

Chapter 1

Jacob Skinner

Introduction

On May 16, 1844 Charles Adams (son of former president John Quincy Adams), and Josiah Quincy (future mayor of Boston) visited Nauvoo, Illinois in hopes of garnering Mormon support for Henry Clay's presidential bid. Instead they witnessed the nomination of Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and his second-in-command Sidney Rigdon on a third party ticket. That evening the marching band played, a barrel of tar was burned, and Joseph Smith was hoisted on the shoulders of his supporters who paraded him twice around the blazing fire (Bushman 2006, 5). Joseph Smith saw the pursuit of the presidency as the last means to restoring losses in property, life, and treasure, when the Mormons were driven from Missouri at the end of a bayonet by the state militia. Governor Lilburn W. Boggs, by executive order, called for the Mormons to be exterminated or driven from the state (Bushman 2006, 364-365).

The Mormons have come a long way from those terror filled nights where "their trail over the frozen, sleet covered ground was marked by the blood from their lacerated feet (Hinckley 1947, 57)" as they fled from the mob. Mormons have gained a far greater degree of acceptability among Americans – one which is confirmed by the presence of two credible 2012 GOP primary candidates who are Mormons - Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman. With a Mormon so close to winning the White House it can be argued to represent a capstone in a period of increased national awareness for the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints¹. In 2008, the Church received significant attention for its participation in the California Proposition 8 initiative aimed at preserving marriage between a man and woman only. Largely on the back of Mormon support, it passed in a state which is arguably the most pro-gay in the US. Since that time, the California Supreme Court has overturned the proposition on the grounds that it was motivated by religious values (Henderson and Levine 2012). That same year, Glenn Beck rose in prominence as a leader in the Tea Party movement and as a conservative pundit on the Fox News Network. In entertainment, Mormons have starred in virtually every major reality show including *American idol* (David Archuleta), *Dancing with the Stars* (Donnie and Marie Osmond, Julianne Hough, and Lacy Schwimmer), *So you Think you can Dance* (Chelsea Hightower), and more. *Big Love* and *Sister Wives* also received national acclaim for their portrayal of polygamous lifestyles even though the mainstream Mormon Church outlawed polygamy from its ranks in 1890. The trial and conviction of Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) Church leader Warren Jeffs, captured the imagination and disdain of the American Public (Newcomb 2012). The award winning Broadway musical, *The Book of Mormon*, was nominated for eleven Tony awards in 2011, winning nine of them including best Broadway musical (Rael 2011). And Mormon success goes beyond the world of entertainment, expanding to sports, the intellectual community, and business. The culmination of all this attention on Mormons has been referred to as “the Mormon moment (Bringhurst 2011, xix).”

The large degree of recent Mormon success presents a stark contrast to negative views surrounding Mormonism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century’s where the religion was seen as anti-American, militant, and sexually deviant (Shipps, *The History*

¹ Mormons prefer to be called ‘Latter-day Saints’.

of Mormonism in US Politics 2011). Mitt Romney has benefited from the ‘Mormon moment’ as it has provided fertile grounds by which a Mormon can legitimately seek the US Presidency with the expectation that he might win. One hundred years ago this idea would be laughable as Reed Smoot was barred from taking up his office in the Senate (Hansen 1981, 173). While Mormonism may not have reached the level of acceptability it would like, it appears to be less harmful for a Mormon to run for president in 2012 than at any other time.

Mormons have an unexpectedly long tradition of running for the US Presidency beginning with Mormon founder Joseph Smith. Interestingly, Joseph Smith would be America’s first ecclesiastical leader to run for president and to be assassinated while doing so. If one were to tally the number of Mormon presidential candidates, Mitt Romney would be the eleventh, and while the presence of Jon Huntsman on this years GOP ballot may have made the field appear unusually saturated with Mormons, in 1968 three Mormon candidates ran for president - George Romney, Ezra Taft Benson, and Eldridge Cleaver (Bringhurst 2011). Among Mormons, Mitt Romney has been the most successful being the only one to reach the needed delegate total to qualify as the 2012 Republican nominee. Rick Santorum, the last remaining serious challenger, suspended his campaign on April 9, 2012 opening the door wide open for Romney to gain the needed delegates by June (Kingstone 2012). Mormon Presidential nominees are almost as rare as non-Protestant ones. In the history of the United States Romney will be only the third, following Catholic candidates, Al Smith in 1928, and John F. Kennedy (JFK) in 1960. Should he defeat Obama in November, he would be only the second non-Protestant candidate to win the presidency (Plotz 2000).

For Romney, 2012 represents his second campaign in his quest to win the presidency. When he ran in 2008, he was largely an unknown figure, despite his time as Governor and being credited for saving the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics. Competing in important events like the Iowa straw poll, and leveraging his financial advantage to out-advertise competitors, helped him increase national awareness in a short period of time. As the public became more familiar with him as a candidate the question of his Mormonism gained prominence and was targeted by opponents. After his 2008 loss, many blamed his faith pointing to bigotry. The purpose of this Master's Research Paper (MRP) is to investigate the effect of Mormonism on Mitt Romney's candidacy in 2012, and how his affiliation with the Mormon Church may affect voter behaviour in the primary and the general election. This paper finds the Mormon effect to be less harmful than many suppose (Kranish and Helman 2012, 284), suggesting that other factors will play a more prominent role in deciding who will be the next US president.

In June 2011, *Gallup* released polling numbers indicating that Mormons face a degree of bigotry that makes it more difficult to win the presidency. Twenty-two percent of respondents said they would be unwilling to vote for a Mormon candidate even if he were well-qualified. In 1960 JFK faced similar bad news; *Gallup* said twenty-five percent of respondents would not vote for a well-qualified Catholic either; yet he went on to win, showing that religious bias does not necessarily preclude a candidate from winning the presidency (Saad, Gallup 2011).

In the *June 2011 Gallup Survey*, two groups demonstrated greater bias than any other - Evangelical Christians² and members of the Democratic Party (Saad 2011). Chapter two of this MRP will look at the effect Evangelical perceptions have on Mitt Romney's electability, reviewing how Evangelicals have behaved in the 2012 primary, and how they might be expected to act in the general election. President Obama who opposed gay marriage in *The Audacity of Hope* (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 223) has reversed his opinion choosing to favour same-sex marriage now (Trinko 2012). This has changed the dynamic of the campaign causing Evangelicals to embrace Mitt Romney more closely, ignoring the 'otherness' that his Mormonism might present. Whatever apathy among Evangelicals that may have worked to favour the Obama campaign has been forfeited (Sheppard 2012). For Romney, Evangelicals represent a key constituency which he will need if he hopes to win. With this support now assured, Obama may have saved Romney from pandering to Evangelicals in an attempt to motivate them.

The Democratic objection to a Mormon candidate is the key subject in chapter three. The *June 2011 Gallup Poll*, indicated greater bias towards a Mormon candidate among Democrats than Evangelicals. Unlike Evangelicals, Democrats have more reasons to object to a Mormon candidate. Not only do they differ theologically, Mormons and democrats tend to stand at different ends of the political spectrum, disagreeing on almost

² Evangelicals de-emphasize the role of ritual in spiritual life focusing on the need for personal conversion. They believe in the saving power of Jesus Christ and look to the Bible as a powerful authority in their lives. Evangelicals actively express and share their religious beliefs. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Evangelicals rose in prominence as a political force for the GOP as the women's movement, the sexual revolution, and the gay movement became more assertive. Culminating these decisions was the Supreme Court passage of *Roe v. Wade* legalizing abortion. Feeling under attack and to counter cultural trends, Evangelicals became a powerful political force as they participated in politics en masse. With their emphasis on tradition, order, and family the GOP attracted what has come to be known as the Christian right. They are counted among the strongest grass root supporters of the Republican Party.

every important social and economic issue. In a study conducted by David Campbell from the University of Notre Dame, he identified Mormons as the most conservative social group in the United States; more so than Evangelicals (Campbell 2012). Being among the most conservative Republicans, Mormons diametrically oppose liberals who make up the Democratic base. Conflict on topics of religion as well as politics help explain why some Democrats categorically oppose a Mormon presidential candidate.

Chapter two and chapter three succeed in outlining why Evangelicals and Democrats oppose a Mormon Presidential candidate, but fail to convince that Mormonism is so harmful that it precludes Mitt Romney from winning the presidency on that characteristic alone. If Mormonism is not as important a variable as once thought; what is? Chapter three looks to the economy and race as variables more likely to influence the outcome of the election than Romney's religion.

President Obama ran a campaign that set high expectations for the voter, where he promised to repair virtually every ail facing the American people (Obama, Transcript: Barack Obama's Inauguration Speech 2009). In terms of the economy, it appears that he may have over promised, but under delivered. The housing market continues to suffer (Times 2012), employment is still above eight percent (Good and Bingham 2012), the US credit rating was downgraded (Detrixhe 2011), the deficit is over one trillion dollars (Klein 2012), and fuel has more than doubled in cost since he took office (gasbuddy.com 2012).

Polling shows that Mitt Romney holds an advantage when it comes to the economy (Cohn 2012), so Obama has used a strategy which deflects attention from the economy and discredits Romney's ability to manage it effectively. If the economy shows

improvement, the Obama camp can then talk about the ‘improving economy’, moving away from social issues that may not be as beneficial to his re-election campaign. The second strategy has been to discredit Mitt Romney’s business credentials by branding him a ‘vulture’ capitalist and pointing to job losses that occurred in some companies Bain serviced. Romney benefits by defining himself as the candidate best capable of fixing the economy, and while Obama may be perceived as more likeable, Romney may be seen as more capable. This is why Obama’s message on the economy so far has been a very simple one: “We’re making progress, and the other guy will take us backwards (Eskew 2012).”

Race is the silent issue of this campaign. Studies regarding race and the 2008 election found that Obama’s colour would have been harmful to his campaign if not for high levels of dissatisfaction regarding Bush’s policies. The Iraq War and the financial meltdown caused a high level of ‘Bush fatigue’ which dampened racism for voters. In 2012, it is more difficult for Obama to blame Bush, making him more vulnerable to prejudice (Weisbert and Devine 2010).

