

Could Limbaugh Be (Gasp) Wrong?

✘ I had better start by declaring that I consider the Rush Limbaugh show the best thing going on radio. I listen to it every chance I get, and Rush has been my treasured companion on many a long trek along the interstate highways. As a result, I have heard him repeat, more times than I can count, his assertion that if 4 million Republican voters hadn't sat home in the 2012 presidential election, Mitt Romney would have beaten Barack Obama.

I am puzzled as to how he arrived at that statistic and that conclusion. If he is referring to so-called Republicans who registered as young adults in 1948 to vote for Dewey, and have rarely voted since, then I can see it. The voting rolls of both major parties are loaded with slugs who cannot really be called voters. But if he means those who normally vote, but who deliberately sat out the 2012 election, presumably because Romney wasn't conservative enough for them, then I fear that he may have gotten it wrong.

Romney received 60.9 million votes in 2012, about 1 million more than the 59.9 million votes cast for John McCain, the previous GOP candidate, in 2008. Meanwhile, Obama received 65.9 million votes in 2012, down 3.6 million from the 69.5 million he polled in 2008. It would appear that Democrats, not Republicans, were the principal stay-at-homes.

That there was a significant number of normally active voters who decided not to vote in 2012, for whatever reason, is beyond dispute. The total votes cast for the two major-party candidates declined by 2.6 million from the 2008 election, which is not what you might expect in a country where the population keeps growing. But no matter how hard I massage the stats, I cannot make them tell me that 4 million genuine Republican voters stayed away from the polls specifically to

spite Romney.

Let's look first at the 3.6 million voters who deserted Obama in 2012. Most of this group actually did stay home, rather than vote instead for Romney. It seems fair to surmise that the group was composed largely of independents or loosely committed Democrats, who became disillusioned with the President during his first term.

There may have been some soft-core Republicans in the group, who had switched sides in 2008 to participate in a victory of historic importance, but such people would be unlikely to abstain from voting entirely in 2012. They would be more likely to account for Romney's slight increase over McCain in the number of votes received.

The mysterious 4 million recalcitrant Republicans whom Limbaugh chides so often for not voting must have sat out the 2008 campaign as well, considering that McCain got fewer votes than Romney. Again, no doubt, because the candidate wasn't conservative enough. But that brings us back to the question of how you define the term "voter". If someone sits out two (or more) consecutive presidential elections, is he really a voter, much less a Republican?

Let's take a closer look at the actual voting statistics, not phantom ones.

In only 14 states did Romney receive fewer votes than McCain, and of those 14, six gave their electoral votes to Romney anyway. So in those six cases, as Hillary Clinton might say, What difference did it make?

In seven of the remaining eight states where Romney lost ground – California, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont – he never stood a chance. Only if all the graveyards in those states had spewed up their dead Republican voters – the kind of improbable event that actually seems to occur, with parties reversed, in Illinois and other Democratic strongholds – would Romney have had even the most

meager prospects of winning.

The one remaining state where Romney lost ground is Ohio, that most crucial of swing states, which Obama won twice. Romney in 2012 received 16,387 fewer votes in Ohio than McCain did four years earlier, but Obama received a whopping 112,334 fewer votes in Ohio the second time than he did the first. In Ohio, the stay-at-home problem was more Obama's than Romney's.

Finally, let's try a statistical experiment, based on Limbaugh's theory that 4 million genuine Republicans opted to watch soap operas, rather than vote, on that fateful November day in 2012.

If the alleged 4 million Republican no-shows had been added to Romney's actual total of 60,933,500 votes, that would have amounted to a 6.6 percent increase. It is unlikely that the increase in every state would have been exactly 6.6 percent. In some it would be more, in some less, but there is no point in speculating about what the exact totals might have been.

Instead, let's just increase Romney's actual vote totals in each state by exactly 6.6 percent. Would that have caused Romney to win any states that he lost in the real world?

As a matter of fact, yes. He would have won Florida and (here it comes again) Ohio. That's the good news. The bad news is that those two states would have brought his electoral-vote total to just 253, or 17 shy of the amount needed to win the election.

The influential Rush Limbaugh serves a worthy purpose when he prods all Republicans to vote for the party's candidates. And he may be correct in his supposition that conservative candidates would stand a better chance than moderates like Romney, McCain and Bob Dole (who ran and lost in 1996).

But, alas, Obama won the 2012 election, and there are no plausible what-ifs that could have changed that.

