

## II. Presidential Result / National Overview

Barack Obama's seven point victory on November 4<sup>th</sup> confirmed his message of change connected with the electorate among nearly every demographic. The political climate in which Obama entered the race for the presidency nearly two years ago was perfectly suited for a "change" message. At that time the country was showing signs of the subprime mortgage crisis, was only one year removed from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the nation was lead by a president whose approval ratings hovered around 30%. In short, hindsight proves Obama was the ideal carrier of an anti-Washington/anti-establishment message which resonated with the electorate at seemingly every political level. The data below offers insight into how Obama achieved his victory compared to John Kerry's performance in 2004:

- With Democrats already claiming a definite electoral advantage due to the failing economy, Obama outperformed John Kerry across the board. For instance, Obama increased Kerry's margin among white voters by two points (43% Obama – 41% Kerry), increased the margin among Hispanics by 13 points (66% Obama – 53% Kerry) and furthered Kerry's margin of those between the ages of 18 – 30 by 12 points (66% Obama – 54% Kerry). Moreover, Obama distanced himself from Kerry by dominating among groups in the ideological "middle" including Independents, suburbanites, and Catholics. Conversely, Obama only underperformed Kerry among those over the age of 65 (45% Obama – 47% Kerry) and among Democrats (89% Obama – 89% Kerry).

Obama successfully complemented his central theme of change by articulating the metaphor that electing John McCain was like re-electing President Bush for four more years. Despite efforts to shed himself of Bush's image, McCain was inextricably linked to the unpopular president and there's little doubt this relationship proved to be a major encumbrance to the McCain campaign. In addition to his overall message and political advantage, Obama achieved victory primarily due to the following three reasons:

### 1. The financial meltdown in mid-September proved to be an electoral tipping point

While John McCain rallied conservatives and suburban swing voters with his choice of Governor Sarah Palin, the momentum stalled when the credit crisis broke in mid-September. Independent voters crucial to each candidate's success started to break in favor of Obama in the aftermath of the economic downturn and McCain was never able to recover. As you'll see, this moment more than any other, underscores the point that Obama's victory (and Democratic gains in general) were the products of voter dissatisfaction with the incumbent party and not necessarily the result of a widespread value shift. There indeed was a party shift in this election but there was virtually no change in ideological identification from 2004.

2. Obama won key swing groups such as Independents, suburban voters, and Catholics

It's important to note that despite the overall success of the Democratic Party on election night, the country's value base remains center-right, unchanged from 2004 when George W. Bush was reelected with 51% of the vote. Exit polls revealed that roughly the same number of voters identified themselves as conservatives in 2008 as in 2004. Obama won the presidency by appealing to Independents and moderates, winning both groups by substantial margins. Swing voters broke decisively for Obama, not because they were attracted to a progressive agenda but because Obama simply offered change. He also campaigned like a Reaganite, promising tax cuts for 95% of the nation and thereby mitigating the issue as solidly Republican. In short, social issues like abortion and gay marriage (issues that resonate with conservatives) mattered little in 2008 – it was all about the economy and change.

3. Young voters (those under 30 yrs) and minorities flooded the margins in favor of Obama

Often unreliable voters, those between the ages of 18 – 30 and minorities, especially Hispanics, voted in record numbers and supported Barack Obama over John McCain by a 2 to 1 margin. Perhaps the most concerning issue for the GOP in the wake of defeat is that Hispanics may now be considered likely Democratic voters. Two issues are likely playing a large role in this transition: First, the GOP defied the president on immigration reform in the last Congress and alienated Hispanics. Second, social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage didn't connect with Hispanics – traditionally a reliable social conservative voting bloc. The combination of these issues, plus the fact that Hispanics are the nation's fastest growing ethnic group, contributes to the thought that Democrats now have the ability to create a lasting majority.

States such as Texas and Arizona, historically "red" states, will figure mightily into the Democratic political strategy in future election cycles.

### III. **Presidential Result / Missouri Overview**

John McCain's very narrow 3,900 vote win in Missouri made 2008 the first time since 1956 that our state didn't pick the winner in the presidential contest. McCain carried 106 of Missouri's 115 counties. Significantly, of the nine battleground states identified by pundits as critical for success, Missouri was the only one providing an edge to the McCain – Palin ticket.

The McCain win in Missouri was based upon an old paradigm for electoral success (see Map 1). Prior to 2008, it was believed that Republicans could not withstand a defeat in the state's urban areas (St. Louis City, St. Louis County and Kansas City) of more than 220,000 votes. McCain lost those areas by a margin of 319,000 – by far a new record.

Yet, he carried the state by just under 4,000 votes. The McCain map may be the last time ever that Republicans carry the state with a "George W. Bush-style" electoral map that maximizes rural votes while allowing the cities and suburbs to steadily become more and more Democratic. A comparison of the George W. Bush map from 2004 (see Map 2) and the McCain map from 2008 shows how much erosion has occurred in the state's urban geographies.

The county breakdown of the McCain / Obama election reveals the growing strength of the entire southern part of the state. In Southwest Missouri, McCain ran up huge margins in every key county. They included Greene (+22,000), Jasper (+16,000), Christian (+13,000), Newton (+10,000) and Taney (+8,000). In the Southeast, Cape Girardeau performed extremely well (+13,000) as did Scott and Stoddard Counties (each with a 5,000 vote McCain margin). Interestingly, Mid Missouri also produced solid wins in every county except Boone (Columbia), where Obama won by 10,000 votes. That margin was completely eradicated by neighboring Cole County (Jefferson City), where McCain won by 10,000. Of particular interest in the Kansas City area was the 10,000 vote McCain margin in Cass County, a collar immediately to the south of Kansas City. There is a warning in the St. Louis area, however, as St. Charles County, long a GOP stronghold, saw its Republican margins diminish for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive election cycle. McCain won St. Charles by 18,000, or nearly 20% worse than Bush had performed in 2004.

