

## Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

### Obama Surges by Building Broad Support and Eroding McCain Strengths

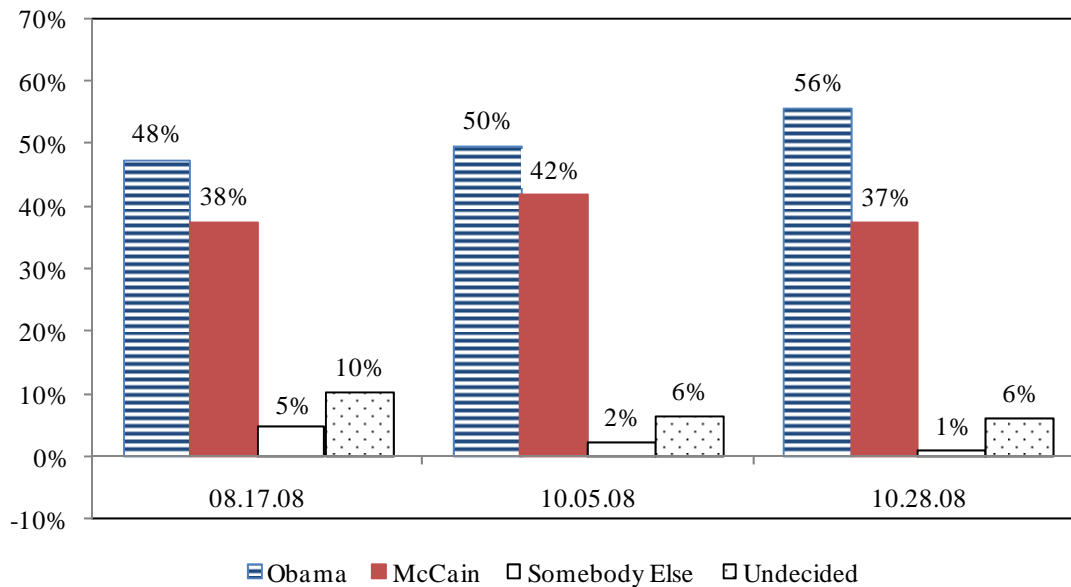
Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance  
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The latest Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute poll shows Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama with his largest lead of the campaign over his Republican rival John McCain, 56% to 37%. Senator Obama's 19 point advantage doubles the lead he enjoyed earlier this month and before the August party conventions.

#### Obama Widens Advantage over McCain



Obama's lead in the MPR News/Humphrey Institute poll is consistent with the two most recent polls. Rasmussen showed Obama with a 15 point gap and the Big 10 Battleground survey reported a 19 point advantage for the Democrat.

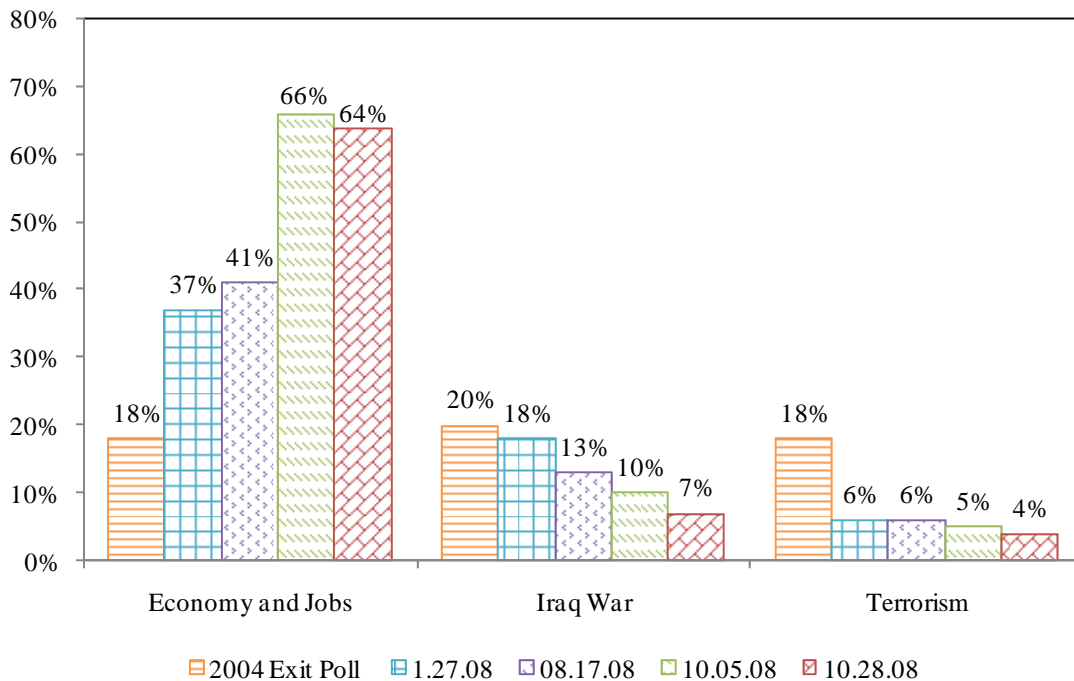
Obama’s advantage and wider lead results from building a remarkably broad coalition, capitalizing on the backlash against President George W. Bush and the country’s economic downturn, and eroding core components of Senator McCain’s base of support.

