



Beyond Bush: Texas Republicans in an Obama Era

**A statewide survey of voters
November 15th-17th, 2008**

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Introduction

part 1 of 4

- About Hill Research Consultants

- Founded in 1988 and based in The Woodlands, Texas, HRC conducts public-opinion surveys, focus groups, policy and background research on behalf of a nation-wide roster of political, corporate, public-affairs and trade-association clients
- Political clients include...
 - Over half a dozen state governors
 - More than a dozen United States Senators
 - Over two dozen members of Congress
 - In excess of 100 members of state legislatures
 - The RNC, NRSC, NRCC and Republican party organizations in more than a dozen individual states



Introduction

part 2 of 4

- Background & purpose

- November 4th, 2008 represented the first time in 16 years that a candidate named “Bush” didn’t appear on the statewide Texas ballot
- In the aftermath of a historic rebuke by voters of GOP-rule, Republicans across the country are attempting to answer the questions of “What went wrong?” and “Where do we go from here?”
- HRC is particularly concerned that Texas may be on a similar path as that recently taken by voters in Colorado
 - 2000: Colorado is clearly defined as a “Red State”—home to James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family,” a large military-retiree community, Tom Tancredo and the free-spirit of the West
 - 2002-06: Democrats make steady gains, to the point that by...
 - 2008: The Governor’s Mansion; both chambers of the Colorado legislature; a majority of the congressional delegation and both US senators are Democrats
- It can happen; the time to ring the alarm bell, if necessary, is now

Introduction

part 3 of 4

- Philosophy
 - Our goal was to be forward looking—not focused on who people voted for in the past, but how they might vote in the future
 - Our methodology was cautious—looking at all registered voters, not just likely voters—so as to understand what could occur in a “worst case scenario” (and not potentially be caught off-guard)
 - Our interest was general—not examining a particular race (Governor, Senate) or floating trial-balloons for one or another candidate—but rather, generating insights that would be valuable to all Republican candidates, consultants, operatives and grass-roots supporters

Introduction

part 4 of 4

- Methodology

- Statewide sample of 636 active voters
- Interviews conducted November 15th-17th, 2008
- Typical interview took approximately 24 minutes
- Margin of error of $\pm 3.9\%$ for 636 cases

- Contributors

- Dr. David B. Hill, Director, Hill Research Consultants
- Dr. Stephen H. White, Assistant Director
- David J. Benzion, Senior Research Analyst
- Jason Nemeck, Project Manager

- Contact

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Key findings

part 1 of 2

- The Texas electorate is dissatisfied with the status quo and shares other Americans' yearning for change
- Voters single out economic concerns as the issues state office-holders should prioritize highest
- Especially in such economically anxious times, current tax burdens are considered onerous—and the public clearly wants the government to get its hands off their wallets
- Voters don't think the GOP is delivering government that is low-cost, in-touch, sensible, and devoted-to-the-common-good—sentiments reflected in their volunteered perceptions of both parties
- On most every measure tested, the generic Republican “brand” is significantly less appealing than the Democratic one

Key findings

part 2 of 2

- On average, multiple deceased Democrats handily beat still living Republican office-holders in favorability, who often also trail high-profile figures currently outside politics
- Generic Republican candidates trail on qualities voters most look for in office-holders & on perceived concern for voters' problems; at best, only draw even on stewardship of economy
- Negative perceptions of Republicans (arrogant, racist, corrupt, angry, unwelcoming) are untenable for the party's long-term health
- "Bush fatigue" is overwhelmingly cited as driving GOP struggles, but there is a solid awareness across the electorate that Republicans are also failing to connect with younger voters and the Hispanic community
- Bottom line—GOP job approval is below 50% and soft in relative intensity; while elections are decided between actual, concrete candidates, in principle the electorate is ready to give the "right" Democrats a chance to do better

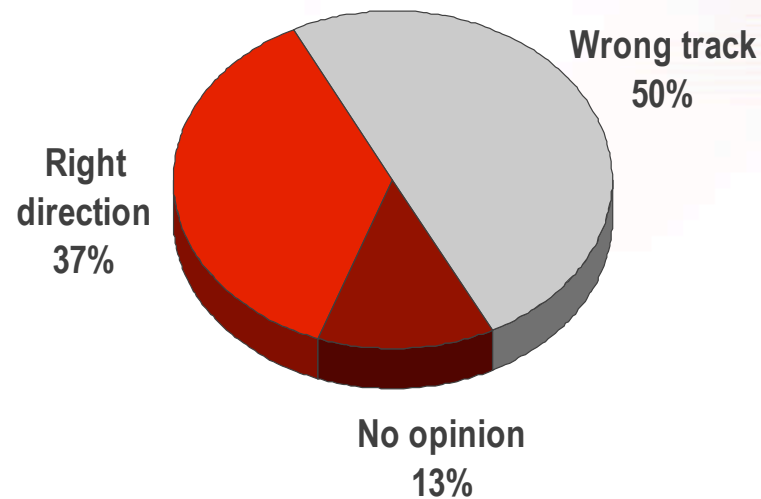
Right direction vs. wrong track

among all voters

- The electorate is dissatisfied with the status quo

State of the state

"Do you feel things in your part of Texas are going in the right direction these days, or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?"

