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**Subject:** Grabbing the Third Rail - ALR's National Polling Summary

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## April 14, 2011

# Anzalone Liszt Research National Polling Summary

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Friends,

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

Fresh off of a last-minute budget agreement, President Obama wasted no time jumping into another budget-related debate, this time over the "third rail" of American politics: entitlement reform.

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

John Anzalone and Jeff Liszt

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### **STORY THIS WEEK: GRABBING THE THIRD RAIL**

#### **Strong Opposition to Cuts and Privatization**

A recent [Pew poll](#) shows that a majority of Americans say that deficit reduction should be a top priority this year, yet they are very wary of any cuts to the entitlement programs that make up much of the federal government's spending. Nearly [two-thirds](#) are against changes to Social Security and Medicare, and according to a recent [CNN poll](#), 87% believe that funding for those programs should either be increased or remain unchanged.

Opposition to cutting funding for Social Security and Medicare is so strong that Americans are far more willing to see cuts in defense spending, even though almost [two-thirds](#) believe that military spending should be increased or kept at current levels. When a [CBS/NY Times poll](#) forced respondents to choose between

cutting the military, Social Security and Medicare, 55% chose to cut military spending, with just 21% and 13% opting to cut Medicare and Social Security, respectively.

Privatization is also not seen as a viable option for reducing entitlement spending, as a March 2010 [Bloomberg survey](#) found that the public rejected privatizing Social Security and Medicare by a 26-point margin. A [Pew poll](#) from last September found a similar level of opposition to turning Medicare into a voucher program (33% favor / 52% oppose).

The strong resistance to cutting funding for these two programs might encourage some to set their sights on Medicaid as a source of savings. But recent polling shows that this program is also not a target for the public. [Three-quarters of Americans](#) say that funding for Medicaid should either be increased or kept the same, and a January [CNN poll](#) found that 70% say that it is more important to protect the program from significant cuts than to cut its funding for deficit reduction.

### **Openness to Some Entitlement Reforms**

Given such high levels of opposition, cutting funding for any of these programs carries a great deal of risk. Recent polling does reveal a couple entitlement reforms that the public is less averse to.

For one, the public supports increasing taxes on the wealthy as a way to help fund these programs. This is shown in the latest [Kaiser poll](#), which finds that 58% of Americans want to keep the part of the new healthcare law that increases Medicare taxes for upper income Americans. A March [ABC/News Washington Post poll](#) shows similar results on Social Security, with 53% of respondents in favor of removing the \$107,000 limit and applying Social Security taxes to all levels of income.

Similarly, while the public claims to prefer spending cuts to tax increases generally, the reverse is true for entitlement programs. When respondents in the January [CBS/NY Times poll](#) were asked whether they preferred a reduction in Medicare benefits or higher Medicare taxes, they favored the latter by an overwhelming 40-point margin (64% to 24%). When the same question was posed for Social Security, the results were identical.

The [ABC/Washington Post poll](#) also found that opposition to a number of Social Security cost-control measures had declined over the past six years, with the public now split on reducing cost of living increases (45% support / 48% oppose) and 46% supporting a reduction in benefits for those who retire early, a 10-point increase from 2005.

### **Current Standing of the Parties on Handling Entitlements and the Deficit**

As the parties move into a debate over entitlement reform in the coming months, neither can claim a clear upper-hand in the debate at the moment. Though [Kaiser](#) finds that Democrats hold sizeable advantages over Republicans on who the public trusts to handle Medicare (44% Democrats / 30% Republicans) and Social Security (44% Democrats / 29% Republicans), the percentage preferring them falls well short of a majority. Meanwhile, in addition to trailing the Democrats on Social Security and Medicare, Republicans have seen their pre-election advantage on handling the deficit evaporate, as the March [AP/GfK poll](#) now finds the public split on which party they trust more on the issue.