The MPR News/Humphrey Institute survey was conducted of 451 likely voters between October 24<sup>th</sup> and October 28<sup>th</sup>. The margin of error is 4.6 points. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

**Economic Downturn and Backlash Against Bush Propel Obama**

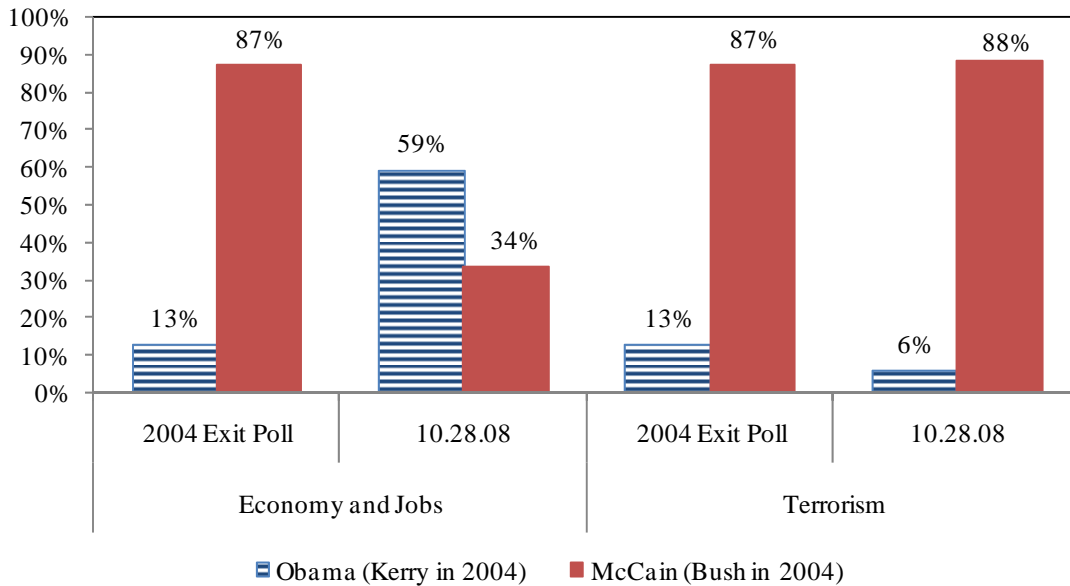
The 2008 election has been reduced to one dimension – the economy and jobs. In 2004, 18 percent of voters singled out the economy as the single most important national problem; today more than 6 out of 10 voters do. As the economy has come to predominate, the national security issues that propelled President Bush’s campaign in 2004 have plummeted in their importance to voters.

**An Economic 9/11**



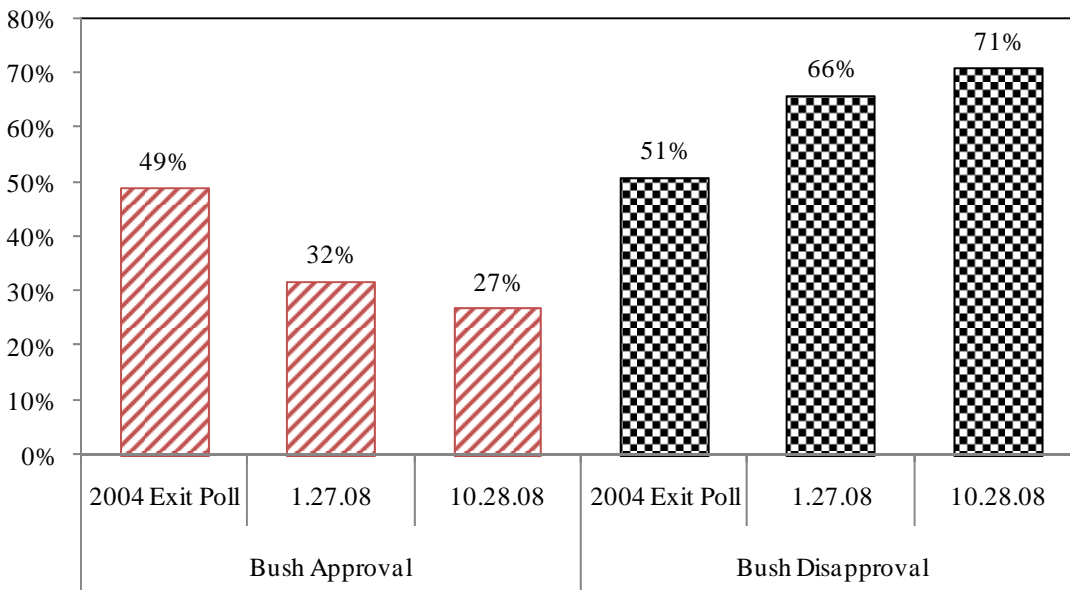
The dramatic change in the issues of greatest importance to voters has transformed the debate during the presidential campaign. Among voters singling out the economy, Obama has a 25 point advantage (59 to 34) compared to a 74 point advantage for Bush in 2004. Of greater importance to Senator McCain, he has actually expanded the Republican lead among voters singling out terrorism to 82 points (Bush built a 74 point gap). In other words, if the 2008 campaign focused on national security and terrorism, the McCain campaign would be in a much stronger position.

### Obama benefits from debate on economy rather than terrorism



The malaise about the economy has combined with a deep disaffection with Bush. Disapproval of the President’s job performance has increased by nearly 50 percent since the 2004 elections while his approval has plummeted by an equal proportion. Bush’s disapproval puts a significant drag on the McCain campaign, with three quarters of the critics supporting Obama.

### Bush Drag



**More than 8 out of 10 voters indicate that the country is heading off on the wrong track. Among these voters, nearly two thirds will be voting for Obama.**