Obama also faces an enthusiasm gap among his own followership. Race motivated followers because they were participating in a historic event by electing the first black president. Followers are not raising as much money or organizing as robustly as they did the first time around. Obama may be struggling from an old news/new news variable of his own which works against (Morris 2012). In 2008, it seems Obama faces two dangers as a result of race. First is voter apathy, which explains why he has had difficulty deciding on a re-election campaign theme. The second is covert racism, where

race is not dampened but possibly amplified by Obama's failure with the economy. Some voters may use the bad economy as a cover for racism.

Campaigns are relative affairs, and Mitt Romney represents a formidable opponent to Obama, especially in an election where the economy is a prescient issue. In an interview with R.B. Scott, he suggested that Mitt Romney "is the best prepared US Presidential candidate in history (Scott 2011)." Romney's path to the presidential nomination, and potentially the presidency, has been paved by successes that make his resume an attractive one. Romney, although being born to a politically powerful and wealthy family, has made use of his advantages, earning a greater degree of prosperity and influence in politics. His path was largely marked by his father George Romney, which Mitt Romney has traveled and improved on. The elder Romney, was lauded for turning around American Motors, while his son helped turn around multiple businesses during his time at Bain Capital - including Bain itself at one point (Kranish and Helman 2012, 188). When the Salt Lake Olympics were mired in corruption allegations, Mitt Romney stepped in and turned them around, delivering not only a successful Olympics, but the most profitable in history. He was so notoriously cheap some workers dubbed the games the 'MittFrugal Olympics' after the McDonalds brand (Scott, Mitt Romney: An Inside Look at the Man and His Politics 2012, 98). Romney was educated at Harvard where he earned a MBA/JD. In his personal life, he has been married for over forty years and has five sons. He is known as a great husband and father. In his capacity as a church leader, he has served in highly respected capacities, as a Mormon Bishop and Stake President (Scott, The Effect of Romney's Religion on Electability 2011). Politically, he

presented a stiff challenge to Ted Kennedy in 1994, forcing Kennedy to rebuild his political organization and use negative campaign tactics to win – including attacking Mitt Romney regarding his Mormon beliefs (Kranish and Helman 2012, 177). In 2004, Romney would succeed in winning the Governorship of Massachusetts. To do so he defeated a Republican incumbent and a strong Democratic challenger (Scott, Mitt Romney: An Inside Look at the Man and His Politics 2012). Mitt Romney learned much from his 2008 presidential bid. One of those lessons was not to expect Evangelical voters to come easily. In 2012, he calibrated his strategy to go after voters in high population centers and states where Evangelical influence was weaker. For example, in Iowa he did not invest as much of his time and resources there and looked to New Hampshire as the springboard to his election campaign. As a result, he won New Hampshire and did better than expected in Iowa too. During the 2012 primary process, when it appeared he would lose to the likes of Rick Perry, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, or Rick Santorum, he stayed with his message and effectively used his financial advantage to concentrate attacks on the individual candidate next closest in the polls. During debates, he proved to be the most consistent, managing to embarrass his opponents at times, and being rewarded not necessarily by personal gains in supporters, but in losses that the challenger sustained as a result of Romney's ability to expose weaknesses during debates. Rick Perry most notably, went from the favourite after entering the contest, to the bottom of the pack after poor debate performances which Romney capitalized on (Yadron 2011).

When asked about his Mormon faith, Romney has moved to contain negative perceptions of his religion knowing it has the potential to harm his electability. In 2008 he was more willing to talk about his faith, but in 2012 he refuses to speak about it almost

entirely (Scott, *The Effect of Romney's Religion on Electability* 2011). This has contributed to a decrease in news articles highlighting negative perceptions of Mormonism. When Romney won the Governorship in 2004, there was fewer than half the amount of news articles on the topic of his faith during that election cycle, than when he ran and lost in 1994 to Ted Kennedy (Bringhurst 2011, 241). Similarly in 2012 the amount of news articles in the media on the topic of his religion is substantially lower, and Romney has appeared to make a conscious effort not to include the subject of faith in his broader discourse. Instead, he has focused on building upon common beliefs, and deflecting specific questions about Mormon Doctrine to representatives of the Mormon Church.

This MRP does not aim to predict whether Mitt Romney will win or lose this election. Rather, it will highlight the pitfalls his faith may or may not present to him. It shows that the Mormon factor is less harmful to Romney's campaign than some may believe, and like JFK, negative Mormon bias can be overcome. This being the case, questions surrounding the economy, and how confident voters will be that Romney can do a better job than Obama, are more important determinants in deciding the winner, than religion. Romney also stands to benefit from a 'race bump' as voters act with a greater degree of prejudice when deciding who to choose for President.

Chapter 2

Overcoming Evangelical Perceptions: Romney's Primary Challenge

Jacob Skinner

On 6 December 2007, approximately a month before the Iowa Caucus, Mitt Romney delivered his "Faith in America Speech" in an attempt to forestall what were plummeting and potentially fatal polling numbers in his first presidential run. The speech he would deliver would be compared to John F. Kennedy's famous speech given in 1960, which addressed Kennedy's Catholicism and how it affected his qualifications to be President. In Iowa in 2008, anti-Mormonism had taken its toll prompting Romney to answer critics about the roll of Mormonism in a Romney presidency (Bringhurst 2011, 229). When Kennedy, ran he did not feel the necessity to deliver a speech addressing his faith until after he won the Democratic nomination. His speech was designed to redact opinions that a Catholic is more appropriately a member of the board, rather than a chairman, and likewise more suited to be Vice President than President (Schlesinger 1965, 7).

Romney's speech was long anticipated, with media pundits arguing not over whether a speech on the Mormon question would be given, but when. The meteoric rise of Mike Huckabee was largely due to the support of Evangelicals, who felt uncomfortable voting for a Mormon President. Iowa was an important part of the Romney strategy; winning there was supposed to give him the momentum he needed to capture later primaries (Seminary 2012). Romney feared that anti-Mormonism, with help from Mike Huckabee had derailed his campaign, and Romney hoped he could restore

confidence among Evangelicals through his address. In it, he highlighted America's tradition of religious tolerance and liberty pointing out that the "constitution was made for a moral and religious people (Romney 2007)." As JFK did in 1960, Mitt Romney downplayed the influence the Mormon Church would have on presidential decisions: "Their authority is theirs, within the province of church affairs, and it ends where the affairs of the nation begin (Romney 2007)." He then went on to describe his belief in Jesus Christ: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind (Romney 2007)." In his closing remarks Romney drew on the words of Sam Adams at the First Continental congress that he would: "hear a prayer from anyone of piety and good character, as long as they were a patriot. And so together they prayed, and together they fought, and together, by the grace of God, they founded this great nation (Romney 2007)." Romney's performance was lauded as a success, but did not sway Iowans to vote for him, which helped undermine the support he had in New Hampshire, opening the door to the eventual 2008 nominee, John McCain (Heilemann and Halperin 2010, 302).

Romney backers pointed to anti-Mormonism among Evangelicals as a strong reason for his defeat in 2008. In Utah, Mormons were disappointed that Evangelicals refused to back a Mormon in light of the state's strong loyalty to the Republican Party, and their past support of Evangelical candidates. Shortly after Romney suspended his campaign a Utah editorialist wrote this:

It was surprising to [Latter-day Saints] that fundamentalist Christians found it acceptable political strategy to undermine Romney's campaign by attacking his LDS faith. This despite the fact that Utah has been one of the most reliably Republican strongholds in the nation and preferred George W. Bush by larger margins in the two past elections than any other state (Playing with Fire: Romney Campaign Exposed to Anti-Mormonism 2008).

There is little question that Romney's Mormonism was seen as a political weakness. The John McCain campaign coined the Romney's Mormonism 'TMT' (The Mormon Thing), and in *Game Change* it was highlighted as the primary reason for disqualifying him as McCain's Vice Presidential running mate. Romney's Mormonism turned off voters especially Evangelicals who were not entirely comfortable with John McCain's conservative credentials. He was seen as borderline Democrat, and rumours that he might select Joe Lieberman (D) as his running mate, was a quasi-confirmation of their suspicions (Heilemann and Halperin 2010, 357-358).

In 2008, the Mormon question would be used to irreversibly damage Romney's campaign. In the month leading up to the Iowa Caucus, Romney held the polling advantage, and earned a following by competing heavily in the Iowa straw poll. He hoped to appeal to GOP voters on the basis of common moral values, conservatism, and his business credentials. At about this same time, two radio stations whose audiences were largely Evangelical began airing anti-Mormon rhetoric, questioning Romney's qualifications for President on the grounds that his religion should disqualify him from the position. The Romney campaign would approach the radio hosts in a hope of resolving their opposition to Romney's Mormonism. They agreed to stop, provided Romney would disavow the main tenets of his faith, explaining his Mormon membership was a result of being born into the religion. For Romney to deny his religion was too much and he vowed never to do so (Seminary 2012).

In Iowa, Mike Huckabee would exploit the Mormon question to his advantage by preying on anti-Mormon rhetoric. When asked his thoughts on the Mormon question Huckabee slyly responded: "I think it's a religion. I don't know much about it. Don't

Mormons believe that Jesus and the Devil are brothers? (Bringhurst 2011, 254)” An aggressive campaigner, Huckabee used his television ads to further define his Evangelical brand and bring home to Iowan Evangelicals, that unlike Romney, he was one of their own. In one ad he said: “Faith doesn’t just influence me. It really defines me (Bringhurst 2011, 253).” He ended the commercial by saying: “Let us never sacrifice our principles for anybody’s politics. Not now, not ever. (Bringhurst 2011, 253)” Huckabee’s goal to confirm his religious sameness relative to Romney’s ‘otherness’ paid off. While Romney led polling from May 2007 to November 2007, by November 25, 2007, the *Des Moines Register* had Huckabee passing Romney for the lead with twenty nine percent of the vote to Romney’s twenty four percent. What looked like a neck-in-neck race would turn into a nine point route for Huckabee (RealClearPolitics 2008).

