

If Obama Thinks He Inherited a Mess Four Years Ago ...

☒ I was part of a political panel over the weekend on the upcoming election. The first question was this: Given the weak economy, given the large number of Americans who can't find a job, and given that most Americans think the country is on the wrong track, why isn't Mitt Romney way out ahead?

Good question. One possibility is that the polls are tainted. No conspiracy to hurt Romney, just bad science. Maybe they're over-polling Democrats. Maybe they're assuming that the same number of Obama supporters will show up this time just as they did in 2008, which is not likely

But let's say the polls are accurate. Then why, given the state of the economy, an issue most voters say is most important to them, isn't Mitt Romney leading by 5 points or more?

Don't underestimate the likeability factor. Every poll has President Obama leading by a mile when asked which candidate is more likeable. That matters. I went back to every presidential election since Eisenhower-Stevenson in 1952, and the more likeable candidate won every time, except when Richard Nixon beat the Happy Warrior Hubert Humphrey.

That could explain why Romney, at best, is running neck-and-neck with the president.

And according to a new CBS News/New York Times poll, voters give President Obama a lead over Mitt Romney when asked which candidate would do a better job handling foreign policy, Medicare, health care, taxes – and this is a significant switch – even the economy and unemployment, where the president holds a one point lead over Romney. One point isn't much, that's for sure. But the economy was Romney's strength

– an issue Romney won in the polls until now.

Only when asked who would do a better job with the federal budget deficit does Romney come out ahead of the president, 51 to 43 percent.

Most of the panelists, which included media pundits from the right and conservative activists, thought Romney would win, and win big. I think those people are either geniuses or certifiably nuts.

Yogi Berra was right when he said making predictions is hard, especially when they're about the future. But I still think Obama is the odds on favorite.

But if Mitt Romney manages to win, I'm guessing it will be because the Democrats couldn't get out the vote the way they did four years ago.

Young people enthusiastically supported the president last time around. They still favor him, but in smaller numbers. Four years ago a lot of them were in college. Today, a lot of them still can't find a job.

Hispanics probably won't come out in the same big numbers as for years ago, and neither will Jewish voters, which might matter in Florida. You can only make a first impression once. Obama made his in 2008. For a lot of his one-time supporters, the thrill is gone.

Barack Obama talks a lot about the economic mess he inherited four years ago. Wait till he sees the mess he inherits this time if he wins.