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It's the Terrain, Stupid.

"We think the Republicans are now slight favorites to win at least six seats and capture [the Senate]," Nate Silver writes in his FiveThirtyEight blog. Most analysts agree. But why? Is it because of President Obama's diminishing popularity? The disastrous rollout of Obamacare? Concern over Russian aggression?

Actually, it's the terrain, stupid. The most hotly contested Senate races this year are being fought on territory hostile to Democrats.

President Obama has offered his own explanation. "In midterms we get clobbered," the President told a Democratic congressional fundraiser, "either because we don't think it's important or we've become so discouraged about what's happening in Washington that we think it's not worth our while."

That's certainly what happened in the 2010 midterm. The number of voters in congressional elections dropped by nearly 35 million from 2008 to 2010. Democrats lost 27 million of those votes. Two years later, in the 2012 presidential election, Democrats picked up 21 million House votes while Republicans gained 13 million.

The New America constituencies that President Obama rallied don't seem to care much about congressional elections. Young people, African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, working women, single mothers, and gays will come out to vote for a champion like Obama (and possibly Hillary Clinton). But it may be difficult to get them out to save other Democrats like Kay Hagan (NC),

Mark Pryor (AR), or Natalie Tennant (WV).

The problem for Democrats is the mix of Senate seats up this year. Democrats have to defend most of the 36 seats on the 2014 ballot: 21 Democratic seats and 15 Republican. The Democrats' problem gets worse if you take into account how those states voted in the last presidential election. The reason you have to do that is that all politics is

becoming national. States and congressional districts are less and less likely to split their votes—one party for President and the other party for state and local offices.

Right now, the U.S. has a record number of states under one-party control (meaning that same party controls the governor and both houses of the state legislature). Of the 23 red states, 18 voted for Mitt Romney in 2012. But a quarter of the U.S. senators from those states are Democrats. Of the 13 blue states, all but one (West Virginia) voted for Barack Obama in 2012. And only one of their 26 U.S. senators is a Republican (Mark Kirk of Illinois).

Clark Bensen of Polidata reports that the number of congressional districts that split their votes for the President and House in 2012 "has hit a low point compared to recent elections." Only 26 out of 435 districts split their votes in 2012, down from 83 in 2008. Barack Obama won 17 districts that sent a Republican to the House. Mitt Romney won 9 districts that elected a House Democrat. The rest of the country—more than 400 congressional districts—voted the same way for President and Congress.

**...all politics
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Now look at the 36 states holding Senate elections this year. Seven Democratic seats are up in states that voted for Romney (Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Montana, North Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia). Only one Republican seat is up in an Obama state (Maine). If those states vote for Senate the same way they did for President, Republicans will gain the six seats they need to win a majority.

Senate Seats Up in 2014

Democratic Seats Up	In 2012 Obama States	14
	In 2012 Romney States	7
Total		21
Republican Seats Up	In 2012 Obama States	1
	In 2012 Romney States	14
Total		15

Senate Seats Up in 2016

Democratic Seats Up	In 2012 Obama States	10
	In 2012 Romney States	0
Total		10
Republican Seats Up	In 2012 Obama States	7
	In 2012 Romney States	17
Total		24

What about the widely noted demographic trends favoring Democrats? Sean Trende writes in RealClearPolitics, "The demographic changes that are working in Democrats' favor elsewhere are not helping them in many of the most competitive states in this [Senate] cycle." Alaska, Montana, South Dakota, and West Virginia are just not gaining very many minority voters. And we are not seeing big increases in the number of African-American voters. In southern states like Arkansas, Louisiana, and North Carolina, African-American turnout probably peaked when Obama was running in 2008 and 2012.

Meanwhile, Gallup reports that white voters have become more Republican in the Obama years. The party affiliation of whites nationwide averaged 4 points more Republican than Democratic during the Clinton years (1995-2000), 5 points more Republican in the George W. Bush

years (2001-2008), and 9.5 points more Republican in the Obama years (2009-2013).

If all politics is becoming national, you might wonder why Obama got elected twice but the House of Representatives still has a Republican majority. That's where gerrymandering comes in. Republicans regained control of the House in 2010 and won a sweeping victory in state elections that year. In many states, they used their power to draw congressional district lines that protect their House majority. According to Polidata, Romney won 226 congressional districts in 2012 while Obama won 209. So the House vote is consistent with the presidential vote cast along congressional district lines.

Democrats need not despair, however. As bad as the terrain looks for Democrats in 2014, it improves markedly in 2016. Of the 34 Senate seats up in 2016, Democrats will be defending only 10. Not one of them will be in a Romney state. Republicans will be defending 24 Senate seats in 2016, but seven of those seats are in Obama states. If presidential voting continues to be the controlling factor, 2016 may see Democrats reverse this year's likely Senate losses.

