

*U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2012*

*ΜΑΡΙΑ ΚΟΥΤΟΥΛΑΚΟΥ (MARIA KOUTOULAKOU)*

*Abstract*

This November America was divided once again between Democrats and Republicans and its representatives. On 6<sup>th</sup> of November American people were called to choose between liberal Barack Obama and the rather moderate conservative Mitt Romney. Both sides had supporters and enemies. The World Press, during and after the electoral confrontation, recorded in detail the struggle of the two Presidents and their political argumentation. The Greek and French Press were more clearly in favor of Obama like the rest of the Europe in contrast with the American Press that was more objective and divided almost in half. However, all the articles were focused on what solutions the both sides proposed to solve important economical, social and political issues. This time the citizens of America voted not only based on the President but on their political programs too.

*Keywords:* American Elections 2012, Barack Obama, Democrats, Mitt Romney, Republicans, Greek Press, International Press.

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*Introduction*

The U.S. Presidential Elections were carried out on 6 of November 2012. It was the 57<sup>th</sup> Presidential elections that take place every four years. This time the contestants were Barack Obama, representing the Democratic Party, and Mitt Romney<sup>1</sup>, representing the Republican Party. Barack Obama, stronger than ever in the race for his second term, refers to issues more liberal such as women's rights and the right to homosexuality. On the other hand, Mitt Romney, known also as a business executive, focuses on economic discussions.

*Presidential Debates*

The first debate between Obama and Romney took place in Denver on 3<sup>rd</sup> of October and their discussion was about taxes, deficits and creating job opportunities. Obama accused his challenger for supporting the same economical measures that brought the downturn on 2008 and for not analyzing his positions in detail. Romney aggressively answered to Obama that he does not know his fact, when he was accused of wanting to cut educational facts. He continued saying that his main goal is the healthcare plan and the remake of Medicare as well as the prevention of another financial crash, again without being specific. The rivals fought over many other issues such as the oil business subsidies and Romney's persistence not to raise taxes.

The second round was held on 16<sup>th</sup> of October in New York's Hofstra University. Obama showed his competitive and aggressive nature while both were cool and calm. The debate started with the unemployment issue which Romney said it was his first thing to tackle. Obama did not focus on job opportunities but on the quality of jobs and he stressed that middle class is heavily burdened and promised tax cuts. They also touched upon energy, environmental issues and equal status of women in the labor arena. They both agreed that there still are many inequalities in that domain and they will both work for women's rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Mitt Romney was born on March 12, 1947 and he is an American businessman who has served as the 70<sup>th</sup> Governor of Massachusetts from 2003-2007. He was raised in Michigan and he is a Mormon missionary since 1966. His wealth is estimated between 190 and 250 million with which he invested in his campaign on 2012 elections. Romney has attended Stanford University and Harvard Law School and Business School and graduated in the top five percent of his business school class. He has worked as a management consultant and since 1994 has been interested in politics.

Subsequently, they debated about the immigration, the green card and the U.S consulate in Libya, where they did not have many differences. They closed the debate with issues such as criminality and foreign investments and a personal question about what they think it is the wrong assessment that has been formed for them during their election campaign.

The final presidential debate was held in Boca Raton on 22 of October, where they focused on the foreign policy. They agreed on Afganistan, Libya and Syria and they discussed intensely about White House. When Romney said they have fewer ships in the U.S Navy, Obama answered mockingly: ‘We also have fewer horses and bayonets’. Generally, the audience seemed to take the third debate as a clear win for Obama but they were all waiting for the big day and the uncertain results. On 6<sup>th</sup> of November Obama won his second presidential elections and Mitt Romney was defeated.