The Dimwits are Always with us

✘ I don't recall ever hearing the term "low-information voter" before this year, but I have been familiar with the concept for more than a half-century. Low-information voters are those who know nothing about politics and politicians, but who insist on voting anyway.

Both Republicans and Democrats are using the term to describe the bulk of the people who voted for the other party's candidate in the 2012 presidential election. And it is true that they can be found on both sides of the political spectrum.

Some observers found it impossible to understand how there could still be voters who hadn't yet decided between the polar opposites Barack Obama and Mitt Romney as the campaign reached its final days. However, to me it was easy enough to understand if one is familiar with low-information voters.

The low-information voters have always been with us, but you may have known them by other names. While taking a presidential poll in Philadelphia during the 1960 election campaign, I encountered many such voters, and coined the term "dimwit fringe" to describe them when I wrote a magazine article about the experience.

I'm not so sure that they represent only a fringe in today's political environment. It appears that they have captured some of the middle ground as well, although I can't speak with authority, because that opinion poll I conducted 52 years ago was my last.

I hope I don't have to remind you that John F. Kennedy ran

against, and beat, Richard M. Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. It was one of the more interesting match-ups of my lifetime, and I decided to poll the citizens of Philadelphia for a local newspaper where I worked.

I correctly predicted that Kennedy would beat Nixon in that city by an unprecedented margin, but to me that was not the most interesting part of the story. What was more interesting was how horribly uninformed many of the prospective voters seemed.

Because the Kennedy-Nixon race was so close nationwide – decided by a margin of two-tenths of one percent of the electorate – and because so many voters were so obviously confused about the candidates, I came up with the hypothesis that the election may actually have been decided by accident.

For example, I interviewed one voter who said that he was voting for Kennedy because the Communists helped Nixon to become vice president. You could say that this was true, but only in a twisted sense. Nixon moved up from congressman to senator largely because of his attacks on Communism, and as a senator from California, a large state, he attracted Dwight Eisenhower's attention when the general was picking a running-mate.

Another voter said that she was voting for Kennedy because he was born in England, and therefore an authority on foreign affairs. Kennedy's father had been the U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, but Kennedy, like all presidential candidates before 2008 (and maybe even after), was born in this country.

The fact that Kennedy had chosen Lyndon Johnson as his running mate seemed a trifle risky at the time, because Johnson, a southerner, might alienate black voters. But half the blacks I interviewed had either never heard of Johnson, or had no opinion about him. One black man said: "Oh, Jackson (sic) is a nice guy."

One retired gentleman told me that he looked askance at Kennedy, because “his wife isn’t cultured enough to sit in the White House.” I don’t know how well you remember Jackie Kennedy as First Lady, but she oozed culture from every pore – annoyingly so.

A production-line worker told me he was wary of Nixon because, in watching the TV debates, he discovered that “Nixon ain’t got no smile on his face.”

As to the religious question – the fact that Kennedy was a Roman Catholic – a taxi driver told me: “Bring the Pope over. Who cares?”

An office clerk, sizing up Nixon’s running mate, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was Eisenhower’s UN ambassador, scornfully observed: “He only knows one thing: the United Nations.”

I ran into an elderly white man with black neighbors who didn’t know what the term “civil rights” meant, and a housewife who hadn’t the slightest idea what either Kennedy or Nixon had said about foreign policy.

I came away thanking heaven for the two-party system. If the voters weren’t pretty much forced to limit themselves to a choice between two candidates, if there were multiple candidates with a chance to win, who knows who we might have gotten as our leader.

On second thought, what are we to make of the last two presidential elections?

What Rhymes with Mandate? Shmandate!

✘ What's this hoey about Barack Obama winning a mandate to impose his economically destructive agenda on the American people? It's understandable that the Democrats and their media lap dogs would try to propagate such hogwash, especially at a time when we are careening toward the so-called fiscal cliff – but must the more timid Republicans also sing that tune? I've just finished reviewing this year's state-by-state presidential election results – the final summation as far as I can tell – and I don't come away with the feeling that Obama received new marching orders from the electorate.

If anything, the results of the election – in which much of Obama's support from 2008 melted away – suggest that he has less of a mandate than he did when he started his first term.

The people don't seem to be urging him to go wild with his economically wrongheaded doctrines, but rather to cool it.

Let's start with the fact that he received 5 million fewer votes this time than last. That hardly seems like a national vote of confidence, an affirmation that Obama has been doing something right, and that the people want more of the same. I dare say that if the 2016 Democratic presidential candidate draws 5 million fewer votes than Obama did this time, he or she will lose the election.

