

The POLITICO-GW Battleground Poll

Republican Strategic Analysis:

by Ed Goeas

A key factor over the last year of the 2010 election cycle has been that Republican voters have held continued and historically high advantages on “vote intensity” over Democratic voters. This intensity gap between Republican and Democratic voters, along with the “angry independents” that are teaming up with those Republican voters, have set the stage for a political environment that is heavily tilted in favor of Republican candidates. In this most recent Battleground Poll, there is an eight-point intensity gap (73% to 65%) between Republicans and Democrats stating they are extremely likely to vote. Republicans outpace the overall electorate by six-points while Democrats lag the overall electorate by two-points.

While the impact of the “angry independents” have been a complicating factor in some Republican primaries, with those primaries being fairly close to an end, look for their focus to become even more focused on Washington and the Democrats in control of the White House Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives. Yes, this political environment has been strongly anti-incumbent, but look for it to become much more anti-Washington and anti-Democratic over the next seven weeks. Fully sixty-two percent (62%) of voters think the country is on the wrong track, including eighty-one percent (81%) of Republicans and sixty-two percent (62%) of ticket splitters. Voters who are dissatisfied with the direction of the country tend to blame the party in power for this condition. With the Democrats in control of both Congress and the White House, they will be absorbing much of the blame for this high level of voter dissatisfaction.

In addition, this survey finds the generic Congressional ballot tied (43%-43%). On this generic ballot, Republicans hold significant advantages with key demographic groups like seniors (52%-33%), those who disapprove of the work of both parties in Congress (55%-25%), and those who are extremely likely to vote (46%-40%). Most importantly, when looking at the turnout model of likely 2010 voters, the generic ballot moves to 50% Republican and 42% Democratic – an eight-point advantage. All of this reinforced by the fact that by when asked who will control the House and the Senate after the election by a nine-point margin on both questions voters feel the Republicans will control those chambers.

Regarding President Obama, voters overall hold mixed views about his work as President – forty-five percent (45%) approve and forty-eight percent (48%) disapprove. However, a majority of Republicans (80%), a plurality of Independents (49%), and even twenty-two percent (22%) of conservative Democrats disapprove of his work as President. This level of frustration severely limits the ability of the President to campaign for candidates by making an appeal that he needs more supporters in Congress to enact his agenda. In the 2008 cycle, Obama was a lifeline to energize and mobilize voters for Democratic candidates. In this cycle, he is an anchor that provides significant challenges with the electorate for Democratic candidates all over the country.

This intensity of this dissatisfaction among Republicans and other persuadable voters will also present strong challenges for Democratic candidates. This election provides an opportunity for these frustrated and angry voters to send a message to Obama via their Congressional and Senate votes. Many Democratic candidates are now in the uncomfortable position of attempting to distance themselves from the President while also courting base supporters who still hold the President in high regard.

On the issue matrix, jobs and the economy is the dominant issue concern for voters, being selected by sixty-three percent (63%) of the electorate as the first or second most important issue.

Looking at this impact these concerns will have on the fall elections, Congressional Republicans are at parity with Congressional Democrats on two key economic issues on which Congressional Democrats have traditionally held significant advantages. For turning the economy around, Congressional Republicans have made an eight point gain on this issue since April to now holding an advantage for the first time since 2002. For creating jobs, the two parties are at parity, which represents an eight point gain for Republicans on this issue. This is first time in the history of the Battleground Poll that Democrats have not had an advantage on this issue.

Congressional Republicans also have strong advantages over Congressional Democrats on critical fiscal issues like holding down taxes (53%-26%) and controlling wasteful spending (42%-28%).

In these recent days, the White House and national Democrats have taken part in high profile efforts to make John Boehner a target for criticism. These efforts have included an extraordinary level of commitment from President Obama himself.

This strategy is clearly focused on the long term as fully sixty-four percent (64%) of voters have “no image” of Boehner. To a majority of voters, even Democrats, John Boehner is not the embodiment of the most partisan elements of the Republican Party. Instead, he is a non-entity whom they are unable to identify. This effort is a clear effort by the White House to demonize the man they expect to be the next Speaker of the House.

In a clear repudiation of one of the major efforts of President Obama and the Congressional Democrats, a majority (54%) of all voters, including eighty-one percent (81%) of Republicans and sixty-two percent (62%) of ticket splitters, believe that the stimulus is not working. This election season will conclude with an economy that has not improved. As many voters cast their ballots against candidates who supported this failed effort, the economic recovery plan of the White House will be tossed into the dustbin of history.

In fact, the White House has now switched to a class warfare argument on taxes to provide them with a new recovery debate for 2011 and beyond. This survey finds that President Obama already fending off questions about his own re-election prospects. In a match-up with a generic GOP candidate, Obama is trailing by two points (46%-44%). Indeed, this unnamed GOP candidate has eighty-four percent (84%) support with Republicans and plurality support with ticket splitters. It will interesting to watch over the final days of this campaign season how many days Obama spends in 2008 swing states to bolster his own prospects versus days that he spends working for truly endangered Democratic incumbents.

When the economy does improve, voter concerns will shift to the issues of excessive government spending and the taxes needed to sustain this reckless spending. For years, Democrats have felt confident about the advantages their Party enjoys on economic issues, but the failure of the stimulus and this upcoming focus on spending and taxes will provide Republicans with strong advantages for the next election cycle and beyond.

The bottom line is that as this election cycle concludes and the next one begins, the playing field is clearly tilted towards the GOP for the first time in several election cycles. If, in fact, Republicans use this election to claim victory, this may be a short lived advantage. If, however, Republicans claim this election as a

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victory for the American people to begin turning the country around from the direction that President Obama and the Democrats have been taking the country for the last two years, then this may be the beginning of a very positive direction for the country and for Republicans.

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