

May 15, 2012

Anzalone Liszt Research

National Polling Summary

Friends,

Below you will find the weekly Anzalone Liszt Research National Polling Summary, which provides a pollster's take on data and trends that affect political campaigns.

Richard Lugar's 20-point drubbing at the hands of Tea Party darling Richard Mourdock shunted the six-term Republican Senator into forced retirement. The result crosses out yet another name from the dwindling roster of Republicans who have ever worked in a serious, bipartisan manner. The middle ground is becoming precarious political terrain, to some extent with both parties but particularly with the GOP. With the 2012 elections ahead, the widening partisan divide between Republican and Democratic voters is worth studying.

Following our analysis are additional news items and data we thought you'd enjoy.

John Anzalone and Jeff Liszt

Moderate Republican Senators: A Dying Breed

To defeat Dick Lugar, State Treasurer Mourdock capitalized on his own popularity among the most conservative elements of the Republican electorate. A May 1 [Howey-DePauw Poll](#) gave Mourdock a 10-point lead over Lugar (48% Mourdock / 38% Lugar). The composition of Mourdock's lead is revealing: among "somewhat conservative" Republicans (33% of voters), Mourdock and Lugar were actually running almost even (43% Mourdock / 41% Lugar). Forty-four percent voters, though, considered themselves "very conservative", and broke hard for Mourdock (62% Mourdock / 26% Lugar). The Senator did poll well among one group – he trounced Mourdock among moderate Republicans (60% Lugar / 26% Mourdock) – but moderates comprised the smallest share of the likely electorate (19%).

Most of the senators who are [retiring or facing tough re-election races](#) in 2012 were ranked in the middle of the ideological spectrum in 2011. On the Republican side, moderate Scott Brown (MA) is in a [dead-heat](#) with Elizabeth Warren, while Olympia Snowe (ME) has already announced her retirement. [Nate Silver of The New York Times](#) calculates that, since 2007, moderate Senate Republicans have suffered a 78 percent "attrition rate"—many in their own primaries, like Bob Bennett or Lisa Murkowski (who went on to win a write-in campaign). The

more conservative Republicans, by contrast, have lost only 11 of 28 members (including 2 who retired because of scandal, and 1 who died in office).

Moreover, Republicans like John McCain and Orrin Hatch who have withstood Tea Party culls have been forced to [run and legislate even further to the right](#). And attempts to add to the moderate Republican ranks lately have been stymied, like Delaware Congressman Mike Castle falling to Christine O'Donnell before she was dispatched by Democrat Chris Coons in the general election. The ranks of moderate Blue Dog Democrats have withered too, but this has been less due to primary purity tests and more due to moderate Democrats losing most of the swing seats they held in 2010 that had turned from red to blue in the 2006 and 2008 cycles.

Electorate Becoming More Polarized

Part of what is driving parties towards the extremes of their ideologies in primaries is the increasing ideological uniformity in each party. Nate Silver [explored this](#) via the General Social Survey from the University of Chicago which found that, while in 1984 only 54% of Republicans identified as conservative, in 2008 70% identified as conservative. As Mitt Romney grasped before flip-flopping on a multitude of issues to appeal to conservative Republican primary voters, there aren't enough moderate Republican voters to carry moderate candidates to nominations. Democrats have become more liberal, though on a lesser scale: liberal Democrats were the plurality in the Democratic Party in 2008, while in 1984 moderates were the largest group. We should note that, while moderates have left both parties to a degree and moved to political independence, they remain a largely Democratic voting bloc: in 2009 Pew [found](#) that moderates leaned heavily Democratic in party self-identification (36% Democrat / 16% Republican / 43% Independent), and in [2008](#) and [2010](#) exit polls moderates broke heavily for Obama (60% Obama / 39% McCain) and Democrats in Congress (2010: 55% Democrats / 42% Republicans).

One barometer of these polarized political times is the [partisan gap](#) in presidential job approval. In 2009, President Obama received an average approval rate of 88% among Democrats and just 27% among Republicans. The 68-point partisan gap is the [highest](#) for any President's first year in office, and this partisan gap has grown almost without fail over the last 40 years, as evidenced by the following chart from Pew (which includes some of Gallup's polling).

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind	R-D Diff
Job Approval	%	%	%	%	
Obama, March 9-12, 2009	59	27	88	57	-61
Bush, April 18-22, 2001	55	87	36	56	+51
Clinton, April 1-4, 1993	49	26	71	47	-45
Bush, May 4-7, 1989*	56	79	41	48	+38
Reagan, March 13-16, 1981*	60	87	41	61	+46
Carter, March 25-28, 1977*	72	56	81	70	-25
Nixon, Mid-March, 1969*	65	84	55	65	+29

* 1969-1989 data from Gallup.

