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The Illinois Republican Party has relentlessly bashed House Speaker Michael Madigan almost every day via press release during the past few months. Not many of those statements have been covered by the media, but the GOP is obviously hoping to make Madigan an issue in this election by blaming him for just about every problem in Illinois, even more than it did two years ago.

Madigan has also been hammered by the *Chicago Tribune* in a series of stories about his alleged conflicts of interest. Madigan initially dismissed the criticisms as “garbage” but eventually responded point-by-point in a letter that was mostly ignored by the media, and never addressed by the *Tribune* itself. The *Tribune*’s editorial board has led the charge against the speaker over the years, demanding his toppling as the House’s top guy.

House Republicans have tried for at least two decades to make the speaker an issue in campaigns. It’s never really succeeded, mainly because people hadn’t heard enough about Madigan to be moved by the GOP’s negative advertising.

Because it seems clear that the GOP plans to use Madigan as its favorite target again this year, I went looking for a poll to see if attacking him now might work in a state House race after years of bad publicity. A northern suburban legislative district that leans Republican seemed a good

place to look, because the *Tribune* is read pretty widely up there and the residents might be more inclined to accept the fact that Madigan was bad for Illinois.

Campaigns being campaigns, I can't divulge which district this poll comes from, but it was paid for by a northern suburban Republican. It was a legitimate live telephone poll of 301 people taken by a national pollster in mid-July.

Again, this district leans Republican, so the Madigan numbers are probably a bit worse than they would be statewide.

Madigan's "image" was tested by the poll, which found his positive rating at just 16 percent, while his negative rating was at 44 percent. Just 3 percent had a strongly positive view of his image, while 31 percent had a strongly negative view.

But 40 percent either had never heard of Madigan (17 percent) or had no opinion (23 percent). This is generally regarded as a well-educated region with politically aware voters, yet a very large percentage of that population doesn't really seem to care either way about the speaker.

The crosstabs have a much higher margin of error than the full poll's 5.7 percent, but they're still worth a look.

In the age brackets, Madigan's worst rating comes from people 65 and over. A whopping 63 percent of people in that age range have a negative opinion of Speaker Madigan, with 53 percent having a strongly negative viewpoint. Only 8 percent of that age group have a positive view of the speaker, and 29 percent either have never heard of him (9) or have no opinion (20) .

Fifty-eight percent of those aged 55 to 64 had a negative view of Madigan, while 42 percent of those who were 45 to 54 have a negative view of him, and of those who were 18 to 44, 28 percent have a negative view.

The general rule of thumb in politics is that the older one gets, the more one votes. And this poll in this particular district clearly shows that the older one gets, the more one despises Michael J. Madigan.

Among independents, a voting bloc that tends to lean more Republican, 46 percent have a negative view of Madigan, with 31 percent having a strongly negative view. But 43 percent either have never heard of Madigan (17) or didn't have an opinion (26). And 56 percent of independents aged 55 and up have a negative view of Madigan, while a third either didn't know about him or had no opinion.

The bottom line here is that there are some real dangers for the Democrats with Madigan's negative image. His 59-percent negative rating among older women, who tend to be more independent, is high enough on its own to set off alarm bells, at least in this district. Even 41 percent of Democrats aged 55 and older have a negative view of him, according to the poll. So, yes, the cumulative result is that the attacks may be having some impact. We'll know more as the campaign proceeds.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax *(a daily political newsletter) and CapitolFax.com* .