**Kara Durward**

**Monmouth College**

**A Look into the 2008 Democratic Primary Election**

Abstract

*The 2008 Democratic Primary was one of the most interesting and hard fought battles in recent political history. It was an election that at first showed on obvious winner in Hillary Clinton, who had been on the political stage for quite a long time and was known quite well, but was beaten by an almost unknown candidate from Illinois named Barack Obama. Race versus gender is often put forward as the most important aspect of the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primary. In this research paper I argue that Obama’s victory in the Iowa primary was one of the most significant variables in his eventual victory over Hillary Clinton. His Iowa victory showed the Democrats that if he could win among mostly White and rural constituency in the Mid-West he could win the White House. Oprah Winfrey’s endorsement of Obama early in the race was a second significant factor in Obama’s victory. I also looked at how Obama was able to deal with racially charged controversies such as the Jeremiah Wright controversy. There is the question of whether Obama’s win was due to the fact that the media treated both candidates differently based on their gender. My conclusion is that Obama’s was treated better by the media but that was not a significant factor in his eventual victory.*

The primary election in 2008 was one of the most interesting and hard fought primaries in recent history because the first time in American history a woman and a Black man were the front runners. two minority candidates, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, against each other in the hopes of becoming the next president of the United States no matter who won history was going to be made. If that did not make it interesting enough there was also the fact that it was not supposed to be a race at all, Clinton was supposed to make it an easy victory over the likes of John Edwards. It was a complete shock that Obama a community organizer in Chicago and one-term senator, was about to pull out a victory.[[1]](#footnote-1) How could this happen? Was the Obama campaign full of genius and magical moves or was it simply people did not like Clinton, or was there something else that contributed to the crazy twist during the 2008 Democratic Primary election.

**Superdelegates**

There are a few ways that Obama was able to pull out this win it is true that there were forces working for Obama such as the media’s portrayal of Clinton or how the superdelegates were distributed between the two candidates and how Florida and Michigan were taken out of the race basically. The plan here for Florida was to get more exposure from candidates to their state they were even warned that if they were hold their election too early their delegates would not be invited to the convention that summer.[[2]](#footnote-2) All of these attribute to the lucky side of Obama, but when it comes down to it there were so many factors showing how well of a campaign he ran. Some of those including his celebrity endorsers, his charismatic attitude in speeches and debates, how he was able to pull in a victory in Iowa, and his use of social media to try to get new and younger voters to come out for support. The question that should be asked from this evidence is; do campaigns matter?

By looking at the issue of *Superdelegates* we can see the move that Obama made within the Democratic Party when it came to the viability of his candidacy. Superdelegates are influential people within the party, either governors, large city mayors, members of Congress and state party chairs basically people who have put in their time and are high up in the party. These delegates were formed during the 1982 Hunt Commission, when the leaders of the party thought that the primary voters had not been picking the best candidates. It was thought that people in higher up political offices had a better idea of who would be a better holder of the office and who would be a more viable or electable candidate when it came to the general election. This did not seem to be a problem throughout many of the elections due to the fact that the primary and caucus voters seemed to like the same candidate that the superdelegates did. It only started to become a problem when superdelegates supported Howard Dean in 2004 a candidate that was not as well supported by the people. This started a whole new discussion on how the Democratic Party should be electing their nominees, the controversy of rank-and-file vs. Trustee brokerage comes into play here. People who support rank-and-file feel like it should be a more Democratic process especially in the Democratic Party and that the people should have a much bigger say in who is elected and who is not elected to run in their party. A trustee brokerage supporter feels like those people have a much better idea on who is a good candidate and who is not. It is also important to note that superdelegate favorites won every election from 1980-2000. This was most certainly a big problem within the 2008 Democratic Primary election it and it is clear that superdelgates did have an impact in Obama winning. So does this count as a great campaigning strategy? You could say yes, because it shows that people that were high up in the party trusted him to win, but how? It also could be said that he did not gain as much support and popularity as the media had tried to say he did.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This was a big factor in the 2008 Primary election for Obama. The superdelegates accounted for 20% of the convention delegates in 2008. Obama clearly won with superdelegates which could be for a variety of different reasons. The first would be the momentum that Obama received in certain states making a lot of delegates shift their support since they saw him as a more viable candidate. This would be a credit toward his campaigning ability because it is based on the fact that superdelgeates started to support him more because he was becoming more and more popular with the Democratic voters and with the American population in general. There had to be some reason for it, which will be addressed later in the research. Another could be the amount of money Obama gave to delegates to run their campaigns. Both candidates gave money to delegates but Obama outspent Clinton 680,926 to 247,500. This obviously would have a huge impact on which a delegate would support. It is also a big part of every campaign, every campaign has to spend money if they hope to win, and in fact usually each candidate is given a certain amount of funds to run for a Presidential election in 2012 both candidates opted out of using the grants, but could have gotten approximately $91,241,400.[[4]](#footnote-4) This just shows that elections always consist of money and since Obama contributed more to these people they threw their support behind him. This also brings into question whether the trustee-brokerage approach actually works, if candidates can basically buy votes are they actually picking the better candidate? In the end the evidence seems to point to the superdelegates seeing Obama as a more likable and viable candidate down the road (general election).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Who knows if Obama would have won the primary without the support of the superdelegates. He did not have a decisive win with the popular vote, so it can somewhat be related to the 2000 presidential election. A perfect example of this is the Ohio primary; Clinton received the most votes in the popular election, but received only 78 delegates as opposed to Obama’s 81 delegates.[[6]](#footnote-6) So it can be assumed that there is a very big chance that the superdelegates in this election had a huge impact on how it would turn out. It was almost necessary for it to work out that way though since the race between Obama and Clinton was so close in the popular vote.

