

How Obama prevailed

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campaign against Mitt Romney.

After all the discussion of Obama's play for women — and his effort to make Romney appear extreme on women's issues — the president won among female voters by 12 points. He took 55 percent of the demographic, compared with 43 percent for Romney — not far off from 2008, when he won women by 13 points.

In particular, the president won big among unmar- ried women, who backed the president by a whopping 38 points, 68 percent to 30 percent.

But unlike 2008, when Obama won men by one percentage point, the president lost men to Romney this year. He took 45 percent of their vote, compared with 52 percent for Romney, according to the exit polls.

Obama prevailed among the two minority groups that supported him in large numbers in 2008: Latinos and African Americans.

Ninety-three percent of African-American voters backed Obama, while just 6 percent who backed Romney. Turnout among the demographic remained steady at 13 percent of the overall electorate.

Obama's support increased with Hispanic voters: he won 69 percent of the demographic, compared with 29 percent for Romney. That 40-point deficit is slightly higher than his 36-point victory among Hispanic voters in 2008.

And the president saw higher backing among Asian voters, who sided with him by a 49-point margin, 74 percent to 25 percent. The margin was 27 points in 2008.

Although he again lost Protestant voters to his GOP opponent, Obama held onto his advantages among Catholic and Jewish voters. He won 70 percent of the Jewish vote, down from 78 percent in 2008, and he won Catholic voters 50 percent to 47 percent. Romney carried

Protestant voters by a 13-point margin, 56 percent to 43 percent.

While Obama's previously huge margin among 18 to 29-year-olds dropped slightly — he won the age group by 34 points in 2008, compared with 24 points this year — the overall turnout was up slightly among young voters, certainly a factor in his victory.

Like McCain, Romney won older voters: he took 51 percent of 45- to 64-year-olds and 55 percent of voters 65 and older.

On the jobs front, Obama benefited from voters' slightly improved outlook about the direction of the country and the economy. Four in 10 voters said the economy is getting better, a group Obama won with 88 percent, and voters were roughly even split on the direction of the country: 52 percent of those surveyed said the country is still on the wrong track, while 46 percent said it's headed in the right direction.

The economy was still king at the polls: 59 percent of voters named it, and unemployment in particular, as their top issue. Of those voters, 51 percent of them chose Romney, compared with 47 percent for Obama. Romney also got high marks from voters on his proposed handling of the federal deficit.

Obama's issue strengths, on the other hand, came on foreign policy and health care — although both issues that fell much lower on voters' priority lists this year. Eighteen percent of voters said health care was their top issue, and 5 percent chose foreign policy.

But despite Romney's slight advantage on the economy, Obama's team proved able to portray Romney as someone who aims to help just the wealthy: exit polls showed that more than half of voters think the former Massachusetts governor's policies would favour the rich, compared with 34

Romney won the suburbs by 2 points, 50 percent to 48 percent, and rural areas 60 percent to 38 percent.

National exit polling was conducted by the Associated Press and the television networks at about 350 polling places around the country, surveying about 60,000 voters.

More voters in the swing states of Florida, New

York and Pennsylvania split their votes between Romney and Obama.

His wife Ann invoked their love story as high school sweethearts to show the human side of a man whose ram-rod straight bearing is lampooned as too stiff, whose hair was never even slightly mussed.

The couple's squeaky-clean and loving family life -- they have been married 43 years and have five sons and 18 grandchildren -- was thought to be a clear vote-winner.

But after losing the 2008 nomination to McCain, he distanced himself from his crowning gubernatorial achievement, as the program served as a model for the nationwide plan created by Obama in 2010, which most Republicans despise.

That fit seamlessly into the narrative perpetuated by White House attack ads -- that Romney has undertaken a wholesale reversal of many positions for political gain.

Initially "pro-choice," Romney switched to become anti-abortion after being elected governor. He made a similar about-face on gay rights.

He raised eyebrows among conservatives when he said in early October that he could not foresee supporting any new law restricting women's rights to abortion, but rowed back the next day, pledging to be a "pro-life" president.

Romney faced opprobrium for comments that surfaced in August in a video that showed him disparaging "47 percent" of voters as government-beholden victims.

It was there in 1968 that tragedy struck. Romney had been driving members of the Mormon church when another car slammed into their Citroen. A passenger was killed and Romney himself nearly died.

But he recovered and returned to the United States and to Ann, whom he married months later.

As a rising star with Harvard degrees in law and business, he joined Bain & Company in 1977, where he impressed the chief executive that in 1984 he was entrusted with heading the new venture capital arm, Bain Capital.

Romney ran the firm for 15 years, earning spectacular wealth and laying the groundwork for a political career that made him a decisive win for Obama.

