

Thoroughly moderate America

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The global credit crunch and Barack Obama's neutralisation of the 'religious right' in America are likely to sweep him to an historic victory in the US elections, according to an expert at The University of Nottingham.

Professor Richard H. King, from the School of American and Canadian Studies, believes 2008 has been the most effective Democrat campaign for years and chiefly because Obama dealt with the 'religious right' at the beginning of his campaign: “Obama blunted it early by making clear his own religious views and stressing them on occasion and that's what 'family politics' was about; allaying the value issues, allaying the American people's fear.”

Unlike the 2004 campaign when the religious vote was considered hugely significant for George W. Bush, Professor King believes the Republicans have been quieter on this front this time: “The explicitly religious rhetoric has been surprisingly muted as opposed to just general patriotism. So people will look back and say not that the religious right or the evangelical movement in politics is gone, but that this election hasn't seen it energised or flushed out in a way that we might have thought.”

The recent news of a plot to kill Obama and a group of black students does not seem to have swayed him, but Professor King said the news could have serious repercussions: “It will feed the worry that many people keep barely under control — can an African American president survive a full term in office?”

“I don't see it gaining or losing Obama many votes. The information about the plot so far is sketchy, but it seems to have emerged from the outer reaches of neo-nazi fringe groups. The way it was formulated is bizarre and self-defeating on the face of it.”

The economic crisis has also been a dominant factor for both sides, and saw Republican President Bush struggling to secure a rescue plan for the ailing economy. Finally a 263-171 vote in the House of Representatives passed the \$700bn package. The net effect though, Professor King believes, is an advantage for Obama and his appeal to the moderate voter, despite a lack of specific ideas in the Democrat's campaigning: “If there's any single thing that could be deemed a break for Obama that has to be it. It's almost a re-run of 1932 when Republican President Hoover is in the White House and runs against Franklin Roosevelt. Neither candidate by the time the campaign got going was very specific about what they were going to do. It was incumbent upon Roosevelt to say what he was going to do with more specificity because he was the challenger as a Democrat and he was very vague. Obama has been pretty vague about it all, but he has the definite advantage.”

Professor King believes the election will be won and lost over who gets the support of independents and moderates. The attacks on Obama from the McCain-Palin camp have cost the Republicans these moderate votes. Coupled with Sarah Palin's inability to be effective beyond the core Republican base, the balance is with Obama's camp.

But the extent of that advantage itself raises the issue of race. “You would have thought with any other candidate of his intelligence, abilities, capacity to speak and demeanour, that he would be even further ahead in the polls. There may be a glass ceiling there somewhere that's keeping him from kicking beyond a certain margin. In some ways the better he does and the more confused McCain's campaign can seem, the more he has to shift gears, the more it raises the race issue of why Obama's not

further ahead.”

Ultimately, Professor King believes, electing Barack Obama is the only way to begin repairing America's shredded international reputation; “This is largely symbolic on two levels — firstly internally in America. Electing an African American President is enormously important. I think the other area is America's image in the world as translated into foreign policy. The last eight years is the worst I've experienced as an American living abroad. The sheer gut-level anti-Americanism has been incredible — but largely justified, based on American foreign policy. An Obama victory has got to help enormously and even in the Arab world.”

In 2004 George W. Bush secured more than four million more votes than Democrat candidate John Kerry. In 2008 Professor King is predicting a significant victory for Obama, but warned against expectations of a landslide: "With all due consideration of the possibility of an upset, it is difficult to see how Obama-Biden can lose. Of course, some part of their support — such as younger people — could fail to turn out; or millions of heretofore silent voters could suddenly show up and vote for McCain-Palin. But the Democrats' campaign has been one of the most effective in years and events this autumn have conspired to give the Democrats a big boost toward victory in November. Not a landslide, but a comfortable margin for Obama-Biden."

A full podcast interview with Professor Richard King is now available at to hear:

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