



## Will Obama's re-election prompt a reinvention of the GOP?

Joanna Slater - 11/7/2012

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The election is over. Let the blame game begin.

As Republicans take the measure of their defeat in Tuesday's presidential poll, they are already pointing fingers, searching for ways to explain how their candidate failed to unseat a vulnerable incumbent in a struggling economy.

Some took cold comfort in the fact that President Barack Obama's margin of victory was the narrowest of any incumbent in modern times. But others pointed to the stark truth that Republican candidates have now lost the popular vote in five of the last six presidential elections – not the track record of a party with broad appeal to American voters.

A battle is brewing within the party over what Tuesday's loss means for its future. The question boils down to this: Is the result a disappointment or a watershed?

### The narrower view

Mr. Obama's victory was "the definition of winning ugly," according to an editorial posted on The Wall Street Journal's website a little after midnight. The piece listed numerous reasons for the result – the Democratic turnout machine, Hurricane Sandy's October surprise that drew voter focus away from the economy, Mitt Romney's weaknesses as a candidate and his string of gaffes.

What it didn't do was engage in soul-searching or hand-wringing over the Republican party's future. The only place where the party must improve, it suggested, was in making a stronger appeal to Latino voters.

Early Wednesday, this was a key refrain among Republican loyalists: The party must fix its problem with the fastest-growing sector of the American electorate, chiefly by adjusting its stance on immigration.

"Republicans cannot survive being the party of old white men," wrote Michael Tanner, a fellow at the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, early Wednesday. And that means leaving hard-line anti-immigration politicians behind, plus moderating its embrace of causes that turn off women voters.

## **The broader view**

For other Republicans, the loss is not a question of tactics or positions or even candidates, although they allow that all of those factors played a part in Mr. Obama's victory.

Some are voicing a larger anxiety that the broad majority of the American populace is drifting away from conservative tenets.

"Those of us who continue to oppose the fiscal and constitutional overreach of the modern social state now find ourselves in the wilderness," wrote Michael Knox Beran on the website of the National Review.

A fellow conservative pundit went further, dismissing attempts to pin the loss on weak support from minorities: "The fact is a lot of pasty, Caucasian, non-immigrant Americans have also 'shifted,' and are very comfortable with Big Government, entitlements, micro-regulation, Obamacare and all the rest," wrote Mark Steyn.

Alex Castellanos, a prominent Republican consultant, argued late Tuesday that the Republican party needs a wholesale reinvention.

"It is what it is folks. Romney is not performing all across swing states at levels he needs. This is not about Romney. Much bigger," he wrote in a tweet.

Later, he elaborated: "GOP needs to evolve. New Dems, worked. New Republicans, we are waiting."

For liberal pundits, the lesson for Republicans was clear. Their party had become so extremist that it scared away voters, even those disappointed with Mr. Obama. While Mr. Romney is not a right-wing extremist, "to win the nomination... he had to feign being one," wrote Jacob Weisberg on Slate.

"The GOP now faces the challenge of self-examination and internal reform that Democrats began to undertake after losing twice to Ronald Reagan."