

BATTLEGROUND XXXIII
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Republican Strategic Analysis
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This is probably not a shock to most of us, but Oprah Winfrey has got it right! The next election is about change. Voters still want change. They are decidedly unhappy with the direction of the country and many feel the same way about the direction of their state and a few even feel that way about their local community.

The voters switched out the U.S. Congress for a new team last election cycle, and they did not get the change they were seeking. Expectations were raised by this new Democrat-run Congress headed by our first woman Speaker in history. But the results have been less than stellar.

The difference between running and governing is that the Democrat leadership in the House and Senate now has to stand for re-election having raised those expectations and not met them. As the last GWU/Battleground survey revealed, Congress has never been held in lower esteem. Deserved or not, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid had the shortest honeymoon period in history as leaders of a new Congress.

Democrats in Congress now enjoy a lower job approval rating than the President they are taking shots at.

Of course, the change that voters were seeking in 2006 was different for different groups. For the Democrat base, there is disappointment in not having ended the war in Iraq. The trick for the Democrats will be to convince their base that the fault lies with an outgoing President. But Democrats of late have pulled back from declaring defeat in Iraq in part because a plurality of American voters thinks things are getting better in that country.

But American voters have demonstrated time and again that they are not interested in concentrating too much power behind one party. The electoral victory of 2006 has reduced the Democrats chances of regaining the White House.

To varying degrees, each of the frontrunners for the Republican and Democrat nominations represent this element of change. The most revealing finding in this survey may be the fact that so many Americans think the next President can make their lives better and can help the middle class. Despite real and deep concerns about the next generation of Americans, voters today have confidence that the next President can make all of our lives better. Further, belief in the American dream persists.

On the Republican side, the front-runners remain Mayor Giuliani, Governor Romney and now Governor Huckabee. None of these candidates have spent much time in Washington with the exception of Giuliani's time in the Reagan Justice Department. All of them are unique brands in today's political marketplace.

But it still may be difficult for any of the Republican candidates to convince the American electorate that they represent a true change from the current Administration. The big issue which stands in their way is the war in Iraq. American voters want to move forward on issues – on the economy, on health care and on a myriad of others – and the war is seen as impeding that forward progression.

On the Democrat side, an African American and a woman lead the ticket. Many assumed that Senator Clinton was headed for a coronation by her party. But it is Barack Obama that has captured the mantle of change within the ranks of the Democrat Party. It is the base of the Democrat Party which harbors this strong impulse for change.

After a lifetime in politics, eight years in the White House and her current service in the U.S. Senate for the state of New York, it is going to be hard for Senator Clinton to argue that she is the standard bearer of change. Senator Clinton is the only candidate in this survey with a larger unfavorable score than a favorable score. But Senator Clinton's biggest problem is that so many of the voters report that they would never vote for her on election day – more than twice as many as any other candidate (either Republican or Democrat).

It seems strange that the first serious woman candidate for the White House is having trouble carrying the mantle of change. It seems stranger still that the person pointing it out is the high priestess of American television. They both tend to be known by their first names – Hillary and Oprah. The good news for Senator Clinton is that this is not her opponent on the ballot.

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An Impetus for Change

It is not enough to characterize the American electorate as unhappy with our current national direction. For at least five years now, a majority of voters have felt that the nation is off on the wrong track. Today, 71% of American voters feel that the country is off on the wrong track and 58% feel strongly about it. It is this growing intensity which should be the most alarming to those running for office.

Democrats are nearly universal in their belief that the country is off on the wrong track. Among Democrats, 90% think that things are headed in the wrong direction. In addition, seventy-six percent (76%) of working women feel that things are off in this country.

This intensity is what Democrats hope will propel them to the White House in 2008 and increase their numbers in Congress. But the intensity of dissatisfaction that Democrats feel within their own ranks about the direction of the country is not nearly outside the Democratic Party. For example, among Republicans, 52% think the country is off on the wrong track and just 37% think things are headed in the right direction.

