

Battleground Poll 65
The 2020 Election: Voters Already Entrenched and Ready for Battle

Republican Analysis
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The Political Environment – Retreat to your corner and wait for the bell

Every boxing match begins with the referee finishing his instructions and telling the fighters to return to their corners and come out fighting at the sound of the bell. The current political environment is much like that final prelude before the fight begins. Voters are engaged and energized at levels not normally seen until fall of a contentious election year. This energy and enthusiasm have led voters to retreat to their partisan corners on a variety of issues.

Fully eighty-two percent (82%) of voters indicate that they are extremely likely to vote. Most importantly, there is no partisan enthusiasm gap between Republicans (84% extremely likely to vote) and Democrats (82% extremely likely to vote). This type of intensity is unprecedented in Battleground Polling over the last twenty-eight years and particularly unusual for partisans on both sides to be so engaged. One expects the out-party's supporters to be energized, but this is an impressive level of enthusiasm for the incumbent party's supporters.

This deep partisan divide arises again and again when asking voters to assess the political environment. While a strong majority (58%) of voters believe that the country is on the wrong track, fully seventy-two percent (72%) of Republicans think the country is headed in the right direction, while ninety-one percent of Democrats (91%) think the country is off on the wrong track.

There is a similar split on the job approval ratings for President Trump. The President is upside down on his overall job approval rating (43% approve/53% disapprove). However, ninety percent (90%) of Republicans approve of his job performance while ninety-four percent (94%) of Democrats disapprove. In this latest Georgetown University Battleground Poll, we also ask job approval ratings for the President on six issues – the economy, foreign affairs, taxes, jobs, immigration, and health care. While the President has a majority approval rating among all voters on the economy (57%) and jobs (57%), two-thirds of Democrats (67%) disapprove of President Trump's job performance on all six issues while sixty-nine percent (69%) of Republican voters approve of his job approval on all six issues.

There continues to be a sharp divide when voters are asked to choose one of three options to describe their reaction to the President’s often uncivil manner. A majority of all voters (52%) select that “Donald Trump’s style and comments are frequently insulting, and he has the wrong approach on many issues”. However, just nine percent (9%) of Republicans select this option versus ninety percent (90%) of Democrats who do the same. On a middle option: “Donald Trump’s style and language bother me, but he is raising important issues”, just seventeen percent (17%) of voters select this option, but thirty-two percent (32%) of Republicans select this option.

In contrast, while twenty-nine percent (29%) of all voters select: “Donald Trump tells it like it is and he has the right approach on the issues I care most about”, a majority of Republicans (58%) select this viewpoint – (what is often referred to as the “Trump Base” as opposed to the broader “Republican Base”).

Trump view	All voters	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Donald Trump's style and comments are frequently insulting, and he has the wrong approach on many issues	52%	9%	53%	90%
Donald Trump's style and language bother me, but he is raising important issues	17%	32%	15%	5%
Donald Trump tells it like it is and he has the right approach on the issues I care most about	29%	58%	25%	4%

Most disconcerting about these numbers is that to receive majority support from the American Electorate, President Trump’s reelection campaign would have to garner 100% of the Trump Base and 100% of those voters whose Trump’s style and language bother them but believe he is raising important issues. Even then, President Trump would still have to cut into that majority group of voters who believe Donald Trump’s style and comments are frequently insulting, and he has the wrong approach on many issues. With that middle group who believes he is raising important issues, that is exactly what those voters need to hear from the Trump reelect – Issues (especially addressing the economy and jobs)! With that last group President Trump needs to drive up the negatives of the Democratic nominee. The tough part is these two groups need to be hearing much different things from Donald Trump and his reelection campaign that potentially work against each other, but more on that later.

The 2020 Presidential Election – Run it Back

One of the biggest mistakes that candidates and consultants make is trying to re-run the last campaign instead of focusing on the new and different challenges of the present campaign. The 2020 Presidential campaign is shaping up to be a mirror of the 2016 campaign. Exit polling in 2016 indicated that 19% of voters who voted on Election Day had an unfavorable view of both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. President Trump won most of these “dislike both” voters by a two-to-one margin in the key states making this bloc of voters decisive for his victory. With the release of the FBI statement, negative press focused on Hilary Clinton in the final weeks of the campaign and gave Trump the opening he needed to win over these voters. The may have not liked Donald Trump, but they disliked Hillary Clinton more.

