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## It's All Politics

For Americans, it is an article of faith that politics is the enemy of problem-solving. Why can't we deal with the deficit? Politics gets in the way. Why can't we do something about climate change? Too much politics. It's why voters are often attracted to non-politicians like Ross Perot or Colin Powell. They can put politics aside and just fix what's wrong.

Nothing makes the case that politics gets in the way better than the current immigration crisis. There's clearly a risk in failing to act. But for both Republicans and Democrats, taking action may be the greater political risk.

Three billionaires of different political persuasions recently lamented the political impasse in an article on *The New York Times* op-ed page. Sheldon Adelson, Warren E. Buffett, and Bill Gates wrote, "We could without doubt come together to draft [an immigration reform] bill acceptable to each of us... You don't have to agree on everything in order to cooperate on matters about which you are reasonably close to agreement." So why can't Washington do it? The authors blame "the current stalemate—in which greater pride is attached to thwarting the opposition than to advancing the nation's interests." In other words, politics.

Right now, President Obama is getting most of the blame for the border crisis. In a poll taken by *Investors Business Daily*, Americans endorse the view that "Obama Administration policies are

causing the current immigration crisis," 59% to 39%. This despite the fact that the public supports Obama's call for immigration reform. In fact, anti-immigrant sentiment has declined substantially in recent years. Growing numbers say immigrants

contribute to the country rather than cause problems (*New York Times* poll), strengthen rather than weaken the U.S. (*Wall Street Journal-NBC News* poll) and, if they are undocumented, should be legalized rather than deported (CNN poll).

Republicans are willing to take the political risk of doing nothing to advance immigration reform in Congress. Most Senate Republicans voted against immigration reform in 2013, and House Republican leaders refuse to allow a vote. It would very likely pass the House as it did the Senate, with solid Democratic support, plus a minority of Republicans.

Republicans know the current crisis puts President Obama on the defensive. They believe Obama's policies caused the surge of illegal immigrants by proposing what they regard as "amnesty." Republicans are balking at the President's request for \$3.7 billion to beef up border patrols, add new immigration judges, build more detention centers and aid Central American governments in getting word out that unlawful immigrants will be sent home. "We're not giving the President a blank check," House Speaker John Boehner said. "This is a problem of the President's own making."

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solving.**

Republicans claim the President's executive action deferring the deportation of "dreamers" (undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children) has been a "lure" for parents to send unaccompanied children across the border. But the estimated 57,000 illegal immigrants who have entered the U.S. since October are not "dreamers." They are able to stay in the U.S. temporarily, however, under the terms of a law passed in 2008 to combat human trafficking. That law was approved by unanimous consent in both houses of Congress and signed by President George W. Bush. As long as the 2008 law is on the books, President Obama cannot send child immigrants back to their home countries without a legal process that can take up to two years.

Aren't Congressional Republicans worried about a backlash from Latino voters if they refuse to do anything? Not so much. On average, Latinos make up only 5% of eligible voters in this year's most competitive Senate races and fewer than 7% in Republican House districts. In a presidential election, Latinos are a bigger problem for Republicans because they can swing the outcome in several battleground states (FL, CO, NV, and NM). But congressional Republicans care most about their own survival. Their biggest threat would come from angry conservatives, not angry Latinos.

As long as the issue is seen as Obama's problem, Congressional Republicans don't feel much pressure to do anything.

President Obama has threatened to act on his own. He warned Congress, "This is something that you have prioritized—as I have. Don't wait for me to take executive actions." Immigration activists are pressuring the President to grant temporary legal status to the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants who would qualify for legalization in the Senate bill. But that could create a full-scale constitutional conflict. House Republicans are already planning to sue the President for his previous executive actions. An executive action to implement immigration reform would instantly kill any chance that Congress will act on the President's top legislative priority for his second term.

