



Talking Points: Last Night's Elections

Off year gubernatorial elections are decided by local issues and circumstances and are bad predictors of national trends.

- For example, in 2001, the Democrats won NJ and VA, when Bush was at the peak of his popularity and then lost seats in the Senate and House in 2002, and Bush was reelected in 2004.
- At the time, Matthew Dowd, Bush's political strategist said: "These races are divorced from national perspectives. They're decided completely on their own merits."

In Virginia and New Jersey we had strong candidates who were running against a significant historical tide and faced uphill battles from the start of this campaign.

- In New Jersey, the party in power in the White House hasn't won the Governor's office since 1985.
- The party in power in the White House hasn't won the Governor's office in Virginia since 1977.

Given historical trends it would have been historic - if not unprecedented - to win even one of these races.

And President Obama's approval ratings in New Jersey and Virginia are better today than the share of the vote he received in each state in 2008 (57 percent in VA and 61 percent in NJ, according to recent polls).

The real story for these elections is what happened in NY-23. The moderate GOP candidate was literally pushed out of the race by the extreme right wing of the party including Sarah Palin, Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck, creating a schism that allowed the Democrat to win a Republican seat, giving President Obama one more vote in the House for his agenda for change.

The GOP is purging its ranks and essentially hanging up a sign that says: "moderates need not apply."

This race turned out to be the worst of all possible worlds for Republicans. Not only did the Democrat Bill Owens win a seat Democrats have not held in more than 100 years -- what occurred in New York exposed a war within the Republican Party that will not soon end.

That war played itself out in Pennsylvania earlier this year when longtime Republican Senator Arlen Specter became a Democrat, and is playing itself out in House, Senate and Gubernatorial races nationwide.

The GOP is becoming more and more marginalized. In recent polls, GOP party identification is at its lowest level in 25 years.

And the Right Wing has become even more emboldened by their success in NY-23, which will lead to primary challenges and internal dissension that will dog the GOP well after today.



President Obama's Political Standing

Ten months into his term, President Obama is maintaining the level of support he earned in the 2008 election:

According to the most recent CNN/Opinion Research Corporation survey, President Obama's overall approval rating is 54 percent, one percent more than the 53 percent of the vote he won during the 2008 election.

- In the most recent ABC/Washington Post poll (10/15-18), President Obama's approval rating among Independents was a strong 55%.
- In the most recent Fox News poll (10/27-28), Obama held Independents 49-34.
- Other recent polling shows similar numbers for the President, with You Gov/Polimetrix (10/25-27) at 49-43, ARG (10/17-20) at 57-42 and CBS News (10/5-8) at 52-35.

In the 2008 election, President Obama won Independents 52-44.

The consistence of President Obama numbers are striking, given that since the beginning of the year, the number of self-identified Republicans has been shrinking while the number of Independents has risen. What that means is that Independents have grown more conservative with disaffected Republicans joining their ranks.

While the President's political standing has remained steady over the past year, the Republican brand has collapsed.

According to the Pollster.com National Party ID tracker, Republican Party ID has fallen from 26% in June to 21% today, while Independents have moved from 34% to 38%. Democrats have stayed steady, moving from 35% to 34%.