Concern about the War as the top problem facing the country has waned. This is not to suggest that the voters are no longer focused on the war. However, it is extremely revealing that pocketbook issues, and the economy and taxes in particular, are now at the forefront of voter concerns.

Nearly a third (30%) of voters tells us that pocketbook issues are their biggest concern. This concern is greatest in competitive Congressional Districts. Ticket-splitters, Hispanics, Independent men and Catholics are all more likely to be focused on some aspect of the economy.

As a top concern, the War in Iraq has dropped from 23% to 13% since July. Even among moderate-to-liberal Democrats, concern about the War only rises to 18% -- only half the percentage that are concerned about pocketbook issues. Even among Democrats, the litmus test for the primary is more properly the economy rather than the war in Iraq.

For Republicans, the top issue of concern after the economy is immigration. Eleven percent (11%) of the overall electorate and 17% of Republicans think this is the top issue. This reality is clearly reflected in the current Republican Presidential primary and was evident in last year Congressional Elections.

Health care remains a top concern for many voters and Senator Clinton is counting on it. But with only 11% of voters talking about it as a top concern, expect her campaign to try to push for a focus on this matter. Health care remains the issue that voters most identify with her – whether they agreed with her earlier policy effort or not

Number One Problem: A Time Series

	July <u>2007</u> %	December <u>2007</u> %
Economy/taxes	11	21
Unemployment	4	5
Terror/nat'l. defense	6	2
Education	2	2
Health care	12	11
Moral values	3	3
Immigration	10	11
War in Iraq	23	13
Energy costs	4	4

General opinion about whether the war in Iraq has been worth fighting has not changed in the last six months. Forty-three percent (43%) of American voters feel that the war has been worth fighting and a majority (52%) think the war has not been worth fighting. Notice that almost no one is undecided (5%) and that virtually everyone (78%) feels strongly about the matter.

There is a strong partisan divide about the War with 80% of Democrats thinking that the war has not been worth fighting and 73% of Republicans thinking that the war has been worth fighting. The balance is tipped by ticket-splitters, among whom a simple majority (50%) feels that the war has not been worth fighting.

Perhaps one of the more positive results in this survey for Republican candidates is the fact that a plurality of voters now feel that the situation in Iraq has gotten better over the past six months. Forty-three percent (43%) of voters feel that things have gotten better in Iraq over the last six months. This view is driven by white males, conservatives, Evangelicals, Republicans and those who are married. Among Republicans, 71% think that things have gotten better.

But it is probably no accident that the 53% who think things that have either stayed the same (30%) or gotten worse (23%) correspond pretty strongly to the 52% who think the war has not been worth fighting. It is likely that the American electorate is not particularly malleable on this issue. It is likely that support for our current direction on the war in Iraq probably cannot get much better, but this is an improvement from public sentiments six months ago.

Situation in Iraq/Last 6 Months

Gotten better	43%
Stayed the same	30%
Gotten worse	23%

An Unchanged Political Climate

The generic ballot has improved for Republicans at the Presidential level. In fact, the Presidential and Congressional generic ballots now match, in part because the voters are now aware that George W. Bush is not going to be on the ballot next year. What was an 11-point deficit on the generic Congressional ballot six months ago has improved to just a 6-point deficit today.

It is likely that this generic picture will continue to improve as the Republican Party crowns a nominee perhaps as early as mid-February of the coming year. That improving tide is important not only for the Presidential campaign, but particularly for those who are down the ballot.

Democrats have a generic majority only in the Northeast, while Republicans have a generic advantage in the South Central, Central Plains and Mountain regions. But in the states contested during the last presidential election, Democrats enjoy a majority advantage. Perhaps more importantly, Democrat voters are more likely to support a generic Democrat candidate than are Republican voters for their own candidate.

But again, this generic picture is something that Republicans expect and hope will continue to improve over the coming year.

Presidential Generic Ballot: A Time Series

	July <u>2007</u> %	December <u>2007</u> %
Republican	38	41
Undecided	14	12
Democrat	49	47

The generic ballot for the Congress has only improved by a single percentage point over the last 6 months. While this is a disappointment, it is again something that is expected to improve further. Forty percent (40%) of voters would like to see a Republican in office and 46% would prefer to see a Democrat. The good news is that, in contrast to the generic Congressional ballot, Republicans are nearly as supportive of their candidate as Democrats are of their own candidate. A plurality of ticket-splitting voters remains undecided on the question.

