

The Battleground 2008

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Democratic Strategic Analysis

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A profound and growing sense of dissatisfaction with the direction of the country continues to feed the public's appetite for change. The President, who is not just a lame duck, but a dead weight, is paying the biggest price for voters' discontent; but the political atmosphere in the country is poisonous and no one is immune. The breadth of voters' frustration even extends into the GOP's own party base. Even independent of the President, Congressional Republicans have their own problems. Democrats enjoy a solid lead in the 2008 generic ballot as well as on a number of key issues, including a strong and expanding advantage Iraq—voters' number one concern—and even a solid advantage on non-traditional issues, such as the deficit. As the election nears, the party that offers the more convincing vision of positive change for country is the party that will emerge victorious.

The Context: Direction Of The Country Bad And Only Getting Worse

The sense of public optimism this president inherited when he took office in 2001 has almost completely dissipated. Americans are deeply unhappy with the direction of the country. Fully seven in ten likely voters believe the nation is headed off on the wrong track, including a solid majority who strongly feel that way (58 percent). Just 21 percent believe things in the country are headed in the right direction, with only 13 percent expressing a strong opinion on that front.

Perceptions of the direction of the country have only grown worse since the last Battleground poll. In January of this year, 64 percent of likely voters said the country was off on the wrong track and 25 percent were positive about the direction of the country.

The breadth of voters' frustration even extends into the Republican base, with nearly half of all Republican voters (49 percent) saying that the country is on the wrong track compared to just over one-third who believe it is headed in the right direction. Fully 71 percent of independents and 89 percent of Democrats also believe the country is off course.

Increasing Displeasure With Both Parties, Especially The GOP

Despite Democrats' electoral advantage, the political atmosphere is poisonous. Voters express extreme disdain for all politicians and hold both parties in contempt. Fully 61 percent of American voters disapprove of the job Republicans in Congress are doing compared to just 28 percent who approve. On a less critical scale, just 42 percent of voters have a favorable impression of Republicans in Congress and 49 percent have an unfavorable impression. These numbers are virtually unchanged since January of this year when 41 percent of voters had a favorable impression of Congressional Republicans and 48 percent had an unfavorable impression.

The populist critique of Republicans – what the GOP attempts to characterize as class warfare (in reverse?) – remains the most resonant among the voting public. Voters' top criticism of Republicans is that they are "too focused on the rich" (19 percent). In addition, Republicans are paying a price for blind loyalty to their leader. Voters fault them for "not providing enough oversight on the war" (15 percent), "supporting Bush too much" (13 percent), "not getting anything done when they were in charge" (12 percent), and "too willing to allow deficit spending" (12 percent). Another 11 percent criticize the GOP for being "too tied to lobbyists and corruption" and just 4 percent say they are "too conservative." The top two criticisms among independent voters are that Republicans are "too focused on the rich" (20 percent), and "too tied to lobbyists and corruption" (15 percent).

Only in relative terms, however, can Democrats be considered in sounder political health. Forty-nine percent of voters have a favorable impression of Congressional Democrats and 44 percent have an unfavorable impression, though since January, impressions of Democrats have grown more critical. At that point in time, 51 percent had a favorable impression of the Democrats and 36 percent had an unfavorable impression. Asked to rate Democrats in professional terms, voters are even more reproachful: 52 percent disapprove of the job Democrats are doing in Congress while just 37 percent approve.

Democrats' worries about appearing too aggressive appear to be misplaced. **In fact, the most frequent criticism of Democrats is that they "gave in to President Bush on the War in Iraq."** Nearly one-quarter of voters (24 percent) picks this criticism out of a list that includes "not having gotten anything done" (18 percent), "being too liberal" (13 percent), "being too tied to lobbyists and special interests" (9 percent), "being too interested in raising taxes" (10 percent), and "being too focused on the poor" (4 percent). Just 11 percent of voters fault Democrats for "not supporting Bush enough." The top criticisms of Democrats among independent voters are that they "gave in to President Bush on the War in Iraq" (20 percent) and have "not having gotten anything done" (22 percent).

Independent voters follow the nationwide trend of widespread dissatisfaction with both parties, but with more severe criticism reserved for the GOP. Fully 58 percent of independents have an unfavorable impression of Congressional Republicans

(43 percent favorable) and 62 percent disapprove of the job they are doing in office (23 percent approve). The Democrats are in only slightly better shape. Fifty percent of independents have an unfavorable impression of Congressional Democrats (43 percent favorable) and 57 percent of independents disapprove of the job the Democrats are doing (28 percent approve).