Republican candidate Mitt Romney, by contrast, got slightly more votes than John McCain did in the 2008 campaign against Obama, although their totals are so close that I would call them tied. So the election wasn't a case of a plague on both your houses. GOP voters stood by their party's candidate, many Democrats did not.

In only six states did Obama win a greater percentage of the

major-party vote this year than he did four years ago. Those states are Alabama, Alaska, Louisiana, Mississippi, Maryland and New Jersey.

In the first four, all of them solid and reliable Republican states, one can assume that many GOP voters considered it a waste of time, and of \$4-a-gallon Obamagas, to venture to the polls. That their electoral votes would go to Romney was foreordained. In rabidly Democratic Maryland as well, it may be that GOP voters opted for frugality over futility.

As for New Jersey, that appears to have been an anomaly. New Jersey was probably going to go for Obama in any event, but he iced it when he spent a high-visibility half-hour in the state after Hurricane Sandy, and bestowed a French kiss, or whatever it was, upon turncoat Jersey Governor Chris Christie (R? I don't think so).

In only five states and the District of Columbia did Obama draw more votes than he did in 2008. The five states were Colorado, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina and South Carolina.

Colorado and North Carolina can be explained primarily by the heavy campaigning in battleground states. The other Obama vote gains may reflect his campaign team's surprisingly effective effort to bring out the black vote in heavily black states, to help ensure that the first president of that color didn't get humiliated the second time around.

I hate to be a wet blanket, but I also must point out that in each of the places where Obama won more votes than in 2008, Romney won more votes than McCain. It was scarcely a tour de force for Obama. Both candidates benefitted from larger turnouts.

In only 16 states and the District of Columbia did voter turnouts increase from 2008. Battleground states were prominent in that group. Obama and Romney paid so many visits

to the battleground states – and so few to anyplace else – that the residents of those states must have felt that it would be terrible manners to stay home all that Tuesday watching “The View” or “Dr. Oz.”

The battleground states with increased turnouts included Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Virginia and Wisconsin. Given the outcomes in those states, one might dispute whether they all really belonged in the battleground category. But during the campaign it seemed that they did, and the mercilessly frequent visits from the candidates obviously got many voters off their duffs.

Sorry, but Failure to Rally the Base Didn't Make the Difference

✘ There was a lot of fuss on the political talk shows today about the fact that Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate, received some 2 million fewer votes this year than were cast for John McCain, the 2008 GOP presidential nominee.

Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity both suggested that this means the Republicans didn't do enough to mobilize the party base, and that this may have cost Romney the election.

However, President Obama's vote total compared even less favorably with his tally in 2008. This time he got 9 million fewer votes than last time. So, if we follow the logic, the Democrats did an even worse job of mobilizing their base, yet Obama had enough wiggle room to win by a close margin, rather

than the comfortable margin he achieved four years ago.

Obama's nationwide popular-vote lead, with some votes yet to be counted, stands at about 2.9 million. Even if we could somehow award Romney the 2 million votes that slipped away from the Republicans this time, Obama would still be some 900,000 votes ahead in the popular count.

Well, but we all know that it isn't the popular vote total that wins elections, it is the electoral votes. If we gave Romney back those 2 million lost McCain votes, could he perhaps have won the electoral vote even if he lost the popular vote?

Sorry, but it doesn't look that way. The lost McCain votes were distributed last time mainly among states that were never in play during this year's election. They were concentrated mainly in states that would have gone to either Obama or Romney no matter what.

As I write this, 31 states and the District of Columbia have counted every last ballot, while nineteen states still have at least a few to count.

Among the group that is done counting, the Republicans attracted fewer votes in ten states and the District of Columbia. Five of the states showing Republican vote losses – Alabama, Arizona, Kansas, Mississippi and Oklahoma, – were nonetheless carried by Romney by substantial margins.

A lot of the vote loss in those states might simply have been prompted by laziness – by people figuring that their states would go for Romney no matter what, so why bother bucking traffic to get to the polling place.

The Republicans also lost votes in California, D.C., Hawaii, New Mexico, Ohio and Vermont. Let's set aside Ohio for the moment, and look at the others. There couldn't have been a single Republican in any of those states who thought Romney

would win their electoral votes. Many of them, too, must have concluded that there was little point in voting.

A considerable portion of the Republican vote loss, then, probably can be attributed to the very nature of the electoral college system, which gave people in solid red or blue states little incentive to vote.

