

# Independent Voter Project

## **Wave 8 Summary of Findings Report**

**May 18-25, 2011**



# Background

## Why Study Independents?

Independents are a critical voting bloc in American politics. About one-third of registered voters identify as independents, so swings among this group towards one party or another often determine election outcomes. Significant attitudinal differences exist, however, within the independent bloc. Lumping them together misses important patterns and potential opportunities for both political parties.

## Research Objective

To better understand the political landscape of the country, this effort will build on previous waves of research to understand and track the political attitudes and views of registered voters, particularly Independent and unaffiliated voters.

The following presentation is commissioned and prepared by Altria Client Services and contains data from seven waves of public opinion surveys conducted on the political landscape and the attitudes of self-identified independent voters.



# Methodology

This survey of n=1367 registered voters nationwide was conducted May 18-25, 2011 by trained interviewers at Voter / Consumer Research's phone center in Houston, Texas. The total sample consists of a base sample of n=800 registered voters plus an oversample of 567 self-identified independent voters to reach a total of n=1367. The margin of error for the base and the independent sample is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence interval.

Respondents were selected randomly from a registered voter sample including both cell phone and landline telephone numbers. Cell phone respondents make up approximately 15% percent of the base and independent samples. All respondents confirmed that they are registered to vote.

Quotas were set for gender, age, race and census region to ensure consistency with previous waves and national demographic trends. Party identification for the base sample of registered voters is 36% Democrat, 29% independent, and 33% Republican, and was weighted to align with national party identification and for consistency with previous waves.



# Executive Summary

## Political Environment

- Voters continue to think the nation is headed down the wrong track (60% wrong track, 32% right direction) and since the February 2011 wave are increasingly concerned about the economy (up 4-points to 36%) and government spending and debt (up 5-points to 16%).
- As such, congressional approval has declined, particularly of Republican members (approval down 9-points to 31%). President Obama's approval rating stands at a statistical 1:1 ratio (50% approve, 47% disapprove). This represents a 4-point increase in approval since our 46% tracking low of September 2010.
- With prolonged pessimism about the state of the nation and high disapproval of elected leaders, voters are becoming more polarized on the appropriate role of government.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, data from this wave show that the electorate continues to prefer smaller government (57%) to bigger government (32%) in theory, but divides on whether the government should be doing more to help people (47%) or leave more up to businesses and individuals (49%).



# ...Executive Summary...

## Election 2012

- The 2012 generic presidential and congressional ballots are still largely undetermined. Voters divide their support equally between President Obama and a generic Republican candidate (38% to 38%) and evenly within the margin of error for a generic Democratic and Republican congressional candidate (39% to 41%). On both measures, pure independents remain largely undecided (44% on presidential ballot, 38% on congressional ballot).
- Indecision on the presidential ballot likely stems from the lack of a Republican challenger, or even a decided frontrunner in the Republican primary field. Data from the Republican primary ballot show more primary voters undecided (21%) than supporting any one of the named candidates. Among those who pick a candidate, Mitt Romney leads by 4-points (20%), while Sarah Palin leads by 1-point among Tea Party supporters (17%) and Ron Paul and Romney tie for first (17%) among independents.
- While the congressional ballot remains divided, the measure suggests some shoring up of support for each candidate. Despite declining job approval, support for the generic Republican has increased 6-points among Republican voters since the last wave (84% to 90%). On the other hand, the generic Democratic candidate is showing gains among pure independents who were undecided in the last wave (up 6-points to 25%).



# ...Executive Summary...

## Federal Debt

- Tying deep spending cuts to the debt ceiling vote continues to polarize the electorate. Overall, voters are only slightly more likely to agree that Congress should take more time to responsibly cut spending (49%) than offset increases in the debt ceiling by trillions of dollars in cuts (43%). Not surprisingly, there is significant partisan divide on this measure; majorities of Republicans (59%), Republican-leaning independents (60%) and Tea Party supporters (65%) say debt increases should be balanced by cuts, while majorities of Democratic voters (69%) and Democratic-leaning independents (59%) say equivalent cuts would be too hasty and drastic.
- The electorate is more decided, however, on whether tax increases should be part of the solution to the debt problem. Reinforcing the findings of publicly available opinion data<sup>1</sup>, our data indicate that the majority of the electorate (driven by Democratic identifiers) prefers a combination of tax increases and spending cuts to reduce the debt. By more than 2 to 1, voters are more likely to say that tax increases should be a part of the solution to the debt problem rather than off the table for consideration (62% to 30%). Majorities of Republicans (51%) and Tea Party supporters (55%) take the view that tax increases should be off the table, however, these are not strong majorities. This data suggests that an awareness of the magnitude of the debt might temper the hard-line views of the Republican base.



# ...Executive Summary...

## Public Sector Unions

- Data indicates that voters think taxpayers should have a stronger voice in the debate over public sector union compensation. Two-thirds think taxpayers should have the most say in determining government employee compensation (66%), yet just over one-third (37%) think taxpayers actually have the most say.
- Furthermore, a 56% majority of voters and a decided 64% of pure independents think public sector unions should be stripped of their abilities to contribute to political campaigns. Even a majority (51%) of voters who say they work in the public sector agree that these unions should not contribute to campaigns because it represents a conflict of interest.



# ...Executive Summary

## Corporate Tax Rate

- Voters are largely unaware of the corporate tax rate. Many say they don't know what the rate is (40%), while almost half (48%) think the rate is lower than it actually is.
- This misperception helps shape the prevalent view that corporations do not pay their fair share of taxes (58%). Semantics also play a role in shaping the results of this measure, as more voters think that “businesses” pay the right amount or too much tax (49%) than too little (43%).
- Voters are divided on how to change the corporate tax rate to improve the economy. When asked whether the corporate tax rate should be raised to reduce the debt, or lowered to create and keep jobs in America, voters split 46% to 45%. In part, these results reflect the equal importance of creating jobs and reducing government spending and debt<sup>1</sup>, as well as misperceptions about the actual corporate tax rate. In fact, voters who more accurately identify the corporate tax rate as within the 16% and 35% range largely agree that it should be lowered to create jobs (62%).
- Despite the lack of awareness about the actual corporate tax rate, voters almost universally agree that the rate should be the same for all corporations. This view crosses party lines, with more than 70% of Democratic and Republican voters in agreement that the playing field should be leveled so all corporations pay the same rate.



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## Abbreviation Key

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DEM	Democratic voter/candidate/party
DLI	Democratic-leaning independent
DNK	Do not know
PI	Pure independent
REP	Republican voter/candidate/party
RLI	Republican-leaning independent
TPS	Tea Party supporter

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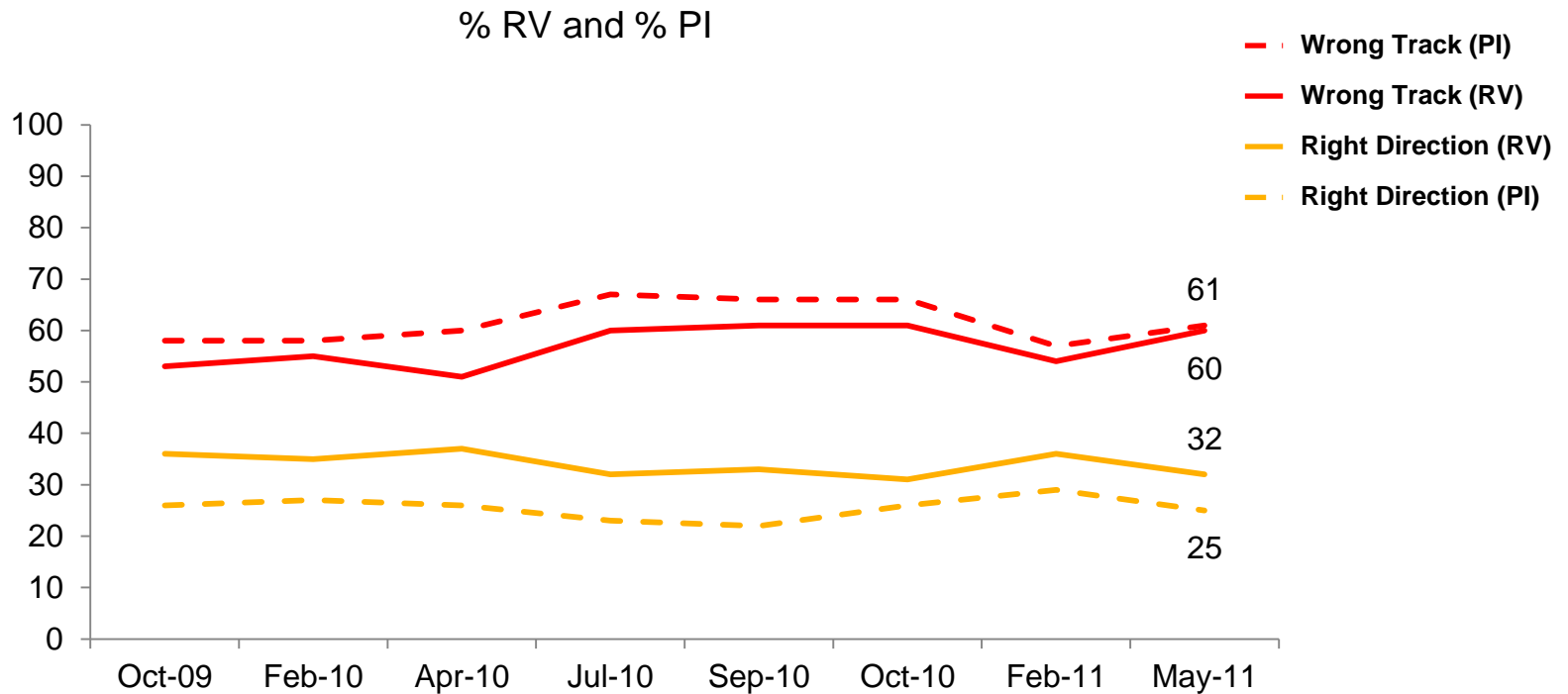
# Section 1 Political Environment



# Pessimism returns to pre-election levels

Q.7 Now thinking more generally about the direction of the country, would you say things in this country are [ROTATE: Heading in the right direction; OR Off on the wrong track]?