There is no doubt that the superdelegate had a huge impact on who would come out on top in this election. It is important to understand how these superdelegates worked and in turn how they worked in helping Obama win. It must also be understood that getting to the party bosses and superdelegates was in fact an important part of Obama’s campaign strategy, because without them he would most definitely lost. One must remember that primary elections are not completely like the general election at the end of the day the people who are in charge of the party are the ones in charge of who gets nominated.

**Primary Viability and Changing Support**

Iowa was most definitely one of the most important parts of Obama winning the election, without the win in this state he would not have been as viable of a candidate and maybe would have not have had the impact that he did. Iowa fits into all of this, and how it was so important to Obama winning. If it were not for Iowa there is no way he would have won the primary, it gave him the ability to keep moving and it got his name out there.

The early primaries or caucus also had a huge impact on the outcome of the races. It would be obvious that this would have a positive impact on the front-runner, but it did not. In 1976 only two states Iowa and New Hampshire had held primary elections by March 1st, and by 2008 38 states had already held elections by February. The campaign also started very early even though their announcements to run started around the same time that most primary candidates announce (about a year before Super Tuesday). The candidates participated in ten televised debates before the end of 2007. Meaning that voters had received plenty of time to get to know the candidates before any elections took place. There is also the case that in primaries there is not as large of a gap between ideological differences so people default to name recognition or personal character traits, and even sometimes who they think will have a better chance of winning in the general election.[[7]](#footnote-7) All of the criteria just mentioned would have been pointed right at Hillary Clinton at the time that the Primary election started. The one thing that is strange about Iowa is that it is hard to ever figure out exactly who will win and does not always have the impact that it did in 2008. In 1980 George Bush beat Ronald Reagan in Iowa thinking he was the front runner for the rest of the way and well we know how that turned out. That did not seem to be the case in 2008 largely due to the fact that it gave people the idea that he was a legitimate candidate after that. The reason that some people might not have seen it coming though was not only because of his race but also because of the way people vote in Iowa or support candidates. In 2008 a reporter went to a restaurant in Shenandoah, Iowa where John Edwards (another candidate in the primary election) was wearing a button. The reporter asked if she was an Edwards’s supporter, she replied back that she was not. The reporter than asked if she was going to at least vote for him which she replied back to saying she had just wore a Biden button the week before and that she had even wore a Romney button.[[8]](#footnote-8) This change from one moment to the next could very well have impacted how polls were constructed and gave Clinton a false sense of security that was not there. This is one other way that Obama could have pulled out a surprise victory; it was not actually a surprise it was just there was no way to get a proper sampling from the state.

*Momentum*

It seemed to be evident that the amount of momentum that Obama gained had a large impact on his success in the 2008 Primaries. This also shows why Iowa was such an important win for Obama. Not only did the wins increase the media coverage and mane recognition of Obama, they also added to the voters views on how electable he was as a candidate. As mentioned before that was a very, very important part to how candidates win a primary election. When Obama won in Iowa it not only gave people the reassurance that he could win the white vote it also made him seem like a more viable candidate overall, making other states swing his way. This would also explain why Clinton’s large lead before nomination elections changed so much. Obama kept winning states resulting in others starting to follow in the same path. This is not only evident on Obama’s side people who knew Obama won Iowa were 11% more likely to vote for Obama in their state election, but people who knew Clinton had won New Hampshire were 11% more likely to vote for Clinton in their state election. This goes to show the relevance of this study since it went on both sides. One downfall to this study though was that it is almost impossible to figure out whether these votes were generated by Obama’s momentum or whether they were already Obama’s supporters. One would say that due to Clinton’s large lead in the polls before elections started would mean that momentum had enormous impact on Obama’s victory.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**The Demographics who Supported Obama and how they were influential**

A major part of understanding any campaign strategy is to understand who supports you as a candidate and how to get them to support you if they do not already. This was an important part of the campaign strategy for the Obama administration, we will first look at who supported him and try to figure out why they might have, this will hopefully make us see how he was able to rally these groups after we look at ways that he was able to campaign.

