

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

October 23, 2012 – After the Debates

- As we said after the conventions, the debates could be most important in determining how this campaign goes. President Obama's dreadful performance in the first debate turned this campaign back into a real horse race. Both campaigns now think they will win. The second debate was much better for Obama and allowed him to slow down Romney's charge.
- Going into the third debate, Obama still had enough of a lead "if the election were held today" to prevail in the Electoral College. We will not know for sure for several days, but I believe the last debate will allow Obama to solidify enough of his support to be re-elected. Romney's strategy was clearly not to make any major mistake, agree with the President as often as possible, even when it meant changing long-held positions, and by doing so, reassure voters that he would be the same as Obama on foreign policy issues.
- Obama, on the other hand, clearly showed his mastery of foreign affairs and in doing so, reinforced his mastery of the job of President. For many of those wavering, that should be enough.
- Some may want to compare Romney's task, especially in the final debate, to other challengers to incumbent presidents. Today's race is not completely analogous. The prime example is Ronald Reagan. When he debated Jimmy Carter, voters were wary of Reagan. When he came across as affable and intelligent, his election was assured. However, in 1980, voters did not want to vote for Carter. They did not particularly like him and they blamed him for the Iran hostage crisis and for accusing them of being part of a "malaise" affecting the country. Today, many of the undecided or persuadable voters like Barack Obama and are not necessarily looking for a way to vote for someone else. Despite the difficult economy, they have to be convinced that Romney will be better than Obama, or at least that there is a good chance Romney will be better.
- While Romney has enhanced his chances in several states, especially Florida, Virginia and North Carolina, and tightened things up in Ohio, New Hampshire, Colorado and Pennsylvania, I still believe that, after his improved debate performances, Obama will hold onto Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Nevada, Iowa, and New Hampshire. Even without Florida, Virginia, Colorado and North Carolina (some of which Obama may still win), this still gives Obama 281 electoral votes, enough to be re-elected. However, it also means that Ohio is more important than ever and is more likely than ever to determine the winner.
- Just read an interesting article written by someone who specializes in polling Latino voters. His contention is that just about every general population poll undercounts the magnitude of Obama's lead among Latino voters. He cites several polls of only Latino voters, polls that also included an option for the voter to do the interview in Spanish. If correct, it could mean that most polls we see in states with large Latino populations should have Obama with anywhere from 2% to 4% higher vote totals. The author also

says that this is a problem that has existed for many years and still has not been corrected by the major national polling organizations. He claims that all the pollsters missed Harry Reid's re-election victory in 2010 because they undercounted the influence of Latino voters. It will be interesting to see if today's projections are correct.

- In about 10 days we will publish our predictions for the presidential and U.S. Senate races. I think this will be tougher than in years past.
- One final, random thought: For many years, it has amazed me how Republicans are able to convince majorities or near-majorities of voters to vote against their own self-interests. I can only assume that, in large part, they convince these people that Republican policies are good for rich people and some day they may be rich (that's their American Dream, isn't it?), even though nearly all of them will never be wealthy.