This latest Georgetown University Battleground Poll finds that a majority of voters (56%) have an unfavorable view of President Trump. An unfavorable number that has remained a flat-line throughout the Trump presidency. However, all of the Democratic candidates with a realistic chance of winning their nomination are also upside down on their image, including Joe Biden (45% favorable/50% unfavorable), Kamala Harris (35% favorable/43% unfavorable), Bernie Sanders (44% favorable/50% unfavorable), and Elizabeth Warren (43% favorable/44% unfavorable). This election is shaping up to be another election where a significant number of voters have an unfavorable view of both President Trump and the Democratic nominee. If this continues to develop, as was the case in the 2016 Presidential Election, these “dislike both” voters will be the swing vote again in the 2020 Presidential Election, keeping the outcome of the election in question until the final days of the campaign.

Both Presidential candidates will also be challenged to meet the aspirational views of the electorate. On forced choice questions, more than three-in-four voters (78%) want a candidate whose views match their own rather than a candidate who can beat the other side (16%). (* editor’s note – electability has always

been the fool's gold of both Democratic and Republican presidential primaries.) In addition, more than seven-in-ten voters (71%) want to vote for their candidate and not against the other candidate (21%). This Presidential campaign will be focused by both candidates on drawing sharp contrasts and trying to paint their opponent as an unacceptable choice. This vast majority of the electorate who wants to cast an affirmative vote for a candidate whose views match their own will struggle to find much to like in these efforts to draw contrasts and criticize opponents.

Impeachment – Everyone has heard, but is seeing things differently

An astounding ninety-four percent (94%) of voters indicate that they have seen, read, or heard something about the Congressional investigation on impeachment. As a comparison, only ninety-two percent of voters had an opinion on the direction of the country.

However, this is yet another case where a voter's partisan affiliation is determinative. While more than one-third (36%) of Democrats indicate they are following news about impeachment extremely closely, just twenty-eight percent (28%) of Republicans are doing the same.

On the key question of impeachment, in which we provided a description indicating impeachment would lead to a trial for removal from office in the Senate, we are half-way expecting that the President may soon be tweeting a negative hit on the Battleground Poll much like he did against the Fox News Poll. As did the Fox Poll of last week, we found fifty-one percent (51%) of voters are in favor of impeachment of the President in the House and his being sent to the U.S. Senate for trial.

[Donald J. Trump](#)

 [@realDonaldTrump](#)

From the day I announced I was running for President, I have NEVER had a good [@FoxNews](#) Poll. Whoever their Pollster is, they suck. But [@FoxNews](#) is also much different than it used to be in the good old days. With people like Andrew Napolitano, who wanted to be a Supreme....

However, the partisan divide is here as well. Fully ninety-one percent (91%) of Democrats want the President impeached while ninety percent (90%) of Republicans do not. The real swing voters in the coming weeks and months on the issue of impeachment are the Independent voters who are currently fairly split, but leaning for impeachment, with fifty-three percent (53%) responding yes to impeachment and forty-three percent (43%) holding a negative view. The underlying problem is that a lot of water has already gone under that bridge with Independent voters and fifty-eight percent (58%) of these Independent voters already hold an unfavorable opinion of the President and fifty-three percent (53%) see the President as insulting and wrong. These twitter antics of President Trump may be good for keeping the intensity up with his base, but very counterproductive with these swing voters.

The Battle for Control of Congress – Define or die

As noted earlier, Congressional candidates will not be able to count on a popular Presidential candidate creating voter goodwill to generate votes for them. Democratic candidates will also not be able to count on voter goodwill about their Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, and her equally negative image (41% favorable/52% unfavorable). Additionally, the image of both Republicans in Congress (39% favorable/51% unfavorable) and Democrats in Congress (42% favorable/49% unfavorable) are sufficiently negative that it will be challenging for candidates to run just by affirming their party allegiance.

Instead, as seen below, Republicans cannot allow Democrats to define ancillary issues like education broadly or student loans specifically, or health care broadly or prescription drug prices specifically, as major economic issues. Republicans will need to run on more basic issues like jobs, the economy, or national security. The Democrats will want to nationalize this issue debate and use President Trump as their foil. As seen below, this is not a detriment to the issues of jobs and the economy and is actually an extra push on taxes. If there was ever an election that every Republican headquarters (Including the Trump reelect headquarters) needed a sign saying “It’s the economy stupid!” this would be that election.