In 2012, Romney would face similar questions regarding his religious affiliation. In a *June 2011 Gallup Poll*, it was revealed that Mormon bias was still alive. *Gallup* asked:

Between now and the 2012 political conventions, there will be a discussion about the qualifications of presidential candidates – their education, age, religion, race, and so on.

If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be Mormon, would you vote for that person (Saad 2011)?

Seventy six percent of respondents answered yes, but twenty two percent answered no. According to *Gallup* these numbers are historically consistent, closely resembling polling results in 1967, 1999, and 2007 where a ‘No’ response hovered between seventeen percentage points, and twenty-four percentage points, with the greatest negative Mormon bias coinciding with Romney’s 2008 presidential run. Among religious groups, Evangelicals were most likely not to support a Mormon Presidential nominee, confirming

suspicions that the groups biases harmed Romney's electability in his 2008 presidential run, and threatened to do the same in 2012 (Saad 2011).

Strong language from Evangelical Preacher Robert Jeffress sheds light on the feelings that many Protestants share regarding Mormonism. At the *2011 Values Voters Summit* Jeffress supported the candidacy of Rick Perry citing his strong 'Christian' credentials as his primary reason for doing so. When questioned back stage about Romney's Mormonism, he said that: "It was not Christian and a cult (Weiner 2011)." He went on to argue that a 'Christian' candidate as long as he or she remained in the GOP field was the better qualified candidate, regardless of anything else he/she may bring to the table (Weiner 2011). Warren Smith, another Evangelical voice, agreed with Jeffress and suggested that it is immoral to vote for Romney because he is a member of the Mormon Church; an organization which he claims to be a purveyor of lies. He worried that a Mormon US President would provide greater legitimacy to the Mormon Church, which would convert greater numbers of people to its' 'false teachings'. Smith also worried that a candidate who chose to believe in Mormonism was either gullible or a person who knowingly perpetuates lies (Smith 2011). The claim that Mormonism is a cult was condemned by most media sources as bigotry. In 2012, Mormons have become too mainstream to simply lump them into the same category as the Branch Davidians, which is a group better fitting the 'cult' description (Weiner 2011).

In 2012, Romney has used a careful strategy to contain negative Mormon bias, opting to concentrate his campaign in areas where there is less Evangelical opposition. He also reduced discourse surrounding Mormonism, in an effort to dampen any negative effects his religion might conjure up. When his faith is questioned, he often cites Article

VI paragraph 3 of the Constitution, which says “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Learning from 2008, Romney concentrated his early campaign in New Hampshire rather than Iowa; the state where he currently resides and chose to kick off his 2012 campaign. Expectations in Iowa were played down, and he opted not to compete in the Iowa Straw Poll, ceding whatever political advantages it might offer to Michelle Bachmann. He played down expectations, and conserved money for states that he perceived would provide greater returns. Doing so would allow Romney to explain away a potential loss on the grounds that he did not compete in Iowa to his full ability, and that he was saving his strength for what he anticipated would be a prolonged nomination process. Many winner-take-all states now divide delegates based on proportionality, making the nomination process more competitive, and the accumulation of the one thousand forty four delegates needed to seize the nomination, more difficult.

As it became apparent that Romney’s chances of winning Iowa were hopeful, he invested more. On election night he was surprised to find he had won by eight votes, but a few days later a recount ferried away the victory to Rick Santorum (Haberman 2012). But the perceived victory in Iowa (albeit scathingly narrow – thirty four votes) had already helped rally Romney supporters in New Hampshire who voted for him overwhelmingly this time.

Romney’s reason for skipping the Iowa Caucus, however, was to avoid the same anti-Mormonism that effectively damaged the credibility of his campaign in 2008. Evangelical pundits in Iowa would find attacking Romney much harder if he ignored the Caucus and opted not to compete. By avoiding Iowa almost entirely, it reduced the

negative discourse surrounding his Mormon faith, and did not allow his brand to be tainted by his Mormon ‘otherness’. (Seminary 2012).

By hedging in Iowa, it gave Romney the room to say ‘oh well’ when the victory was finally shifted to Rick Santorum. Not only did he benefit from the short-term perception that he won the state, but was able to shrug off the loss in a good natured way. What was a disastrous loss for him in 2008, had little impact on him in 2012, despite the drama surrounding the recount. The real loser in the debacle was Rick Santorum who was largely ignored when he gave a speech highlighting the fact he was the real Iowa winner, but the election had moved to other states in the process, and Iowa was old news by then. Mitt Romney may have lost the state, but he won the momentum helping him to win New Hampshire and Michigan successively (Staff 2012).

By the South Carolina Primary, Newt Gingrich surged in the polls and defeated Romney there, even with the help of Romney surrogate John McCain, who carried the state in 2008. McCain blamed the loss on anti-Mormonism:

We haven’t had time to do a real analysis of the Romney race in South Carolina, but once we break that down, there was some element of anti-Mormonism in that vote. I’m not saying all of it, but there were elements there. There was nothing that Mitt Romney could have done (McPike 2012).

While other variables contributed to the Gingrich victory in South Carolina - like his strong debate performance the night before, an organization that proved more capable and better suited for victory in South Carolina, and an ability to connect better with voters (York 2012) - the South Carolina victory suspiciously fits a trend suggesting anti-Mormonism. In states where fifty percent or more Republican Primary voters were Evangelical, either Newt Gingrich or

Rick Santorum won. All other states supported Mitt Romney (Lizza 2012). South Carolina with a fifty six percent Evangelical population crosses the 'Evangelical threshold' that does not favour Mitt Romney (Lizza 2012). As Evangelical voting populations increased in density they were increasingly less likely to vote for the Mormon candidate, Mitt Romney (Grant 2012).

Opponents of Mormon presidential contenders have the capacity to use negative Mormon bias as an electoral edge, but a campaign built on this strategy alone has proven to be a losing one. Mike Huckabee, who rose up as the Evangelical favourite in 2008 may have defeated Romney through anti-Mormonism, but went on to lose because he failed to appeal to a broader base of GOP voters. The Evangelical advantage appears to have its limits, and GOP candidates who wish to win the nomination need other GOP demographics too.

The anti-Mormon strategy works well in caucus states where a disproportionate number of Evangelicals can maneuver into delegate slots or in states with the magic fifty percent Republican primary voter population (Lizza 2012). Once states fitting this description are exhausted, the anti-Mormon advantage is reduced. If candidates relying on this strategy fail to develop alternative reasons to vote for them, then they will fail to win the nomination. This helps explain the disjointed nature of the GOP primary process, where Santorum benefited from an anti-Mormon bump in the South, artificially prolonging the credibility of his long-term chances of winning the nomination.

Now that Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich have suspended their campaigns and endorsed Mitt Romney; that Ron Paul (following his libertarian credo to avoid debt) has tacitly ended his campaign by refusing to spend money; and Romney appears to have the

needed delegates to win at the convention, it is clear Mitt Romney has won the nomination. The question remaining for Evangelicals is to what degree they will support Romney in the general election? If Robert Jeffress is a barometer on what to expect, he suggested that if it came down to choosing between Obama or Romney, that he would support Romney, albeit grudgingly (Weiner 2011). This suggests the real possibility that Evangelical voter turn out will be dampened by a Romney candidacy, which may do enough harm to cause his general election defeat.

The strength of Evangelical support will depend not on what Mitt Romney does, but on how Barack Obama chooses to approach social issues, like gay marriage or abortion, during the election process. President Obama, who had up until recently, not made any public decision on gay marriage, recently endorsed it (Somashekhar 2012). This has generated a lot of fear among religious communities, that Obama's 'evolving' ideas on homosexuality might lead to the repeal of DOMA (The Defense of Marriage Act), which Obama's Justice Department no longer defends, or to push a Federal law legalizing the practice of same-sex marriage. There is also the concern that laws banning same-sex marriage may be tried in the US Supreme Court, potentially sweeping away bans on gay marriage in some thirty states (Somashekhar 2012).

Obama strategists have used the marriage debate to divert attention away from the economy, but at a cost. This eliminates the need for Mitt Romney to pander to 'unsold' Evangelicals and to shift his views more to the center if he finds it helps his electability. Anti-Mormonism, which threatened to dampen voter turn out among Evangelicals in the general election, has been forgotten in the common cause of preserving the traditional

family, allowing Romney the ability to risk more liberal views without having to worry over whether Evangelicals will turn out for him (Tobin 2012).

Between 2008 and 2012, there has been a change in perceptions surrounding the Mormon question, which bear some resemblance to Romney's previous political campaigns in Massachusetts. When he ran in 1994 and looked poised to defeat Ted Kennedy, the Mormon question was used in a way to suggest that Mitt Romney was a racist and supported restrictions on female freedoms (Bringhurst 2011, 237). Romney failed to effectively counter these views and never recovered from the criticisms. When he ran for Governor in 2000 the O'Brien campaign did not use anti-Mormonism as a negative issue, and Romney's faith received half of the news coverage it received in 1994. Romney won that election (Bringhurst 2011, 241). This suggests that there may be an old news – new news dynamic at work. It appears that the media, and voters who perceived Mormonism as a strong negative factor the first time around, may feel it is less of a problem the second time (Seminary 2012). In an interview with R.B. Scott author of *Mitt Romney: An Inside Look at the Man and his Politics* agreed with this assessment:

The anti-Mormon issue will be a bigger issue in the primary than the general election but mainly because people are talking a lot about it. In different areas of the country where pockets of people begin making distinction on religious lines on whether Mormons are Christians, Mormonism will be a factor in their voting decision. Anti-Mormonism is likely to be less of an issue now than in 2008 because the voters are already aware of his religion (Scott 2011).

Although Gallup's June 2011 survey suggests that Mormonism may harm electability for some voters, it is worth noting that in 1960, in a similar survey regarding John F.