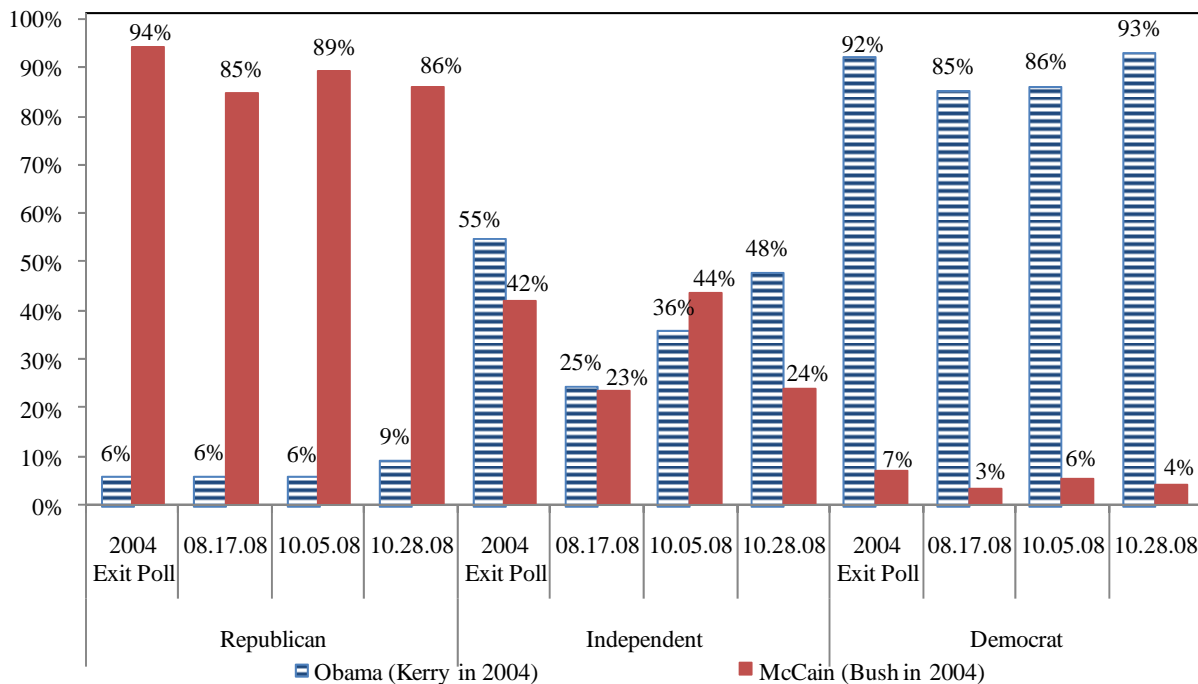
**Obama wins support of voters concerned about country’s direction**

	All Voters	Obama	McCain
Right Direction	12%	30%	68%
Wrong Track	82%	62%	31%

**Obama Rallies Democrats and Independents**

Obama has improved his support among Democrats while McCain lags in unifying Republicans behind him. **The Democrat has expanded Democratic support by 8 points (from 85 percent in August to 93 percent in late October).** **McCain receives the support of 86 percent of Republican voters** compared to the 94 percent support for President Bush in 2004 according to the exit poll in Minnesota, which was conducted for a large media consortium by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky.

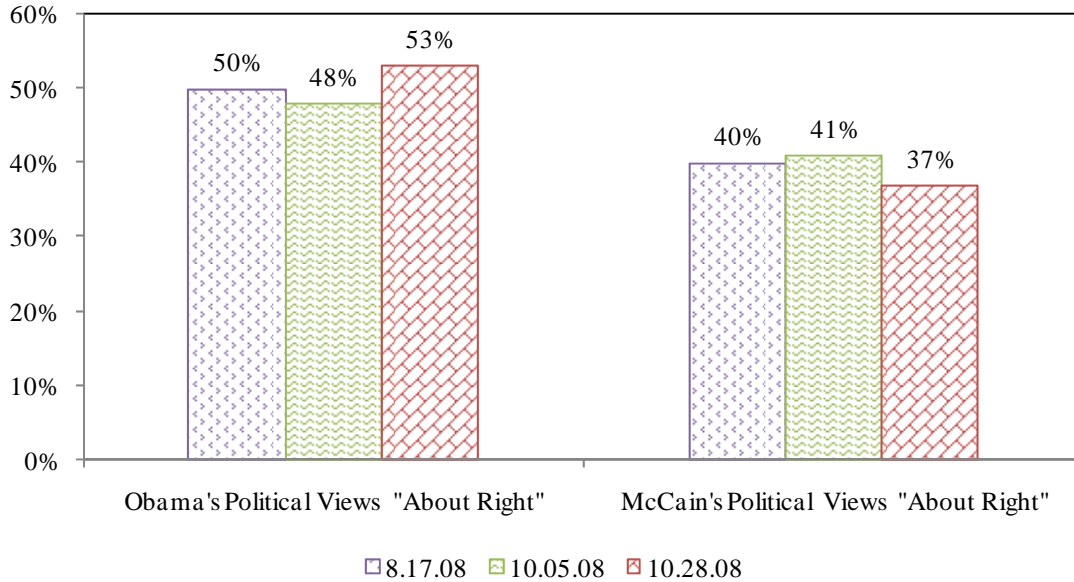
**Obama unifies Democrats and wins Independents**



**Independents are also flocking to Obama.** The Democrat has opened up a 24 point advantage among these voters, 48 percent to 24 percent. (The Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry had a significantly smaller 13 point advantage among independents.) Before the Conventions, Obama and McCain were splitting independents.

**Part of Obama’s draw with independents may stem from his success in positioning himself as more of a centrist than McCain.** Fifty-three percent of voters identify Obama as having political attitudes that are “about right,” an improvement since August. By contrast, only 37 percent of voters now perceive McCain as having political views that are “about right,” a decline since August.

