



Transcript

Polarized People? The Changing Nature of the American Electorate

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Xenia Dormandy:

I'm Xenia Dormandy. I run the US programme here at Chatham House. As I say, we're extraordinarily lucky to have John Zogby with us today. He's the founder of the Zogby Poll and the Zogby Companies and currently serves as a Senior Analyst at JZ Analytics.

He has appeared on every major US television network, including, and I noticed the one that jumped out to me is the *Daily Show* with John Stewart, for those of you who enjoy. He writes weekly columns on Forbes.com, US News and *World Report*, *Politics* magazine and News Corp, the *Daily* also. And is a founding contributor to Huffington Post. He has written a *New York Times* bestseller, *The Way We'll Be: The Zogby Report on the Transformation of the American Dream*.

He has polled and consulted for a wide spectrum of business, media, government and political groups. He is a senior advisor at Harvard's Kennedy School. Commissioner for CSIS, a think tank in the United States, the Commission on Smart Power, a senior fellow at the Catholic University Lifecycle Institute, and chairman of Sedan Sunrise. And in his spare time... no, I'm joking.

We're extraordinarily lucky to have him here today to talk about 'Polarised People: The Changing Nature of the American Electorate'. And with that I will hand straight over and get to it. Thank you very much.

John Zogby:

Thank you. That's such a nice intro, Xenia. And nice to see you again.

Xenia Dormandy:

I could have kept going.

John Zogby:

I know, and I was ready for you to keep going. You know, you get to be a certain age and when you start to hear your name and extraordinarily in the same sentence, it's a little heady so thank you for that.

Wow, where do I begin? This is... I was at BBC earlier today, and some of the editors said, 'You know, we just can't seem to work ourselves into any real interest in the US election this time.' And I was thinking, this is the most

important election in the US in many years. 2008 was a defining moment, needless to say, but 2012 determines the broad direction of both domestic policy and foreign policy for at least the next decade if not the next generation. So it's an extremely important election.

So in that context, let's kind of explain what's going on. And I speak in moments, because things can change tomorrow and then I'll be completely wrong. So I get to renew these every once in awhile, okay?

Today, as we sit, it's tied. In the Gallop polls and the Rasmussen polls. If you take a look at the average, which many of us have been doing recently, aggregating several polls together, President Obama leads by three points, 48 to 45. And I can breathe a sigh of relief because that's where I have it, at 48-45.

48% is acceptable for an incumbent president at this point in time. In academic terms, it graduates you but it doesn't necessarily get you into a decent graduate school. But in the 48-45 combo of things, it's better to be at 48 than it is at 45. And that's just a little pearl of wisdom I just wanted to share with you.

The President's job approval rating is 48. Also acceptable, especially given the fact that it was 39 and 41 not so long ago, six or eight months ago. So there's been significant growth. It is also not bad for the President because, at 48, it means really a number of things. Given the fact that 42 – 43% of voters just simply, absolutely hate his guts, 48% in that context isn't so bad.

Also, let's drill down deeper into this 48 and see what it means. The President was elected in 2008 and there were four key demographic groups that voted in record numbers and each voted with a sense of historical destiny, as if this was their moment in time to be making a major statement. Let's take a look at each of them.

Latino voters. Hispanic voters. If we consider that in 1992, Hispanic voters were 4% of 92 million voters, 20 years ago... I'm not going to show off and do the increments, but in 2008, they were 9.2% of 133 million voters. And by all accounts, we project the Hispanic vote to be 11% of the total in 2012. So an extremely important voting group to look at, and I'm going to examine it more closely.

Generally speaking, when we take a look at the Democrat to Republican split on who gets the Hispanic vote, the average is roughly 65% Democrat, 35% Republican. There have been aberrations. Ronald Reagan got a few extra points in his 1984 re-election. George W. Bush in his re-election got 40% of

Hispanics, which is extremely important. He connected with Hispanic voters for a while, not only from his roots in Texas and the fact that he spoke Spanish, but more importantly the fastest growing element among Hispanic voters are conservatives, evangelical Christian voters.

However, since that time, the Hispanic vote has gone heavily Democrat. So much so that Barack Obama won the presidency with 69% of the Hispanic vote to McCain's 31%. And then also, we need to look at the immigration issue. I don't make the rules, people make their own rules. And to Hispanic voters, whether they are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, even Cuban, anti-illegal immigration translates into anti-immigration, and anti-immigration translates into anti-Hispanic. That's just how it is seen. I know from years of polling and doing focus groups among Hispanic voters.