## **OTHER NEWS FROM THE POLLING AND POLITICAL WORLD**

**Voters approve of Obama's handling of budget agreement:** A recently released [CNN/Opinion Research poll](#) shows that 58% of Americans approve of last week's agreement that averted a government shutdown. They give higher marks to Obama's handling of the agreement (54% approve) than to either Republican or

Democratic leaders in Congress (44% approve for each). When asked who was more responsible for the agreement, 48% said Obama and the Democrats, compared to just 35% who gave credit to the Republica

**Two-thirds support continued federal funding for Planned Parenthood:** The recent [CNN poll](#) also fi that 65% of the public supports continued federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

**Strong opposition to defunding new healthcare law:** While a majority opposes repealing the new heal law, two recent polls show that opposition to defunding it is even higher. [Kaiser](#) finds that 64% are again defunding the law, while [CNN](#) puts the share at 58%.

**GOP at odds with public on taxing the wealthy:** A new [Gallup/USA Today poll](#) shows that 59% of the public supports raising taxes on household incomes earning \$250,000 a year or more, putting Republican Congress at odds with a significant portion of the electorate on a core aspect of the budget debate.

**Plurality doesn't think slavery was the primary cause of the Civil War:** This week marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War (the Sesquicentennial) and despite the strong opinions of [Abraham Lincoln](#), [Haley Barbour](#) and virtually all [Civil War historians](#), a recent [Pew poll](#) finds that a plurality of American not believe that slavery was the primary cause of the war. To help set the record straight we recommend David von Drehle's article in [Time](#) this week, or better yet, James McPherson's Pulitzer Prize winning bo [Battle Cry of Freedom](#).

**Good week for the Donald:** [Three national polls](#) of Republicans released in the past week show Donald Trump among the top-tier of GOP presidential hopefuls. He was tied for first with Mike Huckabee in the poll (19%), tied for second and trailing Romney by just 4 points in the NBC/WSJ poll (17%), and 4 poin behind leader Mike Huckabee in the Fox News poll (11%). However, at this stage, national horse-race numbers don't mean much, and Trump's 37% unfavorable rating among Republicans remains a major bar Still, even if the GOP nomination doesn't work out, [ratings](#) for "Celebrity Apprentice" are rising every w and way up from last year. He's also still married to [Melania Knauss](#).

**Less than half of Republicans believe Obama was born in US:** [Fox News](#) finds that 67% of American believe President Obama was born in the United States, including 69% of Independents. But among Republicans the percentage drops to 47% (37% say he was not and 16% are unsure), helping to explain Trump's strategy and recent bump in primary polls.

**Three that would trump Trump:** [Gallup](#) finds that General David Petraeus, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bu and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie are all well-regarded by Republican primary voters. Petraeus is most popular, with 61% viewing him favorably, compared to 53% for Bush. Christie's is not known to ne half of GOP primary voters, but those who know him rate him favorably by a ratio of more than 3:1 (41% favorable / 12% unfavorable).

## PUBLIC POLLING

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING				
Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Approve	Disapprove
Gallup	4/10-12/11	Adults	44%	48%
Ipsos/Reuters	4/7-11/11	Adults	46%	49%
CNN	4/9-10/11	Adults	48%	50%
FOX	4/3-5/11	Adults	49%	47%

<b>DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY</b>				
<b>Polling Firm</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Right Direction</b>	<b>Wrong Track</b>
Ipsos/Reuters	4/7-11/11	Adults	25	69
NBC/WSJ	3/31-4/4/11	Adults	28	63
AP/GfK	3/18-21	Adults	35	62

<b>UNEMPLOYMENT</b>					
<b>Polling Firm</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Unemployment rate</b>	<b>Discouraged workers* (thousands)</b>	<b>Part time for economic reasons (thousands)</b>
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)	Mar 2011	Adults	8.8%	921	8,433
BLS	Feb 2011	Adults	8.9%	1,020	8,340
BLS	Jan 2011	Adults	9.0%	993	8,407
BLS	Dec 2010	Adults	9.4%	1,318	8,931
BLS	Nov 2010	Adults	9.8%	1,282	8,960

\*Defined by the BLS as persons not looking for a job because they believe no jobs are available for them

<b>PARTY SELF ID</b>					
<b>Polling Firm</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Dem</b>	<b>Rep</b>	<b>Ind / other</b>
Pollster.com Trend	4/13/11	Adults	30%	23%	39%



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