impact, for now, at least, the President's legacy is intact a little while longer.

¹ "Here Is What Donald Trump Wants To Do In His First 100 Days." NPR. <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/09/501451368/here-is-what-donald-trump-wants-to-do-in-his-first-100-days> (December 3, 2016).

² "Here Is What Donald Trump Wants To Do In His First 100 Days." NPR. <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/09/501451368/here-is-what-donald-trump-wants-to-do-in-his-first-100-days> (December 3, 2016).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Davis, Julie Hirschfeld, and Gardiner Harris. 2016. "'Fired Up' Obama Makes Final Push for Clinton, and His Legacy." The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/08/us/politics/obama-donald-trump.html> (December 3, 2016).