



ISSUE 48 : SEPTEMBER 2014

ISIS Debate Colored by Iraq War Votes

Politicians are like generals. They're always fighting the last war. That's why the debate over the new war in Syria resonates with the passions of the old war in Iraq.

In fact, that's why a debate is happening at all. The conflict with ISIS is not yet stirring much division among voters. Democrats and Republicans are equally horrified by ISIS atrocities. Both are committed to the elimination of the murderous radicals. The September 17 vote in the House of Representatives to arm and train moderate Syrian forces was not an especially partisan vote. Solid majorities in both parties voted to support President Obama (57% of Democrats and 69% of Republicans).

In the September Pew poll, 60% of Democrats and 64% of Republicans said they approved of President Obama's plan to wage a military campaign against the Islamic militants. But party division was just beneath the surface. By two to one, Democrats were more concerned that the U.S. would "go too far in getting involved." By better than two to one, Republicans were more concerned that the U.S. "would not go far enough." That's the fallout from the war in Iraq.

Debate over the new war in Syria resonates with passions of the old war in Iraq.

Back in 1991, when the Persian Gulf War resolution was being debated in Congress, Democrats were solidly opposed. Their response was shaped by the last war—

Vietnam. Democrats in both houses voted against war (45 to 10 in the Senate, 179 to 86 in the House). In October 2002, when the Iraq War resolution came before Congress—one month after the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks—Democratic opposition was not as solid. House Democrats still voted against going to war but by a narrower margin (126 to 82). Senate Democrats voted in favor of war, 29 to 21. Five Democratic senators with presidential ambitions all voted for the Iraq war (John Kerry, John Edwards, Joe Biden, Christopher Dodd and Hillary Clinton).

Having gotten burned by failing to support the successful Gulf War in 1991, many Democrats didn't want to make the same mistake again. So they made a different mistake. They supported a war that quickly lost public support. That's the memory shaping the current response to President Obama's call for action against ISIS.

This time, however, there's a twist. Unlike the Gulf war and the Iraq war, this engagement

is being led by a Democratic President. As a result, antiwar Democrats are being cautious in raising objections, while vigorous criticism has emerged on the right. In his floor speech, Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) noted how muted antiwar Democrats had become. "I see an empty chamber," Paul said. "There will be no voices against war because this is a Democratic President's war." In fact, Senate Democratic leaders tried to stifle debate by folding the vote on Obama's military plan into a vote to fund government operations until mid-December.

Democrats don't want to risk antagonizing the party's antiwar base. They are depending on that base to turn out in November to save the Democratic majority in the Senate. "The people in this body are petrified, not of ISIS, but of the American voter," Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) said.

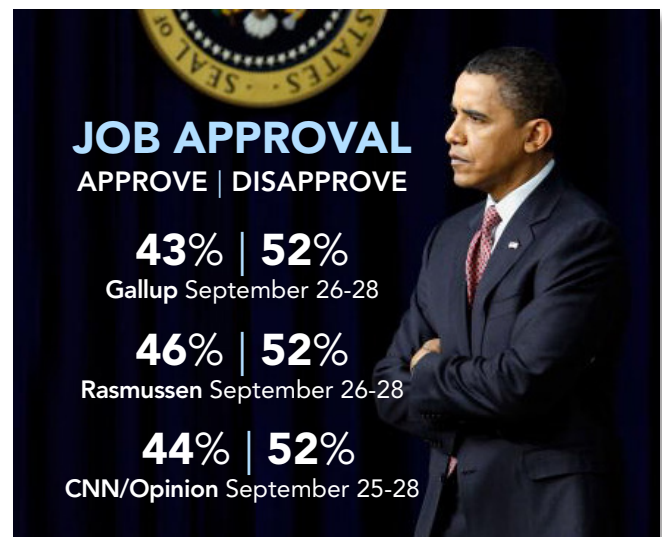
President Obama claims the votes in Congress give him authorization "to train and equip vetted elements of the moderate Syrian opposition so they can defend themselves against, and ultimately push back on, ISIS forces." That sounds like a proxy war. Can it work? Critics are asking whether it is a sustainable strategy for the U.S. to restrict itself to air power while relying on proxy forces of questionable reliability—the Iraqi army, Kurdish militias, Syrian rebels—to fight ISIS on the ground.

