

The Stage is set for a Direction Changing November Election

George Washington University Battleground 55

Republican Analysis:

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As we enter the last sprint of this election cycle, Republicans are in position to make impressive gains this November. The GOP has intense and motivated supporters; the President's image continues to hover at all-time lows; the political environment clearly favors Republicans; and anxiety about the economy continues to be a dominant issue for a significant portion of the electorate. This latest edition of the George Washington University Battleground Poll makes clear that Republicans are poised for a takeover of the Senate, and to hold, if not solidify, their majorities in the U. S. House of Representatives, Governors' mansions, and State Legislatures across the country.

The vote intensity of Republican voters is strong – a net twelve-points more than their Democratic counterparts. Overall, sixty-two percent (62%) of voters say they are extremely likely to vote in the November elections. However, Republicans (69% extremely likely) outpace Democrats (57% extremely likely). In fact, this intensity advantage exceeds where Republicans were in the September 2010 Battleground Poll. In addition, Republicans hold a four-point advantage (46%-42%) on the generic Congressional ballot. In states with a competitive US Senate race, Republicans hold a sixteen point advantage (52%-36%) on this generic ballot. Not only are Republicans getting stronger support on the generic ballot from “hard” Republicans (93%) than Democrats are getting from “hard” Democrats (89%), “soft” Republicans are voting a net sixteen-points stronger for the generic Republican on the ballot than “soft” Democrats are voting for the generic Democrat. By any measure, Republicans are fired up and ready to deliver victories to their candidates in November, with of the strong backing of Independent (+15-points) and middle class voters (+11-points).

As the political environment continues to trend in favor of Republicans, or more specifically away from Barack Obama and Washington Democrats, it is interesting to

note that virtually every Democratic political pundit on TV today falls back on the talking point of, “Barack Obama is not on the ballot this November.” Sounds right, and in fact, is technically right, but looking at this latest Battleground data, the reality is that Obama is very much on the ballot this November. Seven-in-ten voters (70%) believe the country is on the wrong track, including ninety-six percent (96%) of those voters who disapprove of the job Obama is doing as President, and ninety-five percent (95%) of the voters who disapprove of the job Obama is doing with the economy. Even a plurality of Democrats (47%) believe the country is on the wrong track, driven by conservative Democrats (55% wrong track). It will be tough for Democratic candidates in the next nine weeks to convince voters that they will change the direction of the country, especially the economy, with seventy-one percent (71%) of voters saying their personal economic situation is either the same or worse than four years ago. On top of that, President Obama is not only upside down in voter approval of his handling of the economy, but voters for the first time now “strongly” disapprove of his handling of the economy by a two-to-one margin. Add to that the fact that Obamacare remains unpopular, and is further driving voters’ economic angst in virtually every segment of the country, with the exception of partisan Democrats, and every Democratic member of Congress voted for Obamacare; time has run out for President Obama to change his image with voters for the better, and incumbent Democrats wanting to unlink from the President’s image.

In particular, the economy is the top vote-deciding issue for both voters in states with competitive Senate races (30%) and for Independents (28%). It will be challenging at best to make a case to these crucial voters that continuing the policies of the last five and a half years is the best way to ease their anxieties about the economy.

Most of the US Senators facing voters now either won or were re-elected in 2008 when President Obama’s extraordinary campaign lifted the tide and brought into port even the less-than-stellar candidates. Like their House counterparts in 2010, these U. S. Senators are now facing a much different electorate with much different views about President Obama.

Indeed, this poll finds a majority (51%) of voters disapprove of the job performance of President Obama with fully forty-five percent (45%) of voters strongly disapproving of his performance. The ratio of voters who strongly disapprove to those who strongly approve is 1.7 to 1 strongly disapprove. The President has a majority disapproval rating with some notable key voting blocs for this election, such as voters in states with competitive U. S, Senate races (63%), men (55%), seniors (52%), white voters (60%), Independents (53%), married voters (59%), and middle class voters (53%). Looking at the breadth and depth of the disapproval the electorate has for President Obama, it is no mystery why so many Democratic candidates in competitive races have increasingly been avoiding events with him.

On issue specific job approval ratings for President Obama, he is upside down on nine of the twelve issues tested, including the economy (55% disapprove), solving problems (55% disapprove), working with Congress (57% disapprove), the federal budget and spending (61% disapprove), jobs (50% disapprove), taxes (50% disapprove), foreign policy (58% disapprove), Social Security (45% disapprove), and immigration (57% disapprove). In addition, with the exception of jobs (1.4 to 1 strongly disapprove) and Social Security (1.4 to 1 strongly disapprove), on all of these measures, the ratio of those strongly disapproving to those strongly approving is 2 to 1, or worse. Voters are dissatisfied with the performance of the President on key issues overall and the passion and intensity is with those who are dissatisfied. Frustrated voters vote, and those critical of the President are notably frustrated.

That is true of middle class voters, and particularly white middle class voters. On two of the issues where the President is right side up or even, standing up for the middle class (50% approve/48% disapprove) and representing middle class values (48% approve/48% disapprove), a majority of middle class voters actually disapprove of his performance on these issues (51% disapprove for both). So among voters most likely to be attuned to his performance on these class specific issues, the President is actually upside down.

In fact, on every issue tested with the exceptions of Social Security and Medicare, a majority of middle class voters disapprove of the job performance of the President. The President and his party have tried to make much of this election cycle about how Republicans are insufficiently concerned about the economic struggles of middle class voters. These job approval judgments from middle class voters illustrate that the President and his party have failed to make this case about their policies on not only economic issues, but on issues like foreign policy and immigration as well.

This trend continues on a series of issue handling questions about the ability of the parties to better handle key issues. Overall, Republicans have the advantage on five of the eleven issues tested; the parties are within the margin of error on two issues; and the Democrats have the advantage on four issues. However, Republicans have the advantage on the issues most likely to be decisive with voters like the economy (+7%), taxes (+5%), foreign policy (+10%), and immigration (+7%). Republicans enjoy a double digit advantage with middle class voters on these decisive issues. For voters worried about their pocketbook, their safety from foreign threats, or the sovereignty of their nation, the GOP is winning the battle of ideas.

As mentioned earlier, on voters' assessment of their personal economic situation, more than seven in ten voters (71%) say that their situation has gotten worse (36%) or stayed the same (35%). For most the electorate, sending more members to Congress to continue the same economic policies of the current White House is not a desirable choice. Those voters who say things have gotten better for them economically (29%) are driven by Democrats (44%), especially moderate to liberal Democrats (47%), not the Independent or middle class voters the White House or Washington Democrats would have you believe.

The 2010 cycle saw Republicans make decisive wins across the country, driven by a motivated base and swing voters who were displeased with the policies of the Obama administration. Only a lack of skillful candidates, especially in US Senate races, kept the GOP from making even more gains. This cycle finds similar political dynamics – a motivated base of Republican voters, a depressed Democratic base, and dissatisfied

voters weary of the myriad of failed policies of the Obama administration. The only difference? This year's crop of Republican Senate candidates is getting much higher reviews across the board. This latest Battleground Poll points to a stage that is set for a direction-changing election. A direction-changing election driven by Republicans taking control of the U. S. Senate – bringing their control of Congress to both houses, and hopefully, for the sake of the country, putting proven Republican solutions for our nation's problems, domestic and foreign, truly on the table.