Overall, the McCain win probably represents the absolute worst case scenario for Republicans in the metropolitan areas that still allows for a statewide GOP win. Republican erosion in the key county of St. Charles also indicates a real need for Missouri candidates to find ways to reduce Democrat margins in the cities and in St. Louis County. The Kinder for Lieutenant Governor results discussed below provide the best roadmap for the future.

### **III. Governor / Statewide Races**

Kenny Hulshof's performance in the gubernatorial contest was the weakest GOP showing since 1996. Four factors conspired to bring about this disappointing result (see Map 3):

- 1) Hulshof got a very late start in the race due to Governor Blunt's surprise announcement in late January, 2008 that he would not seek reelection;
- 2) The Republican Primary between Hulshof and State Treasurer Sarah Steelman produced predictable party in-fighting and made message development a major challenge. The primary also delayed the Republican nominee from engaging Democrat Jay Nixon until the final stages of the campaign;
- 3) Hulshof, a 6-term congressman from Columbia, lacked statewide name recognition and thus became much more definable by his opponents in the primary and general elections;

- 4) A lack of resources at the end resulted in a dramatically reduced television presence just when the race had begun to tighten.

Hulshof, a very gifted candidate, simply was never able to get the race into a competitive structure. One week after his primary victory, Hulshof trailed Nixon by 19 points in internal polls. This gap began to narrow when the campaign got into its contrast phase, getting as close as 11 points about one month before Election Day. The size of the gap, however, caused the Republican Governor's Association to redeploy their resources to other targeted states and left the Hulshof campaign with a \$1.3 million budget shortfall. Rather than deficit spend, the campaign scaled its media back severely for the next few weeks and the ultimate 19-point Nixon victory was secured.

The Lieutenant Governor's campaign between Republican incumbent Peter Kinder and Democrat State Representative Sam Page of St. Louis provides the best road map for a winning Republican statewide campaign of the future (see Map 4). A comparison between Kinder's performance and McCain's narrow victory tells an interesting story. In St. Louis City, McCain lost by 108,000 votes but Kinder lost by only 90,000 – an 18,000 marginal vote improvement. St. Louis County is even more remarkable. While McCain lost the county by 111,000 votes, Kinder lost by only 72,000 – a 39,000 marginal vote improvement. This performance is even more impressive considering that Kinder's opponent lives and works in the central part of the county (Creve Coeur / Town and Country area). Elsewhere, Kinder performed better than McCain in southern Missouri as well. Most notably, Kinder carried Greene County by 10,000 more votes than did McCain (+32,000). Finally, Kinder only lost Boone County by 2,000 votes compared to McCain's -10,000 there.

A major difference in the Kinder campaign was a sustained emphasis on African American outreach. Throughout his first term as Lieutenant Governor, Kinder spent considerable time and effort in the urban core communities of Kansas City and, more so, in St. Louis. Kinder outperformed the entire GOP ticket in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. His ability to minimize Democrat margins in their core and to maximize GOP margins in our core provides the pathway to future success by Republican candidates in the years ahead.

The campaigns for Attorney General and Treasurer (Michael Gibbons and Brad Lager, respectively – see Maps 5 & 6) both produced narrow GOP defeats. The most instructive assessment of these campaigns was an underperformance in St. Louis and, most troubling, in St. Charles County. In addition, both campaigns slightly underperformed the McCain levels in Greene and Christian counties in Southwest Missouri. To withstand 300,000 vote Democrat margins in Kansas City, St. Louis City and St. Louis County, it requires a near perfect storm in every single other county in the state for a Republican to prevail. Gibbons and Lager, both first-time statewide candidates, came up just a hair short.

The table below shows the GOP losses in the "Big 3" voting jurisdictions (St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and Kansas City) and then the performance in the remainder of the state.

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>BIG 3 Margin</u>	<u>Balance of State</u>	<u>Final Result</u>
McCain – Palin	-307,000	+311,000	+ 4,000
Hulshof	-383,000	-161,000	- 544,000
Kinder	-242,000	+315,000	+ 73,000
Gibbons	-280,000	+122,000	- 158,000
Lager	-290,000	+198,000	- 92,000

Finally, Missouri Republicans should take some comfort in the fact that the Show-Me State continues to lean "red". Our state's GOP padded their dominant majority in the Senate and surrendered only three seats in the House. Ten Senate seats were up for grabs on election night and all 10 were won by Republicans including three seats that flipped from the Democrats to the GOP (Districts 1, 19, and 31). The elimination of straight ticket voting in Missouri may help explain why high vote counts for Nixon and Obama didn't necessarily translate into Democrat victories down the ticket. While McCain's Missouri victory is reason for optimism, down-ballot Republican wins provide the greatest cause for hope as we look forward.

#### **IV. Congressional Contests**

One of the more encouraging signs from Election Night '08 was the Republican performance in the state's nine congressional districts. The GOP faced an open seat (Hulshof's in Northeast Missouri) and had a highly targeted incumbent (Sam Graves in Northwest Missouri). By prevailing in both of these districts, Republicans maintained their 5-4 majority in the state's congressional delegation. In a year when Republicans nationally lost 21 seats, it is heartening that we held our ground with a national Congressional Approval Rating of 9%.

Looming ahead is the critical congressional redistricting plan that will take place in 2011 after the 2010 census. At present, Missouri is likely to lose a seat in congress, moving from nine districts to eight. Having strong incumbents and majorities in the State House and State Senate is critical for continued Republican strength in the state's congressional delegation.