

AMERICAN ELECTION 2012: Obama Shines Again!



President Obama's success

EDITORIAL DESK, International Herald Tribune

President Obama's dramatic re-election victory was not a sign that a fractured nation had finally come together on Election Day. But it was a strong endorsement of economic policies that stress job growth, health care reform, tax increases and balanced deficit reduction -- and of moderate policies on immigration, abortion and same-sex marriage. It was a repudiation of Reagan-era bromides about tax-cutting and trickle-down economics, and of the politics of fear, intolerance and disinformation.

The president's victory depended heavily on Midwestern Rust Belt states like Ohio, where the bailout of the auto industry -- which Mr. Obama engineered and Mr. Romney opposed -- proved widely popular for the simple reason that it worked.

More broadly, Midwestern voters seemed to endorse the president's argument that the government has a significant role in creating private-sector jobs and boosting the economy. They rejected Mr. Romney's position that Washington should simply stay out of such matters and let the free market work its will.

The Republicans' last-ditch attempt to steal away Pennsylvania by stressing unemployment was a failure there and elsewhere. Voters who said unemployment was a major issue voted mainly for Mr. Obama.

Mr. Romney, it turns out, made a fatal decision during the primaries to endorse a hard line on immigration, which earned him a resounding rejection by Latinos. By adopting a callous position that illegal immigrants could be coerced into "self-deportation," and by praising Arizona's cruel immigration law, Mr. Romney made his road in Florida and several other crucial states much harder. Only one-third of voters said illegal immigrants should all be deported, while two-thirds endorsed some path to legal residency and citizenship. The Republican approach, if unchanged, will cost them dearly in the future.

Still, Mr. Obama's victory did not show a united country. Richer Americans supported Mr. Romney, while poorer Americans tended to vote for Mr. Obama. There also remained clear divisions among voters by gender, age, race and religion.

African-Americans and Hispanics overwhelmingly supported Mr. Obama. White men voted for Mr. Romney; he won among those who said they opposed gay marriage, wanted to outlaw abortion, or favored mass deportation of illegal immigrants. None of those are majority positions in this country anymore.

Mr. Romney's strategy of blaming Mr. Obama for just about everything, while serenely assuring Americans he had a plan to cut the deficit without raising taxes or making major cuts in Medicare, simply did not work.

A solid majority of voters said President George W. Bush was to blame for the state of the economy rather than Mr. Obama. And voters showed more subtlety in their economic analysis than Mr. Romney probably expected. Those who thought the housing market and unemployment were the nation's biggest problems said they voted for Mr. Obama. Those most concerned about taxes voted heavily for Mr. Romney.

Significantly, 60 percent of voters said taxes should be raised either on the rich or on everyone. Only 35 percent said they should not be raised at all; that group, naturally, went heavily for Mr. Romney. The polling made it clear that Americans were unhappy with the economic status quo, and substantial numbers of voters said the economy was getting worse. But Mr. Romney did not seem to persuade voters that the deficit was a crushing problem. Only 1 in 10 voters said the deficit was the most important issue facing the country.

Republicans had to be disappointed in the results of their unrelenting assault on Mr. Obama's health care reform law. Only around a quarter of Americans said it should be repealed in its entirety.

People who were comfortable with the rightward slide of the Republican Party (as measured by their comfort with the Tea Party) voted heavily for Mr. Romney.

But Christopher Murphy's victory over Linda McMahon in the Senate race in Connecticut, Joe Donnelly's defeat of Richard Mourdock in Indiana's Senate race and Claire McCaskill's defeat of Todd Akin in the Missouri Senate race showed the price the Republicans are paying for nominating fringe candidates in their primaries.

The polls were heartening in that they indicated that a solid majority of Americans believe abortion should be legal, and that half of Americans now say their states should recognize marriages between same-sex couples.

That the race came down to a relatively small number of voters in a relatively small number of states did not speak well for a national election apparatus that is so dependent on badly engineered and badly managed voting systems around the country. The delays and breakdowns in voting machines were inexcusable.

