Campaign DOCTOR

SPECIAL REPORT

The ORVS Formula: How to Determine if You Have a Prayer in Hades of Winning... By the Numbers!

(September 2019) - Thanks to gerrymandering, the biggest question for many party activists, and especially GOP donors, isn't so much whether a candidate is philosophically aligned with them but whether they actually have a chance to win.

I mean, it's great if a candidate tells us he or she is pro-life, pro-gun and anti-tax. However, if they live in a district in which Democrats outnumber Republicans by a factor of 10-1...

Is that really a race where I'm going to devote any significant amount of time or money? Um, no.

But what about districts that have a Democrat majority but not necessarily an overwhelming majority? How do you decide whether or not it's a race worth paying attention to or investing in?

For that matter, how does a prospective candidate thinking of running in such a district objectively and realistically assess his or her chances?

Well, there's a formula for that. And I recently was reminded of it and thought now would be a good time to share it with those who aren't aware. Here's the deal...

So I got an email asking me to meet with a Republican congressional candidate and serve as her witness in signing the Taxpayer Protection Pledge. And readily agreed.

First-time candidate. Has potential. But running for Congress right out of the gate? Why not start at the local or state legislative level? Natural questions.

Bigger question: Why Nevada's 4th congressional district which has a whopping 38,000 more registered Democrats than Republicans and has only been won once by a GOP candidate - during the freak "red wave" election of 2014?

"How are you going to win this seat?" I asked.

The candidate provided all the usual pie-in-the-sky scenarios: I'm young, I'm different, I'm new, I'm a business owner, people like me, the incumbent's a liberal, etc., etc., etc.

Exactly the sort of thing I've heard from novice candidates for over two decades now. Which isn't the candidate's fault. They don't know what they don't know because they've never done this before.

But this candidate's campaign manager/consultant? Surely he'd "run the numbers" and could provide an objective and realistic path to victory, right?

Wrong.

Again I was given "feelings," "beliefs" and hypotheticals. No data. No numbers. Just "gut feelings."

This is why I say there is more incompetence in the field of political consulting than in any field other than psychiatry.

Of course, the number I was looking for is a number this consultant has probably never even heard of: The ORVS number.

ORVS stands for Optimal Republican Voting Strength.

It's an objective number based on a formula of historical election results taught to me back in the mid-1990's by a guy named Kevin Moomaw who was, at the time, the Executive Director of the New Mexico Republican Party.

So why should you consider this formula by a guy you almost surely have never heard of? I'll let Mike Hailey of *Capitol Inside* present Kevin's bona fides…

> *"No one including Karl Rove can take more credit than Kevin Moomaw for the transformation of the Texas GOP into the state's majority party.*
>
> *"Moomaw got started in the business under U.S. Senator John Tower before going to work at the state Republican Party in the early 1980s. Republicans picked up an astonishing 16 seats in the Texas House in one year alone under his leadership.*
>
> *"He went on to serve as the Texas coordinator for the Bush-Quayle ticket in 1988 and again in 1992 - and he managed statewide campaigns as well before taking the call of the west and heading to New Mexico to build the state GOP there like he had here as its executive director."*

So Kevin didn't just fall off the turnip truck last night. He's an experienced party operative who actually knows what the heck he's doing...and has done it.

No, Kevin didn't invent the ORVS formula. He just used it successfully for many, many years in two different states.

The formula itself helps party organizations determine where to target their limited resources in order to get the most bang for the buck; to target seats that are actually winnable.

What a novel idea!

Indeed, Hailey noted that the ORVS system was initially used in Texas in the 1980's and "helped the GOP pick up a record 16 state House seats in 1984."

The ORVS system has been used nationally ever since - although no one interested in running as a Republican in Nevada's 4th congressional district appears to have ever heard of it.

Unfortunately, there are probably very few - if any - party leaders or activists in your neck of the woods who are familiar with it either. So let's rectify that situation…

The essence of the ORVS formula is the fact that while a significant number of voters do, indeed, "vote for the man (or woman), not the party," some 70% of the votes for most races - particularly down-ballot races - are determined by party affiliation/preference.

ORVS represents the GOP base vote plus 2/3 of the "swing" vote - a percentage that a solid GOP candidate who works hard can expect to receive.

So here's the step-by-step formula for evaluating the odds of a Republican candidate winning a particular seat…

And don't worry if you get a little lost and confused at the beginning. I'm going to run through an example and it'll all become clear at the end. So just keep reading.

What you'll need to do is research and compile the results from the last SIMILAR election.

That means if you're looking at races in 2020, a presidential election year when turnout is historically higher, you'll want to research the results from 2016, the previous presidential election year.