It is worth noting that, as has been the case for some time, voters are far more sympathetic to their own member of Congress than to members of Congress more generally. Fully 65 percent of voters have a favorable opinion of their own member of Congress and just 23 percent have an unfavorable opinion. Voters of all partisan stripes are positive in this regard, though Democrats tend to be slightly more glowing in their assessments of their member of Congress (66 percent favorable to 18 percent unfavorable) than Republicans (64 percent favorable to 26 percent unfavorable) and independents (62 percent favorable to 27 percent unfavorable).

Substantial Public Cynicism Toward Politics

Most Americans hold a negative opinion of politicians. Fifty-three percent have an unfavorable opinion of politicians compared to 43 percent who have a favorable opinion. Fully 55 percent of voters disagree with the statement: “most elected officials are basically trustworthy,” and with significant intensity (28 percent strongly disagree). Just 43 percent agree with that statement, and only 9 percent strongly agree. Relatively speaking, politicians rank slightly above corporate executives in the public’s esteem (35 percent favorable to 50 percent unfavorable) and below entertainers (45 percent favorable to 40 percent unfavorable). And, much to the dismay of these pollsters, voters set aside a particular brand of scorn for political consultants (26 percent favorable to 44 percent unfavorable) – and lobbyists (19 percent favorable to 66 percent unfavorable).

Americans believe that members of Congress put politics over people with a striking unanimity that bridges every demographic, regional, and attitudinal divide in the data. Fully 93 percent of voters believe that lawmakers in Washington put partisan politics first. A mere 7 percent believe that people are prioritized over politics in the nation’s capitol. Underscoring the widespread nature of this cynicism toward politics, well over eight in ten voters of every stripe in America agree on this sentiment. Framed in more modest terms, voters are divided on the statement that “most elected officials are trying their best to find solutions to our nation’s problems”, with 48 percent agreeing and 50 percent disagreeing, though intensity, in this case too, rests with the cynical (just 13 percent strongly agree as compared to 29 percent who strongly disagree).

Voters are eager for government to provide solutions to the problems they – and the country – face. Sixty-three percent of voters believe it is more important to have a member of Congress who possesses a willingness to find practical, workable solutions to the country’s problems. Just 32 percent would prefer that a member of Congress possess a strength of values and convictions. Noticeably, Democrats and independents are even more eager for pragmatism than are Republicans. More than three-quarters of Democrats prefer practical solutions over values and convictions (76 percent to 20 percent, respectively), as compared to 59 percent of independents (35

percent prefer the alternative) and 53 percent of Republicans (fully 43 percent prefer the alternative).

Also balancing voters' cynicism is the fact that American voters still see the act of voting as a worthwhile method of affecting the direction of their country.

Seventy-two believe that "voting gives people like me some say about how the government runs things," including 36 percent who feel that way strongly. Just 27 percent disagree with that statement.

It's the War AND the Economy, Stupid

The war in Iraq remains the most pervasive issue weighing on voters' minds and, barring some drastic change, will once again be a deciding factor in national elections. Iraq continues to be the number one issue on voters' minds; nearly one-fourth (23 percent) cites it as the concern they and their families worry about most. However, voters are dissatisfied with the direction of the country on a number of fronts and are looking hard for change that will improve their lives and their wallets as well as secure America's place in the world. Candidates at all levels will have to contend with an issue agenda viewed through the prism of the Presidential race, nationalizing the election a long themes of broad change for the country.

A majority of voters continues to believe the war in Iraq is not worth fighting and they are looking for real a change in direction there. Fifty-three percent of voters say the war in Iraq is not worth fighting with nearly all of those (45 percent) saying they feel so strongly. Attitudes on the war are polarized along partisan lines. Republicans continue to cling to support for the war, with 71 percent saying it is still worth fighting, though nearly one-fourth (23 percent) now disagree. Independents (42 percent worth it, 52 percent not worth fighting) and particularly Democrats (15 percent support, 82 percent not worth it) remain clearly against the war. This feeling has increased even since our last Battleground in January, when voters overall were split on the measure (46 percent worth fighting, 48 percent not worth it).

While voters clearly blame Bush for the direction the war has taken they do not give Congress a bye on the issue. In fact nearly three-fourths of the electorate believes that both Congressional Democrats (71 percent) and Republicans (76 percent) should have significant influence on the course of the war. However, while the decreasing favorable ratings for Congressional Democrats are largely related to the lack of change in Iraq, voters still believe the Republicans have a stronger influence (76 percent influence, 41 percent a lot) than Congressional Democrats (71 percent influence, 35 percent a lot). Democrats also have an advantage on dealing with Iraq over both Congressional Republicans (+15) and President Bush (+14), this is up significantly from a 7- and 8-point advantage, respectively, as recently as January. That said, Democrats at all levels will be forced to answer for the lack of change in Iraq. And as a result, they will likely need to demonstrate actively and repeatedly their concrete plans for change. With a Republican President and only a tenuous edge in Congress voters may forgive Democrats for not being able to enact change on this issue, but they will not forgive what they see as a lack of effort on the number one problem facing the United States.

