

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

Senator Coleman's Battle for Re-Election: A Tenuous Approval Rating and Franken's Challenge

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
Lawrence R. Jacobs
Director, Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota
(612) 625-3384

Joanne M. Miller
Research Associate, Center for Study of Politics and Governance
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science
University of Minnesota

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Senator Norm Coleman's bid for re-election faces some challenges even as he remains a formidable candidate, according to a Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute poll conducted between January 18 and January 27, 2008.

Tenuous job rating: Minnesotans are divided on Coleman's job performance. His rating is poised at 50 percent, a symbolically significant tipping point for an incumbent seeking reelection. By contrast, Minnesota's first year Senator – Democrat Amy Klobuchar – is enjoying a remarkably strong approval rating of 66 percent. Twice as many Minnesotans strongly approve of her performance compared to Senator Coleman's (30% vs.16%).

Senator Coleman Job Approval

| Strongly Approve | Somewhat Approve | Somewhat Disapprove | Strongly Disapprove | Don't Know / Other |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 16% | 34% | 17% | 17% | 16% |

Number of Minnesotan residents interviewed, 917; Margin of Error, 3.2 points

Senator Klobuchar Job Approval

| Strongly Approve | Somewhat Approve | Somewhat Disapprove | Strongly Disapprove | Don't Know / Other |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 30% | 36% | 12% | 7% | 15% |

Number of Minnesotan residents interviewed, 917; Margin of Error, 3.2 points

Franken Leads Democrats in Battle for Nomination: Al Franken leads the Democratic field in the battle for the Party's nomination to face the incumbent. Among Minnesota residents, Franken is preferred by 32 percent compared to 17 percent for Mike Ciresi, 4 percent for Jim Cohen, and 3 percent for Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer. (Margin of error of 3.2 percentage points.) Democrats are, of course decisive in selecting their Party's nominee.

Among self-described Democrats, Franken enjoys an even wider lead of 24 points over his next rival, Mike Ciresi (42% versus 18%). (The margin of error is 4.5 points).

Battle for Democratic Party U.S. Senate Nomination

| | Franken | Ciresi | Cohen | Nelson-Pallmeyer | Don't Know / Other |
|----------------------|---------|--------|-------|------------------|--------------------|
| All Minnesotans | 32% | 17% | 4% | 3% | 43% |
| Minnesotan Democrats | 42% | 18% | 2% | 3% | 35% |

Number of Democrats interviewed, 478; Margin of Error, 4.5 points

Number of Minnesotan residents interviewed, 917; Margin of Error, 3.2 points

Franken Offers Toughest Test for Coleman: Senator Norm Coleman is locked in a close contest with potential Democratic Party challenger Al Franken among Minnesotans. Franken holds a slight edge (43.2% versus 40% for Coleman), which is at the margin of error. But Senator Coleman leads among other potential Democrats – he holds a narrow edge over Mike Ciresi (43% versus 38%) and double-digit margins over Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer (47% versus 29%) and Jim Cohen (46% versus 31%).

Head-to-head match-ups of Coleman and Democratic Challengers

| | Franken | Ciresi | Nelson-Pallmeyer | Cohen |
|----------------|--------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| Coleman versus | 40% vs 43.2% | 43% vs 38% | 47% vs 29% | 46% vs 31% |

Note: The First number is Coleman's percentage, second number is the Democrat's percentage. Number of Minnesota residents interviewed, 917; Margin of Error, 3.2.

Franken benefits from the sour mood in the country. On the 3 single most important national problems identified by Minnesotans, Franken holds an advantage of 7 points on the economy and jobs (44% versus 37%), 23 points on Iraq (55% versus 32%), and 15 points on health care (48% versus 33%). Franken also benefits from anti-incumbency: among the three quarters of Minnesotans who conclude that the country is heading in the wrong direction, Franken receives 53 percent of their support compared to 29 percent for Coleman. In addition, Franken has a mild advantage among women (44% to 37%) while fighting Coleman to a draw among men.

What works for Franken

| | Coleman | Franken | Don't Know / Other |
|--|---------|---------|--------------------|
| Most Important Problem - National | | | |
| Economy and Jobs (36%) | 37% | 44% | 19% |
| Iraq (18%) | 32% | 55% | 13% |
| Health Care (14%) | 33% | 48% | 20% |
| | | | |
| Country on Right Track or Wrong Direction | | | |
| Right Track (19%) | 74% | 17% | 9% |
| Wrong Direction (73%) | 29% | 53% | 18% |
| | | | |

| Gender | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Male (49%) | 43% | 42% | 15% |
| Female (51%) | 37% | 44% | 19% |

Senator Coleman remains a formidable candidate. His base remains largely in tact, with 80 percent of Republicans supporting him. By contrast, the Democratic base remains a bit fractured with 31% failing to support Franken. Taxes also work for Coleman. Among the 15 percent of Minnesotans who identify taxes as the state’s top problem, 60 percent support Coleman compared to 24 percent for Franken. Coleman also enjoys a nearly 30 point advantage over Franken among Evangelicals.

| Party Identification | Coleman | Franken | Don't Know / Other |
|---|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Republicans (34%) | 80% | 11% | 9% |
| Independent (14%) | 45% | 29% | 26% |
| Democrats (52%) | 13% | 69% | 18% |
| | | | |
| Most Important Problem - Minnesota | | | |
| Taxes (15%) | 60% | 24% | 15% |
| | | | |
| Evangelical | | | |
| Yes (29%) | 55% | 28% | 17% |
| No (72%) | 38% | 48% | 14% |

About the Survey

The survey is collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio and the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The survey was analyzed by the Center. The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (director) and Joanne M. Miller (Department of Political Science). Melanie Burns was the team's research and data analyst.

The survey was fielded by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, which has extensive national and state experience conducting non-partisan surveys on politics and government policy. CSRA called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within the State of Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. The sample was designed to represent different regions of the state in proportion to the number of adults living in each region. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

The results have been weighted to reflect the number of adults in a household and the number of telephone lines reaching the household as well as the demographic characteristics of Minnesota based on region, sex, age, education, and race.

917 residents of Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between January 20 and January 27, 2008; the margin of error is 3.2 percentage points. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minnesota residents will differ by no more than 3.2 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the state. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.