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## The Great Negative Campaign

All signs point to 2012 as the year of the Great Negative Campaign. One where each side tries to scare the bejesus out of voters about what will happen if the other side wins.

It's already started. When he addressed the National Rifle Association this month, Mitt Romney warned that "in a second term, [President Obama] would be unrestrained by the demands of re-election." Romney denounced what he called the Obama Administration's "assault on our freedoms—our economic freedom, our religious freedom and our personal freedom."

President Obama's deputy campaign manager issued a warning of her own. "On social, economic and foreign policy, Romney wants to roll back the clock," Stephanie Cutter told Politico. Politico called it the "Draperization" of Mitt Romney—the effort by the Obama campaign to portray the prospective Republican nominee as "a throwback to the '50s"). The image is that of Don Draper, the fictional ad man from the AMC series "Mad Men" and an unreconstructed white male chauvinist. Obama's chief strategist David Axelrod tweeted that

Romney "must watch 'Mad Men' and think it's the evening news."

Neither side has a strong positive record to run on. The economic recovery has not been convincing to voters. More than three-quarters of Americans believe the economy is still in recession, according to this month's Washington Post-ABC News poll. If the Supreme Court strikes down health care reform, President Obama's signature legislative achievement will be declared unlawful. The elimination of Osama bin Laden may not be enough to get the President re-elected, especially now that the war in Afghanistan has lost public support.

Romney dare not run on his record as one-term governor of Massachusetts. His own signature achievement was also health care reform, and that horrifies conservatives. Romney is running as a turnaround artist, based on his record of turning around failing businesses. But Romney's mandate as CEO of Bain and Company was not to create jobs. It was to create wealth. Sometimes that meant creating jobs, but often it meant eliminating jobs, or sending jobs overseas.

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Super PACs are likely to make the negative campaign even more harsh. Super PACs can trash the other side with impunity since the attacks cannot be attributed to the presidential candidates themselves. In effect, campaigns can outsource attack ads to the Super PACs and keep their hands clean.

Has a President ever gotten re-elected by trashing his opponent? Sure. That's how President Bush won a second term in 2004 (narrowly, with less than 51% of the vote). Bush ran a ferocious negative campaign attacking Democrat John Kerry as a flip-flopper. Bush called his chief strategist Karl Rove "the architect" of the re-election campaign. This month, Rove issued this warning in *The Wall Street Journal* about the Obama re-election campaign: "[President Obama's] harsh attacks, angry misrepresentations and outright falsehoods are light years away from the message of unity and post-partisanship that propelled him into the Oval Office."

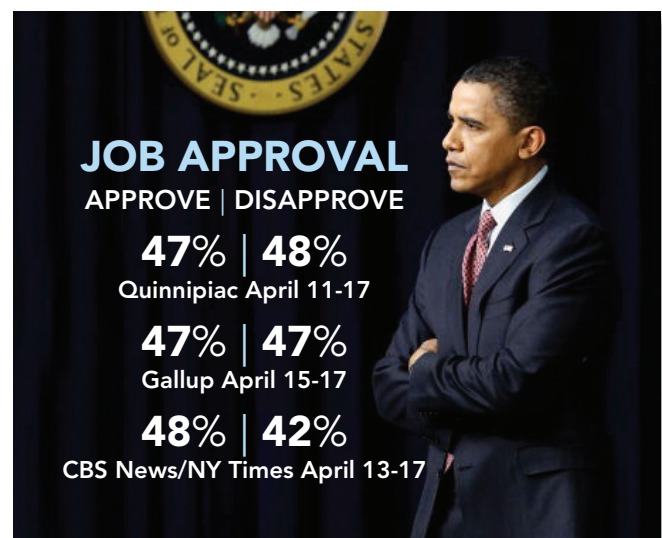
Rove is right about that. President Obama got elected on a promise to unify a bitterly divided country. He was the candidate of "hope" and "change." For Obama to run a negative campaign would betray that mandate.

The Obama campaign's effort to "Drap-erize" Romney as a candidate of the past carries a risk. Many voters identify with traditional values. President Obama can't appear disdainful of them. When a Democratic strategist said that Mitt Romney's wife "never worked a day in her life," President Obama was forced to distance himself from her remark.

President Obama recently called the fairness issue "the defining issue of our time." That is certainly a way to draw attention to Romney's vulnerability as a candidate of

wealth and privilege. But fairness is a negative theme, based on resentment of the nation's growing income inequality. Will that be enough to re-elect President Obama?

Democrats need to offer a vision of growth as well as fairness. That's the essential difference between the parties. Republicans believe growth is sufficient. If the economy is growing, the market will make sure everyone is treated fairly. Democrats believe that growth is necessary but not sufficient. There must be safeguards to ensure that everyone gets a fair share and all the wealth is not concentrated at the top. President Obama has a vision of fairness. But it won't work unless he also offers something the country has not seen during his first three years—a vision of how he intends to make the economy grow faster. That's exactly where Romney, the turnaround artist, intends to claim an advantage. ■



## Are Americans Feeling Pain at the Pump?

Yes, but not as much as four years ago, the last time gas prices averaged over four dollars a gallon. In June 2008, when gas hit \$4.01 a gallon, 51% of Americans said gas prices were causing them "serious hardship." Now, 33% say they are.

