

# Suddenly, Romney Becomes the Best Bet

✘ About a week ago I posted a column here entitled “Romney Isn’t There Yet,” in which I contended that as things then stood, GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney seemed unlikely to win more than 248 of the 270 electoral votes required to take the presidency away from Barack Obama in the November 6 election.

What a difference a week makes! This morning I bet money on Romney on the Irish-based Intrade futures market. As a gambler I am too cold-blooded to vote out of sentiment, but as of this moment – and recognizing that everything could change before the ink dries on this post – Romney seems to have the edge.

I didn’t bet the farm – not even a haystack. I paid \$3.65 for a Mitt Romney contract that will pay me back \$10 if Romney wins, and zero if he loses. In effect, I was wagering that Romney had at least a 36.5 percent chance of winning the presidency.

I can make the argument that his chances are more in the neighborhood of 75 percent. Since I posted a week ago, the Rasmussen polling organization has shown him moving into a tie with President Obama in Iowa, Ohio and Wisconsin, where he previously had trailed slightly, while taking the lead in Colorado, where he had trailed, and New Hampshire, where he had been tied. This is an example of the Mittmentum you have been hearing about.

The only scary news out of Rasmussen recently is that Romney’s lead in Florida has tightened to two percentage points from five previously. This undoubtedly explains why Romney is dashing from town to town in Florida today even as I write.

As of this moment, Romney leads in the Rasmussen tallies in states with 261 electoral votes, Obama leads in states with 243 electoral votes, and there are 34 electoral votes up for grabs in the deadlocked states of Iowa (6), Ohio (18) and Wisconsin (10).

We have to assume that those three states won't be tied any longer after the polls close on November 6. And since they are tied now, we also have to assume that each of them has a 50 percent chance of going for Romney, and a 50 percent chance of going (heaven forbid) for Obama.

Not to bore you with more statistics, but there are eight possible voting combinations among those three states, and six of them – the 75 percent I mentioned above – would put Romney over 270 in the electoral college.

All other things remaining the same, it won't matter how Iowa votes, because its electoral total is too small to make the difference. But any combination in which Romney wins either Wisconsin or Ohio would force the Obama family to reserve a moving van for January.

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## Romney Isn't There Yet

✘ I wish I could be as optimistic as Dick Morris, the former Clinton aide turned GOP pundit. Morris believes that Mitt Romney has a strong chance to win the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, all of which voted decisively for President Obama in 2008.

By my reckoning, if Romney can win either Pennsylvania or Michigan and just one of those other states, he will eke out a victory in the Electoral College.

Morris is an incredibly astute political analyst – I don't think even Karl Rove can top him – but he tends to get carried away. For example, during the 2010 midterm elections, in which the Republicans won a historically large percentage of the Democrat-held seats in the House, Morris predicted that they would do even better than they did.

Judging by the state-by-state presidential polls conducted by the Rasmussen organization, I find it difficult to believe that Romney is there yet. My analysis of those polls – which have been conducted in twenty-three states – indicates that right now Romney is likely to win the majority of the popular vote cast for himself and Obama, but probably no more than 50.3 percent.

Such a squeaky-close margin is not likely to translate into a victory in the Electoral College, because so much of Romney's support is spread among states where he holds a lopsided edge – states such as Idaho in the Old West, Nebraska in the Midwest, or Alabama in the Deep South. Alas, it won't make a difference in his electoral total if he wins staunchly Republican Utah by 100 percent rather than 51 percent.

Obama, on the other hand, holds the edge in several states where the vote is likely to be relatively close. He won Colorado, Iowa, Ohio and New Hampshire by less than 55 percent last time, and he could very well win them all this time by less than 51 percent. But winner takes all in the Electoral College.

I figure that Romney might have to win as much as 51.5 percent of the major-party vote to get the necessary 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency. That is better than George W. Bush did against John Kerry in 2004. Right now I can't see Romney winning more than 248 electoral votes.

To go from his present (estimated) 50.3 percent to 51.5 percent of the major-party vote, he will have to change the

minds of perhaps 1.7 million voters who currently lean to Obama. With 16 days remaining until Election Day, that is more than 100,000 minds per day. Perhaps he can do it if he absolutely creams Obama in tomorrow's Debate #3, but otherwise???

Romney's task would be considerably easier if it weren't for the annoyingly stubborn voters of Ohio. Obama won Ohio, which has 18 electoral votes, with just 52.3 percent of the popular total last time, and based on the net shift to the Republicans that the polls show in other states, Ohio should now be in Romney's column. Yet Rasmussen, in a poll taken three days ago, showed Obama still leading in Ohio by one percentage point.

Some observers have speculated that Ohioans are more tolerant of the incumbent than your average voters because his rescue of General Motors helped the auto-parts industry, which employs huge numbers of Ohioans. The unemployment rate in Ohio is lower than unemployment nationally – but that isn't entirely due to GM. The new governor of Ohio, Republican John Kasich, has pushed through several economic measures that have created new jobs.

How sad it will be if the efforts of a highly effective Republican governor inadvertently make the difference in a victory for Obama.

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## **Romney Gets a Much-needed Boost in Florida and Virginia**

- ✘ No question about it: Mitt Romney struck gold with his commanding performance in Wednesday's first presidential

debate. The Rasmussen polling firm reported Friday the results of new polls in the crucial swing states of Florida and Virginia, and in each of them Romney got a boost.

Romney now leads by 49 percent to 47 percent in Florida, while in the previous Florida poll, taken slightly more than three weeks earlier, it was Obama who led by 2 percentage points. In Virginia, Romney leads by one point, 49 to 48, while in the previous poll, also taken a bit more than three weeks ago, President Obama had led by one point.

In neither state does the total for the two major-party candidates add up to 100 percent. That is because a small number of voters remain undecided, or plan to vote for splinter-party candidates.

Today's news was not entirely cheery for Romney. In Ohio, where Obama led by 47 to 46 three weeks ago, he still leads by one point – 50 to 49. The remaining 1 percent say they are voting for splinter candidates. I have written before that the presence of splinter candidates on the ballot could doom Romney's candidacy, and it might be specifically in Ohio where this happens.

Ohio hasn't cast its electoral votes for the losing candidate in a presidential election since it chose Richard Nixon over John F. Kennedy in 1960. It is a populous state, with 18 electoral votes – the seventh highest total in the nation.

Without Ohio, Romney almost certainly will lose, and if I were in his shoes I would be hanging out there practically the entire month of October. On a personal note, I was born in Ohio, and I sure wish I lived there now.

In addition to Ohio, the states that appear to have this year's election in their hands include Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Carolina and, as I have already mentioned, Florida and Virginia. All of them are states that Obama won in 2008 against GOP candidate John McCain, but where

he got less than 55 percent of the major-party vote.

There are eight swing states in all, and together they boast a total of 105 electoral votes. In 2008 McCain won states that now hold a total of 180 electoral votes, and either candidate needs 270 to win the election, or 269 to tie.

So let's assume that Romney won't lose any states that McCain won. Then he must pick up 90 or more out of the 105 electoral votes that appear to be up for grabs. There are various combinations of victories and losses that would allow him to do that, but none of them include losing Ohio. It is a must state, and so, for that matter, is Florida, with 29 electoral votes.

But if Wednesday's debate teaches us anything, it is that it ain't over till it's over. A couple more lopsided debating victories could put Mitt comfortably over the top. I don't know how much the vice presidential debate will count among voters, but I am going to assume that the brilliant Paul Ryan, the GOP VP candidate, will trump goofy Joe Biden and his silly slogans.