



## Obama's America IN TRANSITION

# Republicans 'must change to survive'

Paul Bibby

THE Republican Party must abandon its "stringently right wing" positions on gay marriage, abortion and immigration or it could be banished to the political wilderness by the American people for decades, says the deputy director of a conservative think tank.

As the recriminations over the Republicans' defeat in last week's elections continued, the deputy director of the Hoover Institution, David Brady, said the party had moved too far to the right, leaving behind a significant proportion of its supporter base, and that more would leave unless the party returned to the centre.

"In order for the Republicans to win again they have to drop the anti-gay, anti-immigrant, strict pro-life, no-abortion social positions they have taken," said Professor Brady, who is in Australia as a visiting fellow at the United States Studies Centre at Sydney University.

"They have to drop those things and move to the centre where the American voters are. Look at gay marriage - support for gay marriage in America is going up; it's not going down. It's a similar situation if you're pro-life. The majority in America has been pro-choice for a while, and

it's not moving anywhere."

Using a series of internet surveys to determine voter preferences, the Hoover Institution found that 8 per cent of the Republican base had shifted towards the Democratic Party since 2004.

"America used to be roughly divided along the lines of a third Republican, a third independent, and a third Democrat," Professor Brady said. "Now it's 35 per cent Democrat, 28 per cent Republican and the rest independent.

This meant that the "base strategy" used in George Bush's campaigns - mobilising the traditional Republican supporter base rather than winning over undecideds - was no longer a winning plan.

Professor Brady's comments were echoed by the Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, over the weekend.

"I think the important thing for the Republican Party is now to also look at other issues that are very important for this country and not to get stuck in ideology," he said in an interview broadcast on CNN.

"Let's go and talk about health-care reform. Let's go and ... fund programs if they're necessary programs and not get stuck just on the fiscal responsibility."

Support for the unsuccessful vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin evaporated in the final weeks of the campaign, and Mr Schwarzenegger is emerging as a possible nominee for the 2012 or 2016 presidential election campaigns. He will leave the governor's mansion in 2010 to stand for a US Senate seat, an ideal platform for a presidential tilt.

Professor Brady stopped short of endorsing his fellow Californian, but he said the next great hope of the Republican Party might be a similarly left-field choice. "Sarah Palin is not a candidate who can win in a general election," he said.

"At this point the front runners would be [Mitt] Romney, Palin, [Mike] Huckabee. But I think what might have to happen is a governor coming up out of the ranks in the same way that George [Bush] did in 2000."

Professor Brady will join the former *Los Angeles Times* editor Michael Parks and the chief executive of the United States Studies Centre, Geoffrey Garrett, in a public forum on America's new political landscape at Verbrugghen Hall, Sydney, tonight.



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Outrage ... gay rights activists take to the streets of Los Angeles to protest against a ban on same-sex marriages. Photo: AP/Afton Almaraz