

Date: March 23, 2010
To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner
From: Stan Greenberg, James Carville and Peyton M. Craighill

Something Is Happening

Independent voters pull back from Republicans

In the *New York Times* op-ed piece today, ‘A Win is a Win,’ we highlight some very big changes. Yes, there has been some movement on health care – before the vote – but more dramatic is the pull back from Republican members of Congress and their party, as voters watch the scene evolving in Washington. Independent voters who did not approve of Democratic governance over the past year seemed to be re-assessing their feelings about the different players.

This pullback is very specific to the Republicans – and does not represent any gain for Democrats or any confidence gain in their direction. Health care’s passage could change perceptions in very important ways, though it is too early to tell. Over the long term, it could be a ‘game-changer.’ But for now, the economy is a bigger driver. Less and less people believe the country is on the right track, or that the economy is getting better or benefiting them – and Democrats have lost serious ground on whom you trust to handle the economy. This poll showed the Democrats’ advantage in party identification drop to just 2 points, and narrowing further to no advantage once independent-lean voters are allocated. This makes it all the more believable, then, that ‘something is happening’ to perceptions of the Republicans.¹

The poll finds ratings of the Republican Party and its incumbent House members taking a sharp fall this month. Republicans have also slipped in the hypothetical congressional ballot with independent voters turning away from the GOP.

Especially troubling for Republicans is the fact that their ratings and vote advantage have slipped, while the Democrats’ overall party identification continues to slide among the likely electorate. Thirty-five percent of likely voters identify as Democrat, 33 percent as Republican and 31 percent as independent. This 2-point gap in Democratic-Republican identification is the narrowest in Democracy Corps polling over the last two years.

Republican House incumbents – who Democracy Corps polls by name – take the brunt of this partisan pullback. Their mean rating fell 7.5 degrees to 49.8 on our 0 to 100 scale, their lowest in three years of polls. Only 35 percent warmly rate Republican incumbents and 31 percent

¹ This memo is based on a Democracy Corps survey conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner of 1,016 2008 voters, March 15-18, 2010. All data is among 850 likely 2010 voters unless otherwise noted.

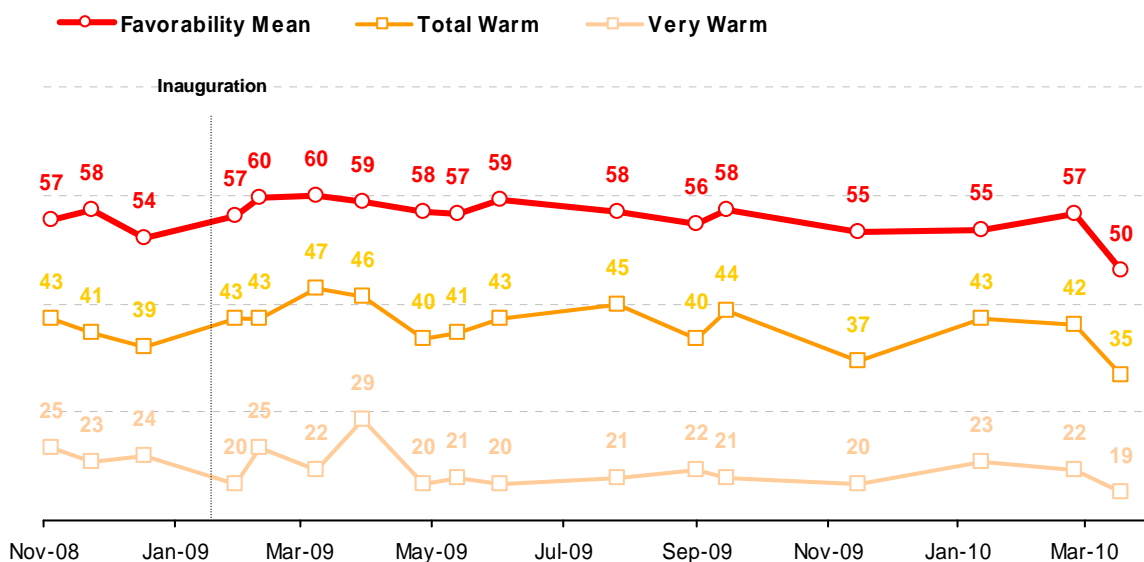


give a cool rating. This narrow 4-point warm-cool gap compares with a 20-point gap in their favor in February.²

Additionally, ratings of the Republican Party have cooled off abruptly this month after holding steady for the past year. Using the same 100-point scale, their mean rating is 41.6 degrees, down 3 degrees from last month – their lowest level since December 2008.

