



The Olympic hurdles facing Mitt Romney in London

Olympics, tax avoidance and the politics of austerity could trip up the Republican hopeful on his UK visit

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REPUBLICAN nominee Mitt Romney arrives in London this week for the Olympics opening ceremony with a recent poll of polls putting him within a whisker of Barack Obama in this autumn's presidential election. The survey puts Obama on 46 per cent and Romney on 44.8 per cent.

Romney hopes his overseas jaunt, which also takes him to Poland and Israel, will help him look more statesmanlike. On foreign policy he currently trails Obama by 40 to 47 per cent according to a recent [CBS/New York Times opinion poll](#).

But the trip is fraught with political challenges. While the most tricky of these will undoubtedly be Israel, Romney faces a number of political hurdles in London.

OLYMPICS

Mitt Romney is likely to take the opportunity of a major TV interview in London to talk about his role in saving the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics from a bribery scandal and funding shortfall, [Fox News](#) reports. However, there is one Olympic connection Romney might be less forthcoming about. His wife Ann owns a horse that will be competing in the Olympic dressage and has been used by the Romneys' critics to paint them as wealthy and out-of touch.

AUSTERITY

The unpopularity of austerity measures in Britain "could prove thorny for Romney", according to the First Read political blog on [MSNBC](#). Romney "has advocated similar deep and broad spending cuts in US government spending to the ones sought by Cameron's Conservative government".

TAX AVOIDANCE

Romney arrives in Britain amid a campaign to stop tax avoidance. Only today, the British government announced plans to 'name and shame' clients of schemes which shelter earnings in offshore tax havens.

This makes it more likely that a row over Romney's own tax affairs - he has refused to release his tax returns in full - will follow him to the UK.

Andrew Sullivan highlighted Romney's problem with tax in [The Sunday Times](#) yesterday: "Romney is actually quite in-your-face about unregulated capitalism, aggressive tax avoidance and burying money in places such as Bermuda, Switzerland and the Cayman Islands."

COMPARISONS WITH OBAMA

President Barack Obama's popularity overseas was already evident when he toured Europe prior to his successful 2008 White House campaign. As political blog [The Hill](#) points out, "Romney will face inevitable comparisons with Obama, whose overseas trip to seven countries during the 2008 campaign culminated with a speech to an audience of 200,000 at the Victory Column in Berlin".

FOREIGN POLICY

"It would seem to me that the wise course is not to talk about foreign policy at all," Christopher Preble, the vice president for defence and foreign policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute, tells [The Hill](#). "It doesn't play either to his strengths or to what the public wants to hear. I am genuinely puzzled by his decision to make this trip." Romney has said he intends use this foreign tour "to listen and to learn".

... AND A HURDLE FOR CAMERON

The Prime Minister is hosting a Number Ten photo opportunity for Romney because, a

senior Whitehall official tells [The Sun](#), "we believe there's now a more than 50/50 chance" of Romney beating Obama in the November election. The paper suggests that Cameron risks a "diplomatic spat" with Barack Obama by inviting his opponent to Downing Street - especially given that First Lady Michelle Obama will also be in London for the Olympic opening ceremony. However, an aide assured the paper the president would not be upset. •