While the war is weighing heavily on voters' minds, issues that affect their pocketbooks are also informing their voting decisions. Voters are pessimistic about their own future and that of their children and the next generation. This pessimism is fueling a desire for real change as well as their growing dissatisfaction with Washington and the current administration.

The economy and jobs are top of mind concerns for voters (15 percent top concern) and even more so when factoring in the issue of health care (12 percent top concern)—which Americans cite as their top economic concern. In fact, combined, these issues outweigh even the war in Iraq as the biggest concern for voters today. And voters do not foresee things getting better; instead they are increasingly worried about the future. A plurality of voters (38 percent) think their children will be worse off than they are, a new and distressing phenomenon that has just taken hold under Bush's tenure. And it is a growing sentiment: just one-third of voters (32 percent) think their children will be better off than they themselves are, down even from our previous Battleground survey in January (39 percent). The remaining fourth (24 percent) do not see things improving for their children but rather staying about the same. Among those voters who cite the economy as their top concern, this pessimism remains evident (34 percent say children will be worse off, 34 percent about the same, 29 percent better off).

Democrats at all levels will need to demonstrate that they have used the advantages voters gave them in the mid-term elections to bring about real progress and reform on economic issues in ways that change the economic fortunes of the country, and the American middle class in particular. While it may prove difficult to break through the pessimism, voters do consistently give Democrats the advantage in looking out for the middle class and continue to view Republicans as too focused on the wealthy (the top criticism of Congressional Republicans at 19 percent).

Similar to the war, despite Democratic majorities in both Houses, Republicans will not easily be able to place blame at the feet of the Democratic Congress on the economy. Voters see both parties as having strong influence on the economy (Democrats 79 percent influence, Republicans 77 percent). Here, however, they believe Democrats have slightly more influence than Republicans (44 percent a lot to 39 percent a lot). As they fight the war, Democrats must deliver on our economic and pocketbook agenda as home as well.

Democrats Expand Advantages Over GOP On Iraq And Other Key Issues

Despite voters' distaste with the political scene in Washington, D.C., they are making clear distinctions between the two major parties when it comes to the challenges facing the nation. Voters trust Democrats in Congress over Republicans on a number of fronts – and by wide margins. Most prominently, on voters' most pressing concern – Iraq – 52 percent of voters favor the Democrats compared to just 37 percent who favor the Republicans. Similarly, solid majorities of Americans prefer the Democrats when it comes to health care (59 percent to 29 percent), energy independence

(54 percent to 29 percent), Social Security (56 percent to 33 percent), and jobs (55 percent to 38 percent). Underscoring the GOP's deteriorating credibility on fiscal matters, a majority of voters even prefer Democrats to Republicans on the issue of deficits (51 percent to 38 percent). Voters are more divided on which party they trust more on the economy (48 percent Democrats to 44 percent Republicans), highlighting the need for Democrats to articulate a broad economic vision for the country.

Additionally, Democrats hold commanding margins on dealing with corruption in Washington (42 percent to 26 percent) and wasteful government spending (42 percent to 33 percent) – though on both measures significant numbers of voters don't believe either party is capable of leadership (33 percent neither/ not sure and 26 percent neither/ not sure, respectively).

In a few cases, Democrats have even improved their margin over Republicans in the past several months. Most noticeably, Congressional Democrats have doubled their advantage on Iraq (from +8 to +15) and have effectively reduced their deficits on the issues of terrorism (from -17 to -13). In the wake of the "D.C. Madam" scandal, Democrats have moved from an 8-point deficit to near parity (-3) on the dimension of moral values.