"We need to crush ISIS and not work on arming more Islamic radicals," Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) said. Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) asked, "What makes you think we can ask a group of Islamists to agree with Americans to fight another group of Islamists, as barbaric as they might be?"

Meanwhile, military leaders have been warning that it may be impossible to defeat ISIS without U.S. ground troops. "Half-hearted

or tentative efforts, or airstrikes alone, can backfire on us and actually strengthen our foes' credibility," retired Marine Gen. James Mattis told the House Intelligence Committee, adding, "We may not wish to reassure our enemies in advance that they will not see American boots on the ground." Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates told CBS News, "There will be boots on the ground if there's to be any hope of success in the strategy."

The Iraq war casts a deep shadow over the Obama plan. Two things became clear from last month's truncated debate: (1) Americans want ISIS destroyed. (2) Americans don't want another Iraq war. Republicans argue for an all-out effort to defeat ISIS, but at the risk of calling for another Iraq war. Democrats are determined to avoid another Iraq war, but at the risk of endorsing an unworkable strategy. Both positions are politically risky. Which is why leaders of both parties want to avoid a debate. ■



Support for Secession

It didn't happen in Scotland. Could it happen here?

A Reuters-IPSOS poll finds that nearly a quarter of Americans (24%) support the idea of their state "peacefully withdrawing from the USA and the federal government." Holy moly—not that again!

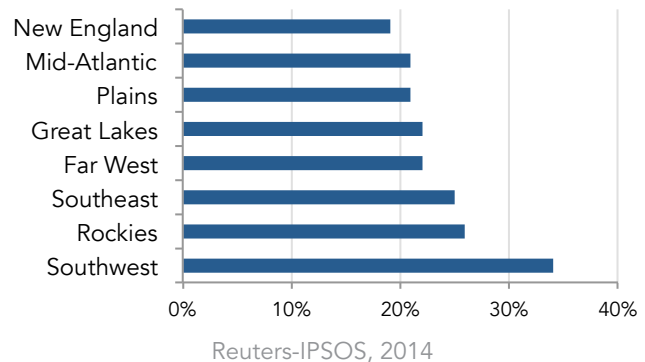
This time, however, the desire to secede is not primarily sectional.

Support for secession is broad but a bit higher in the west, particularly in Texas (38%) where more than 125,000 people have signed a secession petition. (Texas was an independent republic for ten years, 1836-1846, before it was admitted to the U.S.)

Nor is sentiment particularly partisan. Support for secession is only slightly higher among Republicans (25%) than among Democrats (21%). The strongest support comes from Americans under 30 (33%). Among seniors 60 and older, only 15% favor secession.

Support for secession appears to reflect a variety of grievances with the federal government, along with the widely shared view that Washington is broken. According to Reuters, "The sense of aggrievement is comprehensive, bipartisan, somewhat incoherent, but deeply felt." What it appears to signify is not so much the weakness of patriotism as growing disgust with the federal government.

Support For Your State Seceding From the U.S.



Capitalist China?

Here's a surprise: Americans are more anti-business than the citizens of communist China. It comes from a survey conducted in 25 countries around the world this summer by CNBC and Burson-Marsteller.

Americans are more likely than the Chinese to say corporations have too much influence over the economic future and less likely than the Chinese to say that corporations are a source of hope and that it is good for corporations to be strong and influential.

On the other hand, only 19% of Chinese, compared with 59% of Americans, believe corporations have a lot of influence over the national government. In communist China, it's the other way around: the government has a lot of influence over corporations.

