

Rudy's Republican Ranking by Dan Jacoby

Pundits all over the television are astonished that Rudy Giuliani is still leading in all the polls of likely Republican primary voters. They shouldn't be.

Explanations abound, of course. Conservative voters are focusing on the "war on terror" to the exclusion of everything else. They don't know that Giuliani is "pro-choice" (although we don't really know where he stands now). The rest of the field is so bad that Giuliani only wins by default. The list goes on and on.

But every explanation offered to date is probably wrong.

It's interesting that none of the pollsters bothers to ask voters why they prefer one candidate over any other. Or rather, nobody is reporting any results of such questions – perhaps because the pollsters only release that information to candidates and campaigns that pay for it. Whatever the reason, the result is that we are left to figure out for ourselves just why the results are what they are.

Meanwhile, all the self-proclaimed "experts" are making the same mistake France made in 1939. They're still fighting the last war.

The most actively political people all have two things in common: They are highly partisan, and they want to win more than anything else. Republican primary voters want a candidate who has the best chance of winning on November 4, 2008. And like the vast majority of highly partisan political activists, they're willing to compromise on some issues if that's what it takes to win an election.

Now for the sad conclusion most Republican activists have reached: Neither John McCain nor Mitt Romney, nor any of the other "ten little Indians" except Giuliani, has any legitimate chance of winning next year. McCain has aligned himself too closely with an increasingly unpopular George W. Bush. Mitt Romney is not only Mormon, but is also flip-flopping on just about every issue conservatives care about. As for the other "seven dwarfs" – Tom Tancredo? Duncan Hunter? Don't make me laugh!

Of course, Giuliani's rather uncomfortable answers to questions of abortion, his three marriages (and how he announced he was leaving his second wife), his recent support of same-sex marriage, and his left-wing views on gun control all combine to make conservatives very, very nervous. But they also know that nominating Rudolph Giuliani is the only way they can make Democrats nervous too.

So they're holding their noses and supporting a guy they don't particularly like. And that is why Giuliani's poll numbers are so high.

This situation gives Democratic primary voters a rare opportunity. Rather than blindly vote for someone who is perceived as electable (did someone say "John Kerry"?), Democrats can have a real debate. For the first time in a very long time, Democrats have a real choice among several people, any of whom could make a terrific President.

The only remaining question is, will Democrats take advantage of this opportunity to choose someone who will make a real difference? Don't ask the pundits.