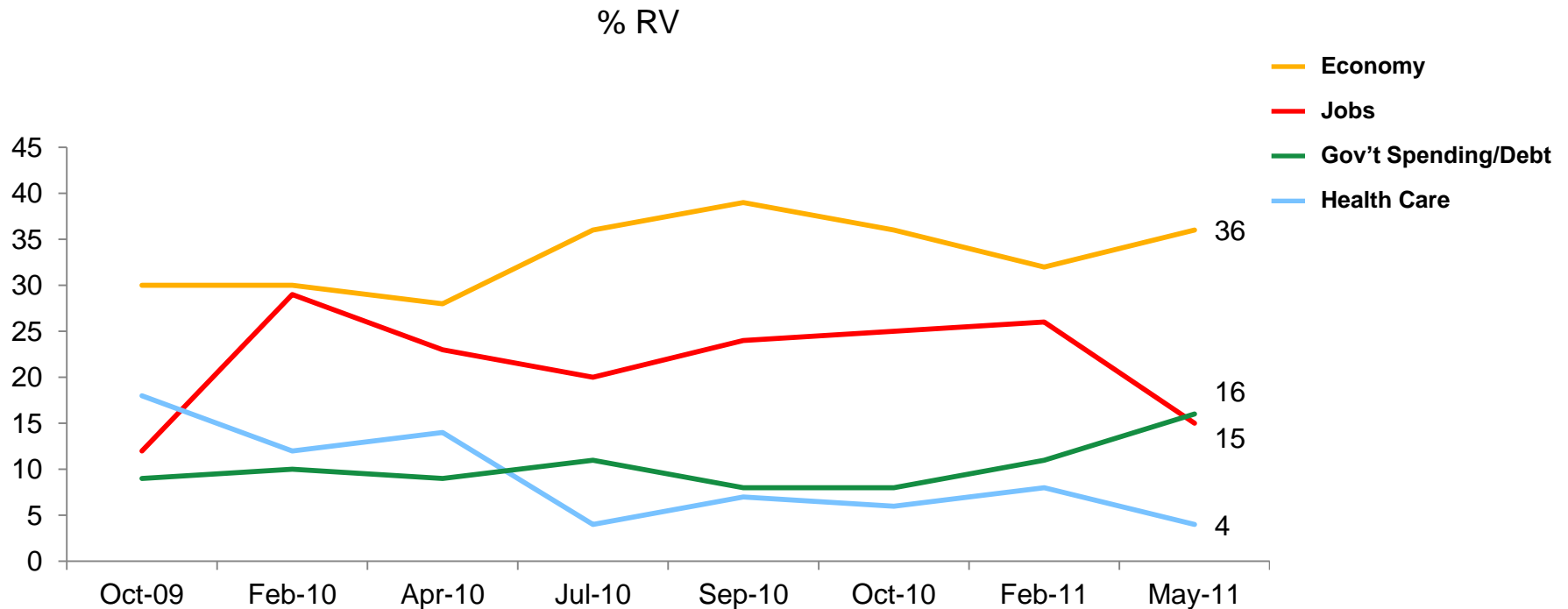
## Direction of the Country



# Concern about the economy and gov't spending and debt rises

Q16. What would you say is the single most important problem facing the nation [OPEN-ENDED]

## Most Important Problem Facing Nation

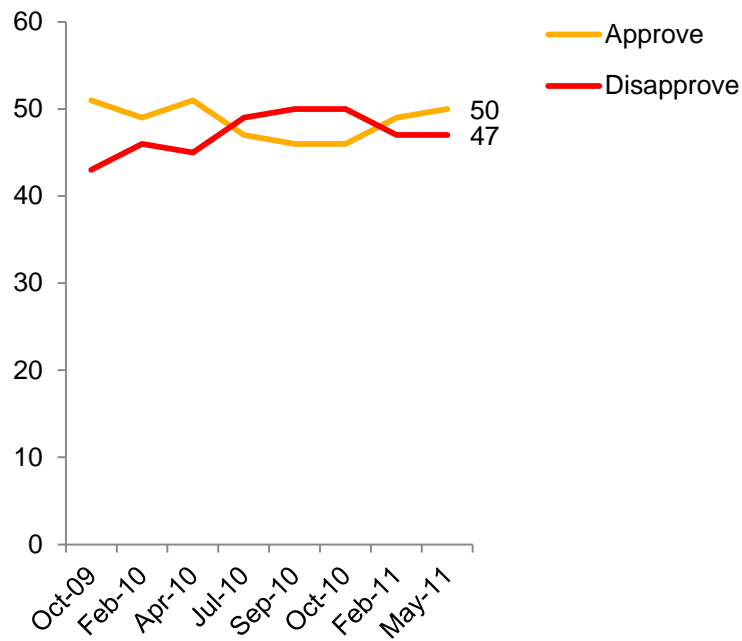


# Presidential job approval reaches tracking high among PI

Q8. As you know, there will be a general election for president and U.S. Congress in November 2012. I know it's still a ways off, but would you say you are extremely likely to vote, very likely to vote but not extremely likely, somewhat likely to vote, or not too likely to vote? [Note: Question was "...there will be an election for U.S. Congress in November 2010..." in waves 10/09 – 10/10]

