

The Battleground 2008

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Democratic Strategic Analysis

by Celinda Lake, Daniel Gotoff, and Mark Keida

Fully seven years into the Bush presidency, the American public remains deeply dissatisfied with the direction of the nation. For years, the war in Iraq fueled voters' strong desire for change, providing the impetus behind the Democratic takeover of Congress just last fall. Yet we are witnessing a noticeable broadening of voters' concerns: The war in Iraq is no longer the issue that Americans say is the most important problem facing the country – by a significant margin, concerns over an economy that solid majorities say is in bad shape, does not serve the middle class, and will provide less opportunity for the next generation dominates the public consciousness. In fact, Americans' pessimism about the economy now runs as high as in 1992, when Bill Clinton was swept into office. Further, voters appear ready to vote their pocketbook – majorities say the next president can make a real difference in helping American families achieve the middle class, and they say this begins with helping families cope with the rising cost of living, particularly on health care and energy.

So far, the Democrats own key advantages over their GOP counterparts. President Bush continues to be a dead weight for GOP candidates at all levels, and Democrats lead Republicans on every ballot tested, including the generic Congressional and Presidential ballots and all four head-to-head races among the Party frontrunners. Swing voters, who are deeply pessimistic about both the economy and the direction of the country generally, are currently breaking for the Democrats – an important bellwether.

Yet the races to control Congress and the White House are still very much in play. Voters are critical of both Parties, and Democrats' current ballot support does not match voters' appetite for change. And their current advantages, much like the centrality of the war in Iraq, may prove fleeting if Democrats cannot speak to the change that voters say they so desperately want. Democrats must establish in 2008 a clear profile on economic issues and the middle class's kitchen table concerns and dreams for their children. As we head into 2008, the Party that is able to offer a credible and compelling case for the prosperity of our families, and our children's generations, will be the one that tastes victory in November.

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THE CONTEXT: VOTERS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT DIRECTION OF COUNTRY, ECONOMY

Despite rosy pronouncements from the Bush administration that the country is in fine health and on a positive track, most Americans remain deeply pessimistic about the direction of the country. Fully 71 percent of likely voters say the country is pretty seriously off on the wrong track, with a solid majority (58%) feeling this way strongly. This stands in sharp relief to the number of voters who say the country is headed in the right direction (21%), including only 12 percent who say so strongly. Voters' cynicism about the direction of the country is virtually unchanged from our July Battleground poll (70 percent wrong track, 21% right direction), yet it remains 7-points higher from our January Battleground poll – taken just as Congressional Democrats took the reigns from the GOP (64%, 25%).

Despite voters' clear yearning for change, Democrats have yet to consolidate the "change" vote. Democrats lead Republicans by 33-points in the generic Presidential ballot among those who say the country is headed off on the "wrong track," but Republicans lead Democrats by 68-points among voters who say the country is headed in the "right direction."

Every demographic group believes the country is going in the wrong direction. Dissatisfaction with the direction of the country extends across the full political spectrum – even to Republicans. Close to half (49%) of Republicans say the country is pretty seriously off on the wrong track. Among crucial independent voters, a whopping 75 percent are negative about the nation's course, which does not bode well for the Party currently occupying the White House. Democrats are the most pessimistic, with fully nine-in-ten (90%) dissatisfied with the direction of the country.

While the war in Iraq still weighs on voters' minds, pocketbook economic issues are driving voters' frustrations about the direction of the country even more. In fact, voters' pessimism about the economy mirrors that of 1992, when George H.W. Bush was denied re-election. For the first time in recent memory, voters are decidedly more concerned about the economic fortunes of the country and their own pocketbooks than any other issue, including the war in Iraq. Close to six-in-ten (57%) believe the economy is now in recession.¹ Not surprisingly, voters rank the economy (15% top concern) as the single-most pressing issue facing the country, followed by the war in Iraq (13%), health care (11%), and immigration (11%). And when other determinants of voters' economic well-being are combined with the economy – health care (11%), energy costs (4%), jobs (4%), and the cost of living (2%) – it becomes clear economic issues have firmly supplanted the war in Iraq as voters' top-of-mind concerns.

Anxiety over the economy is especially acute among voters who will likely decide the 2008 Presidential contest: independents. Fully 24 percent of swing voters cite "jobs and the economy" as the most important concerns facing the nation, which is 4-points more than Democrats (20%)² and 8-points more than Republicans (16%). In fact,

¹ CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll. Dec. 6-9, 2007. N=1,002 adults nationwide.