It is hard to believe, but voter opinion of the Democrats in Congress actually got worse over the last six months. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the voters now disapprove of the job that Democrats in Congress are doing, while only 35% approve. This is more important than how voters feel about Republicans in Congress because the Democrats are actually running things.

We might not be surprised that 76% of Republicans disapprove of the performance of the Democrats in Congress. But we might be surprised to learn that a majority (54%) of ticket-splitters disapproves. Even a third (33%) of Democrats disapproves of the Democrats' performance in Congress.

This is continuing evidence that Democrats in Congress have lost their opportunity to be viewed as the vehicle for change that they were hoping they would be after the 2006 elections. For a Democrat presidential nominee, this should be extremely concerning. The Democrats in Congress have missed an important opportunity.

Democrats in Congress Job Approval: A Time Series

	July <u>2007</u> %	December <u>2007</u> %
Approve	37	35
Unsure	11	11
Disapprove	52	54

The tide against the Democrats in Congress is better demonstrated by their drop in image since taking over the institution. Forty-nine percent (49%) now hold an unfavorable opinion of them. Less than a year ago, a majority (51%) held a favorable impression. This transformation has occurred quite quickly.

Among Republicans, 15% are favorable toward the Democrats in Congress and 73% are unfavorable. Even 25% of Democrats give those controlling the Congress a negative rating. Among ticket-splitters, 24% are favorable and 48% are unfavorable.

Democrats in Congress Image: A Time Series

	January <u>2007</u> %	July <u>2007</u> %	December <u>2007</u> %
Favorable	51	49	39
Unfavorable	37	44	49

Of course, opinion about Republicans in Congress remains just as negative as it was 6 months ago, but you have to question how important this fact really might be. It may be some time before opinions about the Republicans in Congress are re-shaped. It is the hope of the GOP leadership that once the party has a nominee, things will begin to improve.

Sixty-one percent (61%) of the voters continue to disapprove of the job that the Congressional Republicans are doing in office and 47% feel strongly about it. But while it is not likely that a groundswell of public opinion is going to sweep Republicans back into power, the consequences of disapproval for the overall Congress is not something likely to have a positive impact for Democrats. Indeed, because there are fewer Republicans in office, this general feeling of discontent is likely to benefit their challengers more.

The question here is can the Republicans recruit good enough candidates to take advantage? The problem is that most voters accrue the idea of control to the party that controls the White House. That has made it pretty difficult for Republicans to recruit candidates – at least to date. All this could change as voters continue to focus on the next presidential race.

The President's job approval, according to this latest survey, now stands at 38% -- not much of an improvement over the last six months. Disapproval for the President stands at 59% and 51% strongly disapprove. But it is important to realize that President Bush is not going to be on the ballot in November.

Still, like most elections after 8 years of an Administration, voter decisions in 2008 will be as much based on fixing the things they find wanting in this last President. This, coupled with the concern about the war, has resulted in an early and consistent focus on this coming election. Yet, 71% of Republicans still approve of the President.

George W. Bush's image reflects this approval level. Forty-three percent (43%) of the voters hold a favorable image of the President and 55% hold an unfavorable opinion. This is essentially where his image has been for the last two years and seems unlikely to change in the near future.

The President's personal approval has been dropping over time, but it still remains at 55%. For Republicans, it remains almost universal, as 86% approve of Bush personally. That means that Republicans will still be paying homage to their President as we move through the primary season, even if not pointing to his policies.

Catalysts of Change

Each of the frontrunners in both the Republican and Democrat primaries are a break from the past in their own way.

This is just as true for the Republican candidates. The good news here is that the GOP frontrunners share something in common with most of those who have been elected to the White House. They have all held executive positions and done these jobs well. Two have been Governors and one was Mayor not just of a city but for all of America during a crisis that none of us will ever forget.

