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2004 Replay?

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 22, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

At Politico this morning [1], Jonathan Martin and Alex Isenstadt argue that the political map likely to result from the upcoming midterms will look a lot like the map the 2004 elections yielded, with Democratic gains in the South and rural Midwest over the past two election cycles, headed back to the GOP. The red v. blue map will look as it did before the nation soured on the presidency of George W. Bush.

They may well be right. But, there is another sense in which this election may look more like 2004 than some people anticipate. I was speaking with a wise political observer the other day. He believes that every election comes down to a simple choice: Is it time for a change or do we want to stay the course? He said, correctly, that many thought 2004 would be a change election and it turned out to be a stay the course election. I think the polling this year shows greater receptivity to change, but many races remain remarkably close calls. As we are seeing in Alaska, the more people focus on Joe Miller, the less they like him. Ken Buck in Colorado had a gaffe that has cost hom some points in the polls. Pat Toomey has squandered his lead over Joe Sestak in Pennsylvania. In Nevada, I suspect "None of the Above" scores better every time either candidate opens their mouth, but Angle is hardly going to win more votes with her press-avoiding strategy.

In the Politico story, the authors are correct that there are strong regional variations in the polling, and Obama's fourth quarter strategy of trying to motivate young voters and minorities won't help much in the rural Midwest, although it may make the difference in some close southern races. Still, the tsunami requires GOP victories in the Northeast as well as in the South, in New York as well as North Carolina, and it is far from clear to me that having looked more closely at the face of a GOP whose most prominent spokespeople are Chrstine O'Donnell, Joe Miller and Sharron Angle, this election may turn out to be more of a stay the course election than the pundits are predicting.

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[1] http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1010/43993.html