Economy tops

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to make the case that their respective plans were the best fix for an ailing economy buffeted by high unemployment, anemic home sales and high foreclosure rates.

"It's an election in a year when the economy is in a very slow, grinding recovery, so it's sort of between, right? It's neither the kind of booming recovery that would have given

Obama an easy win nor the kind of really ugly jobs picture that we had a year ago," said CNN contributor and New York Times columnist Ross Douthat.

Sixty percent of those polled by CNN as they finished voting listed the economy as the most important issue. Those exit polls provide a window into voters' thoughts in some of the most-closely watched states of Florida, Virginia, Ohio and New Hampshire.

Of those voters who were asked about the biggest economic problem facing "people like you," 38% said it was unemployment, 37% said rising prices, 14% said taxes and 8% said it was the housing market.

Of those who voted Tuesday, 25% said they were doing better today compared with four years ago, 32% said they were doing worse and 42% said they were doing about the same.

The last government unemployment figures before Election Day showed more of the incremental economic growth that Obama heralds as continued recovery and Romney labels insufficient.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the economy added 171,000 jobs last month and the unemployment rate rose to 7.9%, up from 7.8% in September after being above 8% since February 2009 -- the month after Obama took office.

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By early yesterday in the East, Democrats had knocked off 12 GOP House members — including 10 members of the huge tea party-backed House GOP freshman class of 2010. Republican losers included four incumbents from Illinois, two each from New Hampshire and New York, and one apiece from Florida, Maryland, Minnesota and Texas.

Republicans nearly matched that, picking up nine previously Democratic seats. Their candidates defeated one Democratic incumbent apiece in Kentucky, New York, North Carolina and Pennsylvania and picked up an open seat in each of Arkansas, California, Indiana, North Carolina, and Oklahoma currently held by Democrats who retired or ran for another office.

Republicans swept back control of the House of Representatives in mid-term elections in 2010 after a backlash to President Barack Obama's signature health care reforms.

They have since used their majority in the lower House and their ability to delay legislation in the Senate to thwart the White House incumbent's plans.

With a dangerous combination of expiring tax breaks and federal spending cuts looming, the US economy could plunge over its so-called "fiscal cliff" in January and Congress will take center stage after Tuesday's votes are counted.

All new legislation must be passed in identical form by both the Senate and the House before it is signed into law by the president, a fact Obama knows all too well, blaming Republican lawmakers for blocking his agenda.

The fiscal cliff that will dominate discussions in Congress between now and Christmas is a major threat to the economy after a protracted but possibly reckless compromise was agreed last year between Democrats and Republicans.

If Congress fails to agree on how to cut spending over the medium term, the current deal would force deep, immediate spending cuts on the government from January 1, while raising taxes.

If no new plan emerges, the existing agreement could cut up to four percent from US gross domestic product, according to the International Monetary Fund, likely tipping the United States back into recession.

Democrats currently control 53 seats in the 100-seat chamber.

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Hope revived

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The path to victory for Romney narrowed as the night wore along, with Obama winning at least 303 electoral votes.

Accused by Romney throughout the campaign of taking a partisan tone, Obama vowed to reach out to Republicans in his new, four-year term.

"You voted for action, not politics as usual," Obama said, calling for compromise and pledging to work with leaders of both parties to reduce the deficit, to reform the tax code and immigration laws, and to cut dependence on foreign oil.

Health care and the deficit also ranked high with voters.

That, too, was no surprise.

The US Supreme Court's narrow upholding of the health care reform law this summer gave Obama and Democrats a morale boost and riled Republicans who vowed to repeal the law "lock, stock and barrel." The two presidential candidates' rival proposals to trim the nation's debt provided for some of the liveliest exchanges during the presidential debates.

In the battleground state of Florida, which has a large elderly population, 49% of voters said Obama would better handle Medicare, while 47% gave the nod to Romney.

Meanwhile, 29% of those polled said they want someone who has a vision for the future and a nearly identical number, 27%, want someone who shares their values; 21% say the top quality they were looking for is whether a candidate cares about people like them, while 18% want a strong leader.

Meanwhile, political experts say one important indicator would be the question of ethnicity and how the white vs the nonwhite population splits.

In the 2008 election, 74% of the electorate was white. That percentage has declined recently because of the growth in the Hispanic and voting African-American population.

The evening was not without the drama that has come to mark so many recent elections: For more than 90 minutes after the networks projected Obama as the winner, Romney held off calling him to concede.

And as the president waited to declare victory in Chicago, Romney's aides

were prepared to head to the airport, suitcases packed, potentially to contest several close results.