² This compares to 17% of Democrats who say the war in Iraq is the most important concern.

the economy is the top area of concern for both independents and Democrats, and statistically tied with immigration among Republicans (16% to 17%, respectively). When we look at the expanded measure of the economy – the economy, jobs, health care, energy costs, and the cost of living – this figure increases to over four-in-ten swing voters (42%) who cite pocketbook economic issues as their greatest concerns, followed by 40 percent of Democrats and fully 29 percent of Republicans.

Voters still want a change of course in Iraq - a solid majority believes the war in Iraq is simply not worth fighting. While a plurality believes that the situation in Iraq has actually improved over the past six months, (43% gotten better, 30% stayed the same, 23% gotten worse), this perception has not blunted voters' overarching determination that the war in Iraq is flatly a mistake and not worth fighting. Additionally, other work we have done shows that voters overwhelmingly want to start withdrawing troops and want to bring the money home to invest domestically. Over half of voters (52%) say the war in Iraq is not worth fighting, including a whopping 44 percent who feel this way strongly, compared to just over four-in-ten overall (43%) who believe that the war is still worth fighting (34% strongly).

The perception that the war in Iraq is not worth fighting is not solely the province of the Democratic base. A solid majority (55%) of independents feel that the war is no longer worth fighting, as do almost a quarter (22%) of Republicans and over eight-in-ten (81%) Democrats.

Nevertheless, the anti-war vote is not fully consolidated under the Democratic banner – notable since the anti-war vote was essential to the Democratic takeover of Congress in 2006. Among voters who say the war is not worth fighting, just under three-fourths (74%) support the Democrat on the generic Presidential ballot, with 14 percent favoring the Republican and 11 percent undecided. **The challenge for Democrats in 2008 will be proving to the public that the failure to bring the troops home from Iraq is due to the Republicans' and this President's intransigence – not to a lack of effort on their part.**

ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM: MIDDLE CLASS FALLING FURTHER BEHIND

After 7 years of the Republican economic agenda that promised to lift the middle class and reinvigorate the American economy – an agenda featuring tax cuts for the rich, fewer people having health insurance, stagnant wages, record deficit spending, a massive trade deficit, the squandering of a budget surplus, and the creeping privatization of the social safety net – voters are instead expressing widespread and increasing pessimism about the direction of the economy. **Voters are disproportionately more likely to say the economy makes it hard for the middle class to make ends meet, and that the future generation will be worse off than our own.**

Voters say the economy is in bad shape. **Fully 75 percent of likely voters rate the current state of the economy in negative terms, including over a third (36%) who rate the economy as “poor,” compared to just over a quarter (26%) who give the economy a positive assessment.** Independent voters are even more pessimistic (42% poor, 38% fair), as are Democrats (48%, 44%) and voters in battleground Congressional districts (42%, 36%). Voters are only marginally more optimistic about their own economic fortunes, with only 13 percent saying their personal economic situation is “excellent,” 45 percent saying “good,” and fully 42 percent rating their own economic situation negatively. Women in particular continue to be pessimistic about their personal economic situation (45% fair/poor), especially unmarried women (60% fair/poor).

Despite this administration’s assertions to the contrary, **fully seven-in-ten say that our economy makes it too tough for the middle class to make ends meet, including almost half of all voters (49%) who feel this way strongly.** In fact, this belief extends across the political spectrum, with majorities of Democrats (84%), independents (73%), and even Republicans (54%) saying the economy disadvantages the middle class. It might interest this majority of Republicans to learn that by their own Party’s definition, they are engaging in “class warfare” by holding this opinion. Only 28 percent believe that the economy actually serves the middle class.

Voters say the next generation’s quality of life will be worse than their own – yet another sad legacy for the Bush administration and one that parallels his father’s. Roughly two-thirds (67%) disagree with the statement, “I think the next generation will have a better quality of life than I do now,” including a whopping four-in-ten who disagree with this statement strongly. Among swing voters, 70 percent disagree with this statement, as do three-quarters of Democrats and a solid majority of Republicans (56%). Only 12 percent of likely voters are strongly optimistic that the next generation will be better off.

When asked about their *own children*, voters are slightly more optimistic. However, a solid majority (56%) say their children will either be worse off (30%) or about the same (26%) as they are now, compared to just 39 percent who believe their children’s future will be brighter than their own. Notably, majorities of all major subgroups disagree that their children’s quality of life will be better than their own, including 59 percent of both Democrats and independents, 51 percent of Republicans, and all voters who hold at least a high school diploma (which is 94% of the electorate).

Despite this President’s abysmal track record, voters remain cautiously optimistic about the future. **Most voters believe the president can make a huge difference in creating an America where every family has a chance to become part of the middle class.** Roughly two-thirds (64%) believe the next president can help *their family* become part of the middle class, including a plurality (37%) who say the president can have “a lot” of influence. A similar number (63%) believe the next president can make the same difference for *every American family*, not just their own.

