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To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg, James Carville, Anna Greenberg, Missy Egelsky, and Erica Seifert

Voters downgrade Washington

Debt limit and downgrade take a toll on both parties; GOP bears the brunt of voters' anger

A new survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps reveals voters' growing anger with Washington. This survey fielded at a unique time—just as Standard and Poor's announced its credit rating downgrade. These results capture the immediate reactions of American voters: their initial backlash against Washington in general and against Congressional Republicans in particular.¹

The picture is bleak. Three-quarters of voters now believe the country is on the wrong track, up 14 points since June; a mere 16 percent say we are on the right track, the lowest in our tracking since the 2008 financial crisis. This is clearly driven by frustration with, and antipathy toward, the way things work (or don't) in Washington. The debt ceiling debate was a kind of mutually assured destruction for the two parties; both parties in Congress, and leaders from each side, have suffered the consequences. The two parties get the largest downgrade—though the Republicans in the House saw the biggest rise in disapproval and their Speaker, the largest rise in negative sentiment.

Key Findings:

- Voters overwhelmingly believe the country is on the wrong track; they levy blame on both parties, but judge Republicans more harshly.
- Economic ratings are worse now than at any time since March 2009. A mere 12 percent give the economy a warm rating, three-quarters rate it coolly.
- More than half of all voters now say they would consider a third party candidate in 2012.

¹ This memo is based on a national survey of 1480 likely 2012 voters (1000 weighted) August 6-10, 2011 conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for Democracy Corps and Women's Voices, Women Vote: Unless otherwise noted, margin of error= +/- 2.5 percentage points at 95 percent confidence.



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- Frustration with Washington Republicans is evident: while President Obama’s approval and favorability ratings remain steady, approval and favorability ratings for both John Boehner and this Republican Congress have hit record lows.
 - Both parties’ favorability ratings have declined since June, and incumbents from both sides are on the hook for the debt limit debacle. Democratic incumbents fare better than Republican incumbents (by 10 points) but congressional Democrats have suffered a 4-point drop in warm ratings as well.
 - By a 10-point margin, voters believe that the Democrats, more than the Republicans, were the ones looking out for the best interests of ordinary voters and their families.
 - While the president fared better in this debacle than the congressional parties, his vote has remained at 48 percent against Romney, and he is trailing by 16 points among independents, significantly worsened by most recent events.
 - Nearly half of all voters (48 percent) disapprove of the debt limit deal. A 55 percent majority believes that the bi-partisan debt committee will not be able to produce a good result.
 - Coming out of the debt limit debate, both Obama and Congressional Democrats are underperforming among the rising American electorate (the new progressive base of unmarried women, young voters, and minorities). However, by a 2-1 margin, 60 – 28 percent, RAE voters say that Obama and the Democrats looked out for the best interests of their families more than the Republicans in the debt ceiling debate.
 - However, voters’ faith could be restored; while voters do not believe the committee can produce a good result, 71 percent of all voters say they would be more likely to support committee members who give up campaign donations and agree to not meet with lobbyists while serving on the bi-partisan super committee.

Hitting the Ceiling

The long and tortured negotiations that brought the country to the brink of default have already resulted in a heavy cost—not just in the Standard and Poor’s downgrade, but in voters’ faith in public officials. Nearly half of all voters (48 percent) disapprove of the deal. In our test, disapproval was marginally mitigated by the addition of information, bringing approval in line with disapproval.

Voters have downgraded both parties and leaders from each side as a result of the negotiations, though Republicans have suffered a greater backlash across multiple questions.