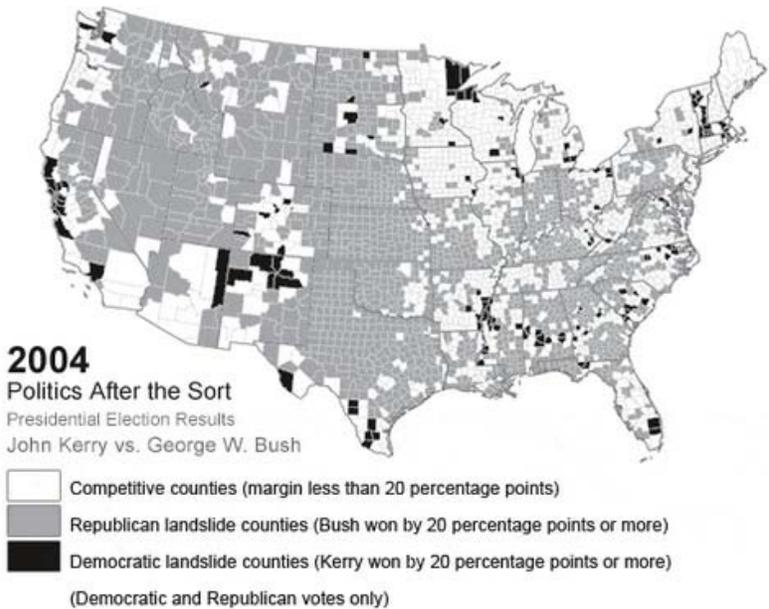
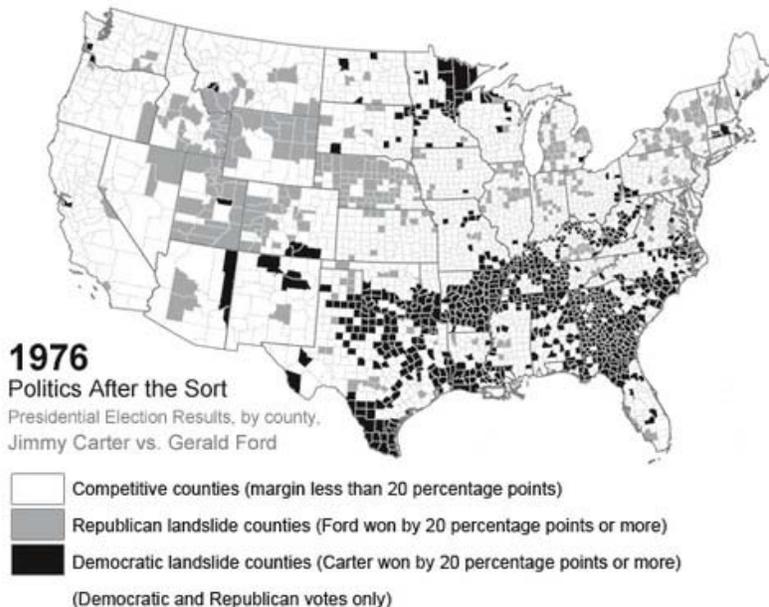
The Big Sort: Communities Becoming More Polarized

One provocative theory of why the country is becoming more partisan comes from Bill Bishop, author of a book called [The Big Sort](#). Bishop argues that more and more Americans are choosing to live in communities that reflect their cultural and political sensibilities, which has led to a kind of ideological balkanization of America. Young people cluster in urban neighborhoods and large college towns, and vote overwhelmingly Democratic. More-educated Americans migrate more often and can choose where to live based on perceptions of an area, reinforcing the political feedback loop. As [one reporter](#) tells it, “An accountant in Texas... can live anywhere she wants, so the liberal ones move to the funky bits of Austin while the more conservative ones prefer the exurbs of Dallas.”

As more and more neighborhoods become political echo chambers, inhabitants grow more entrenched in their beliefs and more partisan. This is mirrored in electronic media and virtual communities as well: MSNBC, Fox News, and myriad political websites and blogs now cater to each party’s base, further allowing people to retreat into their own political ideologies.

Electoral data backs up this theory. In 1976, about a quarter of American voters (26.8%) lived in a county that Gerald Ford or Jimmy Carter won by more than 20 percentage points. By 2008, almost half of voters (48.1%) lived in these “landslide counties” (counties that went for Obama or McCain by at least 20 points). Of course, Obama’s landslide counties look very different than McCain’s, reflecting a widening gap between urban and rural partisanship. The average population of an Obama landslide county was 278,601, while the average McCain landslide county had 37,475 people.