9/11 is for our generation a defining moment. Most of what is happening around the world today has been shaped by it. Certainly our elections since then have played against that one event as a backdrop.

Despite his position as a hero of the 9/11 events, Mayor Giuliani's image has deteriorated a bit over the last year. Forty-nine percent (49%) of Americans retain a favorable view of the Mayor and 43% are unfavorable. But among Republicans, 70% remain favorable and 23% are unfavorable.

John McCain's image has improved during the course of the last six months. Today, 58% of the voters are favorable toward McCain and 29% are unfavorable. Among Republicans, 72% are favorable toward McCain and 19% are unfavorable. His image has improved just as voter views of the progress of the war have improved.

Mitt Romney, fresh off his speech on religion, is simply not as well known nor as well regarded by either the general electorate or Republicans themselves. Overall, 41% hold a favorable opinion of Romney and 32% are unfavorable. Among Republicans, 59% are favorable and 18% are unfavorable.

Romney's higher unfavorable rating comes from Democrats, union households, minorities, and those who do not attend church. Should he receive the nomination, it will be interesting to see if Romney can overcome his early image problem.

Image Comparison (Among Republicans)

	<u>Aware</u> %	<u>Favorable</u> %	<u>Unfavorable</u> %
Giuliani	98	70	23
Romney	91	59	18
McCain	97	72	19
Thompson	84	52	20

For Democrats, what appeared to be a coronation has turned into a real battle in part because of this question of change. It is hard for Senator Clinton to argue that she is both the agent of change that voters seek, particularly Democrat voters, and the pillar of experience she claims to be.

Of all the candidates, only Senator Clinton is viewed more unfavorably than favorably by voters. There may have never been a politician who is more polarizing than Senator Clinton. Forty-eight percent (48%) are favorable toward the Senator and 50% are unfavorable toward her. That is a tough place for a candidate to be even before the first vote of the primary season has been cast.

Among Democrats, she is highly regarded. Among Democrats, 82% are favorable and 16% are unfavorable. This is something that many political pundits may not realize. Senator Clinton may be polarizing, but by definition that means that she is highly regarded within her own party.

Barack Obama has clearly been identified as the agent of change by Oprah Winfrey. Obama is now a household name across the country. An increasing number of voters, however, have developed in unfavorable opinion, but he is still held in high regard. This high opinion is particularly true for Democrats, among whom 74% are favorable and 16% are unfavorable.

John Edwards is certainly a known entity to voters, but he carries his own high unfavorable scores. While 51% are favorable toward Edwards, 36% are also unfavorable. But among Democrats, this unfavorable score shrinks away. Among Democrats, 71% are favorable and 15% are unfavorable toward him.

Image Comparison (Among Democrats)

	<u>Aware</u> %	<u>Favorable</u> %	<u>Unfavorable</u> %
Obama	97	74	16
Clinton	100	82	16
Edwards	94	71	15

The Contests

The Republican primary contest has taken a new twist, as this latest survey reveals the impact of Mike Huckabee's rise within the Iowa caucus contest. Huckabee now captures 23% of the vote. He garners this level of support by doing well among Southern residents, the most competitive congressional districts in the country, rural residents, female/not employed, rural whites, white men/65+, 45 & over/GOP, very conservative, Protestant, Baptist, Evangelicals and white conservative Christians.

For the moment, Huckabee seems without the resources necessary to complete his mission and capture the nomination. Without those resources, Huckabee's rise could be a short one--if for no other reason than the fact that this would hamper his ability to engage his opponents.

Huckabee and Giuliani are within the margin of error of each other and are therefore tied according to this data. Rudy Giuliani, the long-term leader in virtually every survey of the American electorate throughout the year, has fallen to second place in this survey. This change in position has come not from losing votes but through another's rise.

Giuliani does particularly well in the Northeast and Midwest, but he also does well in Florida and California. Working women, 35-44 year olds, liberals, Catholics and those less active in religion are also likely to be a part of his coalition in the primary. Unlike Huckabee, Giuliani has the resources he needs to carry his message to the voters.