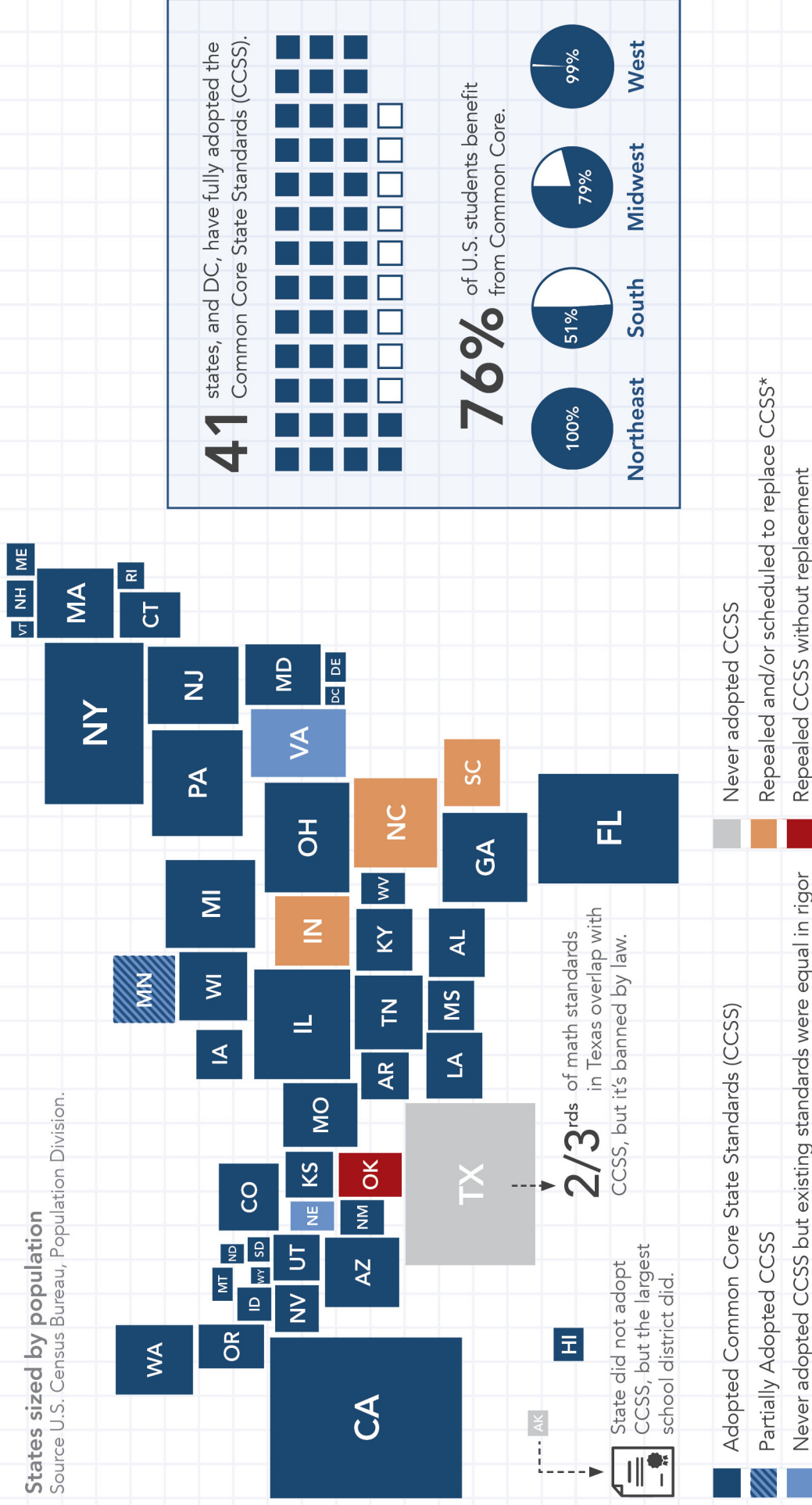
The Chinese public appears to recognize that state-sponsored capitalism has been the key to their country's remarkable economic success. The ruling Communist Party doesn't seem to have a problem with that. What it has a problem with is democracy.

Opinion		
Corporations have too much influence over our economic future	49%	24%
Corporations are a source of hope rather than fear	36%	84%
It is a good thing when corporations are strong and influential because they are the engines of innovations and economic growth.	31%	74%

CNBC & Burson-Marsteller, 2014

Facts Over Frenzy

Common Core is More Commonly Accepted Than You May Think



* Indiana has repealed Common Core, but its replacement draws heavily on Common Core standards. North and South Carolina are scheduled to replace Common Core but are currently still using it through Spring 2015.

Sources: Salazar and Christie, "States and the (not so) new standards—where are they now?," ECS, 2014; See also "50 State Look at How Common Core Playing Out in US," *The Associated Press*, 2014; See also National Center for Education Statistics, Table 203.20.

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