

February 6, 2012

[Josh Kraushaar](#) of National Journal with the first of three reports on the election. He says Obama is struggling in the battleground states.

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First, the good news for Team Obama: His political standing is in respectable shape in traditionally Democratic Midwestern battlegrounds, like Wisconsin, Michigan and the more Republican heartland state of Iowa (46 approval/46 disapproval). Obama's numbers in Virginia are better than in other battleground states - 45 percent approve, 49 percent disapprove. And his numbers in North Carolina (44/49 approve/disapprove) and Florida (44/48 approve/disapprove) and even Georgia (45/48 approve/disapprove) aren't good, but given his overall numbers, they are relatively decent.

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[Kraushaar's](#) second report is on Romney's Bain record and the failure of Newt to gain traction with this line of campaigning.

President Obama's re-election team has been focused on Mitt Romney's record at Bain Capital as a major part of its offensive against the former Massachusetts governor, hoping to portray him as a heartless capitalist who laid off workers while restructuring companies

Two new polls conducted over the last week -- one nationally and one in Florida -- raise questions on the potency of that message. A [new ABC News/Washington Post poll](#), released today, finds that a narrow 40 percent plurality view Romney's work "buying and restructuring companies" unfavorably, with 35 percent viewing it favorably. Among independents, it's a near-even split: 35 percent view Romney's work at Bain favorably, while 36 percent view it unfavorably.

In the battleground state of Florida, a [Mason-Dixon poll](#) conducted for the Tampa Times and Miami Herald, showed favorable results for Romney. Nearly half (46 percent) of Florida voters viewed Romney's business background positively, while just 30 percent negatively. ...

[The Third](#) is on the disappearance of Obama's fundraising advantage.

Every presidential election, there's a new development that changes the nature of campaigns that one party, often the one out of power, takes advantage of. In 2008, it was the Obama team's impressive use of social media to connect with new young voters and expand the electorate. In 2004, it was the Bush campaign's savvy use of micro-targeting technologies to identify narrow slices of the electorate, and get them to show up and vote Republican.

This year, it's the Republicans' adept and aggressive use of super PACs to even the financial playing field, blunting the often-massive money advantages that an incumbent president has at

his disposal. With the emergence of American Crossroads, Crossroads GPS and Restore Our Future, a well-stocked Romney super PAC, the Obama fundraising juggernaut no longer looks so imposing. If Romney is the Republican nominee, he won't be overwhelmed with a wave of negative advertising, and will have the resources to fight back.

Take a look at the end-of-year numbers. ...

Also from National Journal, [Ron Brownstein](#) looks at the numbers for the president. ... *In the 2011 numbers, the situation looks much more difficult for Obama. From 2010 to 2011, Gallup found, his average approval ratings dropped in every state except Connecticut, Maine and (oddly enough) Wyoming. As a result, to reach 270 Electoral College votes based on the 2011 numbers, he would need to win 20 states plus the District of Columbia where his approval rating stands at 44.5 percent or more. Since one of the states above that line is Georgia, which is also a stretch for Obama in practice, to reach 270 he would more likely need to carry Oregon and North Carolina, where his approval ratings stood at 44.5 percent and 43.7 percent, respectively. (It's worth filing away that the scenario based on either year's numbers - Virginia and North Carolina stand right at the tipping point between victory and defeat for Obama.)*

In sum then, Obama in 2010 could reach an Electoral College majority by carrying states where his approval rating stood at least at 46.6 percent, something that would be difficult but hardly impossible. To reach a majority based on the 2011 results, he'd need to carry states where his approval stood at 43.7 percent or above. That's a much more daunting prospect. ...

Think the GOP is having a bad time in the selection process, [Frank Fleming](#) says look what the Dems are stuck with.

It's a crucial election year. As another global financial crisis looms and rogue states pursue nuclear weapons, the American people are desperately looking for a strong leader to show them the way to a brighter tomorrow.

So it's unconscionable that the Democratic primaries have yet to produce a single serious candidate for president.

This election is a great opportunity for the Democrats. After the setbacks the party has suffered, the Tea Party is finally dying down, and people are getting fed up with the Republicans in Congress. If the Democrats could come up with a strong candidate for the White House, he or she would easily win the election.