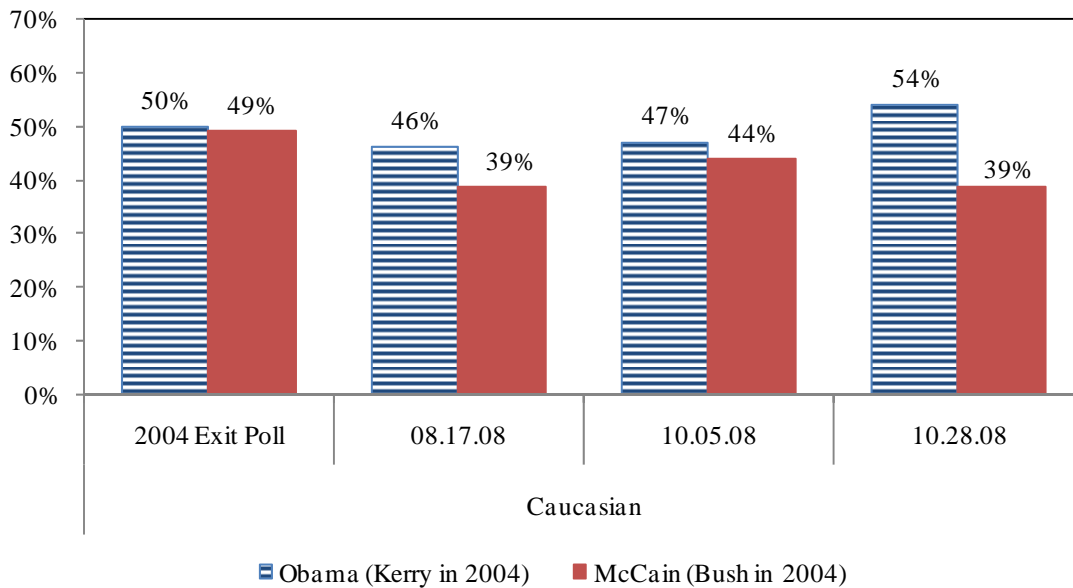
**Obama grabs center**



**Obama wins over white voters**

Obama’s candidacy has fuelled widespread speculation of a backlash among white voters. The new MPR News/Humphrey Institute poll shows no evidence of this backlash. Indeed, the Democrat has now opened up a 15 point gap among likely white voters in Minnesota (54 to 39), a dramatic improvement from previous polls and from Kerry’s 1 point edge in the 2004 election.

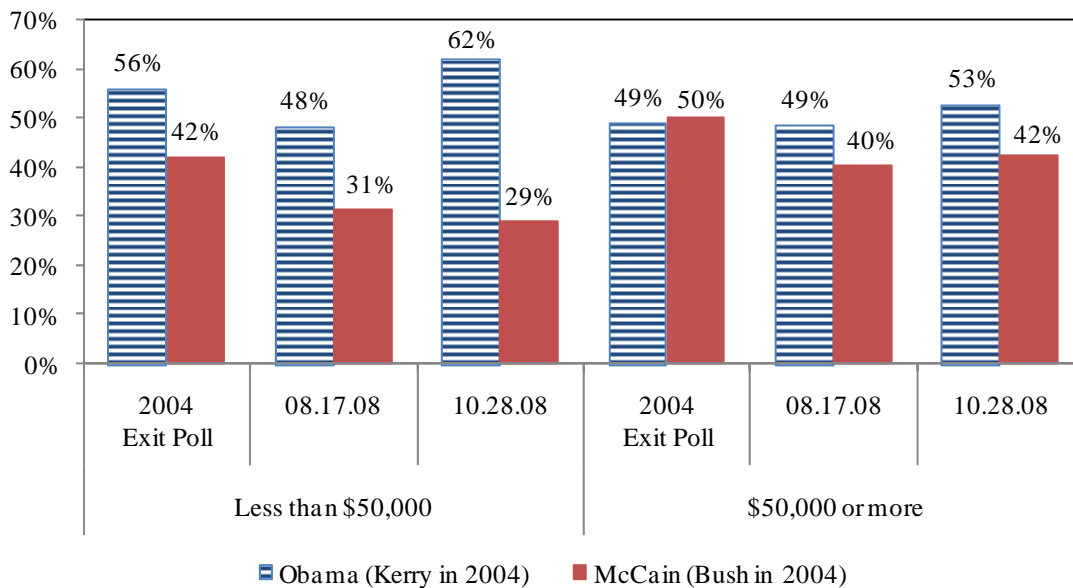
## Obama expands support among white voters



## Winning over Joe

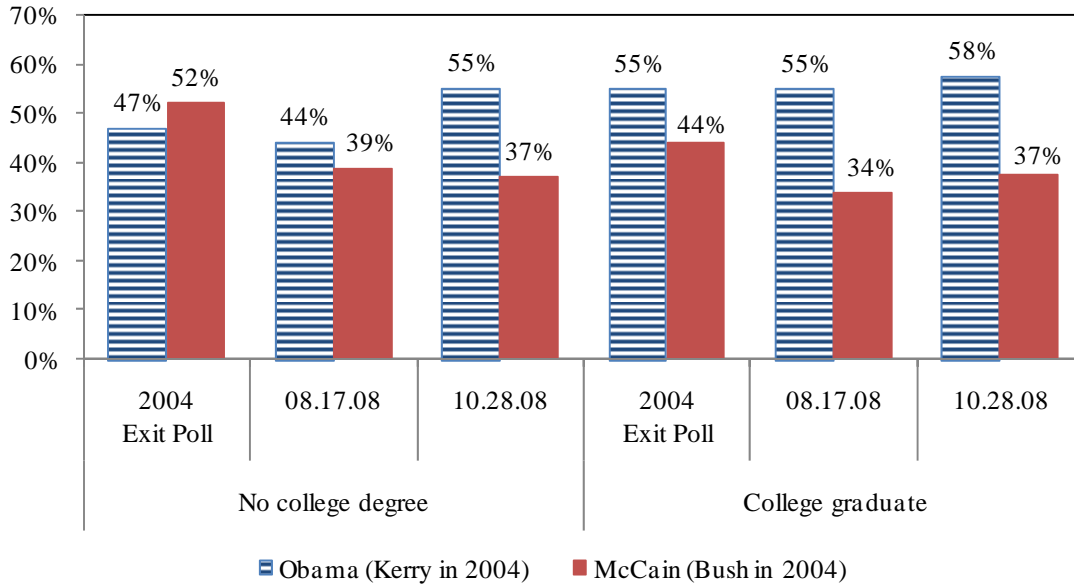
Senator McCain has made “Joe the Plummer” into a national celebrity as part of his appeal to middle and lower income workers, a group of voters that the Democrat struggled to win over during his primary contests with Senator Hillary Clinton. Obama has built a 33 point advantage among voters earning less than \$50,000 per year (62 to 29), more than doubling his earlier margin among these voters and that of John Kerry in 2004. Even as Obama has appealed to these voters, his policies on taxes and other issues has not alienated higher income voters where he enjoys an 11 point lead, reversing Bush’s 1 point edge in 2004.