Helping American families become part of the middle class starts with addressing the skyrocketing cost of living, including the cost of health care and energy. In contrast to previous election cycles, voters' anxiety about the economy centers less on their short-term preoccupation with keeping their job and more on the failure of their current job to keep pace with the rising cost of living. In fact, **a solid plurality (25%) say rising health care costs will be the most important economic issue determining their vote for president, followed by the rising cost of gasoline and fuel (14%) and the federal budget deficit and national debt (14%)** – each of which this administration and Congressional Republicans have done little to remedy, and much to exacerbate.

VOTERS CRITICAL OF BOTH PARTIES, BUT ESPECIALLY BUSH AND GOP

The political atmosphere remains toxic for both Parties, especially the GOP and this Administration. Voters are not seeing the change they want, and they place much of the blame at the feet of the President and his Party. Still, Democrats are certainly not immune from the public's ire; the public has soured on them as well, albeit to a lesser extent than Bush and the GOP. Voters want change and they will be looking to see if their elected officials, Democrat or Republican, are making things better, or are part of the problem.

Despite all manner of effort to resuscitate President Bush's public image, he remains a deeply polarizing figure and serious liability for Republicans at all levels heading into 2008 – even as a lame duck. More than six-in-ten voters (61%) disapprove of the way President Bush is handling his job, including a solid majority (51%) who strongly disapprove of Bush's job performance. Less than one-quarter (24%) strongly approve of Bush's performance as President. More telling are his numbers among independents and Republicans: Nearly three-in-ten (28%) members of his own Party are unwilling to give him positive marks, including 17 percent who strongly disapprove, while 66 percent of independents say they disapprove of the way the President is handling his job. Not surprisingly, only 9 percent of Democrats approve of Bush's job performance.

Further, the President's job performance numbers are slightly worse since our July Battleground survey (55% disapprove, 47% strong disapprove, 26% strong approve), even as the public's perceptions of the war in Iraq – on which his legacy ultimately rests – have actually improved.

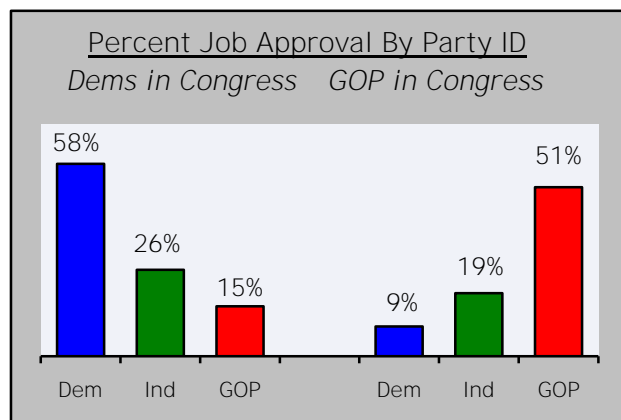
Voters are only slightly less critical of Bush as a person, but not by much: fully 55 percent hold an unfavorable personal opinion of him, including 43 percent who say so strongly, compared to just one-quarter who volunteer intensely favorable opinions of the President. But Bush remains popular among his Party base (78% favorable). Democrats and independents, however, remain especially critical of both the man (87% and 67% unfavorable personal opinion, respectively) and his job performance (89% and 66% job disapproval, respectively).

Much to the consternation of Republicans further down the chain, the public's virulent dissatisfaction with the President does not end with him – the GOP's rankings are even worse. In fact, over six-in-ten (61%) voters give Congressional Republicans a negative job performance rating, including nearly a majority (47%) who are strongly disapproving of their job. Only 12 percent of likely voters offer intensely positive reviews of the GOP in Congress. As with Bush, Republican voters are noticeably critical of their own, with nearly four-in-ten (39%) saying they disapprove of the GOP's job performance, compared to a slim majority (51%) who approve. Independents (65% disapprove) and Democrats (81%) give the GOP very unflattering assessments.

Worse yet, Congressional Republicans receive even less cover from voters' impressions of them on a personal level. Fully 51 percent hold an unfavorable opinion of Congressional Republicans – up from 48% in July – including three-in-ten who hold intensely negative personal feelings toward them. Only 36 percent hold a favorable opinion of the GOP in Congress, compared to Bush's 43 percent. Driving Republicans' meager favorability ratings are majorities of both independents (61% unfavorable) and Democrats (73%), as well as one-quarter of the Republican base (25%).