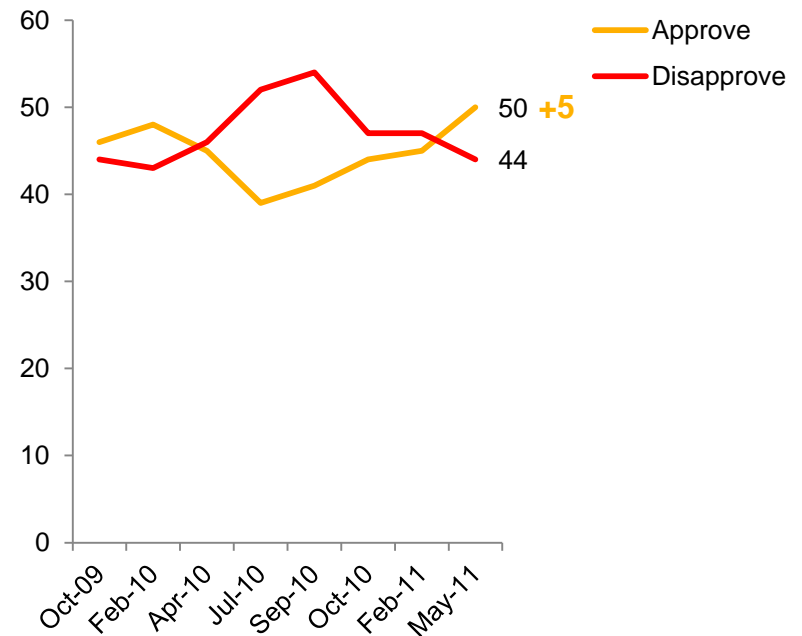
## Approval of President Obama

% RV



## Approval of President Obama

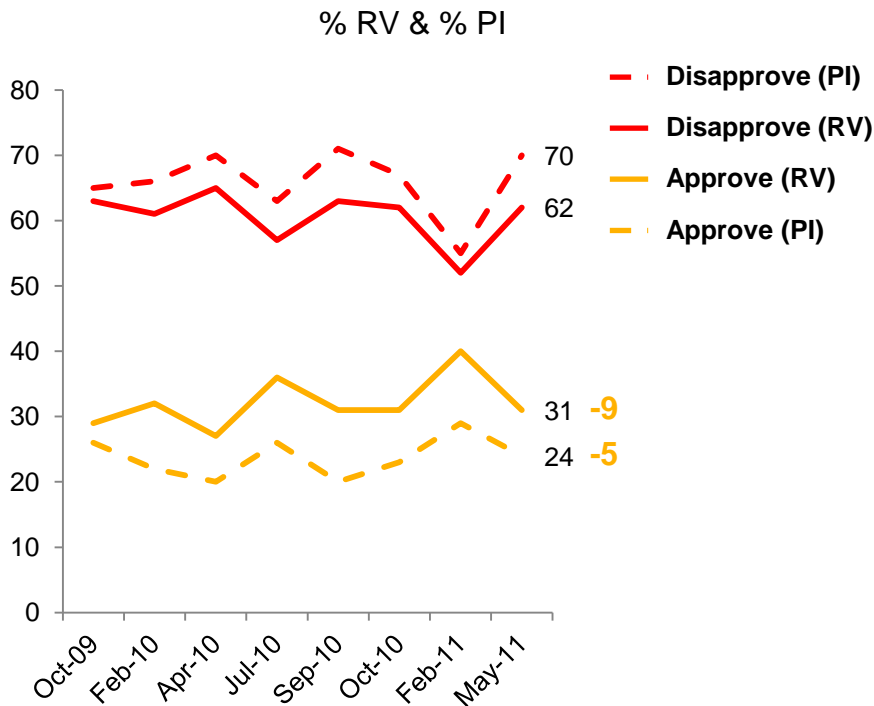
% PI



# Approval of REP in Congress drops overall and among base

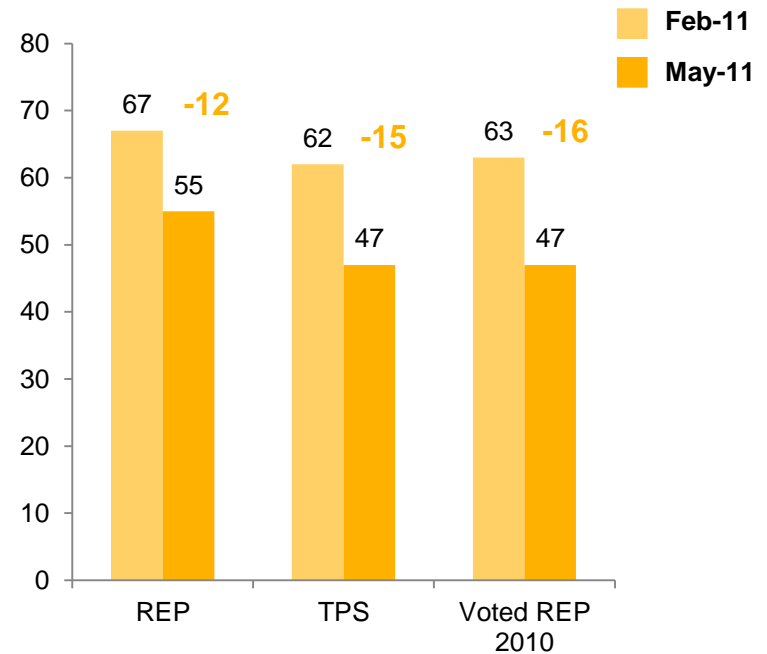
Q14. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Republicans in the U.S. Congress are handling their job? [IF APPROVE, ASK: Do you strongly approve or somewhat approve?] [IF DISAPPROVE, ASK: Do you strongly disapprove or somewhat disapprove?]

## Approval of REP in Congress



## Approval of REP in Congress Comparison

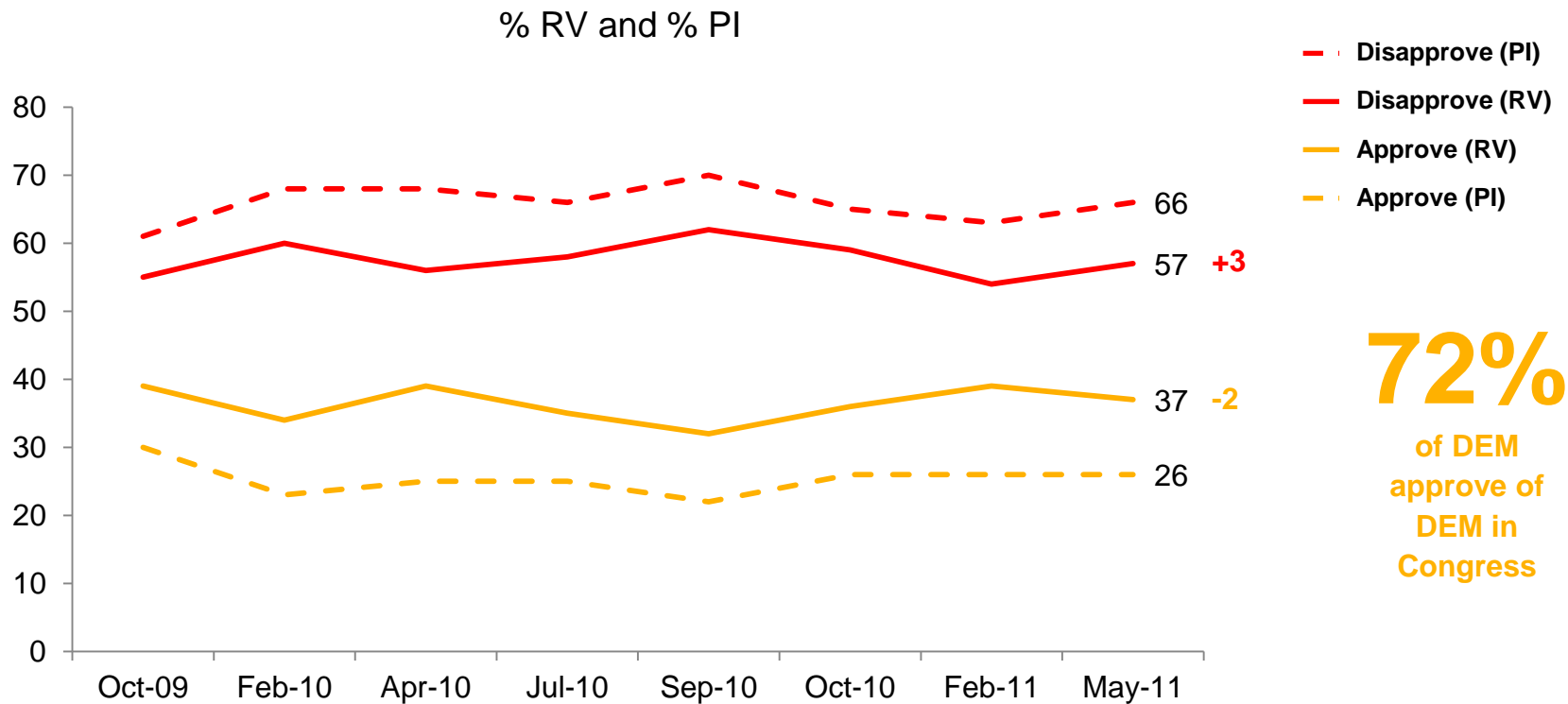
% REP, % TPS and % 2010 REP Voters Approving



# Voters slightly less approving of DEM in Congress as well

Q15. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Republicans/Democrats in the U.S. Congress are handling their job? [IF APPROVE, ASK: Do you strongly approve or somewhat approve?] [IF DISAPPROVE, ASK: Do you strongly disapprove or somewhat disapprove?]

## Job Approval of DEM in Congress



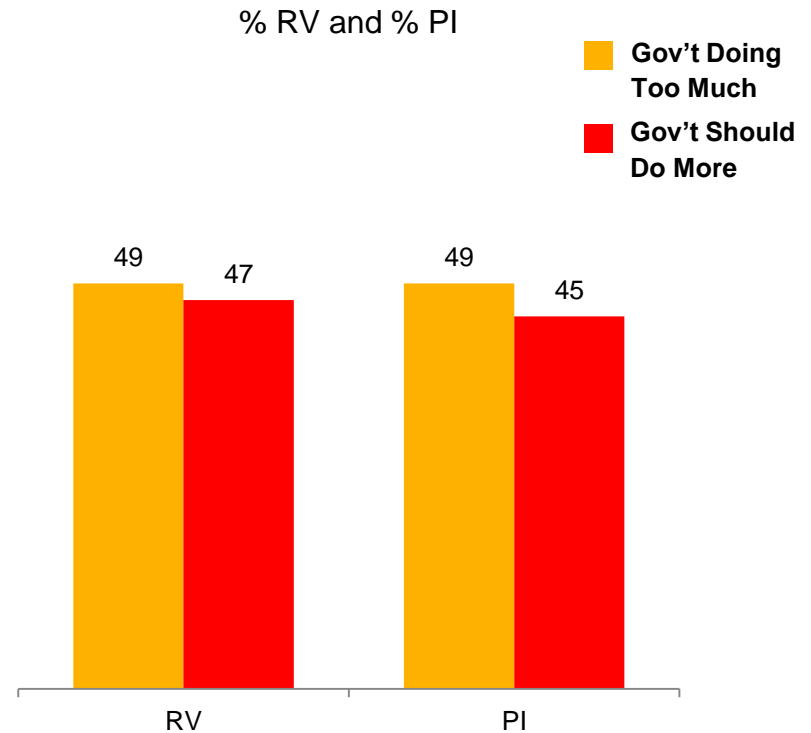
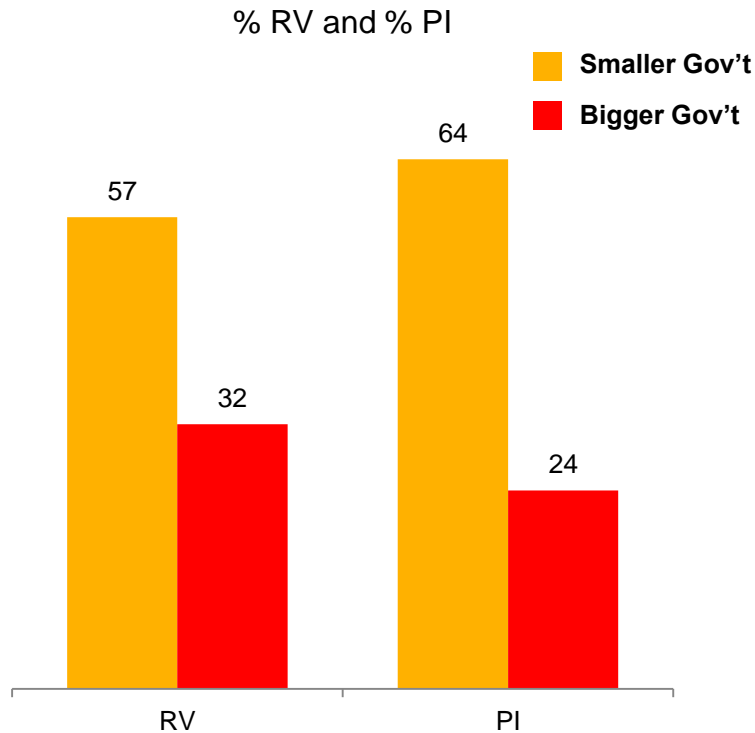
# Voters prefer smaller gov't in theory, but divide evenly on gov'ts current role

Q17. In general, do you prefer [ROTATE: Bigger government with more services; OR Smaller government with fewer services]?