There were several factors that had to do with how Obama won the Presidential Primary election in 2008 and the first has to do with the demographics that supported Obama. Patrick Fisher addresses many things that are surprising using a system he calls Gapology which is simply the gaps in between different demographics. The main thing that he addresses is who Obama had support from and why. He is thorough in explaining why these people support each candidate and why the support from those groups is important to the failure and success of both candidates. He also shows how they change throughout the course of the race and how different factors impact the change. Some of the main groups that he talks about were; education level, income, religion, race/ethnicity, and age. All of what Fisher brings up is without a doubt one of the most important parts of the political campaign process and important for us to analyze in this situation.

*Education Level*

There were many things found within the education level of the Gapology as Fisher calls it. Obama was found to do better with each level of higher education, and his reform message seemed to sit well with the college educated voters. Like I said before his numbers went down as the education levels went down, so for example he received only 40% of the high school vote, around 45% with people who had some college, around 55% of the people with a college degree, but above 55% with postgrad vote. This shows that the more educated the more likely to vote for Obama. In fact Obama won by a greater than 2:1 margin in new-growth cities, which are defined as cities that are more technological cities and have a need for people that pursue jobs with such skills, these cities have a need for higher educated individuals. Obama also won over 60% of the vote in college counties such as Monroe Indiana and Boone MO. Obama even won a county in New York, the state Clinton was from, he won Tompkins County with 57% this county consist of Cornell and Ithaca College. Another example of this gapology is that Obama only won 22% of the voters in West Virginia with no college degree and he also only won 25% of the vote in Kentucky. This means that they looked at the group of people and saw that they what was happening for them, at the time it seemed hard for college graduates to find jobs when for so long a college degree had guaranteed them a job. These people saw a need for change for “reform.” This was his way in to their hearts and their minds they saw someone who was going to help them. This is just one example of how knowing what people want is an important part of campaigning strategy his message resonated with high educated people so they were more likely to vote for him. This also shows that they had a little bit of common sense when they were working towards groups, because thinking logically about it higher educated people want to vote more often than lower educated people, so going after a group who most likely would come out and vote was an important part.

*Income*

The income gapology goes hand in hand with many of the other categories and crosses with both race and education. Race had a bigger effect on the race than the factor of income in many cases. Obama was much more popular with wealthier voters and received over 50% of the vote from people that made more than 100,000 dollars a year, this goes hand in hand with education as well since usually higher educated people make more money. Support proceeded to decline in votes as the income of the voters declined until he ended up getting only under 45% of the vote from people who made 0-29,999 dollars a year. Obama also only won 1 in 5 of those votes of those making less than $30,000 in West Virginia and Oklahoma two of the poorest states, but also two of the states that have very few minorities. It is addressed that these two states have the fewest minorities because in Mississippi Obama won 70% voters that make less than $30,000, the difference between Mississippi and the other two states is that Mississippi had a much larger African American population than the other two, showing that race was a much more important factor than income. It also showed that the poor white voters were supporting Clinton, but that has more to do with race, and the south in general.

*Religion*

Religion was also a major demographic or more like lack of religion. Obama was much more likable to those who had no affiliation with religion and won 56% of the “none” religion vote, while winning 50% of the Protestant vote, 44% of the Jewish vote, and only 40% of the Catholic vote. It was obvious that Catholic’s were not big fans of Obama and in fact Clinton won 8 of the states with the largest Catholic populations. There is also the idea that many African Americans are religious and since it has been said that Obama did extremely well with African Americans this shows how well Clinton had to have done with the white religious voters. This shows that even though this gapology was important it is not even close to as important as the racial issue still going on today.