Kennedy's association with Catholicism, that twenty-five percent of respondents suggested that they would not vote for a Catholic either; yet he went on to win, demonstrating that religious bias can be overcome (Saad 2011). In the case of Mitt Romney, it appears that anti-Mormonism is having less of an effect on his candidacy in 2012 than in 2008 among GOP voters, indicating a stronger willingness to vote for a Mormon presidential candidate. Anti-Mormonism has been dampened because of Romney's strategy to contend less in highly populated Evangelical states and to focus more on high population areas with lower Evangelical voting populations (Lizza 2012). If negative Mormon bias exists, careful strategy can contain the effects by avoiding it. Potential voter apathy among Evangelicals is helped by Obama's focus on social issues important to them – especially when it comes to gay marriage or abortion law. Obama's support of gay marriage may satisfy one of his key constituencies, and steer attention away from the economy, but may do more to benefit Romney's campaign by uniting Evangelicals behind him (Trinko 2012). In the next chapter, the effects of perceptions held by Democrats, who hold stronger biases against a potential Mormon President than Evangelicals, will explain the reasons for their strong opposition to a possible Mormon Presidential candidate, and how they might be expected to behave in the general election.

Chapter 3

Democratic Perceptions: A General Election Problem

Jacob Skinner

The last chapter focused on how Evangelical perceptions of Mitt Romney and his affiliation with Mormonism might help or harm his election chances in both the primary and general election. In this chapter it is hoped that much of the same can be accomplished, except by investigating the reasons Democrats feel inclined to disqualify a well-qualified candidate because he is a Mormon. The Democratic Party has built its modern brand on being the Party of acceptance. Since the 1960s it has been the Party most likely to defend civil rights or to advance women issues (Frum 2008, 25). The Democrats have been the only major Party to support a non-Protestant nominee and help one to win the presidency – John F. Kennedy (a Catholic) in 1960 (Saad 2011). For this reason, it comes as a surprise that Democratic bias towards a Mormon candidate like Mitt Romney would be stronger than that of Evangelicals.

The Romneys' as a family have flirted with the possibility of joining the Democrats when faced with the prospect of a political career. Prior to George Romney's automotive career, he worked as an aid to a Democratic Senator in Washington, and in 1962 when he was making the difficult decision of running for Governor of Michigan, he pondered over whether he should run as a Democrat. One day coming down for breakfast he asked Mitt and the rest of the family their opinion on the topic: "You know, I think I'm going to run for governor. Should I run as a Republican or a Democrat (Kranish and Helman 2012, 23)?" George Romney would run as a Republican,

distancing himself from the GOP enough to appeal to swing voting Democrats, and Independents. He donned the guise of a ‘maverick outsider’ often going against the GOP establishment, and fighting against what he termed the more ‘extremist elements’ of the Republican Party (Bachelder Fall 2007, 2). Like his Father, Mitt Romney considered membership in the Democratic Party because of the practical benefit it could lend to his political career; but in the end, he decided to stick with the Republicans, and take a more moderate tact on Massachusetts social issues in order to appeal to voters there. In 1992, Romney had given money to Democratic candidates and voted as an independent in the Democratic Primary casting his vote for Paul Tsongas. Romney would not become a registered Republican until 1993, one year before his Senate run, drawing criticisms that his political calibration was tailored to voter approval, rather than personal political views; that perhaps he was “philosophically vacuous (Kranish and Helman 2012, 170).”

Interestingly, in the late nineteenth century Mormons were ardent supporters of the Democratic Party. Few if any associated themselves with the Republican Party at all. As a prerequisite for statehood the Mormon Church disbanded the Utah People’s Party and ‘asked’ many of its members to join the GOP, although most of them would have preferred membership in the Democratic Party instead:

The Popular folklore, still told today, is that Church President Wilford Woodruff (or sometimes Apostle John Henry Smith, a fervent Republican) instructed ward bishops to assign ward members evenly to the two national political parties and that according to the folklore, many bishops simply stood at the pulpit, used the central aisle as the division point, and assigned half the house to one party and the other half to the other (Prince and Wright 2005, 334).

Early history of the Mormon Church reveals a deep affinity for progressive politics. Mormons were among the most socialist groups in American history practicing what they termed ‘the united order’. Those who joined the ‘united order’ would contribute their assets to a general fund to be divided evenly among all of its members. The association would work cooperatively to help this fund grow, sharing in the returns. Some of these communities would thrive for many years until ultimately ending in failure:

In the 1860s William Somerville responded to a call from Brigham Young to help settle Mona in Juab County. William and part of his family joined the united order in Mona in 1875, putting his cattle and sheep in the company herd. When the order failed he lost all his livestock, making his sons bitter (McConkie 2003, 24).

Failed social experiments like this would foster bitterness towards communal enterprise, making Mormons easy converts to capitalism and right-wing ideology.

Mormon Democrats would convert to the Republican Party in greater numbers, as the GOP became less progressive and the Democratic Party more so. Among Mormons today, a negative stigma accompanies those who continue to identify themselves as Democrats. Many question whether a Democrat can be a good and faithful member of the Mormon Church (Bringhurst 2011, 141-147). Reconciling some of the social views of the Democratic Party with Mormonism is a difficult fit, especially in the case of abortion or gay marriage, and this leads Mormons to wonder how Harry Reid can continue to hold good standing in the Church as a Democrat? Culturally, it appears there is social pressure which promotes Republican Party membership and discourages

Democratic Party membership, which explains why Utah has been a strong supporter of Republican Presidential nominees as of late (Kaufmann 2012).

This leads to the primary reason Democrats are unwilling to vote for a Mormon Presidential candidate; they oppose one another on most issues. Notre Dame Professor David Campbell confirms Mormon opposition: “Among social groups Mormons represent the most socially conservative demographic ranking higher than Evangelicals (Campbell 2012).” If that is the case, then liberals who make up the Democratic base are diametrically opposed to Mormons, who count themselves among the conservative constituency composing the Republican base. Mormons and liberal Democrats find themselves at odds on issues like civil rights, women’s suffrage, gay marriage, and the economy. Because Mormons have been enemies of the Democrats on these issues, anti-Mormonism has seemed fair game in campaign strategy (Bringhurst 2011, 237-238).

In 1994, when Mitt Romney ran against Ted Kennedy for his Senate seat, the Kennedy campaign used anti-Mormonism in explicit ways in order to defeat Romney. Ted Kennedy’s nephew, Joseph P. Kennedy II criticized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for its exclusion of blacks and women from leadership positions. Through the media, Senator Kennedy would ask where Romney stood on racially exclusive issues of the past: “Where is Mr. Romney on those issues in terms of equality of race prior to 1978 and other kinds of issues in question (Kranish and Helman 2012, 187)?”

Romney, perceiving Kennedy’s use of anti-Mormonism to be effective, took to the podium to address the questions being asked about his faith. He invoked the words of Ted Kennedy’s brother, John F. Kennedy, saying: “I do not speak for my church on

public matters, and the church does not speak for me (Kranish and Helman 2012, 187).” He would go on to chastise the Kennedy campaign, suggesting that they were trying to take away the religious victory his brother, JFK, won in his 1960 political victory; and that President Kennedy’s political victory, went beyond the forty million born Catholics in the United States, extending to Americans of all different religious denominations. While Mitt Romney delivered these remarks to the media, George Romney paced anxiously in the wings and unable to contain his building anger, he broke into the midst of the group of reporters who turned to him, and said: “I think it is absolutely wrong to keep hammering on the religious issues. What Ted is trying to do is bring it into the picture.” Mitt Romney would deftly make light of the situation and retake control of the news conference but the point that anti-Mormonism was taking a central role in the campaign, was made (Kranish and Helman 2012, 187).

On the issue of civil rights, the Mormon Church has historically supported a conservative approach which Democrats have criticized. At the height of the ‘red scare’, top Mormon leaders associated themselves with the political machinations of the John Birch Society. Ezra Taft Benson (a high ranking authority in the Mormon Church), went so far as to call the civil rights movement a communist plot (Benson 1969). *The Deseret News* quoted Benson:

The pending ‘civil rights’ legislation is, I am convinced, about ten percent civil rights and ninety percent a further extension of socialist federal controls. It is part of the pattern for the communist take-over of America (Prince and Wright 2005, 70).

Benson's leadership on this issue, coupled with the lack of opposition to his zealotry by Church President David O. McKay, caused a large portion of the Mormon Church to believe top Mormon officials had tacitly endorsed this political position, and so a majority of Mormons followed Benson and supporting his views (Prince and Wright 2005, 286-289).

With regards to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), Mormons opposed it taking an active role in seeing it defeated. In the late 1970s, Sonia Johnson (a Mormon who would also run for President) had achieved a national reputation as a militant protester on behalf of the ERA. Her eager support was "highly publicized and led to her excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in December 1979 (Bringhurst 2011, 184)."

In 1994, Mitt Romney suggested there was a wall of separation between his personal political beliefs and those of the Mormon Church – especially concerning civil rights and women issues; but critics questioned his sincerity. Could he be trusted? Was he telling the truth? If one goes off the civil rights record of his father the question borders on the ridiculous. Among Republicans George Romney was a strong leader on civil rights and he criticized fellow Party members who opposed legislation improving civil rights for Blacks.

[George] Romney's biographers are unanimous in their judgment that the governor's decision [not to endorse Barry Goldwater] was based on principle, representing his profound concern that Goldwater's vote against passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act reflected the inordinate influence that rural and segregationist southern whites had over Goldwater (Bachelder Fall 2007, 7).

George Romney also petitioned the Mormon Church to change its policy regarding the rights of Blacks to receive the priesthood, long before they shifted their stance in 1979 (Prince and Wright 2005, 84). Mitt Romney's father fought to improve civil rights, risking his political credibility along the way, suggesting that it is improbable that Mitt Romney is a racist.