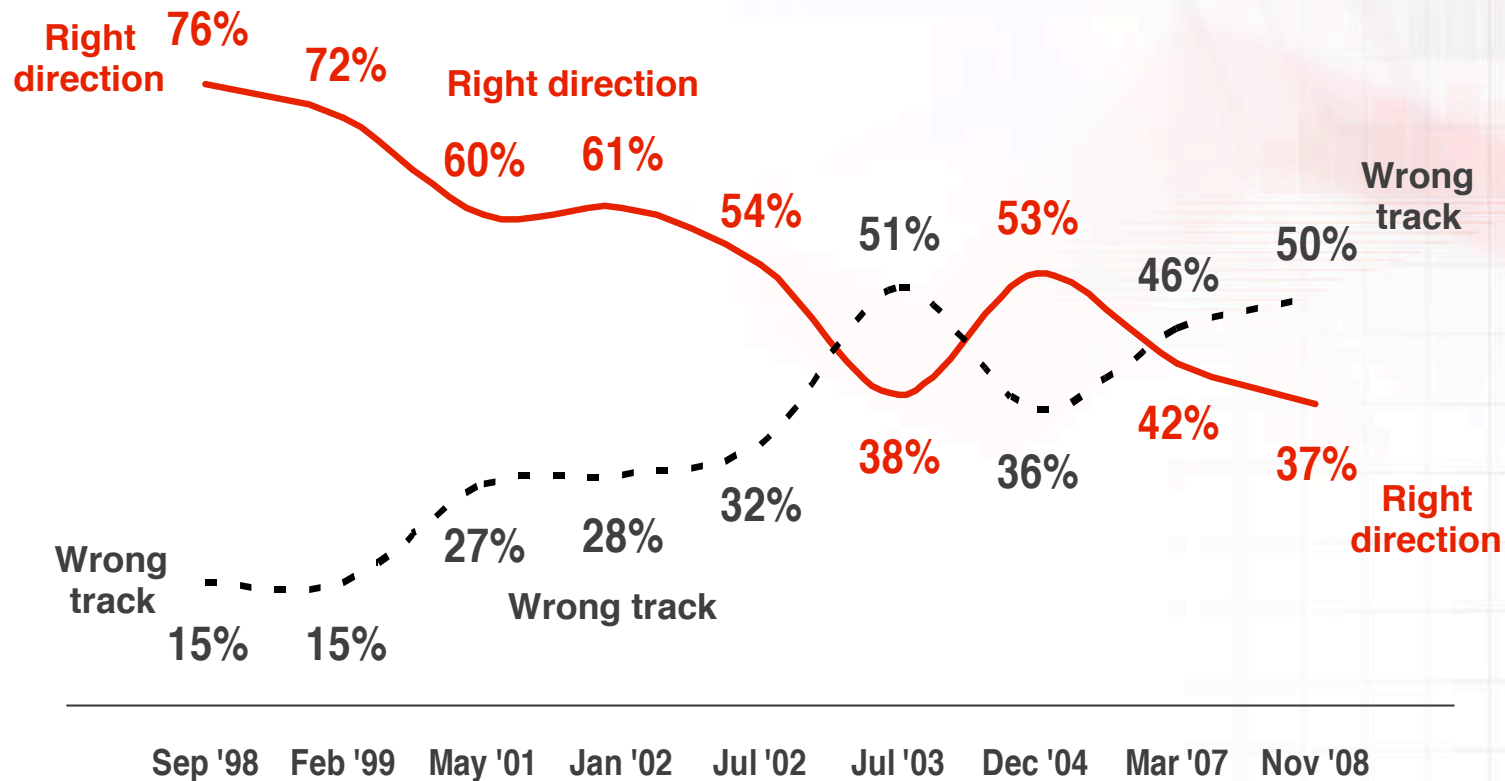


Right direction vs. wrong track

time series

State of the state

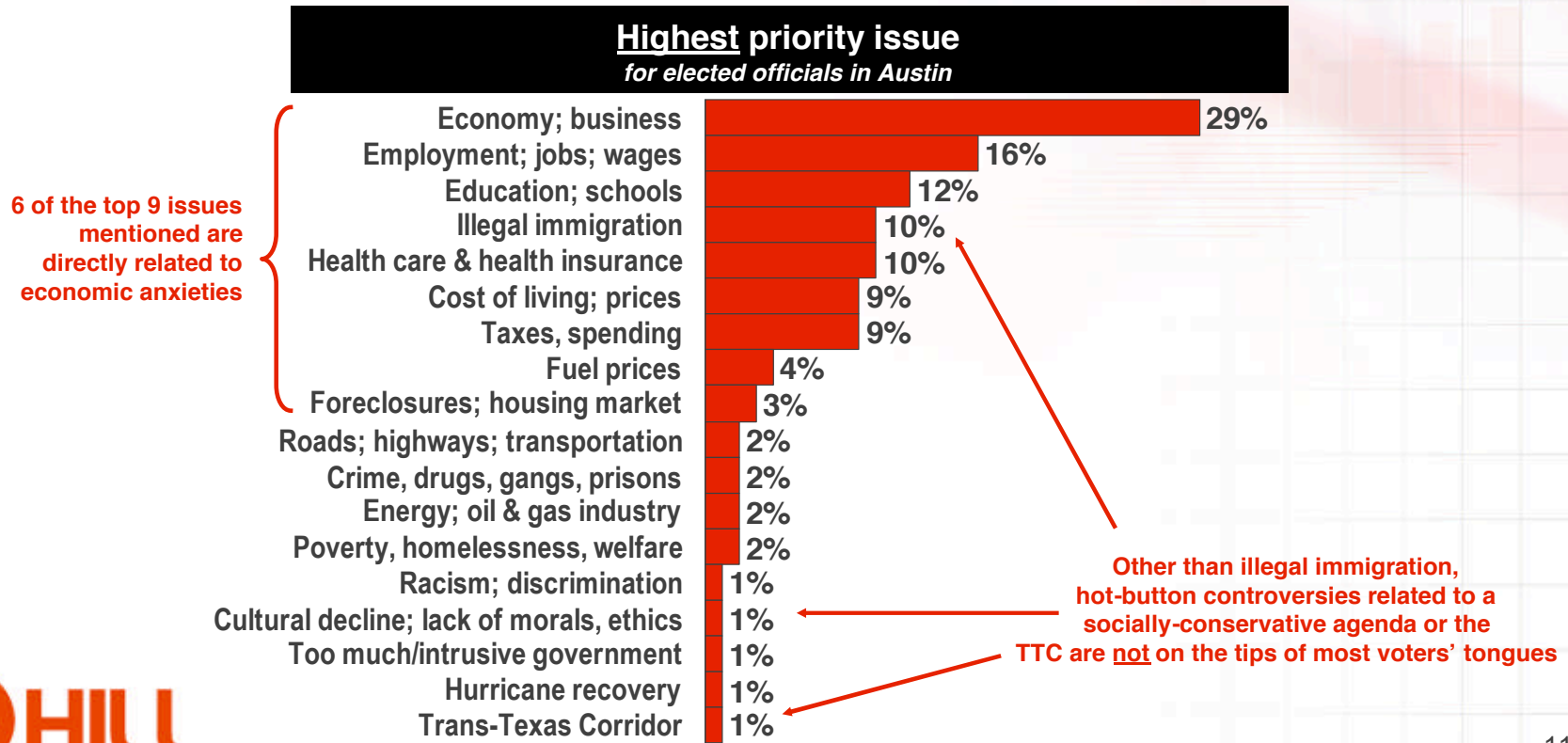
"Do you feel things in your part of Texas are going in the right direction these days, or do you feel things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?"



Top-of-mind issue agenda

among all voters

- Asked to volunteer (in their own words) what issues they'd most like to see elected officials in Austin work on, macro-economic and personal pocketbook concerns dominate

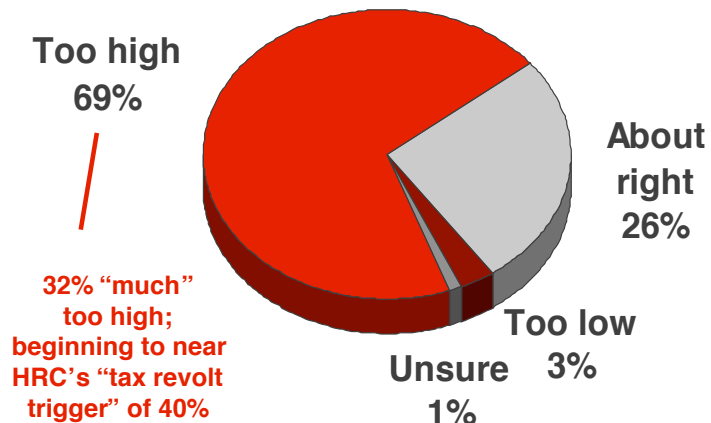


Taxes & spending

among all voters

- Especially in such economically anxious times, current tax burdens are considered onerous—and the public clearly wants the government to get its hands off their wallets

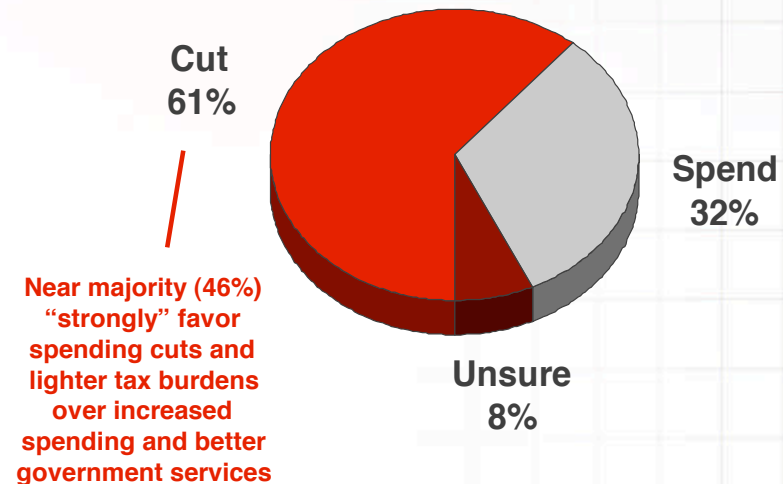
Combined taxes paid to fed/state/local govt.



Point of view closest to your own?

Should state & local government...