*Race*

Race was one of if not the biggest factor in how Obama was able to win the presidential primary due to demographics. Out of the 33 states Obama won 83% of the African American vote, 40% of the white vote, and 40% of the Latino vote. This might not have been possible if it were not for the Iowa caucus though; Obama at first did not have the backing of many of the prominent and influential African American party leaders when the race started. Then after Obama pulled out the win in Iowa (a state consisting of a majority of white voters) the African Americans saw him as an African American candidate that could actually pull out the White vote, and they started to back him. These bosses knew that they needed to have a candidate that could get them the white vote and many of the African American candidates from before could not get the white vote. This could have been why so many African American candidates had never gained the full support of their party they did not appeal to all voters, like Obama seemed to do. This also caused more African American voters to turnout because they also saw him as the first African American with a realistic shot. Along with that Obama ended up winning 4 out of every 5 African American votes, votes that are typical of a Democrat against a Republican in the general election not the primary election. This all goes to show how important the African American vote was but also how important Obama’s victory in Iowa was to the rest of the race and campaign which will be addressed again at a later time. It is also noted in this section that the gender gap between Clinton and Obama depended on race more than actual gender which helps to discredit the argument made earlier. Women made up a very large portion of the voters, but tended to side with racial backgrounds more than their gender background. For example most African American women voted for Obama instead of Clinton, an example of that comes from polls of two different states with two very different backgrounds. The first is Mississippi where there is a very large population of African Americans in this state Obama won 58% of the female vote. Now compare this to the state of Massachusetts where the white population exceeds the African American vote by quite a bit. In this state Obama won only 36% of the female vote. Showing that in a category that Clinton should have had some advantage she did not because in this case the idea of race trumped the idea of gender. This was most definitely the easiest group to appeal to in the election especially after his surprising win in Iowa, but it was also his most important without the numbers of people to support him from this group Obama most likely would not have won the election.

*Age*

Age was also very important in the outcome of the race, and even became big news on the idea that there were a lot of young voters coming out. The fact is though the younger the voter the more likely to vote for Obama and actually younger voters had started to become more liberal and had not leaned Republican since Reagan. In fact over 60% of voters 19-29, 55% of voters 30-45, 45% of voters 45-59, and only 35% of voters 60 and older voted for Obama. The young vote was also very important to the outcome of the Iowa Caucus, because Iowa had a surprising turnout of young voters. 22% of the voters in Iowa were under 30 meaning that the age could have more than likely been the main reason Obama won Iowa which is where the idea of a large amount of younger voters coming out started. Age also did not seem to be effected by race as 52% of non-African American voters 18-29 voted for Obama while 25% of non-African Americans 30-45 and only 15% of non-African Americans 45-59 voted for Obama. The electorate age 18-29 also went up 52% from 2004; in 2004 it was 9% and in 2008 it was 14%. The average age of the Democrat voter also dropped from 52 to 49. So an important factor that the campaign administration had to have figured out was how to bring in younger voters and get them excited which will also be talked about later on. Other evidence of age being a major factor if the rise of the electorate age 65 and up in New Hampshire (a state that Obama lost).

All of these factors are just examples of who backed who, but they show a lot on how Obama was able to win the election the biggest blow to Clinton in demographics was the lack of support from women and the support that Obama got from the young people. Both of these could have helped Clinton or at least not helped Obama as much as they did. The main thing that Obama did right with his campaign was to identify these groups and do whatever he could to appeal to them, this would be the ideal way a campaign is supposed to work, and seemed to for a one time senator. [[10]](#footnote-10)

**The New Age of Social Networking Campaigning**

The first step is to appeal to younger and tech savvy voters, but how do you do that in an age where there is so many things accessible to them. How to you get someone excited and willing to listen when everything they have is at the touch of their fingertips? How does one appeal to a certain group of people who have no time or attention span to listen to anything you have to say? Well the answer is quite simple actually you go to them. Obama’s campaign did a great job of using the internet and social networking like Twitter and Facebook to get the message across to the younger generation of voters. They knew that this was the way to get that demographic and as illustrated earlier it worked and most likely resulted in a win, since it resulted in him winning Iowa and then resulted in more people backing him after the Iowa win. “Numerous media accounts have supported the idea that Barack Obama and his campaign absolutely dominated the political landscape in terms of Internet use to garner campaign support.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

The internet and using websites for campaigns was most definitely not a new concept in fact they first appeared in the late 1990’s, but some could say that the use of social media was fairly new to politics. Facebook was extremely important or at least influential in the Obama campaign and in fact from the primary season until Election Day in 2008 there were more than 1,000 Facebook group pages that were focused on the campaign. This is important to a campaign because it is important in getting the word out to people. It also must be noted that Facebook is one of the most used sites on all of the internet and in fact it is only second to Google with the amount of visits on a daily bases. The idea of Facebook being important also helps to explain where Obama was able to mobilize younger voters. Facebook started as a group that was just for college students as of 2007 it has changed to target anyone who has a valid email account, but a majority of the users are still college students.[[12]](#footnote-12) This is important in looking at because it helps to explain why Obama was able to get an increase in younger voters, which was important in his win in Iowa and ultimately his win over Clinton as a whole.