Issue	Trump	Cong Dems	Trump adv		Cong GOP	Cong DEM	GOP adv
Jobs	52%	41%	11%		50%	42%	9%
Economy	52%	40%	13%		51%	41%	11%
Education	41%	51%	-10%		36%	55%	-18%
Health care	42%	51%	-9%		36%	57%	-21%
Immigration	46%	48%	-2%		41%	53%	-13%
National security	50%	44%	6%		51%	41%	10%
Climate change	31%	54%	-23%		27%	61%	-34%
Taxes	50%	42%	8%		47%	46%	1%
Student loans	38%	52%	-13%		34%	53%	-19%
Retirement security	45%	47%	-2%		45%	43%	1%
Rising cost of living	44%	44%	0%		40%	50%	-10%
Prescription drug prices	41%	48%	-6%		38%	52%	-15%

Economic Anxiety – Even here voters are in partisan corners

Overall, voters have mixed views about how worried they are about an economic downturn that would affect their family. Twenty-one percent (21%) of voters are very concerned. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of voters are somewhat concerned. Twenty-three percent (23%) are not too concerned. Nineteen percent (19%) of voters are not at all concerned.

On this of all issues, one would expect geography or economic circumstance to be a primary driver of views. However, Democrats (32% very concerned/48% somewhat concerned) are among the most economically anxious voters while Republicans (30% not too concerned/36% not at all concerned) are among the economically confident voters.

There are, however, several subgroups that are important when it comes to the economy and their hearing the right message on the economy. First and foremost are middle class voters who comprise about fifty-eight percent of the electorate. Currently they are slightly upside down on the President’s image (48% unfavorable and 51% unfavorable), but giving him a slight edge (47% voting Trump and 45% for the democratic candidate) on the generic presidential ballot. If Donald Trump is to win a majority of the popular vote next November, middle class voters are a key constituency he must win by better than even. Again the economy is the key. With these middle-class voters, Trump receives a sixty-four percent (64%) approval rating on the economy, a fifty four percent (54%) approval on taxes, and a sixty-two percent (62%) job approval on Jobs – which is normally a strong Democratic issue.

Another key voter group who must hear a strong economic message throughout the 2020 presidential campaign are White married women. As we saw in the last Georgetown University Battleground Poll, the Gender Gap is the worst Republicans have faced in decades. White married women as a group have always mitigated Republican losses with women by voting Republican by about 20-points. In this latest data, women are upside down in their image of Donald Trump (47% approve and 51% disapprove) and even on the generic ballot (46% voting for Trump and 46% voting for the generic Democratic candidate). Again, as with middle class voters, a strong and consistent message on the economy looks to be the key with this voter group. White married women give President Trump a sixty-percent (60%) approval rating on the economy, a fifty-two percent (52%) approval rating on taxes, and a fifty-seven percent (57%) approval rating on jobs.

Conclusion – Areas for Concern but the Ghosts of 2016 Remain

The 2020 election is shaping up to be truly historical. Voters are engaged and energized. Presidential candidates, Congressional leaders, and Congressional political parties all have images that are upside down. The President has a majority disapproval job rating overall and on key issues like foreign affairs, immigration, and health care. His most viable path to victory is to paint his Democratic opponent as an unacceptable choice whose views are unacceptable. Those highly engaged voters hoping for an inspirational candidate running an aspirational campaign will be sorely disappointed.

President Trump won late in the 2016 presidential cycle by getting the lion's share of the large swing group of voters who had an unfavorable view of both candidates. They broke late, and they broke big, and they broke because Hillary Clinton was the focus of the negatives last. This is a challenging endeavor for any candidate to benefit from once let alone plan to manufacture the second time around. That said, the viable Democratic nominees already have upside down images and months of vigorous primary campaigning is unlikely to improve their standing, making the eventual Democratic Presidential nominee a juicy target for the Trump reelection campaign.

Shortly after this poll release, we, along with Democratic pollster Celinda Lake and the Georgetown University Institute of Politics and Public Service, will release some trendline questions from this latest Battleground Poll on political civility. The already formed dynamics of this 2020 presidential campaign indicate that the “death spiral” of uncivil behavior in the political climate of today will only continue throughout the 2020 election . . . and in that environment, there are no winners!