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Paper 2

The 2012 Presidential Election: An Analysis

In the 2012 presidential election, President Barack Obama defeated Governor Mitt Romney with 332 electoral votes to 206 electoral votes respectively. Overall, President Obama received over 4 million more votes than Governor Romney, with about a 51% share of the electorate compared to Romney's 48% according to CBS News. This result was unexpected by many pundits who believed the election would be closer, and President Obama surprised many by carrying all of the swing states.

In my analysis, I predicted that President Obama would win the election, correctly predicting that he would carry between 50.5% and 51.5% of the popular vote. However, I also predicted that President Obama would receive 290 electoral votes to Governor Romney's 248. I awarded Governor Romney both Virginia and Florida, which ended up swinging for President Obama. In addition to him leading slightly in polls, I believed that because of Governor Romney's strong debate performance in the first debate he would carry a larger percentage of independent voters. Additionally, in Virginia, I believed that comments President Obama made about the U.S. Navy could cost him support in a state that is largely built around Naval bases. With these assumptions, I incorrectly forecasted both Virginia and Florida.

For the battleground states that I selected, I said that Ohio would be the most important state in this election. When Ohio was projected by the networks, it was the

tipping point putting President Obama over the 270-needed electoral votes to win re-election. In exit polls taken in Ohio, 59% of voters approved of the auto bailout signed by President Obama.¹ In addition to this, as I mentioned in my previous paper, the unemployment rate has been lower in Ohio than the national average. This helped President Obama's support amongst working class voters, a key vote in the state of Ohio.

The second and third states that I said was key to President Obama's victory were the states of Michigan and Pennsylvania. President Obama carried these states comfortably, and for many of the same reasons that he carried Ohio. Ultimately they were not very contested, although Governor Romney did make a last-ditch effort in Pennsylvania realizing that his path to victory was narrowing. I believed they were important to President Obama's path to victory because I did not forecast him winning the states of Florida and Virginia. However, because he carried those state, Michigan and Pennsylvania were not as important as I believed them to be.

In examining the election outcome, it's understandable how President Obama was able to be re-elected by such decisive margins. Many pundits did not expect the 2012 electorate to replicate the 2008 electorate in terms of demographics, and they believed that 2008 was an outlier. Gallup polling expected the Black vote to drop down to 11% of the electorate, the female vote to drop to 52%, the Hispanic vote to represent 7% of the electorate, and the 18-29 year olds to drop a percentage.² In reality, the Black

¹ RealClearPolitics, "Exit Poll: Auto Bailout Popular In Ohio," Nov. 6, 2012, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2012/11/06/exit_poll_auto_bailout_popular_in_ohio.html>

² Gallup, "2012 U.S. Electorate Looks Like 2008," Oct. 26, 2012, <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/158399/2012-electorate-looks-like-2008.aspx>>

vote maintained at 13% of the electorate, the female vote maintained at 53%, the Hispanic vote rose to 10%, and the 18-29 year olds remained consistent compared to 2008.³ These slight variations in the demographics of the projected electorate and the actual electorate can account for the flawed polls released before the election that downplayed President Obama's eventual success. President Obama outperformed Governor Romney in each of these categories, and because of this polls leaned slightly to the right of what the electorate was.

There were a few other reasons Romney may have lost by such a large margin both electorally and in terms of the popular vote. Hurricane Sandy, which struck devastation to much of the Northeast Coast took away from the momentum he had gained following the debates. It allowed President Obama to appear presidential a week before the election was held.⁴ Most observers, including Republican Governor Chris Christie, praised the President's handling of the superstorm.

Second, the President's campaign had a far superior ground game which was crucial in this election. In Florida, the President's campaign had 102 local offices compared to 48 for Romney, and in Ohio, President Obama had 122 field offices compared to Romney's 40.⁵ The ground game is extremely important to turning out the vote, and it's reasonable to believe this is how Obama was able to win in close states like Florida and Virginia.

³ NY Times, "President Exit Polls," n.d., <<http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/results/president/exit-polls>>

⁴ CNN, "Analysis: Why Romney lost," Nov. 7, 2012, <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/07/politics/why-romney-lost/index.html>>

⁵ Business Insider, "Obama Camp Touts Ground Game," Oct. 23, 2012 <<http://www.businessinsider.com/obama-winning-ground-game-2012-10>>

Third, Mitt Romney was never able to get beyond the likability issue. He always seemed awkward and out of place during the campaign, and was unable to convince voters that he was ready for the job. I forecasted that Mitt Romney's personality would be a decisive factor in this election, and I think that it's clear that it was. President Obama had a 53% favorability rating in exit polls compared to Mitt Romney's 47%.⁶ This is somewhat ironic, considering Mitt Romney's accusation that there were 47% of Americans who would vote for President Obama "no matter what," a comment that painted Governor Romney as out-of-touch.

In addition to this, he was unable to pin the poor economy on the Obama Administration. Exit polls showed that George W. Bush takes more of the blame than President Bush does for the poor economy.⁷ Connecting President Obama to the poor economy was Mitt Romney's number one objective, and was the only area where he seemingly had an advantage in this election considering the demographic composition of this electorate. Because of his positions on various social issues that turned away women and minority voters, he had to make that ground up elsewhere, the best argument being the poor economy under Obama's watch. However, the Governor failed to do this.

Considering all of the factors in this election, it's very easy to understand how the President was able to win re-election so significantly in an election that was supposed to be close. The continued demographic shift in the American electorate, Mitt Romney's

⁶ Associated Press, "Exit poll: Hint of economic optimism boosted Obama," Nov. 7, 2012, <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/exit-poll-shows-economy-still-top-concern>>

⁷ Politico, "Exit Polls 2012: Voters blame George W. Bush," Nov. 6, 2012 <<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83422.html>>

likeability issue, and the failure of the Governor Romney to tie the poor economy to the President's hands all contributed to his loss. It's unclear which of these factors impacted the election the most, and it's also difficult to gauge the impact of Hurricane Sandy on the election. Ultimately, the President built a stronger coalition of voters and ran a superior campaign.