



ISSUE 15 : JUNE 2011

Can Romney Do It?

Things have definitely been moving in Mitt Romney's direction. The downturn in the economy, signaled by last month's uptick in the nation's unemployment rate, played to Romney's message: "President Obama has failed."

Then there was this month's ABC News-Washington Post poll showing Romney running neck-and-neck in a trial heat against President Obama (leading 49% to 46% among registered voters nationwide). Obama leads all the other well-known Republican contenders.

Then there are polls of Republican voters nationwide showing Romney as the frontrunner for the GOP nomination. The latest, from NBC News and *The Wall Street Journal*, has Romney at 30%, more than twice as much support as any other candidate.



Then there was the June 13 CNN debate in which none of the other Republicans laid a glove on Romney, despite repeated prodding from the moderator.

Soon there will be second quarter fund-raising totals, which are likely to confirm Romney's commanding lead.

Then there's the Republican tradition of nominating candidates who have run for President before: Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole, and John McCain. (George W. Bush was an exception, but he got a pass because his name was George Bush.) If the Republican tradition holds, 2012 will be Romney's turn.

Smooth sailing for Romney? Maybe. But first, the former Massachusetts governor has to find a strategy for getting through the Republican primaries. With so many Tea Party conservatives dead set against Romney's nomination, what can he do? He can do what John McCain did in 2008: change the subject.

The Republican race begins with two sub-primaries. They define the leading candidates from each wing of the party: the establishment and the fundamentalists. Establishment Republicans are the country club conservatives who usually win the nomination. Fundamentalists include two overlapping constituencies: the Religious Right (religious fundamentalists) and the Tea Party (economic fundamentalists). A survey last year by the Public Religion Research Institute found that nearly half of those who consider themselves part of the Tea Party movement also consider themselves part of the Christian Conservative Movement.

Now that Mitch Daniels and Haley Barbour are out of the race, the two main establishment contenders are Romney and Jon Huntsman (oddly, two Mormons). Newt Gingrich might have tried to claim that title but his behavior has been too erratic for the country club set. The establishment contest will be settled in the New Hampshire primary.

The fundamentalist wing of the party must decide who will be the anti-Romney. Right now, the leading contenders for that title are Tim Pawlenty and Michele Bachmann (oddly, both from Minnesota). That contest will be settled in the Iowa caucuses, where the Religious Right and the Tea Party have a lot of influence (Minnesota borders Iowa). Whoever wins the Iowa caucuses will carry the banner of true conservative believers against Romney the impostor.

Romney is not playing the same game as the others. The rest of the candidates are competing to see who can be the most conservative. That's why there wasn't much of a debate in New Hampshire. They all agree that Obamacare must go, that the House Republican budget is the path to redemption, that the nation's debt limit must not be raised without significant budget cuts, that abortion should be criminalized, that Libya is an unwise military commitment, and that global warming has nothing to do with human activity.

All except Romney, who defends the Massachusetts health care law and accepts the fact that people contribute to climate change. What game is he playing?

The same game John McCain played in 2008. In primary after primary, Republicans who voted for McCain said they voted for him because of "personal qualities" rather than issues or ideology. McCain offered an inspiring life story—military officer, war hero, man of courage and honor.

Romney is running a sharply focused campaign that promotes a single message: that he is a turnaround artist. He said in his announcement speech, "All of these experiences—starting and running businesses for 25 years, turning around the Olympics, governing a state—have helped shape who I am and how I lead... Turning around a crisis takes experienced leadership and bold action. For millions of Americans, the economy is in crisis today."



Romney is, by profession, a business executive. How many business executives have been elected President? Two. And they were both named Bush. Romney is counting on his management credentials to give him credibility as someone who can do what Obama has so far failed to do—turn the economy around.

