

December 15, 2005

## RT Strategies Analysis

### Bush's "Recovery"

The RT Strategies/Cook Political Report Poll in November was the first to identify that Bush's approval rating had risen above 40% again, after the period following the Katrina-Libby-Miers-gas prices string of bad news dropped Bush approval ratings into the mid-30s. Since then other national polls confirm that Bush scores have improved by a net double digits and approval is back above the 40% level:

The most recent RT Strategies/Cook Political Report Poll conducted December 8-11, 2005, confirms that Bush has recovered, with 42% approve-55% disapprove. Our feeling is that Bush has recovered his standing only with his base supporters, but has a long way to go before extending his appeal beyond that Republican base.

| Poll                                      | Date                 | Approve      | Disapprove   | Spread        |
|---|----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| <b>RCP Average</b>                        | <b>12/5 - 12/11</b>  | <b>42.5%</b> | <b>55.5%</b> | <b>-13.0%</b> |
| <a href="#">CNN/USA Today/Gallup</a>      | 12/9 - 12/11         | 42%          | 55%          | -13%          |
| <b><a href="#">Cook/RT Strategies</a></b> | <b>12/8 - 12/11</b>  | <b>42%</b>   | <b>55%</b>   | <b>-13%</b>   |
| <a href="#">AP-Ipsos</a>                  | 12/5 - 12/7          | 42%          | 57%          | -15%          |
| <a href="#">CNN/USA Today/Gallup</a>      | 12/5 - 12/8          | 43%          | 52%          | -9%           |
| <a href="#">CBS News/NY Times</a>         | 12/2 - 12/6          | 40%          | 53%          | -13%          |
| <a href="#">FOX News</a>                  | 11/29 - 11/30        | 42%          | 48%          | -6%           |
| <a href="#">Gallup</a>                    | 11/17 - 11/20        | 38%          | 57%          | -19%          |
| <b><a href="#">Cook/RT Strategies</a></b> | <b>11/17 - 11/20</b> | <b>41%</b>   | <b>52%</b>   | <b>-11%</b>   |
| <a href="#">CNN/USA Today/Gallup</a>      | 11/11 - 11/13        | 37%          | 60%          | -23%          |
| <a href="#">FOX News</a>                  | 11/8 - 11/9          | 36%          | 53%          | -17%          |
| <a href="#">AP-Ipsos</a>                  | 11/7 - 11/9          | 37%          | 61%          | -24%          |

- Among Independents, 31% approve, 67% disapprove.
- Among Moderates, 30%-66%.
- Among women, 37%-60%, and 18-34 year olds, 36%-61%.
- Even among whites, 46% approve and 51% disapprove, a remarkably poor showing among whites for a Republican President.

Looking at intensely held feelings, overall strong disapproval (43%) far outstrips strong approval (27%), with 70%+ strong disapproval among Dems 70%, liberals 72%, non-whites (74%).

Close to half or more of some large demographic groups strongly disapprove: women (48% strong disapprove), moderates (51% strong disapprove), Independents (49% strong disapprove), urban (54% strong disapprove). With that kind of implacable opposition even among swing groups and large demographic groups, the odds are unlikely that Bush will improve dramatically from his base score around 40% approval.

Three years out from 2008, the GOP has 4 big deficits to overcome:

Bush job approval is minus 13 (55% DISapprove-42% approve);  
Congressional Party Control Preference is minus 11 (49% Dem-38% Rep);  
Generic Presidential 2008 ballot is minus 13 (45% Dem-32% Rep).  
Overall party ID with leaners is minus 8 (46% Dem-38% Rep).

The Democratic Party has to be rated the presumptive favorite for the time being for this cycle, in 2006 and 2008, based on the consistency of these findings. It confirms what political scientists have always known, that when a party in power is not nominating its vice president in the next election, the out party has a 5-point advantage.

### **Looking Ahead to 2008**

1. The Democratic coalition is cohesive. The Republican coalition is showing some wear and tear.

32% of adults vote Republican in the 2008 generic Presidential ballot, far below the roughly 40% Republican base; party cohesion for the Democrats (45% on the generic 2008 Presidential ballot) is strong.