But as it became increasingly clear that no amount of contesting would bring him victory, he called Obama to concede shortly before

Dhaka seeks Delhi's help in dredging

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Pending a solution to sharing of the waters of common rivers including the Teesta, Bangladesh yesterday sought India's help for dredging and re-excavating those rivers to ensure irrigation in the lower riparian country.

Raising the issue during her talks with Indian Water Resources Minister Harish Rawat here, visiting Agriculture Minister of Bangladesh Matia Chowdhury cited the example of Japanese assistance for Bangladesh in building irrigation facilities. She mentioned that India too can chip in with its expertise in the area in a similar manner.

Talking to newsmen, she said the issue of the proposed Teesta water-sharing deal came up for discussion in the meeting. The Indian minister said his government was continuing its efforts to evolve a consensus on the issue.

"While we want India to give due importance to a deal on sharing of Teesta waters, efforts should also be made to augment availability of water for irrigation in the common rivers flowing in the Bangladesh territory," noted Matia.

Responding to a question on the flurry of visits by an array of Bangladeshi leaders to India in recent months, she welcomed the trend. "It's a global village we are living in and it is but natural that there will be more and more interaction even between people who used to shun each other."

Indian Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar hosted a lunch for Matia.

The two ministers discussed Indian expertise for growing water-resistant crops in Bangladesh and increasing the number of scholarships for Bangladeshi agricultural scientists.

Later, noted Indian agricultural scientist Dr M S Swaminathan met the Bangladeshi minister at a hotel and discussed potential areas of cooperation between the two countries in agriculture and irrigation.

Late on Tuesday night, Indian National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon had a meeting with Matia. They discussed security cooperation between India and Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, India and Pakistan face the common problem of extremism and the neighbouring countries should cooperate with each other to end this, she observed.

It is widely forgotten, but the most ambitious "transformational" speech Obama made in his first term was delivered three months after taking office, in Prague. The new president described a future for the world free of nuclear arms, and pledged that America, one of the world's two leading nuclear

Obama carried four years ago. But Obama won Michigan, the state where Romney was born, and Minnesota, a pair of states that Republican groups had spent millions trying to make competitive.

Americans delivered a final judgment on a long and bitter campaign that drew so many people to the polls that several key states extended voting for hours. In Virginia and Florida, long lines stretched from polling places.

As he delivered his brief concession speech yesterday, Romney did not directly address the challenges facing Republicans. His advisers said his second failed quest for the White House would be his last, with his running mate, Representative Paul D Ryan of Wisconsin, standing as one of the leaders of the party.

"We have given our all to this campaign," said Romney, stoic and gracious in his remarks. "So wish that I had been able to fulfil your hopes to lead this country in a different direction."

The results were more a matter of voters giving Obama more time than a second chance. Through most of the year slight majorities of voters had told pollsters that they believed his policies would improve the economy if they could stay in place into the future.

Compiled from reports of The New York Times, The Washington Post, AFP and Reuters; Infographics: NYT

Another chance

powers, would play its part in moving in that direction. The next year, he took the first step towards delivering on that promise, signing the New Start treaty with the then Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, which reduced both countries' nuclear stockpiles by a third, to a ceiling of 1,550 deployed strategic warheads. But the huge political effort of pushing the deal through a reluctant Senate exhausted the administration's disarmament effort for the first term.

All the signs from the White House suggest Obama still believes the world's nuclear powers will have to disarm much further if they are to continue to expect the nuclear have-nots to accept the status quo.

There will also be a new push to engage the Russians in a new treaty.

Obama needs to settle the US relationship with Moscow to help sustain his "pivot to Asia" intended to contain a rising, more assertive China, which is beginning to challenge America's regional allies over territory. He will continue to bolster those alliances, but he has little control over the driving force in the region, China's economic growth and the political uncertainty that comes with it. The coming party congress in Beijing will usher in a new generation of Chinese leaders who are far more nationalist than their predecessors and who may be tempted to look for confrontation abroad as a distraction if growth rates start to sag.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the US alliance with Israel gives Obama a powerful lever he can pull to influence the course of events but he has so far balked at using it. In his second world be transformational speech on foreign policy, made in Cairo in June 2009, Obama pledged to change the US role in the Middle East, and Arabs took that to mean more American pressure on Israel to accept a peace deal. However, in a stand-off with Netanyahu over Israeli West Bank settlements later the same year, Obama blinked, mindful of the imperatives of re-election in a strongly pro-Israel country.

With that now out of the way, the question is whether the president has the stamina to try again.

The great attraction of foreign affairs for a second-term president is that he does not have to deal with Congress. The downside is that he has to find partners prepared to take the long view.