## Appealing across income groups



There is also little evidence for speculation that Obama is aloof and might find it difficult to connect with less well educated voters. Obama enjoys 20 point advantages among voters with different levels of education; he has strengthened his position earlier in the campaign and dramatically reversed Bush's 5 point lead among voters without a college degree.

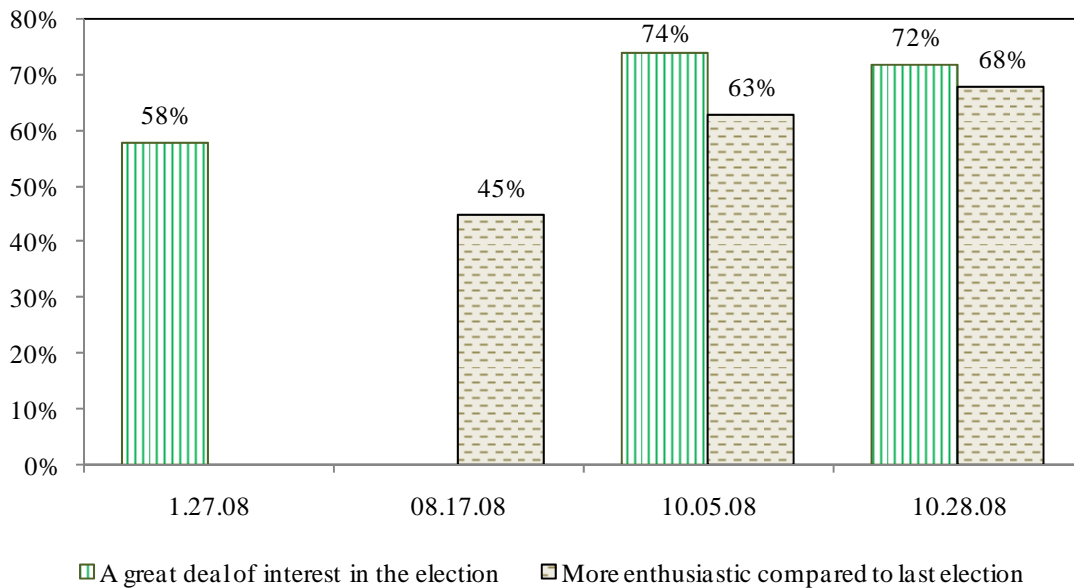
**Obama wins over voters with different levels of education**



**Obama's Campaign is Charging up Voters**

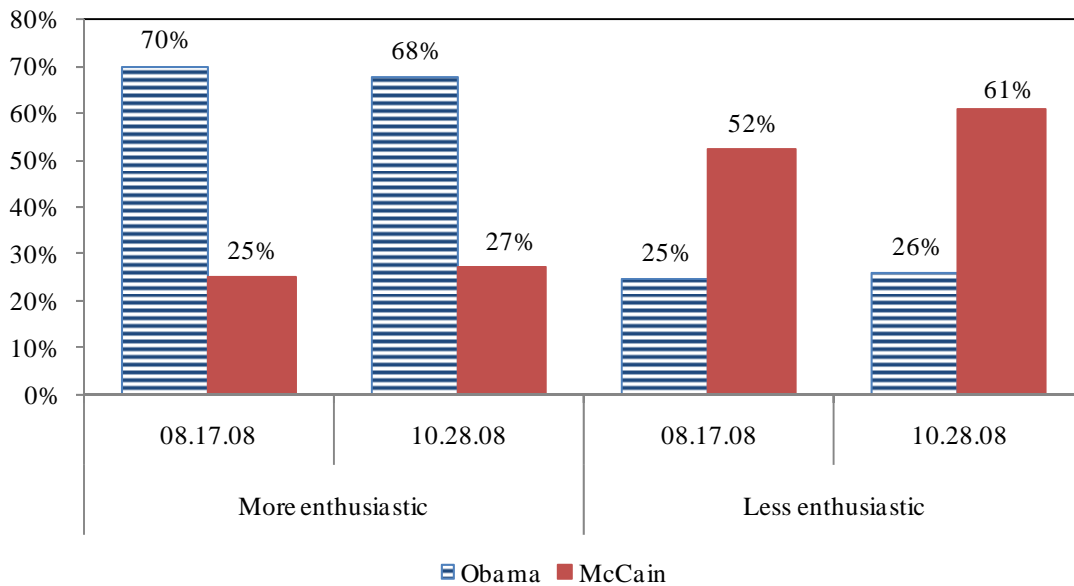
Minnesota voters are remarkably engaged in the 2008 elections. Far from losing interest, their engagement has increased during the campaigns for each party's nomination and the general election battle. More than two thirds of voters now have a great deal of interest in the election and are more enthusiastic than during the last campaign. This extraordinary level of engagement is about 50 percent higher than in January.

### Tremendous Interest and Enthusiasm in the election



**Obama enjoys a remarkable enthusiasm gap.** Among voters who are more enthusiastic about the election than previous contests, the Democrat has a 41 point advantage. Conversely, McCain has the ominous distinction of leading among voters who are less enthusiastic about this election. **The notable disaffection of the Republican’s supporters may be an indicator of depressed turnout on Election Day.**

