

Could the Splinter Parties Doom Romney?

☒ According to the esteemed Rasmussen poll, President Obama did indeed get a slight upward bump in the wake of the Democratic National Convention last week at Charlotte, NC. Rasmussen focuses its polling heavily on the crucial battleground states, where the presidential race is considered more or less a toss-up, and in some of them Obama has made gains since the previous polls were taken.

In both Virginia and Ohio, which previous Rasmussen polls had shown to be tied, Obama now enjoys leads of 1 percentage point each. In Florida, where Obama previously was behind by 2 percentage points, he is now said to be ahead by that same amount.

Among the freshest polls, only the one taken in Missouri showed a favorable trend for Republican nominee Mitt Romney. Obama had moved 1 percentage point ahead of Romney after the Todd Akin “legitimate rape” gaffe, but now Romney is ahead by 3 percent, although he is still a bit short of where he was before Akin, the Republican nominee for the Senate in Missouri, put his foot in his mouth.

Rasmussen still hasn't done any polling in 29 of the 50 states (or is it 57?), but one can hardly find fault with that, because many states are so lopsidedly Democratic or Republican that polling there would be of no practical value. Of the 21 states where polling has been done, 19 show Obama performing worse than he did in 2008.

From this we can confidently conclude that Obama would do worse if the election were held today than he did in 2008, when he won 53.7 percent of the votes cast for him and his Republican opponent, John McCain.

But how much worse? Obviously, he can do worse than he did last time and still win the election.

My own manipulation of the Rasmussen figures – I will spare you the boring details – indicates that today Obama could expect to win anywhere from 50.1 percent to 50.6 percent of the popular vote awarded to the Democratic and Republican parties. As we saw in 2000, winning more popular votes than your opponent doesn't necessarily ensure victory in the electoral college, but still Obama's lead is something to be reckoned with.

With the margin between Obama and Romney so small, this could be one election in which the splinter parties make a decisive difference in the result. Generally, when Rasmussen conducts its polls in a given state, it finds that about 3 or 4 percent of the voters prefer neither Obama nor Romney, but some other candidate. Sometimes, as in Virginia, the splinter parties get considerably less support; in others, such as New Mexico, they get considerably more.

I regret to say that the presence of splinter parties in the race could hurt Romney more than Obama. Gary Johnson, the Libertarian party candidate, and Virgil Goode, the Constitution party candidate, whose supporters probably would have been more likely to vote for Romney than Obama, are reportedly outdrawing Jill Stein, the Green party candidate, whose supporters generally consist of disaffected Democrats.

ABC News recently came out with a report suggesting that Goode, a former Republican congressman from Virginia, could siphon off just enough GOP voters to give that hotly contested state's 13 precious electoral votes to Obama.

Before you panic, bear in mind that the latest Rasmussen polls evidently do not reflect the public's reaction to Obama's hopelessly inept handling of the new Middle East crisis. He has shown once again that he has no business conducting our foreign affairs, no business serving as commander-in-chief of

the United States – in short, no business being President.

However, if the voters let Obama's demonstrated incompetence just wash off their backs – as many of them seem inclined to do – then we may have to brace ourselves for a very sorry election result, one that augurs ill for the democratic process.