Yet, for some reason, many of the most promising Democrats chose not to run in the primaries, and those who did run are not appealing candidates. Indeed, the front-runner who has swept the early primary states despite a lack of enthusiastic support, Barack Obama, is just not a viable candidate in the general election. ...

Last week Ann Coulter was touting Romneycare. [David Harsanyi](#) is not as enthused. ... No doubt, the impending presidential debate will center on the state of the economy -- and general election voters are far less ideologically motivated than primary voters. Yet grander themes can move people. Obama will continue to spin tales about a nation strangled by capitalistic excess and inequity. It is an arching theme that plays on the fears of many nervous Americans and is sure to animate grass-roots supporters in urban tent environments everywhere.

Republicans, in turn, have lost a genuine opportunity to point to the purest example of Obama's aversion to economic and individual freedom. It's the mandate that allows Obamacare to assault religious freedom. It's the mandate, coupled with increasing regulatory burdens, that many people fear will limit consumer choice and competition.

The entire project falls apart without the mandate.

No doubt, Mitt or Newt will continue to promise to overturn the health care reform law -- and, who knows, the winner may. Or perhaps the Supreme Court will save us all by deeming the mandate unconstitutional. But to think, after all the anger and frustration caused by Obamacare -- not to mention its persisting unpopularity -- one of the strongest arguments against it has been dulled before the GOP presidential nominee could even make it.

[Walter Russell Mead](#) posts on the decline in global warming.

As the world suffers through a mix of weather (warm winter temperatures) in the continental US and climate (cold weather) in Alaska and Europe, some interesting new numbers are starting to trickle in.

Preliminary reports from the Energy Information Administration's "Annual Energy Outlook" (which will be fully published in April) suggest that any carbon crisis may not be quite as imminent as thought. Not so long ago, the EIA predicted carbon emissions levels would rise by 37 percent between 2005 and 2035. The EIA — get this — now thinks that global CO2 emissions in 2025 will be 6 percent lower than they were in 2005.

Check the [report](#) for yourself, but to [Via Meadia](#) and [others](#) this looks like a serious reduction in the forecast of carbon emissions over the next couple decades. There are likely numerous reasons for the change; easier access to cleaner fuel sources like shale gas, the rising price of oil and cheapening of solar and wind are but several.

And there is one other thing that is clear: the people who put these forecasts together have no idea what they are doing. This is one of the cases in which the use of the word forecast should be banned; these are guesses, not forecasts, and it's a big deal. ...

[The Economist](#) reports on satellite info that has forced China to be more forthcoming about pollution.

"PM2.5" seems an odd and wonky term for the blogosphere to take up, but that is precisely what has happened in China in recent weeks. It refers to the smallest solid particles in the

atmosphere—those less than 2.5 microns across. Such dust can get deep into people's lungs; far deeper than that rated as PM10. Yet until recently China's authorities have revealed measurements only for PM10. When people realised this, an online revolt broke out. Such was the public pressure that [authorities caved in](#), and PM2.5 data are now being published for Beijing and a handful of other cities.

What of the rest of China? At the moment, only PM10 data are available. But the government's hand may soon be forced here, too. Though pollution data are best collected near the ground, a plausible estimate may be made from the vantage-point of a satellite by measuring how much light is blocked by particles, and estimating from those particles' chemical composition the likely distribution of their sizes. And a report prepared for The Economist by a team led by Angel Hsu of Yale University does just that, drawing on data from American satellites to map out PM2.5 pollution across the entire country. ...

National Journal - 2012 Decoded

[Obama Struggling In Battleground States](#)

By Josh Kraushaar

President Obama's reelection team has [spun multiple pathways](#) to an electoral vote majority, but a glance at his [state-by-state approval ratings](#) throughout 2011 suggests the campaign has been doing a lot of bluffing.

First, the good news for Team Obama: His political standing is in respectable shape in traditionally Democratic Midwestern battlegrounds, like Wisconsin, Michigan and the more Republican heartland state of Iowa (46 approval/46 disapproval). Obama's numbers in Virginia are better than in other battleground states - 45 percent approve, 49 percent disapprove. And his numbers in North Carolina (44/49 approve/disapprove) and Florida (44/48 approve/disapprove) and even Georgia (45/48 approve/disapprove) aren't good, but given his overall numbers, they are relatively decent.