Romney's management credentials will certainly be challenged. How many companies has he closed? How many jobs has he eliminated? How many jobs that he created have gone to China? That's all fair game. But it's a game he might be able to win. Unlike the game of competing for the title of Tea Party hero, which he can't win. Romney is following the cardinal rule of political debate: if you can't win the argument, change the subject. ■

IN FOCUS

Congress 2012

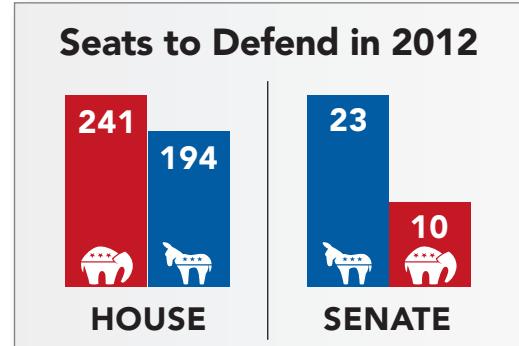
2012 looks like a much better year for Democratic House candidates than for Democratic Senate candidates. Here's why.

The base year for the House election is 2010. 2010 saw a Republican landslide (a net gain of 63 House seats). Republicans go into the 2012 election defending 241 House seats to the Democrats' 194. Republicans will be hard-pressed to defend those gains in 2012. Especially with new district lines being drawn.

In fact, even though Republicans control the redistricting process in most states, they are finding it difficult to gerrymander new Republican districts. It will take all of their skill for Republicans to protect the seats they won last time.

The base year for the Senate election is 2006. 2006 was "the Iraq election," a Democratic landslide that resulted in a net gain of six Democrats in the Senate.

Democrats are defending 23 Senate seats next year, more than twice as many as the Republicans (10 seats). So Republican gains look likely in the Senate, with a reasonable chance that Republicans will make a net gain of three or four seats, enough to become the majority party (depending on which party wins the vice presidency).



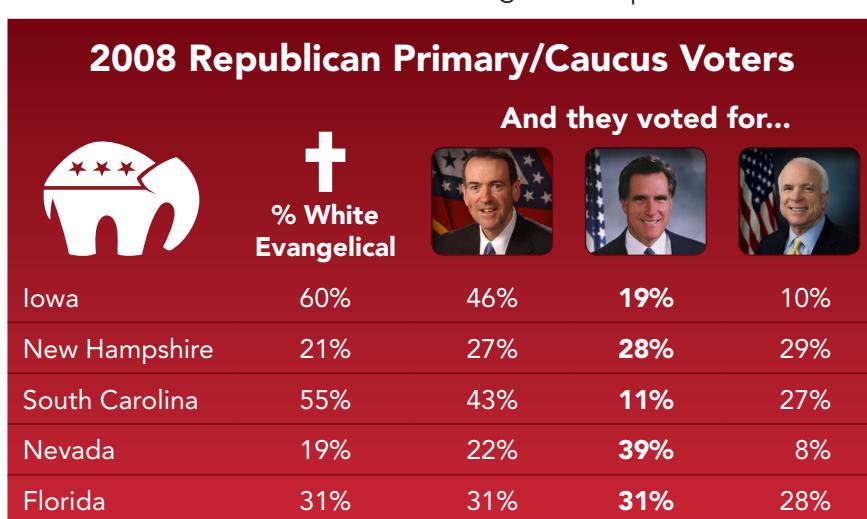
Republican Evangelical Voters

Evangelical voters are an important constituency in the Republican Party. But not everywhere.

They certainly are in Iowa, where in 2008, 60% of Republican caucus participants came from the religious right. Evangelicals also constituted a majority of Republican primary voters in South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and Tennessee.

In 2008, Mike Huckabee was the favorite candidate of evangelical Republicans. But not everywhere.