CUT spending to lighten out tax burden; OR
SPEND more to improve quality of our lives

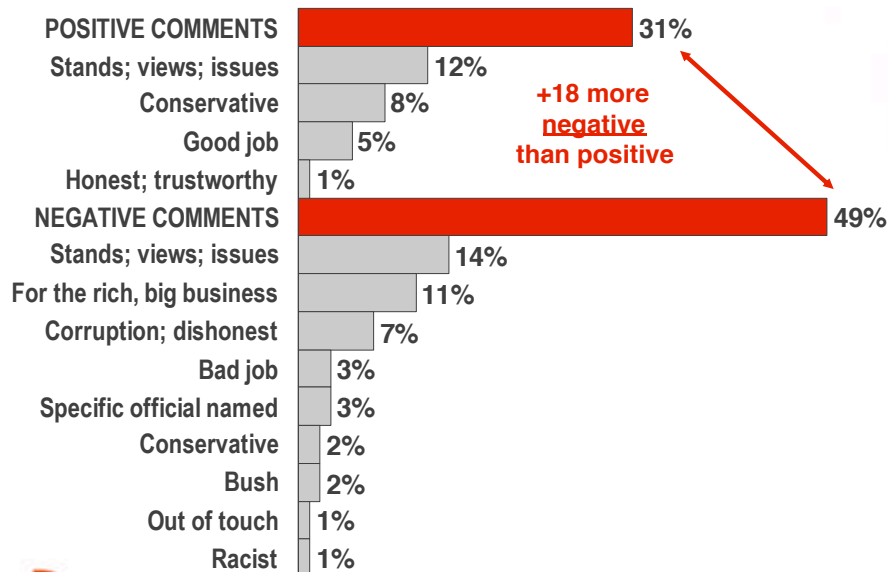


Top-of-mind perceptions of parties

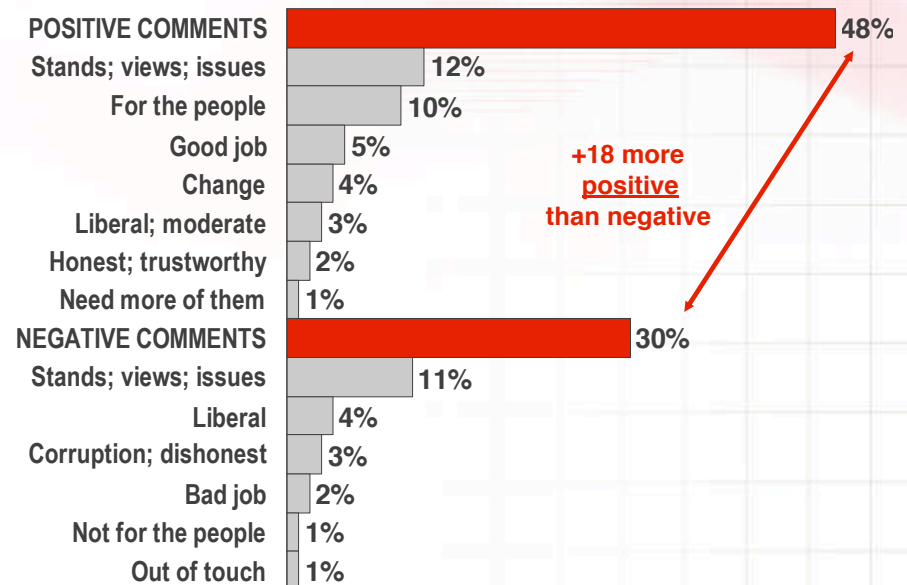
among all voters

- Voters don't think the GOP is delivering government that is low-cost, in-touch, sensible, and devoted-to-the-common-good—sentiments reflected in their volunteered perceptions of both parties

REPUBLICAN elected officials in Texas



DEMOCRATIC elected officials in Texas



Head-to-head generic ballots

among all voters

- Thus, on most every measure tested, the generic Republican “brand” is significantly less appealing than the Democratic one

Generic ballot preferences

Are you likely to vote for the
Republicans or the Democrats in the next election for...?

→ GOP trails DEMs by double digits on generic ballots for Governor and State Rep.

	GOP	margin	DEM	unsure
Governor	31%	-13	44	26
State Representative	31%	-14	45	24

Impression

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of
(Republican/Democratic) elected officials in Texas?

→ Even the intensity of opinion is revealing—
GOP favorability skews soft
(just 15% “very” vs.
32% “somewhat” favorable)

	GOP	margin	DEM	unsure
very	15		22	
somewhat	32		37	
Favorable	47%	-12	59%	
margin	+2		+30	
Unfavorable	45	+16	29%	
somewhat	21		19	
very	23		10	

← Relative to the Democrats,
Republicans are
-12 points favorable
and
+16 points unfavorable



Impressions of individuals

among all voters

In fact on average, multiple deceased Democrats handily beat still living Republican office-holders in favorability, who often also trail high-profile figures currently outside politics

	Favorable			margin	Unfavorable			
	very	somewhat	total		total	somewhat	very	not fam/uns.
Ann Richards	32	30	62%	+44	18	9	9	21
Roger Staubach	31	29	60%	+51	9	5	3	31
Chuck Norris	26	32	58%	+42	16	9	6	25
Lyndon Johnson	20	32	53%	+34	19	10	10	28
T. Boone Pickens	22	30	52%	+38	14	10	4	35
Barbara Jordan	28	21	48%	+38	10	6	4	42
Average of top-tier GOP elected officials*	19	27	46%	+14	32	14	18	23
Ross Perot	13	33	46%	+14	32	21	12	22
Joel Osteen	19	23	43%	+25	18	9	9	39
Bob Bullock	13	27	40%	+27	13	8	5	48
George W. Bush	20	18	38%	-19	57	14	42	5
Jim Hightower	10	23	33%	+21	12	7	5	56
Michael Dell	8	21	29%	+23	6	4	2	65
Karl Rove	9	15	24%	-8	32	10	22	44

*Data for individual top-tier GOP elected officials (Dewhurst, Hutchison, Perry) not revealed as a professional courtesy



Generic CANDIDATE traits

*ranked in order of “extremely” important
among all voters*

- Generic Republican candidates trail...
 - On the qualities voters most look for in an office-holder
 - On perceived concern for voters’ problems
- At best, only draw even on stewardship of the economy

How <i>important</i> ?			Sounds more like...?					
extremely	very		GOP	margin	DEM	both	neither	unsure
43%	48	Trustworthy, honest, ethical	21%	-12	33	17	25	3
30%	55	Uses common-sense to run government more efficiently and effectively	25%	-11	36	18	19	2
29%	60	Committed to fair and impartial justice for all	22%	-20	42	23	10	4
27%	56	Understands how to strengthen and grow the economy	32%	0	32	19	13	3
25%	53	Champions the needs of the vulnerable, like children, the poor, and the elderly	13%	-49	62	16	6	3
24%	52	Cares about the concerns and problems of people like me	19%	-31	50	17	11	3
17%	52	Champions the needs of home-owners, small businesses and average taxpayers	30%	-13	43	17	6	3

Generic PARTY traits

among all voters

- Long-term, this is simply untenable

Republicans “lead” in every negative characterization by wide, double-digit margins

At best we draw even

Obama’s Hope & Change halo shines across the Democratic brand

Message Received:
“Unless you are already like us,
we don’t want you around”

Do you think Republicans or Democrats are more...?

