



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 9, 2012

Obama v. Romney: Their Core Beliefs

President Barack Obama and presidential hopeful Mitt Romney are in the public eye almost every day, telling Americans about their plans to guide the country should they win the 2012 presidential race. Ironically, given such constant coverage, most Americans would probably be hard pressed to factually state what positions the candidates hold concerning fiscal issues, foreign policy, civil liberties, and social issues, especially to a depth great enough to compare and contrast the candidates or understand the long-term ramifications of their policies.



Americans are likely aware that Obama claims to have turned our ailing economy around, while Romney claims Obama is making the economy worse. And they are probably cognizant of the fact that Romney claims that while he was governor, he pushed fiscally sound policies and didn't raise taxes and that he will undo Obama-Care, while Obama claims Romney's policies will lead to the outsourcing of the remainder of America's manufacturing and hi-tech jobs. But are the claims true, and if they are true, are the claims meaningful?

Even with information about the candidates readily available, most Americans simply don't have the time to research the claims and counterclaims that are being made about the men, so information overload literally leads to ignorance.

So we did the homework for you, complete with links to the original sources.

Fiscal Issues

Obama's [budget plan](#) is pretty simple: increase tax revenues by a third over the next four years and still rack up an annual deficit of about \$650 billion in 2016 (see first chart below). And that's assuming his budget estimates, unlike his past projections, turn out to be accurate. Three years ago, in his [first budget](#), he projected a deficit of \$557 billion in 2012. He was off by about a factor of two. The deficit for 2012, the fiscal year ending this September 30, is now [estimated](#) to be \$1.17 trillion.

(Note: Click on charts to enlarge them.)



Romney's Spending Projections for 2016 <small>Compared to Obama's 2016 estimates (in billions of dollars)</small>	
Proposed Spending Cuts	Amount Saved
Repeal ObamaCare	-95.00
Privatize Amtrak	-1.60
Reduce NEA, NEH, CPB, LSC	-0.60
Reduce Title X Family Planning	-0.30
Reduce Foreign Aid	-0.10
Turn Medicare into Block Grant	-100.00
Reduce Waste/Fraud/Abuse	-60.00
Implement Federal Pay Cuts	-47.00
Federal Layoffs Through Attrition	-4.00
Repeal Davis-Bacon Act	-11.00
Total Change: +262.42	
Proposed Increases	
Amount Added	
Increase Defense Spending	+203.02
Individual Income Taxes (20% cut)	+352.00
Eliminate Death Tax	+27.00

Obama's Budget Proposal <small>(in billions of dollars)</small>			
	Revenue	Spending	Deficit
2012 estimates	2,468.6	3,795.5	-1,326
2013 estimates	2,902	3,803.4	-901.4
2014 estimates	3,215.3	3,883.1	-667.8
2015 estimates	3,450.2	4,059.9	-609.7
2016 estimates	3,680.1	4,328.8	-648.8

Mitt Romney promises “spending cuts of approximately \$500 billion per year in 2016 assuming robust economic recovery with 4% annual growth, and reversal of irresponsible Obama-era defense cuts.”

But the math on Romney’s spending cuts thus far proposed doesn’t match his \$500 billion campaign promise. Even taking his dubious campaign figures at face value, which include \$60 billion in savings by eliminating waste and fraud (a standard promise by politicians that is never realized, at least in part because of the inefficiencies inherent in government bureaucracies), the Romney campaign details less than \$320 billion in proposed cuts (see “Romney’s Spending Projections” chart above). And those cuts are based on cutting projected future spending, they are not based on cutting the budget in the absolute sense. Even if all the proposed cuts are made, government spending would still climb, only not as much as currently projected.

Moreover, Romney would radically increase defense spending over Obama’s projections with his promise of “reversal of irresponsible Obama-era defense cuts.” Romney promises to keep defense spending “at a floor of 4 percent of GDP,” which is slightly less than the United States is spending this year (\$718 billion) on two wars, but some \$203 billion more than Obama’s recommendation of \$578 billion by 2016.