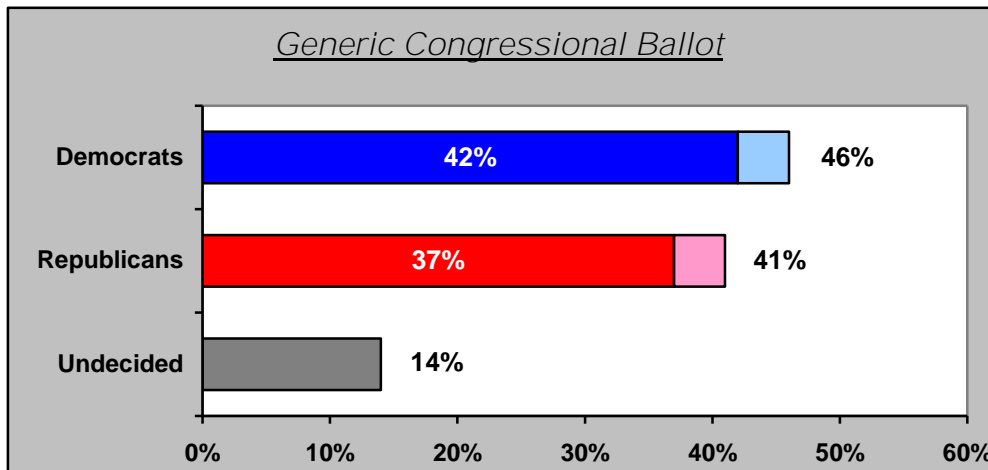
Still, the political atmosphere is bad for both parties – voters' frustration with what they see as a fundamental lack of change on Iraq and the economy is reflected in Democrats' declining numbers as well. In fact, the Democrats in Congress are now viewed net-negatively by the voting public, with 39 percent offering favorable impressions of them, compared to nearly half (49%) who hold an unfavorable opinion of Democratic lawmakers. Democrats are viewed slightly more favorably than Republicans among crucial independents (27% versus 24% favorable, respectively), yet a majority (57%) still hold an unfavorable view of the Democrats, compared to 61% who hold an unfavorable view of the Republicans.

The Democrats own a 7-point advantage over their GOP colleagues in terms of job performance (35% approve to 27%, respectively), yet fully four-in-ten strongly disapprove of Democrats' stewardship of Congress. Not surprisingly, Republican voters are the most critical of the Democrats' job performance (75% disapprove). Independents are equally critical of both parties in Congress (61% disapprove, for each). Yet the larger problem for Congressional Democrats is the fact that 31 percent of their own Party faithful give them negative job marks, with just under six-in-ten (58%) who give them a positive job rating. Looking at it another way, Democratic voters are 10-points more negative in assessing their own leaders' job performance than Republican voters are in assessing theirs.



CONGRESSIONAL DEMOCRATS LOOK TO HOLD SERVE, REPUBLICANS NOT FAR BEHIND

With the 2008 elections less than one year out, Democrats continue to lead the GOP in the generic Congressional ballot, 46 percent to 40 percent, with 14 percent undecided. This represents only a 1-point decrease in support for the Democrats since our July Battleground survey (47% Dems, 40% Reps), despite the public's perceptible dissatisfaction with the status quo in Washington. Democrats also command a much larger share of strong support, 42 percent to 37 percent, respectively. Even with a conservative turnout number, Democrats are ahead.



Regionally, Democrats are either winning or pulling virtually even in the most important battlegrounds. **Democrats lead Republicans by wide margins in the Northeast (+21), West (+11), and Midwest (+8), and pull into a statistical tie in the South (-1) – the electoral and symbolic Republican stronghold.** Republicans take the South Central portion of the country (-12), Central Plains (-8), and Mountain States (-6). Additionally, Democrats command sizeable advantages in contested states (+11), including Florida (+24), as well as in competitive Congressional districts (+11). **Rural areas, which tilted toward the Republicans in our July Battleground survey, are now going the way of the Democrats too (+3, up from -4).**

Democrats continue to lead Republicans among subgroups that will likely prove decisive in 2008. The gender gap favors Democrats – women prefer Democrats by 18-points; men prefer Republicans by a smaller differential (-10). Democrats take single voters (+53), those “no longer married” (+24), unmarried women (+41), and married women (+1), though married men remain faithful to the Republican Party (-21). Democrats lead among self-described moderates by a whopping 32-points, as well as among independents (+7) – though among both groups the undecided vote hovers near three-in-ten (27% and 36%, respectively). Democrats take every major age cohort except voters 35-44 (-9), and pull within 2-points of Republicans among rural whites. **And most important, Democrats have a more energized and supportive base, successfully converting 87 percent of Democratic voters (compared to 81% of the same for Republicans).**