### *The Greek Press*

Before the elections, Greek Press analyzed the controversy between Obama and Romney slightly in favor of the African – American President. Did this not only because of his previous performance but due to his opinion on Greek recession. VIMA a very important newspaper in Greece conducted a survey four days before the elections day for the international developments and concluded that 54,8% of the Greek citizens have an interest in American elections and that 75,7% of them are for Obama and only 5% of them being in favor of Romney<sup>2</sup>. In the same newspaper there were many articles that wrote about the advantages and flipside in Obama’s program as well as for the dilemma between him and Romney. Specifically, Anestis Kellidis wrote on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November that Obama urged Merkel to help Greece’s socio-political crisis but nothing has been done since then because TROIKA waits for Romney to win the elections (Anestis Kellidis: Obama or Romney?, *TO VIMA*, November 4, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

Another article referred to what side does the market support. Most people take bets that Obama will win with 51, 9% of the votes and Romney will lose with 48,25%. Mantikidis Tasos continued pointing out that fiscal and economic policy is of great concern for America because combined with the crisis in Eurozone and the power of China can affect global economy (Mantikidis Tasos: Which one does the market vote for a new president, *TO VIMA*, November 4, 2012)<sup>4</sup>. In addition, hurricane Sandy was godsend for Obama who was presented as the savior while Romney as ruthless. This gave Obama the chance to be shown as ‘presidential’ when he personally skipped bureaucracy in order to help the disaster-stricken areas and Romney as the ‘bad guy’ for wanting to dissolve the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). When journalist asked him about that, he just refused to answer (Bozaninou Tania, Pastrokous Elisabeth: Presidential Obama VS Ruthless Romney, *TO VIMA*, November 4, 2012)<sup>5</sup>.

The divided America voted on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November in one of the most difficult elections over decades, as the two opponents were very close in vote percentages. The first indications showed that Obama had the lead and they turned out to be right. Ellis Athanasiou, an envoy to Washington, continued writing: ‘Alongside with the race for the presidency they also took place the elections for the Senate and the Parliament [...] that indicates that whoever is going to be elected for president, he will not be able to fully apply his policy, but he is going to have to compromise’<sup>6</sup> (Athanasiou Ellis: Obama’s – Romney’s tough battle, *KATHIMERINI*, November 7, 2012)<sup>7</sup>. The same person wrote for the same newspaper a week later that development and creating job opportunities will be the main concern for Obama in his second term. He will work with Republican Party and will also focus on fiscal policy. At the center of the discussion was the Petreous case and the President said ‘people are innocent till is proved otherwise’. He also stated that he is willing to work for a diplomatic solution in Iran’s case (Athanasiou Ellis: Obama focused on the fiscal, *KATHIMERINI*, November 15, 2012)<sup>8</sup>.

The calm president Barack Obama that throughout his campaign showed an unknown perfectionist and competitive side of him, the last day before the election said thrilled: ‘We have not finished this journey...

<sup>2</sup> The research was conducted by KapaResearch for *TO VIMA* newspaper.

<sup>3</sup> Ανέστης Κελλίδης: Ομπάμα ή Ρόμνεϊ; *TO BHMA*, 4 Νοεμβρίου 2012

<sup>4</sup> Μαντικίδης Τάσος: Ποιον ψηφίζουν οι αγορές για νέο πρόεδρο, *TO BHMA*, 4 Νοεμβρίου 2012

<sup>5</sup> Μποζανίνου Τάνια, Παστρικού Ελισάβετ: Προεδρικός Ομπάμα VS Άσπλαχνο Ρόμνεϊ, *TO BHMA*, 4 Νοεμβρίου 2012

<sup>6</sup> <<Παράλληλα με την αναμέτρηση για την προεδρία, λαμβάνουν χώρα και οι εκλογές για τη Γερουσία και τη Βουλή [...] κάτι που σημαίνει ότι όποιος κι αν εκλεγεί πρόεδρος, δεν θα είναι σε θέση να εφαρμόσει πλήρως την πολιτική του, αλλά θα αναγκασθεί να προχωρήσει σε συμβιβασμούς.>>

<sup>7</sup> Αθανασίου Έλλης: Σκληρή μάχη Ομπάμα – Ρόμνεϊ, *Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ*, 7 Νοεμβρίου 2012

<sup>8</sup> Αθανασίου Έλλης: Στα φορολογικά εστίασε ο Ομπάμα, *Η ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ*, 15 Νοεμβρίου 2012

