

Don't Blame Romney if Obama Wins

With the election less than two months away, there is [growing dissent in some quarters of the Republican Party](#) as it is becoming clear that President Obama is now the slight, but clear, frontrunner in this election. Republican leaders and activists are growing increasingly upset as an election that -- given the lackluster pace of economic recovery, the fervor of anti-Obama sentiment and, until recently, the relative lack of enthusiasm in the Democratic base and the resounding defeat the Republicans handed the Democrats in 2010 -- should have been a relatively easy win for the Republican candidate is now looking like a likely win for Obama. Right-wing pundit Laura Ingraham's comment "this is a gimme election, or at least it should be," sums up this sentiment.

Two years ago, most Republicans probably thought this presidential election was going to look a lot like 1980 when a lackluster Democratic president was soundly defeated in a reelection bid. Instead, it is shaping up to look more like 1996 when, despite, or perhaps because of, losing seats in the midterm election, the Democrat recovered and got reelected. This analogy was suggested by none other than Bill Clinton, who was reelected in 1996, during his recent speech at the Democratic convention. The two cases are not the same, as Clinton had a much stronger economy in 1996, but there are parallels.

If Romney loses, there will be lots of explanations and excuses offered by people associated with the Republican Party. Already, Romney is being characterized by some as a lackluster candidate who is not able to run a strong and compelling campaign against Obama. William Kristol's observation that "when a challenger merely appeals to disappointment with the incumbent and tries to reassure voters he's not too bad an alternative, that isn't generally a formula for victory," sums up this critique.

Romney's uninspired campaign will be only one of the targets by the right should Obama get reelected. Others will blame Romney for moving too close to the center or too far to the right, while others will chalk it up to circumstances particular to this election. There will, of course, be some truth to all these notions, but a big part of the problem the Republican Party faces is that they are contesting presidential elections, and indeed functioning as a party, with one hand tied behind their back.

Today's Republican Party, probably more than ever, is a party that only seeks votes from a relatively limited part of the electorate. In the upcoming election, the Republican Party can be expected to get less than 35 percent of the votes from Latinos, Jews, LGBT voters and African Americans. In most cases 35 percent is a high estimate as, for example, the African American vote for President Obama will likely exceed 95 percent and LGBT voters will probably remain in the neighborhood of 75 percent or more for the president.

Only being able to win substantial proportions of votes from white, and in 2012, largely male, white voters puts the Republican Party at several disadvantages. First, and most obviously, because of their weakness among other voters, Romney and his party probably need to win around 60-65 percent of the votes of white Christian straight voters. This is a relatively high bar

for the campaign, but this obstacle, while worse than in previous years, is not new.

The inability or unwillingness of the Republican Party to do anything about this except occasionally float the name of a female or Latino politician as a presidential candidate is creating serious problems for the party. For example, only a few election cycles ago, the New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado were solidly Republican, but because of growing Mexican-American populations who have little interest in voting for the Republican Party, those states are now considerably more in play. More seriously for the Republican Party, if demographic trends continue, Texas will, during one of the next few election cycles be a swing state because of its growing Mexican American population. These are demographic realities which the Republican Party can only address by decisively changing its ideology, not by running tougher or more dynamic candidates.

The Republicans not only draw their votes from a relatively narrow slice of the electorate, but Republican candidates, activists, operatives and strategists are also drawn from that same small segment of the electorate. While the Democrats have candidates representing all of America, the Republican candidates are still overwhelmingly white, Christian and straight. This necessarily limits the party's ability to recruit candidates and cedes much of the political talent to the Democrats. Obviously, not all Republican candidates, leaders and senior officials are straight white men, but the overwhelming majority are. A brief comparison of the crowds at the two recently completed conventions demonstrates this. The challenge the Republican Party faces is that to expand their appeal in anything other than a symbolic way, they will have to remake the party, not by seeking, for example, to win Latino votes by cursory appeals to Latinos as businesspeople or social conservatives, but by genuinely signaling that the party is inclusive, accepts America's diversity and has no room for bigots. This will not be easy, but will be necessary for the Republicans if they want to not just win elections, but to remain a truly national party.