Courtesy: International Herald Tribune

The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

The Obama realignment

ROSS DOUTHAT

WHEN you do it once, it's just a victory. When you do it twice, it's a realignment.

The coalition that Barack Obama put together to win the presidency handily in 2008 looked a lot like the emerging Democratic majority that optimistic liberals had been discerning on the political horizon since the 1990s. It was the late George McGovern's losing coalition from 1972 finally come of age: Young voters, the unmarried, African-Americans, Hispanics, the liberal professional class -- and then more than enough of the party's old blue collar base to hold the Rust Belt for the Democrats.

But 2008 was also a unique political moment, when George W. Bush's immense unpopularity was compounded by a financial collapse, and when the possibility of electing the country's first black president fired the imagination of the nation (and the nation's press corps). So it was still possible to regard the Obama majority of '08 as more flukish than transformative -- or at the

fact that his party didn't particularly want to be reinvented, preferring to believe that the rhetoric and positioning of 1980 and 1984 could win again in the America of 2012.

You could see this belief at work in the confidence with which many conservatives insisted that the Obama presidency was not only embattled but self-evidently disastrous, in the way so many voices on the right sought to raise the ideological stakes at every opportunity, in the widespread conviction that the starker conservatives made the choice between left and right, the more votes they would win.

You could also see this conviction shaping the punditry and predictions that issued from conservatives in the days leading up to this election. It was remarkable how many analysts not normally known for their boosterism (I'm thinking of Michael Barone and George Will in particular) were willing to predict that Romney would not only win but win sweepingly, capturing states that haven't gone Republican since Reagan. But even less starry-eyed conservatives -- like, well, myself -- were willing to embrace models of the



Tuesday's result ratifies much of the leftward shift in public policy that President Obama achieved during his first term. It paves the way for the White House to raise at least some of the tax revenue required to pay for a more activist government and it means that the Republicans let a golden chance to claim a governing coalition of their own slip away.

very least, to see it as a fragile thing, easily shattered by poor choices and adverse developments.

There were plenty of both during the president's first term. The Obama White House underestimated the depth of the recession, it overreached politically on the health care bill and the failed push for cap and trade and it reaped a backlash at the polls in 2010. The Republican Party, left for dead after 2008, revived itself, and at many points across the 2012 campaign season Obama's majority coalition looked vulnerable. Its policy victories seemed to teeter on the edge.

And the Obama coalition was vulnerable. I believed that at the beginning of the campaign season; I believed it in mid-October, when I thought Mitt Romney might just pull the election out; and I believe it even now that the president has won a narrow (in the popular vote) but electorally decisive victory.

But the lesson of the election is that the Obama coalition was truly vulnerable only to a Republican Party that took Obama seriously as an opponent -- that understood how his majority had been built, why voters had joined it and why the conservative majority of the Reagan and Bush eras had unraveled.

Such understanding eluded the Republicans this year. In part, that failure can be blamed on their standard-bearer, Mitt Romney, who mostly ran as a kind of vanilla Republican instead of showing the imagination necessary to reinvent his party for a new era. Romney's final month of campaigning was nearly flawless, though.

His debate performances were the best by any Republican since Reagan and he will go down in history as one of the few losing challengers to claim a late lead in the polls. A weak nominee in many ways, he was ultimately defeated less by his own limitations as a leader, and more by the

electorate that overstated the Republican base of support and downplayed the Democrats' mounting demographic advantage.

Those models were wrong about 2012, and they aren't likely to be right about 2016 or 2020. Republicans can console themselves that they came close in the popular vote. They can look ahead to a favorable Senate map in 2014 and they do still have their House majority to fall back on.