If you're researching for 2022, the next NON-presidential election cycle, you'll want to look at the results from 2018.

With me so far?

OK, we're going to be looking at races for the 2020 presidential election cycle, so the figures you need to research will come from the results of the 2016 election.

Regardless of which election year you're looking at, the first thing you need to determine is what was the BEST partisan statewide race that year - meaning the statewide race in which the largest number of votes were cast (for ALL candidates in the race, including third-party and independent candidates) - and the WORST partisan statewide race that year - meaning the statewide race in which the fewest number of votes were cast.

You see, there's always a certain level of "drop off" as you move from the top of the ballot down.

A number of people will cast their ballot for president...and that's it!

Others may vote for president, senator and/or governor...and that's it.

A smaller number will add a vote for Congress. An even smaller number will add votes for state legislative races. And an even smaller number will include votes for local races.

The further down the ballot you go, the fewer total number of votes are cast. Many voters, if they don't know the candidates running, will simply leave those races blank.

Got it?

So to be clear: BEST and WORST in calculating your ORVS number refer to the number of votes cast in that particular race, not necessarily which candidate/campaign was the best or worst.

Now, in a presidential election year, the BEST race will likely be the presidential race. In a non-presidential year it will likely be a U.S. Senate or gubernatorial race.

The WORST partisan statewide race will often be for something like secretary of state or state treasurer or attorney general.

However, the example I'm going to use is a State Assembly race in Nevada. And back in 2016 there were only two statewide races on the ballot: President and a U.S. senate seat.

So in this case the BEST statewide partisan race was the Trump (R) vs. Hillary (D) presidential race in which 1,125,385 votes were cast.

And the WORST statewide partisan race was the U.S. Senate contest between Republican Joe Heck and Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto in which 1,108,294 votes were cast.

Now, once you've determined the BEST and WORST races to look at, it's time to

look at how the Republican candidates in those two races did in the particular district you're evaluating in order to come up with that race's ORVS number.

Here are the 7 steps...

Step 1.) Record the total overall number of votes cast in the district for your BEST race.

Step 2.) Record the total number of votes cast for the Republican candidate in your BEST race.

Step 3.) Calculate the percentage of the vote the Republican candidate received in the BEST race by dividing the number of votes the candidate received by the overall total number of votes cast in that race.

Step 4.) Record the total overall number of votes cast in the district for your WORST race.

Step 5.) Record the total number of votes cast for the Republican candidate in your BEST race.

Step 6.) Calculate the percentage of the vote the Republican candidate received in the BEST race by dividing the number of votes the candidate received by the overall total number of votes cast in that race.

Step 7.) Add the BEST % figure + the BEST % figure + the WORST % figure and divide by 3 and…

BAM! That's your ORVS number!

Again, if you're feeling a little lost, don't worry. Stick with me. I'm now gonna walk you through a real-life example step-by-step.

The 2020 race I'm going to be looking at is Nevada Assembly District 5, in which some folks believe the GOP has a shot for a pick-up while others believe it's a waste of time.

What are they basing their opinions on? Mostly gut feelings. But not us! We've got the secret ORVS formula. So let's plug in the numbers…

First there are 33 precincts in Assembly District 5. See Exhibit 1…

EXHIBIT #1

Precinct	Presidential Votes	Trump
3826	340	164
6601	1,145	501
6602	960	399
6604	1,141	386
6606	843	239
6611	682	338
6625	711	367
6631	641	310
6632	627	306
6633	978	461
6634	780	436
6635	985	530
6642	756	354
6661	939	404
6662	689	370
6663	572	215
6664	630	243
6665	920	461
6671	560	216
6672	698	284
6673	1,330	534
6674	737	286
6675	795	384
6681	1,033	583
6683	553	307
6684	468	263
6693	1,154	427
6694	624	263
6695	811	303
6702	698	269
6707	1,214	552
6708	920	331
6709	501	220
	26,435	11,706

Now, in the first column…

Wait, before going any further I need to give credit where credit's due.

My friend Dan Burdish, who became the Nevada GOP executive director after I stepped down in 1995, is my ORVS guru and number-cruncher.

He used the formula, inputted the data and created the spreadsheet for this example. So, <u>THANKS DAN</u>! Now, onward…

In the first column in Exhibit #1, you'll see all 33 precincts which make up Assembly District 5 listed.

In the second column you'll see the total number of votes that were cast in the presidential race for each precinct.

When you add up the total number of votes cast for president in each precinct you come up with 26,435 - which is the number you see at the bottom of the second column.

In the third column you'll see how many votes Republican Donald Trump got for president from each precinct. Add 'em all up and Trump got 11,706 votes out of the 26,435 votes cast in the presidential race in Assembly District 5.