There is only one candidate in the race with the ability to self fund his campaign is Mitt Romney. Romney has been on the air in key states for months now. Not surprisingly, in some of those early states, Romney leads on the ballot. But in all of them the contest is at least a close one, although who Romney is battling seems to depend on the state.

Romney does well with those out West, but his support is unique in that there are few subgroups of strength that support him.

The only other candidate in double digits is John McCain. McCain captures 15% of the vote. His real impact in his last presidential contest was in New Hampshire and the same may be true for the 2008 race. His campaign was considered all but over earlier in the year and he seems to be making a bit of a surge as the New Hampshire contest gets closer. His successful surge in the primary followed closely the successful surge strategy now being employed in Iraq.

In this primary, Romney seems to be doing his best to run the table early and carry as much momentum as possible into the February 5 Super Tuesday election night. Giuliani, while interested in the early contests, seems to be banking on the Florida contest to set up his run of the February 5th contests, which most polling has put him well ahead on. McCain is clearly trying to catch fire in New Hampshire and explode onto the scene afterward.

Republican Primary Ballot for President

Mike Huckabee	23%
Rudy Giuliani	21%
Mitt Romney	16%
John McCain	15%
Fred Thompson	10%
Ron Paul	5%
Other	3%
Undecided	7%

The Democrat primary does not appear to be nearly the contest that it is being hyped to be. Senator Clinton dominates the ballot garnering 47% of the vote. Her campaign has run an incumbent strategy to date. Senator Clinton has argued that her nomination is inevitable and has emphasized her experience in policy and politics. Despite her gender, she has not run as an agent of change.

Senator Clinton's coalition is stronger with Northeastern residents and those out West – especially Californians. Working women, seniors, Hispanics, white women, conservative Democrats, Catholics and white Evangelicals are all more likely to be supportive of Senator Clinton. Based upon this nationwide look at the numbers, Senator Clinton's locomotive approach seems to be working well.

Barack Obama is trying to play the spoiler. With Democrat voters so interested in making a change in Washington, the relatively inexperienced Obama could capture this theme away from Senator Clinton. The fact that Oprah Winfrey has identified Obama as that agent of change is critically important. Whether Oprah can transfer her own popularity to a political candidate is yet to be determined, but it is an interesting experiment.

Obama currently splits the African American vote with Senator Clinton in the Democrat primary. The question remains whether Obama can be expected to emerge the victor if he does not outdistance his opponents among African Americans. At the same time, Senator Clinton seems to be holding onto her union support well enough to make it across the finish line – despite this challenge from Obama.

Democrat Primary Ballot for President

Hillary Clinton	47%
Barack Obama	24%
John Edwards	13%
Joseph Biden	3%
Other	6%
Undecided	8%

Senator Clinton is clearly the candidate that most voters have decided they will not ever support. It has been said that Senator Clinton is the most polarizing candidate ever to run for President and this survey supports that theory. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the electorate report that they would not ever vote for her.

The larger concern for the Democratic National Committee is that about a third of ticket-splitters will not support Senator Clinton. However, among Democrats the figure is merely 8% who would not support her. Should Senator Clinton become the Democrat nominee, her campaign would almost certainly have to rely on excoriating her opponent from the very beginning.

Who Would You Not Vote For

The Republicans:		The Democrats:	
Giuliani	15%	Clinton	37%
Romney	5%	Obama	5%
Thompson	3%	Edwards	2%
McCain	2%	Kucinich	1%
Huckabee	2%		
Paul	1%		

One of the leading candidate for the Republican nomination seems to have a similar problem, but not nearly to the degree of Senator Clinton. Fifteen percent (15%) of the voters would refuse to support Rudy Giuliani. Among Republicans, the figure is merely 2%. More importantly, among Independents the figure is less than half of the figure that Senator Clinton is facing – just 17%.

The Democrat frontrunners have taken the lead in the general election ballots tested in this survey. Against both Giuliani and Romney, the Democrat candidates are ahead. Yet the contest between Obama and Giuliani, once a 10 point spread, is now too close to call.