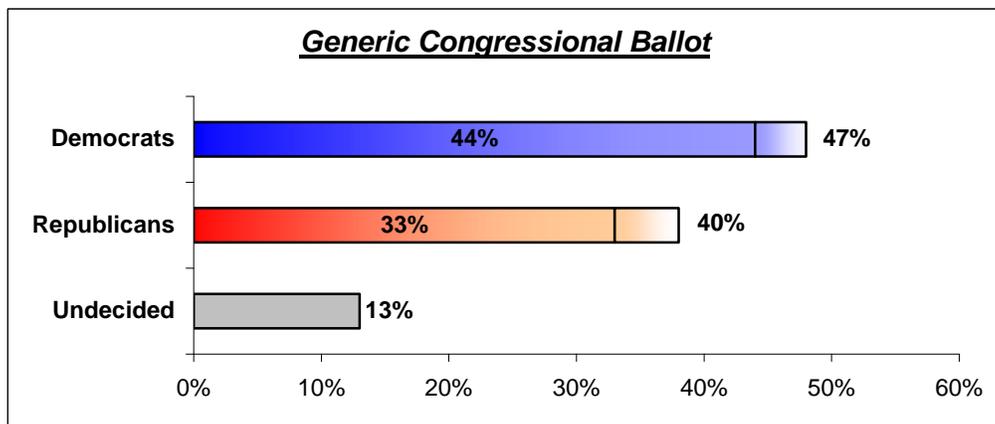
Republicans fail to convince a majority of voters that they are better suited to handle *any* issue tested, though they continue to hold a decisive advantage on terrorism (49 percent to 36 percent). GOP margins on taxes (46 percent to 44 percent), illegal immigration (41 percent to 36 percent), and moral values (42 percent to 39 percent) are all far more narrow.

Finally, independent voters afford Democrats substantial double-digit margins on every issue, including health care (+44), social security (+40), energy independence (+32), wasteful government spending (+12), deficits (+37), the economy (+5), jobs (+26), Iraq (+24), and corruption in Washington (+18). Among independents, Democrats even lead Republicans by 14 points on the issue of taxes and by 5 points on moral values. Republicans can only boast advantages and terrorism (-9) and illegal immigration (-17) among independent voters.

Congressional Democrats vs. Republicans: Which Party Would Do A Better Job Of Handling...				
	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Dem-GOP</i>	<i>1/07: Dem-GOP</i>
Health care	29%	59%	30	39
Energy independence	29%	54%	25	26
Social Security	33%	56%	23	24
Jobs	38%	55%	17	14
Corruption in Washington	26%	42%	16	16
Iraq	37%	52%	15	8
Deficits	38%	51%	13	---
Wasteful government spending	33%	42%	9	---
The economy	44%	48%	4	3
Taxes	46%	44%	-2	-3
Moral values	42%	39%	-3	-8
Illegal immigration	41%	36%	-5	-4
Terrorism	49%	36%	-13	-17

The Battle To Control Congress 2008: Democrats Remain In Ascendance More Than 1 Year Out

While there are many months between now and the Congressional elections of 2008, Democrats are maintaining a sound lead in the generic Congressional ballot, 47 percent to 40 percent, despite just a modest 1-point lead in party identification in a poll with a tight turnout screen. Democrats' edge is underscored by an advantage in firm support, as 44 percent of American voters support the Democrats solidly compared to 37 percent who solidly support the Republicans.



The gender gap is alive and well, with women supporting the Democrats by a whopping 19-point margin (53 percent to 34 percent) and men supporting Republicans by a more meager 5 points (46 percent to 41 percent). Democrats are also winning nearly every major age cohort, including 18-34 year olds (+28), 45-64 year olds (+9), and seniors (+5). Republicans lead only among voters between the ages of 35-44 (+9).

Democrats have shifted the marriage gap to the point where they are breaking even among married voters (44 percent to 44 percent), while still holding significant margins among single voters (+25) and those who are no longer married (+18). Republicans are only carrying married men.

Regionally, Democrats are winning with solid margins in the West (+17), the Northeast (+14), the Central Plains (+12), and the Midwest (+11). Republicans lead outside the margin of error only in the Mountain states (-7), though their lead there is reduced. The South and South Central regions of the country are even battlegrounds at this point (-1 and tied, respectively). If this remains the case going into the election, of course, the consequences for the GOP could be disastrous. Democrats are winning urban areas by 17 points, suburban areas by 7 points, and losing rural areas by just 4 points.

Currently, Democrats are doing a better job of consolidating their base, winning 89 percent to 4 percent. By comparison, Republicans convert just 81 percent of their party faithful and fully 8 percent are defecting to the Democrats. Among the swing independent bloc, Democrats lead by 10 points, 41 percent to 31 percent, though a substantial number are undecided (29 percent).

