

Opinion

RealClearPolitics

Will There Be Coattails in November?

RealClearPolitics

- Dick Morris: Consider Obama's Proposals
John Stossel: Does McCain Understand Markets?
Tony Blankley: Was Iraq Worth It?
Robert Samuelson: The Return of Inflation
Thomas Sowell: Why Should We Imitate Europe?

Reid Wilson
Fri Jun 20, 10:45 AM ET

One may argue the merits of Barack Obama and John McCain for hours, or months, on end, and the coming clash of style, substance and ideology will be a presidential election few will forget. But for the hundreds of Democrats and Republicans across the country who will share a ballot with the two candidates, one thing is certain: Neither party could have done a better job choosing its nominee if it hopes to take advantage of coattails in November.

"They have to make their own opportunities," Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee spokesman Doug Thornell said of advice his organization is giving to their candidates. "They have to create their own environment." But in a political atmosphere this year in which one party is significantly disadvantaged, and in which both presidential contenders have their own big positives, many believe excitement over one or both candidates, and the resulting coattail effect, will play a significant role in November.

"What we've seen in the past ... is that coattails largely work through turnout," said Jim Campbell, a political scientist and turnout expert at the University of Buffalo. "If you can boost the turnout for a candidate at the top of the ticket, that carries along maybe six out of ten, between six and eight out of ten additional votes below that." For Democrats, the reason to hope for a coattail effect is obvious: Over the primary process, more people cast ballots for one of the party's candidates than ever before. Obama is "a powerful partner for House Democrats heading into the fall election," Thornell said. "He has a proven ability to win independents. ... That's a voting bloc that Senator Obama has done very well with, Democrats are making gains with, and I think that's going to be something that I think helps the entire party out." Democrats won 8% more of the independent vote in 2006 than they did in 2004, a recent memo from DCCC chairman Chris Van Hollen notes, and Obama's strength among that bloc in states with big House races this year -- states like New Mexico, Ohio, Missouri and Virginia -- bodes well for November. "Having Senator Obama at the top of the Democratic ticket in November will be a tremendous asset for Democratic House candidates," Van Hollen concludes. Furthermore, while the battle for the White House battle has largely been fought in a dozen or so swing states in recent years, Obama has promised to build on the Democratic

ADVERTISEMENT



OPINION VIDEO



After the Show Show: 6/24 FOX News



Exclusive: Nancy Pelosi Uncut FOX News

All news video

NEWS SEARCH

"Senator Obama" Search

Related Searches:

- DCCC chairman Chris Van Hollen notes
National Republican Congressional Committee spokesman
Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee
Rep. Lincoln Davis



ELSEWHERE ON THE WEB

The Christian Science Monitor:
[Afghanistan: Taliban keeps up pressure with assaults](#)

ABC News: [British Man Guilty of Killing Wife, Daughter in Massachusetts](#)

McClatchy Newspapers: [Kansas governor warns GOP will play race card](#)



ALSO IN YAHOO! NEWS



Popular World News

The most popular world news and

photos.

[» All Most Popular](#)

National Committee's 50-State Strategy and put at least some staff in every state. There is no way Obama will win every state in which he makes a staff commitment, of course, but he doesn't have to in order to benefit the party.