The bad news: His job approval ratings in the other battleground states are solidly underwater and, in many states, worse than publicly perceived. In Colorado, seen as a gateway to aggressively contesting the Southwest, Obama scored a net -12 job approval (40/52) throughout the year. In Nevada, also seen as a major bellwether, Obama has a 41 percent approval rating, with 50 percent of respondents disapproving. In the critical battleground state of Ohio, 50 percent of voters disapprove of his performance, with only 42 percent approving. In the must-win state of Pennsylvania, Obama's job approval is underwater, with 45 percent approving and 48 percent disapproving.

Some unpleasant surprises abound for the Obama campaign, too. New Mexico has been seen as a Democratic-leaning state because of its voting history and significant Hispanic population. But Obama's performance there -- 42 percent favorable, 51 percent unfavorable -- isn't much different than his weak standing in the other Southwestern battlegrounds. The Obama

campaign has been arguing it has an outside shot at contesting Arizona, but his approval rating is at 40 percent, with 52 percent disapproving.

In New Hampshire, a state that John Kerry carried in 2004, Obama's job approval is at 39 percent, with 54 percent disapproving. It's a state that, with Romney heading the GOP ticket, is starting to look out of reach.

Keep in mind the data is from throughout 2011, reflecting as much the past year as the present. But Obama's approval hasn't budged all that much throughout the year, dipping in the low-40s in Gallup's daily tracking, and inching upwards to 46 percent in the most recent three-day track.

Based on these numbers, the most plausible path for the president's re-election runs through Virginia, Florida and Iowa. That wasn't a scenario Team Obama [drew up in its spin sessions](#), but if Gallup's numbers are to be believed, it may be the most likely.

National Journal - 2012 Decoded **[Polls Show Split Opinion On Romney's Business Record](#)**

By Josh Kraushaar

President Obama's re-election team has been focused on Mitt Romney's record at Bain Capital as a major part of its offensive against the former Massachusetts governor, hoping to portray him as a heartless capitalist who laid off workers while restructuring companies

Two new polls conducted over the last week -- one nationally and one in Florida -- raise questions on the potency of that message. A [new ABC News/Washington Post poll](#), released today, finds that a narrow 40 percent plurality view Romney's work "buying and restructuring companies" unfavorably, with 35 percent viewing it favorably. Among independents, it's a near-even split: 35 percent view Romney's work at Bain favorably, while 36 percent view it unfavorably.

In the battleground state of Florida, a [Mason-Dixon poll](#) conducted for the *Tampa Times* and *Miami Herald*, showed favorable results for Romney. Nearly half (46 percent) of Florida voters viewed Romney's business background positively, while just 30 percent negatively. This is despite lots of scrutiny in the news media about Romney's record at Bain over the last several weeks.

The numbers suggest that Romney's work at Bain and his wealth are vulnerabilities, but hardly a poison pill that will significantly hurt his general election prospects against President Obama. It's useful to think about Romney's vulnerabilities in comparison to other presidential nominees. Reports on Bill Clinton's philandering were arguably much more damaging than Romney's business track record in 1992; his net favorable/unfavorable dropped to negative double-digits in April of that year. And Ronald Reagan's outspoken conservatism -- including his past opposition to Medicare -- was a glaring vulnerability in polls back in 1980.

Republican strategists say polling on Bain and Romney's business record is very volatile, and both positive and negative messages that get delivered will play a major role in the public's

perception of the candidate. But it's hard to see it being a game-changer, especially if voters are exposed to both positive and negative messaging on the subject.

National Journal - 2012 Decoded

Obama Fundraising Advantage Disappearing

By Josh Kraushaar

Every presidential election, there's a new development that changes the nature of campaigns that one party, often the one out of power, takes advantage of. In 2008, it was the Obama team's impressive use of social media to connect with new young voters and expand the electorate. In 2004, it was the Bush campaign's savvy use of micro-targeting technologies to identify narrow slices of the electorate, and get them to show up and vote Republican.

This year, it's the Republicans' adept and aggressive use of super PACs to even the financial playing field, blunting the often-massive money advantages that an incumbent president has at his disposal. With the emergence of American Crossroads, Crossroads GPS and Restore Our Future, a well-stocked Romney super PAC, the Obama fundraising juggernaut no longer looks so imposing. If Romney is the Republican nominee, he won't be overwhelmed with a wave of negative advertising, and will have the resources to fight back.

Take a look at the end-of-year numbers.