Undecided voters tend to be female, older, non-college education, suburban and White. They are more Republican than Democratic, though a plurality are independent. Of the 13 percent of voters who are undecided, 54 percent are women and 46 percent are men. Just 7 percent are under the age of 35, another 11 percent are between the ages of 35-44, 47 percent are between 45-64, and 32 percent are seniors. Forty-four percent have college degrees, but a majority have either not finished college (27 percent), are high school graduates (26 percent), or did not complete high school (3 percent). Fully 83 percent are white, 6 percent are African American, 3 percent are Hispanic, and 8 percent identify as "other." Regionally, 55 percent of undecided voters in the Congressional ballot live in suburban areas, 27 percent in urban areas, and just 18 percent in rural areas. Their partisan leanings favor the GOP, as 39 percent are independents, 38 percent are Republicans, and just 24 percent are Democrats. However, undecided voters are very unhappy with the direction of the country (64 percent wrong track) and solidly disapprove of the job the president is doing (60 percent); even on a personal level they do not like him much (56 percent unfavorable).

Lame Duck or Dead Weight?—Perceptions and Consequences of the President

Traditionally the President's lame duck status would lessen his influence on Republican Congressional and Presidential candidates. **However, the virulent dissatisfaction for this President, even among a significant portion of his own party, has made him an increasing liability, even without being on the ticket.**

More than 6-in-10 voters (61 percent) disapprove of Bush's job performance as President, with a majority (55 percent) saying they disapprove strongly. Just 19 percent of voters strongly approve of his job as President. Not surprisingly, Democrats

particularly disapprove of the job the President is doing (91 percent). Two-thirds (66 percent) of independents also disapprove of his job performance. Perhaps most significant though, is the drop in approval among members of the President's own party. Sixty-eight percent of Republicans approve of the job the President is doing, however, this is down from 80 percent of Republicans who gave him positive job approval ratings just seven months ago in our January Battleground survey (28 percent of Republicans disapprove).

While this downward movement is no doubt a concern for Republicans, of even more concern must be the public's lack of trust in Bush on the majority of top of mind issues. Most significantly, Bush has dropped to a 14-point disadvantage on the war in Iraq, double the 7-point disadvantage he was at in January. The President also is particularly behind Congressional Democrats on the top domestic issues of the economy (16-point disadvantage), jobs (11-points), and health care (28-points). The 2008 races, which will likely turn on these issues, will no doubt include the spectacle of Republican candidates trying to distance themselves from the President at each opportunity.

However, the bad news for Republicans does not end there, while not at the very top of the issue agenda, the President brings even more baggage to some equally important issues including energy independence (-30), Social Security (-23), deficits (-23), wasteful government spending (-18), illegal immigration (-17), and corruption in Washington (-13).

Bush has squandered many of the advantages he once had over the Democrats. At this point in time, he has not only eliminated any Republican coattails but has clearly become an albatross around the neck of his fellow Republicans. This is evident as Republican Presidential candidates increasingly distance themselves from their leader. Bush lags behind Congressional Democrats on nearly every top of mind concern, coloring voters' perceptions of his party on these vote-deciding issues. Bush maintains advantages on only the Republican stronghold of terrorism (10-points) and a lesser advantage on moral values (4-points) and the historical Republican stronghold of taxes (-2-points). However, even the advantages he receives on these issues have narrowed significantly over time and continued to drop even in recent months. In January, Bush held a 15-point advantage on terrorism, however at nearly this point before the last Presidential election (September 2003) his advantage on the issue was at 38-points. And as recently as January, Bush held a 12-point advantage on moral values. Bush is also behind his party on energy independence, deficits, taxes, the economy, and terrorism.

President Bush vs. Democrats: Who Would Do A Better Job Of Handling...			
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Pres. Bush</i>	<i>Dems-Bush</i>
Energy independence	59%	29%	30
Healthcare	59%	31%	28
Deficits	57%	34%	23
Social Security	57%	34%	23
Wasteful government spending	51%	33%	18
Illegal immigration	50%	33%	17
The economy	56%	40%	16
Health care	54%	40%	14
Corruption in Washington	47%	34%	13
Jobs	52%	41%	11
Taxes	48%	46%	2
Moral values	43%	47%	-4
Terrorism	41%	51%	-10

In addition, a majority of voters (55 percent) has a negative personal image of the President, with 43 percent saying they have a strongly unfavorable image of him. Despite the White House's repeated efforts to improve the President's image, the course of the war in Iraq and lack of progress here at home have impeded any improvement in his ratings from our last two surveys (53 percent unfavorable in both January of this year and just before the mid-term elections last year).

Republican woes extend beyond Bush. Gaining increasing attention and ire from voters is Vice President Cheney, who despite efforts to keep a low profile has formed a particularly negative image with the American public. Nearly 6-in-10 voters (58 percent) have an unfavorable view of the Vice President with more than 4-in-10 (43 percent) strongly unfavorable. Cheney's net-unfavorable rating has tripled just since January, from -7 points to -21 points. Republicans remain net-favorable (+35-points) towards the vice-president, but three-in-ten (30 percent) have an unfavorable view of him. Both Democrats (-68 points) and independents (-36 points) have particularly negative impressions of the Vice President.

