

Trends aren't pointing GOP's way

By Frank Askin

Conservative Republican spinmeisters attempting to make lemonade out of electoral lemons appear to rely on two silver linings: 1) They captured 55 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives, and 2) their success in the 2010 midterm elections demonstrates they still have a message that resonates with the American people, and things would have been just fine if they did not have a flawed candidate at the head of the ticket this year.

There are several fallacies in that analysis. The first is that Republican congressional candidates actually received fewer nationwide votes than their Democratic opponents in 2012. The reason they won a majority of congressional seats had to do not with voter support, but with legislative gerrymandering.

In 2010, the Republicans captured control of a number of state governments, so they were able to adopt congressional redistricting plans that favored their candidates. By packing Democrats into fewer districts where they would win by large margins, they were able to create more districts in which the GOP

candidate could win with smaller majorities. Exhibit A, Pennsylvania, where Democratic candidates won only five of 18 seats, while President Obama and Sen. Bob Casey won re-election with 52 and 53 percent of the vote, respectively.

The other flaw in the conservatives' argument is that we were dealing with far different electorates in 2010 and 2012. In the 2010 midterm election, about 90 million people voted. In 2012, the number was some 40 million larger.

Totals are always lower in off-year elections, when the electorate is older and whiter.

That fact may suggest that Republicans can look forward with hope to 2014 — but it is also true that their base is getting smaller and smaller. Indeed, in 2012, the (Republican-favored) white vote was some 4 points fewer than in 2008, while the escalating population of Latinos, African-Americans and Asian-Americans voted overwhelmingly Democratic.

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That suggests right-wing tea partiers have their heads in the sand when they pledge to stay the course and just avoid nominating middle-of-the-road Republicans such as Mitt Romney.

Indeed, if the Republican Party does not move back to the mainstream, no matter what happens in 2014, it is going to face disaster in 2020 — when Hillary Clinton wins a landslide re-election and carries with her huge Democratic victories in formerly Republican-dominated states. And that will be payback time, with new Democratic state majorities realigning congressional districts to guarantee Democratic control of the House, at least for the rest of the decade.

Then, with Democrats in control of the White House and both houses of Congress, there can be a real electoral revolution with the enactment of universal voter registration for federal elections. That would be the ultimate calamity for conservative politics in the United States.

The one saving grace for the conservative movement now is that, even in presidential elections, some 90 million eligible voters do not participate, in some part due to registration barriers. But if most everyone voted in a country that is moving toward a non-Caucasian majority, the Republican Party as it now fashions itself would go the way of the dinosaurs.

As recently reported by the Pew Research Center for the People was a poll titled "Nonvoters: Who They Are, What They Think." Of those who had an opinion on the presidential race, 59 percent favored Obama and 24 percent favored Romney, a Democratic margin of 70 to 30. On the question of favorability, the Obama advantage was 64 to 28.

A law making it easier for everybody to vote in federal elections would almost certainly spell doom for the Republican Party, barring significant ideological change.

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