	GOP	margin	DEM	both	neither	unsure
Arrogant	43%	+28	15	24	14	4
Racist	33%	+24	9	15	36	7
Corrupt	32%	+23	9	38	16	5
Angry	35%	+14	21	21	17	5
Pragmatic & practical	28%	-2	30	20	18	4
Professional	22%	0	22	42	12	2
Competent	20%	-5	25	34	18	2
Smart	14%	-13	27	44	12	3
Innovative	19%	-16	35	26	16	5
Reformers	21%	-19	40	17	16	6
Fair	17%	-21	38	26	15	4
Party of the future	20%	-25	45	11	17	8
Thoughtful	13%	-26	39	26	18	4
Open & welcoming	14%	-33	47	23	12	3

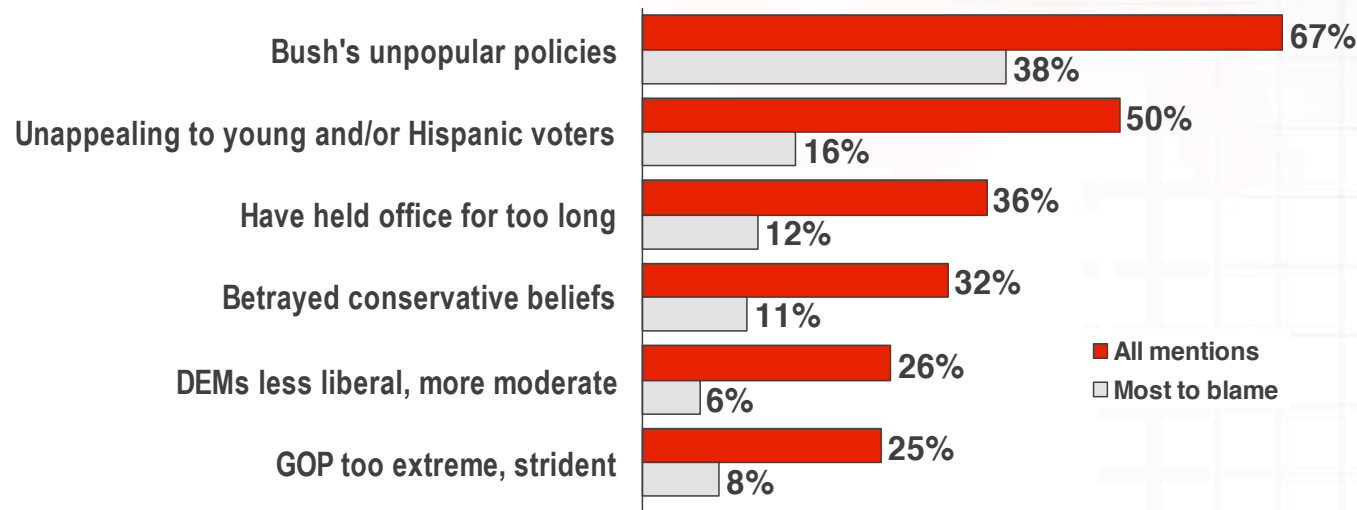
Explaining recent GOP setbacks

among all voters

- “Bush fatigue” is overwhelmingly cited as driving GOP struggles, but there is a solid awareness across the electorate that Republicans are also failing to connect with younger voters and the Hispanic community

Responsibility for GOP loses, DEM gains

“In recent elections in Texas, Republicans have begun to lose power and Democrats started to gain more control of state government. Which of the following do you think is most responsible for these changes?”

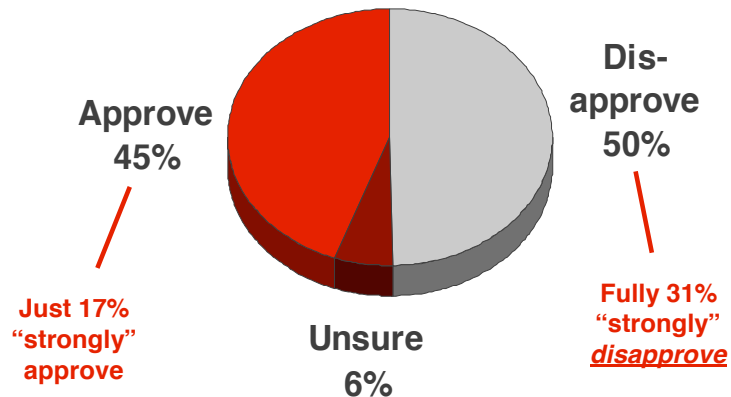


Bottom Line

among all voters

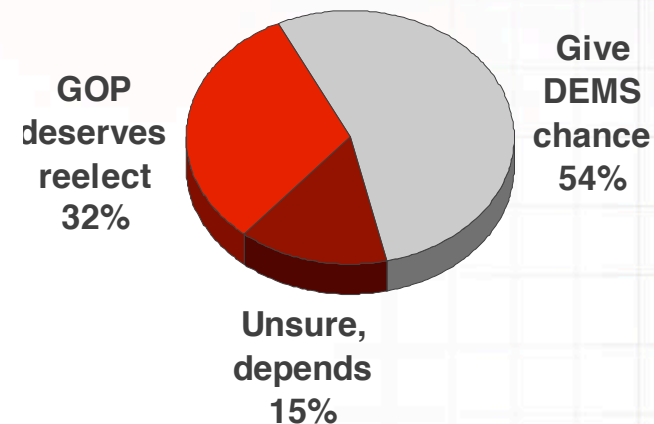
- GOP job approval is below 50% and soft in relative intensity
- While elections are decided between actual, concrete candidates, in principle the electorate is ready to give the “right” Democrats a chance to do better

Overall job approval of Republicans in Texas state government



Deserves re-elect?

"Do you generally think that Republican elected officials in Texas have performed their jobs well enough to deserve reelection to their offices, or do you think it's time to give Democrats the chance to do better?"

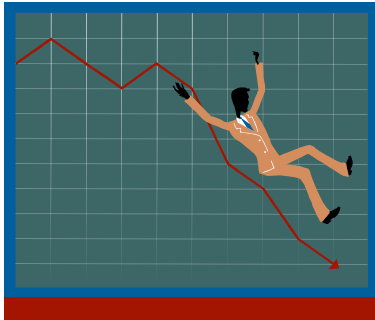


Segmenting the electorate

- Using ideology & partisanship, five key voting blocs emerge
 - Enduring Republicans—(long term, unchanged GOP ID)
 - 21% of overall electorate; most conservative ideologically, beginning with social issues, then fiscal ones; skew older in age
 - Emerging Republicans—(moving toward GOP, but ID not solid)
 - 10% of overall electorate; still broadly conservative, but less intensely so; skew female, younger, upper-income
 - Critical Middle—(not in either camp solidly)
 - 25% of overall electorate; heavily male, under age 50, self-described moderate and/or Independent; focused on fiscal rather than social issues
 - Emerging Democrats—(moving toward DEM, but ID not solid)
 - 17% of overall electorate; economically liberal; skew younger, African-American, female
 - Enduring Democrats—(long term, unchanged DEM ID)
 - 27% of overall electorate; heavily skew older, female, liberal; lower-income, pro-choice

ENDURING GOP “distinctives”

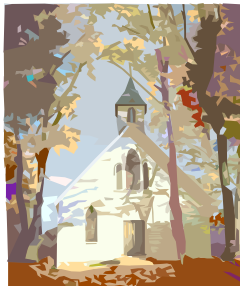
The monied set suffers too?



Tough financial year; highest pct in the financial services industry (14%) and lowest (43%) to say they will be “better off” next yr, yet still voice the fewest complaints about taxes despite highest home values

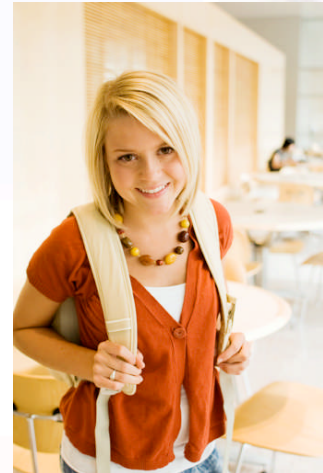
Immigration

Highest pct (21%) tagging illegal immigration as state’s top issue



Faith

Most frequent church attendees; 52% worship 4+ times each month



Kids are us?