From now on, the only thing that counts is you. The issue is no longer in my hands. The most powerful force in our democracy is you' (Kitty Ksenaki: Time for the polls for Obama and Romney in a divided America, *TA NEA*, November 6, 2012)<sup>9</sup>. In the same newspaper Aristotelia Pelsoni wrote that Obama supports Greece, Washington recognizes the contribution of the country in Libya and that the relationship between the two countries has improved. Greeks understand that this relationship will benefit not only the foreign policy of Greece with Turkey but its relationship with Israel and determine the energy issue (Aristotelia Pelsoni: Athens votes for Obama, *TA NEA*, November 5, 2012)<sup>10</sup>. Generally, although there are supporters of Romney in Greece, the most of the Press and the citizens vote for Obama as they believe that a more liberal President will be able to solve economic problems quicker and in favor of the people not the markets.

### *The American Press*

Barack Hussein Obama was named winner on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> of November with the most points coming from New Jersey (58%), Rhode Island (63%), New York (63%), DC (91%) and Hawaii (71%) with a total of 303 electoral votes. Obama stated after his win: 'Tonight in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while our road has been hard, while our journey has been long, we have picked ourselves up, we have fought our way back. We know in our hearts that for the United States of America, the best is yet to come.' Mitt Romney's wished to the new President and his family well and said: 'This is a time of great challenges for America, and I pray that the president will be successful in guiding our nation.' (Jeff Zenely, Jim Rutenberg: Divided U.S. Gives Obama More Time, *The New York Times*, November 6, 2012).

President Obama in order to claim his second term, he did not only focus on the economic and the fiscal issues but to human rights as well. The nomination of Obama meant 'a sea change for the gay rights movement'; it will be a win for them as well. The equality prevailed as Obama was pronounced a winner at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> of November and stated that he will support the gay marriage in May. The fact that Tammy Baldwin will be the first gay U.S senator confirms the above. Frank Schubert, though, the California campaign consultant said that this does not bring any significant change in the country, people still believe marriage is a 'union between one man and one woman' (Alana Semuels: Election shows country is changing, gay marriage advocates say, *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 2012).

The Republicans said that what brought the defeat of Romney is the fact that he was very vague about his agenda and that he failed to respond to criticism. They claim that they need a more detailed policy that goes beyond the target group of the party which is the white, male voters. Barbour said that Obama's campaign was focus on attacking Romney and blame Bush for everything that went wrong and it was a mistake of Romney to let that unanswered. (Associated Press, Top Republicans: Romney lost because proposals lacked specifics, response to criticism timid, *The Washington Post*, November 15 2012). In the same newspaper a day before announced that Obama will "let taxes rise on the wealthiest Americans on both economic and political grounds". The president pointed out that this is not going to make a difference, they will still be rich. He is willing to negotiate as it seems that Republicans do not agree for any tax rising and his main concern are the relief of the lower classes. Many economist believe that any differences in taxes will affect the markets and lead further to 'fiscal cliff', while Obama thinks that half of it will be removed if a legislation keeps the cuts in place excluded those with the upper-income (Associated Press: Obama stands firm on raising taxes on richest Americans, says best way to avert 'fiscal cliff', *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2012).

### *The French Press*

In France, people had gathered in different social spots in order to watch the elections' results with the majority wanting Barack Obama being the winner, but there was a part of French citizenship who voted for Romney. Hervé Gattegno wrote in *Le Point*, a weekly right-wing newspaper in France, that the fact that Obama won, should not be a surprising one. The elections were a performance as the President already had the advantage in eight out of nine states where the election was being played. However, this is the way political system works in America in order to show to its civilians that their votes and therefore their trust are sacred, the rest are all promotional material. The fact is that there is a crisis which has started from George

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<sup>9</sup> Κίττυ Ξενάκη: Ώρα της κάλπης για Ομπάμα και Ρόμνεϊ σε μια διχασμένη Αμερική, *TA NEA*, 6 Νοεμβρίου 2012 / <<Δεν το έχουμε τελειώσει ακόμα αυτό το ταξίδι... Από εδώ και πέρα, μετράτε μόνο εσείς. Το θέμα φεύγει από τα χέρια μου. Η πιο ισχυρή δύναμη στη δημοκρατία μας είστε εσείς>>.