As for the question regarding equality among the sexes, it is similarly a difficult argument to forward in the case of Mitt Romney. Romney's mother Lenore Romney ran for Senate unsuccessfully in 1970. On the question of abortion there is some ambiguity as to where she fell on the topic. In *The Real Romney* Kranish and Helman make the claim that: "Lenore Romney had openly said during her 1970 Senate campaign that she supported the liberalizing of abortion laws (Kranish and Helman 2012, 184)." But in a May 1970 story in the *Owosso Argus-Press* she indicated otherwise. "I'm so tired of hearing the argument that a woman should have the final word on what happens to her own body. This is life (Kranish and Helman 2012, 184)!" Whether Lenore Romney supported abortion or not is less important than the fact that her behaviour demonstrated that man and woman were equal in the Romney home, which would have influenced Mitt Romney's views regarding women in a way Democrats would approve of.

For the Romney campaign, the question of abortion has been an important one, both in 1994 when he ran for Governor, and in 2012. As a rule, the Mormon Church does not support abortion except in a limited set of circumstances including rape, incest, or a threat to the life of the mother (Stolberg 2012). On a personal level, Romney has agreed with this same rule of thumb, especially in his service to the Mormon Church as a Stake President and Bishop.

In 1994, he approached the issue of abortion in a way that suggested he did not support it privately, but understood that it was a private decision, and that it would be unfair for him to impose his religious views on others. In 1963, the Romneys were a part of a personal tragedy which helped shape this claim (Stolberg 2012). Ann Hartman Keenan, his brother-in-law's sister, died from an illegal abortion. From that time forward, Mitt Romney and his family claimed to support a woman's right to a safe and legal abortion. As Governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney would endorse and legalize RU-186 which was an abortion inducing drug; and appeared at a fundraiser on behalf of Planned Parenthood where Ann Romney made a personal donation of one hundred fifty dollars (Kranish and Helman 2012, 183).

In 1994 Ted Kennedy would label Mitt as being 'multiple choice' on the subject of abortion. This is the result of Romney's insistence that a politician can divide his private views from his public beliefs (Kranish and Helman 2012, 183). By creating 'two Romneys', this allows Mitt Romney to straddle more than one side of an issue, contributing to claims that he is a flip-flopper, groundless, and lacking in integrity. The public finds the division confusing and political opponents find it objectionable. As Bishop, and later Stake President in the Mormon Church, he fervently supported the church's position on abortion counseling one mother of six to have another child, although her Doctor had recommend an abortion because of the health risks it posed to her (Scott, Mitt Romney: An Inside Look at the Man and His Politics 2012, 62-65). In 1994, he would explain away such behaviour on the grounds that he was representing the interests of the Church. This was likely a disingenuous claim where his personal views actually align with those of the Mormon Church on the subject.

Mitt Romney has adopted a more conservative approach on social issues opposing abortion and same-sex marriage; positions which are consistent with those of the Mormon Church. In 2005, Romney would write an article in the *Boston Globe* declaring his ‘pro-life’ position, shocking constituents who voted for him based on his campaign claim that he supported abortion (Stolberg 2012). In 2008, when faced with questioning from ABC’s George Stephanopoulos he struggled to explain the change of stance: “I never said I was pro-choice, but my position was effectively pro-choice. I changed my position (Stolberg 2012).” Romney’s change of opinion on this topic harmed his credibility as a trustworthy candidate adding to claims he is a political opportunist (Scott, *Mitt Romney: An Inside Look at the Man and His Politics* 2012, 141).

Romney has shown a similar willingness to switch positions on other issues under the same justification, that his private beliefs and public views are separate. While Obama has experienced an ‘evolution’ concerning gay marriage (Sullivan 2012) it might be comparatively fair to say that Romney has experienced ‘devolution’ (Kranish and Helman 2012, 256). In order to win over Massachusetts Log Cabin Republicans in 1994 (Republicans who support gay marriage), Romney suggested his support for increasing gay rights in a letter thanking them for meeting with him: “I am more convinced than ever before that as we seek to establish full equality for America’s gay and lesbian citizens, I will provide more effective leadership than my opponent [Ted Kennedy] (Kranish and Helman 2012, 182).” At Romney’s Liberty University Speech in 2012, he has reinforced the opposite view by showing his strong support for traditional marriage that it is to remain exclusively “between one man and one woman (Blake 2012).”

Romney's shifting views are a source of concern for Democrats who have decided that it is difficult to trust him. While those dissatisfied with Obama because he has failed to improve their economic circumstances may be inclined to vote for Romney, this veil of distrust may hamper the swing voter as well as independents in making a firm decision to cast their vote for him. It appears, however, that his public views in the presidential race align much better with his personal views, suggesting that the 'Romney' that is running in 2012 more closely resembles the 'real' Romney.

In the discussion to determine where Romney stands, it is important to note that at least one of the reasons for opposing Romney for Democrats is the same reason that many Evangelicals opposed him in the Primary – his un-definability. This presents a unique problem for the Obama campaign as they decide how best to 'brand' Romney to the public. Highlighting his moderate views will make him appear more centrist appealing to a broader base of the electorate. Defining him as 'severely' conservative also benefits Romney, by confirming his conservatism in the eyes of skeptical followers. Recent ads by the Obama camp suggest they prefer the conservative definition (MSNBC 2012). There may be a missed opportunity however to take an alternative approach to the problem. Continuing with the strategy that John McCain effectively used in 2008, and which Rick Santorum and other failed to implement in the GOP primary; Obama would benefit by branding Romney as a candidate not to be trusted. If Romney is a flip flopper, a political opportunist, and not a 'true' anything, independents will doubt his credentials, and Democrats who are likely to vote Republican this time, will hesitate to do so. Using this strategy does not allow Romney to appear more conservative because his un-definability disqualifies him from being either (Scott, Mitt Romney: An

Inside Look at the Man and His Politics 2012, 142), and it builds on a problem Obama identifies in *The Audacity of Hope*, that “the most elusive quality in [America’s] leaders [is] the quality of authenticity (B. Obama 2006, 66).”

Obama’s decision to endorse gay marriage at this point in the race furthers the view that he is attempting to define himself as a ‘liberal’ candidate, in order to act as a foil to Romney’s conservatism. Obama benefits by taking this position because it rallies the liberal base which has been more lethargic in 2012 than 2008; but at the same time it rallies Evangelicals behind Romney perhaps benefitting Romney more in the process. Firmly rooting Romney in the conservative tradition erases any opportunity of portraying Romney as ‘philosophically vacuous’, and causes Evangelicals to forget about Romney’s Mormon ‘otherness’ (Trinko 2012). Pat Buchanan went so far as to say that “social conservatives and Evangelicals are now singing Onward Christian Soldiers” in favour of Mitt Romney (Sheppard 2012). This frees Romney from the task of pandering to Evangelicals (probably to no avail) and goes a long way to insuring their presence at the polls where turn out among Evangelicals was looking to be less robust (Slack 2012).

One other reason for strong bias towards a Mormon presidential candidate (and by no means has this chapter been one hundred percent inclusive on what all those reasons might be), is the anti-religious element among the Democratic Party. The views of Bill Maher or Christopher Hitchens are representative of a group of voters who side more often with Democratic candidates than Republican ones. Pastor Robert Jeffress may take issue with Mormonism for being a cult, but anti-religious voters object to a candidate who is religious at all. Hitchen’s, for instance, criticizes the Mormon Church not on the grounds that it is a cult but that it is “weird (Hitchens 2011)”; an idea that Obama tested

against Romney early in the GOP primary but quickly abandoned (Hallowell 2012). The Mormon belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet, who translated the Book of Mormon from plates made of gold delivered to him by an Angel, seems too fantastical for belief (Hitchens 2011). And it is not merely that these ideas are ‘strange’, but that it seems that one would have to be a ‘sucker’ to believe them (Smith 2011). This hurts the credibility of a leader who believes in such far fetched stories. Adding to anti-religious views is the ‘exceptional’ claim by Mormons and other faiths that the afterlife holds a special place for them, while disbelievers are consigned to an eternal form of punishment (Hitchens 2011). Believers are righteous, and non-believers are wicked, creating an adversarial relationship between the two groups both in Heaven and on Earth. As the old ditty goes:

We are the pure and chosen few

And all the rest are damned

There’s room enough in hell for you

We don’t want heaven crammed (Hitchens 2011).

The *June 2011 Gallup Poll* has suggested that Democrats hold greater bias toward a Mormon Presidential candidate than any other group (Saad 2011). In relation to Evangelicals, there appears to be more reasons for a Democrat to oppose a ‘Mormon’ for President than Evangelicals, perhaps explaining the small difference in bias. While the Evangelical objection to Romney is grounded in theological differences (Reynolds 2012), the Democrats are less willing to vote for a Mormon because of both differing religious and political views.

While there was some speculation that Democrats might play spoiler in open GOP primaries, they did not turn out in large enough numbers to harm Romney. Attempts at running ads against Romney similarly failed, and may have contributed to Romney's legitimacy as a candidate who Democrats feared was capable of defeating Barack Obama in a general election. In the general election Democrats are sure to oppose Mitt Romney but not because he is a Mormon. Although Mormons oppose Democrats on key political issues so could another candidate who happened to be a strong Muslim, Jew, Protestant, or Evangelical. Where Obama stands to gain most is by insuring Mitt Romney's Evangelical base remains apathetic. However, Obama's recent announcement that he supports gay marriage may have erased the 'Mormon' effect. Common enemies tend to make great friends and Evangelicals are likely to embrace Romney now that Obama has challenged the traditional family. Obama may have inadvertently rallied Romney's followers to a greater degree than Obama's own; which may hurt his re-election chances. It appears that negative Mormon bias has been largely contained in the 2012 election, meaning other factors will be of greater significance. The next chapter looks at two variables more likely to have a greater impact on election outcomes – the economy and race.