In short, Romney would re-spend most of his proposed “cuts” on defense and not make any substantial overall cuts in federal spending. Indeed, his campaign [promises](#) he would “Set Honest Goals: Cap Spending At 20 Percent Of GDP ... Reduced from 24.3 percent last year; in line with the historical trend between 18 and 20 percent.” But with his publicly released cut proposals, Romney would not substantially cut federal spending, and spending would remain at the 24 percent of GDP level into the indefinite future.

Romney does propose some tax cuts that Obama hasn’t proposed, and this is the only substantial fiscal difference between the two candidates. While Obama wants to raise the income-tax rates on Americans earning \$250,000 or more per year, Romney proposes only tax cuts, including:

- Make a permanent, across-the-board 20-percent cut in marginal rates
- Maintain current tax rates on interest, dividends, and capital gains
- Eliminate taxes for taxpayers with AGI below \$200,000 on interest, dividends, and capital gains
- Eliminate the Death Tax
- Repeal the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT)



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- Cut the corporate rate to 25 percent
- Strengthen and make permanent the R&D tax credit
- Switch to a territorial tax system
- Repeal the corporate Alternative Minimum Tax

While Romney's proposal to cut corporate tax rates may actually bring in more federal revenue, as capital that has fled abroad comes home, many of his other tax-cut proposals, in the absence of offsetting spending cuts, will spike the national debt — resulting in the creation of more money out of thin air to finance the debt, higher interest payments to service the debt, and the further decline of the dollar's purchasing power. This is not to suggest that taxes should not be lowered, but they need to be lowered through less government in order to reduce government's burden on the economy.

On balance, Romney's proposals would make the deficit significantly larger compared to current projections. This will lighten the short-term tax burden on taxpayers, but increase the burden in the long run.

Of course, presidents have little practical power in the budgeting process. Constitutionally speaking, presidents propose budgets, then Congress disposes of them and does what it wants. The Constitution requires that Congress originate all spending and tax bills. The president can do little more than set a tone and make his recommendations, and threaten to veto spending bills when Congress seems bent on passing spending that's out of line with his recommendations. But a presidential veto threat on congressional appropriations bills is usually not politically serious, as most appropriations bills contain a variety of funds that are politically impossible to do without.

Verdict: No substantial difference. Romney is somewhat better on taxes, while Obama is significantly better on deficit control.

Foreign Policy

Presidents make a major impact on foreign policy issues, in contrast to fiscal policy. This has been especially true as presidents have diverged from the constitutional principle that Congress possesses the war power.

On paper, President Obama has several major foreign policy successes to his credit. He has [found and killed](#) Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks; [saved](#) an American merchant marine captain kidnapped by Somali terrorists; and [declared](#) an end to the Iraq War in December 2011.

In actuality, Obama's success in this venue must be tempered by relevant facts. The announced withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq occurred several years later than his campaign promises to withdraw them within 16 months of taking office. Even now, the U.S. war in Iraq continues without the name. Some [5,000 mercenary troops](#) in armored cars and attack helicopters patrol the streets of Iraq, commanded by Hillary Clinton's State Department, in addition to an increased U.S. presence of drone surveillance and strikes.

One reason Barack Obama was elected in 2008 was to end wars, but he has unleashed drone strikes — acts of war — against a half a dozen nations or more, including [Iraq](#), [Afghanistan](#), [Pakistan](#), [Yemen](#), [Somalia](#), and other countries. President Obama [claims](#) that he's kept a "tight leash" on drone strikes, but documented drone strikes have [killed at least 168 children](#) according to widely published studies. One of these children was 16-year-old, Colorado-born, U.S. citizen [Abdulrahman al-Awlaki](#), who was



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killed in a Yemeni drone strike in October 2011.

Abdulrahman al-Awlaki is the only American child known to have been targeted by the Obama administration, but the Obama administration reportedly has an [assassination list](#) of people who can be killed on sight, and two other U.S. citizens have also died in drone strikes, al-Awlaki's father, Anwar, and Samir Khan. U.S. and foreign news agencies have widely reported numerous civilian casualties in the drone war.

