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**Subject:** Addressing the Nation - ALR's National Polling Summary

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## January 25, 2011

### Anzalone Liszt Research

### National Polling Summary

Friends,

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

Tonight, the Anzalone Liszt Research team will be watching the State of the Union address together and hope you take the time to watch as well. Below is our assessment of polling of Obama's first two years and the significance of the State of the Union address in poll numbers.

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

John Anzalone and Jeff Liszt

#### **OBAMA HEADING INTO SECOND STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS: AN ASSESSMENT**

As Obama heads into his second state of the union address, we'd like to reflect on Obama's first two year presidency and pre-empt the tea-leaf-reading what will inevitably surround the State of the Union Address.

**Obama's first two years, from a polling perspective:** According to [Gallup](#), by far the best source for poll numbers more than a decade old, Obama's average job approval rating is 46% over the last three months. It is up from his quarterly nadir of 44.7% last quarter—in fact, Obama has recently been posting some of his highest job approval ratings since 2009, and Gallup's three-day rolling average has him at 51% approve / 42% disapprove as of Jan 17-19. Where does Obama's 46% average for the eighth quarter stack up against past presidents over the same time period?

- Ahead of Obama: Kennedy (75%), Eisenhower (65%), G. W. Bush, (64%), G. H. W. Bush, (61%), Nixon (55%), Carter (49%).
- Behind Obama: Clinton (44%), Reagan (41%)

So Obama is behind the curve, as far as Gallup's numbers go. But does it mean anything? A couple points

1) *Everyone's a critic in the Information Age.* Average eighth-quarter job approval for president before 1980 (the year CNN went on the air): 61%. Average eighth-quarter job approval of president since 1980: 52%.

2) *Second-year job approval numbers have no statistical relation to reelection.* Average eighth-quarter job approval of presidents who won reelection: 54%. Average job approval of those who lost: 56%. Notably, the two presidents with the worst eighth-quarter job approval rating (Clinton and Reagan) went on to win in relative walks, while only Eisenhower won handily of the three highest that stood for reelection (the Bushes went 1-1, one of them going down big and the other winning dogfight). There's a lot of time between January 2011 and November 2012.

3) *High unemployment exacerbated Reagan's problems in his second year, and dropping unemployment rates boosted his reelection campaign.* There are some potential parallels between Reagan and Obama in this data. The [unemployment rate](#) went from a high of 10.8% in December (the last month of Reagan's eighth quarter) down to 7.4% in October 1984, the month before he was reelected. The link between [the economy and presidential reelection](#) has been well explored in other places.

4) *As if we needed further evidence, polling is the body politic's drug du jour:* In the first two years of every president's term since Eisenhower (not including Obama), Gallup conducted 197 polls, an average of 24.6 polls per president. George W. Bush was the most-polled president at 46 polls. In Obama's first two years? [347 polls](#), almost twice the other nine presidents combined over the same span. Furthermore, organizations besides Gallup have released an additional 20 public polls of Obama's job performance since January 1, according to [Pollster.com](#).

**State of the Union polling: what does it all mean, if anything?** The State of the Union is of course an important event that allows the President to set his agenda for the year in front of Congress and the American people. However, we can expect a barrage of polling and related coverage next week that [overhypes](#) and misinterprets the speech's impact. Here's what we really know about State of the Union speeches:

1) *There is typically no "State of the Union" bump.* Again, Gallup has pretty good historical data and it shows [no real change](#) in a President's job approval after the state of the union in almost every case. Over the last 31 years while Gallup has been tracking this data, the President's job approval has gone down an average of 0.03%--obviously [well](#) within the margin of error. The only notable exceptions are George W. Bush in 2005 (6 point improvement) and Clinton in 1996 (6 point improvement) and 1998 (10 point improvement).

2) *With that said, a substantial number of people tune in for the speech.* Last year, the address averaged more than [48 million viewers](#)--for comparison, about 125 million voters voted in the presidential election, with just under 67 million of them voting for Obama. Next Tuesday, President Obama will have one of the largest public audiences of his presidency--the speech's agenda-setting ability is far more important than its ability to boost the President's numbers.