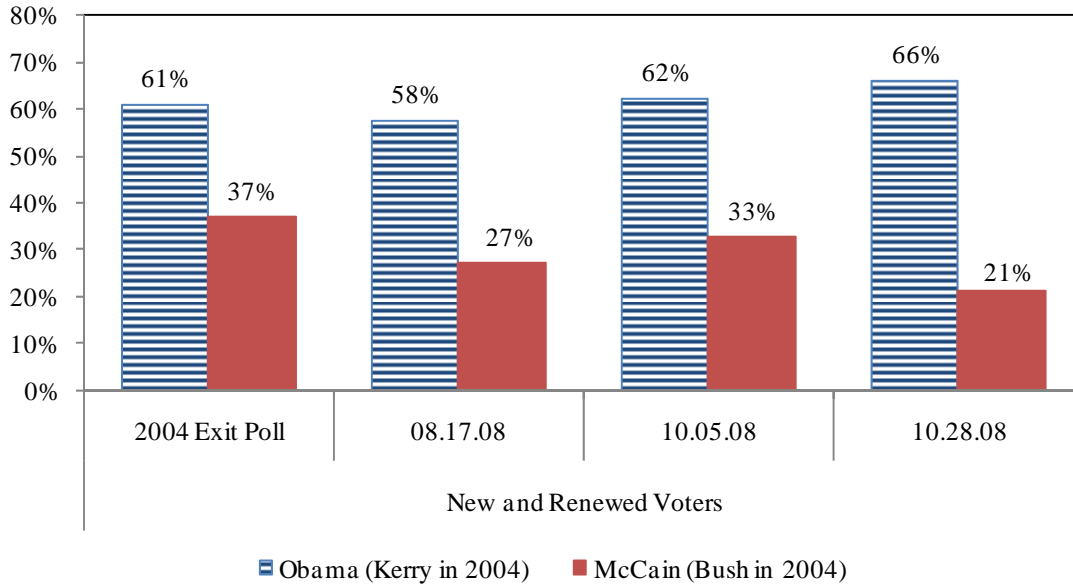
### Obama’s Enthusiasm Gap





**Obama has widened his advantage among voters who are participating for the first time or have not voted recently.** The Democrat now enjoys a remarkable 45 point lead among new or lapsed voters, an improvement from earlier in the campaign and from Kerry's performance in 2004.

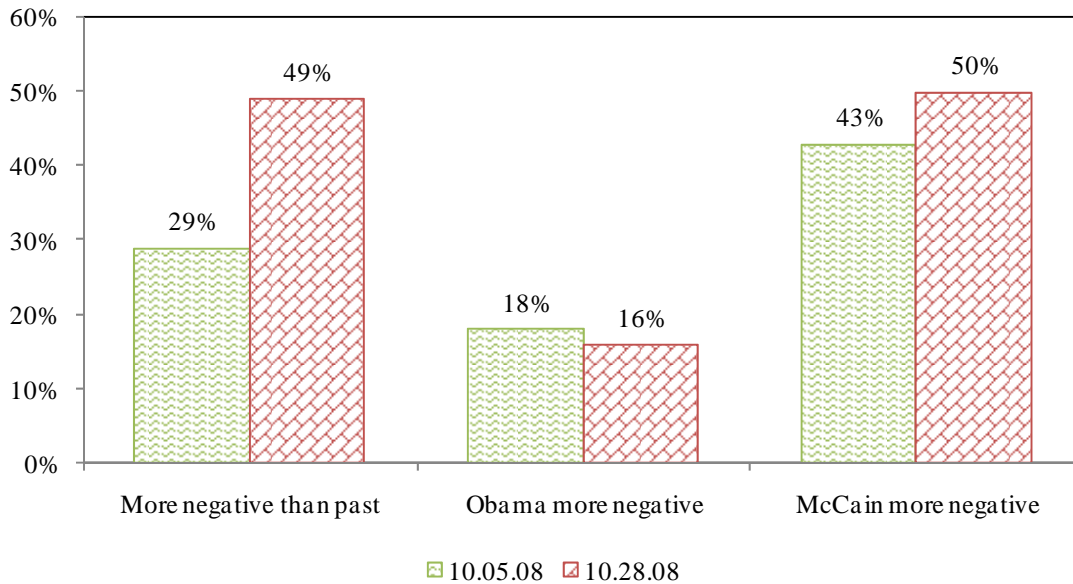
**Obama winning newer voters**



**The Price of Going Negative**

Half of voters declare the 2008 election more negative than previous elections, a 20 point increase from earlier in the campaign. Senator McCain is singled out more than Senator Obama for running a more negative campaign.

## McCain Singled Out for Going Negative



McCain is being punished by voters for being seen as running a more negative campaign. Fifty-eight percent of voters indicate that they were less likely to vote for the more negative candidate; Obama is winning three quarters of these voters.

## McCain Punished for Negativity

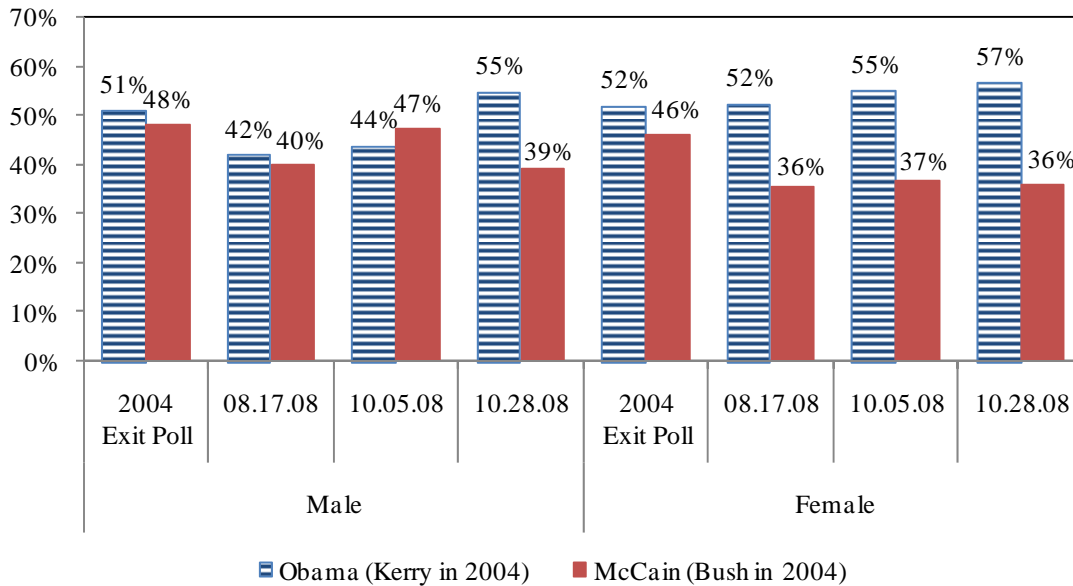
	All Voters	Obama	McCain
More likely	1%	50%	50%
Less likely	58%	78%	17%
No difference	41%	56%	41%

The perception of McCain going negative may have contributed to a sense that the Republican was avoiding the difficult economic and other challenges facing America. By a 24 point margin, voters singled out McCain as out of touch with them (57 to 33).

