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Americans deeply split over politics

Poll: Red, blue states worlds apart

By Ralph Z. Hallow, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Americans are as deeply divided over party, ideology and values as they are over the legitimacy of the presidency of George W. Bush, a new poll shows.

The splits are so profound that Mr. Bush and his Democratic challenger might as well be campaigning in two different, but parallel, worlds, said John Zogby, who conducted the survey for the O'Leary Report, published by political analyst Bradley S. O'Leary.

The survey also found that the most important "gender" gap is not between male and female voters, but between married women and single women, Mr. Zogby said.

"That gap is enormous - married and single voters live not on different planets, but different solar systems, when it comes to their politics and values," Mr. Zogby said. "Republicans have a problem with single voters, especially single women. The Democrats' problem is with married people, especially married women."

Among other survey findings, married voters approved of the Bush tax cuts by a margin of more than 2-to-1 - 51 percent of married voters said the tax cuts were a good idea and 20 percent said they were a bad idea. By comparison, single voters said the tax cuts were bad by a 34 percent to 25

percent margin.

The Dec. 15 to 19 survey compares the views of 1,200 likely voters on abortion, same-sex "marriage," religion, gun rights, tax cuts, Social Security reform and other issues.

The results highlight the division of views between the 30 so-called "red states" won by Mr. Bush in 2000 and the "blue states" [20 states and the District] carried by Democrat Al Gore.

The views in the red states and blue states are so divergent that they can be considered as two nations, Mr. O'Leary said at yesterday's press briefing with Mr. Zogby.

Mr. O'Leary said the poll revealed the most meaningful divisions emerged not in the usual geographic categories of East, Midwest, West and South familiar to political strategists and the press, but in groupings he called "precincts," where there are concentrations of voters who share the same social and economic interests and the same values.

"Within this poll, we identified 10 very important social and economic precincts that deliver money, votes and volunteers in the presidential election and live within the blue

and red states," Mr. O'Leary said. "We identify the issues that divide these precincts. The results demonstrate that each of these precincts split the American electorate almost evenly, or at worst between 42 [percent] and 52 percent."

"The poll is an attempt to get at the core of this division," says Mr. Zogby. "We see significant demographic and ideological differences between ... blue and red states. The blue states have fewer Republicans, 55- to 69-year-olds [the most conservative age group], rural dwellers, conservatives, born-again Christians, daily or weekly attendees at a place of worship, local sports fans, gun owners, investors, military veterans and married voters."

"These differences portend a harder sell for Republican candidates [in blue states]," Mr. Zogby said. "On the other hand, red states have fewer younger voters, single voters, college graduates, liberals, Catholics and Jews, union members, and non-prayers. In short, the two regions think and vote differently because they are different."

In red states, he noted, 62 percent of voters said Mr. Bush is the legitimate president, while 32 percent said the election was stolen from Mr. Gore.

GRAPHIC: President Bush, who attended a fund-raiser Monday in St. Louis, and his policy initiatives are favored by people living in "red" states, which voted for him in 2000. [Photo by AP]