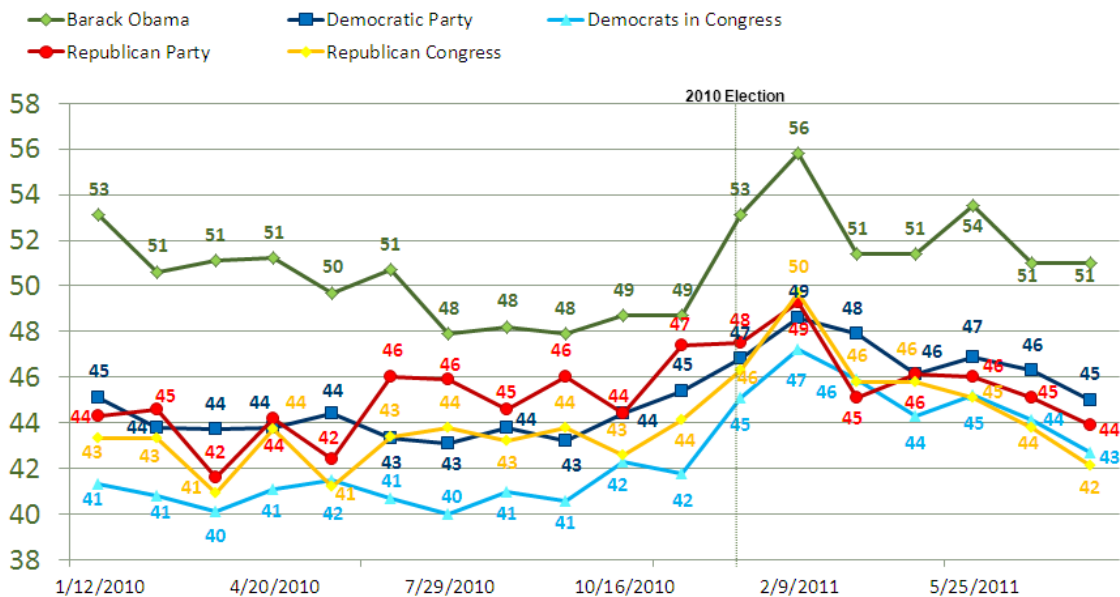


Republican Backlash

While voters are willing to spread the blame—and Democrats do not come out of this unscathed—Republicans bear the brunt of the backlash. Approval of the Republican Congress has plunged in the last few months: Republicans started the year with 48 percent disapproval. Today, two thirds disapprove of the Republican Congress—and they do so intensely. Strong disapproval is now at 44 percent —a 7 point surge since June.

Everybody's falling – with Republicans in Congress lowest

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with 100 meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold.



*Note: From Democracy Corps surveys conducted in the past year. Data represents MEAN ratings, likely voters

The very swing voters who went for change last November and who could easily do so again next November voice strong disapproval of this Republican Congress. In the “change” districts (voted for Obama in 2008 but went for a Republican in 2010) 57 percent disapprove of the Republican Congress, and 41 percent strongly disapprove. Independents have turned sharply against the Republican Congress; two-thirds of independents and 70 percent of suburban voters disapprove and they do so intensely. Even in their own districts, only 37 percent give their Republican incumbents a warm rating. The backlash extends to the leadership—John Boehner’s



favorability has dropped to its lowest level in our tracking.

Republicans came to power in November claiming a deficit reduction mandate. Americans do still prioritize fiscal health, and 46 percent still say they would vote for a Republican in order to reduce the deficit. However, the more Republicans unveil plans to make deep cuts to popular programs, the more voters turn against pure deficit reduction schemes. For the first time in our tracking, “a plan to invest in new industries and rebuild the country over the next five years” gets higher ratings (by a 6-point margin) than “a plan to dramatically reduce the deficit over the next five years.” The result: the Republican margin on which party would do a better job on the economy has eroded.