## Obama Winning Men and Women

Democrats often struggle among men. **Obama has opened up a 16 point advantage among men (55 to 39) and a bulging 21 point gap among women (57 to 36).** These margins far surpass Kerry's narrow 3 point edge among men and 6 point lead among women.

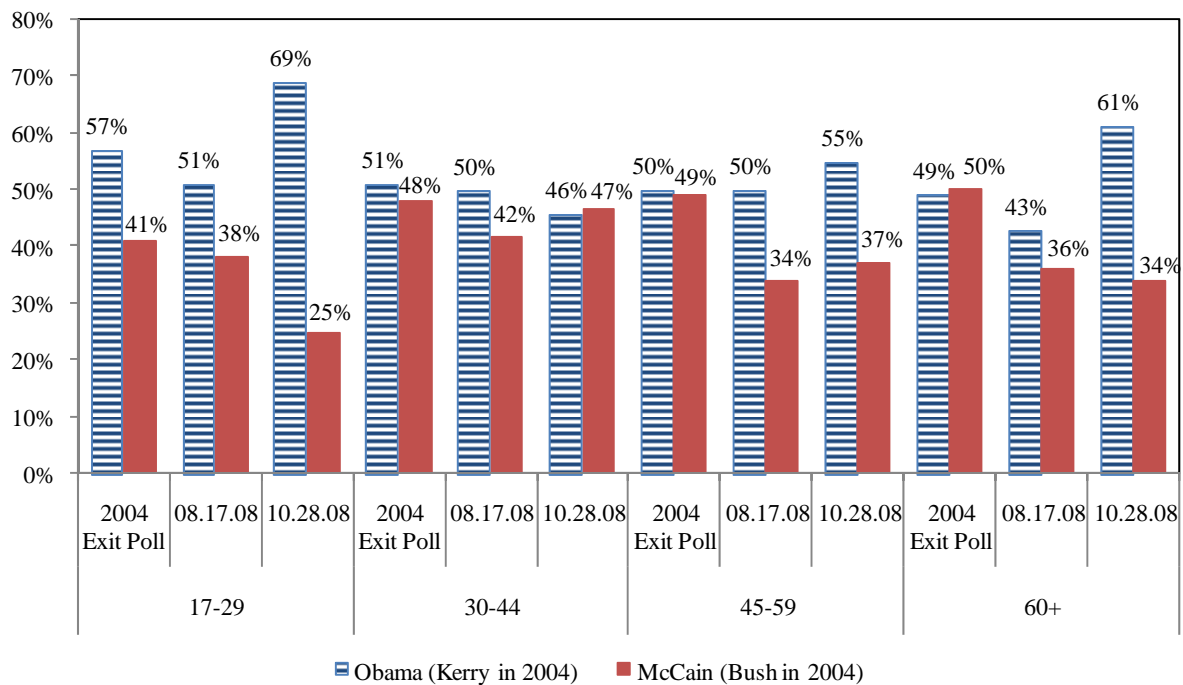
## Obama's Gender Advantages



## The Surge among Youth and Seniors

Obama now enjoys a remarkable 44 point gap among youth (69 to 25), which more than doubles his support before the Conventions and Kerry's edge in 2004. Obama has also opened up an impressive 27 point lead among seniors, a significant improvement of his earlier standing and a dramatic shift from Bush's 1 point edge in 2004.

## Obama leading across age groups

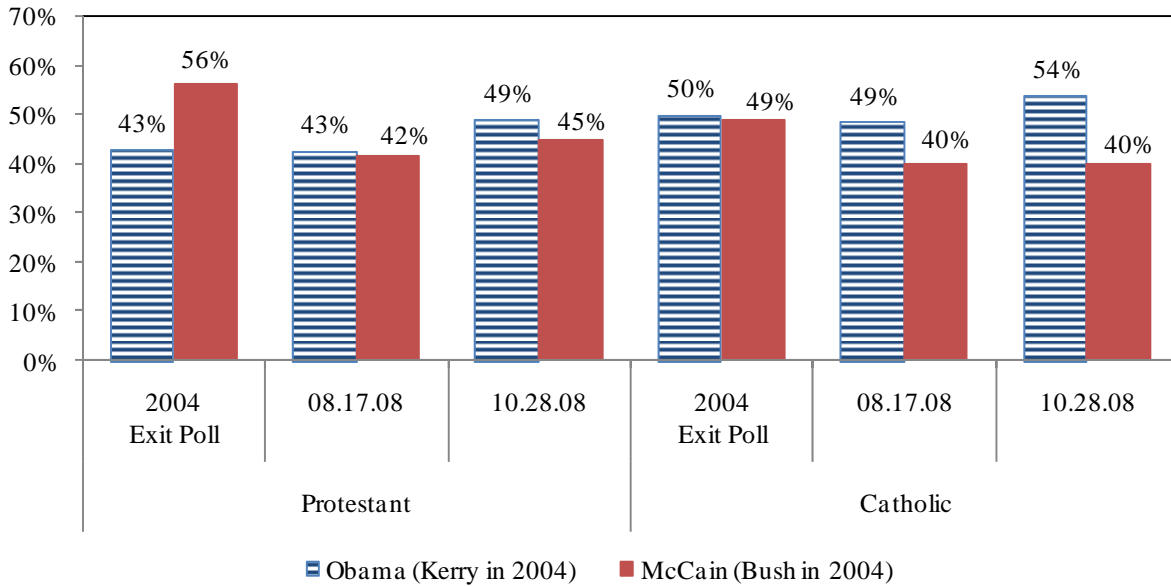


**Fracturing of the Faith Vote**

George W. Bush won election and re-election on a foundation of strong support among Protestants and inroads in Democratic support among Catholics. McCain’s struggles among these core groups of voters has continued and worsened during the fall campaign.