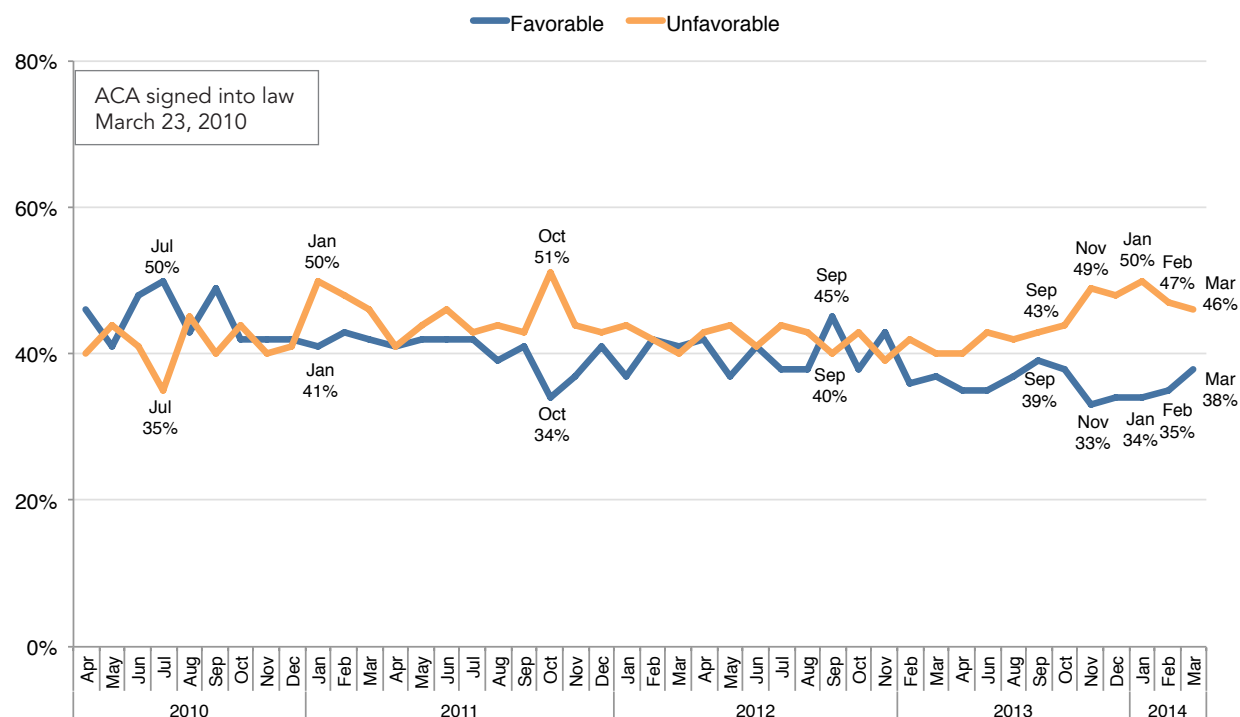
The long-term demographic trends do favor Democrats. In the short-term, however, congressional election results are shaped by the terrain: which states are holding elections and which party draws the congressional district line. ■



IN FOCUS

The Verdict on Obamacare (to date)

What's the verdict on Obamacare now that the deadline for enrollment has passed (sort of)? People are less unhappy than they used to be. But they're still not happy.



Source: "ACA Opinion Still Tilts Negative, But Narrowing Since January," Kaiser Health Tracking Poll, March 2014.

The Kaiser Family Foundation has been tracking public approval of Obamacare for four years now. Negative opinion has usually outweighed positive opinion by a small margin, though disapproval increased markedly after the disastrous rollout of the website last fall. Since January of this year, approval has been trending slightly up. The March figures show 38% of the public with a positive view of Obamacare and 46% negative—an 8-point negative margin. In January, the negative margin was twice as large (50% to 34%).

So what do people want Congress to do? Just get rid of it? Only 18% say that. Get rid of it and replace it with a Republican-sponsored alternative? Another 11%. Keep it just the way it is? 10%.

The prevailing view: keep Obamacare in place but work to improve it (49%).

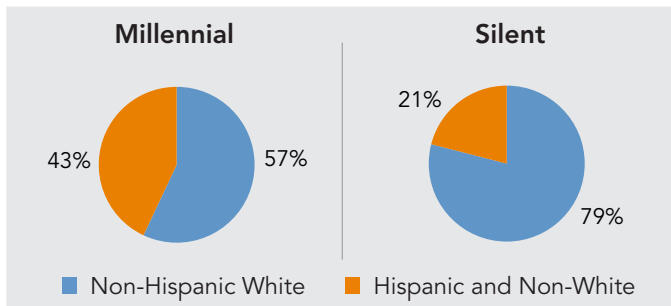
The March Kaiser poll reveals the same thing it has been showing for four years. Every provision of Obamacare is popular—guaranteed enrollment, subsidies, dependent coverage, preventive services, Medicaid extension. Except one: the individual mandate.

Get rid of the mandate and the public would embrace Obamacare. But get rid of the mandate and the law won't work.

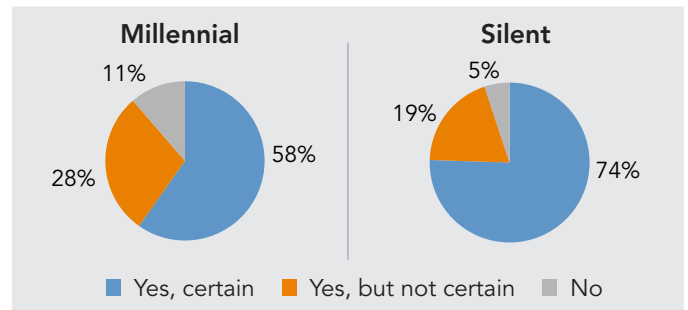
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KIDS TODAY?