The sharpest decline was among Democrats. Partisanship? Actually, no. Independents are also less likely to feel gas prices are causing serious hardship now compared to four years ago.

Why is the crisis less painful this year than it was in 2008? For one thing, the price increase is less steep this year. Gas prices have gone up 22% since December. In 2008, they went up 35% in six months. And adjusting for inflation, \$4.00 a gallon gas now is equivalent to \$3.72 in 2008. The pain is also less severe because Americans are driving more fuel-efficient cars. And driving fewer miles.

But politics does seem to be affecting the way Republicans feel. They haven't changed at all since 2008. Four years ago, 41% of Republicans said gas prices were causing a serious hardship. George W. Bush was President, and Republicans were then the least likely to complain. Now 40% say gas prices are causing severe hardship. Barack Obama is President, and Republicans are the most likely to complain.

The fact that Republicans are complaining just as much as before doesn't sound like hardship. It sounds like partisanship.

### Gas Price Hardship

	JUNE 2008	APRIL 2012	DIFFERENCE
Avg Price/Gallon	\$4.01	\$3.94	-\$0.07
% Saying Gas Prices are a Hardship			
All Adults	51	33	-18
Democrats	59	27	-32
Republicans	41	40	-1
Independents	51	37	-14

Source: Department of Energy and Washington Post-ABC News Poll

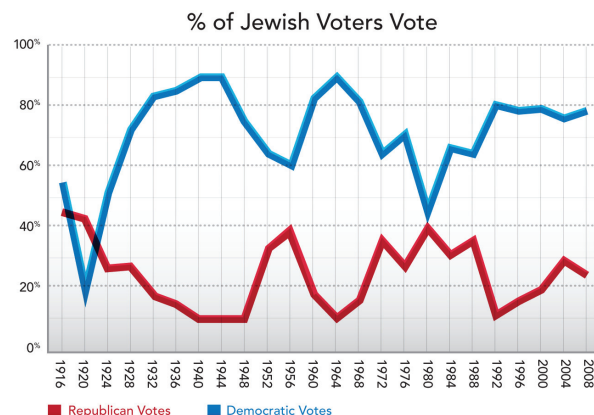
## Jewish Voters: Values Trump Interests

Are Jewish voters sticking with President Obama? The answer appears to be yes, according to a poll of Jewish voters taken in February and March by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI). 62% of Jewish voters said they would like to see Obama re-elected. That's down a bit from the 78% who voted for Obama in 2008. But it's still a solid majority, and it's in line with a Gallup poll taken in April 2008 that showed 61% of Jews for Obama at the same stage of the campaign.

Republicans have not been able to get more than 40% of the Jewish vote since 1920 (see chart). The high point of Republican Jewish support? Surprisingly, that was in 1956, when President Eisenhower got 40% of the Jewish vote. The 1956 election happened one month after the U.S. opposed Israel during the Suez crisis and pressured Israel to withdraw from Egypt. In the 1950s, American Jews did not have nearly as strong a commitment to Israel as they did after the 1967 war.





Even today, very few Jews say Israel is the most important issue in their vote for President (just 4% in the PRRI poll). The economy, inequality and health care are far more important.

Jewish interests would predict much higher Republican support. Not just Israel but also economics—American Jews are relatively high-income earners. But Jews have always voted their values more than their interests. (So do a lot of evangelical Christians and gun owners.) And Jewish values remain quite liberal. In the PRRI poll, 44% of Jews described their views as liberal and only 18% as conservative. Some years ago, a Jewish commentator observed, "Jews have the wealth and status of Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans." That is still true.



# THE GENDER GAP

In every presidential election since 1980, women have been predominant in the Democratic coalition. But during that span Dems have won only 3 of 8 contests and three times they failed to win a majority of women (1980, 1984, and 1988).

		 <b>DEM VOTE</b>		<b>WOMEN DIFFERENTIAL (%)</b>	
<b>2012*</b>		<b>49%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>+6</b>	
<b>2008</b>		57%	50%	<b>+7</b>	◀
<b>2004</b>		52%	44%	<b>+8</b>	
<b>2000</b>		53%	45%	<b>+8</b>	
<b>1996</b>		54%	45%	<b>+9</b>	◀
<b>1992</b>		46%	41%	<b>+5</b>	◀
<b>1988</b>		48%	44%	<b>+4</b>	
<b>1984</b>		45%	36%	<b>+9</b>	
<b>1980</b>		44%	36%	<b>+8</b>	
<b>1976</b>		48%	53%	<b>+5</b>	◀
<b>1972</b>		38%	37%	<b>+1</b>	
<b>1968</b>		45%	41%	<b>+4</b>	
<b>1964</b>		62%	60%	<b>+2</b>	◀
<b>1960</b>		49%	52%	<b>+3</b>	◀
<b>1956</b>		39%	45%	<b>+6</b>	
<b>1952</b>		42%	47%	<b>+5</b>	

\*Quinnipiac University Polling Numbers ▶ Democratic Victory

Sources: Poll, Quinnipiac University, April 11-17, 2012, Q1, Accessed April 19, 2012. Available at: <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/institutes-and-centers/polling-institute/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=1737>

See also "Election Polls -- Presidential Vote by Groups," Gallup, 1952-2008. Available at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/139880/Election-Polls-Presidential-Vote-Groups.aspx#1>.

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