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Mounting Chatter that Victory is 'Inevitable' Could Boomerang Against Obama

It seems that most pollsters, pundits and many media outlets are declaring the Presidential election preordained.

According to them, the election isn't over, but show time has been set, and the fat lady is in rehearsal. This "inevitability" theme is actually an influence tactic that I believe could backfire by motivating Romney's supporters *and* Romney himself.



Mitt Romney (Photo credit: Dave Delay)

It's a tactic that basically equates "big" with victory. I've written extensively about why it's good to be the "little guy" in influence situations, especially when influencing up the food chain, and an election is an upward persuasion encounter. The voters are the boss. That's why I am intrigued that some are claiming the election results settled. It's a poorly chosen influence tactic.

The last time we saw this tactic in the political arena it was used by [Hillary Clinton](#)'s team. Remember how the political experts told us that it was inevitable that she would win the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination? My colleague Dr. Kelton Rhoads of USC and Director, [Working Psychology](#), reminds us: "The

political experts at the time told us that 'Hillary's got the nomination all wrapped up. You Obama people can go home now, it's all over.' What did that do? It sent the Obama camp into overdrive. So the inevitability theme has a spotty track record at best. It can boomerang, and tip the opposition into reactance."

I believe this reactance could manifest itself not only in Romney's supporters, *but in the candidate himself*. Romney has grit, he is persistent. Robert P. Kirchhoefer writes in his American Spectator blog post titled "[Indefatigable](#)" that in the GOP primary, the pundits reminded us that there was an "anti-Romney voting block" and that he could not beat Texas Governor Rick Perry or insurgent candidate Herman Cain. We know how that show ended. It seems that Romney does quite well when facing obstacles.

Why the "Inevitability" Tactic Can and Does Backfire

While the inevitability tactic is presumably used to mitigate enthusiasm and motivation of one's opponent, it can do the opposite. Dr. Rhoads elaborates: "Those of us who study propaganda recognize this tactic as the 'inevitability theme.' It sounds like the Borg in Star Trek: 'Resistance is futile. The fight is over. You have already lost, so you may as well give up now.' It's a dangerous tactic to use, because it may or may not lead to defeatism, as it is designed to do. It can also have the opposite effect. It can help motivate resistance.

"The U.S. military used the 'inevitability theme' at the beginning of the Iraq War with 'Shock and Awe.' At that time, it was a popular idea that the flamboyant bombing of Baghdad and the frightening reputation of the U.S. military would cause the Iraqi resistance to immediately collapse, and that the war would be over within weeks. I don't suppose we need to remind anyone that the Iraq war lasted longer than WW II.

"So the inevitability theme has a spotty track record at best. It can boomerang, and tip the opposition into reactance. Come to think of it, if I remember my Star Trek, the theme didn't work for the Borg, either."

The Bottom Line

Big organizations and causes like to intimidate others with their “We are so big you might as well give up” motif. Proceed with caution—you could just be injecting your opponents with even more motive force.

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