OK, now let's consider Ohio. Romney lost the state by about 103,000 votes, and he drew 84,000 fewer votes there than McCain. If the McCain votes could be magically restored to Romney, that certainly would narrow the margin, but it wouldn't have closed it. Meanwhile, Obama lost a humongous 243,000 Ohio votes this time compared to last, yet he won the state anyway.

I don't think any rational person can conclude that either party failed to rally its base in Ohio. If anything, that probably is the state where the parties tried their hardest. In spite of all the glad-handing and lapel-grabbing, both parties lost votes there – perhaps because the voters simply didn't much like the candidates. Ohio just wasn't destined to go to Romney.

What about the nineteen states that are still counting votes as we speak?

Six of them were considered sure things for the Republicans, eight of them sure things for the Democrats, and all of those voted according to form. Scratch them from consideration.

That leaves five states that were considered by at least some prognosticators to be part of the so-called battleground – Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Romney already has drawn more votes than McCain in all those states except Pennsylvania, and in Pennsylvania, even with votes still to count, Romney has almost equaled the McCain 2008 total.

Is anyone going to argue that either party failed to rally their base in any of those battleground states? Even if we generously hand Pennsylvania's 20 electoral votes to Romney, on the ground that the Republicans didn't start campaigning there soon enough, Obama would still win the election.

Let's face the dreary fact once and for all: Obama won this election, and would have won it even if Romney had paid personal visits to every registered Republican. Let's start looking for a winning strategy, because we sure didn't come up with one this time.

Don't Waste Tears on Obama's Victory

☒ Take a good look at Barack Obama. He made history yesterday. He apparently became the first U.S. president to win a second term with fewer popular votes than he received the first time.

I say apparently only because the popular-vote totals for the first nine U.S. presidential elections have been lost to history. Since 1820, twelve presidents have been elected to second terms, and only Obama polled worse the second time around.

Everybody on the Right is lamenting Obama's victory, finding it difficult to believe that American voters could have re-elected someone who presided over a dreadful economy and made innumerable destructive moves in conducting our foreign affairs, of which Benghazi-gate is only the latest.

Rush Limbaugh, in his election recap today, declared that they

– meaning society’s leeches – now outnumber us, the producers. He says that the takers understandably chose to vote for Santa Claus. The nation, he fears, may no longer belong to people with ambition, fortitude, and an independent spirit.

I can understand the dismay. I feel the pain too. I know that if someone’s team loses the World Series, it doesn’t help much to point out that they lost the final game by only one run.

But really, doesn’t the result of this election look better than the result from 2008? In 2008, Obama beat John McCain by some 10 million votes. This time, based on the preliminary tallies, it looks as though he beat Mitt Romney by fewer than 3 million.

Both parties lost voters this time. Obama’s tally fell a whopping 9 million votes short of his total for 2008. Romney’s total is only about 2 million below McCain’s. The first time, few people really knew Obama. After they got to know him, 13 percent of his supporters walked away. That strikes me as a good sign.

Rather than conclude simply that “they” now outnumber “us,” one could divine instead that we are catching up, and that it might not take much to put us over the top next time. To resume the baseball metaphor, the Republicans rallied impressively in the ninth inning of the final game, but fell just short.

I have been hearing about the imminent death of the Republican party throughout my life. I wasn’t around yet when FDR beat Hoover in 1932, but that was supposed to be the death knell of the GOP. And it did come pretty close, with FDR and Harry Truman winning five consecutive elections. But then came Eisenhower to the rescue.

After the 1964 election, in which Lyndon Johnson absolutely swamped Barry Goldwater, that was supposed to be it for the

Republicans. Yet four years later, Richard Nixon became president.

When the same Nixon was forced to resign from office in 1974 because of the Watergate scandal, that was it for the Republicans. But then, lo and behold, along came Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Bill Clinton's victories over George Bush the elder and Bob Dole seemed to reveal a Republican party on the ropes, but then Bush the younger won his two terms.

What we can't predict, particularly when we are as depressed as we are on this morning after, is that large, unexpected developments frequently throw conventional wisdom for a loop.

In 1952, a revered war hero dragged the GOP out of the dumps. In 1968, a GOP candidate capitalized on his predecessor's criminal mishandling of the Vietnam situation. In 1980 the GOP rose from the ashes in the wake of the Iran hostage crisis and Jimmy Carter's demonstrable ineptitude. In 2000 a Republican eked out a victory after his predecessor as President disgraced himself and his office.

With the reelection of Obama, one liberal blogger is speculating that the next Republican president may not have been born yet! A bold prediction, and typical of the Left whenever they win an election.

What will happen next to save the GOP? Don't ask me, but I am willing to bet that it will.