Social networking has really started to take off in past years and almost everyone uses some type of social networking or has internet access of some type. So why not use that to your advantage in campaigns? It is an easy way to get your voice heard by the people and it is much more cost effective. Obama and his campaign team were able to address this issue and were able to get some good use out of it. There is no way to get voters interested really anymore commercials are not as effective and most people get all of their news from the internet.[[13]](#footnote-13) This idea of social media campaigning also gave a lot of campaigning power to their supporters, a post from a supporter on Facebook will have a much bigger chance of influencing people and also a much bigger chance of getting the word out now a days a person who shares something about Obama is helping campaigning making it supper cheap all you have to do is put it out on the internet. This also gives that person who does share something a sense like they did something good like they are helping out, the main idea of these sites is to broadcast anything and everything about one’s self, so broadcasting who you are voting for should be a big part of it as well. The more a person feels like their voice is being heard the more they like someone, which in this case is exactly what Obama did he gave the people a voice by letting them tell everyone how much they supported him and why. We live in a self-absorbed world know the more credit you can give to people the more they enjoy the whole thing. This also worked for the younger voters because like I said earlier they are the ones on these sites posting for them to see it and be involved made them want to go out and make a difference after that as well, that is just my idea of how it worked since I come from the age of Facebook and Twitter. Media was thought to be a big factor in this race, but it had been a big deal in many races since presidential campaigning started even. Social networking is fairly new and Obama’s team showed that it can actually be a very handy tool in gathering voters and getting them to side with you, it was somewhat of a new innovation and goes to show how well of a job Obama’s team did in finding new, exciting and effective ways to get through to voters and let them have a voice, it is probably one of the better campaign strategies seen in recent history.

**Celebrity Endorsements**

Sometimes in a campaign it is important to show how much other people support you and your ideas, a person that people look up to and respect is very important in this case, it cannot just be anyone. This was also an important part of the Obama campaign and most likely helped toward his win in the Primary election. The more people to endorse you the better, but the quality of an endorser trumps the quantity, this was very much evident in the Obama campaign.

The role of celebrity endorsements also made for an interesting race, especially Oprah’s endorsement of Obama. It is said the Oprah’s endorsement of Obama (the only candidate she had ever endorsed which made it even that much more influential since she doesn’t just throw her support at anyone) resulted in approximately 1,000,000 additional votes for Obama obviously a big boost to anyone’s chances in winning. There are many reasons for this some of those include; her commercial appeal, her influence through media, and her huge influence in the world and on people.

*Commercial Appeal*

Oprah has and will have a large impact on the selling ability of anything or in this case anyone. Craig Garthwaite and Tim Moore analyze through different things Oprah has been able to endorse and how successful they have been which would in turn result in her success in endorsing political candidates. The major one that is looked at is her ability to sell books through her book club. Basically each month Oprah endorses a different book, gives her followers time to read it and about a month later has the author or an expert come on the show to talk about that certain book. It is shown that books that Oprah had on book club saw a dramatic increase in their sales after that. An example of this would be Oprah’s endorsement of a book called *Anna Karenina* this book was selling less than 10,000 copies, after the book appeared on Oprah’s book club list the book rose to sell about 80,000 copies. That by itself is a perfect example of how much commercial power Oprah has and how that might correlate into a successful endorsement for one candidate or another.

The next example of commercialism from Oprah is her magazine O where a lot of coverage on Obama was displayed. The problem with the data that is presented is that O’s readers had a lot of the same readers, who were supports of Obama. So it is hard to say whether the magazine had an influence on those people or whether their views were already more aligned with Obama and not Clinton. It was shown however that Oprah’s O magazine had more effect than magazines like *People* or *Self* who appeared to endorse Clinton more. Those magazines did not show any positive outcome for Clinton.

All of Oprah’s “sellabiltiy” as brought before you goes to show you how marketable she really is and gives us an idea as to why her endorsement was such a big deal to the whole campaign. She is one of the most loveable television personalities in television; she has never had a mark on her record and is respected. All of this tells us that while celebrity endorsements are important because people tend to do what their favorite celebrities do this one was even more important because Oprah is so likeable.

*Influence through media*

There have been many campaigns who have used celebrity endorsements throughout their campaigns before though. This is due to the fact that people listen to media endorsements way more than they do political endorsements. People feel like celebrities gain that inside access and would report back to them in a way that political endorsers would not do, they trust a celebrity they have nothing to gain from endorsing one candidate or the other. They are also not known for being liars and cheaters as politicians have recently become known for. One thing that does stand out is the fact that Clinton did not have as many celebrity endorsers as Obama did. This could most likely be one reason she did not fare as well as Obama did. Oprah’s endorsement also got Obama a lot more media attention than he might have not gotten without her endorsement, which like we talked about before was an important part of Obama’s win. In fact after her endorsement the amount that they talked about Obama and Oprah rose to over 500 stories about the two. It was contrasted to the amount of time they talked about Chuck Norris and Huckabee together which only peaked at over 200 stories. So it is safe to say that the endorsement of Oprah had an extremely large impact in the amount of time people saw Obama in media reports. Oprah also ranked 1st in web presence and TV or radio mentions. Her endorsement would have been instrumental in getting Obama’s name into the public eye helping to make him rise above an obvious front-runner in Clinton. Oprah was voted as one of the most powerful and influential people in the world in 2007 the year she endorsed Obama as her preference for presidential candidate. This could have been due to the fact she helped Obama get elected in a big way, all of the factors that we have talked about were a big result of Oprah’s help his media and internet attention skyrocketed thanks to Oprah’s endorsement.

