

January 26, 2010

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Jim Kessler, VP for Policy
RE: Independents in NJ, VA, and MA

For Better or for Worse ...

There has been a long debate within the progressive movement about whether the best electoral strategy is to have an agenda and narrative that appeals to the liberal base or one that reaches out to Independents and moderates.

Those on the left believe exciting the base boosts turnout among dependable progressive voters. Those in the center feel that appealing too strongly to the base repels enough Independents to make electoral success impossible. And of course, both sides feel that their policy ideas are the best.

We studied the election results in New Jersey, Virginia, and Massachusetts and our conclusion is this: For better or for worse, *we're married*. It may not be a marriage made in heaven, but electorally, neither Independents nor Democrats can succeed without the other.¹ In the Virginia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts races, one spouse (Independents) was clearly dissatisfied. The other spouse (Democrats) seemed happier, but, let's be honest - they had some issues too.

In this analysis, we compared the electoral results of candidate Barack Obama in 2008 with the results of Jon Corzine of New Jersey, Creigh Deeds of Virginia and Martha Coakley of Massachusetts in 2009 and 2010. (Note: we "shrunk" the size of the electorate in 2008, so that the total turnout in each state was identical - the methodology description is in the back. In that way, we could conduct an apples-to-apples comparison of how well each candidate fared among each party.)

Here are our six observations:

- 1. You don't listen: The motivated voter was an Independent.**
 - Independents comprised 31.7% of the electorate in New Jersey, Virginia, and Massachusetts in 2008, and 35.6% in 2009 and 2010.
 - The Republican turnout barely budged, from 25.9% to 26.6%.
 - Democrats represented 42.5% of the electorate in 2008 and 37.8% of the electorate in 2009 and 2010.
- 2. We're sticking with it: In two of the three states, the losing Democrat won a greater share of Democrats than did Obama.**

¹ To whom it may concern: Any reference to marriage, marriages in general, and the occasional difficulties that come with marriage does not refer to my marriage. OK, honey?

- In New Jersey and Virginia, the Democratic gubernatorial candidates received a slightly higher percentage of the Democratic vote than did Obama.
 - 91% percent for Corzine compared to 89% for Obama; 93% percent for Deeds compared to 92% for Obama.
 - However, Democratic turnout was lower in all three states.
3. **The first year is the toughest: Democrats suffered a twelve-point, 1.5 million voter swing.**
 - In 2008, Obama won the three states 58.1-41.9%; in 2009 and 2010, the Democratic candidates lost those states by 46.1-53.9%. That's a 12-point swing.
 - Using an adjusted turnout so that 2008 vote totals equal those of 2009 and 2010, Obama beat McCain in the three states by 1,031,788 votes. In 2009 and 2010, the Democratic candidates lost to the Republicans by 490,151 votes.
 - That is a vote swing of 1,521,939, when turnout is made identical.
 4. **Independents are by far the biggest swingers: More than 60% of the vote shift was Independents.**
 - Of the 1,521,939 votes that shifted, 952,617 (62.6%) were Independents.
 - The remaining vote shift was made up of Democrats (344,489 votes or 22.7% of the swing) and Republicans (224,930 votes or 14.8% of the swing).
 5. **Maybe we should see other people: Independents went from leaning solidly Democratic to a Republican landslide.**
 - Obama won Independents in the three states by 54.4-45.6%.
 - The three Democrats lost them by 32.9-67.1%, a 21.5 percentage point shift.
 6. **You're all the same: Independents performed remarkably similarly.**
 - In all three presidential races, Independents favored Obama; in all three 2009 and 2010 races, the Democrat received either 32% or 33% of the Independent vote.

Conclusion:

If the Democrats had turned out the base like they did in 2008, would they have won in either New Jersey, Massachusetts, or Virginia? Perhaps. But realize that for Martha Coakley to have pulled even with Scott Brown, 172,854 more Democrats would have had to have gone to the polls. That's a 20% increase in turnout, and that's tough to do.

The lesson is that even in a state like Massachusetts – a state in which only a fraction of the electorate is registered Republican – Independents must be an equal part of the relationship. Their interests, and most importantly, their concerns about government are very different from the Democratic base. That, however, is a subject for a different paper. For now, if this marriage is to be saved, Independents need to feel listened to by Democrats.

Appendix

The votes by State:

Virginia

2009 turnout = 1,981,763 (53.768% of 2008 turnout)
2008 turnout = 3,684,537

2008 Presidential	Margin	Adjusted Vote
<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dem. Margin</u>	<u>Vote</u>
39% Democrat	92-8%	711,669-61,357
33% Republican	8-92%	52,319-601,664
27% Independent	49-48%	259,681-257,286

2009 Gubernatorial	Margin	Actual
<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dem. Margin</u>	<u>Vote</u>
33% Democrat	93-7%	608,203-45,779
37% Republican	4-96%	29,330-703,922
30% Independent	33-66%	196,195-392,390

Decline in performance for Deeds compared to Obama by party affiliation:

Democrat = -87,88 Republican = -125,247 Independent = -198,590

New Jersey

2009 turnout = 2,208,363 (57.680% of 2008 turnout)
2008 turnout = 3,828,629

2008 Presidential	Margin	Adjusted Vote
<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dem. Margin</u>	<u>Vote</u>
44% Democrat	89-11%	865,535-106,065
28% Republican	14-85%	86,567-525,588
28% Independent	51-47%	312,338-291,128

2009 Gubernatorial	Margin	Actual
<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dem. Margin</u>	<u>Vote</u>
41% Democrat	91-9%	823,940-81,489
31% Republican	6-91%	41,076-622,979
28% Independent	33-66%	204,053-408,106

Decline in performance for Corzine compared to Obama by party affiliation:

Democrat = -17,019 Republican = -142,882 Independent = -225,263

Massachusetts

2010 turnout = 2,226,789 (74.381% of 2008 turnout)
2008 turnout = 2,995,367

2008 Presidential

Margin Adjusted Vote

<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dem. Margin</u>	<u>Vote</u>
43% Democrat	88–11%	843,341–104,610
17% Republican	9–90%	34,070–340,698
40% Independent	59–41%	520,497–365,833

2010 Senatorial

Margin

Actual

<u>Party Affiliation</u>	<u>Dem. Margin</u>	<u>Vote</u>
38% Democrat	79–20%	668,482–169,236
13% Republican	4–95%	11,579–275,008
48% Independent	32–67%	342,035–716,135

Decline in performance for Coakley compared to Obama by party affiliation:

Democrat = -239,485

Republican = +43,199

Independent = -528,764

ⁱ Methodology: For the Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Virginia presidential races, as well as the New Jersey and Virginia governors races, we relied upon national exit polls downloaded from CNN.com. For the Massachusetts senate race, we used two election day surveys (Lake Research Partners, Jan. 18-19, 2010, 600 voters and Fabrizio-McLaughlin, Jan. 19, 2010, 800 voters). In order to best compare the separate races, we “shrunk” the turnout in 2008 so that the total turnout in each state’s race was equal. Thus, using this methodology, the number of people voting in New Jersey in 2008 would equal the number voting in 2009. That meant shrinking the 2008 turnout by 57.680% in New Jersey, 53.786% in Virginia, and 74.341% in Massachusetts. This caused very slight distortions in the overall vote which we then adjusted to match the exit poll results by party affiliation (A 0.1%-point adjustment for Democrats and a 0.5%-point adjustment of Independents). We also eliminated third-party candidates for the calculation.