If the President moves to speed the deportation

of child detainees, it will infuriate Latinos and progressive Democrats and discourage them from voting this November. Obama's critics have already labeled this President "deporter-in-chief" for deporting more illegal immigrants than George W. Bush did in eight years. Obama was trying to persuade Republicans that he could be trusted to enforce the law. A Lot of good that did.

The crisis is real, and by doing nothing, President Obama looks hapless and ineffectual. When he failed to visit the border on his trip to Texas this month, Republicans called it Obama's "Katrina moment." It was a thoroughly unfair charge. President Obama has submitted an emergency plan to Congress to deal with the border crisis, and unlike President Bush after Katrina, Obama was avoiding what he called a "photo op." But Obama did enable Texas Gov. Rick Perry to look more engaged and in control than the President.

In a crisis, the President has to take the political risk of acting decisively, even if it creates new problems. Republicans see no political advantage in getting President Obama off the hook. Sarah Palin imagines a sinister plot behind the President's inaction. "Opening our borders to a flood of illegal immigrants is deliberate," she wrote on Breitbart.com. "This is his fundamental transformation of America." This crisis confirms the Old America's worst nightmare: Democrats are plotting ways for the New America to take over the country by flooding it with racial, religious and ethnic minorities. It may look like a humanitarian crisis, but, to many in Washington, it's all politics. ■



## No More War

The public's enthusiasm for military adventures overseas has declined dramatically over the past ten years. Gallup has measured public support for each of the last four U.S. military interventions. The polls were taken shortly before the U.S. intervened, while the issue was being debated.

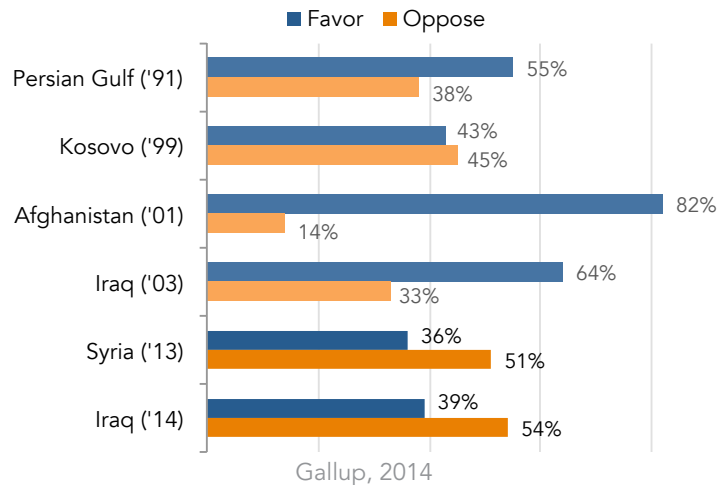
A majority of Americans supported military intervention in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003. The public was split over the bombing campaign in Kosovo in 1999. The U.S. had no vital interests in Kosovo. The Clinton Administration argued for intervention on humanitarian grounds—to end ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. No U.S. ground troops engaged in combat.

Now look at public support for potential U.S. military actions in Syria last year and in Iraq this year.

In both cases, majorities have opposed military intervention. After the government of Syria was found to have used chemical weapons against its own people, the Obama Administration proposed a U.S. military strike to punish the Assad regime. Because of public opposition, Congress refused to authorize military action.

The same thing is happening now in Iraq. Even though the U.S. is allied with the Iraqi government and the Islamic radicals are hostile to the U.S., most Americans don't want to see this country get involved again. After spending \$1.7 trillion and losing nearly 4,500 American lives, Americans have done enough.

### Support for Proposed U.S. Military Intervention



## The Iowa Problem

When Howard Dean ran for the 2004 Democratic nomination for President, he had to contend with a shocking revelation: Iowans do not take kindly to criticism of their revered institution. On a radio broadcast four years earlier, he had criticized the Iowa caucuses, saying they were "dominated by the special interests" who "represent the extremes." Dean came in third in Iowa.