Q18. Now I'm going to read two statements about the role of government, and I'd like to know which one comes closer to your point of view: [ROTATE: Government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people; OR Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals]?

## Preference for Government Size

## Preference for Government Role



# Section 2 Election 2012

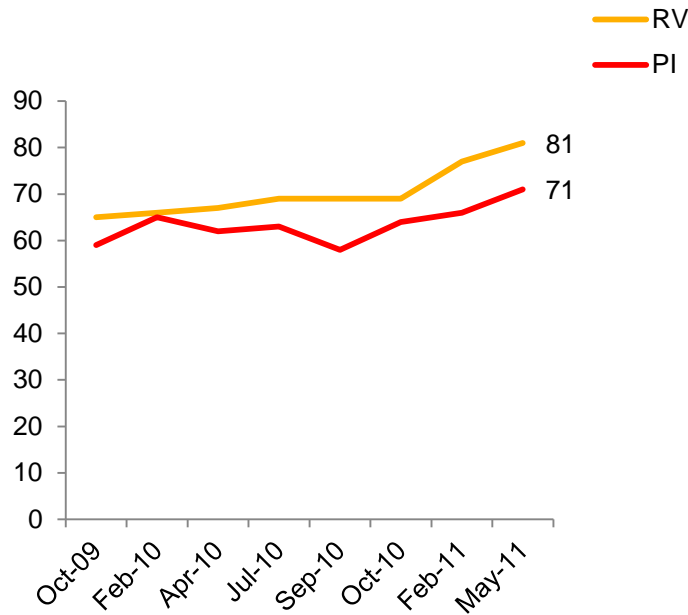


# Vote intensity reaches high point; REP have early advantage

Q8. As you know, there will be a general election for president and U.S. Congress in November 2012. I know it's still a ways off, but would you say you are extremely likely to vote, very likely to vote but not extremely likely, somewhat likely to vote, or not too likely to vote? [Note: Question was "...there will be an election for U.S. Congress in November 2010..." in waves 10/09 – 10/10]

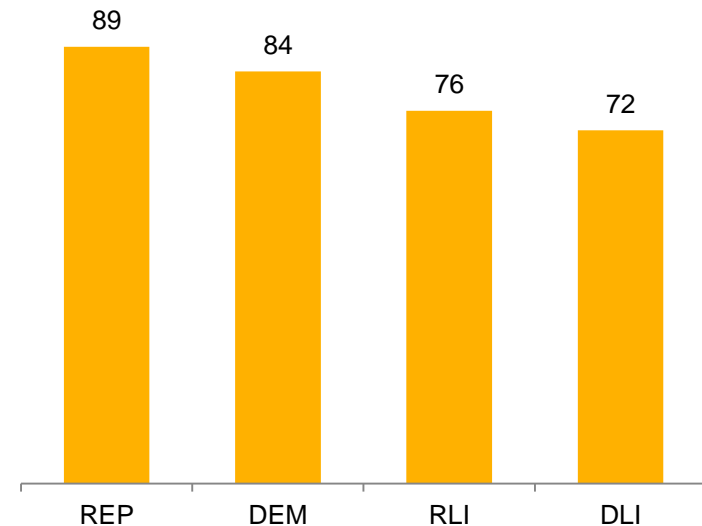
## Vote Intensity Trendline

% RV and % PI "Extremely Likely" to Vote



## Vote Intensity Advantage

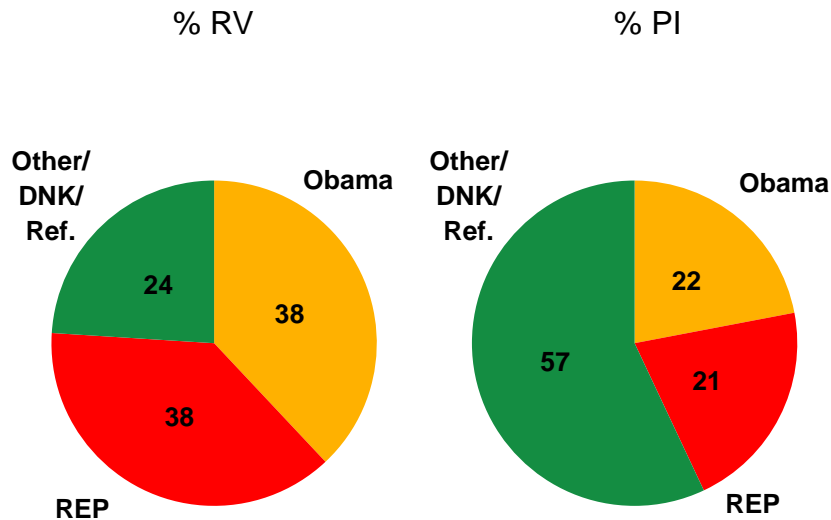
By Party ID, % "Extremely Likely" to Vote



# Presidential race is dead heat overall, while a majority of PI remain undecided

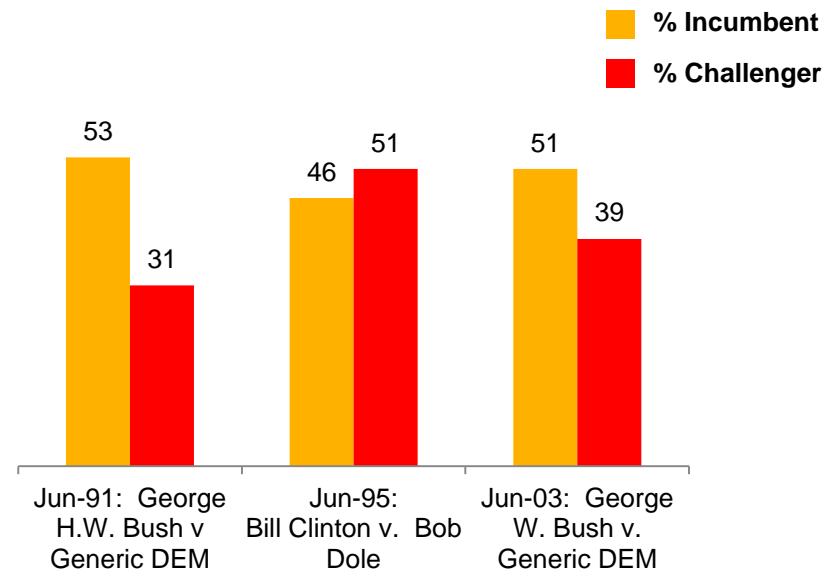
Q9. Thinking about the 2012 Presidential election, do you think you will [ROTATE: Vote for President Obama, the Democratic candidate; OR Vote for the Republican candidate]? [IF OBAMA ASK: Would that be definitely President Obama or probably President Obama]? [IF REPUBLICAN, ASK: Would that be definitely the Republican or probably the Republican]?

## Presidential Ballot



## Presidential Ballot Comparison

Last three presidents facing re-election



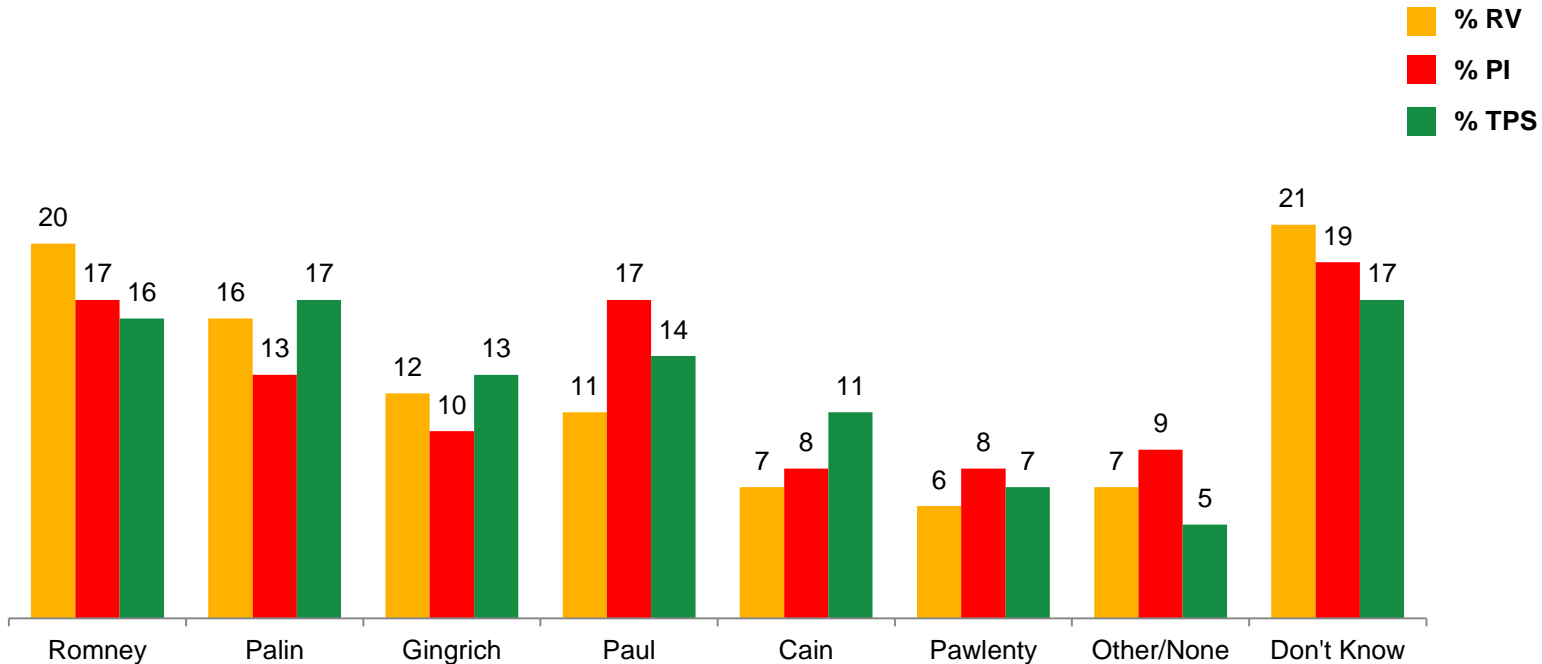
Source: Gallup, 5/5-8/2011, n=886 Registered Voters