Chapter 4

Jacob Skinner

The Effect of Economy and Race

The preceding two chapters focused on Mormonism as a key variable in how Evangelicals or Democrats will cast their vote in the 2012 election. For Mitt Romney, Mormonism plays an important role in defining the perceptions of potential voters. Despite his actions in business or government the stigma that comes with being a Mormon will follow him whether for good or ill. Yet the question must be asked, ‘How consequential is Mormonism as a variable in relation to his electability?’ Is Mormonism in relation to Romney a proverbial ‘straw man’? Evidence presented so far concludes that it has the capacity to be harmful, but in the 2012 election Mitt Romney’s Mormonism does not. This chapter will look at two variables of greater significance – the economy and race.

In 2008, Barack Obama became the first black man to win the US Presidency, inspiring thousands. His message of ‘hope and change’ appealed to the positive nature of most American voters, and came at a time when the foundations of the economy were crumbling in the United States (Sugrue 2012, 92). In the process of winning the presidency Obama promised big change; that he would correct the economy; implement new regulations to prevent derivatives from unbalancing the market in the future; put a stop to banks granting home loans to unworthy borrowers; and, to create millions of jobs by retrofitting inefficient homes which would have the added benefit of reducing dependence on foreign oil. Jobs did not pan out as hoped (Ito and Effinger 2012), and

gas prices have been the source of rising costs (Kim 2012). In an additional effort to spur employment and assist a deflated construction sector, he promised to fast track ‘shovel ready’ projects to restore America’s aging infrastructure: “We will rebuild the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together (Obama, nytimes.com 2009).” Green energy initiatives would replace fossil fuels in powering cars and factories: “We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories (Obama, nytimes.com 2009).” Health care costs would be reduced, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, would come to a responsible close. Terrorism would be defeated:

We'll begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we'll work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life nor will we waver in its defense. And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that, ‘Our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken. You cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you (Obama, nytimes.com 2009).’

In President Obama’s inaugural address he chastised those who doubted whether his ambitions could be achieved:

All this we can do. All this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short, for they have forgotten what this country has already done, what free men and women can achieve

when imagination is joined to common purpose and necessity to courage (Obama, nytimes.com 2009).

The question now is whether Obama has delivered on the promises he made while campaigning for president? Has President Obama overpromised and under delivered? In 2008, President Obama inherited an economy which teetered on a modern day 'Great Depression'. Pumping trillions of dollars into the economy to save banking allowed the United States to narrowly escape this end (M. J. Rosenthal 2012). In 2012, the economy continues to be the area of greatest concern among American voters (Rasmussen, Importance of Issues: Economy, Health Care Top Voter Concerns 2012).

When the question is asked, 'Which candidate will be the better steward of the economy,' Mitt Romney holds a forty nine percent to forty four percent advantage over Barack Obama, according to a Washington Post and ABC News Poll released 9 July 2012 (Cohn 2012). After a string of good news on economic performance, consumer confidence tumbled in May 2012 as home prices were reported to have declined to the 2002 price range. The Consumer Confidence Index dropped by four points to 64.9 when economists had predicted gains; this following unexpectedly low numbers in new jobs and disappointing GDP data. The Consumer Confidence Index, while it is not the only economic measure, is a useful barometer in signaling the strength of the economy – a Consumer Confidence Index of ninety indicates a healthy economy. To put into perspective how bad Obama's numbers are, George W. Bush averaged around eighty-eight in spite of 9/11, fighting two wars, and two recessions. The average Consumer Confidence Index while Obama has been President has been fifty-seven (Malcolm 2012).

The Consumer Confidence Index is largely dependent on the reasons the President provides people with to feel confident about the economy. With the United States being almost four years into the recovery, unemployment is still above eight percent, gas prices continue to rise, household income is down by five percent, and home values have not significantly improved (Malcolm 2012). The situation regarding the debt is also of serious concern to Americans. America's triple AAA rating was downgraded, and the deficit is once again projected to be over a trillion dollars. Americans see Congress and the President as fiscally irresponsible.

The economy has yet to yield the improvements Obama promised, undermining confidence in his policies, and causing the public to hold him accountable for his lack of success (Knoller 2012). Obama supporters continue to blame his predecessor George W. Bush for current economic conditions, but voters are increasingly more inclined to blame Obama for the bad economy (Lemire 2012). This is bad news for Obama, since voters who perceive their economic circumstances the same or worse than when Obama took office are more likely to vote for Mitt Romney (Rasmussen, Importance of Issues: Economy, Health Care Top Voter Concerns 2012). Economists are predicting that the economy will not show signs of improvement before the November election, hurting Obama's re-election chances. A recent report by the Organization of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) released a report on 10 July 2012 predicting a slow global market as growth in the European Union is unlikely and China's economy continues to cool – a prospect which will impact the US economic recovery negatively (OECD 2012).

This bad news on the economy probably makes the Mitt Romney campaign almost gleeful; and while poor economic performance can not be blamed entirely on Obama, the argument can be made that he failed to exercise his agency to do more when Democrats held control of both the House and Senate from 2008 – 2010.

Congress was busier during this period than the Romney camp makes people think. During this period the Dodd-Franks Bill was passed to restore much of what was lost when Glass-Steagall was repealed during the Clinton years. The Affordable Health Care Act was touted as a money-saving program where a mandate to own insurance would prevent the government from having to pay for patients who received services but did not pay for them because they were uninsured. The Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) was designed to rescue banking and bail out the automotive industry. The passage of the Home Affordable Modification Program (HAMP) was to help homeowners with unaffordable mortgages lower their monthly payments. This legislation helped the economy escape a twenty-first Century ‘Great depression’, but Obama is criticized by both the right and the left for not doing enough.

The Dodds-Frank bill may have restored some of Glass-Steagall but did not implement new rules governing derivatives, which was the main problem behind the economic collapse in the first place; and insurance companies that gave Collateralized Debt Obligations (CDOs) high ratings escaped punishment. This was a big failure on the part of the Obama administration (N. Y. Times 2012). The Affordable Health Care Act did not satisfy liberals, who prefer a single-payer program much like Canada’s, and upset those on the right (Pershing 2009), who feel that forcing the purchase of health care is a violation of individual liberty and unconstitutional (Kinsley 2012). TARP succeeded in

bailing out banks but the lay American was left wondering how a bank could receive billions while their plight went largely ignored (Siegal and Kelly 2010). HAMP has also had its problems by not reaching enough Americans, or those who would benefit from help the most, and for many who already lost homes the help is too late (Kuttner 2012). The home continues to be the primary asset in terms of wealth for Americans and little improvement has been made in home values; and with the prospect of more foreclosures waiting in the wings, values are likely to remain low for a long period of time (Davies 2012).

The price of fuel is as harmful or more to Obama's reelection bid as home values, because it provides a daily reminder to Americans that the economy is not better than it was four years ago (Chowdhry 2012). When Obama took office in 2008, gas prices in the United States averaged \$1.61 per gallon. In 2012 that price has more than doubled, averaging \$3.63 nationwide (gasbuddy.com 2012). The costs of increasing fuel prices have been felt throughout the broader economy inflating the price of most goods and services during a period of time when health care costs have increased and income has trended downwards (Kowalski 2012). Obama has done little to help make fuel more affordable. Couple this with what many Americans view as failed economic policies it builds a case (however rational or irrational it may be) that Obama could have done more for the economy; but did not.

Mitt Romney has campaigned primarily on his business credentials and his ability to turn failing enterprises into successful ones. He argues that if he could turn around a multitude of businesses, the Salt Lake Olympics, and Massachusetts, then why not the country? Some critics suggest that Romney's ability to turn around the country is

overrated (Ashbrook 2012). Romney's work at Bain Capital involved retooling flagging businesses, and making them profitable for large fees. The Obama campaign has suggested that Romney's business dealings while at Bain were not as noble as he suggests, and when he claims to be a 'turn around specialist', he was really practicing 'vulture' capitalism. Some businesses Bain assisted failed, but before declaring bankruptcy they would rack up massive debts, with Bain collecting millions of dollars in fees. In other cases re-tooling a business included cutting or outsourcing jobs to foreign countries, rebutting Romney claim to be a skilled 'job creator' (Parkey 2012).

Obama has used two tactics to prevent Romney from branding himself the 'economy' candidate: First by fomenting doubts regarding Romney's business performance while at Bain; and second, by deflecting attention from the economy altogether by elevating the importance of social issues (McPike, Romney Rips Obama's Health Care Law Ahead of Ruling 2012).

Connected to questions about Romney's time as CEO of Bain Capital, is Romney's wealth, which is estimated to be \$250 million. This ranks him among the richest US presidential nominees in US History (A. Press 2012), and all of it was gained while working at Bain. Unlike President Obama, Mitt Romney was the product of wealthy circumstances, growing up in a home where his father was Governor of Michigan and CEO of American Motor Company. Although Mitt Romney made the most of his opportunities, there is the stigma that his advantaged upbringing was responsible for his personal success, making his accomplishments less praise-worthy.

Harming Romney's credibility to turn around the economy is that the rich have been blamed for the 2008 financial collapse. It was wealthy bankers and business elites

who participated in the CDO market and extended home loans to unworthy borrowers knowing they could not pay. When the government decided to bail out the economy it was the rich who benefited rather than ‘common folk’. Nearly four years after the collapse, banks have paid back TARP loans and have returned to profitability, while personal wealth dropped by thirty-nine percent for the average American between 2007 and 2010 (Wilcox and El-Hassan 2012), and unemployment is still above eight percent (Ito and Effinger 2012). As a member of the ‘one percent’, Mitt Romney is seen as out-of-touch and benefiting from an economy which gives his class most of the advantages.

Some comments by Mitt Romney make him appear insensitive on the matter of wealth. In his speech to the Detroit Economic Club prior to the Michigan primary, Romney described the many American-made cars that he owns, including two Cadillacs driven exclusively by his wife (Carter 2012). His comment that he “likes to be able to fire people” drew criticism from an American public who see unemployment as a key issue (Rosenthal 2012). Comments like these make Romney appear boastful which can cause resentment and dislike.