But it must be said: Dean was right about the Iowa caucuses. Many observers idealize the Iowa caucuses as the ultimate expression of democracy: good citizens gathering in their neighborhoods to decide the fate of the country. That's nonsense. Caucuses are public voting. You have to stand up in front of your friends and neighbors and declare your support for Rick Santorum or Michele Bachmann or whoever. Ideological activists love to do that. Normal people don't bother.

Compare turnout in the Iowa GOP caucuses and the New Hampshire GOP primary. In 2008, Iowa had more than twice as many registered voters as New Hampshire (1,630,000 in IA, 756,000 in NH). But turnout in the New Hampshire primary was about twice as large as turnout in the Iowa caucuses (235,000 in NH, 119,000 in IA).

Iowa Democrats are trying to do something about the problem. Party functionaries are looking into allowing absentee ballots and online voting, so voters don't actually have to show up at a two hour meeting on a cold winter night. It is suspected that Hillary Clinton supporters are behind the effort. Clinton did not do well in the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucuses. She came in third behind Barack Obama and John Edwards. Antiwar activists tend to dominate the Iowa Democratic caucuses, and they held Clinton's 2002 vote to authorize the war in Iraq against her. Broader participation could dilute the influence of the activist left.

But there's a big problem: New Hampshire. Under both parties' rules, Iowa has the right to hold the first caucus and New Hampshire the first primary. A caucus is a meeting. A primary is an election. If Democrats turn the Iowa caucuses into something that looks like a primary, New Hampshire would insist on going before Iowa. So what do Iowa Democrats care more about—a more open and democratic process, or keeping their "first in the nation" standing? If you chose (b), you're probably right.



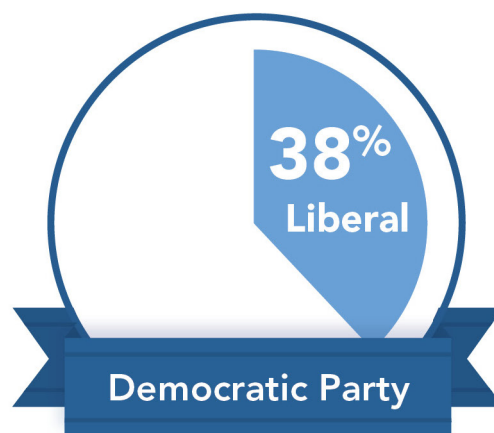
# Not Conservative Enough?



The Republican base is both more concentrated and more ideologically extreme than the Democratic base—and they think Congressional Republicans are too moderate.

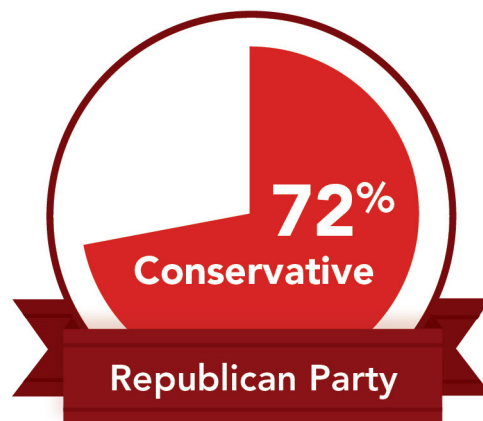
4 in 10 Democrats identify as liberal.

These liberal voters don't see much difference between themselves and Democrats in Congress on an ideological scale—putting Congressional Democrats just right of themselves, as slightly more moderate.



7 in 10 Republicans identify as conservative.

Conservatives place Republicans in Congress a bit to the right of center, but a world away from where they rate their own conservative beliefs.



Nearly **2x more** Republicans call themselves conservative than Democrats who identify as liberal.

1 — Very Liberal

- Liberals
- Congressional Democrats
- Congressional Republicans
- Conservatives

3.9

4.3

.4

5 — Moderate

5.8

1.6

7.4

9 — Very Conservative

**4x the gap**  
between liberals  
and Congressional  
Democrats