The Race for the White House

Voters have mixed views of the top contenders from both parties. Not surprisingly, the images of the better-known candidates are more divided than those of the candidates who are still building name identification.

On the Democratic side the current top candidates all have significant name identification, with just 1 percent of voters unable to rate **Hillary Clinton**. Opinion on the Senator is split, with half (50 percent) viewing her favorably and nearly as many (48 percent) viewing her unfavorably. Among those who view her favorably, more than half

(27 percent overall) have a strongly favorable image of her. While the Senator's image is somewhat divided among the entire electorate, Democrats have a very positive image of her (86 percent favorable, 12 percent unfavorable). Independents are divided (47 percent favorable, 52 percent unfavorable), and not surprisingly Republicans are negative (15 percent favorable, 84 percent unfavorable).

Barack Obama garners somewhat more favorable ratings, with 59 percent having a positive image of him (28 percent very favorable). Just one-fourth (27 percent) has a negative view of the junior Senator from Illinois. Fourteen percent of respondents do not know him enough to offer an opinion. Obama has similar levels of name recognition among Democratic voters (15 percent could not give an opinion). Democrats also like him (72 percent favorable, 12 percent unfavorable). Nearly as many independents have a favorable opinion of the Senator (67 percent, 21 percent unfavorable), while Republicans are split (41 percent favorable, 46 percent unfavorable).

John Edwards continues to be well known, with just 12 percent of voters unable to rate him. His image falls between the two front-runners with 53 percent having a favorable view of him and 35 percent having an unfavorable one. The intensity behind Edwards, however, is not as strong as Clinton or Obama, with just 19 percent having a very favorable view. Edwards has a solid image among both Democrats (73 percent favorable, 12 percent unfavorable) and independents (53 percent favorable, 34 percent unfavorable), while Republicans clearly still familiar with him from the last race, are distinctly unfavorable (33 percent favorable, 58 percent unfavorable).

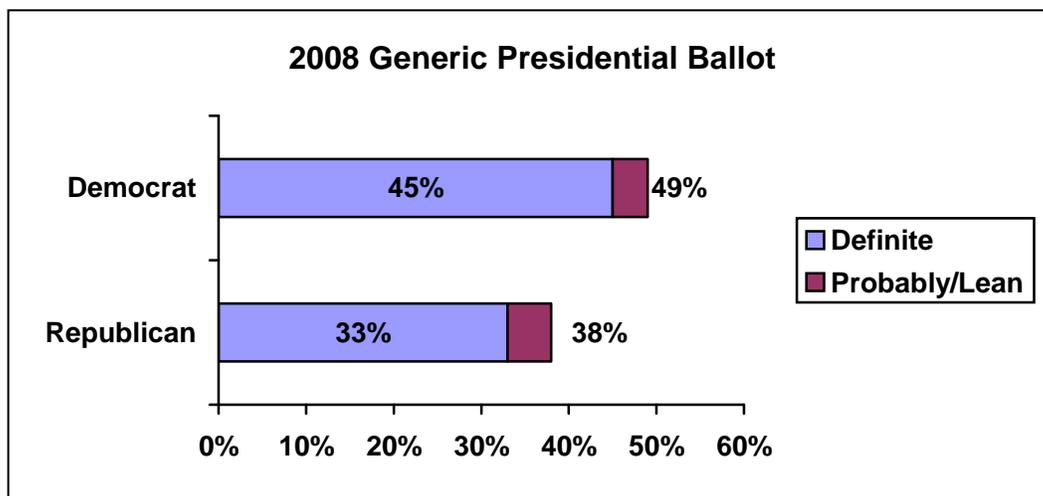
While the Democratic field is fairly well known across the board, there is a wider range of familiarity on **the Republican side**. Former New York Mayor **Rudy Giuliani** is the best known (just 9 percent do not have an impression of him) and is viewed the most favorable among those tested. Six-in-ten voters have a favorable view of Giuliani, while 31 percent view him negatively. Noticeably he does not garner the same level of positive intensity as the Democratic frontrunners (23 percent strongly favorable, 37 percent somewhat favorable). Among Republican voters, Giuliani has a strongly favorable image (78 percent favorable). While many Republicans have touted Giuliani as the only candidate with crossover appeal, his numbers with independents (59 percent favorable) are not as strong as those Obama receives.