Undecided voters favor Democrats. Demographically, undecided voters tend to be women, older (45+), non college-educated, suburban, conservative, independent, and largely white. Of the 14 percent who are undecided, they are more likely to be independents (43%) than Republicans (34%) or Democrats (23%), and much more likely to be conservative (59%) than liberal (30%) or moderate (11%). Women (54%) are more likely than men (46%) to withhold their vote at this point in time, as are voters aged 45-64 (40%) and seniors (36%) more so than younger voters (23%). Undecided voters are slightly more likely *not* to have a 4-year college degree (54%) than they are to be college graduates (45%), and are much more likely to be married (68%) than either “no longer married” (25%) or single (7%). The undecided vote is comprised of mostly whites (80%), followed by African Americans (8%) and Hispanics (7%), and regionally tends to be much more suburban (55%) than urban (24%) or rural (21%). Notably, undecided voters are deeply pessimistic about the direction of the country (73% wrong track), and cite jobs and the economy as their top concerns (20%, followed by the war in Iraq at 15%). A majority of undecided voters disapprove of both Bush’s and Congressional Republicans’ job performance (57% and 52%, respectively), but they are even more critical of Democrats’ job performance (61%) – pointing to the need for Democrats to establish a compelling profile on the economy.

THE EVE OF IOWA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE: IMAGES OF THE PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS

The race for the White House – and toward the most critical stops along the way, the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primaries – is moving at the fastest clip since 1972. As expected, the frontrunners from both Parties are playing to the Party faithful, yet each side has a different set of challenges. **The Republicans**, on the one hand, are attempting to thread the thinnest of needles, simultaneously distancing themselves from the policies that have crippled the public standing of their leader, Mr. Bush, without alienating the Party faithful who still hold the President personally in high regard. Ironically, the Republican challengers are also now defending themselves against charges that they have “flip-flopped” on critical issues, including abortion and taxes, over the course of this campaign. **The Democrats**, for their part, are hoping to capture the dimension of change that thrust them into power 13 short months ago, but they must now account for their record in Congress – which many now criticize as having fallen somewhat short of a new direction for the nation.

The race for each Party’s nomination is still wide open. Not surprisingly, the presumptive favorites from each Party are better known, but also more polarizing – both within their own Party and among independents – than those who sit just points behind them in the polls.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton is the best known, with fully 98 percent of voters having formed a substantive opinion of her. About half (48%) say they have a favorable impression of the New York Senator, including fully 26 percent who have an intensely favorable impression of her. But Clinton’s support cuts both ways: she carries the highest intensely favorable rating among all the Presidential contenders (26%

strongly favorable), but today she also has the field's highest strongly unfavorable rating (40%). Democrats prefer Clinton to any other Democrat (85% favorable including 48% strongly favorable, 14% unfavorable), but unlike both Obama and Edwards a majority of independents (46%, 50%) has a negative impression of her. Republicans also hand Clinton the highest unfavorable rating for any candidate in terms of party identification (12%, 87%).

The other Democratic frontrunners remain close to Clinton. **Barack Obama** sports enviable popularity ratings and the highest favorable-to-unfavorable ratio among the leading Democrats, at nearly 2:1. Eighty-nine percent of voters know enough about Obama to have formed an opinion of him, well over half (57%) of likely voters – including 62 percent of independents (26% unfavorable), 73 percent of Democrats, including 36% strongly favorable (17% unfavorable), and 38 percent of Republicans (52% unfavorable) – report having a favorable opinion of the Senator from Illinois. Twenty-two percent have a strongly favorable opinion of Obama (still 4 points less than Clinton). In contrast to both Clinton and Giuliani, the spectrum of Obama's unfavorability is more evenly distributed, with 33 percent having an unfavorable impression of him, including just 20 percent (compared to Clinton's 40%) who are intensely unfavorable toward him. Perhaps more surprising, women are noticeably more favorable toward Obama (61%, 27%) than both Clinton (57%, 41%) and Edwards (55%, 31%).

John Edwards continues to occupy the position between Clinton and Obama. Nearly nine-in-ten voters (87%) have formed a substantive opinion of the former Senator from North Carolina, including a slim majority (51%) that views him favorably (16% strongly favorable) and slightly more than one-third (36%) holding an unfavorable opinion of him (21% strongly unfavorable). While the intensity of Edwards' unfavorability is in the same league as Obama's, his larger challenge is commanding the intense support of the Party faithful (72% favorable including 27% strongly favorable, 17% unfavorable), who at this point are more firmly situated in Clinton's, and to a lesser extent Obama's, camps. Still, Edwards commands a slim majority of independents (51%, 33%), and is viewed favorably by about three-in-ten (29%) Republicans (60% unfavorable).