Highest pct (42%) with children under 18 in the household; by far the best educated (59% college grads), yet investment in public education, more affordable college tuition and child healthcare access are comparatively lower-rated priorities

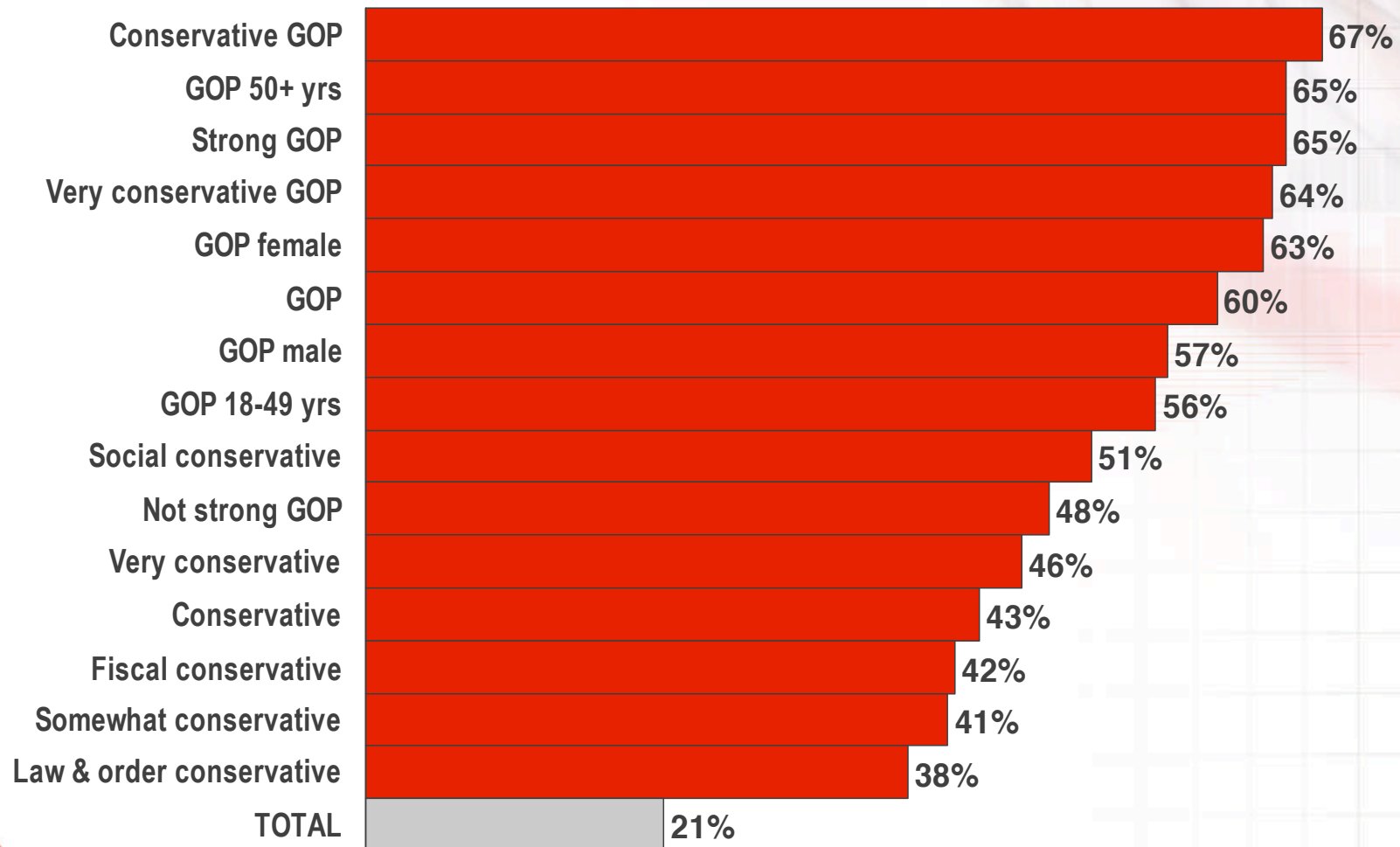
Faithful forever

Fidelity to President Bush is in their DNA: 84% still hold favorable impression of George W. Bush; their loyalty even extends to Bush’s key operative Karl Rove, who maintains a 3-to-1 favorable to unfavorable image



ENDURING GOP profile

select categories w/above-average likelihood of being an “Enduring GOP” voter



EMERGING GOP “distinctives”

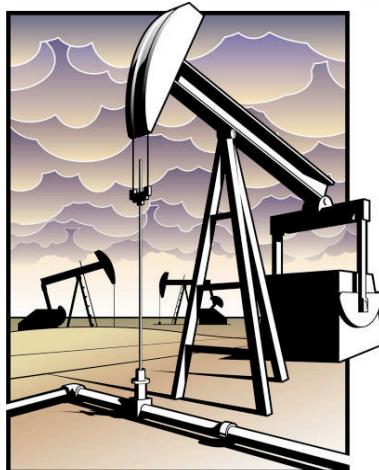
Webheads



One-in four (24%) say they get most news & information from the Internet, as many as use cable news like FOX (24%)

Drill now, here

Highest pct (52%) saying oil & gas industry is most important to Texas economic future



Empty nests

Category dominated by young couples w/o children and retirees whose children are grown

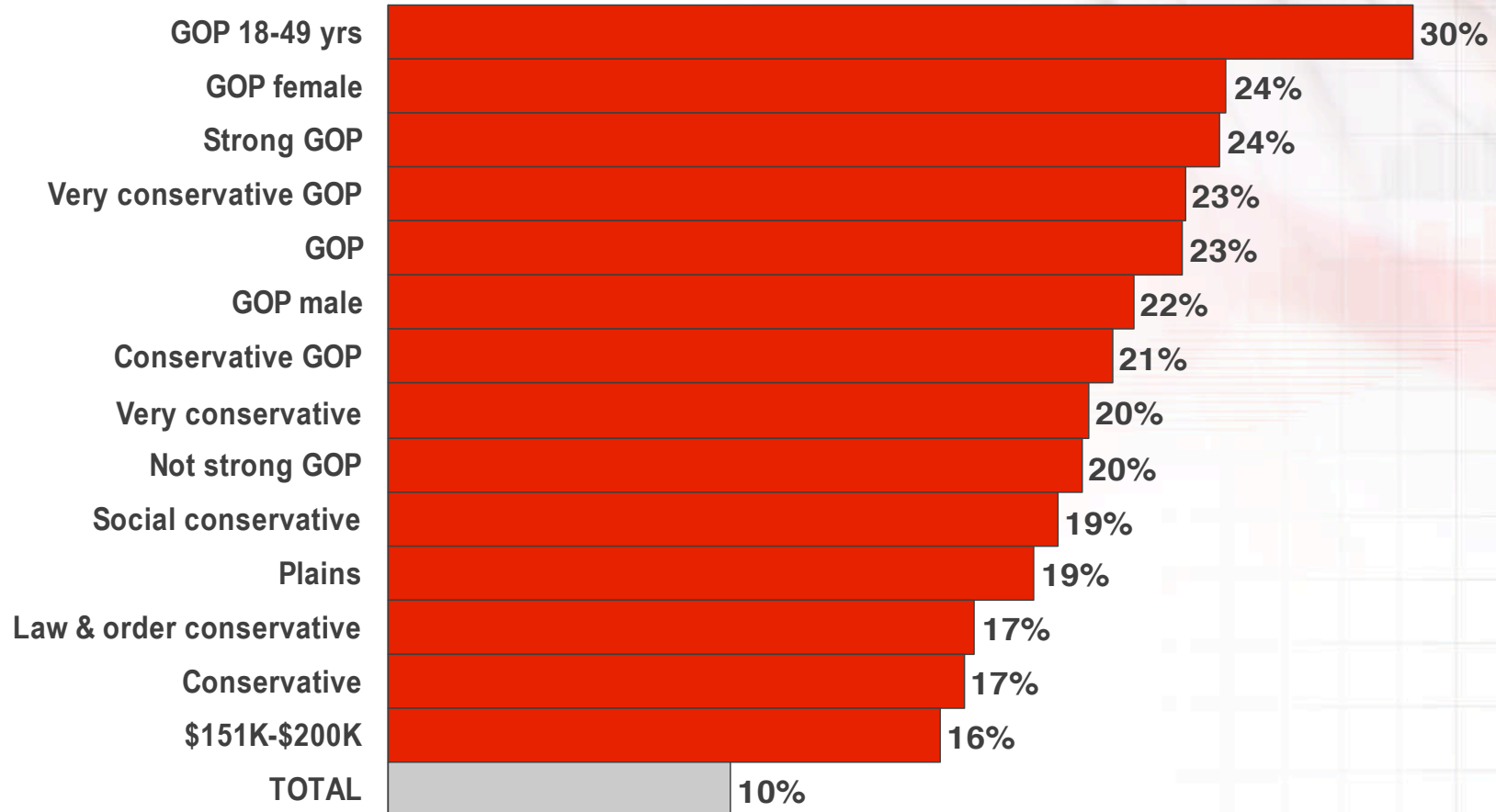


Suburbia

Most live in the suburbs (43%), especially around Dallas; Central Corridor is also a common habitat

EMERGING GOP profile

select categories w/above-average likelihood of being an “Emerging GOP” voter



Enduring and Emerging Republicans have many similarities

- Both are planning to vote for a Republican governor and state representative in the next election
- Both hold a favorable impression of Republican elected officials in Texas and say they approve of Republican job performance
- Both agree that the Republicans better understand how to strengthen and grow the economy
- BUT, there are differences . . . so read on . . .