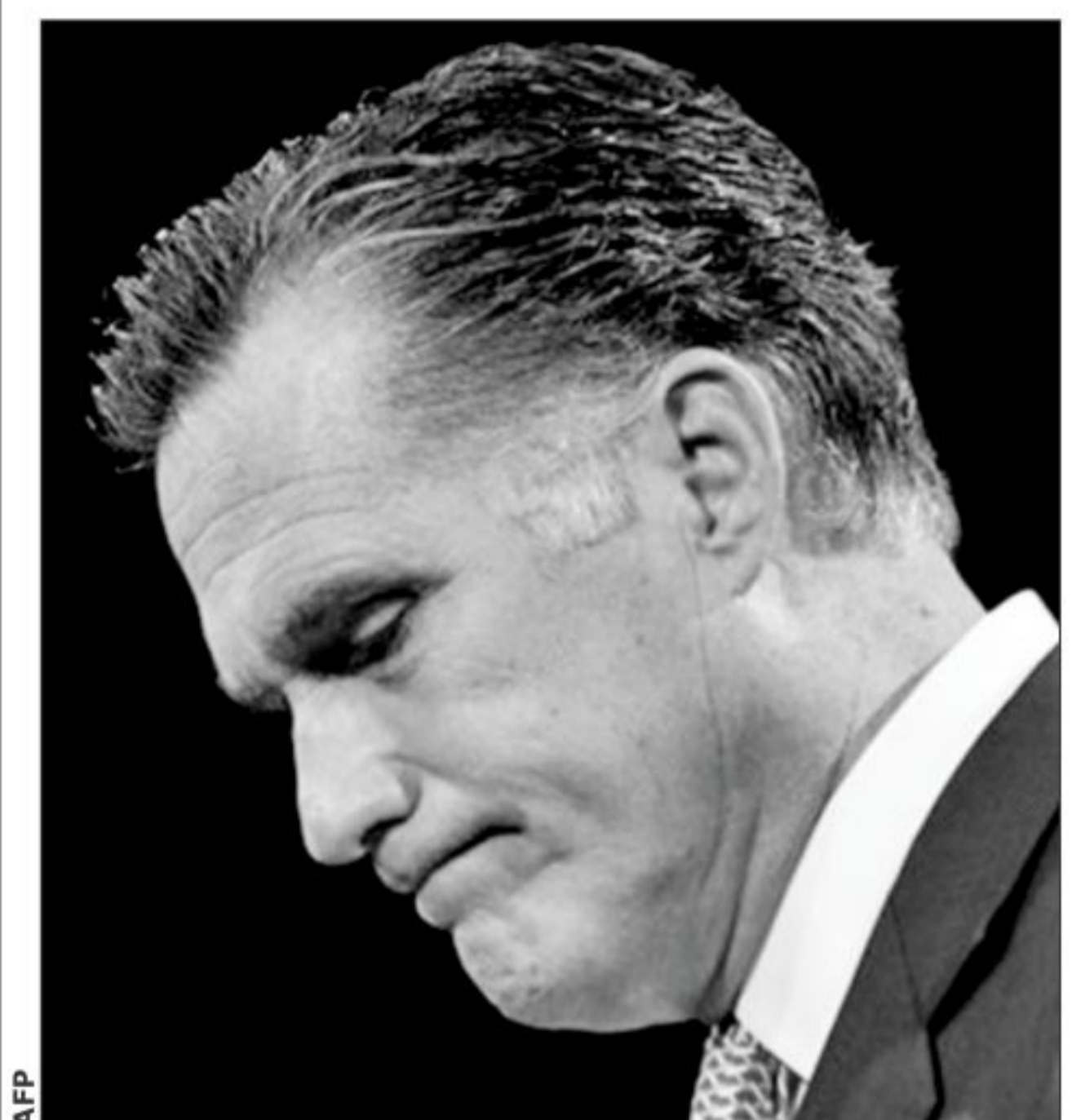
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In this sense, just as Reagan Republicanism dominated the 1980s even though the Democrats controlled the House, our own era now clearly belongs to the Obama Democrats even though John Boehner is still speaker of the House.