Republican members (named) see sudden drop in standing

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with 100 meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; 0 meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.



*Note: Data from Democracy Corps surveys conducted since the 2008 election.

Republican Woes on Congressional Vote

These perceptions of the GOP may have political consequences. The congressional vote choice narrowed slightly this month to being essentially even at 44 to 43 percent, with Democrats slightly over Republicans among likely voters. Crucially, this shows Republicans fading by 4 points from last month, when the race was 47 to 44 percent to the Republicans' advantage.

Independent voters, who are the key to victory, shifted especially sharply this month. In February, they favored the Republican candidate by 51 to 29 percent over the Democratic candidate – the widest margin among independents in our data since 2006. But this month, that margin has narrowed, with the preference standing at 39 to 34 percent, which is within the margin of error for this group.

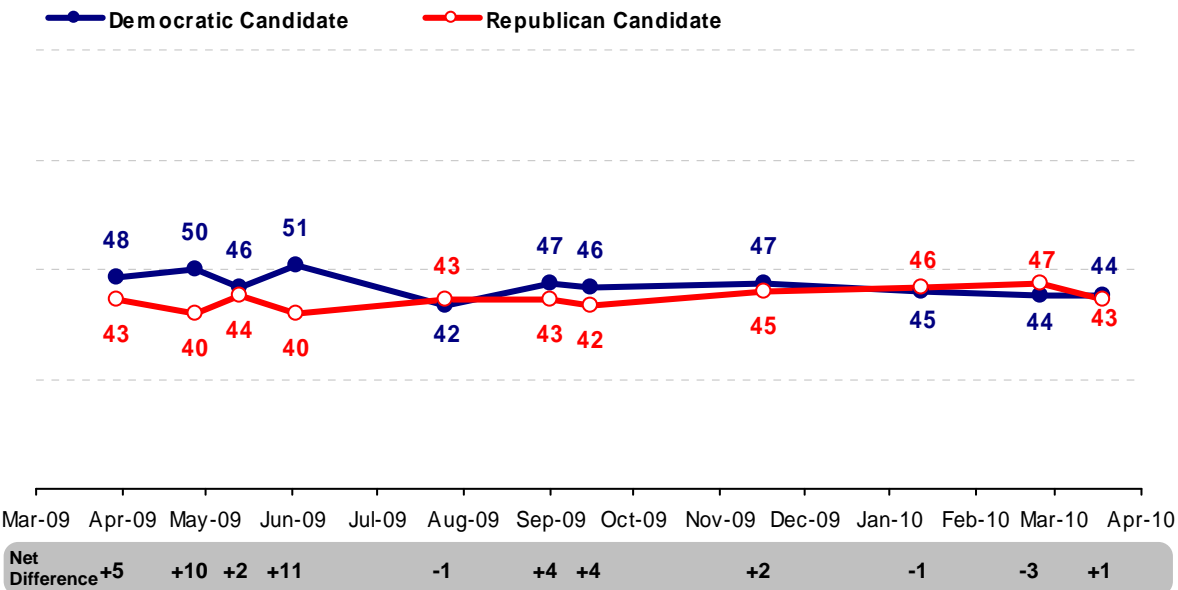
² Poll conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps and Third Way among 1,001 2008 voters, February 20-24, 2010. The results are available online here: http://www.democracycorps.com/wp-content/files/dcor022410fq.web_.pdf



The swing among independents is due almost entirely to women, who went from a 45 to 31 percent Republican-Democratic gap in February to reversing their vote completely, 42 to 32 percent in favor of the Democrats this month.

Congressional election tied but Republican vote drops 4 points

I know it is a long way off, but thinking about the elections in 2010, if the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you be voting for (DEMOCRATIC HOUSE CANDIDATE) or (REPUBLICAN HOUSE CANDIDATE)?



