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Does the GOP need to cut ties with Fox News, Limbaugh?

By: David Boaz – November 12th, 2012

The first thing Republicans should do is stop reading only the conservative media.

The conservative echo chamber apparently convinced them that Romney was winning the election. Romney himself is reported to have been "shell-shocked" by his loss. I wasn't, because I'd been reading the polls, including the swing-state polls. If the conservative media are going to tell Republicans what they want to hear, then smart Republicans had better start looking at a broader range of media.

My colleague Roger Pilon can't think of much the Republican Party should change. I'll try to think more creatively. Let's see . . . the Republican Party might have avoided running up federal spending by a trillion dollars during the Bush administration, alienating libertarian and tea-party type voters in the past few elections. It might have avoided miring the country in two endless wars, undermining its advantage on national security issues. And it might come to grips with its decades-long alienation of black, female, Hispanic, and gay voters.

During the civil rights era, conservatives - including party-switching Democrats such as Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms - adamantly resisted the push for equal rights and equal dignity for African Americans. When women began to demand an equal place in society, politics, and the economy, conservatives said that a woman's place was in the home. After those positions were no longer tenable, conservatives and Republicans came to accept race and gender equality, and they don't understand why they still face a gender gap and overwhelming opposition from black voters. In our own time Republicans have sent hostile messages to Hispanics on the immigration issue and to gay voters on marriage and other issues. And they are in the process of permanently alienating those voters, too. As former Reason magazine editor Virginia Postrel says, "Policy aside, people rarely vote for pols they think despise them."

Conor Friedersdorf blames Rush Limbaugh for Republicans' image problems among minority voters. Maybe so. But it's a problem that began before Limbaugh, and certainly can't be blamed entirely on him or other pundits. The idealized Republican/conservative message of individual liberty, limited government, and economic growth ought to appeal to most voters. But Republicans have to accept, as even Dick Cheney saw, that "freedom means freedom for everyone," and then they have to be consistent in delivering and

applying that message. The hole they've dug with voters outside their straight white male base will take time to climb out of. They'd better get started.