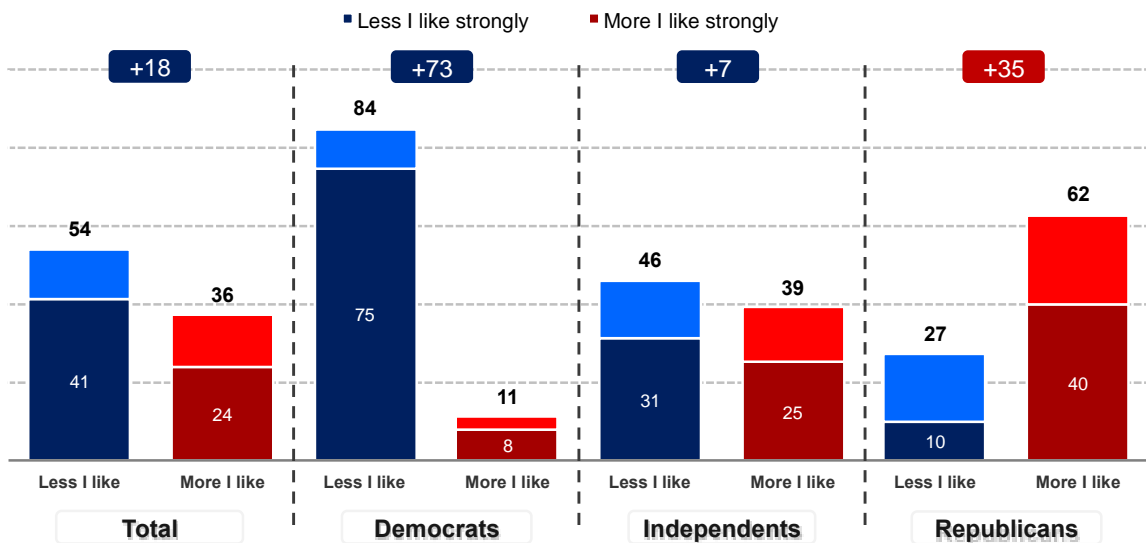
It is not surprising, then, that 54 percent of voters say that the more they hear from House Republicans, the less they like. This sentiment is widely shared, including by 46 percent of independents who say that they like the Republicans less and less. And while they have provided a stable base of support for Republicans, 59 percent of white seniors increasingly dislike what they hear from Republicans.

The more they hear, the less they like.

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

STATEMENT 1: The more I hear from Republicans in Congress, the LESS I like.

STATEMENT 2: The more I hear from Republicans in Congress, the MORE I like.





A year out from the conventions, 53 percent say that they will consider voting for a third party candidate next year. The number is much higher among swing voters—70 percent of independents, 58 percent of white non-college voters, and 51 percent of voters in districts carried by Obama in 2008 and won by Republicans in 2010. The defection from the political mainstream is sharp among swing voters, but it is striking among the Republican base. If Republicans have any chance of taking the presidency and holding on to the house in 2012, they will need to convince the 58 percent of Republicans, 60 percent of McCain voters, and 61 percent of current Romney supporters who now say they will consider voting for a third party candidate.

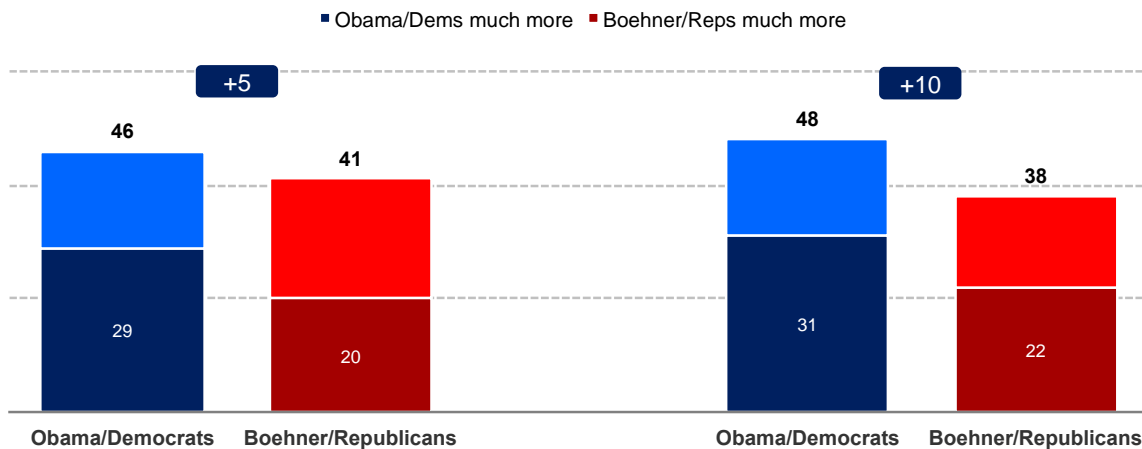
Obama hangs on

To be sure, neither party and no party leader has improved his image as a result of the debt limit debacle and subsequent downgrade. However, even as they turn sharply against leaders and parties in Washington, voters do believe that the Democrats are on their side. By a 10-point margin, voters identified the Democrats as the party looking out for their best interests. Similarly, voters believed that Democrats had the best interests of the country in mind while negotiating to raise the debt limit. By a five-point margin, voters said that President Obama and the Democrats were looking out for the best interests of the country more than John Boehner and the Republicans.

