

“Why Obama Is the Best Qualified Change Leader for Our Country”

By Stanford Prof. Behnam Tabrizi

Nearly 75% of the voters believe that the country is on the wrong track. This has created an immediate and compelling sense of urgency and crisis that the next President can seize upon to make a lasting transformation in the U.S. political landscape. Given the close race amongst the two democratic candidates, the question that begs an answer is which candidate will be the most effective change leader to spearhead this necessary transformation. Interestingly, there are few policy differences between Senator Clinton and Obama. Further, they are both junior U.S. Senators with Hillary having served 4 more years, and Obama having served an extra 7 years in the Illinois Senate.

Meanwhile, evaluating differences between the two candidates' values, skills, and moral character leads me to select Barack Obama. Here are some of the reasons I select Obama as the superior change-leader to lead our country's transformation:

1) Authenticity: Authenticity is the *sine qua non* of a change leader. Barak Obama stands for a moral message of creating a life that ennobles the human spirit. He has bold courage that is consistent with his principles. Initially, his stance against the war in Iraq was unpopular, yet he did not surrender to political pressures and opposition. In hindsight, his decision proved to be absolutely correct and further gives the voters a lucid insight to his true moral character. Consistent with his longstanding principles and anti-war convictions, Sen. Obama is the best candidate to lead us out of the war, and to restore the American ideals to which so many people in the world aspire.

2) Honesty. Second, is Sen. Obama's decision of refusing to take money from federal lobbyists as opposed to Hillary Clinton receiving the most money from these Washington special interests groups. The corrupting influence of the Washington lobbyists runs contrary to the democratic principles to which our country's Founding Fathers aspired.. Interestingly, when Senator Obama took this decision based on his uncompromising ethics, many pundits thought he would lose the election. History has proven them wrong since he has so far raised more money from more than 470,000 individual donors compared to Senator Clinton.

3) Upbringing: Sen. Obama's personal upbringing and family background show his true character. As the son of an immigrant who came to America as a foreign student on scholarship from Kenya, and of a white mother from Kansas, Obama is the product of a new America that transcends racial boundaries. Obama has deep empathy and personal affinity for the Asian culture: his sister Maya Soetero is half-Indonesian, and his brother-in-law Konrad Ng, is Chinese-American. Obama is also a global citizen, having lived in Indonesia for four years as a child, and later, in Hawaii, the true melting pot of America. As United State's role in the world is reshaped in a new globalized and flat world, Obama's own multicultural background gives him the global perspective to elevate the U.S.' image globally and transcend petty conflicts.

4) Mobilization Skills: Personal character and leadership is also evidenced by one's ability to change and influence others. In this regard, Obama's campaign has been building broad-based grass-root support for change. He has galvanized and unified people across ethnic, racial, gender, age, political, and geographic divide and has inspired them by his call for action. His ability to mobilize and inspire new voters; unify independent, crossover republican, and democratic voters behind his message; and excite and re-engage ordinary citizens in conversations about politics in livingrooms across America is a testament to his remarkable leadership skills and transformation capabilities.

5) Experience: No job quite prepares one for the Presidency of the United States. However, for all candidates, the current Presidential campaign is the largest and most complex organization they have run. Both Senator Clinton and Obama have generated well over \$100 million dollar campaign in support and manage a large staff of mainly volunteer teams. Here Obama has clearly outperformed Senator Clinton. Senator Clinton's campaign has been in disarray in several occasions with financial trouble, and firing of her campaign manager and reshuffling of her staff. Obama's campaign, by contrast, continues to grow in size and grassroots momentum in all voter segments.

6) Effective Communication: Oratory skill is the prerequisite of an effective Presidential leader. Many commentators refer to Obama's oratory skills as the best of both John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. At a time when the nation is divided and the reputation of U.S. is unambiguously damaged in the world, Obama's communication skills will lift up the nation and will bring the best out of people. His famous message "Yes We Can" is an optimistic call to change, and has become a daily refrain on thousands of grassroots blogs, YouTube videos, emails and articles across the U.S.

7) Ability to listen: The issues facing our country are multifaceted and complex. , Given the precarious nature of the world, the next President will be faced with new unexpected challenges that defy any one person's innate abilities. Obama's advisor Robert Gibbs, describes him as, "somebody with a tremendous amount of intellectual curiosity who will talk to people who know more about things than he does." For example, by listening closely to the Illinois Republican Senators' concerns, Obama first bill as an Illinois Senator was a campaign finance reform that was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support.. This demonstrates Sen. Obama's willingness to listen, and his ability to parlay this skill toward reconciling conflicts and finding pragmatic solutions.

8) Being an outsider: Senator Obama brings a fresh face and creative and collaborative solutions to the age-old problems of cruel partisan politics of winning with 50 percent plus one of the voters, and undue influences of the special interest groups. As an outsider to Washington D.C., he is most likely to bring a "clean sheet," vs. incremental approach to politics, and examine all the long held assumptions by asking the two most important questions, "why?" and "how about....?" The grass-root energetic support that he has already mobilized will hopefully prevent him from surrendering to the opposing forces of status quo politics. Change is never easy, but Sen. Obama

has already shown through his own life's example how he can rise to the top of any situation as an outsider, and still maintain his own integrity and convictions.

For Americans and people around the globe who have longed for a US President with the visionary abilities, uncompromising ethics, and grass-root mobilization skills of Gandhi, Mandela and Martin Luther King combined, Barack Obama could be the closest any candidate has come to this ideal. America may never again have such an opportunity as now to put its collective trust into the leadership of an extraordinary individual who combines personal charisma with brilliant intellect and strong moral character. Perhaps Tocqueville's words of "America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great," could remind us of the virtues of becoming "good" for which we all yearn.

Dr. Tabrizi teaches at Stanford University and has written 4 books on Transformation and leadership. His fourth book, "Rapid Transformation: A 90 Day Plan for Fast and Effective Change," is rated as the "most popular book" by Harvard Business School Press. He regularly advises the CEOs and executives of leading Fortune 500 and non-profit enterprises on Leadership and Transformation. He is registered as an independent voter. His website: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/MSandE/old/faculty/behnam/index.htm>