The Republican position to continue the ‘Bush Tax Cuts’ not to raise taxes on the rich, is consistent with Romney’s economic philosophy; that raising taxes on wealthy Americans will hurt the economy (Romney, *No Apology: A Case for American Greatness* 2010, 129). This can appear self-serving to the general public who think that wealth should be shared more broadly. Warren Buffett’s support of raising taxes on his own class (the rich) confirms this sentiment. When Obama was Junior Senator in Illinois, he recounts a meeting he had with Buffet, where he entered a non-descript office and had a conversation regarding wealth disparity in the United States.

“I did a calculation the other day,” said Buffett. I’ll pay a lower effective tax rate than my receptionist. In fact, I’m pretty sure I pay a lower rate than the average American (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 190).” Like Romney, most of Buffett’s income is derived from capital gains and dividends which is taxed at a lower rate than regular income (McGreal 2012).

Buffett would go on to say: “Some of that wealth has to be plowed back into education, so that the next generation has a fair chance, and to maintain our infrastructure, and provide some sort of safety net for those who lose out in a market economy. And it just makes sense that those of us who’ve benefitted most from the market should pay a bigger share (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 190).” And on the topic of eliminating the estate tax, Buffett would add: “When you get rid of the estate tax you’re basically handing over command of the country’s resources to people who did not earn it. It’s like choosing the 2020 Olympic team by picking the children of all the winners at the 2000 games (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 190-191).”

When Mitt Romney released his tax returns it showed him paying less than fifteen percent in taxes which is far lower than the average American. Here is one of Romney’s responses to critics: “I pay all the taxes that are legally required and not a dollar more. I don’t think you want someone as the candidate for president who pays more taxes than he owes (McGreal 2012).” That is a fair response, but it still does not erase the fact that a Congress, which is populated by wealthy representatives, has been passing laws that favour their demographic; and that Romney agrees with this position, harms claims that he cares for the poor and middle class (McGreal 2012).

Defraying the idea that Mitt Romney is out-of-touch, is the perception that President Obama is not relatable to the average American either. Obama, while being less rich than Mitt Romney, is still wealthy. His charisma and being the first black president has earned him celebrity status. In 2008, John McCain highlighted Obama's disconnect with the public in a campaign commercial which aimed to exploit this weakness. It flashed images of Paris Hilton and crowds chanting the President's name, giving the impression that Obama's presidential ambitions were riding a wave of hollow popularity, and that his qualifications were superficial and lacking. Adding to this image is Barack Obama's resume, which is devoid of any political achievement of note. He won his Senate office on a stroke of luck (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 18) and as a member of a minority Senate, he was limited to amending bills rather than crafting them (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 326). As President his major piece of legislation, *The Affordable Health Act* was nearly struck down by the Supreme Court, but was saved when they proclaimed it constitutional on the grounds that charges for refusing to buy insurance would be regarded as a tax, rather than a penalty (Gleckman 2012). His celebrity status brings his qualifications to manage the economy into question in a different way than Mitt Romney; but has a similar effect.

Although Obama lacks the 'common touch' because of his popularity, the public usually finds celebrities to be more likeable than business tycoons. The American public may be disappointed in Obama's performance, but they want him to succeed, not just because they want the economy to improve, but because they 'like' him. This is an important distinction between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama which also explains the large disparity between approval of Obama's job performance, and very low numbers in

what voters perceive the direction of the country to be going. Obama's approval rating was 45% as of 8 July 2012 which is comparable to George W. Bush's re-election number but below that of Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan (Gallup 2012). On 16 May 2012, *Gallup* reported that only 24% of voters believe the country is heading in the right direction; a number similar to that of George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter who both served one-term presidencies before suffering election losses (Saad, National Mood a Drag on Obama's Re-Election Prospects 2012).

President Obama's charisma has served him well contributing to his popularity, but his colour, has also defined his presidency as being of historic importance. The second variable effecting Obama's re-election is his race, which has been a largely silent issue in the election so far. In the modern campaign, identity is distilled to the public through the filter of the media. Positive press leads to positive impressions among the public, but can do the opposite depending on the partisanship of the media source (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 121). Through the media, cultural conceptions about race are proliferated. Partisanship creates added ideas which are not always expressed positively. Democrats are portrayed as weak, indecisive, and groundless (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 124); and when that Democrat is black there is a portion of the American population who believe a man of colour, does not belong in the White House.

Compared to white Americans, blacks are seen as less productive citizens. Black criminality, black intelligence, and black work ethic are all regarded as inferior, and the more a person of colour deviates from the external markers of the white majority, the

more likely they will be regarded with negative assumptions (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 235). Obama's presence by some might be regarded as a novelty which has had its time.

Obama's race problem concerns not only his skin colour but his name and background. Even among black Americans there was some question as to whether he was black enough to claim to be an African American in the same way as those who descended from black slaves. Obama is the namesake of his Kenyan father adding a second stigma on top of his colour. In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama recounts a lunch he had with a media consultant shortly after 9/11 who lamented his Islamic name: "Really bad luck. You can't change your name, of course. Voters are suspicious of that kind of thing. Maybe if you were at the start of your career... (Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* 2006, 3)"

In an age where the United States has been at war with Islamic nations, there are some who believe he is a secret Muslim, contributing to the perception that he is unpatriotic. His 'international' upbringing has raised concerns that he may not have been born in the United States; even though a copy of his birth certificate was presented by the state of Hawaii authenticating his citizenship. When Obama was young his mother decided to marry an Indonesian man who got called into active military duty. This caused Obama and his mother to move to Indonesia for a time contributing to questions of his nationality and the conspiracy that Obama is not an American and as such an unconstitutional and illegal president.

In 2008, Obama faced added questions about his religion. For some, he was a secret Muslim, but for others he was a member of an anti-American black Chicago

Church. In a sermon by Barack Obama's spiritual leader, Reverend Jeremiah Wright was recorded cursing the United States: "Not God bless America – God damn America (Heilemann and Halperin 2010, 234)!"

There is also the historical relevance of his race, where backlash towards African American gains, are followed by a subsequent set back. Advancements by blacks after the US Civil War were washed away with reconstruction. Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act led to strong Party polarization, giving rise to conservatism and a backlash on social programs that benefited Black Americans (Weisbert and Devine 2010, 570). Will black America's victory be diminished by relegating Barack Obama to a one term presidency following this pattern of ebb and flow?

Just as the old news-new news principle applied to Romney by dampening negative perceptions regarding his Mormonism, there is the possibility that Obama's race may dampen enthusiasm in 2012. Fundraising for Obama has been less prolific and re-organizing 2008 grass roots organization has been more difficult. Although President Obama maintains a larger 'war chest' than Mitt Romney, he failed to raise more money than him in May 2012, and lost the fundraising battle in June 2012 as well (Friedman 2012).

A study by Weisberg and Devine suggests that race will be a problem for Obama and was less of a problem in 2008 because of 'Bush fatigue'. Holding all variables constant, except for feelings regarding George W. Bush and racial resentment, it was found that as racial resentment and approval of President Bush increased the likelihood of voting for Obama diminished. The opposite effect occurred when the scenario was reversed; but at the midpoint, where all things are equal, voters were less likely to vote

for Obama suggesting racial prejudice. The P-value was less than the .05 level indicating this finding to be significant (Weisbert and Devine 2010, 577). Although the median respondent from this study was less likely to vote for a black President, the majority of voters fell within the demographic that was below the midpoint, allowing Obama to win more votes despite his race (Weisbert and Devine 2010, 578-579).

This being the case, there is reason to suspect that race will be harmful to Obama because it will be more difficult to pass blame on President Bush for the current state of the country. Obama, as the incumbent, stands to lose more ground than white Presidents of the past who have enjoyed similar approval ratings, because his race may have the effect of skewing his electability downwards, if the same pattern observed by Weisberg and Devine is applied to Obama in 2012.

This chapter has focused on two variables that appear to be of greater importance than Mitt Romney's faith. The first is the economy and the second is race; and in both instances it appears that Romney holds key advantages although he may be hindered by his wealth which makes him appear out-of-touch. Obama won the presidency riding a slogan that offered 'hope and change'. Among all the promises that he made to improve the economy it appears he may have over promised and under delivered. This has disappointed an electorate who like him very much and want him to succeed. Obama understands the danger that the economy poses to his re-election bid. He has implemented two strategies to counter this threat. The first has been to deflect attention from the economy by emphasizing social issues. Doing so may have come at a cost however, serving to rally gay and liberal supporters, but erasing apathy among

Evangelicals as well. The second tactic has been to undermine Mitt Romney's credentials as an expert on the economy. For this reason, Obama has been focusing efforts on discounting Romney's achievements at Bain Capital. Romney's claim to understand job creation is also challenged by instances where jobs were cut in the process of retooling failing businesses. There are risks in this regard as well. If saving a company means firing some of the employees, voters may see this as common sense. Inaccurate information and misleading comments may also hurt confidence in Obama's attacks, making future negative ads (although perhaps truthful) less effective. The second variable addressed the effect of race on electability. Racial identify continues to be followed by negative stigmas which have the capacity to harm Obama's re-election chances. In 2008, racism was less of a concern because the economic crisis and 'Bush fatigue' dampened negative perceptions of his race. Voters who were motivated by the prospect of making history are less so now. Fundraising is less robust the organization is less enthusiastic.

Chapter 5

Jacob Skinner

Conclusion

Many Massachusetts Republicans were upset by Mitt Romney's decision to seek the presidency, feeling he left them with a candidate incapable of winning office (Scott, *The Effect of Romney's Religion on Electability* 2011). His Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey would win the Republican nomination, but go on to lose to a Democrat ending a streak of Republican Governors, in a predominantly left leaning state. Romney's official decision to run for president would come two days before he was his term as Governor ended, and on February 13, 2007, from the Henry Ford Museum in Michigan, he would make his formal announcement (Bringhurst 2011, 244).