All of these factors tie into why her endorsement could have been so much more important than any other celebrity endorsement. Younger voters were said to respond to her message and it increased the turnout of voters at caucuses by .4% and at primaries by 18%. Turnout was one of the important reasons for Obama’s victory and the endorsement from probably the most influential celebrity did a lot to help that. This is a lot of evidence to say that Obama has Oprah to thank for a lot of what he accomplished every group that surprisingly sided with him was affected by Oprah in some way. This also shows how influential this is to a campaign it is an important part of winning to get these celebrities on your side and reach out to the people in a way that a political candidate just cannot do.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**Obama’s Charismatic Rhetoric**

We touched on this earlier a bit, but one way Obama was able to appeal to voters was his ability to be actually very likeable due to very charismatic, this includes his speeches, what was said, and how both candidates acted in debates. This also has to do with how Obama responded to the Jeremiah Wright incident and how he was able to get a good unifying message across to all people. This section not only talks about how likeable Obama was compared to Clinton but it also shows how both candidates conducted themselves in debates and why, and then also how Obama said things that made voters like him which is an important part of any campaign to talk about words that will get people to support you even if they are cliché.

*Obama’s Charismatic Rhetoric*

It seemed to be that Obama was always going to be a more likeable candidate than Clinton no matter what race or party affiliation, there could be several reasons for that. The first reason is Obama used slogan words and his use of we, us, and the collective. All of these words have an effect on how people think no matter what we are all seen as doing things together and being American so to speak so when someone is talking like that you seem to jump on board without even realizing it. “In the 20th century Presidents have been seen as going over the heads of congress to appeal to the people and have replaced reasoned argument with sloganeering and more lofty words” as stated before. (Schroedel, Jean; Bligh, Michelle; Merolla, Jennifer; Gonzalez, Randall) Reagan did something similar with unemployment issues in the 80s’ and Clinton used it in the 90s’ with crime even though that had been a Republican idea. This is exactly what Obama did with his ideas of uniting the people and his campaigning words that enforced that. Obama knew how to get the people to vote for him and he did it very well.[[15]](#footnote-15) This is a perfect example of how campaigning works, people start to like you for those slogans that you have and if you are able to deliver these slogans in a likeable way like Obama was able to do then you have a winning formula.

*Jeremiah Wright*

Jeremiah Wright’s story brings on another interesting part of the whole campaign. In the middle of the primary election Obama’s Reverend was filmed saying comments about how the white man ruled the country and things that were saw as being very unpatriotic to the American people. These videos were posted to YouTube for the public to see right in the middle of the hardest part of the primary battle. People who saw this that said they had a problem with this said that it showed Obama was unpatriotic (which had already been questioned due to him not wearing an American flag pin) and that it conflicted with his unity message. It was also a blow to his support because he was seen as a candidate that could help to further unite African Americans and whites and it didn’t seem so clear since it was his reverend and all. Some people thought that he may have had the same views. It is shown that African Americans followed the race more closely (a 30% opposed to 27%) but that white people were disturbed much more by it than African Americans (38% to only 16%). This could be due to the fact that African Americans were more used to seeing church run like this because we all know that church is still the most segregated place in America the cultures between the two are different. This gave African Americans a better understanding of what Jeremiah Wright was actually saying. In the end this did hurt Obama a little bit, probably due to him being almost unknown as a candidate and this was the only thing that people really had to go off of to make any judgment about him. Obama’s favorability ratings slipped 7-10% and 21% of registered Democrats were less likely to support Obama after his comments. This was even after Obama’s speech addressing the fact and letting the people know he did not support what Wright had said which did help him to get some of his support back.[[16]](#footnote-16) All of this shows that Obama was able to take something that was could have ended his chances at winning and make people forget about it. This shows how charismatic he really is, it was a shot for people who did not like him to throw him under the bus and yet he made a speech that seemed to make people like him even more than before, he addressed the problems and yet distanced himself from the problem, in a timely manner after the incident.[[17]](#footnote-17)

*Debates*

Recently debates have become a big part of our culture everyone wants to say who will say what and if someone will say something stupid that we can talk about until the next debate, so it would be extremely important for someone to be able to pull out a great performance in a debate, because if not people are going to be talking about it that is for sure. It seemed that Obama was able to do a great job in his speeches which led to even more likeability and respect, because people were talking about how great he had done, this could have also been an effect of no one ever really hearing from him for the most part which could have led to an advantage in this situation since no one knew what to expect they got better than what they expected from him.

