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**The 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections: What Caribbean American Voters Need to Know**

By: Melissa Noel

The historic two-term presidency of America’s first Black President, Barack Obama will soon come to an end. In 2016 Americans will head to the polls to elect the next president of the United States. Among the potential voters are [six million](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/caribbean-immigrants-united-states) Caribbean Americans, including those of Caribbean descent.

As the campaign trail moves along, here are five things that Caribbean Americans Need to Know

**1. Keep up with Campaigns:** This may seem obvious, but it’s easy to lose track. There are currently fifteen (15) Republicans and five Democrats in the race for president and more are expected. With so much information out there it can be hard to put things into perspective, but there are a number of resources that can help. Websites like [Ballotpedia](http://ballotpedia.org/Presidential_election,_2016) offer insight on Democrats and Republicans that are running for president, along with individual profiles for each prospective candidate. There is also an interactive guide that outlines how each state has voted in past elections.

Other good resources that will keep Caribbean Americans on top of 2016’s presidential election developments include the interactive tracker [Who Is Running for President](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/2016-presidential-candidates.html) from the **New York Times** and [Project Vote Smart](http://votesmart.org) among others.

2. **Focus on the Track Record:** In addition to keeping up with campaigns in general, knowing the specifics of each candidate’s platforms and the key changes they would like to make in the country is vital. Use the resources outlined in the first point and regularly follow the news and debates to answer critical questions. Learn how presidential hopefuls voted in the past versus what they say on the campaign trail.

Caribbean Americans should know the stance of candidates on these key issues: education, budget, policing, immigration, healthcare and foreign policy.

3.  **Pay Special Attention to Immigration Reform:** Depending on whose elected in 2016, the rights of immigrants can be secured or curtailed in ways that can impact the physical migration of Caribbean people to the United States. Other areas that would be impacted include education, entrepreneurship and innovation.

Caribbean immigrants make up more than half of the [3.8 million](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/04/09/a-rising-share-of-the-u-s-black-population-is-foreign-born/) Black migrants living in the United States, which accounts for nine percent of the foreign born population. It’s crucial for Caribbean Americans to know the specifics of candidates’ immigration plan.

Know the candidates’ position on passing a federal [DREAM Act](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/DREAM-Act-WhiteHouse-FactSheet.pdf) and expanding Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals, or [DACA](http://www.immigrationequality.org/get-legal-help/our-legal-resources/path-to-status-in-the-u-s/daca-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals/).

**4. Know US-Caribbean relations:** Current U.S. policy toward the Caribbean region is focused on four main priorities. These include promoting economic and social opportunity, ensuring citizen security, strengthening effective democratic institutions and securing a clean energy future.

Under the Obama administration, the U.S. reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba after more than five decades, the White House Caribbean Energy Security Summit took place and the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative (CESI) launched. The president also made a historic trip to Jamaica in April to meet with Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller and leaders from other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations, which marked what seemed to be an awakened interest in the Caribbean region.

These priorities may shift or change under a new administration, so become familiar with current administration’s policy toward the Caribbean and how 2016 presidential candidates may want to expand initiatives or change them.

5. **Follow What’s Happening Locally:** Along with voting in national elections, it is critical to pay attention to Congressional, Gubernatorial and Mayoral races that will take place in 2016. Along with the presidential race, there are 34 senate seats as well as 435 house seats and 12 state governorships are up for election. It’s important to be well informed about these candidates, especially in states where there are large Caribbean American populations such as New York, Florida and the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. The elected officials in these positions make decisions on how tax dollars are spent on important issues from education to infrastructure.

Don’t get overwhelmed during the 2016 presidential campaign. Use these guidelines to stay informed and up-to-date in order to make an informed decision come Election Day.

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------*About the Author: Melissa Noel is an award winning freelance multimedia journalist covering culture, race, health and the Caribbean Diaspora. Her work has been featured on NBC News, Voices of NY, TheGrio.com, The Caribbean Television Network and in Ebony Magazine among others. Follow her on Twitter@noelknowswell*