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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner
From: Stanley B. Greenberg, James Carville and Andrew Baumann

Rush Limbaugh Weighs Down Heavily on Republicans

National Survey Shows Talk Show Host Unpopular with Everybody, Except Conservative Republicans who Defend him and Share his Values

With a national debate raging over the place of radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh in the Republican Party, a new national survey from Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner¹ finds that Limbaugh weighs down heavily on an already weakened Republican Party — putting Republican leaders and their party’s conservative base voters out of sync with not only Democrats and independents, but even the bloc of moderate Republicans. On virtually every question the great majority of the mainstream rejects Limbaugh’s ideas and vision of the Republican Party, which severely constrains Republican elected leaders. It does not help that some of the key voters in the 2006 and 2008 elections, like younger voters, are particularly uncomfortable with Limbaugh’s politics. Conservative Republican voters, however, embrace Limbaugh, giving him a very high favorability rating; they say he shares their values and urge Republican leaders to defend him when he is criticizing President Obama.

Remarkably, voters view Limbaugh negatively by a two-to-one ratio (53 to 26 percent), with nearly half the country, 45 percent, viewing him very, very negatively. Among independents, the ratio rises to three-to-one. Meanwhile, Limbaugh’s rating has deteriorated among moderate Republicans since November’s election, with his unfavorability rising from 37 to 46 percent.²

More important are the values that Limbaugh espouses. By a nearly two-to-one ratio (57 to 32 percent) of voters — and independents — say Limbaugh does not “share their values,” but Republicans are in a different world where, by two-to-one, they believe he shares them.

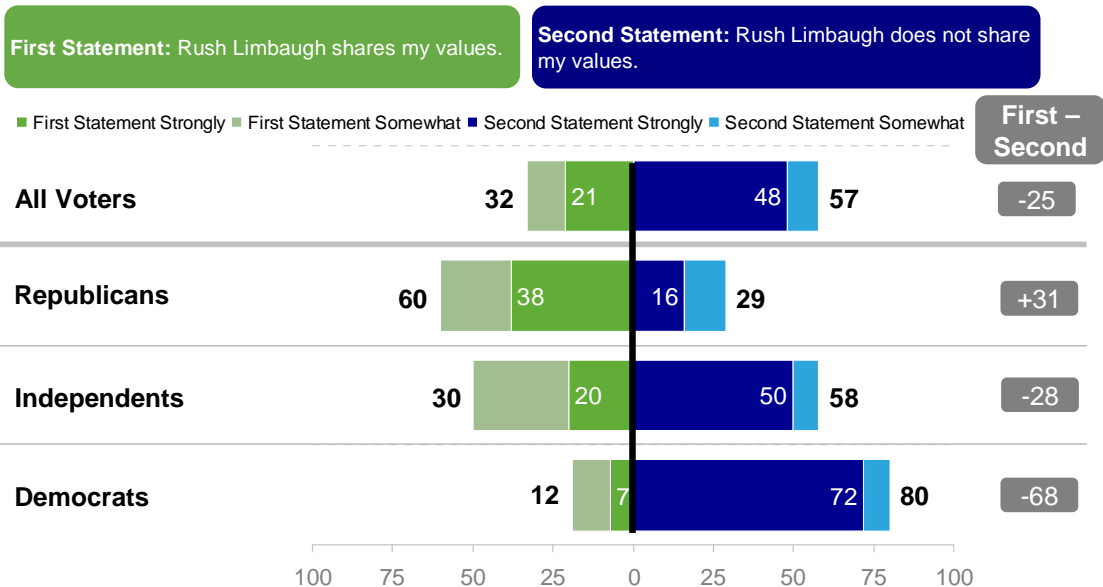
¹ National survey of 1,000 2008 voters, including 170 interviewed on cell phones (120 unweighted) and 830 likely 2010 voters (863 unweighted), conducted for Democracy Corps by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner March 5-8, 2009.

² November data base on joint Democracy Corps-Campaign for America’s Future survey of 2,000 voters 2008 voters conducted November 4-5, 2008.



GOP out of touch – most feel Limbaugh does not share their values

Now I'm going to read you some pairs of statements. After I read each pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