That's mostly because Democrats are more loyal right now. Among Democrats with leaners 84% vote Dem on the generic 2008 Presidential ballot, while only 75% of Republicans with leaners are loyal at this time.

Outside the loyalist partisan groups, the groups in the middle lean strongly Democrat at this time on the generic 2008 Presidential vote. Independents and moderates lean strongly Democratic, for example. Among all adults we see a 13-point Dem advantage overall (45%-32%); but among Independents it's 23 points (44-21) and among Moderates, 33 points (51-18).

Among some Democratic base groups it's a landslide.

- Among women it's a 21-point gap (49-28), even though it's close to a tie among men (41-37).
- Among non-whites it's 76-13, but among whites it's 38-37.
- In urban areas it's a strong Dem majority (57-24), but it's 42-36 in suburban areas and 37-34 in rural areas.

2. When it comes to the 2008 Democratic nomination, Clinton gets as much vote (33%) as Kerry (17%) plus Edwards (15%). The rest are in single digits.

Clinton gets 39% of women Dems/leaners, and leads among Dem/leaner men (25%, vs. 18% Kerry and 12% Edwards). Clinton gets 45% of non-white Dem/leaners.

Among Dem/leaners, Clinton has some real demographic core groups (urban, non-white, women), but at the same time she is not defined by ideology—she does as well with non-liberals (32%) as she does with liberals (34%) and the same with strong pro-choicers (32%) as among non-strong-pro-choicers (34%). She cuts across all the ideological barriers.

Her main opponents combined don't match her overall and also lack an obvious demographic or ideological base of support—Kerry runs only marginally better among Dem/leaners in the Northeast than elsewhere, and Edwards does better with women than with men and shows surprising strength (at least relative to Kerry) in union households. Neither has a real foundation.

To understand the Kerry base and the Edwards base, we analyzed what would happen if Clinton did not run. The big finding is that neither of these two and no one else is a big beneficiary of Clinton dropping out—Kerry gets only 28%, Edwards 23% in a field without Clinton.

Kerry's base is traditional Democrats, the less-well-educated and minorities among Dems/leaners, while Edward's opportunity is among union households, women and those with at least some college experience.

Finally we tried to understand the broad direction Dems/leaners want to take in choosing their 2008 nominee by identifying the type of nominee they'd support in 2008:

- Strong liberal nominee (29%)
- More electable, less strong liberal (31%)
- Non-liberal, non-Northeastern moderate (31%)

Clinton dominates among supporters of all three types of potential 2008 Dem nominee: Clinton wins 33% overall, 42% among supporters of a strong liberal candidate in 2008, 33% among those for an electable liberal, 28% among those for a non-Northeastern non-liberal.

Among the also-rans to Clinton, Kerry only does well among those seeking a real liberal (25% Kerry, vs. 8% Edwards). Edwards beats Kerry among others (21% Edwards-10% Kerry among those seeking an electable liberal, and 16% Edwards-13% Kerry among those seeking a non-Northeastern non-liberal.).

Throw Clinton out, and Kerry wins with those seeking a traditional liberal (43%-15%), while Edwards wins among those seeking an electable liberal (34% Edwards-19% Kerry) and they split the vote among those seeking a non-liberal non-Northeastern (24% Kerry – 21% Edwards), with other candidates collecting a lot of that vote.

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3. When it comes to the Republican nomination, McCain and Giuliani are locked in an absolute dead-heat tie 25%-25% (just between us, they actually get precisely the same number of bodies, 95 to 95 among 380 Republicans and leaners—that's how close it is). They are also tied, 25%-25% among hard-core Republican primary voters as well. Gingrich is at 12% among Reps/leans and 11% among hardcore Rep primary voters.

McCain wins Rep/lean men (30% McCain-25% Giuliani) while Giuliani wins women (24% Giuliani-19% McCain).

Among Reps/leans, McCain wins the West (33% McCain-24% Giuliani), they are tied in the South (where Gingrich claims 17% to 23% McCain and 22% for Giuliani) and Giuliani holds a narrow advantage over McCain in the Northeast and Midwest.