Looking at the general election ballot pitting Senator Clinton against Mayor Giuliani, the positions of the candidates have flipped from six months earlier. Giuliani now trails by 5 points – although Senator Clinton fails to make it to 50%. The major change in support for Clinton on the ballot comes from working women, two-thirds (66%) of whom now support her in this contest. That represents a 22 point increase since last July among working women.

Mayor Giuliani does particularly well among men in his contest against Senator Clinton. Are we likely to have a contest for the White House that merely pits men against women at our polling places? Probably not, because the other group that has moved toward Senator Clinton in this particular contest is Independent men, who are now split in their support. The other strong movement on this ballot comes from minority voters who now have banded behind Senator Clinton as well.

Senator Clinton actually captures a majority of the vote (50%) against Mitt Romney. The difference here is that Romney does not do as well among male voters as Mayor Giuliani does. With Romney's lower awareness level, it is likely that voter support for a Republican candidate has more to do with running against Senator Clinton.

Six months ago, Obama was beating Giuliani in a head-to-head contest with a solid majority of the vote (52%). Obama's 10-point lead has shrunk to merely 3 points – well within the margin of error. Giuliani has not gained but Obama's level of support has plummeted 6 points. For Obama, his support among ticket-splitters has been cut in half (51% to 24%).

But Obama does beat Romney in a general election contest, although not with a majority of support. Obama captures 47% of the vote, while Romney garners just 41%. Romney loses to the Democrat opponent by 6 points in both of his contests, but he is the only candidate on these ballots with lower awareness levels. This impact is revealed as we look out West where the Republican candidate does not do as well.

General Election Ballot Comparison

Giuliani	44%	Giuliani	43%
Undecided	6%	Undecided	11%
Clinton	49%	Obama	46%
Romney	44%	Romney	41%
Undecided	7%	Undecided	11%
Clinton	50%	Obama	47%

While the Democrats have gained the advantage on the general election ballots over the last 6 months, Giuliani outperforms Romney in the general against both Senators Clinton and Obama. Again, the contest pitting Giuliani against Obama is simply too close to call.

The good news here is that the Democrats are only putting U.S. Senators into the process, while the Republicans are likely to choose an executive. There is a reason that the voters have consistently chosen someone with executive experience to serve in the White House. Senator Clinton is trying to argue that she has that experience after 8 years in the White House, but if she wants to make that claim it makes it more difficult for her to argue she is the catalyst for change Americans (and Democrats in particular) seek.

The Real Issue

When American voters are focused on their pocketbooks they have trouble thinking of little else. Even when they look at other issues it tends to be seen through the lens of the economy. When they think about education in this political environment, they worry about the ability of their children to get the skills they need to get a job. For health care, they worry more about the costs. Even with regard to the war, they think about not only the tremendous loss of life, but also what that money and human effort could be doing for them at home.

It is not at all that Americans have forgotten 9/11, but the event has gotten farther in their rear view mirror. To some degree the recent positive direction in Iraq has helped to push security issues farther onto the back burner – at least for most voters. If you are less concerned about your literal survival, you can shift your attention to your economic survival.

Only 26% of the voters think that the economy is either “excellent” or “good.” While that figure is low, it is probably more important that 36% give the state of the economy a “poor” rating. So Americans now rate their economy as somewhere between “just fair” and “poor.”

At the same time, 58% would rate their own personal economic situation as either “excellent” or “good.” This figure rises to 63% among men and falls to 54% among women. Only 29% of African American voters think that their own personal financial situation is either “excellent” or “good.”

So while voters think the national economy is a mess, they think their own personal situation is somewhere between “fair” and “good.”

View of the Economy

	<u>State of Economy</u>	<u>Personal Situation</u>
	%	%
Excellent	6	13
Good	20	45
Just fair	39	31
Poor	36	11

It is interesting that when voters are asked which economic issue is most important in determining their vote for President, they overwhelmingly point to rising health care costs (25%). Health care is a lot more likely to be an area of concern for older women. After that, voters split their concerns among job loss and wages (14%), the budget deficit and the national debt (14%), rising costs of fuel (14%) and higher taxes (12%).