Drone strikes would continue in a Romney administration. Mitt Romney has no problem with a presidential assassination list of American citizens either. [Asked](#) explicitly by Scott Pelley of CBS in a November 12, 2011 presidential debate: "Is it appropriate for the American president on the president's say-so alone to order the death of an American citizen suspected of terrorism?" Mitt Romney responded "Absolutely." Neither the incumbent, President Obama, nor the challenger, Romney, have a need for trial by jury to sort the innocent from the guilty because they apparently believe the president is always right when his party is in power.

Back in December 2007, then-Senator Barack Obama [told](#) the *Boston Globe*: "The President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation." He of course was correct. Under [Article I, Section 8](#) of the U.S. Constitution, only Congress has the power to "declare war." Yet as president, he engaged in a war against Libya without congressional consent. In an address to the nation on March 28, 2011 at the National Defense University, Obama [acknowledged](#): "I authorized military action to stop the killing and enforce U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973." Gone was candidate Obama's stipulation that he needed the permission of Congress under the Constitution.

Obama's [justification](#) for war in Libya included a revolutionary statement that he would continue to put American soldiers into harm's way even when U.S. national security wasn't threatened: "There will be times, though, when our safety is not directly threatened, but our interests and our values are.... In such cases, we should not be afraid to act." Constitutionally, of course, the decision to go to war belongs to the Congress, not the president. And morally speaking, sending American soldiers to fight in aggressive and unnecessary foreign wars against countries that have not threatened or attacked us is not upholding our values; it is instead a betrayal of the trust of those patriotic soldiers.

Mitt Romney, who would be no better at restoring to Congress its rightful power to decide when to go to war, claims that he can start a war against Iran without even consulting Congress. Romney [told](#) CBS's *Face the Nation* on June 17 of this year:

I believe it's important for us to communicate that. I can assure you if I'm President, the Iranians will have no question but that I would be willing to take military action, if necessary, to prevent them from becoming a nuclear threat to the world. I — I don't believe at this stage, therefore, if I'm President, that we need to have war powers approval or a special authorization for military force. The President has that capacity now.

Romney's [bellicosity](#) against Iran is even more militant than Obama's, which itself stops just short of war against the Persian nation. His foreign policy is even more warlike than Obama's, if that is possible. Romney has criticized Obama's planned downsizing of the U.S. troop commitment to Afghanistan:

This past June, President Obama disregarded the counsel of his top military commanders, including General David Petraeus, and announced a full withdrawal of those 30,000 surge troops by September 2012.... There is no military rationale for it.



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Both Obama and Romney not only support NAFTA but have announced their commitment to negotiate and sign more multilateral “free trade” agreements. Obama has negotiated free trade agreements with Colombia and South Korea and committed to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a regional free trade agreement still under negotiation along the lines of NAFTA. Though promoted as free trade, arrangements such as NAFTA do not eliminate government’s involvement with trade; they instead create multinational bureaucracies that supplant national authority to determine trade policy.

Verdict: No substantial difference. Romney’s bellicosity against Iran is marginally worse than that of Obama, who nevertheless ranks as the worst president in American history on foreign policy.

Civil Liberties at Home

A strong argument could be made that President Obama has the worst record of protecting constitutional liberties in American history, despite 2008 [campaign promises to abolish torture](#), [“eliminate warrantless wiretaps,”](#) [end signing statements and executive privilege](#) as a means of backdoor legislating, [close the Guantanamo Bay prison](#), and [“Restore Habeas Corpus,”](#) which Obama accurately described in [2008 campaign literature](#): “The right of habeas corpus allows prisoners to ask a court to determine whether they are being lawfully imprisoned.” With the exception of making some progress on moving away from torture ([Bradley Manning’s solitary confinement](#) and [conditions at Baghram Air Force base in Afghanistan](#) constitute continued torture), every one of those promises has been completely broken.

Obama has vigorously defended the wide-ranging Bush-era warrantless surveillance of American citizens with Justice Department lawyers, and has continued massive funding of the NSA warrantless surveillance capability. Under the [Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution](#), government searches of American persons and private property require probable cause and a warrant from a judge, with a description of what is going to be searched and what contraband or evidence will be found. But Obama has continued, without warrants, to build a [permanent database of Internet traffic](#) through the NSA, which will be able to [store the entire content of the Internet](#). The NSA database [reputedly](#) includes all e-mails sent through the Internet, all web pages, and the dates, times, length, and parties’ numbers of all telephone conversations by American citizens.