These two maps compare the results of 1976 with those of 2004. In about three decades, the “swing” regions that blanketed most of America have shriveled into a few pivotal slices, mostly in the Midwest, Southwest and Florida.



Carter and Ford won each of their states by an average of 10 percentage points, and only 19 states featured 10+ point margins of victory. By contrast, Obama and McCain won their states by an average of 17.4 percentage points, and more than half the map – 29 states plus the District of Columbia – delivered double-digit blowouts.

You Can Always Blame SuperPACs, Too

In previous decades, the Republican Party organization worked to balance ideological purity of its candidates and electoral reality—they would have never allowed a candidate like Richard

Mourdock to knock off a well-liked incumbent and move Indiana from safe Democratic to toss-up. There's now a real chance that Richard Mourdock's aggressive, extreme partisanship – like his view that [Social Security and Medicare are unconstitutional](#) – will alienate independent voters and give Rep. Joe Donnelly a real shot at winning the general election. And this is a repeat of 2010, when weak Tea Party candidates in Colorado, Nevada and Delaware [cost the Republicans](#) a chance to control the Senate.

With the advent of super PACs, however, wealthy ideologues can push the Republican party further to the extremes. Unfettered by contribution limits, a single group – or a single person, in the case of Sheldon Adelson and his bankrolling of the Newt Gingrich campaign – can fund an onslaught of negative ads. Indiana's Republican Senate primary drew millions in outside money, almost all of it aimed at defeating Lugar. Indeed, Mourdock's SuperPAC surrogates [outspent his own campaign](#) by \$1 million. And the effect of those ads was tangible: in the [last poll](#) before the election, a third (32%) of likely voters said their opinion of Lugar had worsened in the past week.

Other News From Around The Polling World

ALR Client Walter Dalton in Dogfight for NC Governor's Race: Dalton narrowly trails McCrory (Dalton 40% / McCrory 46%) according to [Public Policy Polling](#). Dalton has cut his deficit in half since November, when he trailed by 11.

Greeks Want Greece to Stick to Economic Plan: [Fifty four percent](#) of Greeks support remaining on the path the IMF has prescribed for the country, while only 38% support rejecting the program. However, the poll does show the anti-bailout Syriza party poised to make electoral gains from 17% to 21%, putting it in first place.

Is Facebook 2012's Slap Bracelet/Pet Rock? [According to the AP](#), 46% of Americans think Facebook will “fade away as new things come along”, while 43% believe it will be “successful over the long term”.

Upset tonight in Nebraska? PPP shows third-party groups potentially knocking off another Republican—Attorney General Jon Bruning—although state senator Deb Fischer may be the beneficiary and not their favored candidate Don Stenberg (Fischer 37% / Bruning 33% / Stenberg 17%). Bruning's favorability has dropped from 57% favorable / 17% unfavorable in March to its current 49% favorable / 36% unfavorable, largely as a result of outside negative ads.

Public Polling

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Approve	Disapprove
<i>Gallup</i>	May 12-14	Adults	45%	48%
<i>SurveyUSA</i>	May 8-9	Reg Voters	49%	45%

PRESIDENTIAL HEAD TO HEAD

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Obama	Romney
<i>Gallup</i>	May 8-14	Reg. Voters	46%	45%
<i>Angus Reid</i>	May 7-8	Likely Voters	46%	49%
<i>AP-GfK</i>	May 3-4	Reg. Voters	50%	42%

PARTY SELF ID

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep	Ind/Other
<i>Pollster.com</i> <i>Trend</i>	May 15	Adults	36.1%	30.5%	30.6%

GENERIC HOUSE BALLOT

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep
<i>Ipsos/Reuters</i>	May 3-7	Reg Voters	46%	44%
<i>Resurgent Republic</i>	April 30-May 2	Reg Voters	45%	40%
<i>NBC/Wall St Journal</i>	April 13-17	Reg Voters	46%	44%

OBAMA POPULAR VOTE SHARE PROJECTIONS

Polling Firm	Date	Polly Vote	Polls	Iowa Electronic Markets	Econometric Models	Index Models
<i>PollyVote</i>	April 30	51.8%	51.0%	53.5%	49.9%	54.3%

DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Right Direction	Wrong Track
<i>Ipsos/Reuters</i>	May 3-7	Adults	35%	57%
<i>GWU/Politico</i>	April 29-May 3	Likely Voters	33%	59%