Obama and Democrats more looking out for country and family

From what you know of the agreement, who would you say was looking out for the best interests of the **country** more -- Barack Obama and the Democrats in Congress or John Boehner and the Republicans in Congress?

From what you know of the agreement, who would you say was looking out for the best interests of **you and your family** more -- Barack Obama and the Democrats in Congress or John Boehner and the Republicans in Congress?



Looking out for best interests of the country

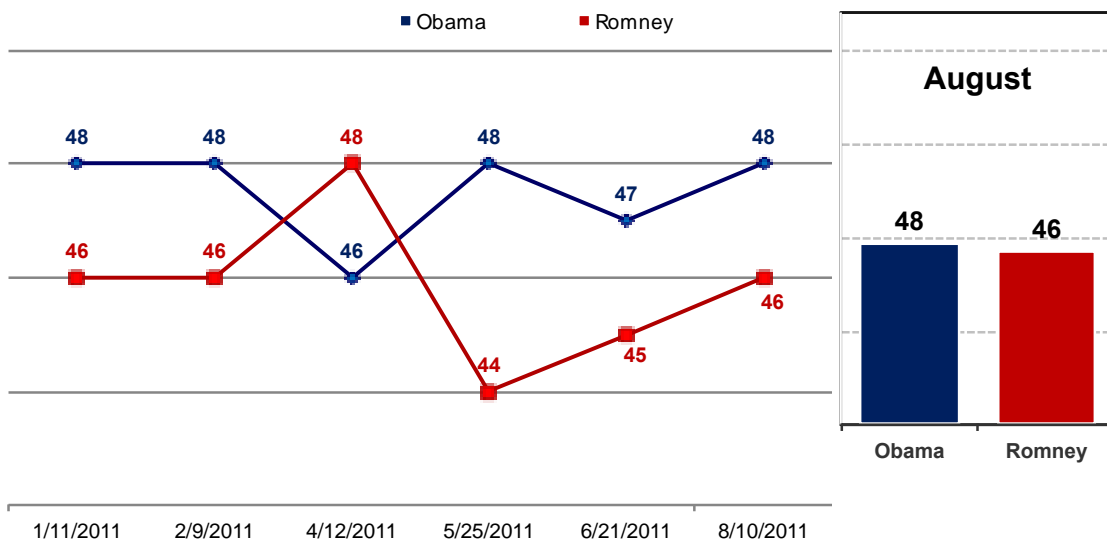
Looking out for best interests of you and your family



As a result, while 52 percent of voters said that they have a less favorable opinion of the President as a result of the debt limit negotiations, his favorability, approval rating, and 2012 Presidential vote outcome remain virtually unchanged over the last few months. Nonetheless, the president's vote has remained stable at 48 percent against Mitt Romney, short of what an incumbent president would want to be in such a tumultuous period.

Obama vote remains at 48 percent

I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the presidential election in 2012, if the election for president were held today and the candidates were Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney, for whom would you vote?