So when I look at the polls today as opposed to several months ago, I was seeing Barack Obama at 41 – 42% of the Hispanic vote. They were greatly disappointed in him and his inability to get immigration reform. By the same token, there were Republican primaries and immigration was a key issue, and so today when I match Obama against Romney or look at Obama's approval rating among Hispanics, it's at 61 – 62%. Meaning he's almost where he needs to be. On the flip side of that, I have yet in any of my polls, Gallop polls or Pew polls, to see a Republican candidate polling any more than 24 – 25% of Hispanics. Translated: Hispanic voters, advantage Obama.

Now what about turnout? There are two things that turn out a group of voters. One is a proactive message. The other is, to put it in blunt terms, when they're scared the bejesus out of. And quite simply, advantage Obama. And Mitt Romney is a centrist. Mitt Romney is, you know, middle of the road. But Mitt Romney had to pivot very, very far to the right and in fact perhaps maybe over-pivoted on the immigration issue and... I'm here in London. It was young Sandy Shaw at the age of 18 who wrote and sang the song 'There is always something there to remind you'. It's going to be very, very difficult to pivot on this issue of immigration.

Let's look at the second group. African Americans. African Americans were posting a significant amount of disappointment in Barack Obama six or eight months ago. So generally speaking, historically, a Democratic candidate for President can count on 90% of the African American vote. Reagan was able to get 10%, so it was 88 to 10 in 1984.

Barack Obama won 95 to 4 in 2008. And not only that, when you look at the African American vote, generally it's 9.5 – 10% of the total. It was 11% of the

total. There was a heightened turnout in 2008. And so 11% of 133 million voters, 95% went to Obama.

Now six to eight months ago, I was seeing Obama polling 83% among blacks. That's a profound disappointment. Now inside track here a little bit, that doesn't mean that 17% vote Republican. That means the rest don't vote. When I see undecideds among African Americans, that means they're not voting. They don't vote Republican unless there's a compelling reason.

What am I seeing today? Obama at 91% of African Americans and Romney... 1%. I just want to make sure there's no illusion here. That's not good. 91 to 1. What it translates into is again a sense of historical destiny. I will go no further, I'll go beyond my polls and tell you that the head of security at my polling firm, African American, told me several months ago, he said, 'If Obama doesn't get re-elected, you'll never, ever see an African American as President of the United States.' That says it all, I think, for me. They will vote and they will vote big and they will vote big Obama.

Third group. Young voters. 18 to 29 year olds made history last time. Generally speaking, they constitute about 17 – 17.5% of the total vote in a presidential election. They were 19.2% in 2008. That's dramatic. 19.2%. And 67% of 18 to 29 year olds voted for Obama.

Now, this is a fly in the President's ointment, because something has happened to that youthful vibrancy and vitality that we saw four years ago. And that is the great recession, that's 3.5 years old and it has taken its toll. This is an age cohort that I have studied and written a lot about - the 'millennials'. I call them America's first global citizens. Globals. They have a planetary sensibility like no other age cohort. They are changing the rules of the workplace, the rules of NGOs, the rules of a lot of things. They have a completely different sensibility than any other age cohort.

One of the aspects in fact that I love about 20-somethings is that we for the most part – I'm looking around – for the most part have grown up in a vertical decision-making world. You know? Take it to the next level. Eventually you'll take a problem to the level where it will die and never be resolved. Young people are horizontal, and I love that. In other words, somewhere in my... put it out to my network and somewhere there's an answer and it comes right back.

But this is a group that is deeply disillusioned. This is a group that has gone on at least three years not having a sense of its next phase in life. On a personal level, as an employer, I tell young people better to have it now, those hard times, than in your 40s. Believe me. But it's taking a huge, huge toll on

them to the point where we're starting to hear for the first time a resentment that we hadn't heard before.

One of the things, in fact, that I wrote in my book was the lack of a generation gap. A different set of thinking, but no resentment towards anyone. And now, what we're hearing is, 'He's 55 and he's still working! And I have all this talent and all this training, can't he just move on so that I can step in?' Well, it's taken its toll on the President.