Now simply divide 11,706 by 26,435 and you'll see that Donald Trump got 44.28% of the vote in Assembly District 5.

So 44.28 is the number you use in calculating your ORVS number for the BEST race.

Now do the same calculation for the WORST race…

In Exhibit #2, you'll see at the bottom of the second column that an overall total of 25,904 votes were cast in the U.S. Senate race in Assembly District 5.

Out of those 25,904 total votes cast, the Republican candidate, Joe Heck, got 11,117.

Now take 11,117 and divide it by 25,904 and you'll see that Joe Heck got 42.92% of the votes cast in that race.

So 42.92 is the number you use in calculating your ORVS number for the WORST race.

Exhibit #2

Precinct	Senate Votes	Heck
3826	336	156
6601	1,127	437
6602	944	350
6604	1,114	341
6606	826	212
6611	672	313
6625	701	376
6631	623	294
6632	617	296
6633	957	445
6634	763	437
6635	968	543
6642	740	336
6661	912	388
6662	679	364
6663	556	188
6664	616	222
6665	902	426
6671	546	208
6672	683	264
6673	1,297	528
6674	724	266
6675	778	375
6681	1,025	576
6683	548	313
6684	462	253
6693	1,136	379
6694	611	254
6695	788	312
6702	683	242
6707	1,190	502
6708	897	315
6709	483	206
	25,904	11,117

Which means to get the ORVS number for Nevada Assembly District 5 for 2020, you add 44.28 plus 44.28 plus 42.92 which equals 131.48. You then divide 131.48 by 3 which, rounded up, gives you...43.83

43.83 is your ORVS number for AD5 in 2020.

Got it?

OK, now that the math portion of our exercise is concluded and we have our ORVS number… what does it mean as far as recruiting and supporting GOP candidates in the race?

First, a couple of definitions...

A "Solid" candidate is someone who is a responsible member of the community and is active in local church and/or civic clubs; people a cut above the rest, but not necessarily superstars with access to the rich and famous.

That would be an "Exceptional" candidate who can run well ahead of the ORVS number.

Now...

Incumbency is worth an extra 5% to the ORVS number. So if the GOP challenger is running against a well-respected Democrat incumbent, you must deduct 5% from the ORVS.

But if the Democrat is NOT well-respected or is unpopular, then don't make any ORVS deduction.

Extremely popular Democrat incumbents may have as much as a 10% advantage over the ORVS number.

For that reason, it may be easier to get such an incumbent Democrat to switch parties than to defeat him or her.

Strong minority GOP candidates can run from 2-5% ahead of ORVS in districts that have 50% or more minority voters.

Every time you double the amount of money a candidate spends against the opponent in a race, that candidate usually does about 1.5% better than the ORVS number.

And lastly, every 3% increase in the ORVS doubles the chances of a Republican being elected.

Thus, the same candidate would have about four times the chance of being elected from a 53% district as one which has an ORVS of 47%.

* * * * *

What the Numbers Mean

60% or more: This is a Republican district. A solid candidate will be unbeatable. Don't fail to recruit a good candidate, because any nut who files will likely get elected...and you'll be regretting it for years.

55-59%: Most solid Republican candidates will win in this type district. These seats should be Republican. Only extremely popular Democrat incumbents can survive.

50-54%: Republicans have a 2 out of 3 chance when running against an incumbent. Weak GOP candidates who don't work hard will lose in this type of district.

45-49%: These seats are winnable only by exceptional GOP candidates or against unpopular Democrat incumbents.

40-44%: These seats are not, in all probability, winnable. Only if this is your best district and you have a truly disliked incumbent Democrat should you recruit an exceptional candidate to run.

Below 40%: Be a friend to a well-intentioned candidate and save him or her from certain defeat.

* * * * *

In our example, Assembly District 5's population is 66% white, 10% black and 19% Hispanic. So no particular bump for a minority Republican in this district.

The Democrat opponent is a two-term incumbent who is not unpopular. But she's more unknown than well-respected. So let's just take 3 points off.

That brings our ORVS number down to 40.83.

This is NOT a race that should be high up on the Nevada GOP's list of targeted races. That's not just what my gut is telling me, that's what the numbers say, as

well.

As for the CD4 race that got this whole thing started, the ORVS number is 44.26. However, the incumbent Democrat in that race in 2020 is well-respected.

That takes the ORVS number down to 39.26.

So that promising first-time candidate I met with a couple weeks ago should absolutely NOT run for this seat...no matter what smoke her political consultant is blowing up her skirt.

Cheers!

Dr. Chuck Muth, PsD
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