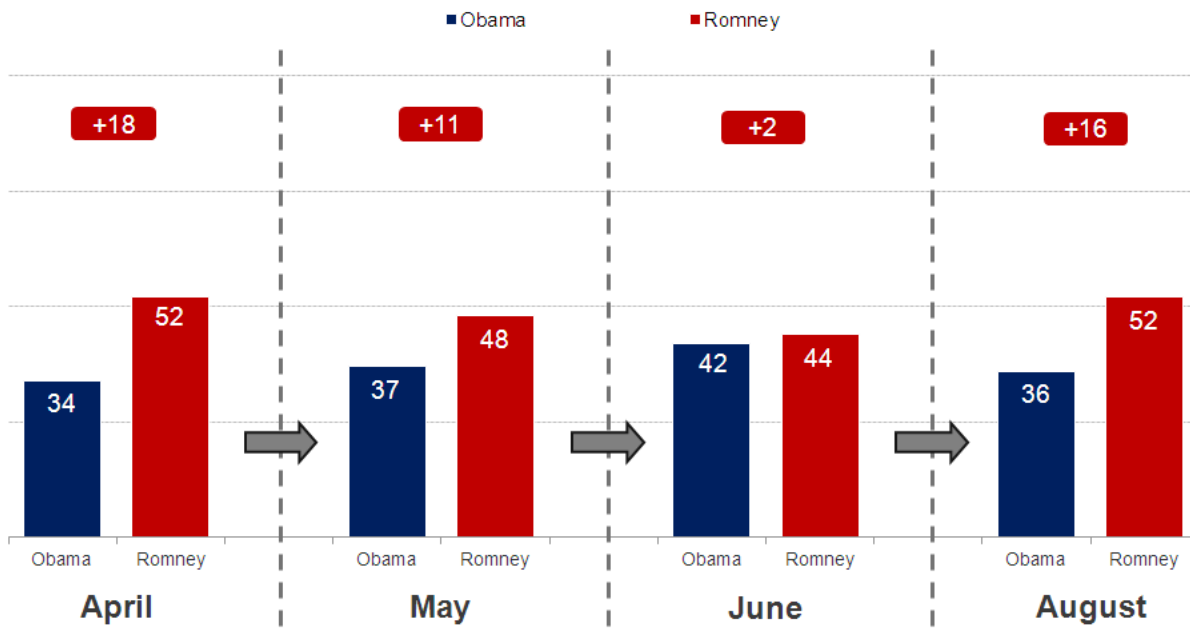


These events have not helped Democrats among independents. For all of his gains among independents in the late spring, Obama now trails Romney among independents by 16 points. On the congressional ballot, Republicans have widened the margin among independents to 17 points.



Obama loses ground among Independents in past month

I know it's a long way off, but thinking about the presidential election in 2012, if the election for president were held today and the candidates were Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney, for whom would you vote?



Rising American Electorate more supportive, but continue to hold back from Obama and Democrats

The debt ceiling debate provides cautions and opportunities for President Obama and the Democrats among the voters who make up the Rising American Electorate (RAE)—including young people, unmarried women, and people of color. These voters—who now make up 53 percent of the voting eligible population but only 42 percent of the electorate in 2010—drove progressive victories in 2006 and 2008 and, their engagement and participation are crucial to the Democrats’ success in 2012.

Like the rest of the electorate, RAE voters express high frustration with the country’s economic situation and demonstrate a desire to see Washington take action to find a solution. Although these voters are historically most open to government spending, 52 percent of RAE voters support the debt ceiling agreement when framed in a context of large spending cuts. More remarkable, this support comes despite the fact that most of the 48 percent of RAE voters who think the



agreement will have a significant impact on their own lives believe that the deal will impact them in a bad way.

Not surprisingly, RAE voters side with Obama and the Democrats in their motivation and approach to this issue. By a 2-1 margin, 60–28 percent, RAE voters say that Obama and the Democrats looked out for the best interests of their families more than the Republicans in the debt ceiling debate.

But, Democrats still need to do more to motivate these voters; only Obama emerges from the debate viewed more favorably, with 50 percent feeling more favorable towards Obama and 39 percent less favorable. While Democrats in Congress do not fare as badly as Republicans post-agreement, a plurality of RAE voters are less favorable towards Democrats in Congress after the debt ceiling debate.

RAE voters also continue to underperform compared to previous levels of support for Democrats in the presidential and congressional contests. Among this bloc that voted 69 percent for Obama in 2008, a plurality (49 percent) is open to the possibility of voting for a third party candidate next year—an indication of their frustration and disappointment with both parties and a measure of how much work must be done to engage these traditionally progressive voters in the 2012 election.

Breaking Through

Voters are skeptical about the debt limit deal and remain doubtful about the bi-partisan super-committee it established. On an un-informed ask, 42 percent said they approve of the debt limit agreement, 48 percent disapprove. However, when voters hear information about the deal, the margin closes to even—46 percent approve, 46 percent oppose. While voters are divided on the deal, skepticism about the 12-member bi-partisan committee is much stronger than opposition to the deal itself; 55 percent say the committee will not be able to produce a good result.

However, despite all of the cynicism and skepticism, voters' remain open to changing Washington. When asked whether they would be more or less likely to support the committee if members agreed to sign a pledge that they would reject campaign donations and refuse to meet with lobbyists while serving on the committee, 71 percent voiced approval. This result does not merely show a potential path forward to breaking through the anger and cynicism that voters feel, it is also instructive about voters' push back against Washington. That is—Americans are concerned that Washington is too tied up in serving the interests of campaign donors, lobbyists, and big money special interests—and not looking out for the average voter. The path back to legitimacy must begin with changing Washington.