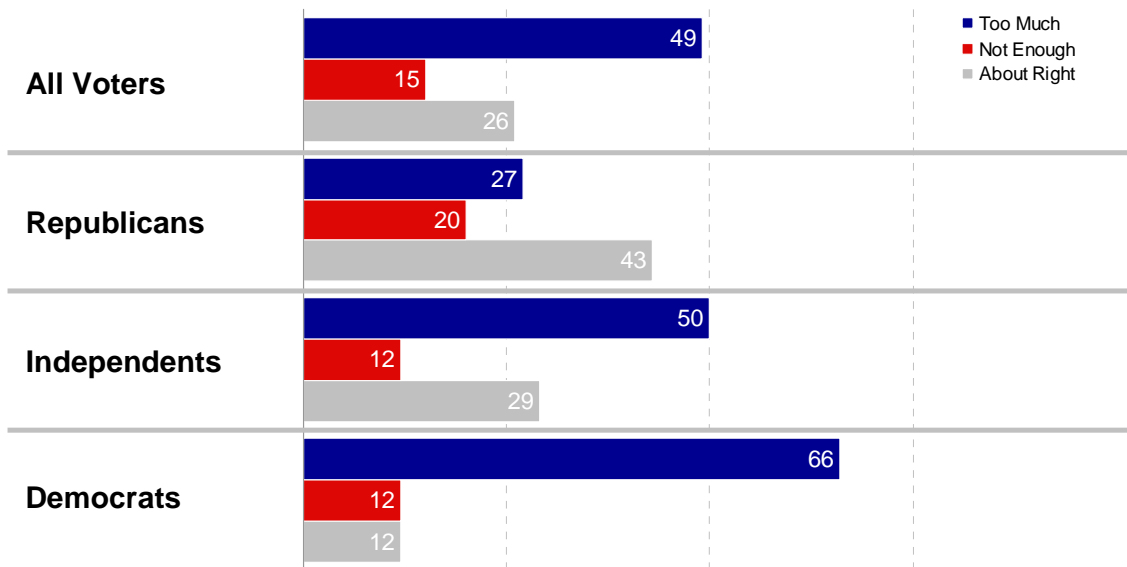


There is a reason why: Limbaugh ranks very high as a leader of the Republican Party’s ideas and direction. Overall, the party’s last presidential candidate, not surprisingly, is seen as the most influential (cited by 38 percent of voters), but Limbaugh ranks in the top tier at 24 percent, tied with Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney, and well ahead of Sarah Palin, the Republicans’ vice presidential nominee. He is seen as more influential than John Boehner and Mitch McConnell, the Republican leaders of the House and Senate, combined. Voters clearly think Limbaugh is a major force in the party and indeed, a near of voters, 49 percent, say that Limbaugh has too much influence over Republican ideas and direction — compared to just 15 percent who say he has too little. Reinforcing the problem, just a quarter of Republicans think Limbaugh has too much influence. This is happening at a time when two-thirds say “the average voter” has too little influence over the Republican Party.



Dems, independents think Limbaugh has too much influence over GOP

Now I'm going to read you a list of people. This time, for each person I want you to tell me whether you think that person has too much influence over the Republican Party's ideas and directions, not enough influence or about the right amount of influence over the Republican Party's ideas and direction.



It is not surprising, then, that a solid (52 percent) believe that “Republican leaders should denounce Rush Limbaugh’s destructive attacks on President Obama,” while just 38 percent say Republican leaders should “defend Limbaugh’s right to criticize policies he disagrees with.” Again, Republicans are firmly out of touch with the rest of the electorate, strongly urging their party leadership to defend Limbaugh while both Democrats and independents believe they should denounce the destructive attacks.

Voters of all political stripes reject Limbaugh’s assertion that the Republican Party must move back to the right in order to start winning. When that argument, with language taken directly from Limbaugh’s CPAC speech, is matched head-to-head against Utah Governor John Huntsman’s statement about moving the party to the middle, all voters — including independents and moderate Republicans — overwhelmingly opt for the governor’s statement by 20 points (57 to 37 percent). But amazingly, three-quarters of conservative Republicans side with Limbaugh’s call to “stamp out the factions” that keep the party from going back to “conservative principles.”



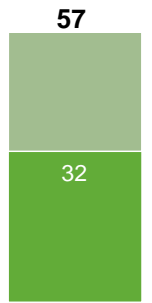
Huntsman’s argument for moving to the middle embraced over Limbaugh’s

As you may know, in recent weeks two Republicans, Utah Governor John Huntsman and radio host Rush Limbaugh, have suggested two different paths that the Republican Party could take to reverse its losing streak and start winning elections again. I am going to read you a pair of statements that summarize these two views. After I read these statements, please tell me which one you agree with more.

Huntsman Statement: GOP should move center

John Huntsman says that the Republican Party has been losing elections because it became narrowly focused on very conservative issues that do not appeal to most Americans. It can only return to relevance by moving to the middle on issues such as the environment and immigration and offering pragmatic solutions that appeal to groups like the youth and minorities that have tuned the party out.

■ Huntsman Smwht
■ Huntsman Strongly

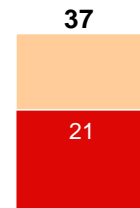


Total Huntsman Statement

Limbaugh Statement: GOP should be more conservative

Rush Limbaugh says that the Republican Party has been losing elections because moderate factions within the party have driven it away from its core conservative principles. If it does not stamp out these factions it will be guaranteed to continue losing elections. Americans are conservatives at heart and the blueprint for Republican victory is to embrace the Reagan revolution and return to conservative values.

■ Limbaugh Smwht
■ Limbaugh Strongly



Total Limbaugh Statement

While voters dislike Limbaugh and his values and think he has too much influence over the party’s ideas and direction, they do not accept that Republicans are following his lead because they want to see Obama fail. Just 32 percent agree with that statement. Still, 62 percent of voters, including a similar percentage of moderate Republicans, say that the Republican Party is embracing the “same old ideas and leaders it has relied on for the past 20 years” rather than seeking out new leaders and fresh ideas. With Rush Limbaugh’s vision and values so strong among the conservative Republicans who are the heart of the party’s base, Republican leaders carry a heavy weight when they attempt to position themselves to act for the broader electorate.