John McCain continues to enjoy a positive image (55 percent) despite recent campaign shake-ups, however he does not garner as intensely strong (14 percent) an image as Giuliani. One-third (34 percent) of voters have a negative impression of McCain, with similar levels of intensity as Giuliani on this side of the spectrum (16 percent very unfavorable). Thirteen percent of voters do not have a strong enough impression of the Arizona Senator to give him a rating. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Republicans have a positive image of McCain, with one-fourth (27 percent) viewing him unfavorably. McCain remains particularly strong with independents, with numbers among these voters that nearly mirror those in his own party (61 percent favorable, 26 percent unfavorable). Democrats are evenly divided on the Senator (41 percent favorable, 42 percent unfavorable).

Former Governor **Mitt Romney** has a lot of room to expand his name identification, as 41 percent are unable to give an opinion of him, including one-fourth of voters (24 percent) who have never heard of him. Thirty-five percent of voters have a favorable impression of him, though just 9 percent of those are very favorable. Another fourth (24 percent) have an unfavorable impression, with 10 percent very unfavorable. Among Republicans he is better known and liked (50 percent favorable, 14 percent unfavorable). Democrats are 13-points net negative towards Romney while independents are more split (3-points net favorable)

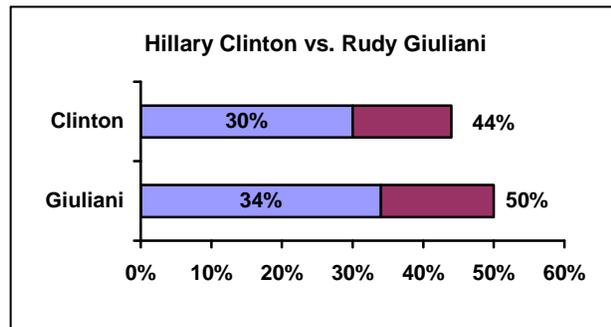
Although yet to enter the race officially, former Senator **Fred Thompson** has a more than 2-to-1 net positive rating (38 percent favorable, 15 percent unfavorable), however nearly half (47 percent) of voters do not have a strong enough impression of him to give him a rating. Thompson is not much more familiar to Republicans (41 percent could not give an opinion) than to voters overall, however those Republicans who do know him like him (52 percent favorable overall, 7 percent unfavorable). Independents have a similar net positive rating for Thompson as voters overall (39 percent favorable, 18 percent unfavorable), while Democrats are split (23 percent favorable, 22 percent unfavorable).

With the general election still more than 15 months away, any head-to-head tests are clearly measures of an undefined race. However, in a generic Presidential ballot that can measure the atmosphere in which the candidates will contend, the Democrat has a 12-point lead over the Republican candidate (50 percent to 38 percent). Intensity favors the Democrats, too, who enjoy an 11-point advantage in strong support. Not surprisingly the vote splits along party lines, though it should be noted that Democrats have consolidated their vote behind the Democratic candidate (90 percent vote for the Democrat, 3 percent Republican, 7 percent undecided) more strongly than the Republicans have (79 percent vote for the Republican, 9 percent for the Democrat, 12 percent undecided). Also of significance, independents give the Democratic candidate an 18-point advantage (43 percent to 25 percent), though one-third (32 percent) of these voters remain undecided. While domestic issues are cutting through the agenda more than they did in the mid-term elections, no doubt much of this race will still center on the war

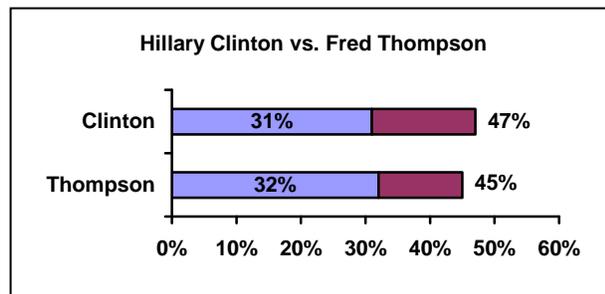


in Iraq. Among those voters who name Iraq as the issue that most concerns them, 71 percent support the Democratic candidate in the head-to-head, while just 18 percent back the Republican.

The gender and marriage gaps are also evident, though the Democrat fares significantly better with the usual Republican-leaning voters than the Republican does with those who traditionally trend Democratic. Men support the Republican candidate by a 3-point margin, however women support the Democratic candidate by 24-point margin. Married voters have closed and even reversed their Republican leaning tendencies, instead supporting the Democrat by a 4-point margin. Unmarried voters remain strongly in the Democratic column, however, with single voters supporting the Democrat by 35-points and those who are no longer married by 18-points. Also of note, those voters in Congressional districts that were not won by either Kerry or Bush with more than 55 percent in the last election support the Democratic candidate in the generic Presidential ballot by 20-points over the Republican.



