



ISSUE 38 : SEPTEMBER 2013

Crossing the Party Line

The left and the right are both in revolt. Not against each other. Against their own party leaders.

Liberals defied President Obama on Syria and sabotaged his preferred candidate for Federal Reserve chairman. Now liberals are struck with a new dread—that Obama might sell them out on the budget. Their nightmare: Obama capitulates to Republican pressure for a budget deal that preserves the sequester. Liberals are determined to resist any such deal.

The Republican rebellion is more far-reaching. Senior White House adviser Dan Pfeiffer was only slightly exaggerating when he observed in *The New York Times*, “The periodic disagreements in the Democratic Party pale in comparison to the epic existential civil war for the soul of the Republican Party that is leading to so much dysfunction.” Conservatives are demanding death to Obamacare, even if it has no chance of succeeding. And even if it puts the full faith and credit of the United States at risk. They have forced Speaker Boehner to surrender.

“I’ve been here for twenty years, and I’ve never seen so much of a repudiation of the conventional sources of power in the legislative or executive branch,” Rep. James P. Moran (D-VA) said.

What’s driving the rebellions? Three things:

1. Weak leadership. There’s a fine line

between thoughtfulness and passivity. Critics on the left argue the president has crossed it. Democrats are complaining that, even though they control the White House and the Senate, they find themselves on the defensive too much.

Meanwhile, Republican leaders are completely unable to control their unruly troops. Conservatives have forced them to accept a “kamikaze budget” that will go nowhere in the Senate and that threatens economic and political catastrophe.

2. Money. Antiwar groups on the left are pressuring Democrats not to support President Obama if he orders military action in Syria. Anti-Obamacare groups on the right are threatening to challenge Republicans who are less than steadfast in their resistance. Both sides can raise money, fund primary opponents, and run ads attacking waverers.

3. Populism. What really energizes party rebels is the fact that their positions have popular support. That has an emboldening effect. It’s easy to defy your own party leaders when you can say, “The people are with me on this!”

The people are certainly with the party rebels on Syria. In the Washington Post-ABC News poll, the public continues to oppose U.S. military strikes by more than two to one.

Most Americans did not have an opinion of Larry Summers, President Obama’s apparent first choice to lead the Federal Reserve.

What really energizes party rebels is the fact that their positions have popular support.

Liberals criticized Summers' closeness to Wall Street and his support for deregulation when he was President Clinton's Treasury Secretary. President Obama credits Summers with having been an architect of the economic recovery. But in the Post-ABC poll, a majority of voters said they don't believe the economy has improved since the financial crisis. And they reject the view that banks and other financial institutions have taken adequate measures to prevent another financial crisis.

Failing to raise the debt ceiling would be, as NPR's Adam Davidson described it in *The New York Times*, "the largest self-imposed financial disaster in history." The public seems to understand that. In the Post-ABC poll, nearly three quarters said a default would cause serious harm to the U.S. economy. Nevertheless, voters don't like the idea of raising the debt ceiling. They oppose it by two to one in the Wall Street Journal-NBC News poll. The Post-ABC poll spelled out the choice: should Congress raise the debt limit "so the government can keep paying its bills and obligations" or not raise the debt limit "and let the government default on paying its bills and obligations"? The public was closely divided; 46% said raise the debt limit, 43% said don't even if it would seriously damage the economy. If you've maxed out on your credit card, how much sense does it make to raise your credit limit?

As for Obamacare, it has been losing public support. According to the Pew Research Center, 44% of Americans opposed the health care law when it was passed in 2010. That figure is now up to 53%. Even people without health insurance are unenthusiastic (49% approve of the new law, 46% disapprove). The big complaint? That the government is forcing people to buy something they can't afford or don't want.

The establishment in Washington and on Wall Street understands that either a

government shutdown or a default on the debt would be a disaster. But conservatives appear willing to take that risk, and Democrats know that most of the blame will fall on Republicans.