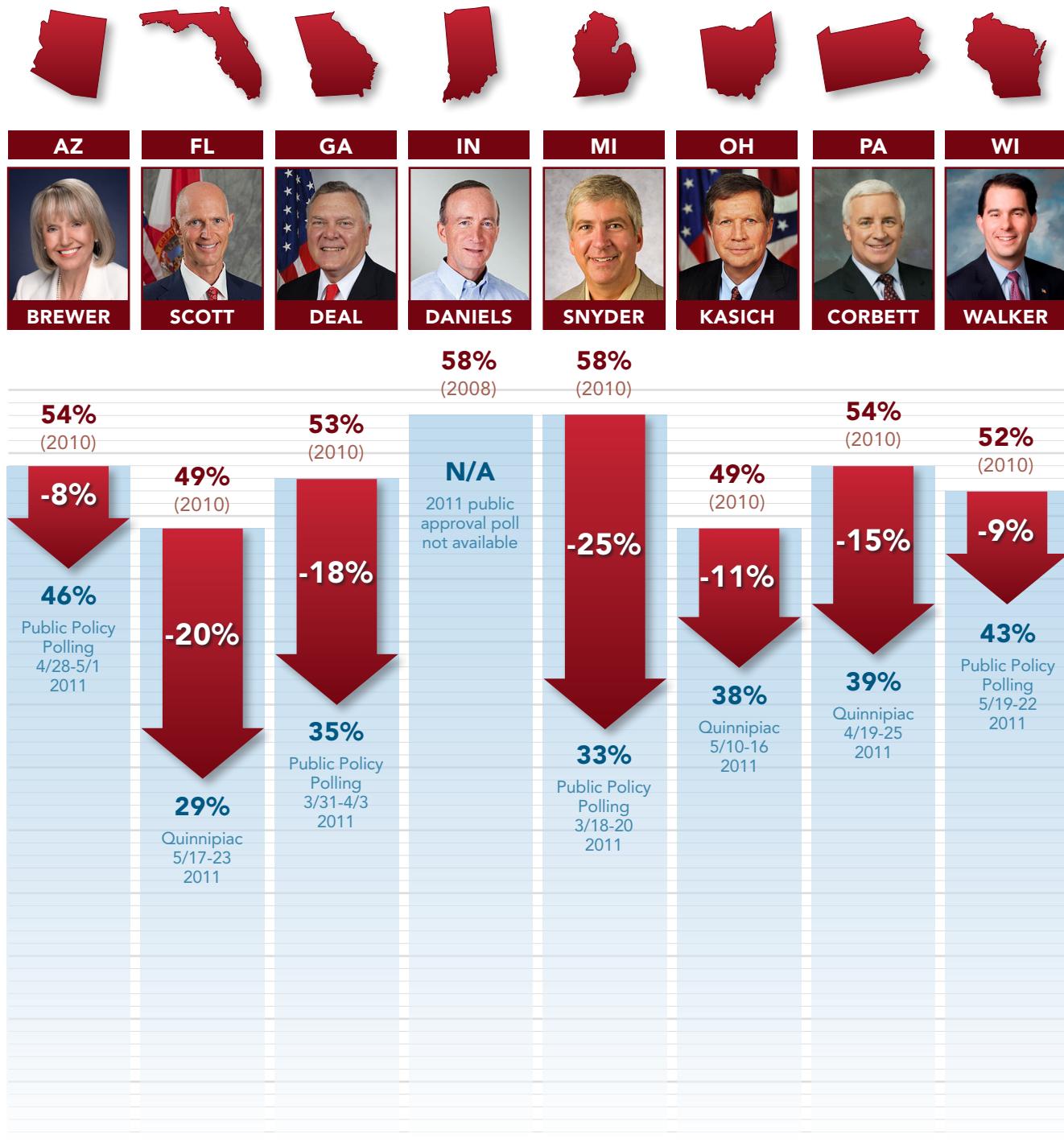
Huckabee dominated the evangelical vote in Iowa and in the south. But Mitt Romney was not politically poisonous to evangelicals. In many states, including Iowa, Nevada, and Florida, Romney did better than John McCain among evangelical Republicans.



Source: Edison/Mitofsky exit polling for ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox News, AP, CNN.

A TASTE OF REPUBLICAN GOVERNANCE

Governor Job Approval Rating vs. Percent of Vote Won
in 2012 Battleground States with GOP Governors and Legislatures



States represented have Republican governors and Republican-controlled legislatures, and are listed as "Toss-Up," "Lean," or "Likely" by The Cook Political Report (<http://cookpolitical.com/>). Georgia is also included as a potential battleground state (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0611/56565.html> page 3) meeting the inclusion criteria.

Concept and research by Chris Hayden, illustration by Bill Rapp.