That era will not last forever; it may not even last more than another four years. The current Democratic majority has its share of internal contradictions, and as it expands demographically it will become vulnerable to attack on many fronts. Parties are more adaptable than they seem in their moments of defeat, and there will come a day when a Republican presidential candidate will succeed where Mitt Romney just failed.

But getting there requires that conservatives face reality: The age of Reagan is officially over, and the Obama majority is the only majority we have.

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Why Romney's bid fell short

JACKIE KUCINICH and PAUL SINGER

THROUGHOUT the election season, President Obama looked vulnerable. The unemployment rate hung above 8%, the White House and Congress had been unable to resolve the nation's looming fiscal crisis, and the nation seemed weary of big government proposals such as the Obama-backed health care law and stimulus spending.

Mitt Romney seemed to be in good position to capitalize -- a successful businessman, a Republican who was elected governor of a Democratic state, a man not tarred by scandal or extreme rhetoric.

And yet, after six years of running for the White House, he fell short.

While books will be written about how the campaign failed to reach the summit, a handful of hurdles stand out.

The economy

The nascent signs of a recovering economy seemed to have given the public just enough confidence in Obama to give him a second term, and deny Romney his chance to try his plan. Several key swing states including Ohio, Virginia, Iowa and Colorado all have seen their unemployment numbers drop below the national average; nationwide, the jobs report released at the beginning of October showed unemployment dropping below 8% for the first time in four years, stealing a key line from Romney's standard stump speech.

Several Republican governors -- such as John Kasich in Ohio, where the unemployment rate has dropped to 7% -- argued that the progress was the result of state-level decisions, not presidential action. But ultimately it appears Romney failed to convince enough voters that the recovery was stalled.

Romney's wealth

Romney is not the first multi-millionaire to run for the White House, and his wealth alone may not have been a fatal flaw. After all, it's possible Democratic Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts is richer than Romney, and his wealth was not a major factor in his defeat by George W. Bush in 2004.

But Romney kept saying things that reinforced a distance from the average American. During an interview with CNN after winning the Florida primary in February, he said he is "not concerned about the very poor. We have a safety net there. If it needs repair, I'll fix it."

A videotape surfaced of Romney saying at a May fundraiser that 47% of Americans were "victims" who paid no taxes, expected government handouts and would vote for Obama regardless.

And he steadfastly refused to release his tax returns for past years, providing only summaries that raised as many questions as they did answers.

The net result is that Romney gave Democrats plenty of material to paint him as an out-of-touch rich guy.

Women

Despite ad campaigns, targeted messages and polls that showed women were warming to Romney in the final days, he still lost the female vote to Obama, 55% to 43%, according to exit polls.

The loss wasn't entirely his fault. Republican Senate candidate Todd Akin in Missouri discussed how women's bodies could prevent pregnancies in cases of "legitimate rape," launching a firestorm of protest. A few months later, Indiana Senate candidate Richard Mourdock, for whom Romney had just released an endorsement ad, said he opposed abortion even in cases of rape because God intended those pregnancies.

Romney tried to distance himself from both remarks, but they gave Democrats plenty of ammunition to argue that Republicans just don't like women.

"Etch-a-Sketch"

As Romney was closing in on the GOP nomination in March by highlighting his conservative credentials, adviser Eric Fehrstrom said on CNN that the themes of the general election campaign may be different. "It's almost like an Etch-a-Sketch," Fehrstrom said. "You can kind of shake it up, and we start all over again."

The remark itself may have had little impact, but it underscored a lingering weakness in Romney that Democrats (and his Republican primary opponents) exploited at every turn -- that his positions on such issues as abortion, health care and climate change have shifted over the years. Conservatives ultimately embraced him despite his background as a moderate governor of a New England state, but it may have left doubts among voters about exactly where he stands.

Hispanics

In the nation's fastest growing demographic, Romney was crushed, 69% to 29% the exit polls showed, a performance that was worse than of Sen. John McCain four years earlier. This would seem to pose long-term concerns for Republicans who want to make inroads with Hispanic voters.

Courtesy: USA Today