Mitt Romney would be unlikely to dismantle the spying apparatus or confine its use to constitutional searches, having long [supported the Patriot Act’s](#) warrantless surveillance provisions. Though he is silent on warrantless surveillance through the NSA, his publicly announced policy advisors include former NSA chief Michael Hayden, the man who [set up and publicly defended Bush’s expansive warrantless wiretap program](#).

President Obama has claimed the right to kill any American citizen he accuses of terrorism, even a child (as explained earlier), and in 2011 he signed a bill to grant himself the additional pretended power to detain American citizens indefinitely without trial. This power has been struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in the cases of [Rumsfeld v. Padilla](#) and [Rumsfeld v. Hamdan](#), but [sections 1021 and 1022 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012](#) (NDAA) affirm “the authority of the President to use all necessary and appropriate force pursuant to the Authorization for Use of Military Force” to “detain covered persons” indefinitely without trial — including U.S. citizens — if the president determines that they are al-Qaeda or “an associated force,” or that they’ve carried out an “attack” against the United States. The terms “associated force” and “attack” are wide-ranging terms: Anwar al-Awlaki was assassinated by the United States, though he was primarily [known for using YouTube](#) to post videos asking for violence against the United States, and had not (as far as the public has ever



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been informed) actually committed an act of violence himself.

Romney's views are no different from Obama's on the indefinite detention of American citizens without trial under the NDAA. The *Wall Street Journal's* Kelly Evans [asked](#) Romney in a January 17, 2012 presidential debate in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: "Governor Romney, as president, would you have signed the National Defense Act as written?" Romney [replied](#), to audience boos: "Yes, I would have. And I do believe that it is appropriate to have in our nation the capacity to detain people who are threats to this country, who are members of al Qaeda.... But let me tell you, people who join al Qaeda are not entitled to rights of due process under our normal legal code. They are entitled instead to be treated as enemy combatants."

Romney's campaign website claims, "Mitt Romney's view of the Constitution is straightforward: its words have meaning. The founding generation adopted a written constitution for a reason. They intended to limit the powers of government according to enduring principles." But Romney's other campaign rhetoric suggests that he will ignore the [Sixth Amendment's](#) requirement that every "person" receive a prompt trial by jury and the [Fourth Amendment's](#) requirement that all searches be cleared by a judge with a search warrant, probable cause, and a description of what will be searched and found.

President Obama pledged to end the Bush administration's abuse of executive orders and signing statements, and use of executive privilege, the latter a [constitutional fiction](#) designed to shield the presidency from congressional investigations into executive-branch wrongdoing. But Obama [invoked](#) executive privilege to protect his attorney general in the "Fast and Furious" gun-walking scandal when it became apparent that the Justice Department would be embarrassed by releasing information about how [the U.S. government gave Mexican drug gangs some 2,000 guns](#). Obama has also prolifically used signing statements and executive orders as a means of undoing laws passed by Congress, such as Obama's [executive order](#) reversing the Mexico City policy on the funding of abortion providers with foreign aid dollars, issued during his first week as president. Likewise, Romney has made several broad claims about planned executive orders were he to become president, including a claim that he could overturn ObamaCare by executive order.

And Romney may actually be less likely to nominate Supreme Court justices who will protect civil liberties. One of the most important powers a president has is to appoint members of the U.S. Supreme Court (with the advice and consent of the Senate), and justices will decide many important issues related to civil liberties. "As president, Mitt will nominate judges in the mold of Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Scalia, Thomas, and Alito," Romney's campaign [website](#) says. Yet none of these "conservatives," who were nominated by Republican presidents, have been among the majority in the Padilla, Hamdan, and Boumediene cases defending the right to habeas corpus and trial by jury. Nor have they appeared interested in stopping surveillance, torture, or any other executive branch excess in the area of civil liberties. Obama's nominee Elena Kagan will likely support more restrictions on the executive branch than the people Romney promises to model his Supreme Court nominees on.

Verdict: Obama is marginally better on issues of civil liberties because he will more likely appoint — if a vacancy occurs — Supreme Court justices who will adhere more closely to the Constitution on civil liberties issues (though less so on social issues, as indicated below).