**Note: Incumbent names were inserted preceded by party identification with the generic "the Democratic candidate" or "the Republican candidate" inserted for the opposition. For the cell phone sample and open seat districts, both candidates were generic.*

A decline among independents is the main force driving the decline in the Republican image. In February, Republican incumbents had a mean positive rating of 53 degrees on the 0 to 100 scale with these voters. That has sharply dropped by 10.8 degrees to a mean of 42.2, more steeply than any other political or ideological group. The pattern is similar for ratings of the Republican brand as well, falling by over 5 points among independents.

Democrats and Obama Hold Steady

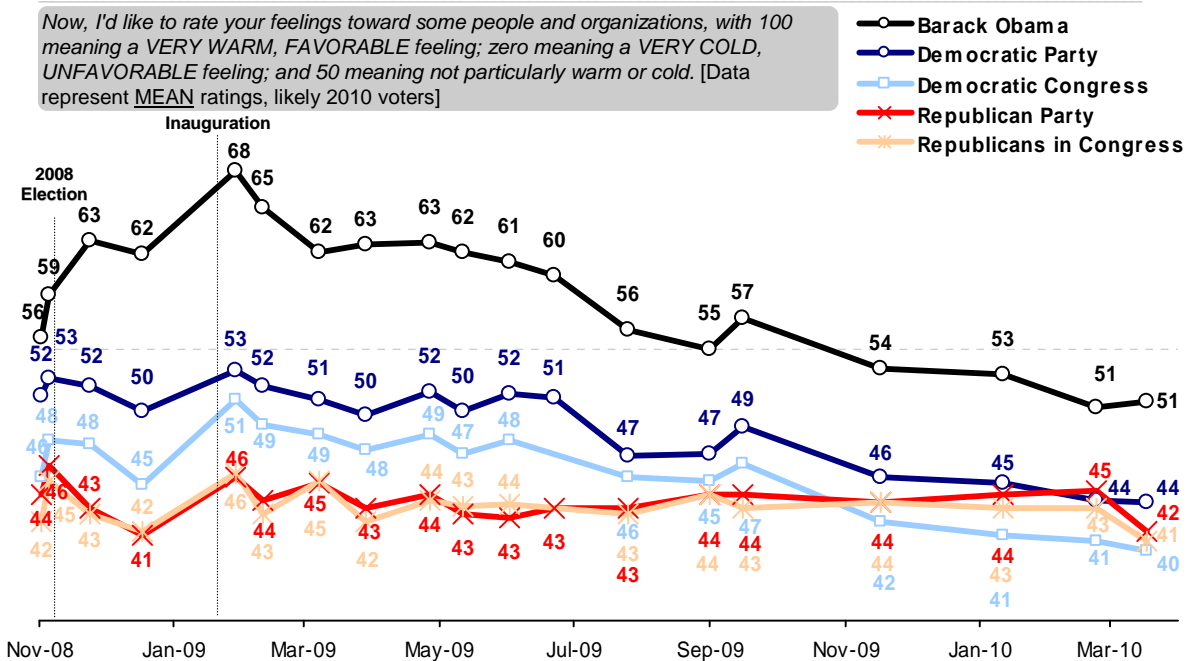
As Republicans have struggled, Democrats have held their ground and maintained an edge, comparatively speaking, in a tough political climate. The country's mood overall remains grim. Only 28 percent of likely voters say the country is heading in the right direction. This is the lowest since February 2009.



President Obama’s approval rating is holding steady at 46 percent – almost exactly the same as his 47 percent approval rating in our February poll. Though stable from last month, this represents the fourth consecutive survey in which less than a majority of voters approve of the job Obama is doing. However, in a separate measure, Obama’s thermometer ratings are holding up, currently standing at 51.1 degrees, which is slightly above last month.

The mean rating of Democratic incumbents, at 53.6, averages nearly 4 points higher than that of Republican incumbents. Ratings of the Democratic Party are stable at 43.7, now giving them a small favorability advantage of 2.1 degrees over the Republican brand (whose mean rating stands at 41.6).

Obama and Democrats hold stable, Republicans show drop



In a measure taken before the House passage of health care reform, there was a modest uptick in support for Obama’s plan, with 41 percent in favor and 53 percent opposed. Intense support for the plan went up 5 points. On its own, these shifts are not statistically significant, but that four of seven public polls showed a rise in support from January, with only one showing less support, suggests something real is happening.