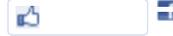


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Most see an N.J. win for Obama

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Column by JOHN

SCHOONEJONGEN

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Many of you know it, some of you might not want to believe it, but all of us must live with the reality.

President Barack Obama is going to win New Jersey in November. GOP nominee Mitt Romney doesn't stand a chance. No less an authority on the Garden State's voters than Gov. Chris Christie has admitted it.

"Listen, let me be honest with you, (Romney is) not winning New Jersey," Christie told the Michigan delegation during the Republican National Convention in late August. "It's not happening."

Not that this information is going to stop people from trying to pump up the electorate on either side. During the convention in Tampa, former New Hampshire Gov. John Sununu told the New Jersey delegation at one of its breakfasts not to give up, that a win was still possible. Going even further, Sununu argued that a New Jersey win for Romney was absolutely necessary in order to reverse the "disaster of the last four years."

The gathered Republicans loudly cheered him on. But even they know it's an uphill slog.

When it comes to Obama, "New Jersey is squarely in his corner," said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers University.

It would be nice to think that New Jersey would be Ground Zero for a ground war in the presidential campaign. It would be nice to be courted, to have money thrown at us in an effort to win our votes. But the truth is, New Jersey is a place where national candidates raise money (through June, Obama and Romney have raised nearly \$9 million here).

This red-state tilt has a trickle-down effect. In the U.S. Senate race, incumbent Bob Menendez, a Democrat, maintains a significant lead over state Sen. Joe Kyrillos, R-Monmouth. That lead exists despite the fact that approximately one third of those polled in a recent Rutgers-Eagleton survey either were unsure of their opinion of Menendez or did not know who he was.

It would be foolish, however, to read anything more into the poll results or the inevitability of an Obama win in November. For example, to imply that Christie is in a weak position because of Obama's poll numbers here is to ignore the odd dynamics of New Jersey voters' relationship with the governor. Polls still show him hovering above 50 percent approval.

The key in November may actually be in how much of a margin of victory Obama can manage in New Jersey. That is why a good number of Democrats interesting in running for governor in 2013 and even Christie himself seem willing to put off any hard decision on jumping into the race until after Election Day 2012.

John Schoonejongen is state editor for New Jersey Press Media. jschoonejongen @njpressmedia.com.

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