



RESURGENT REPUBLIC

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Whit Ayres, Jon McHenry, and Luke Frans
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RE: Early Signs of Another Republican Midterm Wave

Today we are releasing our first survey of the 2014 landscape, a cooperative endeavor conducted with Democracy Corps for NPR. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner conducted the calls March 19-23, 2014, and compiled the data. The survey polled 840 likely 2014 voters nationally. The sample contains 6 percentage points more Democrats than Republicans, 37 percent Democrat and 31 percent Republican, consistent with other national polling of likely voters.

Political Environment

With seven months to go before the election, the political environment looks remarkably promising for Republicans. Six factors create that environment:

- 1. The midterm election in the sixth year of a president's term has been bad news for the party controlling the White House for a century, and this year looks like no exception.** (The one time the pattern did not hold was 1998 when Bill Clinton enjoyed an approval rating in the mid 60s, far above Barack Obama's job approval today.) Obama fatigue weighs on all Democratic candidates up and down the ballot.
- 2. The demographics of midterm elections favor Republicans over Democrats.** White and elderly voters constitute a larger share of midterm electorates, groups where Republican candidates run particularly well.
- 3. Obamacare remains unpopular, especially among Independents who hold the balance of power in midterm elections.**
- 4. President Obama's job approval remains stuck in the low to mid 40s.**
- 5. The generic ballot—a preference for a Republican versus a Democratic candidate for Congress—is essentially even, which has historically been good for Republicans.**
- 6. The Senate seats up in 2014 strongly favor Republicans.** Only one Republican-held seat is up in a blue state, Susan Collins in Maine where she is strongly favored. Seven Democratic-held seats are up in red states that Romney carried convincingly in 2012, and another five Democratic-held seats are up in purple or swing states. If

Republicans win half of those twelve Democratic-held seats, they will take over the Senate assuming they hold all the Republican seats.

The overall political environment in 2014 resembles 2010 far more closely than 2012. While Republicans could not possibly match the historic 63-seat pickup in the House that they achieved in 2010, as of today the chances are better than even that they will take control of the Senate and add to their majority in the House in 2014.

Following are key highlights of the most recent Resurgent Republic/Democracy Corps survey for NPR:

Key Political Measures

1. As seen in a myriad of recent public polls, opposition to Obamacare is at its highest point since becoming law. For the first time in NPR polling, a majority of voters disapproves of the health care law, 51 to 47 percent. Our survey also shows Independents have calcified in their opposition to the law, 59 to 38 percent. President Obama and congressional Democrats remain on the losing side of the intensity battle. Strong opposition tops strong support by 12 points (40 to 28 percent). Moreover, nearly half (48 percent) of Independents strongly oppose Obamacare while only 1 in 5 of these swing voters strongly support the law. There is a partisan intensity gap as well, as 56 percent of Democrats strongly support the law compared to 72 percent of Republicans who strongly oppose it.

2. Majority disapproval is the new normal for President Obama's job performance. Consistent with most public polling since August of 2013, a majority of voters disapproves of President Obama's job performance, 51 to 46 percent. The president's job disapproval rarely reached that level in 2010. Today, President Obama's standing is worse among Independents overall (disapproval 60 to 35 percent) and when considering intensity (strong disapproval outweighs strong approval of Obama by 49 to 14 percent). Republicans and Democrats are mirror opposites on this measure, yet the strong disapproval of Obama's job performance among Republicans (76 percent) is greater than Democrats' strong approval (52 percent). This gap is worth watching as both political parties track base intensity leading up to November.

3. By a 2-to-1 margin, voters believe the country is on the wrong track. By 63 to 29 percent, voters believe the country is on the wrong track. Independents (73 to 20 percent) and Republicans (87 to 10 percent) are the primary drivers of this negative outlook. A majority of Democrats believes the country is going in the right direction (53 to 34 percent). The negative margin among all voters has noticeably increased compared to the softening of political sentiment observed during the fall of 2012.

4. The generic congressional ballot is split overall (Democrats +1, 44 to 43 percent), and Republicans hold a 16-point advantage among Independents (45 to 29 percent). Independents have propelled recent midterm waves swinging toward Democrats in 2006 (57 to 39 percent) and aligning with Republicans in 2010 (56 to 38 percent). Both parties

have locked down their respective base voters with Democrat voters choosing their party's candidate 93 to 3 percent and Republicans doing the same by 89 to 4 percent.

5. Both congressional Republicans and Democrats are viewed poorly and neither party has a decisive edge in capitalizing on voter disapproval of Congress. A majority of voters disapproves of congressional Republicans (72 to 23 percent) and congressional Democrats (59 to 34 percent). Republicans fare worse overall due to majority disapproval among Republican voters (57 to 36 percent). As noted in the generic ballot, the Republican candidate still garners support from 9 out of 10 of these Republican voters. Independents disapprove of congressional Democrats (76 to 17 percent) more than congressional Republicans (72 to 23 percent).

Campaign Messages

1. While opposition to Obamacare continues, Republicans should not run just against Obamacare. Voters were asked to pick between two messages (Resurgent Republic wrote the Republican statement, and Democracy Corps wrote the Democratic statement):

The Republican candidate says: Obamacare is hurting more people than it's helping, and keeping Washington in control of your health care is making the problem worse. Despite the President's promise, millions of people have had their insurance policies cancelled. Millions more are being forced to buy coverage they don't want or need, or can't afford. Obamacare is raising costs, premiums, and the deficit, and cutting funding and benefits for Medicare. It's time to pass health care reform that lowers costs and allows the people—not the federal government or the insurance companies—to control their own health care.