DEMOGRAPHICALLY two breeds of GOP

part 1 of 2

	Enduring GOP	margin	Emerging GOP
College grad	59%	15	44%
Weekly churchgoer	52%	9	43%
Family better off financially next year	43%	13	56%
Child in the household	42%	22	20%
Get most news from cable, FOX	35%	11	24%
Suburban resident	27%	16	43%
Get most news from Internet	11%	13	24%

IDEOLOGICALLY two breeds of GOP

part 2 of 2

	Enduring GOP	margin	Emerging GOP
Self-described conservative	87%	15	72%
Favorable President Bush	84%	15	69%
Strongly prefer govt. spending cuts	67%	25	42%
GOP: "governs efficiently/effectively"	63%	12	51%
GOP: "pragmatic & practical"	59%	14	45%
GOP: "party of the future"	54%	9	45%
GOP: "professional"	50%	11	39%
GOP: "smart"	41%	13	28%
Illegal immigration top priority	38%	16	22%
Self-described fiscal conservative	38%	10	28%
Taxes "much too high"	23%	14	37%
Development is key industry	14%	12	2%
Self-described moderate	12%	16	28%

EMERGING DEM “distinctives”



Moderate about money

48% say they are political moderates, defining that mostly in fiscal and economic terms rather than on the basis of social or justice issues

Young and urban



88% urban;
mean age of 46;
39% under 40

Educated

62% are college grads



Catholic and church-going

More Catholic (24%)
than any other
category; 50%
attend some church
on weekly basis



ENDURING DEM “distinctives”

Liberal



46% say they are social moderates or some type of liberal; more than half of the liberals say they are economic rather than social or justice liberals

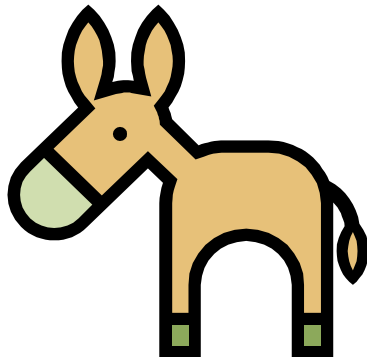
Pro-choice females

56% are pro-choice, more than any other category, including Emerging DEMs; 62% are women



Partisan

81% describe themselves as “Strong Democrats”



Minorities

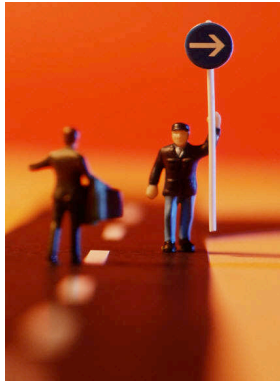
57% are racial or ethnic minorities, divided mainly between Blacks (26%) and African-Americans (25%); five percent say they are of mixed race or ethnicity



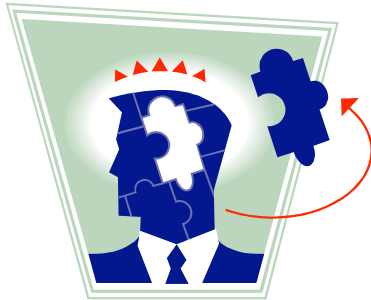
CRITICAL MIDDLE “distinctives”

Middle or muddled?

Most declare themselves to be moderates (51%), but 7% refused to state an opinion about their own political views; those that lean tend to tilt conservative and Republican, but more feel they are migrating to Democrat ID; confused or disenchanted with GOP?



Iconoclasts



Many enjoy being “different,” for example, the one in five (19%) that refuse to be pro-choice or pro-life because the issue is “not important”

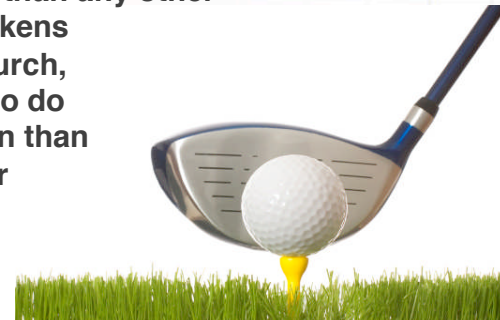
Keeping Austin Weird



Clustered in the Central Corridor, particularly around Austin; 62% are male, most under 50

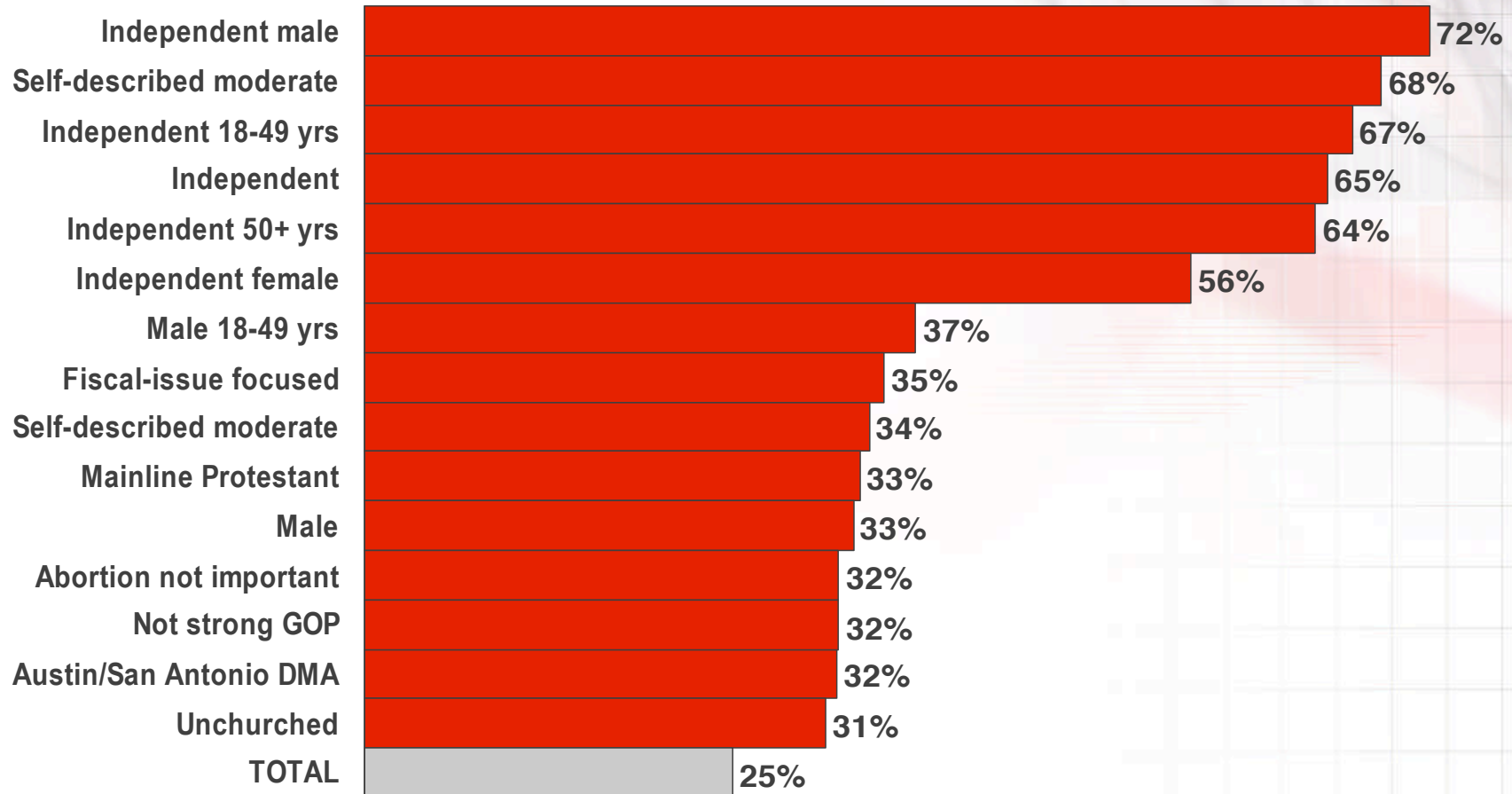
Unchurched

A higher pct (36%) than any other category never darkens the door of any church, and even those who do attend do less often than any Republicans or Democrats