# REP primary largely undecided

Q11. [ASK IF Q10=1] If the Republican presidential primary were held today, for whom would you vote if the candidates were: [RANDOMIZE: Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul, Tim Pawlenty, Mitt Romney; OR Sarah Palin]?

## REP Primary Field

% Self-Identified REP Primary Voters (42% RV, 32% PI)

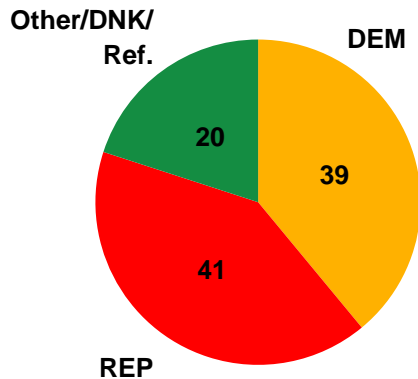


# Congressional ballot tied, DEM candidate gains ground among PI

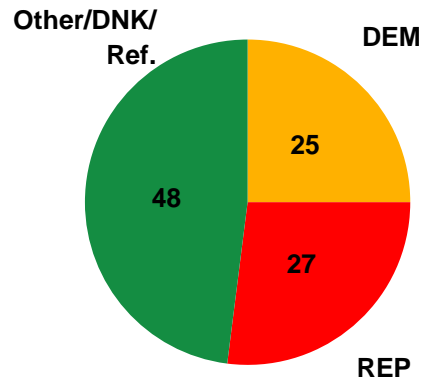
Q12. Now, thinking about the next election for U.S. Congress in 2012. If it were being held today, would you vote for [ROTATE: the Republican candidate; OR the Democrat candidate] in your district? [IF REPUBLICAN, ASK: Would that be definitely the Republican or probably the Republican?] [IF DEMOCRAT, ASK: Would that be definitely the Democrat or probably the Democrat?]

## Generic Congressional Ballot

% RV



% PI



## Generic Congressional Ballot Comparison

By Party Identification

%	Generic REP	Change since Feb-11	Generic DEM	Change since Feb-11
TPS	77	0	6	*
REP	90	<b>+6</b>	1	*
RLI	71	+3	6	*
PI	27	-1	25	<b>+6</b>
DLI	9	*	65	-2
DEM	5	*	82	-2



# Section 3 Federal Debt Debate

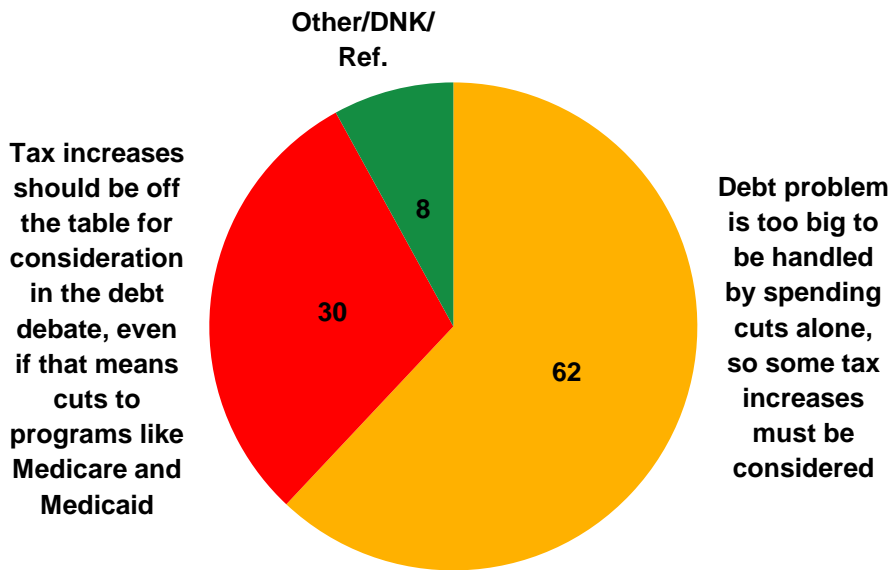


# Voters willing to consider tax increases given the magnitude of the debt

Q19. In general, who do you agree with more: [ROTATE A & B] Congressman A/B who says: The nation's debt problem is too big to be handled by spending cuts alone, so some tax increases must be considered /OR/ Congressman B/A who says: Tax increases should be off the table for consideration in the debt debate, even if that means cuts to programs like Medicare and Medicaid

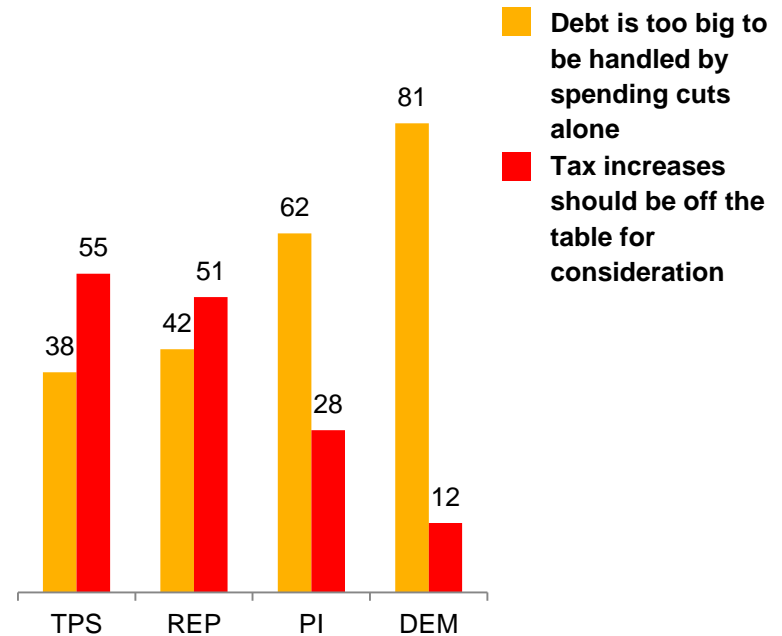
## Agreement with Debt Reduction Strategies

% RV



## Agreement with Debt Reduction Strategies

By Party Identification



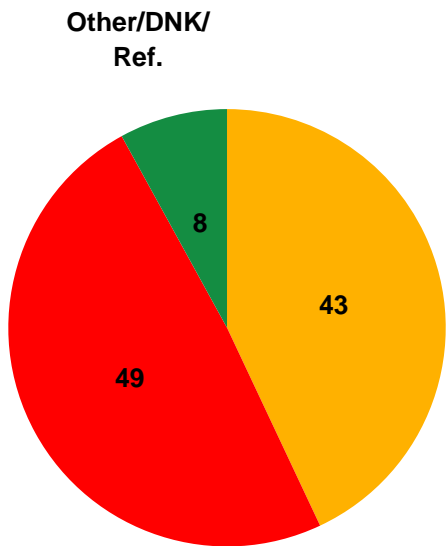
# Voters divided on whether deep spending cuts should be tied to the debt ceiling vote

Q20. [And now,] Which position comes closest to your own: [ROTATE A & B] Congressman A/B says: Any increase in the debt ceiling must be balanced by equivalent spending cuts, even if this amounts to trillions of dollars /OR/ Congressman B/A says: Tying drastic spending cuts to the upcoming debt ceiling vote is a hasty political move. Congress needs more time to determine the most responsible way to cut spending?