The Obama campaign ended the year with \$81.8 million cash-on hand - a very strong total. But the outside Democratic groups, especially the party's newly-created super PACs, haven't given him much in the way of reinforcements. The Democratic National Committee has \$12.6 million cash-on-hand to assist. But Priorities USA banked a meager \$1.5 million, receiving money from just 42 individual donors in the last six months. The party's congressional super PACs -- Majority PAC and House Majority PAC -- also didn't bank much, \$1.3 million and \$1.17 million, respectively.

Meanwhile, the Romney campaign ended the year with \$19.9 million in the bank, far less than the president's cash haul. But when you add in the outside groups, he's about at even strength. Romney's super PAC, Restore Our Future, banked \$23.6 million at the end of the year, thanks to funding from venture capitalists aligned with Romney. American Crossroads, which is poised to play an outsized role in the presidential race, ended the year with \$15.6 million cash-on-hand. And the RNC ended the year with more cash-on-hand than the DNC, banking \$20 million. All told, that adds up to \$79.1 million - and it doesn't include the cash-on-hand from Crossroads GPS, which doesn't file with the Federal Election Commission. But based on Crossroads' announced fundraising totals, it's logical to assume that they have around \$15 million on-hand.

That brings the combined Obama and Democratic outside group totals to \$98.3 million cash-on-hand, with the GOP groups tallying \$94.1 million. Take out the Democratic groups strictly devoted to congressional activities, and it's a virtual financial tie. With labor and environmental groups poised to help Obama's re-election, Democrats still could hold a narrow edge. But it's hardly the cash advantage that would allow Team Obama to run negative advertising uncontested against Romney, without an aggressive response.

It's a far cry from the vision of a billion-dollar Obama re-election campaign bankroll that Democratic strategists are now downplaying. And it shows that the amount of time Democrats spent complaining and attacking the liberalized campaign finance laws before the 2010 midterms would have been better spent preparing for an infrastructure utilizing super PACs to their advantage. Priorities USA, headed by former White House spokesman Bill Burton, hasn't yet shown it can compete with American Crossroads so far -- and time is running short.

President Obama has built up an imposing fundraising infrastructure. But thanks to the rise of the super PACs, it might not be enough to hold any kind of fundraising advantage in 2012.

National Journal - 2012 Decoded

Rocky Terrain: Obama's Electoral College Map Grows Steeper

by Ronald Brownstein

The Gallup state-by-state average approval numbers for 2011 [released](#) this week don't necessarily predict where President Obama will finish on Election Day, but they do measure the hill he must climb to win re-election.

The most important number in presidential elections, of course, is 270 - the number of Electoral College votes it takes to win. The best way to examine the Gallup numbers is to measure them against that yardstick.

In [2010](#), if you sorted down from Obama's highest approval rating to his lowest, he could reach 270 Electoral College votes by carrying the 22 states plus the District of Columbia where his approval rating stood at 46.9 percent or more. Since one of the states above that line was Mississippi, a state Obama has almost no chance of carrying in practice, a more realistic scenario was that to reach an Electoral College majority he would have to carry those 21 states plus Virginia, where his approval rating stood at 46.6 percent.

That would have been challenging, but not imposingly so. Political strategists used to believe that incumbents were unlikely to win elections (or carry states) where their approval rating lagged below 50 percent; but given the widespread cynicism about politicians many strategists on both sides believe the tipping point is now around 47 percent. Below that number, incumbents are a distinct underdog; above it, they are favored, with the ground tilting much more toward them once they cross 50 percent.

In the 2011 numbers, the situation looks much more difficult for Obama. From 2010 to 2011, Gallup found, his average approval ratings dropped in every state except Connecticut, Maine and (oddly enough) Wyoming. As a result, to reach 270 Electoral College votes based on the 2011 numbers, he would need to win 20 states plus the District of Columbia where his approval rating stands at 44.5 percent or more. Since one of the states above that line is Georgia, which is also a stretch for Obama in practice, to reach 270 he would more likely need to carry Oregon and North Carolina, where his approval ratings stood at 44.5 percent and 43.7 percent, respectively. (It's worth filing away that the scenario based on either year's numbers - Virginia and North Carolina stand right at the tipping point between victory and defeat for Obama.)

In sum then, Obama in 2010 could reach an Electoral College majority by carrying states where his approval rating stood at least at 46.6 percent, something that would be difficult but hardly impossible. To reach a majority based on the 2011 results, he'd need to carry states where his approval stood at 43.7 percent or above. That's a much more daunting prospect.