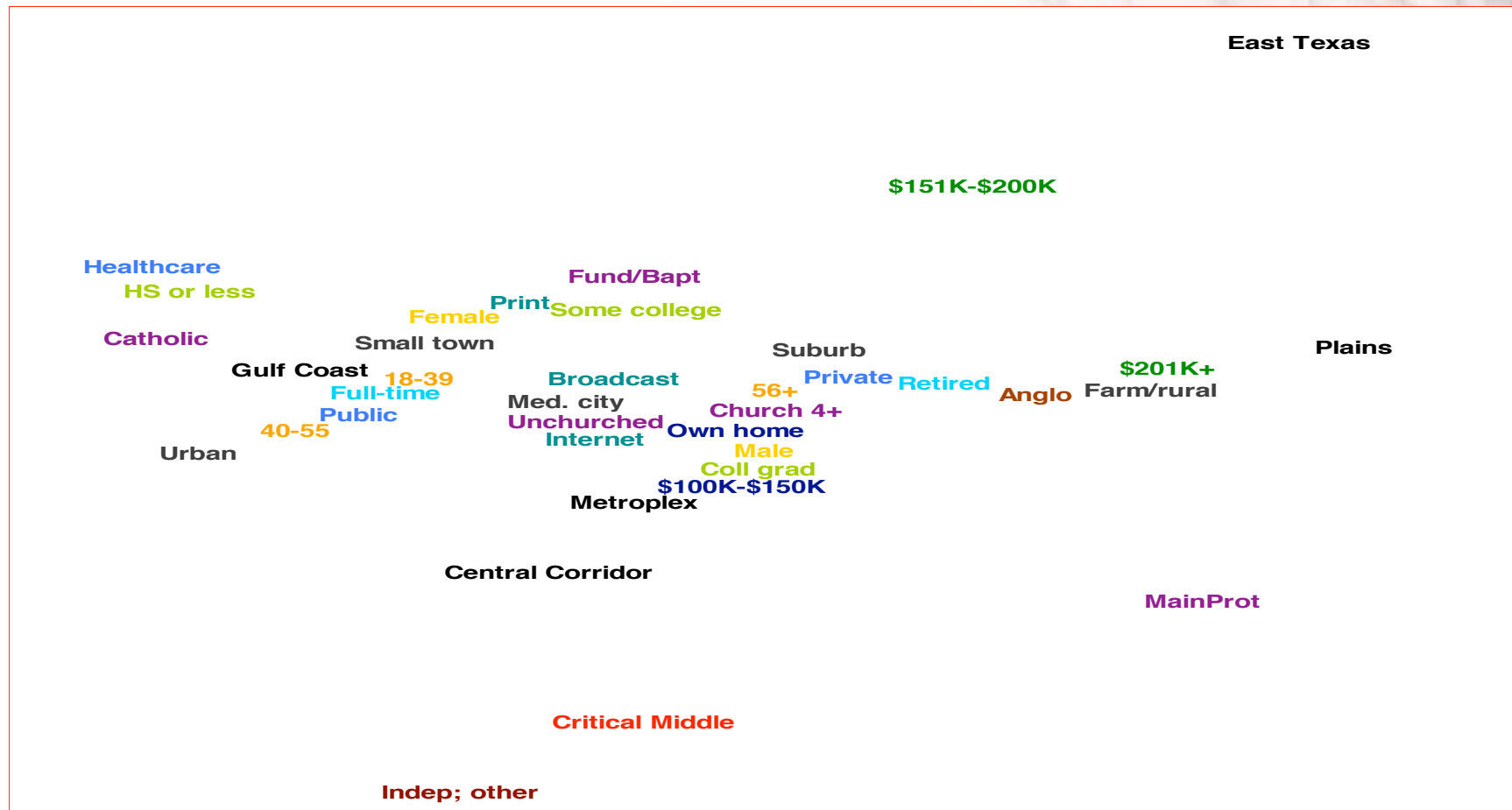
CRITICAL MIDDLE profile

select categories w/above-average likelihood of being a "Critical Middle" voter



Critical Middle

a demographic perceptual map



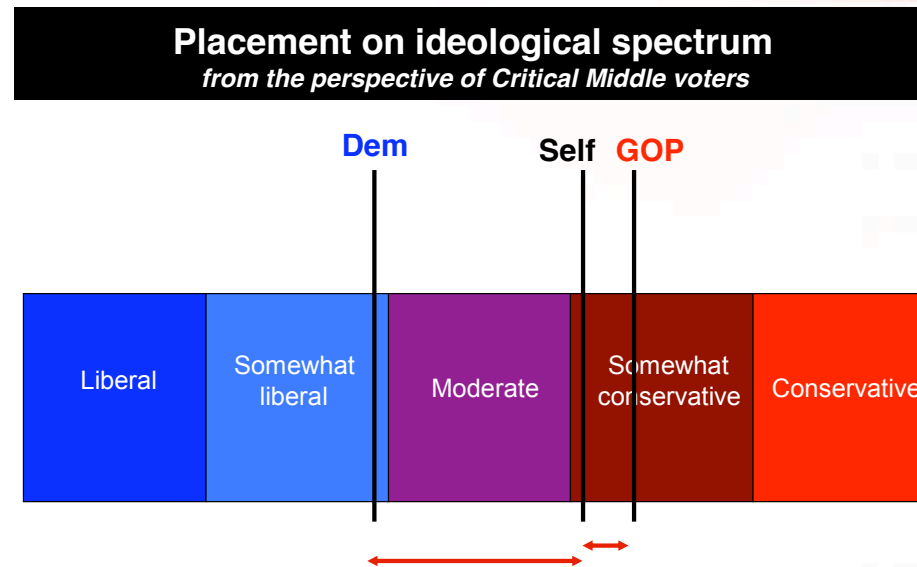
Building a “Minimum Winning Coalition”

- Victory doesn’t result from wishing the rest of the world would agree with you—it requires building a coalition of voters that add up to 50%-plus-one of all ballots cast
- In the context of voter segments identified, this means GOP campaigns **must win at least 80%** of the Critical Middle (and even a sliver of Emerging DEMs)
- This isn’t “optional”—anything less means Republicans lose

Voting Segment	% of total electorate	% of segment GOP must win	Contribution to 50%-plus-one winning coalition
Enduring GOP	21%	100%	21%
Emerging GOP	10%	90%	9%
Critical Middle	25%	80%	20%
Emerging DEM	17%	3%	.5%
	100%	TOTAL	50.5% of ballots cast

IDEOLOGY of the Critical Middle

- Ideologically, Critical Middle voters self-perceive themselves to be just-to-the-right of moderate
 - Less-conservative than the GOP Base, but significantly less liberal than where they see Democrats on the political spectrum
 - Compared to themselves, 34% of Critical Middle voters say the GOP is more conservative, 50% the DEMs more liberal