## Position on Debt Ceiling Vote

% RV

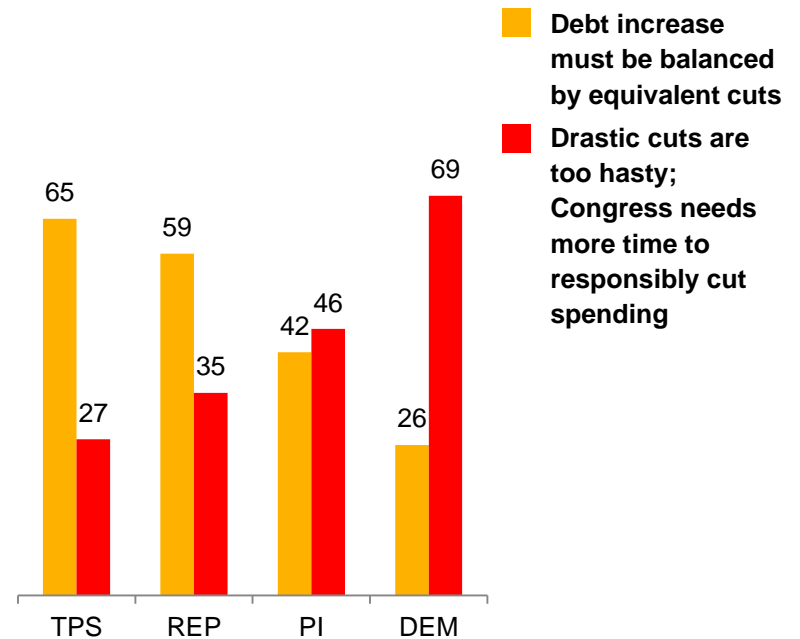
Tying drastic spending cuts to the upcoming debt ceiling vote is a hasty political move. Congress needs more time to determine the most responsible way to cut spending



Any increase in the debt ceiling must be balanced by equivalent spending cuts, even if this amounts to trillions of dollars

## Position on Debt Ceiling Vote

By Party Identification



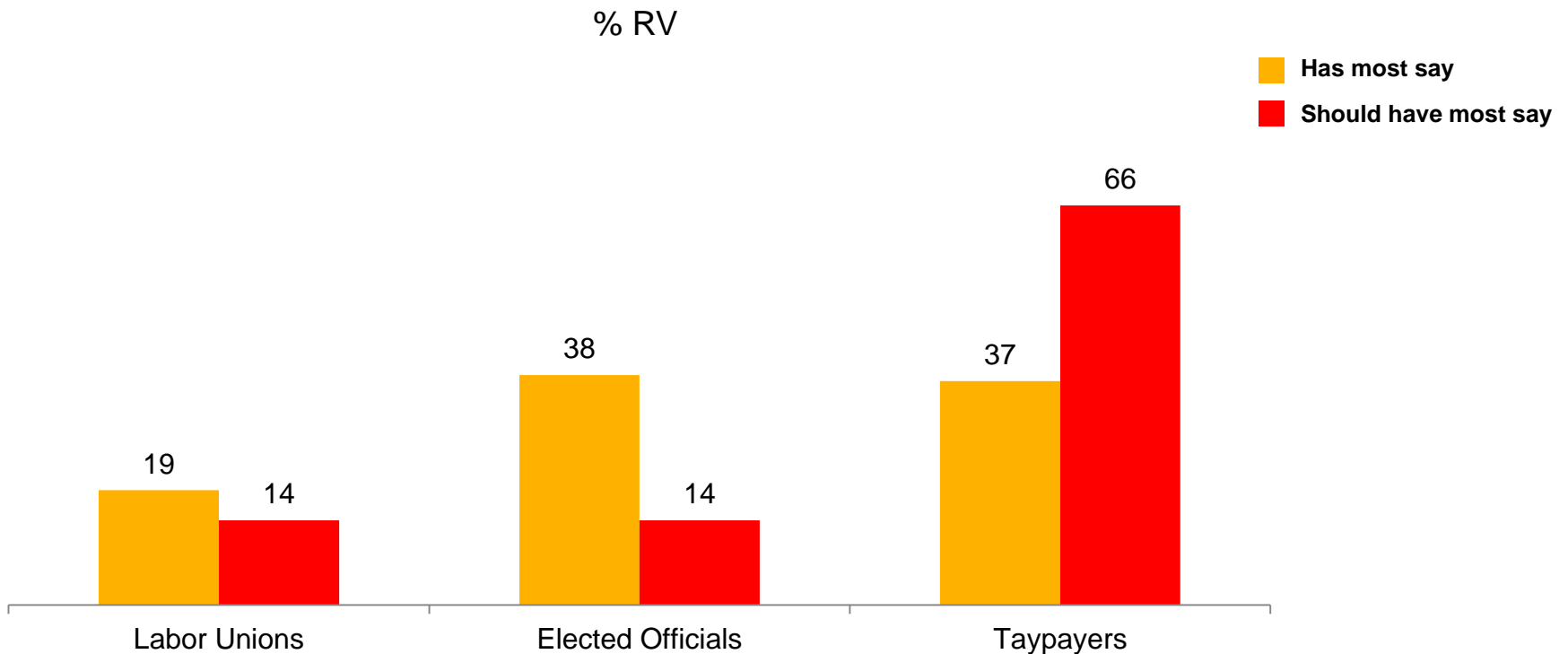
# Section 4 Public Sector Unions



# Voters think taxpayers should have more say in government worker compensation

Q22. Who do you think [SPLIT SAMPLE: should have/has] the most say in determining the wages and benefits of government employees: [RANDOMIZE: labor unions, elected officials; OR taxpayers]?

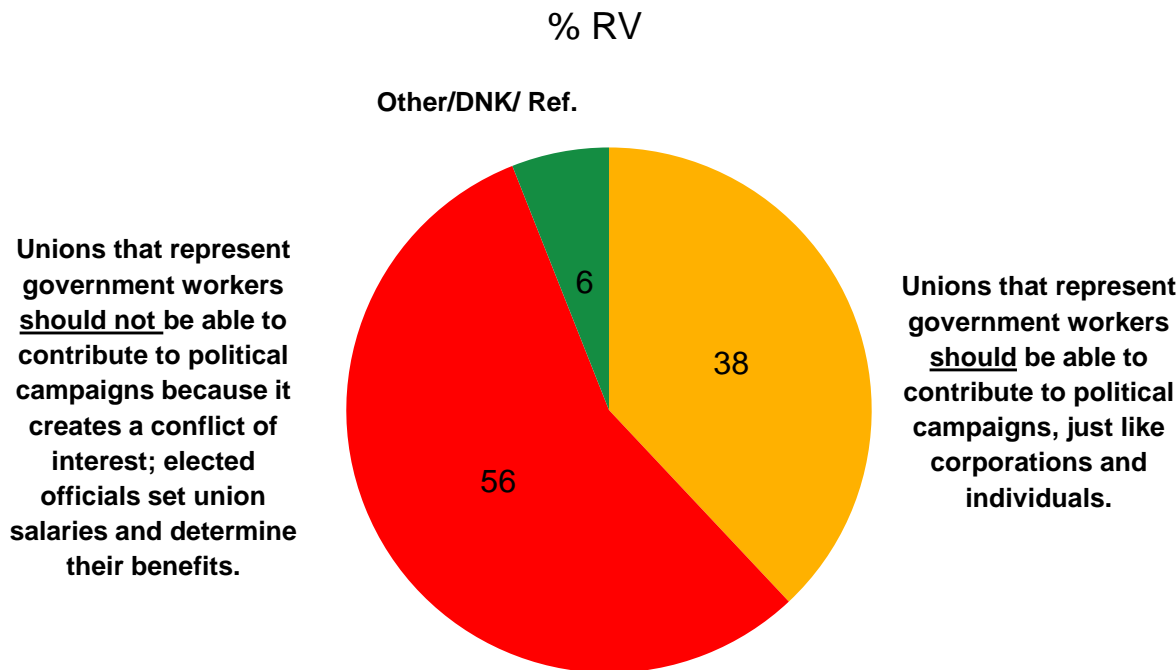
## Most Say in Determining Gov't Worker Compensation



# Wide agreement that public sector unions should not contribute to campaigns

Q23. In general, who do you agree with more: [ROTATE: Some & Other] Some/Other people who say: Unions that represent government workers should be able to contribute to political campaigns, just like corporations and individuals /OR/ Other/Some people who say: Unions that represent government workers should not be able to contribute to political campaigns because it creates a conflict of interest; elected officials set union salaries and determine their benefits?

## Views on Public Sector Union Campaign Contributions



%	Should Not	Should
REP	75	20
PI	64	30
Public Emp.	51	43
DLI	47	43
DEM	32	62

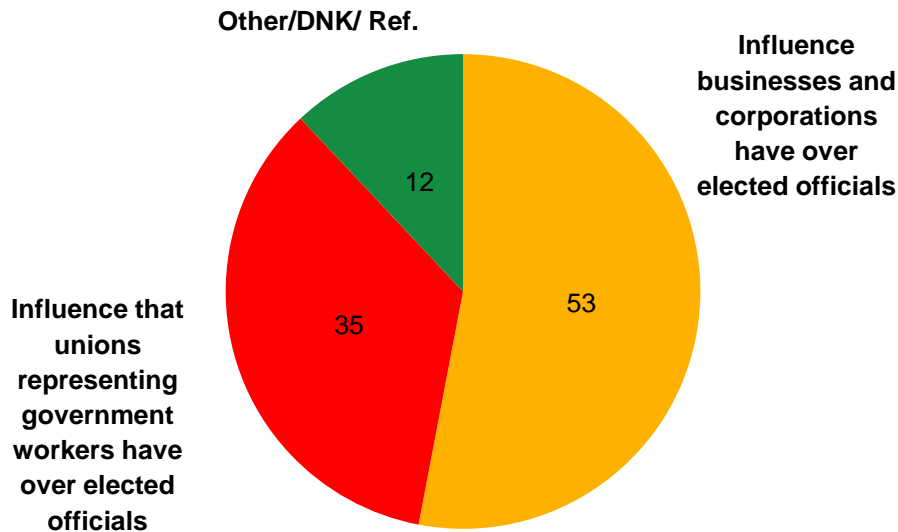


# Voters more concerned about corporate influence than union influence

Q24. Which concerns you more: [ROTATE: The influence businesses and corporations have over elected officials; OR the influence that unions representing government workers have over elected officials]?

