

Battleground 61:
A New Era Begins in Washington
Republican Analysis
By: Ed Goetas and Brian Nienaber

The conventional wisdom defying victory by Donald Trump and the continued Republican control of Congress is ushering in a new era in Washington. For the first time in more than a decade, Republicans will be in control of both the Executive and the Legislative branches of the federal government.

While Donald Trump's victory was shocking to many voters, there are clear signs in this data that voters are optimistic and enthusiastic about this new era in Washington. More than two-in-five voters select that their emotional reaction to Trump winning and the GOP maintaining control of Congress is hopeful (33%) or excited (14%). In contrast, just twenty-six percent (26%) of voters select that they are scared.

An additional defiance of conventional wisdom is seen on an information flow question about President-elect Trump. While much of the earned media and commentary has focused on the foibles of this transition effort, when voters are asked for impact of what they have seen, read, or heard about Donald Trump since his election, a plurality of voters (47%) say this information has given them a more favorable view of Trump. This positive information flow is remarkable given all the negative earned media and critical commentary that has been directed at President-elect Trump since Election Day. Fully forty-three percent (43%) of Johnson voters and fourteen percent (14%) of Clinton voters indicate their views about Trump have become more favorable since Election Day.

This is not to understate the rough and tumble nature of the 2016 Presidential campaign. When voters were asked their view of the language used in this campaign, a majority of voters (52%) select that this language was repulsive and had no place in a Presidential campaign. Despite this view of this language, most voters (54%) say that the language used on this campaign had no impact on their decision about voting for President. All of the concern about the bruising rhetoric of this Presidential campaign was unfounded to the majority of the electorate.

Looking to the year ahead, voters are ready to give President-elect Trump and the Republican Congress the benefit of the doubt. While President-elect Trump still has an image rating that is upside down (45% favorable/49% unfavorable), this represents a twenty-point positive shift, and he now has the highest favorable rating and the lowest unfavorable rating since he entered the Presidential race. In contrast, Secretary Clinton continues to have a majority unfavorable rating (55%) and her favorable rating is lower and showing no improvement from earlier surveys. Elections often have a strong impact on the image of candidates and here that is clearly the case.

A similar trend is seen when Presidential election voters are probed on the reasoning behind their vote. Trump (79%) has more supporters than Clinton (75%) who describe themselves as definite in their decision. Trump (20%) also has fewer voters than Clinton (24%) who describe their support as reluctant. Trump will begin his Presidency with a significant number of voters who made a definite, affirmative choice to select him as their President.

In looking at the reaction of Trump voters to the outcome, the optimism of these voters is even more evident. Those voters who were definite Trump voters were most likely to describe themselves as hopeful (55%) or excited (38%) about the 2016 election results. Those voters who were reluctant Trump voters described themselves as hopeful (69%) at an even higher rate while another nineteen percent (19%) described their reaction as excited. So, even for those voters who were less enthusiastic about Trump, they will enter 2017 with hope and excitement.

On images, for the Republican Congress, Vice President-elect Mike Pence (44% favorable/37% unfavorable) has a net positive image. And, while House Speaker Paul Ryan is at a one-to-one ratio (35% favorable/36% unfavorable), he still has more than one-quarter (29%) of the electorate who do not yet have an image of him. Though he has a more negative image rating (17% favorable/33% unfavorable), Senate Majority Leader McConnell has a similar opportunity with fully half of the electorate not yet holding an image of him. All of these figures have a great opportunity to define themselves as attentive and accomplished leaders if they can shepherd legislative solutions on key issues through Congress.

Voters were asked to select their top two issues for President Trump and Congress to make their focus in the first 100 days. As seen below, voters have diverse views with every issue offered being selected by at least five percent of the electorate.

	Most Important Issue	Next most Important Issue	Combined responses
The economy	15%	18%	33%
Division in the country	21%	11%	32%
Health care	11%	13%	24%
Dysfunction in government	9%	13%	22%
Jobs	8%	11%	19%
Illegal immigration	6%	8%	14%
Foreign threats	5%	8%	13%
Social Security	3%	4%	7%
Taxes	1%	5%	6%
The deficit	2%	3%	5%

Despite this diversity on issue concerns, if President-elect Trump and Congressional leaders can work together to pass legislation on health care reform and on economic development with less rancor than the heavy handed partisan tactics used to pass Obamacare, a significant number of voters will have seen their top concern addressed.

In fact, when looking at voter expectations on an issue by issue basis for President-elect Trump and the Republican controlled House and Senate, a much clearer path for a legislative agenda surfaces.

