



“The Enthusiasm Gap: It’s going to be a Republican Year?”

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No one has a crystal ball, but prospects are looking good for Republicans. Indeed, at this stage of the 2010 electoral cycle, self-identified Republican voters are much more enthusiastic about voting than Democrats. In numeric terms, Republicans hold a 19 point advantage over Democrats and a 33 point advantage over Independents (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Voter Enthusiasm¹ by Party ID

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
August, 2006	62%	59%	49%
August, 2010	60%	79%	46%
Difference	-2%	+20%	-3%

Source: Ipsos Public Affairs 2006, 2010

This is a marked improvement compared to 2006, when only 59% of Republicans were enthusiastic about voting. Interestingly enough, neither Democrats nor Independents show much change in enthusiasm between 2006 and 2010.

What does this mean in practical terms?

First, Republicans will have a much easier time mobilizing their base than Democrats. Indeed, ‘get out the vote’ and other grass roots campaigns are always made easier when the base is positively predisposed.

Second, greater voter enthusiasm, in turn, should translate itself into Republican electoral success vis-à-vis Democrats. At this point, we are not ready to make a final call on Congress, though all indicators do suggest that the Republicans will make large gains in both the House and Senate this year. In our next edition of Ipsos Pulse, we will detail our preliminary estimates for the House.

Some caveats to this overall trend are in order.

¹ We calculate ‘voter enthusiasm’ using a summated scale which includes voting in the last election, a 10-point likelihood to vote question, and a general interest in the election question. This summated index is an important though not exclusive input into our Ipsos likely voter model.



Democrats will most probably be able to reduce their enthusiasm gap with Republicans through their own ‘get out the vote’ initiatives. We must remember that any poll result is merely a snapshot in time and, therefore, is subject to the vagaries of the stochastic process. Any final estimate should leave room for the Democrats making a final push.

There is also some evidence that Republicans overstate their enthusiasm versus Democrats. For instance, Democrats were able to build large leads in the House in 2006 and 2008, even though their relative levels of enthusiasm were quite comparable to Republicans (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Comparison of Enthusiasm Gap and Seat Advantage

	Ipsos Enthusiasm Gap	Seat Advantage in House
2006	3+ Democrats	31+ Democrat
2008	2+ Republican	75+ Democrat

Source: Ipsos 2006, 2008

Here the primary takeaway is that Republicans may declare that they are more enthusiastic about voting, but this does not necessarily translate into numbers on Election Day.

In our opinion, there are three possible reasons for this ‘enthusiasm-performance miss-fit’. First, it might be that Republicans must go out in larger numbers because there are less of them than Democrats. Second, Republicans might ‘talk a good game’ but, in the end, might not show up at the polls on Election Day. And third, ‘enthusiastic Republicans’ probably live in primarily Republican districts which add to the overall vote margins but does not necessarily help in picking up additional seats.

Our final estimates should consider these discrepancies.

Third, some exogenous shock, such as strong jobs numbers or a strong up-tick in economic indicators, might tip the enthusiasm balance back to the Democrats. Based on all economic projections however, we think such a possibility remote and it would likely be too late in the game to significantly change the voter calculus in any case.

Net Net

This will be a Republican year. However, in the final tally, our take is that there will neither be the complete massacre that Conservative bloggers and pundits portend, nor the miracle which Progressives so wish for. A safe bet is probably the average of these two sentiments which is still quite good for the GOP.