Another way of examining the shift is to group states into bands based on Obama's approval rating. In 2011, the states in which Obama's approval rating exceeds 50 percent-enough to make him a clear favorite-have a combined total of 159 Electoral College votes. His rating stands between 47 percent and 49.9 percent in states with another combined 56 Electoral College votes. That means he's favored at least somewhat in states with 215 Electoral College votes. That's a big decline from 2010, when he stood above 50 percent in states with 175 Electoral College votes and from 47 to 49.9 percent in states with another 84, for 259 favored votes.

At the same time, the Gallup data suggests, the number of Electoral College votes that have hardened against Obama has notably increased. In 2010, his approval rating averaged below 42 percent in states with 99 Electoral College votes. Now that's up to 193. There are also fewer states where he's just below the 47 percent threshold. In 2010, he stood between 42 percent and 46.9 percent in states with 180 Electoral College votes; now that's down to 130. The implication is that the number of states Obama can plausibly contest to reach 270 Electoral College votes is narrowing. Another way of documenting that challenge: in 2010, Obama's approval rating stood at 47 percent or above in New Mexico, Oregon, Iowa, Ohio and Nevada, all states he carried in 2008. His average 2011 ratings fell below that level in all five states.

There are lots of reasons why the Gallup numbers could be more a snapshot of the past than a forecast of the future. Obama's approval rating has generally run slightly lower in the Gallup tracking poll than in most other surveys. More important, his ratings have generally ticked up in most recent polls as Americans have expressed somewhat more optimism about the economy's trajectory, and he has shifted the Washington debate away from deficit-reduction toward jobs and tax equity; those improvements would not be heavily reflected in these numbers. He's also generally polling above his approval ratings in head-to-head match-ups against the leading Republican contenders-who have seen their favorability ratings decline amid their fierce primary struggle.

But even with all those qualifications, these Gallup numbers show how much work awaits the Obama campaign, not only in states at the border of the emerging Democratic coalition like Virginia, Florida and Nevada, but some, like Pennsylvania and Oregon that have been part of its core since 1992.

NY Post

[Democrats' Rotten Primary Choices](#)

by Frank Fleming

It's a crucial election year. As another global financial crisis looms and rogue states pursue nuclear weapons, the American people are desperately looking for a strong leader to show them the way to a brighter tomorrow.

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This election is a great opportunity for the Democrats. After the setbacks the party has suffered, the Tea Party is finally dying down, and people are getting fed up with the Republicans in Congress. If the Democrats could come up with a strong candidate for the White House, he or she would easily win the election.

Yet, for some reason, many of the most promising Democrats chose not to run in the primaries, and those who *did* run are not appealing candidates. Indeed, the front-runner who has swept the early primary states despite a lack of enthusiastic support, Barack Obama, is just not a viable candidate in the general election.

People were very excited about Obama when he first emerged on the scene in 2008, but as his campaign went on — and as he's actually served as president — it's become apparent to the general public that he's simply not a serious candidate for the job.

For one thing, he has a flimsy record with no useful experience that would help him *do* the job. He's mainly known for being a community organizer and an undistinguished legislator. The only work he's done that might relate to being president — his three years actually in the office — has hardly created a record he'd want to tout during the campaign.



O: Since '08, résumé has only grown worse.

The fact is, Obama is clearly unelectable. Polls show his policies are unpopular with the American people at large, and even many Democrats aren't thrilled. While the American people are worried about jobs, Obama seems aloof to those concerns and just keeps talking about such left-wing boilerplate as taxing the rich and green energy.

At the same time, many in the Democratic base have begun doubting whether he's a true liberal, because they feel he hasn't followed through on their agenda.

So as the nominee, Obama will face an American people alienated by policies, while an unenthusiastic base halfheartedly supports him. Democrats could face a huge disaster.

The party establishment must be horrified to see Obama cruise through the primary, but there aren't any other good candidates for it to coalesce behind. It's probably too late for someone like Hillary Clinton to jump in and save the day, so the only hope the Democrats have left is a brokered convention.



This may anger some, but it's past time for the adults in the Democratic Party to seize control of things and keep the party from throwing away any chances it has.