Looking at the Republican field, only **John McCain** is viewed favorably by a majority of likely voters.³ Most (87%) have formed a substantive opinion of him, and he is clearly the most liked among his Republican peers, despite (or perhaps because of) the marked depreciation of his standing in the race for the GOP nod. Close to six-in-ten (58%) likely voters have a favorable impression of the Arizona Senator, though there is little intensity to his ratings (18% strongly favorable). Twenty-nine percent hold an unfavorable impression of him, including just 11 percent who say they have a strongly unfavorable opinion of the man. Republicans have a more positive opinion of McCain than any other Republican (72% favorable, 19% unfavorable), but both independents (60%, 26%) and Democrats (44%, 40%) are also net-favorable in their impressions of

³ Mike Huckabee, who is now also considered a leading contender for the GOP nomination, was not tested in this battery.

him. **McCain is the only candidate in the field who is viewed net-favorably by voters of the opposing Party.**

Fully 92 percent of likely voters have formed a substantive opinion of **Rudy Giuliani**, among whom just under half (49%) view him favorably, including 34 percent who hold an intensely favorable impression of the former mayor. Still, over four-in-ten voters (43%) see Giuliani in an unfavorable light, including over a quarter (26%) who say they have a strongly unfavorable impression of the man. Giuliani's favorable ratings are in league with McCain's among the Republican base (70%, 23%), but like Clinton (the only other candidate in which this is the case) he is net-unfavorable among both independents (43%, 47%) and the opposing Party (30%, 62%). **His favorability ratings clearly belie the argument that Giuliani is the most electable Republican.**

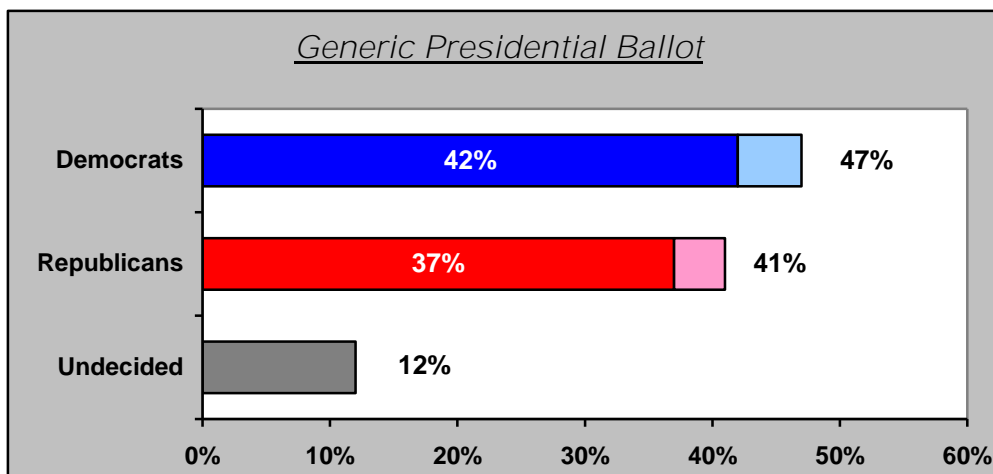
Former Massachusetts Governor **Mitt Romney** continues to expand his brand, though he still has considerable room to grow among the universe of likely voters (73% substantive name recognition, compared to 59% in our July Battleground survey). Among likely voters, Romney is viewed favorably by just over four-in-ten voters (41%), including 14 percent who hold a strongly favorable impression of him. While Romney's unfavorables (32%) trail his favorables by only 9-points, he can take some solace in the finding that his unfavorable ratings are evenly distributed between those who hold mild (16%) and intensely unfavorable (16%) opinions of him. Romney has yet to convert even two-thirds of his own base (59% favorable, 18% unfavorable), but he is net-favorable among independents (45%, 29%). Democrats are not particularly fond of Romney (22%, 47%).

Rounding out the Republican field is **Fred Thompson**, who has clearly failed to distinguish himself as the frontrunner so many conservatives had hoped, and expected, he would become just months ago. Fully 35 percent of the likely voters cannot volunteer a substantive opinion of former Tennessee Senator, while just the same number say they have a favorable impression of him, including only one-in-ten who view him especially favorably. Thirty-one percent have an unfavorable impression of Thompson, roughly half of whom (15%) see him in a strongly unfavorable light. Thompson carries only about half (51%, 19%) of his own base, pulls even among independents (32%, 32%), and falls flat among Democrats (19%, 41%). Worse yet, Thompson's favorable-to-unfavorable ratio has only gotten worse as voters get to know him. In our July Battleground poll, he owned roughly a 2:1 ratio; today his ratio is close to 1:1.