<sup>10</sup> Αριστοτέλια Πελώνη: Η Αθήνα ψηφίζει Ομπάμα, *TA NEA*, 5 Νοεμβρίου 2012

Bush and Obama's presidency has been helpful: 'He withdrew troops from Iraq, eliminated Bin Laden and restored reasons to love America'<sup>11</sup>. The main point is what the election of Obama has to offer from now on. It is true that having Obama as a President, America has a better image in foreign policy especially in case of Middle East, but beside that he cannot influence China or Russia. He finished his article saying: 'Elected Obama was awarded the Nobel Prize without having done anything. Reelected, he can hardly hope the Oscar – perhaps the best supporting actor.'<sup>12</sup> (Hervé Gattegno: Obama won... and then? *Le Point*, November 7, 2012).<sup>13</sup>

The majority of the Press in France, though, was in favor of Barack Obama's reelection. Fabrice Rousselot wrote in *Liberation* that Obama will start his second term more mature. He has made progress but he has understood by now it is not that easy, 'so, it is seasoned, it became less naïve in some way, and much more political'<sup>14</sup>. He became much more cautious about events in Arabia and learned from his mistakes. He describes his program as a 'full' one and he plans to focus in green energy too. (Fabrice Rousselot: Obama the second faith, *Liberation*, November 7, 2012).<sup>15</sup> In another article, in the same newspaper Lorraine Millot wrote that Obama was elected with a total of 50% (Romney had 48%) and the estimated voters were more likely 'the youth, women, minorities, the poor, the urban and the no religion'. The support of Latin population was another advantage for Obama. The result, though, showed that America is still divided and it may have chosen its leader but citizens are still not sure about the course of their future (Lorraine Millot: The country power lines separate, *Liberation*, November 7 2012).<sup>16</sup> *Le monde*, one of the most popular newspapers in France writes that Obama after his victory said: 'We want our children to live in an America that is not threatened by a destructive power of a warming planet' and raised the hope of environmentalists for a fight against the climate change (Gregoire Allix: Barack Obama took a word to the environmentalists for the rival of its climate policy, *Le Monde*, November 10, 2012).<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

After six months of an intense debate and race, Barack Obama won the 2012 American Elections. The African-American President is now ready to start his second term as a Governor having all the pressing issues on his agenda not only for America but also for the world. For the first time, American citizens showed such zeal to participate in the electoral procedure and appeared more politicized than the world thought they were. A sign that confirms this is the rising participation that may be caused by the growing influence of Blacks and Hispanics. The encouraging fact is that youth aged 18-29 participated more actively this year. It was also noted that people did not only take into consideration the representatives but also their political programs. Barack Obama is now officially the President of the United States of America and everybody waits for his next step.

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Μαρία Κουτουλάκου (Maria Koutoulakou): U.S. Presidential Elections 2012. *Délkelet Európa – South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 3. No.3. (Fall 2012) 4 p.

Thank you for your kind collaboration. *Editor-in-Chief*

<sup>11</sup> 'il a retiré les troupes d'Irak, éliminé Ben Laden, redonné des raisons d'aimer l'Amérique'

<sup>12</sup> 'Élu, Obama avait reçu le prix Nobel sans avoir rien fait. Réélu, il ne peut plus guère espérer qu'un oscar - peut-être celui du meilleur second rôle.'

<sup>13</sup> Hervé Gattegno: Obama a gagné... et alors ? *Le Point*, 7 Novembre 2012

<sup>14</sup> 'Du coup, il s'est aguerri, il est devenu moins naïf, d'une certaine manière, et beaucoup plus politique.'

<sup>15</sup> Fabrice Rousselot: Obama, la deuxième foi. *Liberation*, 7 Novembre 2012

<sup>16</sup> Lorraine Millot: Le pays force ses lignes de séparation. *Liberation*, 7 Novembre 2012

<sup>17</sup> Gregoire Allix: Barack Obama pris au mot par les écologistes sur la relance de sa politique climatique. *Le Monde*, 10 Novembre 2012