Social Issues

Barack Obama is a statist liberal on social issues, meaning that he works to thoroughly undermine traditional values, using the force of the federal government to do so. Obama is 100 percent pro-



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abortion, and received a [100-percent rating](#) from the abortion organization NARAL as a senator. He voted as an Illinois state senator to [fund abortions with state money](#), as a U.S. senator to fund embryonic stem-cell research with federal funds, and as president to [overturn the Mexico City policy](#) that banned use of foreign aid to fund abortion providers abroad, using an executive order.

Mitt Romney ran for governor of Massachusetts in 2002 as a “pro-choice” candidate to the left of his former U.S. Senate opponent Ted Kennedy (against whom he ran in 1994), but as governor claimed to have experienced a change of heart on the issue. He now [claims](#) to be 100 percent pro-life on abortion.

The abortion issue and other social issues are at the heart of why many label Romney as a “[flip-flopper](#).” As a U.S. Senate candidate against Ted Kennedy in 1994, and as a gubernatorial candidate in 2002, Romney also supported gun bans (“assault weapons” and “Brady Bill”) and rejected Ronald Reagan as too conservative.

As governor of Massachusetts, Romney sent the legislature a request to double the funds for the Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth in 2005, and then vetoed it when the legislature complied with his request. Local conservative activists had complained about the inappropriate nature of the parades that the commission had sponsored. Romney then [abolished](#) the governor’s commission by executive order and instead [created](#) an “Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity” aimed at fulfilling his [campaign promise](#) to the Log Cabin Republicans of Massachusetts to “provide more effective leadership than my opponent” and “make equality for gays and lesbians a mainstream concern. My opponent cannot do this. I can and will.” Romney also said he favored “gays and lesbians being able to serve openly and honestly” in the military.

Romney even [banned](#) the Boy Scouts from participating in the 2002 Olympics because of their opposition to homosexuality, and [told](#) the *Boston Globe* in 2004, “I feel that all people should be allowed to participate in the Boy Scouts regardless of their sexual orientation.”

On marriage, there is a difference between Romney and Obama, though this will not apply directly to legitimate presidential powers. Obama has recently [publicly endorsed](#) political recognition of same-sex “marriage.” Mitt Romney has backed a constitutional amendment defining marriage between a man and a woman, though Romney favors political recognition of same-sex unions under a name other than marriage.

On healthcare, ObamaCare and Romneycare are based upon [identical principles, though not on the principle of federalism](#): Romneycare nominally leaves healthcare out of the federal sphere. But Romney’s recent campaign statements in the wake of the June 2012 Supreme Court decision seem to indicate that he would keep in place every element of Obama-Care at the federal level, except the individual mandate.

Romney has better public positions on social issues than Obama, and Romney may make some differences on this issue by restoring the Mexico City policy, and by appointing more conservative Supreme Court justices. Romney’s judgment is not rock-solid on social issues, as his campaign website [touts](#) the appointing of John Roberts as a model to follow. Roberts was the deciding vote on the high court that upheld the ObamaCare mandate. This has long been the case with Supreme Court appointments by Republicans. Activist Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren was a Republican governor [appointed](#) by Republican President Dwight David Eisenhower. But, on balance, Romney would more likely appoint justices who, on social issues, would comport with both the Constitution and traditional values than Obama (whose appointee Elena Kagan also voted for ObamaCare) would.



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Even on such social issues as drug legalization, conservatives are more likely to back limits to the federal government's powers. In the medicinal marijuana case, *Raiche v. Gonzales*, only conservative justice Clarence Thomas [argued](#) that medical marijuana a cancer patient grows on her own property for her own consumption is not "commerce" subject to federal regulation under the U.S. Constitution.

Verdict: Romney is marginally better, and will more likely appoint — if a vacancy occurs — Supreme Court justices who will adhere more closely to the Constitution on social issues (though less so on civil liberties issues as indicated above).

A serious analysis of the issues facing the nation makes a choice of the "lesser of two evils" between Democratic incumbent President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney all but a coin toss, even on the Supreme Court nominations that many conservatives assume is a perpetual advantage for Republicans.

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