THE RACE FOR 2008: DEMOCRATS HOLD KEY ADVANTAGES FOR POTUS

With both the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primaries less than a month out, it is hard to imagine a race that could be more undefined and more unpredictable than the one we have now – for both sides. We have seen frontrunners come and go, former favorites just a step behind the pack, and new faces quickly emerging as serious contenders. Despite this volatility, Democrats are still positioned to take back the White House in 2008.

In the generic Presidential ballot, the Democrat enjoys a 6-point advantage over the Republican candidate (47% to 41%), though this margin is down from our July Battleground poll (49% to 38%). Still, the Democrats command a larger share of strong supporters (42%), compared to 37 percent who support the unnamed Republican strongly. Fourteen percent are undecided.



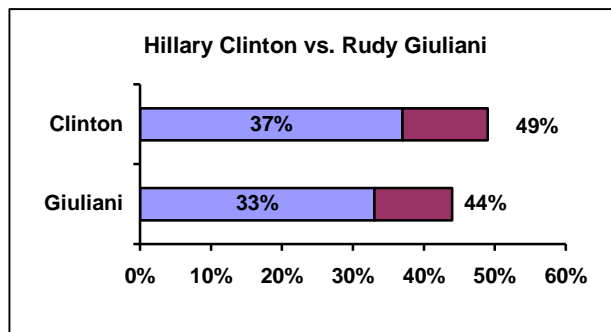
The gender and marriage gaps are the most noticeable fault lines in the generic Presidential ballot. Women prefer the Democrat to the Republican by a whopping 18-points (+18), while men prefer the Republican by half that margin (-9). The Democrat is also the overwhelming favorite among both unmarried women (+36) and unmarried men (+16), as well as among married women (+5), while the Republican is still the clear top choice for married men (-18). The Democrats also lead considerably among Hispanics (+17) and hold a lead with white women (+7), though they fall behind among white men (-21).

As in the generic Congressional ballot test, the Democrat leads the Republican in key regional and demographic battlegrounds. Regionally, the Democrat overtakes the Republican in the Northeast (+23), West (+13), Midwest (+8), and South (+3) – the four largest electoral regions – as well as by strong margins in contested states (+13) and in contested Congressional districts (+6). In contrast, Republicans lead in the South Central portion of the country (-21), the Central Plains (-7), and Mountain States (-15). The Democrat leads in both urban (+22) and rural areas (+3), and pulls into a statistical tie in suburban areas (-1).

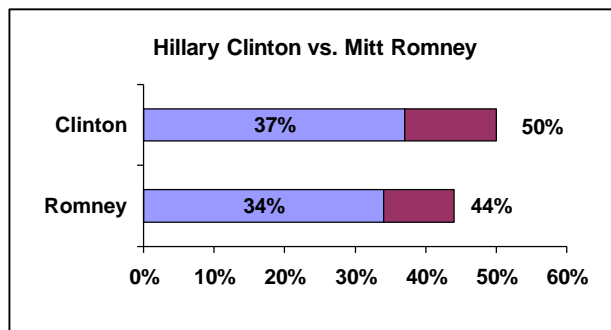
Not surprisingly, the vote splits along Party lines, though the Democrats are slightly more effective at consolidating their base (88% Dem, 5% Rep, 7% Und) than the Republicans (83% Rep, 7% Dem, 10% Und). Notably, the Democrat opens up a sizeable lead among swing independent voters (+12) – though still 32 percent are undecided on the generic Presidential ballot. And while the Democrats have not consolidated the anti-war vote as well as Republicans have the pro-war vote, they lead decisively among voters who list the war in Iraq (+38) or pocketbook economic issues (+24) as the central challenges facing the nation.

While the Democrats may well have lost some of their margin in the generic Presidential ballot, the 2008 race will not involve generic candidates. In our July Battleground survey, the named Democrat beat the named Republican in three of four races. **Currently, the named Democrat defeats the named Republican on every ballot test.**

In a strong turnaround from our July Battleground poll, **Hillary Clinton has erased a 6-point deficit and now beats Rudy Giuliani by 5-points (49% Clinton, 44% Giuliani, and 6% undecided).** Clinton also leads Giuliani among strong supporters (37% to 33%). There is a noticeable gender gap in a Clinton-Giuliani match up, with women preferring Clinton by 23-points, and men preferring Giuliani by a smaller margin (-17). Considering each candidate's comparatively limited crossover appeal, it is not surprising that they are effective at consolidating their bases (89% Democratic support for Clinton, 90% Republican support for Giuliani). Noticeably, independents are closely divided between the two (45% Clinton, 43% Giuliani, 13% undecided).