It is interesting that this dual view of the American economy persists throughout the survey. Voters feel that things are a mess with the current economy, but that their own situation is pretty positive. They are, perhaps as a consequence of this concern for the overall picture, convinced that their children will not have the opportunities that they have enjoyed. At the same time, they still believe in the American dream.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of the voters think that “anyone can get ahead if they work hard enough.” But there is a core group (35%) who disagrees. Those who disagree with this statement are more likely to include working women, African Americans and Democrats. But even among these important subgroups, a majority of them agrees with the mainstream position.

At the same time, 67% of the voters disagree with the view that the next generation of Americans “will have a better quality of life than I do now.” This is a pretty universal view except among Republican men, who are split on the question. Hispanics are a little more likely to agree with this position as well.

Voters overwhelmingly feel that “our economy makes it too tough for the middle class to make ends meet.” Seventy percent (70%) of American voters agree with this statement and 49% feel strongly about it. Feelings run strongest among women, minorities, Democrats, those with a lower education level, those who are single and those who do not go to church.

And yet, 68% of the voters are “optimistic about where I will be financially five years from now.” Disagreement is a little more likely to come from Hispanic women, Democrat women, older Democrats, singles and those with a lower education level. But for each of these groups, a majority of voters still agree with the statement.

So how can voters feel that things are such a mess, but retain great faith in their own situation? American voters continue to overwhelmingly believe in the American dream. Forty-nine percent (49%) report that they themselves have obtained the American dream. Another 29% think the American dream is attainable, but that they have not yet obtained it. That means that, by definition, 78% of voters believe that the American dream is something that can be achieved.

Voter views of the future for their children have actually improved over the last eleven months. Fewer voters are convinced that their children will be worse off in the future. But at 30%, there are still a significant number of voters who think their children will be worse off. These voters are more likely to live out West, but also include Independents.

Belief in the Future for Children: A Time Series

	January <u>2007</u> %	December <u>2007</u> %
Better off	39	39
About the same	19	26
Worse off	37	30
Unsure	6	4

The reasons that voters believe that their children will be better off are varied, but many of them stem from the view that America remains the best country in the world. But more responses have to do with a fundamental belief in our education system. As one individual put it:

“Well I can give you a one word answer, it’s education – because of the opportunities education provides...Education opens more doors and at a higher level; coupled with a strong upbringing, a two parent household and a strong support system.”

Still others talk about America as a land of opportunity. Another individual said,

“Just I believe Americans have opportunities. You should instill in your children that hard work and diligence pay off...The American dream is still there and attainable...Both my sons and daughter are doing much better than I did at that age. I came from sharecroppers.”

But there were those who think their children will end up worse off than they themselves have been. Those concerns are seen in the words of this Virginia Democrat:

“It seems like the prices for gasoline, food, rent, electricity – everything just keeps going up...you cut out everything you used to do so you can keep your family warm, and clothed, and fed...There won’t be anything like an American Dream anymore.”

But most American voters still believe in the American dream and the democratic process that harbors it. As others have pointed out, ours is the worst system except every other in existence. It may be this optimism that is the most promising finding in the entire survey.

Voters believe that the next President can help create an America where every family can become a part of the middle class and their own family can become a part of the middle class. Eighty-four percent (84%) believe that the next President can make at least “a little” difference in creating an America where every family has a chance to become part of the middle class. Seventy-five percent (75%) believe that the next President can make at least “a little” difference in creating an America where their family has a chance to become part of the middle class.

Next President Can Help Create Middle Class Families

	For <u>Every Family</u> %	For <u>Your Family</u> %
A lot	29	36
Some	35	28
A little	20	11
Not much	14	16
Unsure	3	4
Already done (vol.)	--	4

American voters tend to see elections for Mayor and Governor and President in the same light. They want to elect someone with the right kind of experience – someone who has previously been tested under similar circumstances. Presidential elections also tend to be about the future, particularly after 8 years of an Administration. The 2008 election is shaping up to be about the future too, but also about some degree of change.

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