By December 6, 2007, less than a month before the Iowa caucus, Mitt Romney would deliver his speech addressing concerns over his Mormon religious beliefs, which came to be known as 'Faith in America'. Heavy criticism from Evangelicals in Iowa, uncomfortable with his Mormonism, threatened his chances of winning the Caucus. Mike Huckabee, a former Baptist pastor, used anti-Mormon sentiments to his advantage, and some Iowan radio broadcasters focused on Romney's religion as a strong reason not to vote for him. Despite Romney's heavy investment in Iowa, and naivety in thinking that Evangelicals would overlook theological differences in favour of common values; Romney would lose the state to Mike Huckabee by nine points which contributed to his loss in New Hampshire. Voters there lost confidence in Romney's electability and opted

to vote for John McCain who had revitalized his campaign by then (Heilemann and Halperin 2010, 302). Although Romney had finished second in both of those contests, between Mike Huckabee and John McCain, his chances of winning a primary and gaining the momentum he needed to win, was low. Romney's campaign strategy was based on winning the early primaries which would propel him to ultimate victory in later states. While Romney's conservative credentials were stronger than McCain's, Huckabee would act as a shield to McCain in the South drawing potential conservative Evangelical voters to his side, and away from Romney. When Romney lost Florida in 2007, it was clear that even though he was McCain's primary challenger, there was no room forward for his candidacy.

Mitt Romney suspended his campaign but not his plans to campaign for the presidency in 2012 should McCain lose (Scott, *The Effect of Romney's Religion on Electability* 2011). He endorsed John McCain and campaigned loyally on his behalf. He spent his time traveling the country and doing the same for others in 2010 building a strong network of supporters among the GOP establishment, who would feel an obligation to likewise lend their support to Romney later. This is why the GOP elite supported Romney overwhelmingly, even while it appeared the general public did not (Zeleny and Shear 2011). In 1968, ironically it was George Romney's lack of a nationwide organization that placed him at a disadvantage when facing Richard Nixon, who had worked hard to lay that foundation in advance (Bachelder Fall 2007).

The 2012 campaign kick-off would be much more modest than that of 2008. Among servings of hot dogs and hamburgers Romney would officially announce his presidential intentions from Stratham, New Hampshire where he now resides. One of the

key differences in 2012 is that he went into the campaign as the acknowledged GOP front-runner (although this status would be narrowly held). While Romney held a steady support throughout the early primary process this lead was lost, regained, and then lost again as Republicans took a look at each of the different candidates. The most memorable of these would be Rick Perry's challenge, where he was sunk by blunders made during debate performances. Testy exchanges between Perry and Romney ensued with Romney ending up at the better end. It was in the midst of this rivalry when Pastor Robert Jeffress, who officially endorsed Rick Perry based on his Christian credentials, said that he rejected Romney as a candidate, because he was a Mormon. At the *2011 Values Voters Summit* he reinforced this idea by saying that Romney was a member of a cult and was definitely not Christian. The press interpreted Jeffress' strong language as bigotry and quickly scolded him for his views. There are simply too many Mormons, the religion has become too mainstream, and the low level of extremism which Mormons display, make it difficult to forward an argument that they are a cult in the same way as the Branch Davidians (O'Connor and Yadron 2011).

The purpose of this MRP has been to evaluate how perceptions of Mitt Romney's religious affiliation with Mormonism have affected his electability. This was done by focusing on two key voting constituencies which displayed a high degree of bias towards Mormons - Evangelicals and Democrats. As in 2008, Evangelicals exhibited a high degree of bias which increased as the Evangelical voter population became more numerous or dense. In states where the Evangelical voter population was greater than fifty percent, voters favoured Rick Santorum or Newt Gingrich; in those states with a smaller Evangelical population Romney won (Lizza 2012). The reason Evangelicals

object to a Mormon presidential nominee is founded primarily in theological differences. Mormons are seen as simply too different to be included under the broader umbrella of Christian religions (Shipps 1985, 48-49). Since Evangelicals prefer a 'Christian' candidate under their own definition, Mitt Romney fails to qualify as long as he continues to follow Mormonism. To a certain degree this harms Romney's election chances in the primary, but is not a long-term strategy which an opponent can rely on to win the nomination, especially in light of rule changes which guarantee a longer nomination process.

In a general election, Evangelicals are more inclined to stand behind Mitt Romney than Barack Obama, based on common values and political partisanship. There is some question as to the degree of enthusiasm Evangelicals will express for Romney. Speculation abounds as to whether they will turn out for a Mormon. Evangelicals are a key voting block in the Republican Party vital to Romney's success. Barack Obama's recent decision to publicly back gay marriage may have erased this advantage, by stirring up Evangelicals to back Romney in defense of traditional marriage - a view Romney appears willing to champion (Trinko 2012). Obama may have solved a potentially lethal electability problem for Romney, erasing the Mormon disadvantage as Evangelicals appear willing to forgive his Christian differences.

Democrats oppose a Mormon President on theological grounds and political views. Surprisingly, Democrats who are often thought of as the Party of acceptance, hold stronger biases than Evangelicals toward a Mormon President. The agency of the Democratic Party to harm Mitt Romney in the Primary is limited in its capacity. Democrats have the potential to play spoiler in those states which hold open primaries but

failed to succeed in doing so. There was a close call in the Michigan primary, but not enough Democrats were willing to participate. The other method is to tip the balance of opinion by running ads that might harm the candidate, or influence voters to think more favourably about a different candidate. The Obama campaign ran ads to this effect, but to no avail, and he may have inadvertently aided Mitt Romney by attacking him. To conservatives and Republicans it provided a degree of confidence that Romney was a candidate Obama feared could defeat him. Many Republicans cited Romney's electability as the reason for voting for him (Yaccino 2012).

Mormons and Democrats disagree on almost every key political issue like abortion, gay marriage, and the economy; providing more reasons for a Democrat to oppose a Mormon presidential nominee than Evangelicals. If Evangelicals are induced to forgive Romney for being a Mormon, then Romney's Mormon problem is contained within the Democratic Party – who will likely vote against a Republican candidate regardless of his faith. Democrats may hold a greater degree of bias towards a well-qualified Mormon presidential candidate, and may have better reasons to vote for him, but unless Romney's faith does not rally the liberal base to turn out in greater numbers for Obama, then it serves little advantage to the President. In the case of both key groups the negative effects of the Mormon variable are dampened.

If Mormonism is a proverbial 'straw man', then other variables will decide the election. This MRP focused on economy and race as variables more likely to determine the outcome. The election this year will be a referendum on Obama's performance to correct the economy, and in light of consistent bad news it does not bode well for him. May 2012 job figures show only 69000 jobs added, far below the 125000 needed to keep

the unemployment figure from rising. It is now at 8.2% (Ito and Effinger 2012). In a 20 May 2012 ABC News/Washington Post poll only 42% approve of Obama's handling of the economy while 55% disapprove and Mitt Romney is seen by most to be at least as capable, or more so, than Obama in managing the economy. Americans do not see Obama as a particularly strong leader either; fifty one percent describe him as a strong leader, and forty eight percent do not. Compared to Bush in 2004 (which this election resembles in many ways) according to the April 2004 ABC News/Washington Post poll at that time 64% said they saw Bush as a strong leader; 36% said he was not (Langer 2012).

The important distinction however between the 2004 and the 2012 election, is that 2004 was a referendum on the question of terrorism, and 2012 is one that revolves around Obama's handling of the economy. Few questioned Bush's ability to handle terrorism when compared to John Kerry while more appear to believe Romney would do at least as well as Obama or better at managing the economy (Langer 2012). Obama's failure to address the housing crisis adequately and the high cost of fuel are daily reminders to Americans that Obama has not fixed the economy, although he has a legitimate point when he argues that he has not had adequate time to do so (Sullivan and Bohan 2012).

The Obama campaign has used two strategies to thwart attempts to discredit Mitt Romney's ability to manage the economy. The first has been to distract attention from the economy by bringing social issues into the spotlight. The second strategy has been to strongly attack Romney's business credentials while at Bain Capital by portraying him as a self-interested capitalist (Kranish and Helman 2012, 178). Focusing on Bain highlights Romney's wealth and makes him appear out-of-touch with the rest of the public. It also

raises questions of trust and skepticism regarding Romney's business credentials (Blow 2012). Is he as skilled as he claims or has a life of opportunity bought him his success? Obama's celebrity presents a similar problem (Shear 2012), but the public finds him more likeable which may work to his electoral advantage.

The silent issue of this campaign is race. In 2008, Obama's race worked to rally supporters who wanted to participate in making history. Now that history has been made these supporters may be less willing to turn out in 2012. Lower fundraising numbers and a weaker grass roots organization seem to support the idea. Racism is also a variable that voters take into consideration when deciding on a candidate. Being black has a negative effect on voter behaviour. In 2008, this perception was assisted by hard feelings towards George W. Bush. He left office an unpopular president. This time around Obama, as the incumbent, will not benefit as much by blaming his predecessor which some Democrats continue to do (Lemire 2012). This makes Obama more vulnerable to questions regarding his race (Weisbert and Devine 2010). Adding to this, is the long history in the United States where gains by African Americans have been made, only to experience a backlash which stole away at least part of that victory.

This MRP has neither sought to dispel notions of bigotry or racism, or to prove them, but to highlight evidence and findings in an attempt to describe the environment in which the 2012 general election is taking place. In doing so it is impossible to discuss all the different variables involved in a voter's decision. It appears that perceptions of Mormonism posed a threat to Mitt Romney in the primary but a careful strategy avoided its potentially damaging effects. With Evangelicals backing Romney, his Mormonism does not harm his electability in the general election. This is not to say that another

Mormon presidential candidate would not be more susceptible to bigotry in the future under different conditions – all campaigns are a relative process. This election will be determined by who is better able to convince the public through the filter of the media that they are the better candidate to manage the economy. Obama benefits from a strong likeability which may help Americans to be more forgiving of his lack of progress on correcting the economy. Their patience has its limits though. President Obama set the bar high in 2008 running on a message which captured the imagination of all Americans filling them with optimism that better days were ahead. Mitt Romney suggests that the President failed to live up to his lofty promises, but in the end it will be the opinion of the electorate that will matter; not his. That answer will be had on Election Day.

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