This is a man who won 67% of the vote of young people, he's polling at 57% today. Much, much, much better than the 38 and 39 where he was, but there's a growing libertarianism among young people. It's always been part of the backdrop but a growing libertarianism that now expresses itself in the form; 'I don't have confidence in anybody, anything, I don't trust anyone or anything.' That's hard.

I'll suggest to you that one of the real difficulties will be the libertarian movement, led by Ron Paul. Ron Paul will not run as an independent candidate, but Ron Paul is kind of like that old guy who says what he feels and seems to feel what he says. There's an appeal that libertarianism... any vote that Obama doesn't get among young people because either they've stayed home or they've voted libertarian is a real fly in the ointment.

Now, this is not an ideological statement. But how can you hate a guy who stands up at the Republican debates and is standing right next to former Senator Rick Santorum and is asked the question, 'Why are you running ads in Michigan that say that Senator Santorum is a pathological liar?' And Ron Paul comes back and says, 'Because he is a pathological liar.' There's something really refreshing about that.

Fourth group. Fourth group is what we call the creative class. Something that my colleague and good friend Richard Florida has coined. 35 million strong in the United States. Runs the gamut of people who work in the area of knowledge, ideas, creativity. Everyone from our traditional professions, physicians, lawyers and teachers, academics and so on, all the way to software engineers and designers and artisans and so on. This group went heavily towards Obama. So heavily, it's normally a swing voter, it went so heavily to Obama that it was one of the reasons why a number of traditionally red states – those are the states that voted for George W Bush twice – went blue, Democrat, in 2008. The Boston area into New Hampshire, New Hampshire went from red to blue. Heavy, heavy knowledge worker area. North Carolina, big African American vote, small but growing Latino vote, but

clearly in North Carolina the research triangle, Charlotte, creative class centre. Southern Florida as well. A number of states.

So where are they today? They had a profound sense of disillusionment towards Barack Obama, but there are four words that have brought the creative class back into the Democratic fold as of today. Those four words: con-tra-cep-tion. Wow, do some people wish they had that one to do over again, I think.

The whole issue of contraception raised initially by the Administration in terms of a funding proposal for NGOs and Medicaid was adopted by the Roman Catholic bishops and of course by social conservatives. And, just... I'm a pollster. We don't talk morals or ethics. We only talk politics, that's all. In terms of pure politics, it has been a disaster for the Republican party. Why? Young women were not so sure they were going to vote, and now we see a massive interest on the part of young women similar to what we saw in 2008.

I was just on a panel a week ago at Villanova University in Philadelphia. One of the professors said, 'Barack Obama is in trouble. He only leads among married women by seven points, 49 to 42.' I'm not a pollster only, I'm a historian. Married women are a conservative Republican voting bloc. The fact that a Democrat is leading among married women is very significant. The fact that 98% of Catholic women who have admitted to being sexually active use birth control in some form... 98% is a pretty compelling figure.

I daresay that there are Mennonite women who say to their husbands, 'If thou have not those little rubber things, thou ain't touching me tonight.' I'm sorry, that was awful. Those are the sorts of things that my wife really hates about me.

But the fact is, it is a disastrous issue and it has brought young people to some degree who care very much about personal privacy – *they're* allowed to violate their own privacy, but you're not. That's with young people. And then with the creative class, it goes against a social set of behaviour and values that has been kind of an assumption in the last generation or so.

So where are we? There were 12 states that Barack Obama won in 2008 that tipped heavily Republican in the off elections of 2010. In all of those 12 states today, Obama either leads or is tied. This is a very competitive election. Structurally, it's going to be close because Obama now of course is an incumbent and has to defend a record.

But a year and a half ago... I just wrote about – I do a weekly column for Forbes – a year and a half ago, we did a poll and we asked at various levels

of unemployment, at this level, would you vote for Barack Obama? And we started at where it was at the time, which was at 9.3%. When we got down to 8.2% a plurality said they would vote for Obama to be re-elected. When we got to 8.0, it was a majority, 54% that said they would vote for Obama.

So isn't that interesting? We're at 8.2 and we're watching. Watching that trend line and seeing what will happen. But it's not all about the economy. A lot of it is, but some of it isn't.

Why don't I stop right there? It's kind of an overview and I have a lot more to say, so just ask. Thank you very much.