When the party frontrunners are matched up, however, the races become more closely contested. Hillary Clinton loses a trial heat against Rudy Giuliani by 6-points (50 percent to 44 percent). Among strong supporters the gap is narrowed to 4 percent, with Clinton having 30 percent who say they would definitely vote for her and Giuliani garnering 34 percent. The gender gap, which would undoubtedly play a significant role if this race were to materialize is evident even in this early head-to-head: men support Giuliani by 19 points while women support Clinton by a more modest 7 points. While Democrats have a more favorable image of Giuliani than Republicans do of Clinton, voters in both parties consolidate behind their candidate in this horse race: 89 percent of Republicans support Giuliani and Clinton receives 83 percent of the Democratic vote.

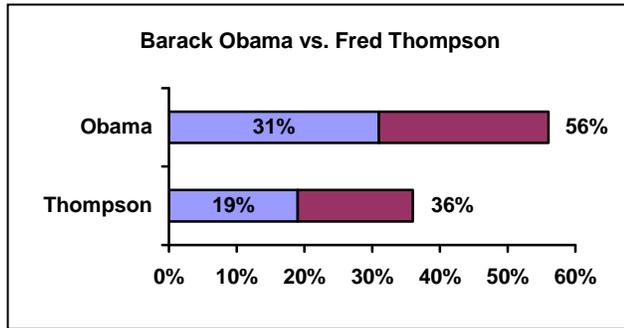


Clinton edges out Fred Thompson by a two-point margin however (47 percent to 45 percent), with both candidates receiving similar strong support 32 percent for Thompson and 31 percent for Clinton. Thompson fares better among independents (42 percent to 37 percent), however women are solidly behind Clinton in this scenario (54 percent to 37 percent).

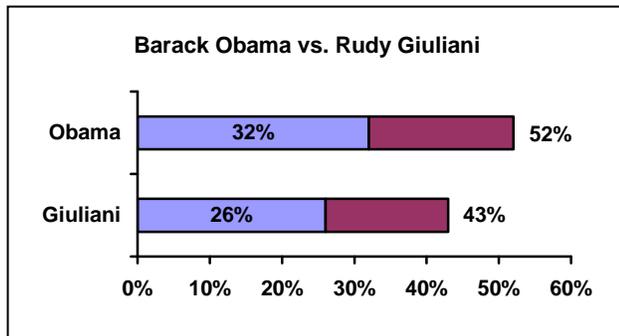
Obama fares better against both Republican frontrunners in these early measures, beating Giuliani by 9-points (52 percent to 43 percent) and Thompson by more than twice that margin. He does nearly as well with a 6-point margin among definite voters taking

32 percent to Giuliani's 26 percent. The gender gap is even more evident in this race with men supporting Giuliani by a 5-point margin and women backing Obama by 22-points, roughly three times the margin they afford Clinton. Obama also does a better job of consolidating his party base than Giuliani. He draws 84 percent of the Democratic vote while Giuliani has 77 percent support among Republicans. Significantly, independents also strongly favor the Illinois Senator (52 percent to 37 percent).

Against Thompson, Obama opens an impressive 20-point lead (56 percent to 36 percent), holding a 12-point lead among definite voters (31 percent to 19 percent). While Republicans back Thompson (66 percent to 24 percent), Obama consolidates Democrats (85 percent to 9 percent) and handily wins independents (60 percent to 27 percent).



The dynamics of the 2008 contest, however, will undoubtedly fluctuate as they are shaped by the growing familiarity with the candidates, the national debate, and events on the campaign trail over the coming months. Republicans in particular will have to contend with natural biases against the party in power and the particularly strong feelings about their current President, his administration, and his handling of the war, and his stewardship of the nation.



One such possible race-altering factor is the significant possibility of a third-party candidate, which could change the Presidential race. As we have seen in the past with Perot and Nader, a third party candidate, even one who does not garner a significant portion of the vote, has the ability to change the outcome of a national contest. And that is clearly still true in the current political atmosphere. When asked if they would be likely to vote for a third-party candidate were one to run, nearly one-fourth (22 percent) of voters said they would (14 percent strongly), while another 20 said they might.

The most discussed third party possible candidate poses less of an obstacle at this time. A considerable portion of the electorate is not familiar enough with him to have an impression of him (46 percent never heard or no opinion), one-third (33 percent) of voters have a favorable impression of him, and 22 percent have an unfavorable impression. Of note, voters across party lines have a net positive view of Bloomberg (Republicans +9, independents +7, and Democrats +14). However, when asked if they would vote for him as a third party candidate, 9 percent of voters overall (including 13

percent of independents) say they would. In a close enough election that can make a difference and lots can and will change before the actual election.