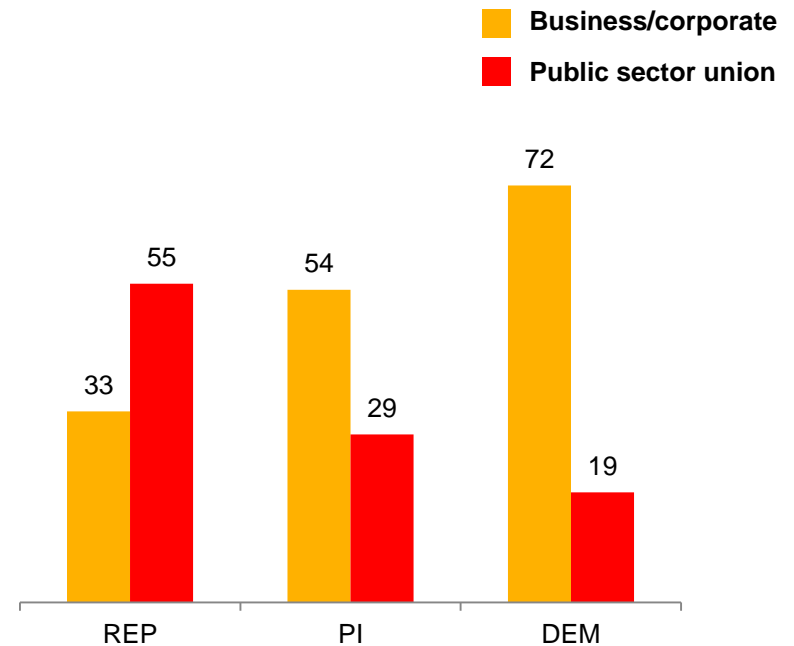
## Concern about Influence over Elected Officials

% RV



## Concern about Influence over Elected Officials

By Party Identification



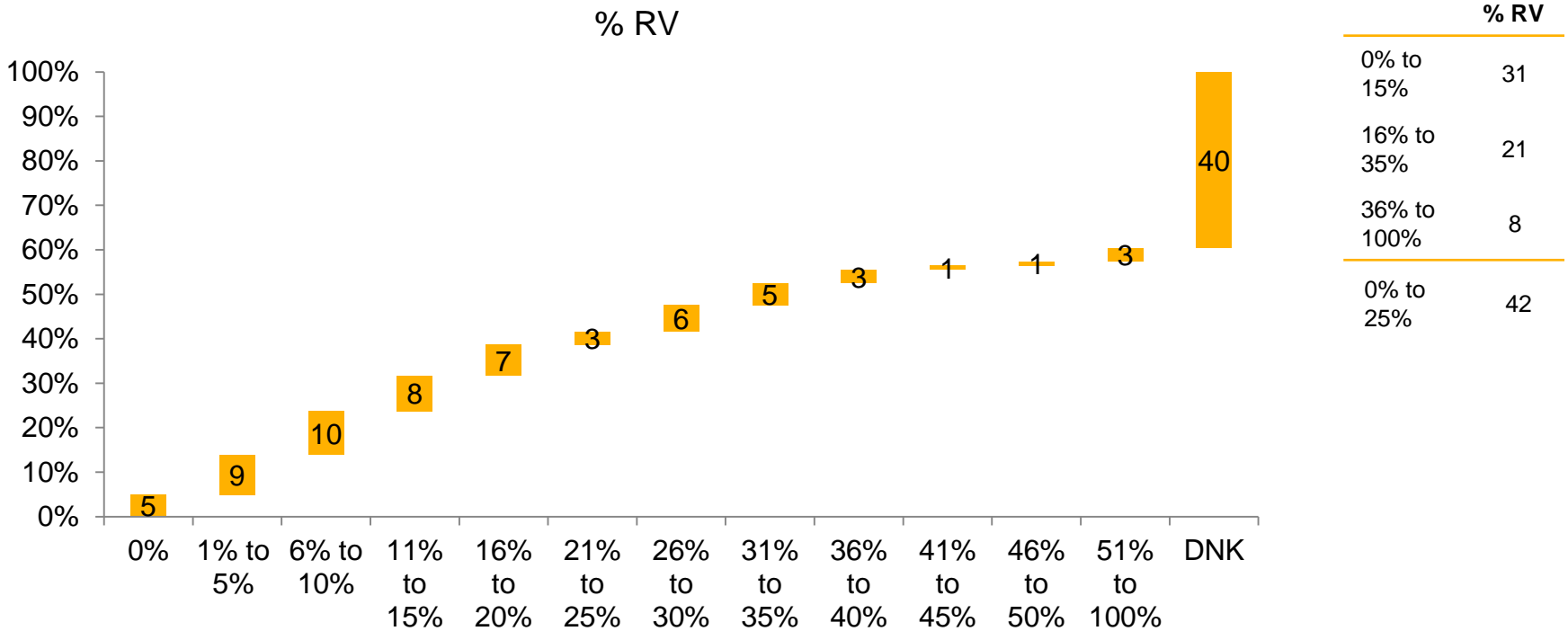
# Section 5 Corporate Tax Rate



# Perceptions of the corporate tax rate vary

Q25. On average, what is the federal income tax rate for corporations in America? That is, what percent of income do you think these corporations pay in federal taxes? [OPEN-ENDED; PLEASE CODE RESPONSES WHERE POSSIBLE].

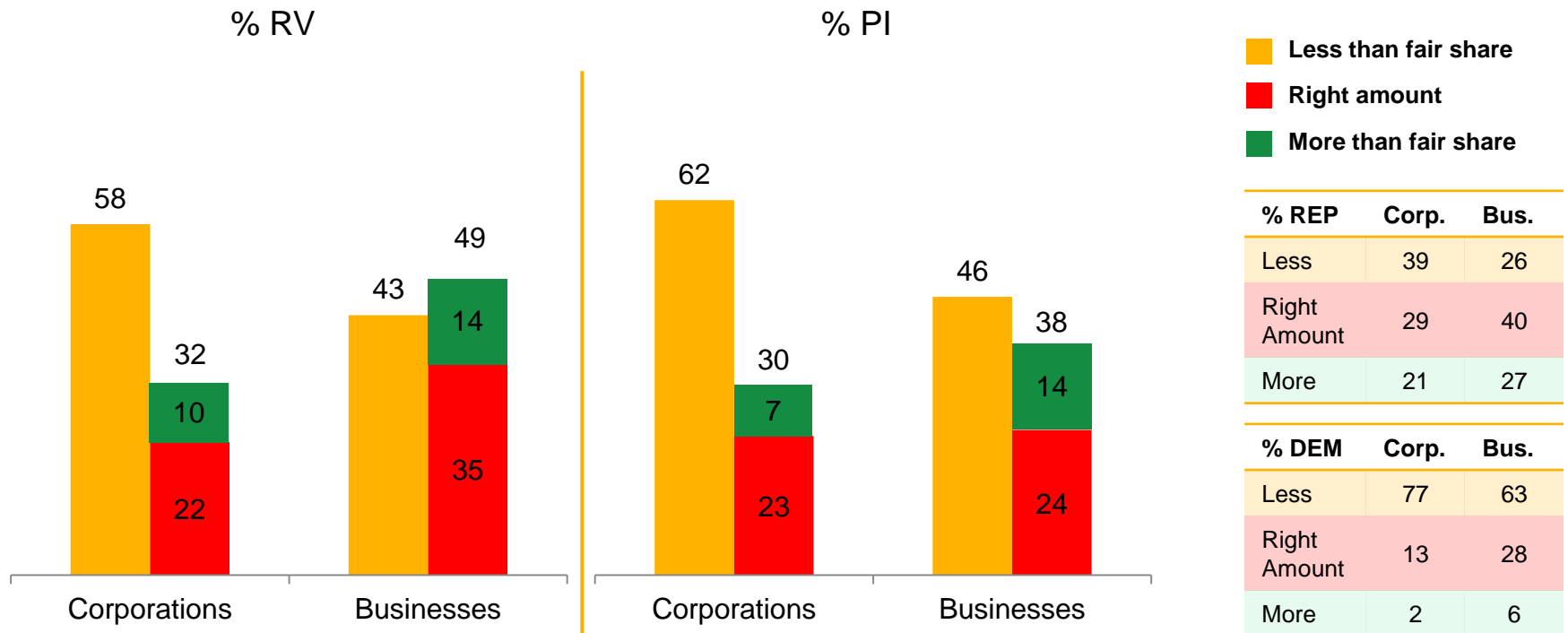
## Perception of Federal Corporate Tax Rate



# PI more likely to think corporations pay less than fair share in taxes

Q26. In general, do you think [SPLIT SAMPLE: corporations/businesses] pay [ROTATE FRONT TO BACK, BACK TO FRONT: More than their fair share in taxes, about the right amount in taxes, OR less than their fair share in taxes]?