Rep. Charlie Dent, a moderate Republican from Pennsylvania, told the *Times*, "It's important that Republicans stop pretending that Mitch McConnell is the Senate majority leader and Mitt Romney is the president." House conservatives are unfazed. "Our job is to reflect the people who sent us here," Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-SC) told *Politico*. "That means sending a good conservative bill out of this House. We'll worry about the Senate after the Senate actually does something."

The problem is, by then it may be too late. ■



A Tale of Two Republicans

How can Republicans become competitive in presidential elections? We'll get a clue from this year's elections for governor in New Jersey and Virginia.

New Jersey and Virginia both voted twice for Barack Obama. Both states have a long history of voting for a governor from the party that does not hold the White House—a tradition that goes back 36 years in Virginia and 24 years in New Jersey.

Chris Christie is a mainstream Republican running in New Jersey, a blue state. Ken Cuccinelli is a Tea Party Republican running in Virginia, a purple state. Quinnipiac polled both states in August. The contrast between the two Republicans is striking.

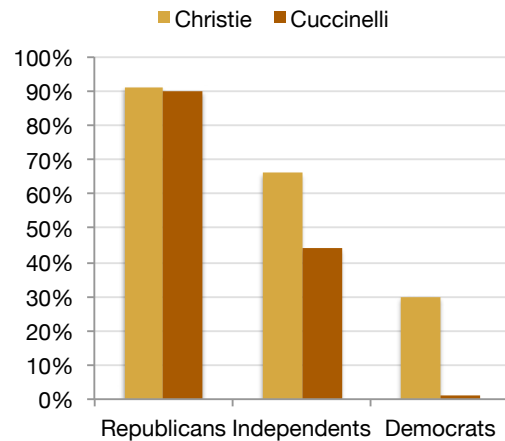
Both contenders get nearly unanimous support from their fellow Republicans. But Christie does 22 points better than Cuccinelli among Independents. And Christie has a lot more bipartisan appeal. Cuccinelli's Democratic support is negligible.

Cuccinelli has a huge problem with women voters because of his stands on abortion and contraception. Only 38% of women in Virginia support the Republican. Christie is drawing 56% from women in New Jersey.

Neither candidate in Virginia—Cuccinelli or Democrat Terry McAuliffe—is particularly popular. Both have low favorability ratings. The best hope for Cuccinelli is to keep turnout low in November. That could happen because of the unusually nasty campaign. In a low turnout election, Cuccinelli's Tea Party supporters are more likely to vote.

If Christie wins and Cuccinelli loses, it will send a strong message to the GOP: a mainstream Republican like Christie can win a blue state, but a Tea Party Republican like Cuccinelli can't win a purple state.

Mainstream vs. Tea Party Republican Support



Unauthorized Immigrants

Thanks to the Pew Research Center, we now know something about the estimated 11.1 million unauthorized (i.e., illegal) immigrants in the U.S.

What we know is that all Latinos are overwhelmingly Democrats. Democrats hold a similar advantage over Republicans—almost 4 to 1—whether they are native-born American citizens, foreign-born American citizens or legal permanent residents of the U.S. Among unauthorized Latino immigrants, the Democratic advantage is a little smaller but still strong.

Fewer than one in five Latinos support the Republican Party whether their immigration status is legal or illegal, citizen or non-citizen. Which suggests that Republicans may have little to gain if many of those here illegally obtain legal status and are allowed to apply for citizenship.

One other finding from the Pew survey stands out. If unauthorized immigrants are allowed to remain in this country legally, how many of them would actually choose to become U.S. citizens? Pew reports that fewer than half (46%) of Latino immigrants who are already eligible to become naturalized U.S. citizens have actually done so.

Why not? The reasons most often given are not speaking English (which is required to become a U.S. citizen for all but the elderly or disabled) and not being able to afford it. It costs \$680 to apply for citizenship. Why bother if they can stay and work in the U.S. legally, even if they don't have the right to vote?



THE WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

The seal of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is partially visible, showing the words "U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY" and a central emblem featuring an eagle and a shield.