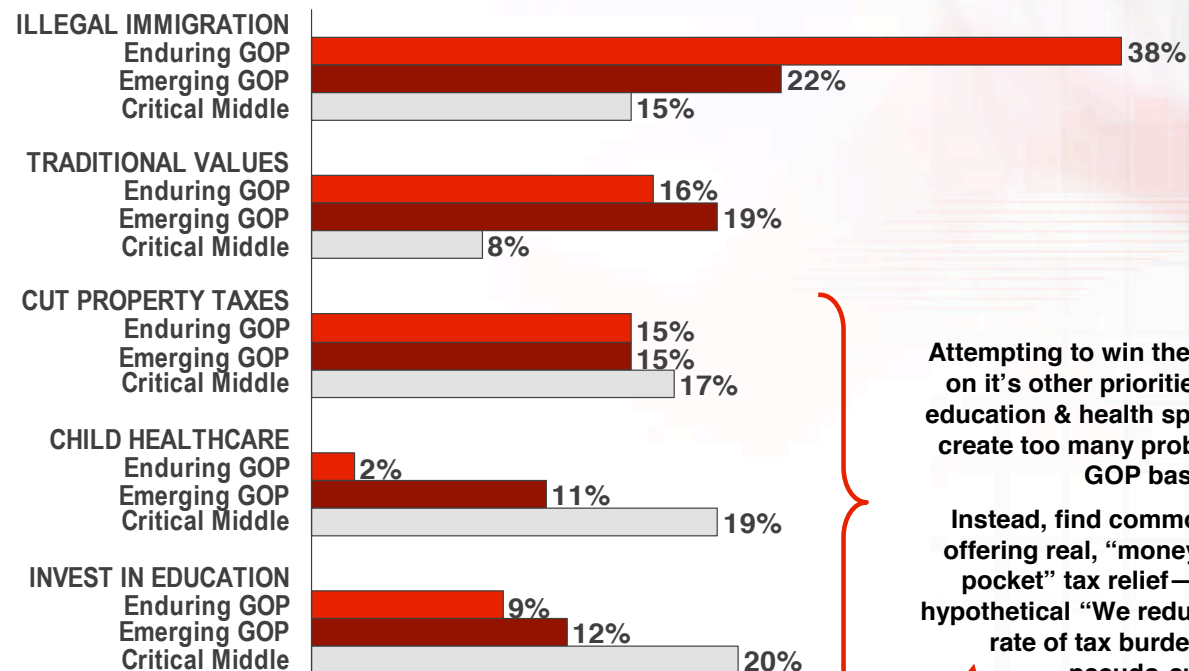


ISSUE AGENDA of the Critical Middle

Highest priority issue

differing agendas between Enduring GOP, Emerging GOP and Critical Middle voters

Illegal immigration is a white-hot topic for the GOP's hard-base... but it weakens in intensity even within the self-identifying Republican coalition, and is well down the scale of Critical Middle concerns (similarly for "traditional values" issues)



Attempting to win the Critical Middle on it's other priorities—increased education & health spending—would create too many problems with the GOP base.

Instead, find common ground by offering real, "money back in your pocket" tax relief—and not just hypothetical "We reduced your future rate of tax burden growth" pseudo-cuts.

In fact, Critical Middle and Emerging GOP voters are significantly more likely than Enduring Republicans to say their current combined tax burden is "much" too high; they also favor spending cuts over spending increases by a vigorous and intense 2:1 margin

Strategic recommendations

part 1 of 5

- Educate the GOP Base re: dangers of TX going the way of CO
 - There is a natural human tendency to resist change until the necessity of having to do so can no longer be avoided
 - Unfortunately in politics (as the GOP saw on the federal level in 2006 and 2008), a realization that the political landscape is shifting and you must adjust often only comes once it's too late; you are now out of power and the road back to electoral success is going to be a much longer, steeper, more difficult climb
 - Grassroots Texas Republicans are firm in their convictions and confident they are right; these admirable attributes cannot be allowed to desensitize our base to the fact that—even in Texas—committed, principled, conservative voters are a minority; a sizeable minority, it is true, but still dependent upon free-floating Independent and less-ideological voters to assure GOP electoral fortunes (and deprive the Democrats of control of state government)
 - Look at what has happened in Colorado over the past eight years; it can happen, and the time to take action and make changes is now, before it does

Strategic recommendations

part 2 of 5

- Appeal to the Critical Middle
 - Yes, these voters are not as conservative as our base might hope... but they do lean to the right, and still perceive Democrats as leaning too far to the left
 - Like it or not, these voters don't care about illegal immigration or traditional values with the same intensity as our base... but taxes and the cost of government can serve as an effective bridge
 - Focus on controlling and reducing government spending and putting more money back in the pockets of hard-working Texans
 - Actually deliver in a way that is concrete to “normal” folks (i.e., a reduction in the rate of future growth of property tax burdens doesn't count)
 - The Critical Middle doesn't care how much more they would be spending on government if it wasn't for Republicans... they want to feel the GOP is saving them money right now

Strategic recommendations

part 3 of 5

- Focus on the economy
 - One hesitates to traffic in hoary political clichés, but it really is the economy (stupid)—more than the base’s issues of illegal immigration or a socially-conservative agenda—that a winning majority of Texas voters care about
 - Satisfy the public on economic terms and you’re likely to hold the power that will allow you to influence other aspects of your agenda; fail to address pocketbook anxieties and eventually you will be on the outside looking in
 - Like national security, Republicans should naturally “own” an issue like stewardship of the economy; the fact that we’re only tied in this regard is extremely alarming, and requires immediate and effective attention
 - GOP opposition to costly Big Government needs to be packaged less ideologically and more practically; explained less by reference to first principles and more by the simple fact that you, the voter, simply can’t afford it any longer, and we’re going to help you control the cost of government (just as you are struggling to control every other expense)
 - Voters who don’t otherwise care to think of themselves as “Republicans” must come to believe that they have more money in their pockets because the GOP holds positions of power in state government

Strategic recommendations

part 4 of 5

- Address the growing GOP-gap with Hispanic & younger voters
 - The GOP cannot long afford to be (“just” or “overwhelmingly”) the party of old White people; there are simply “too many” Hispanics and ever-more young voters to keep winning according to this model alone
 - Governor and then President George W. Bush demonstrated what is possible for a Republican candidate to win among Hispanics—but to ever return to those types of margins, we need to come to grips with the polarizing rhetoric and “Us vs. Them” attitude that has been adopted by some members of our political base
 - Hispanic voters won’t affiliate with the GOP simply because we insist they really have nothing to complain about and “should” since they are socially conservative too; we need to actually listen to their concerns, tone down the rhetoric and attitude, find common ground on immigration/assimilation, and take concrete steps to make them feel welcome
 - Younger voters value freedom and tolerance; while Republicans oppose the “Big” government of liberals, too often (in the eyes of the young) we turn-around and push for “Strict & Harsh” government; “less” government, in both the economic and social realms, is more likely to appeal to voters under age 30

Strategic recommendations

part 5 of 5

- Outside of our core base, voters have come to believe that Republicans are more interested in ruling Texas than governing it
 - “Governing” requires humility, a demonstrated concern for the common good, independence from special-interest influence and a focus on issues relevant to voters’ actual lives
 - Instead we’re perceived to be merely “ruling”—arrogant, corrupted, closed to outsiders, indifferent to average economic anxieties and principally concerned with pushing our own parochial agenda
 - However initially painful, Republicans must push a “reform” agenda
 - “Zero tolerance” on unethical behavior—not merely just not getting caught or having wrong-doing proven; rather, self-imposing rules that (even if they interrupt “business as usual”) allow the GOP to own the issue of “clean government”
 - “Transparency” (e.g. placing documents on-line; searchable video-databases of legislative hearings)—allows sunshine in and appeals to young, Internet-savvy voters
 - “Truth in Taxation”—no more tax increases via hidden appraisal creep; if local entities want more money, let them actually raise rates; require all bond questions appear on November general election ballots
 - “Disclosure”—as in Minnesota, require governmental agencies and entities disclosure the amount of money and time spent lobbying other parts of government