The primaries are supposed to be to find the strongest candidate for the general election, but that route is simply failing for the Democrats this time. The Republican primary field has at least offered a few options people can *imagine* doing a decent job as president, but the reason for Obama's easy success so far in the Democratic primaries (the fact that he's the incumbent) means no one will be able to imagine that about the Democratic nominee.

Democratic voters must be looking to the Republican field with envy. Having a few potentially bad choices certainly beats having just a single horrible one.

Political satirist Frank J. Fleming's e-book, "Obama: The Greatest President in the History of Everything," is out from HarperCollins.

Townhall

Republicans' Obamacare Problem

by David Harsanyi

Once the presidential nomination process is settled -- and Lord knows that day can't come fast enough -- Republicans will get back to doing what they do best, getting on Barack Obama's case. Incredibly, though, they'll have to do it without one of their most potent arguments.

The Republican candidate, after all, can't effectively attack what he supports. Today both leading contenders for the nomination have defended the idea of government's forcing all consumers to buy something in the interest of the common good. An individual mandate is about health insurance today, but really no one has offered any good reason Washington couldn't force us to buy a government-sanctioned iPad or rubber ducky tomorrow.

Even Obama feigned disapproval of the idea during his campaign in 2008. Yet Newt Gingrich has supported some variation of a federal health insurance mandate going as far back as 1993. The blog "Verum Serum" recently uncovered a conference call from May 2009 -- as Obamacare was nearing a simmer -- wherein Newt says he believes that "everyone must have health insurance. Or if you are an absolute libertarian, we would allow you to post a bond, but we would not allow people to be free riders, failing to insure themselves and then show up at the emergency room with no means of payment."

Without the help of Newt's false choices, a recent poll by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation found that about 54 percent of respondents take the "pure libertarian" position and believe that an individual mandate should be unconstitutional. Politically speaking, Gingrich may continue to rhetorically challenge Obamacare's mandate as "unconstitutional," but soon he's going to have to answer for his own long-standing support. Why did he change his mind? Even if he provides a compelling answer, it'll be too late. ("For 20 years, even conservative icon Newt Gingrich supported the basis of the president's health care plan. ... I'm Barack Obama, and I approved this message.")

The same gotcha exists for Mitt Romney, of course, who has never backed away from his support for a mandate or his Massachusetts plan. The only thing more annoying than his decision to remain consistent on this single issue is the epic dissembling he employs to defend it. *We get it; federalism. We get it; the folks in Massachusetts believe that Romneycare is a great idea. Guess what? The folks in Massachusetts think that a lot of dumb ideas are fantastic.*

I suppose Romney believes that voters should be impressed that as governor of Massachusetts, he didn't force West Virginians to use his top-down state-controlled health care system. Yes, federalism diffuses centralized power; it's a worthy process, a great idea, and it's got nothing to do with Romney's record. Put it this way: Just because I love the First Amendment doesn't mean I have to love the obscene things Joe Biden has done with it.

No doubt, the impending presidential debate will center on the state of the economy -- and general election voters are far less ideologically motivated than primary voters. Yet grander themes can move people. Obama will continue to spin tales about a nation strangled by capitalistic excess and inequity. It is an arching theme that plays on the fears of many nervous Americans and is sure to animate grass-roots supporters in urban tent environments everywhere.

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No doubt, Mitt or Newt will continue to promise to overturn the health care reform law -- and, who knows, the winner may. Or perhaps the Supreme Court will save us all by deeming the mandate unconstitutional. But to think, after all the anger and frustration caused by Obamacare -- not to mention its persisting unpopularity -- one of the strongest arguments against it has been dulled before the GOP presidential nominee could even make it.

Walter Russell Mead's Blog

[Global Warming Engine Unexpectedly Slows](#)

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Preliminary reports from the Energy Information Administration's "Annual Energy Outlook" (which will be fully published in April) suggest that any carbon crisis may not be quite as imminent as thought. Not so long ago, the EIA predicted carbon emissions levels would rise by 37 percent between 2005 and 2035. The EIA — get this — *now thinks that global CO2 emissions in 2025 will be 6 percent lower than they were in 2005.*

Check the [report](#) for yourself, but to *Via Meadia* and [others](#) this looks like a serious reduction in the forecast of carbon emissions over the next couple decades. There are likely numerous reasons for the change; easier access to cleaner fuel sources like shale gas, the rising price of oil and cheapening of solar and wind are but several.

