

The Pulse of Politics By Louis Harris: The State of the Republican Party

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According to the latest Harris Poll, the Republicans are a long way from convincing the American people that it is time to return the GOP back to power in Washington.

The public may have serious doubts and reservations about the Democrats, but the Republicans simply are not seen as the alternative either in terms of the stands the GOP has taken or the leaders who are thought to be dominant in today's national Republican Party.

Adding to the roster of Republican woes is the fact that the memory of President George W. Bush and the state of the economy he left as part of his legacy still sticks in the craw of Americans.

When asked whom they most blame for the bad state of the economy, former President Bush tops the list, singled out by 31%. Wall Street, a major contributor of funds to the Republican Party, comes in second as most blamed by 25%.

Then, much further down the blame list, are Democrats in Congress (16%) and President Obama (14%). Republicans in Congress finish next at 9%, with Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke finishing last at 4%.

This result is significant because there is little doubt that whoever is perceived as "owning" the state of the economy is likely to suffer both next November and again in the presidential contest in 2012.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,344 adults surveyed online between March 10 and 12, 2010 by Harris Interactive.

We also asked who, among eight leading GOP figures, could be described as the most powerful person in the Republican Party.

Among Republicans, former Governor Mitt Romney heads the list but with a rather paltry 14% who named him.

He is followed by the 2008 GOP Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin at 13% and then her running mate, John McCain, at 11%. Former Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich comes next at a 6%.

Trailing in the rear are Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell and former Vice President Dick Cheney both at 4%, followed by House Republican leader John Boehner at 3%.

The articulate Republican whip of the House, Eric Cantor, amassed a lonely 1% among his fellow Republicans. But 34% of Republicans are not sure who the most powerful person in their party is.

Apart from the overwhelming reality that the Republican Party is a political force in a desperate search for a leader, the most fascinating result centers on the poor showing of Dick Cheney.

We asked directly if people would feel more inclined to vote Republican, "if former Vice President Dick Cheney became the most powerful force in the Republican Party."

One-quarter (26%) of Republicans said they would be more likely to vote Republican. But a sizable majority said neither more nor less likely to vote Republican (57%), while 17% said less likely to vote for the GOP.

Despite the senior status of Cheney among Republicans and the warm reception given him at a recent meeting of conservatives, it is obvious that most Republicans are not waiting with baited breath for a big leadership comeback by the former Vice President.

Put bluntly, the Republican Party is in dire need of another Ronald Reagan, as well as some positive stands on pivotal issues that its rank-and-file might be inspired by.

Otherwise, the angry Tea Party movement is likely to coalesce behind Sarah Palin in a third party move that would cost all chances of a GOP comeback. It could also place doubt in the ability of the Republican Party, even in two way races, to gain seats in the House this fall.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between March 10 and 12, 2010 among 2,344 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates.

These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population.

Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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