First, there are several issues where voters' expectations for legislative action score fairly low. The number of voters saying it is "very" likely to be met with legislative action; U.S. military involvement abroad (8%), privatizing Medicare (15%), building a border wall with Mexico (17%), and defeating ISIS (24%). When looking at the combined response of "very" likely and "somewhat" likely, only

defeating ISIS (53%), receives a slight majority response from the voters.

There are several issues, however, where an overwhelming majority of voters believe action is either “very” or “somewhat” likely with Republican control of the White House and both houses of Congress – reforming the tax code (70%), ending trade deals like NAFTA (60%), making improvements to roads and bridges (66%), and repealing and replacing Obamacare with different health care reforms (80%).

It is also notable that on these key issues – tax reform, trade reform, infrastructure improvement, and health care reform – strong majorities of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats believe that it is very or somewhat likely that action will be taken on these issues. In addition, more than six-in-ten middle class voters believe that action is very or somewhat likely on these issues.

This is an important political environmental note for the coming year. For a majority of voters, particularly middle class voters, their expectations will be exceeded if Congress passes a tax reform package, rejects an “unfair” trade deal like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and passes an infrastructure improvement package. Most importantly, the majority of the electorate will truly have their expectations exceeded if Republicans can repeal and replace Obamacare, an effort that they have been studying and discussing for years.

In sum, while the results of this Presidential election might have been shocking to many observers, voters have clearly processed these results and are willing to give President-elect Trump and the Republican controlled Congress an opportunity to lead and to succeed. Congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle will have the opportunity to provide the solutions on the issues that matter so much to so many voters. They will be judged on their work on everyday issues like providing economic opportunity and reforming health care as well as broader issues like restoring the image of Washington and its leaders both at home and abroad. Voters elected a Presidential candidate whose primary message was a promise to bring substantial change to Washington. In the last four weeks since the election, voters have shown a positive response to this new era in Washington while keeping their expectations high for several key areas that affect their daily lives. In just a few weeks, the real work begins, and Congress and the President-elect will have an opportunity to further respond to this desire from the electorate for meaningful change.

Editor’s Note: The intent of this latest G. W. University Battleground poll was to analyze where the American Voters’ were one month after the 2016 Presidential Election, not analyze what happened in the election. When looking at both the results of the election and the exit polls from the election, it was clearly a victory for both President Elect Trump and the Republican Party as a whole. Not only did President-Elect Trump score a big win in the Electoral College, winning 306 Electoral votes, but Republicans in the Senate will maintain a majority of the Senate with 52 Senators, and in the House Republicans held a strong majority in the House holding the net loss of Congressmen to the single digits (-6). Additionally, Republicans added a net two governors to their ranks and now have 33 of the 50 states being held by Republicans, and gained over 100 legislators and now control 69 of the 98 state legislative bodies.

Polling has come under some criticism but in the end the national polls were pretty much on the mark, with the average of the national polls having Clinton leading going into Election Day with a three percent (3%) lead and ending up winning the popular vote by about two percent (2%). The state polls have taken a hit, but in reality most in the state polling averages, included polls that ended a week out from the election. (At The Tarrance Group we conducted polls in the last week in OH, FL, NC, and PA all showing both Trump and the Senate candidates ahead on the ballot and moving in a positive direction – clearly the election broke in the last week for Donald Trump in most of these states).

Three factors appear to have played a major factor in the final vote.

First, with that group of voters that were unique in this election – the 18-20 % who were unfavorable towards both presidential candidates throughout the general election – broke late for Trump. In the national exit polling Clinton won 98% of the voters who were favorable towards Clinton, unfavorable towards Trump and Trump won 98% of the voters who were favorable towards Trump and unfavorable towards Clinton, but with the 18% of voters who were unfavorable towards both Donald Trump won by a 49% to 29% margin. In the battleground presidential states (PA, NC, FL, OH, WI), Trump won a majority of that group of voters who were unfavorable towards both, in most cases by a two to one margin. Democrats like to point to the Comey/FBI letter to Congress as a major reason for her loss, but The Trump campaigns' message discipline in the final weeks also played a major role with these late deciding voters.

Second, both the ground game by the RNC and the key Senate races, combined with the higher intensity (+8%) of the Trump voter outside the major cities/suburbs played a major role in the victories in every one of the target presidential states. Clinton touted a ground game equal to that of the Obama 2012 campaign, but ran a campaign that in many ways never connected with key voter constituencies. You have to have both, and in the end you have to have a message that excites voters, connects with voters, or your ground game falls flat.

Finally, in the end the candidate quality that mattered most was “change.” On the Presidential exit polling, “change” was the top response at thirty-nine percent (39%), and Donald Trump won the vote with that group of voters by eighty-two percent (82%).