McCain does very well among Independents we find in the larger group of Republicans and Independents who lean Republican (McCain leads 37%-28% over Giuliani among Independent leaners) and among the Rep/lean moderate/liberals (35%-27%), and especially among the small minority of Reps/leaners who disapprove of Bush's performance (40%-24%).

If Giuliani did not run, no one else makes a move on McCain—no one else moves into double digits with Giuliani out, and McCain leads 2-to-1 over Gingrich (30%-16%) with Giuliani out. Meanwhile, McCain captures all the non-traditional, non-conservative Republicans who he otherwise splits with Giuliani. For example, McCain wins moderate/liberal Republicans 4-to-1 (44% McCain-10% Gingrich, with no other candidate in double digits).

With Giuliani out, McCain easily wins the Northeast (32%-9% over Gingrich, with 12% Pataki) and West (40%-15%, with the Mormon, Mitt Romney 10%, in the Mormon-heavy West), while both McCain and Gingrich struggle in the Midwest (21%-13%) and are in a real dog-fight in the South (26% McCain-23% Gingrich and 12% Frist).



Finally, we tried to understand the Republican factions by describing three potential 2008 nominees, and we found:

Again, things divide evenly among Reps/leaners, with

- 33% for nominating a strong social conservative--especially among those who are very conservative (55%) and strongly pro-life (50%) in the Midwest (40%) and the South (36%), and women (38%).
- 30% for tax/business conservatives—especially mod/lib (45%), the tiny minority who disapprove of Bush performance (57%), Independents among Rep/leaners (39%), and the tax/business conservative approach is also slightly stronger than average among men and younger Rep/leaners. If you are not very conservative (38%) and not pro-life (40%), this kind of nominee appeals to you.
- 29% for neo-conservatives—especially among Rep/leaners 65 and older (39%), men (33%) and the West (32%).

Giuliani easily wins among the middle group of tax/business conservatives—33% Giuliani to 24% McCain. McCain outpoints Giuliani among neocons 28%-25%, and among social issues conservatives, 21% McCain-19% Giuliani.

The traditional tax-and-business Republican conservatives have settled on Giuliani as their candidate for now, but the two types of movement conservative Republican groups—the social issues conservatives and the neocon-national security conservatives—have not yet settled on a candidate.

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## The Alito Nomination: Who Cares if He Moves the Court to the Right?

Some people say you have to present Alito as just a competent and experience judge because ideological discussions would be a negative for him. Those people are wrong.

RT-1. As you may know, to replace U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, President Bush has nominated Judge Samuel Alito, who has 15 years of experience on the federal courts. Alito is considered a conservative in his views while O'Connor is considered a moderate who has been a swing vote on some key issues.

Does hearing that Alito would make the Supreme Court more conservative make you feel MORE likely, or LESS likely, to support the choice of Judge Alito for the Supreme Court, or does hearing that make no difference to you? **(IF MORE LIKELY/LESS LIKELY, ASK:)** Is that much (MORE LIKELY/LESS LIKELY), or only somewhat? **(IF NOT SURE/REFUSED/MAKES NO DIFFERENCE, ASK:)** Well, does hearing that make you lean toward being more likely or less likely to support Alito?

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Total More Likely</b> .....               | <b>32</b> |
| Makes no difference/not lean either way..... | 35        |
| <b>Total Less Likely</b> .....               | <b>29</b> |
| -----  | -----     |
| Not sure.....                                | 3         |

For social conservatives, the poll is an interesting laboratory test. The 1000 adults represent how the public would react *if the whole discussion on Alito focused on Alito as a conservative substituting for the moderate O'Connor shifting the balance of the Court.*

The case could be made that two-thirds of the country either are more likely to support Alito because he will move the Court to the right, or it makes no difference to them. Positive reaction on balance to Alito as a force moving the Court to the right is strong in the suburbs and even strong in rural areas.

Among the Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents who would like to see Republicans nominate a social issues conservative in 2008, 72% would be more likely to support Alito when they hear he would move the Supreme Court to the right. Among tax and business conservatives, only 44% would be more likely to support Alito on those grounds, and 56% of neoconservative-national security Republicans and Republican-leaners feel that way.