3) *The public supports a physical as well as political crossing of the aisle during the speech.* According to CNN, Americans strongly support Senator Mark Udall's (D-CO) idea to [end the middle school dance style seating](#) of the State of the Union and make the Democrats and Republicans sit next to each other. Seventy two percent of voters think parties should sit next to each other ([PDF](#)) while only 22% think they should sit on opposite sides of the room. Most likely to support the separation: conservatives (36%), and Republicans (38%), Tea Party supporters (33%) and men (27%).

## **OTHER NEWS**

**Bodyguards for Congressmen:** A recent [CBS News poll](#) found the public is split 48%-45% on whether members of Congress should be provided with bodyguards.

**Voters not supportive of Republican policies, prefer Obama's direction:** [Pew](#) finds voters generally unsupportive of the policies of Republicans in Congress 43%-34%. Independents disapprove by a 45%-3 margin. Voters also [want to go in Obama's direction](#) rather than the direction of Republicans in Congress 35%.

**Americans do not want to repeal the health care law:** According a CBS/New York Times poll, By a 4:40% margin Americans would rather [keep the health care law](#) than repeal it. Independents favor keeping 45%-38%. Furthermore, only half of those voters who want repeal (20% of the electorate) want a full re the bill, and only 52% of repeal supporters (21% of the electorate) want the bill repealed if it means insu don't have to cover people with preexisting conditions, which was the case in the repeal bill Republicans passed through the House of Representatives last week.

**So you thought Sarah Palin's numbers had nowhere to go but up:** Sarah Palin's numbers are at an all low, according to [CBS News and the New York Times](#)-57% of voters are unfavorable towards her, comp with only 19% who are favorable towards her.

**China now viewed as the most dangerous country to the United States:** [Pew](#) also finds that voters are worried about China than any other country. Twenty percent rate it the most dangerous nation to the US, it roughly even with North Korea (18%) and above Iran (12%) and all other nations. This is the first time 9/11 that voters have told Pew China is our biggest threat. Unsurprisingly, people worry more about Chi to its economic strength (60% of voters) than its military strength (27%). In fact, 47% of voters call Chin world's leading economic power, compared to 27% who say the USA. The USA had a 41%-30% lead on measure as recently as February, 2008. For reference, the USA has about 150% the GDP of China when measured by Purchasing Power Parity and 235% the GDP of China when measured by official exchange

**Asia more important to US voters than Europe:** Perhaps due to this perceived threat from China, for t time [voters now see](#) economic and military ties with Asian nations as more important to the US than they the same ties with Europe by a 47%-37% plurality. In September 2001, Europe held a 44%-34% lead on measure.

<b>PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING</b>				
<b>Polling Firm</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>
CNN/Opinion Research	1/21-23/11	Adults	55%	44%
Gallup	1/17-19/11	Adults	51%	42%
NBC/Wall Street Journal	1/13-17/11	Adults	53%	41%

<b>PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING - AMONG INDEPENDENT VOTERS</b>				
<b>Polling Firm</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>
CNN/Opinion Research	1/21-23/11	Independents	54%	45%

CNN/Opinion Research	12/17-19/10	Independents	41%	54%
CNN/Opinion Research	9/21-23/10	Independents	41%	54%

#### PARTY RATINGS

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Party	Favorable	Unfavorable
CBS/New York Times	1/15-19/11	Adults	Democratic Party	46%	45%
NBC/Wall Street Journal	1/3-17/11	Adults	Republican Party	40%	49%

#### DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Right Direction	Wrong Track
NBC/Wall Street Journal	1/3-17/11	Adults	35%	56%

#### HEALTH CARE REPEAL

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Keep	Repeal	Full Repeal	Repeal with preexisting condition repeal
CBS/New York Times	1/15-19/11	Adults	48%	40%	20%	21%

#### PARTY SELF ID

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep	Ind / other
Pollster.com Trend	1/21/11	Adults	31%	23%	37%

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