"While he may not win in some of these more difficult Republican terrain states, by having a presence there, potentially helping with turnout, that could have an impact on the downballot" races, Thornell said. The turnout bump in Southern states and other areas with large black populations may catch some by surprise. "There is going to be a large African-American turnout surge and the polls may not catch that," Campbell said. That increased turnout could help Democrats in places like North Carolina's Eighth District, where Republican Rep. Robin Hayes faces a tough re-election battle in a district that is 27% African-American. Two incumbent Democrats in Georgia, Reps. [Jim Marshall](#) and [John Barrow](#), always find themselves with tough Republican opponents, but with increased turnout among African-American voters (32% of the population in Marshall's district, almost 45% in Barrow's district), they could be safe for another two years. And Democrats might even have a shot at a Mississippi Senate seat currently held by Republican Roger Wicker, especially if a record number of the state's 36% of African-Americans turn out to vote for Obama in November. While the [GOP](#) is experiencing problems on par with those they had after the Watergate scandal, the party nominated the best possible candidate to limit potential fallout in what is shaping up to be a decidedly un hospitable year for Republicans. John McCain's image and personal popularity extends beyond the Republican label after his name -- look no farther than McCain polling virtually evenly with Obama, while a generic Republican loses to a generic Democrat by double digits. Therein lies the Republican advantage: Only McCain gives his party the ability to distance itself from President Bush. On a virtually daily basis, the McCain campaign works to distance itself from the current occupant of the White House, and one need only recall the personal animosity that erupted between the two during the 2000 campaign to know why McCain has often been seen as a thorn in Bush's side. Among independents and Democrats, he remains the most popular Republican in the country. McCain's chief advantage is the ability to rebrand his party in his own image. For years, Democrats have run away from their party's [presidential nominee](#), and now some Republicans are running just as hard away from President Bush. With McCain heading the ticket, those Republicans have somewhere to run. "To the extent that [McCain] can cut into the disadvantages, reduce the disadvantages that Republicans have this year, he may be able to blunt some of the coattail gains that Democrats might otherwise have made," says Professor Campbell. Too, some Democrats have yet to fully embrace Obama. Tennessee Rep. [Lincoln Davis](#) and Florida Rep. Tim Mahoney, among a few others, have refused to endorse Obama, while newly-elected Mississippi Rep. Travis Childers actually spent money on a television ad distancing himself from the Illinois Senator in a recent special election. "While Democratic candidates continue to forsake Barack Obama and his elitist criticism of working class American on the campaign trail," said National Republican Congressional Committee spokesman Ken Spain, "Republicans are embracing the candidacy of [John McCain](#) whose appeal to independent voters and Reagan Democrats will assist our candidates running downballot." In recent years, a coattail effect has not been as prevalent as it once was, a phenomenon Campbell attributes to a lack of a large number of competitive downballot races. This year, though, with dozens of incumbent Democrats facing difficult challenges and a lot more Republican-held seats featuring a strong Democratic opponent, the field of competitive races is going to be dramatically larger than in previous years. "When you have a lot of seats essentially in play, coattails make more of a difference," Campbell said. That could be good news for both parties. With increased turnout among new, younger voters and African-Americans, Obama will give Democrats an ability to compete in districts not contested before. And with a wounded brand, McCain will give Republicans a chance to find a new home, and even if the party loses seats this year, they have the ability to start fresh for the future, beginning now. The question is not only which candidate will have the stronger effect on downballot races, but how broadly those coattails are felt. The answer could determine whether one party turns a corner, or whether the other builds a massive majority that lasts a generation or more.

[Email Story](#)

[IM Story](#)

[Printable View](#)

[Yahoo! Buzz](#)

RECOMMEND THIS STORY

Recommend It:

Average (7 votes)



[» Recommended Stories](#)



ADVERTISEMENT



Add headlines to your personalized My Yahoo! page
 (About My Yahoo! and RSS)

Opinion - RealClearPolitics.com

» More news feeds

NEWS ALERTS

Get an alert when there are new stories about:

- Senator Obama
- DCCC chairman Chris Van Hollen notes
- National Republican Congressional Committee spokesman
- Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee
- Rep. Lincoln Davis

Add Selected Alerts

» More alerts

Opinion

[NCLB gets a passing grade](#) USATODAY.com

[Our view on security vs. privacy: Election-year spying deal is flawed, overly broad](#) USATODAY.com

[Opposing view: Track terror threats](#) USATODAY.com

[Zimbabwe's neighborhood](#) The Christian Science Monitor

[Blind trusts will improve blind justice in the high court](#) The Christian Science Monitor

Most Viewed - Opinion

[The ACORN Obama Knows](#) Michelle Malkin
[STEPHEN COLBERT, MEET THE PRESS](#) Maggie Gallagher

[Obamanomics](#) The Weekly Standard
[MEXICO MAY BE HEADING TOWARD A POPULIST FUTURE](#) Georgie Anne Geyer

[Morality -- Trotskyite vs. Christian](#) Pat Buchanan

Opinion Video

[After the Show Show: 6/24](#) FOX News - Wed Jun 25, 11:03 AM ET

[Exclusive: Nancy Pelosi Uncut](#) FOX News - Wed Jun 25, 4:04 AM ET

[Powerful Woman in Politics](#) FOX News - Wed Jun 25, 2:03 AM ET

[Here We Go Again](#) FOX News - Wed Jun 25, 2:03 AM ET

Sponsored Links

(What's this?)

[Refinance \\$300,000 for Only \\$965/Month](#)
\$300,000 Mortgage for only \$965/month. Save \$1,000's - No obligation.
www.HomeLoanHelpLine.com

[Refinance and Save \\$1,000S](#)
\$150,000 Mortgage for \$483/month. Compare up to 4 free quotes.
www.pickamortgage.com

[New Car Weekend Sales](#)
Find out Today's Advertised New Car MSRP & Instant Invoice Price Info.
CarBargainsWeekly.com

Search:

All News



Search

Advanced

Yahoo! - My Yahoo! - Mail

[Home](#) | [U.S](#) | [Business](#) | [World](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Sports](#) | [Tech](#) | [Politics](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Travel](#) | [Most Popular](#) | [Odd News](#) | [Opinion](#)

Copyright © 2008 RealClearPolitics

Copyright © 2008 Yahoo All rights reserved. [Copyright/IP Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Help](#) | [Feedback](#)

NOTICE: We collect personal information on this site. To learn more about how we use your information, see our » [Privacy Policy](#)