

# Being sidelined?

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## **Barack Obama has thankfully been re-elected as President, but why weren't impoverished Americans mentioned more in his electoral campaign?**

Having won a very tight election campaign against Republican Mitt Romney, this week saw the United States (US) choosing a path undoubtedly very different, and arguably better, to that which Romney would have chosen for the country. Many Americans and people worldwide felt elated that Obama had been chosen as US President for a second term.

However, there have been questions raised about the lack of discussion about US poverty levels, now at an all-time high because of the ongoing financial crisis. Obama mentioned poverty once during his second-term election campaign, where he seemed ever-so-slightly squeamish, referring to impoverished Americans as “those aspiring to the middle class.” Why, then, has he not tackled this issue head-on, giving time estimations, and making realistic promises? There is only so far that the message to American citizens to keep on “hoping” and “dreaming”, can go, when people struggle to get by on a day-to-day basis.

It is true that the US economy is mending, yet, people who live below the poverty line in the US, which *The Economist* reported this week to be 15% of Americans, or 46.2 million people, will not see it like this. Though Obama will surely do more to meliorate the standard of living than Romney, who infamously said last month that he was not “concerned about the very poor”, people living below the poverty line sometimes have very few, if any, qualifications, and rarely have the chance to have stable incomes.

Therefore, Obama's domestic policies should not just be about “mending” the economy. They should focus upon increasing anti-poverty programmes, such as the provision of soup kitchens and other grass-roots level aid. Furthermore, and perhaps in the long run, there should be a unified effort by both US political parties to re-steer the lives of many marginalised individuals in the US, through educational programmes and more re-integration programmes for ex-prisoners.

To do this, Obama will have to cosy up to the Republicans in Congress, as House Republicans have been against Obama's health care reform since the start, and have called for anti-poverty programmes to take most of the strain when it comes to the deep cuts made to federal spending; overwhelming Republican support of Paul Ryan's budget calling for the aforementioned exemplifies this well.

Tackling poverty rates, therefore will only be achieved with a unified, cross- political party effort to provide more anti-

poverty programmes. This will be an absolute necessity if the US wants to truly recover economically. The fact that 41% of American women who failed to complete high school, are single parents and are on low-income jobs, illustrates that the better educated a person is, the higher their prospects are of having a stable family structure and a well-paid job.

Hopefully, Obama will realise that his messages of “hope” will only ring true with a firm, united front against poverty in the US; he has four years to turn the tide.