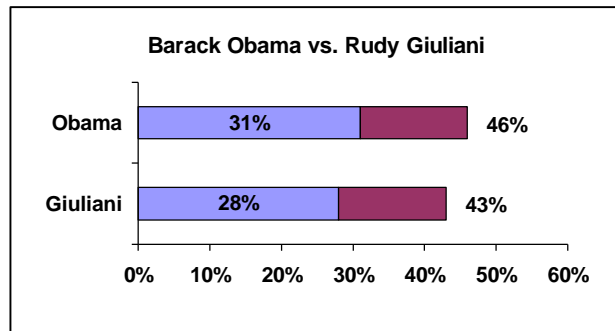


Hillary Clinton leads Mitt Romney by a slightly larger margin, with fully half (50%) of the electorate saying they will support her, compared to 44 percent who close ranks behind Romney, and only 7 percent undecided. **A Clinton-Romney match up is the only race in which a named Democrat leads the named Republican with at least 50 percent of the vote.** Romney trails by 3-points among intense supporters (37% Clinton, 34% Romney) and carries independents by 6-points (47% to 41%). The gender gap is also evident in a Clinton-Romney match up, with women supporting Clinton by the same 23-point margin and men going for Romney by 13-points. That said, Romney is less effective than Giuliani at consolidating the Republican base (85% Republican support for

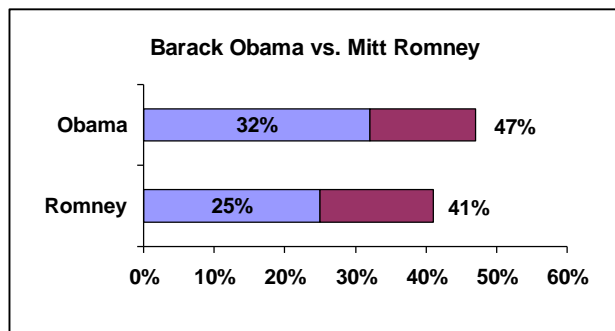


Romney), while Clinton still converts roughly nine-in-ten Democrats (88%) against both. The white evangelical vote benefits Romney against Clinton—he receives 62% of the vote to Clinton’s 29%.

Barack Obama fares equally well against the same Republican opponents, though slightly more voters are undecided with Obama on the ballot. **Obama leads Rudy Giuliani by 3-points, taking 46 percent of the vote to Giuliani’s 43 percent, with 11 percent undecided.** Obama also leads Giuliani among strong supporters (31% Obama, 28% Giuliani), and more importantly, dominates the independent vote by 18-points (51% Obama, 33% Giuliani). The gender and Party gaps are also evident with Obama on the ballot, but both are less pronounced: Obama commands a 13-point lead among women and converts 82 percent of Democrats, while Giuliani leads among men by 10-points and converts just 79 percent of Republicans.



Barack Obama bests Mitt Romney by 6-points (47% Obama, 41% Romney), with 11 percent undecided. Obama opens up a wider margin among strong supporters, drawing nearly one-third (32%) of all likely voters to Romney’s 25 percent, as well as among independents (54% to 29%). The gender and Party gaps are also more favorable for Obama in a race against Romney: women prefer Obama by a solid margin (+15), but men are comparatively supportive of Obama as well (-5). And Republicans, who close ranks behind their candidate when Clinton is on the ticket, are more likely to defect for Obama (76% support Romney, 14% support Obama). Still, Obama is less effective than Clinton at consolidating the Democratic base at this point in time (82% support him, compared to 88% of the same for Clinton).



All of this said, the Iowa caucuses and early primaries will undoubtedly alter the dynamics of the presidential contest, particularly if another candidate (e.g., Mike Huckabee) manages to pickup a top showing in either Iowa or New Hampshire. Currently, Huckabee narrowly edges Rudy Giuliani in the race for the Republican nomination, 23 percent to Giuliani’s 21 percent. He has also caught a fire in Iowa, where most polls now put him firmly in the lead (he still trails Romney by considerable margins in New Hampshire).

The Race for the Republican Party Nomination		
<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Total</i>
Huckabee	10%	23%
Giuliani	9%	21%
Romney	5%	16%
McCain	5%	15%
Thompson	3%	9%
Paul	3%	5%
Other	--	3%
Undecided	--	7%

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton owns a commanding national lead over all of her challengers in the race for the Democratic Party nomination. In fact, she garners the support of nearly half of likely Democratic primary voters (47%), virtually doubling the support of her next closest competitor, Barack Obama (24%). However, polls in Iowa show all three top Democratic frontrunners in a virtual dead heat going into the nation's first official electoral test.

The Race for the Democratic Party Nomination		
<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Strong</i>	<i>Total</i>
Clinton	29%	47%
Obama	12%	24%
Edwards	5%	13%
Richardson	1%	4%
Biden	1%	3%
Other	--	2%
Undecided	--	8%