## Perceived Fairness of Taxes Corporations v Businesses Pay

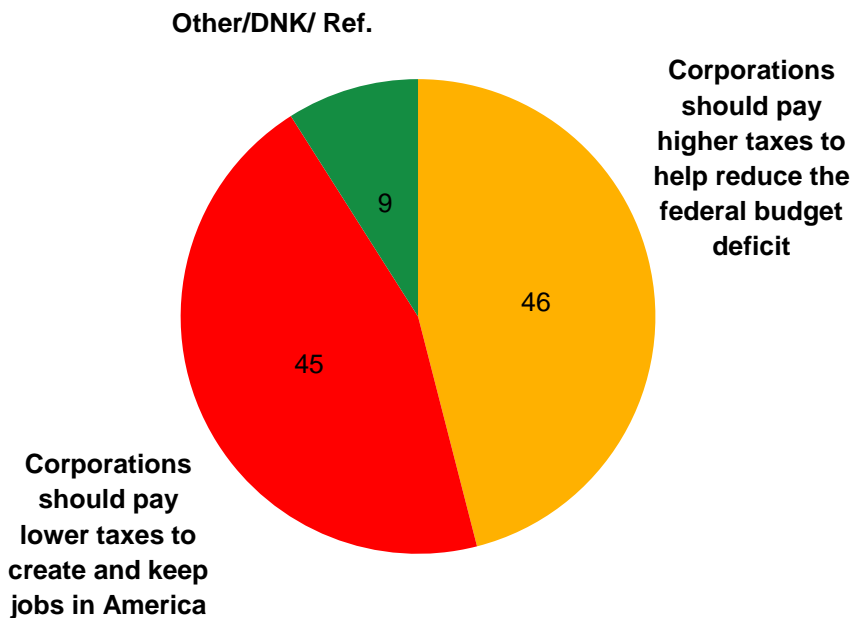


# Voters split on whether to raise or lower the corporate tax rate

Q27. In general, who do you agree with more: [ROTATE Some & Other] Some/Other people who say: Corporations should pay higher taxes to help reduce the federal budget deficit /OR/ Other/Some people who say: Corporations should pay lower taxes to create and keep jobs in America?

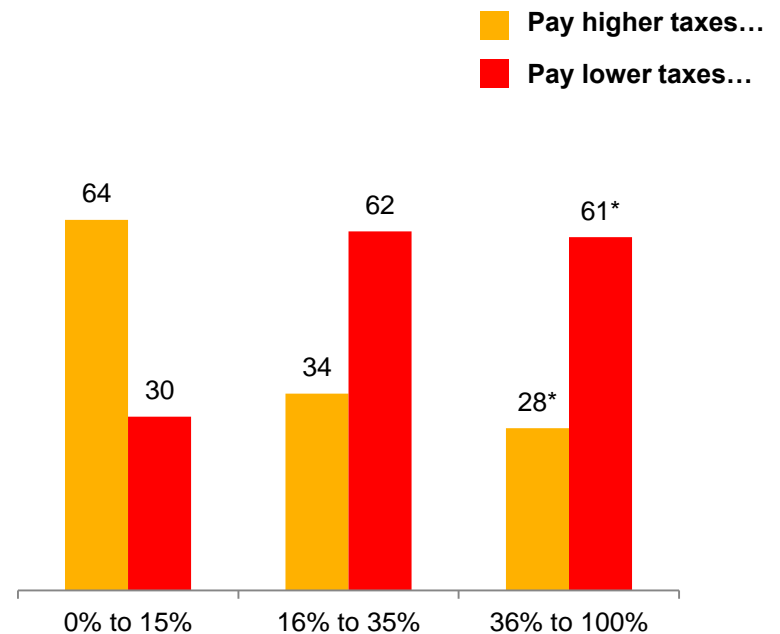
## Changes to Corporate Tax Rate

% RV



## Changes to Corporate Tax Rate

By Perception of Corporate Tax Rate



\*Statistically insignificant due to small n (n<100).

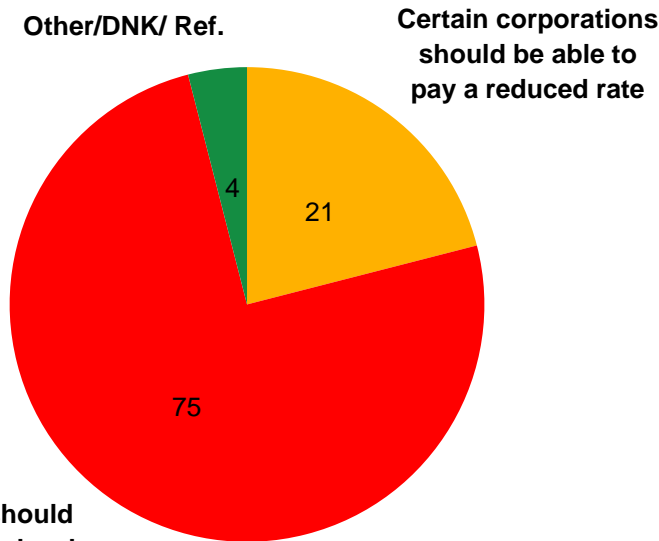


# Strong, bipartisan support for all corporations paying same rate

Q28. Some corporations legally reduce their taxes, or avoid paying them altogether, by using deductions, credits and incentives that are part of the tax code. Do you think [ROTATE: the tax code should be simplified -- to level the playing field so all corporations pay the same tax rate; OR certain corporations should be able to pay a reduced rate]?

## Corporate Tax Deductions and Credits

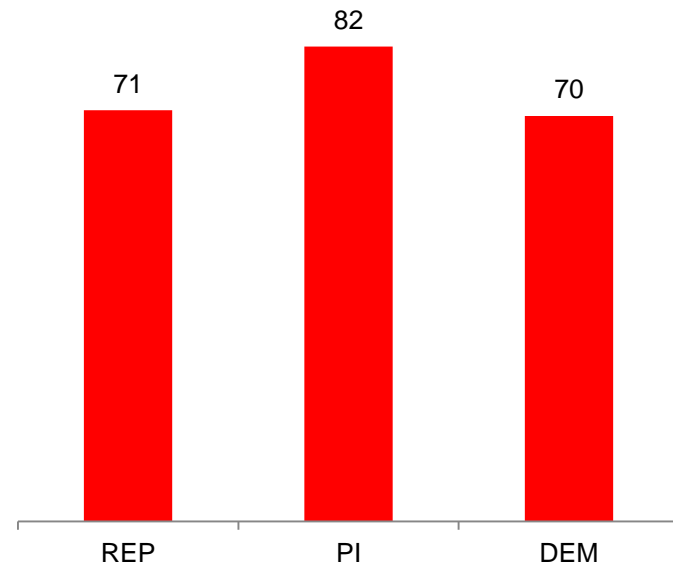
% RV



The tax code should be simplified to level the playing field so all corporations pay the same tax rate

## Support for Same Rate across All Corporations

By Party Identification



# Section 6 Appendix

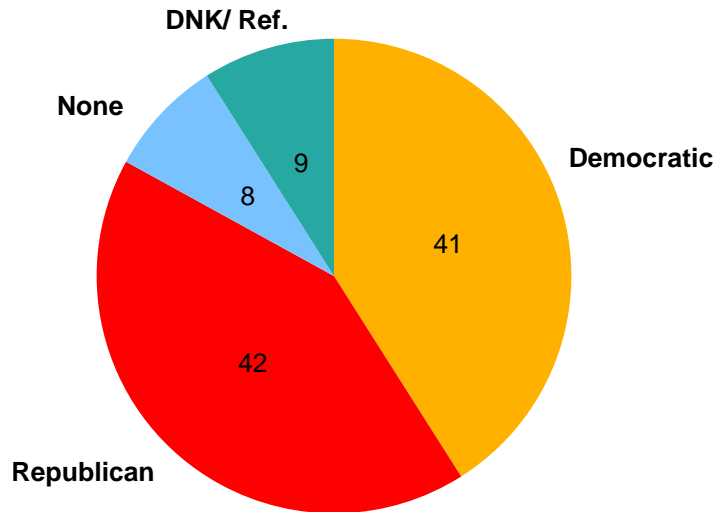


# Republican Primary Ballot

Q10. And now thinking about the Presidential primaries beginning next year... Do you plan to vote in the [ROTATE: Republican primary or Democratic primary] in your state?

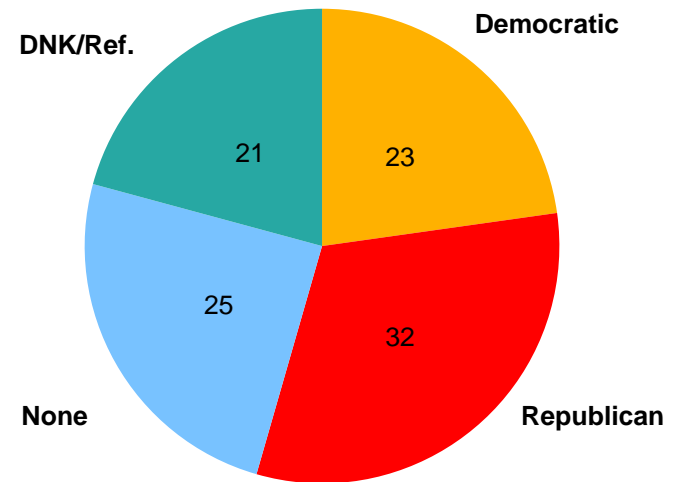
### Plan to Vote in Primary

% RV



### Plan to Vote in Primary

% All Independents



# Attention to Public Sector Union Disputes

Q21. How closely have you followed the disputes in Wisconsin and other states between the governors and government employee labor unions over collective bargaining policies and the states' budget: Very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not at all?

## Followed Public Sector Union Disputes