Debates played a huge part in the 2008 Presidential Primary and actually are used more in primaries than presidential elections and in fact there were 20 primary debates for the Democrats alone in 2008, Clinton and Obama participated in all of them. They are also a good source to get voters; in 2008 94 million voters watched the primary debates (Benoit, Henson, Sudbrock). In these speeches all candidates were more about acclaims than they were about attacks. In fact the debates consisted of 68% acclaims to only 26% attacks. This means they brought themselves up more than they brought the other candidates down. Benoit, Henson and Sudbrock say that the news coverage plays more on the attacks than the acclaims which is why it seems like campaigns are always so negative. It is also said that the candidates like to stay away from attacks because it can produce backlash from voters who dislike mudslinging. The debates also consisted of more talk about policy than character in fact 70% of debates were about policy while only 30% were about character and the Democrats criticized their own party 31% of the time and the Republican Party 30% of the time so in that instance they were pretty even which makes sense since it was the primary election. Speeches were also very upbeat according to Schroedel, Jean; Bligh, Michelle; Merolla, Jennifer; Gonzalez, Randall both candidates talked about action more than they talked about adversity, Obama talked about both more than Clinton, but that is probably due to the fact that Obama did a lot more speeches than Clinton did. Obama participated in 207 speeches (37.4% of speeches on both Democrat and Republican sides) while Clinton did only 87 (only 15.7% of the speeches done) this means that Clinton did less than half of the speeches that Clinton did, meaning this could have been a place that hurt Clinton’s chances of winning since the debates had done so well who’s to say the speeches did not.[[18]](#footnote-18)

***The Media’s Influence***

The media always seems to have some kind of influence on what we do, what we say, and how we feel. So it would make sense that they could also have a big impact on who we vote for. The media definitely seemed to be a factor in the 2008 Democratic Primary election. Whether it was a SNL skit showing how much more people loved Obama with a song, that[[19]](#footnote-19) I can still remember the words to, or something as simple as saying Hillary instead of Clinton. All of this has an impact on how a voter votes and how they view a candidate. This is one thing that Obama most certainly had no control over, but attributed to how he was able to win over the more well-known candidate. The media treated him with more respect and that resulted in the voters treating him with more respect as well giving him more credibility during the election.

In the 2008 presidential Primary the media seemed to cover the two candidates in a very different way and it is said that they covered them so differently because their different genders. This is not how it should be she should have been treated as a major candidate; she had been in the white house for 8 years already, she served as a 2nd term senator from a large state and got more votes, delegates, and state victories than any other female candidate. So it is extremely confusing as to why she was not getting the media attention that she deserved, since she was making history and everything. Granted both candidates that were the frontrunners were making history, but it is extremely strange as to why she was being treated so differently than her male competitors. The media seemed to be extremely critical of what Clinton looked like or how she was dressed instead of addressing the actual facts. Clinton was treated unfairly within the media; it is suggest that when news people referenced Clinton by only her first name they were down grading her in the primary race therefore perhaps giving Obama an unfair advantage without even realizing it. This is because there is gender bias within society women are seen as not being strong enough leaders and in fact males are somewhat resistant to female leaders. This ultimately gave Obama an unfair advantage from the start he was seen as a better candidate just due to the fact that he was a male while Clinton was a female. Within our society we do not associate females with leadership. This fact makes it just that much harder for a female candidate to make any ground work in a political race.

The evidence of Clinton being mistreated by a lot of the media seems to go on and on mainly by things that many people would not find as that big of a deal, but can actually have big implications on the voters without them even realizing it. One major issue that comes from this is the amount of times Clinton was addressed by her first name compared to the amount of times Obama was addressed by his first name, Clinton was addressed by her first name 3% of the time while Obama was addressed by his first name less than 1% of the time. This gives her less authority when people reporting are calling her by her first name without the voter’s knowledge even they were being told to feel a certain way about her. , even if it was only a small amount of times it was still more than Obama. The media also omitted her status as senator 15% more than they did Obama when reporting on the two; giving more evidence to the fact that people do not see women being in a position of power. Like I said before this gives Obama more credibility when they forget to say her title as senator they are discrediting her. It is a sad fact, but there are a lot of people who did not know she was a Senator and could maybe only remember her for what she was in the White House.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Then there is the idea that there is less reported on women candidates this is hard to think about happening in this case since there was a good chance she would be the first major woman candidate, but it still seemed to happen. It is suggested that women receive 50% less media coverage than their male competitors and that when women do get reported on news people talk more about their appearance or what their wearing instead of the issues they stand for. This can be due to the fact that news is becoming increasing more entertainment news and less of getting the facts. This new form of news people also are more likely to address a person by their first name or more informally than they should. Within society today we want more gossip than news so that’s what the news is giving us, but it could be hurting our female candidates in the election process. Women are yet to be respected on their ideas and their ideological views they are seen as objects that are supposed to be up on the latest trends and fashions, this is why we watch those news reports that comment on how someone looked or what they were wearing instead of what they did for the good, there will be no shot in a woman candidate winning an election if this is the way media continues to present them to people.[[21]](#footnote-21)