As contrasted with their Silent Generation grandparents, Millennials are...

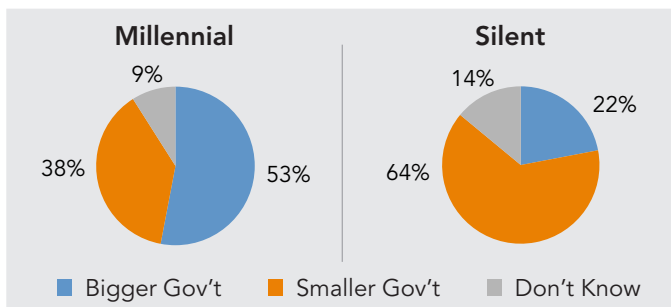
...more diverse.



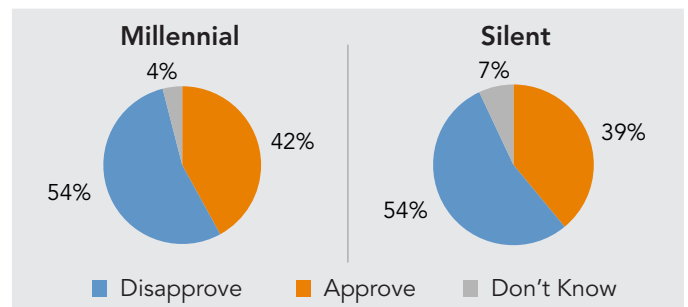
...less likely to believe in God.



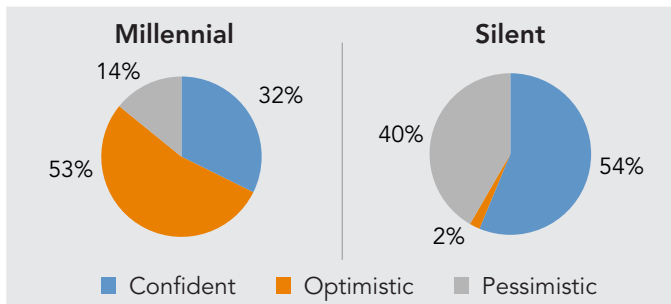
...more open to big government.



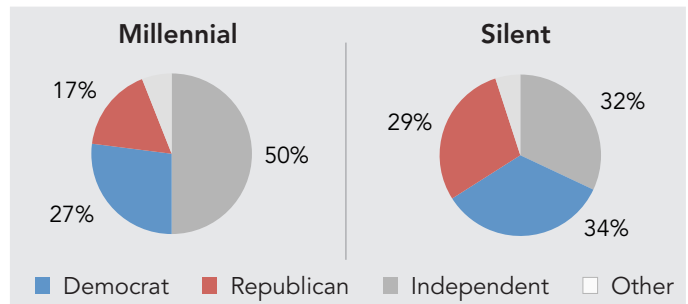
...equally skeptical of the ACA.



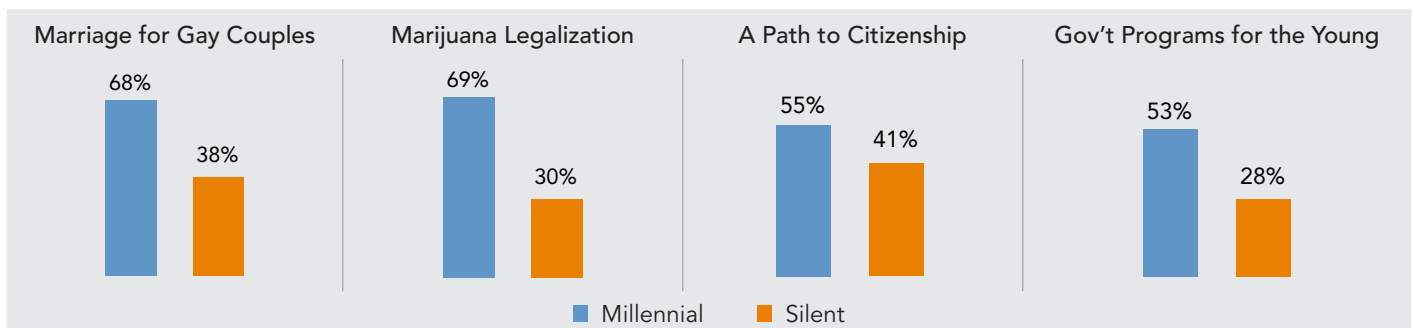
...upbeat about their financial future.



...more likely to identify as Independents.



On the hot button issues, Millennials favor...



The Millennial Generation: born after 1980, The Silent Generation: born 1928 – 1945.

From the Pew Research Center Report, "Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends," March 2014. Available at: <http://bit.ly/QovkbJ>.

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