The Democratic candidate says: the health care law is a start, but it's not perfect. We need to make it work for small businesses and get costs down. Give people more time and let them keep their current insurance if they want. So fix it, but build on the really good changes: this law prevents insurance companies from dropping people or raising rates when they get sick or denying people for preexisting conditions. They can no longer charge women more than men and must cover preventive care like cancer screenings. Repealing it with more political fighting will hurt a lot of people.

A plurality of voters overall favors the Democratic message by 49 to 44 percent, in large part because of the strength of this message among Democratic voters (80 to 14 percent). Independents, on the other hand, favor the Republican message by 50 to 43 percent with “strong support” favoring the Republican message (42 percent) over the Democratic message (33 percent). Republican voters choose the Republican message by 74 to 20 percent.

While this Democratic message narrows the deficit the left faces among Independents, Democrats are still underwater with Independents on this question. The liberal message should hardly be treated as the political equivalent of a “get out of jail free” card, but

Republicans should not dismiss these results as an outlier either. This survey as well as other Resurgent Republic polling leads to several observations about the complex health care debate:

- Voters want health care reform that works, which is different from voters believing Obamacare is the only way to achieve health care reform.
- Stating we should “fix Obamacare” is an acknowledgment that the law is broken. Presumably Democratic candidates would be helped if Democrats can “fix” the law in the next seven months. But it is a hollow argument given the fact that neither the Obama Administration nor the Democratic Senate has proposed or passed any legislation to “fix” the law. Delaying and delaying and delaying the implementation of a broken law is not “fixing” it.
- Saying Obamacare will “get costs down” doesn’t mean voters believe that to be the case. Overwhelming majorities of voters believe the law will raise, not lower, their health care costs. Moreover, the widely forecasted premium increases coming in the fall will further undermine support for the law.
- Running against Obamacare is an effective message. It is even more effective when Republicans can answer the question, “So what’s your alternative?” Without an answer to that question, Republicans are vulnerable to the effective Democratic attack that “they just want to put the insurance companies back in charge.”

2. When considering how to grow the economy, Independent voters favor the Republican message by a 22-point margin. Voters were asked to pick between two messages (Resurgent Republic wrote the Republican statement, and Democracy Corps wrote the Democratic statement):

The Republican candidate says: The Obama Administration has had six years to get this economy going and their policies haven't worked. Monthly wages are going down, and there are not enough good-paying jobs to create opportunities for struggling families. We need to start making things in America again, and stop excessive regulations that are hurting the economy. It's time to produce more energy here at home, and educate people for the jobs of the 21st century.

The Democratic candidate says: The economy is recovering, but not for regular hardworking people. Incomes of CEOs and the top 1 percent are soaring, but in the real economy, people are working harder at jobs that don't pay enough to live on. We have got to do something. We must raise the minimum wage, help people afford job training and college, build a 21st century infrastructure, and stop unfair trade agreements that wipe out American jobs.

A slight plurality of voters overall favors the Republican message by 48 to 46 percent. But Independents strongly side with the Republican message by 57 to 35 percent. Not

surprisingly Republicans (82 to 14 percent) and Democrats (83 to 12 percent) mirror each other in party support.

3. Contrary to conventional wisdom, a liberal attack on House Republicans is effectively countered by a conservative critique of President Obama's leadership. Voters were asked to pick between two messages (Resurgent Republic wrote the Republican statement, and Democracy Corps wrote the Democratic statement):

The Republican candidate says: Leadership starts at the top. President Clinton inherited a difficult economy, but worked with a Republican Congress to improve the economy and balance the budget. House Republicans have passed dozens of bills to create jobs and stop spending money we don't have, all of which have been ignored by President Obama and the Democratic Senate. We need more people in Washington who will work across party lines to grow the economy and help hardworking Americans.

The Democratic candidate says: Political gridlock in Washington is holding our country back and hurting people. The parties should be working together to get things done, but Congress under Speaker Boehner is rated the worst in 60 years. The House Republicans are so intent on fighting President Obama, they shut down the government and voted to repeal Obamacare 50 times, when we should be working together to create good jobs and making the economy work for the middle class.

Voters split overall when considering the dysfunction of Washington, with 46 percent favoring the Republican message and 45 percent the Democratic message. Independents give strong support to the Republican message (53 to 37 percent), while Republicans (78 to 17 percent) and Democrats (76 to 13 percent) equally support their respective parties.

Conclusion

All signs point to a strong Republican year in 2014. Anti-Obamacare and anti-Obama leadership lie at the core of the Republican message. But voters vote for ideas as well as against them, and Republicans should continue to highlight an alternative vision for the direction they want to take the country.

Republicans should take 2014 as an opportunity to lay the foundation for a more promising future for the country in 2016 and beyond. That requires bringing new voters into the center-right coalition, and crafting messages that will appeal to the more diverse electorate of the 21st century.

Methodology

This survey of 840 likely 2014 voters nationally was conducted jointly by Resurgent Republic and Democracy Corps March 19-23, 2014. Calls were conducted and data produced by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner. Respondents were selected randomly from a random-digit-dialing sample including both cellular and landline telephone numbers, and

were contacted by live interviewers. All respondents confirmed that they are registered to vote in the county in which they live. Quotas were set for state, age, and race based on state registration and previous turnout. By party the sample is 37 percent Democrat, 33 percent Independent, and 31 percent Republican.

The margins of error for responses with an even split—50 percent for one response and 50 percent for another response—are ± 3.38 percent for the likely voter sample, ± 6.15 percent for Republicans (254 respondents), ± 5.91 percent for Independents (275 respondents), and ± 5.59 percent for Democrats (307 respondents). The margin of error is smaller when one response receives a higher level of support. For example, the margin of error is ± 2.93 percent when 75 percent of respondents in the likely voter sample choose one response and 25 percent choose another response.