

Rock the Vote September 2006 Poll

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Republican Strategic Analysis

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Introduction and Overview

In examining the political environment, this survey has similar findings to the study in April that found young voters to be intensely negative about the current political environment and finds these voters overall to be strongly oriented towards support for the Democratic Party.

In fact, just look at this litany of negative sentiments about the status quo among younger voters:

- 58% think the country is on the wrong track,
- 50% think the Democratic Party not the GOP would do a better job addressing their top issue concern,
- 53% think the Democratic Party not President Bush would do a better job addressing their top issue concern,
- 58% hold an unfavorable impression of President Bush,
- 62% disapprove of President Bush's job performance,
- 43% select the Democrats on the generic ballot, and
- On an issue handling series, the Democrats are at least the plurality choice on every issue except homeland security and terrorism.

All of this would seemingly lead to the conclusion that the Republican Party is in immense trouble with this segment of the electorate. Certainly, this is not new in that this is the only age cohort that President Bush lost in 2004. However, when examining younger Republican voters, these voters are intense and interested potential voters who could be mobilized in support of the Republican Party.

Political Environment – Young Republicans Remain Stalwart Supporters

As noted above, while the overall trend among young voters is decidedly negative, young Republicans remain optimistic about the country, the party, and its leaders.

Look how different the world view is for young Republican voters:

- 59% think the country is headed in the right direction,
- 61% think the Republican Party not the Democrats would do a better job addressing their top issue concern,
- 67% think that President Bush not the Democratic Party would do a better job addressing their top issue concern,
- 76% hold an favorable impression of President Bush,
- 71% approve of President Bush's job performance,
- 61% select the GOP on the generic ballot, and
- On the issue handling series, young GOP voters think the Republican Congress would do a better job on critical issues like gas prices, creating jobs, the War in Iraq, immigration, moral values, homeland security/terrorism.
- On the issue handling series with President Bush versus the Democrats in Congress, President Bush is their choice on every issue tested except health care, which is a statistical tie.

On critical issues like the War in Iraq, immigration, moral values, and homeland security/terrorism, GOP voters overwhelmingly select President Bush or the Republicans in Congress. For example, on homeland security/terrorism, among young GOP voters, this gap is +55% in favor of the Republicans in Congress and +71% in favor of President Bush.

In addition, fully 63% of young GOP voters indicate that they are extremely or very likely to vote. This intensity of interest and intensity of support for the Republican Party indicate that a targeted effort to reach these voters could provide a notable level of assistance to the GOP in the upcoming elections.

Young Voter Motivations

Young voters are asked if they think candidates have spent too much, not enough, or about the right amount of time discussing some critical issues. Overall, young voters divide on the War in Iraq (40% too much to 34% not enough) and homeland security/terrorism (29% too much to 34% not enough). In contrast, they think they have not heard enough about issues like health care (70% not enough), creating jobs (68% not enough), college affordability (70% not enough), gas prices/energy (66% not enough), moral/values based issues (53% not enough), and immigration (49% not enough).

However, despite this dissatisfaction with the level of discussion on Iraq and homeland security/terrorism, these issues rate very highly with young voters when they asked to rate their interest in hearing from candidates. Several key issues are rated on a 0-10 scale and the top testing issues are health care (8.1 mean score), gas prices/energy (8.1 mean score), creating jobs (7.8 mean score), War in Iraq (7.7 mean score), homeland security/terrorism (7.5 mean score), and college affordability (7.3 mean score).

For young Republican voters, this issue interest matrix is somewhat different with the top issues being homeland security/terrorism (8.1 mean score), gas prices/energy (8.0 mean score), the War in Iraq (7.8 mean score), health care (7.5 mean score), and moral/values based issues (7.4 mean score).

War in Iraq

As with the overall political environment, young voters take a decidedly negative view about the War in Iraq. Among these voters:

- 40% are more likely to vote for a Democratic candidate when thinking about the War in Iraq versus just 17% who select the GOP candidate,
- 30% want the US out of Iraq immediately and 37% want the US out of Iraq within at least two years that begins with an immediate troop reduction,
- 57% think the War in Iraq was a mistake,
- 51% think the War in Iraq was not worth fighting, and
- While a majority (55%) think the War in Iraq is part of the War on Terrorism, 42% disagree with this premise.

However, as with the overall political environment, young GOP voters take a decidedly more positive view. Among young GOP voters:

- 40% are more likely to vote for a Republican candidate when thinking about the War in Iraq versus just 17% who select the Democratic candidate,
- 47% want the US to stay in Iraq until the situation is confirmed stable,
- 56% think the War in Iraq was not a mistake,
- 83% think the War in Iraq was worth fighting, and
- 79% think the War in Iraq is part of the War on Terrorism.

This is an additional indicator that young GOP voters will be open and responsive to the key national Republican messages on Iraq and the War on Terrorism.

Other Issues

While the issues of energy and college affordability are examined, for both of these issues a plurality of young voters say that these issues make “no difference” to whether they will support the Democratic or Republican candidate.

Conclusions

While the overall political environment for Republicans is poor, fully 29% of young voters identify themselves as Republicans. This notable sized segment of the young electorate is as supportive of the GOP as base voters in any other age cohort. On Iraq and homeland security as well as other key issues, these voters are supportive of the party and responsive to its messaging. For many GOP campaigns, piquing the interest of these voters will be no more difficult than making some selected additions to their existing e-mail list. This limited effort could provide substantial assistance to Republican campaigns.

In all, the Republicans in this segment of the electorate are loyal and intense and can be targeted in an effective way by Republican campaigns. In 2002, this age cohort contributed 10% of the overall vote. Given the interest level of the Republicans among their voters and the openness of the Republicans among these voters, reaching out to these voters could be an effective tactic for many GOP candidates this year.