When these women were getting news coverage though they were being set out and there gender was almost always addressed. When news coverage was on them it almost always consisted of something like the first woman or the lone women, pointing out they were a woman at every chance they got. They did point out other qualities of other competitors such as race with Obama, age with McCain, or religion with Biden but not to the same extent as they did for Clinton and Palin. In fact Clinton was labeled by her gender 17.5% as opposed to Obama and McCain’s 11.0% and for uniqueness (first, pioneer, or lone) Clinton was labeled 2.6% as opposed to Obama and McCain’s 4.8%. There is also the issue that feminine political issues were not covered as much as masculine issues and in fact 10.5% of Clinton’s feminine issues were covered as opposed to 29.4% of masculine issues being covered.[[22]](#footnote-22) This could have had a big impact on the amount of female voters that Clinton was able to get, which seemed to be a problem for her in the Primary election.

Many people could argue that a media personnel would informally address a candidate based on their ideological differences, this argument did not fit as well though because a majority of the people that informally addressed Clinton were from stations such as MSNBC, which is known for being a much more Democratic news station, granted both candidates were Democrats, so it could just be that more Democrats liked Obama then Clinton. There is also a case where two candidates that were men tried to campaign in different races using only their first names, but the media would not do it, they seemed to be turned off from the idea and always addressed them using their whole name. This somewhat helps the argument that the media addressed Clinton by her first name because they thought less of her as a leader and candidate.

It also has to be addressed that it could have been many other reasons for her mistreatment in the media. One factor that could discredit this a little that Clinton was already a household name and her relationship with Bill Clinton. With Obama it was different he had only been a senator for one term and was known only very little requiring reporters to address him more formally. It could have also been her status in the race or her policy position. There is then the thought that people were addressing Clinton in such mean and rude terms because they were talking about Hillary and that it had nothing to do with her being a women but her being who she was.

Either way the fact is that the way both candidates were represented to the public was very much different and it did have an impact on the outcome, people saw Obama as a more likeable person which in turn resulted in him getting more support. The voters were influenced by this even if they did not know it, and it was nothing that Obama or his campaign did it was just how it happened. This is one example of Obama’s luck shining through, or his charismatic ways instead of the work his campaign did to pull out a win in the end. Even though it could be his luck there is also the way his campaign used it to their advantage and made him seem like a likable guy which made the media present him that way. His ability to make people like him or his charisma could have also impacted the way the media treated both of them and it may not all be due to the genders of both candidates.

**Conclusion**

In the end the question of do campaigns really matter has been pretty much determined. Without the work of Obama’s campaign team and the work that they put into analyzing and getting Obama’s name out there as a candidate he would have never really won. What was found was that voters opinions can be swayed by the smallest things and usually one thing can have a huge impact on if you will win or not. An example of that could be Howard Dean’s outburst in 2004; he went from the most likeable candidate to a crazy man in a matter of about 30 seconds. This is also true in this campaign, Iowa was a huge factor, because it made the likeable community organizer turned senator seem like he could win. He was also to save himself from a Howard Dean moment when the Jeremiah Wright incident happened, which could have turned the strides that he had made around. This all helps to show how quickly voters change their minds and why campaign strategies and crisis recovery during a campaign are important to the survival of a campaign and ultimately a win in the end for successful campaigns. This Democratic Primary election is a great example of how the hard work and the ability of campaign teams does actually matter to a candidate. Some people would argue that people know who they are going to vote for long before the election ever starts, but you can see that is not true, if it were true Hillary Clinton may have been our next President. People change their mind and new things arise that convince them to change their minds all the times. During an election things are always changing and new things are happening, so it is important to stay on your toes and make sure you run a good campaign. The main thing to take away from this research is campaigns do actually matter, and voters are always gaining new information whether it is true or not that is always changing their views and their minds when it comes to who they will vote for in a certain election.

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