And there is one other thing that is clear: the people who put these forecasts together have no idea what they are doing. This is one of the cases in which the use of the word forecast should be banned; these are guesses, not forecasts, and it's a big deal.

The Chicken Littles of the green movement throw a lot of statistics, trends and projections together and claim the status of scientific truth for whatever big and scary numbers they can coax out of their statistical black box. But even if the climate models are infallible or close to it and will need no more revisions as more information comes in (something that would be almost unique in the history of science) the *economic* models and projections that go into future CO2 level predictions are no better than any other economic models — which is to say they are almost no good at all.

To predict the amount of CO2 that human industry will be emitting in 2050, you need a figure for the world's GDP by then. That means you have to have long range forecasts for China, India,

South Africa, Russia, Brazil, Germany, the US, Canada and many other countries. Nobody has any forecasts of the 50 year GDP growth of any of these countries that is worth anything at all, because economic forecasting doesn't work that way. (It hardly works at all, but certainly not on this long term basis.)

And then you have to forecast how much CO₂ will be emitted per unit of GDP. That involves forecasting the rate and nature of technological change, the state and composition of world energy reserves in thirty years, and many other things which simply cannot be known by anybody living today.

An astrologer would throw up his hands in dismay at this sloppy reasoning and hazy science.

The truth is that forecasts about greenhouse gas emissions are basically worthless. These recent forecasts certainly were; the difference between 37 percent growth and 6 percent decline is 43 percent. That is about the level of accuracy you could expect from a blind monkey throwing darts at a wall.

But without those worthless forecasts, climate math falls to the ground. If we can't predict the future level of greenhouse gas emissions, we can't predict the future temperature of the earth — even assuming that our atmospheric models work perfectly and haven't left anything out.

None of this suggests that we should ignore climate and energy issues, but it confirms my belief that climate activists tend to be bad logicians, and that the way forward has nothing to do with the cumbersome bureaucratic power grabs, crony capitalist porkfests (ethanol, Solyndra, high speed rail) and economic controls that misguided greens hope will save the planet.

The Economist

Pollution in China

Man-made and visible from space

“PM2.5” seems an odd and wonky term for the blogosphere to take up, but that is precisely what has happened in China in recent weeks. It refers to the smallest solid particles in the atmosphere—those less than 2.5 microns across. Such dust can get deep into people's lungs; far deeper than that rated as PM10. Yet until recently China's authorities have revealed measurements only for PM10. When people realised this, an online revolt broke out. Such was the public pressure that [authorities caved in](#), and PM2.5 data are now being published for Beijing and a handful of other cities.

Sweat the small stuff

Population-weighted fine particulate matter concentrations, micrograms per m³, 2007



What of the rest of China? At the moment, only PM10 data are available. But the government's hand may soon be forced here, too. Though pollution data are best collected near the ground, a plausible estimate may be made from the vantage-point of a satellite by measuring how much light is blocked by particles, and estimating from those particles' chemical composition the likely distribution of their sizes. And a report prepared for *The Economist* by a team led by Angel Hsu of Yale University does just that, drawing on data from American satellites to map out PM2.5 pollution across the entire country.

World Health Organisation guidelines suggest that PM2.5 levels above ten micrograms per cubic metre are unsafe. The boffins have found (as the map shows) that almost every Chinese province has levels above that. Indeed, much of the country's population endures air so foul that it registers above 30 on the PM2.5 scale, with Shandong and Henan provinces topping 50. Because these readings reflect the average pollution that a typical resident in a province is likely to endure during a given year, they underplay the sharp spikes in pollution that are seen on particularly dirty days, when spot readings go much higher. That is why Beijingers should take little comfort from the fact that the capital's pollution measures only 35.

This approach is not perfect. Satellites are not great at taking readings over bright surfaces like snow and deserts, and cannot easily distinguish particles high up in the atmosphere from those closer to the ground. And the data also have to be adjusted to take account of the fact that pollution and people tend to coincide. (Otherwise uninhabited areas would drag the figure down, below the average atmospheric conditions actually experienced by the people who live in any given province.)

Such caveats aside, however, this study shows how far China still needs to go in cleaning up its act. Pollution and development have always marched hand in hand, and may even be regarded as tolerable so long as they mark only a temporary blip on the road to prosperity. What is intolerable is that it takes outside intervention to lift the lid on what is happening.