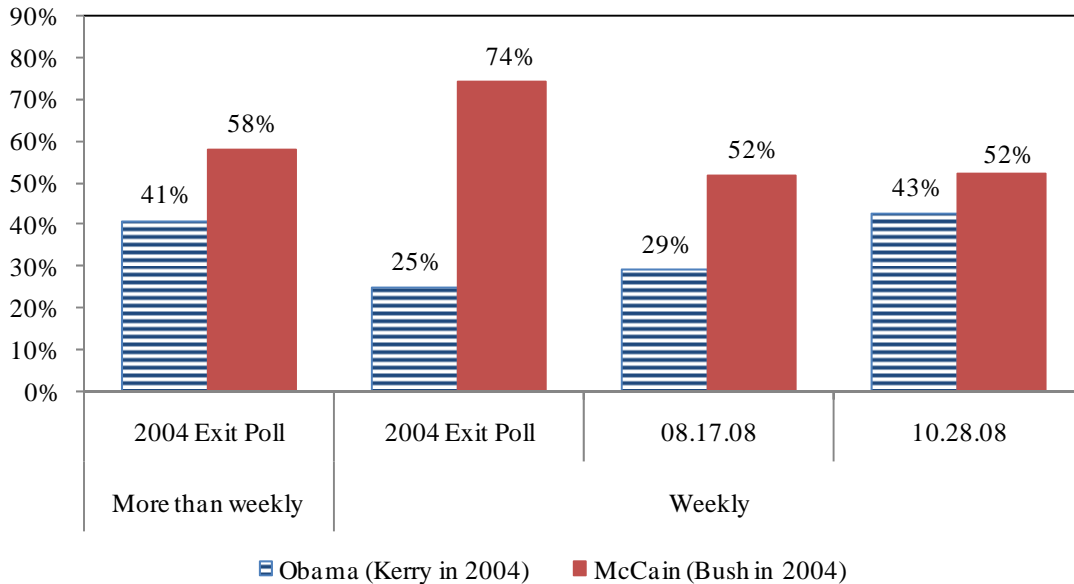
Among Catholics, the Democrat has opened up a 14 point gap (54 to 40), a dramatic improvement from Kerry’s 1 point edge in 2004. Obama has also reversed Bush’s 13 point advantage among protestant voters in 2004 and now actually enjoys a 4 point edge (49 to 45). McCain does boast a 20 point lead among the 35 percent of voters who are evangelicals or born-again Christians (58 to 38) but this represents a 7 point decline from early October. It also appears to indicate a significant change from 2004 when President Bush enjoyed an 83 point lead among “white conservative Protestants” in the exit poll.

**Obama leads among Protestants and Catholics**



The erosion of the Republican dominance of the “faith vote” is also apparent in Obama’s advances among voters who regularly attend religious services. **The Democrat has sliced in half McCain’s advantage among voters who attend services weekly**; it fell from 23 points in August to 9 points in late October. This represents a dramatic reduction in Bush’s 17 point lead among those attending services more than weekly and 49 point gap among weekly attendees.

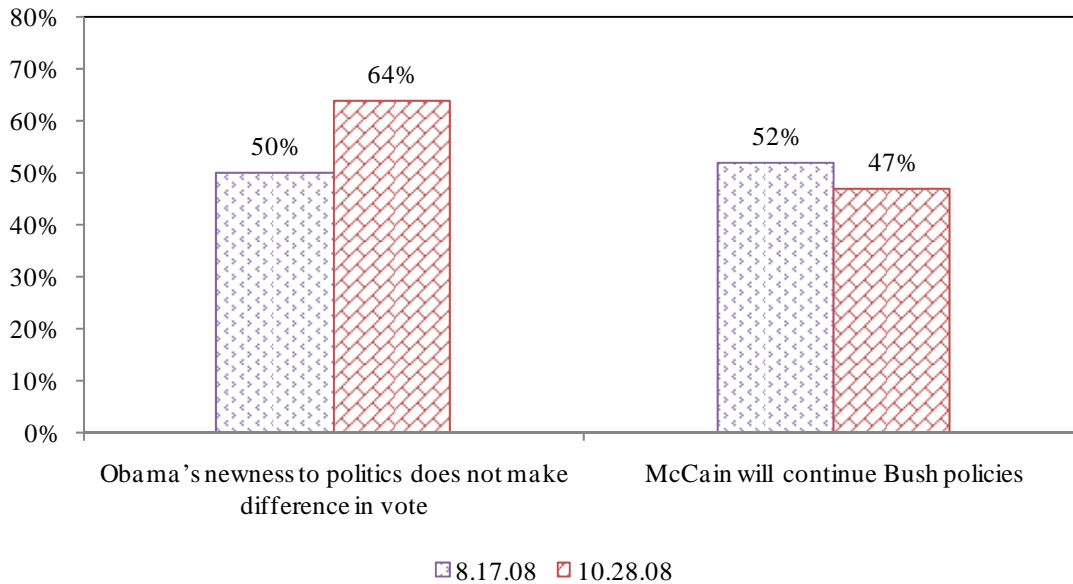
**Obama erodes Republican Advantage among religious voters**



**Candidates Effectively Fending Off Criticisms**

Both campaigns have invested heavily in portraying their opponent in a critical way. The Republican campaign has argued that Obama’s newness makes him unable to hit the ground running the day he steps into the Oval Office. Nearly two thirds of voters reject this argument, a significant improvement since August.

## Obama and McCain Counter Attacks

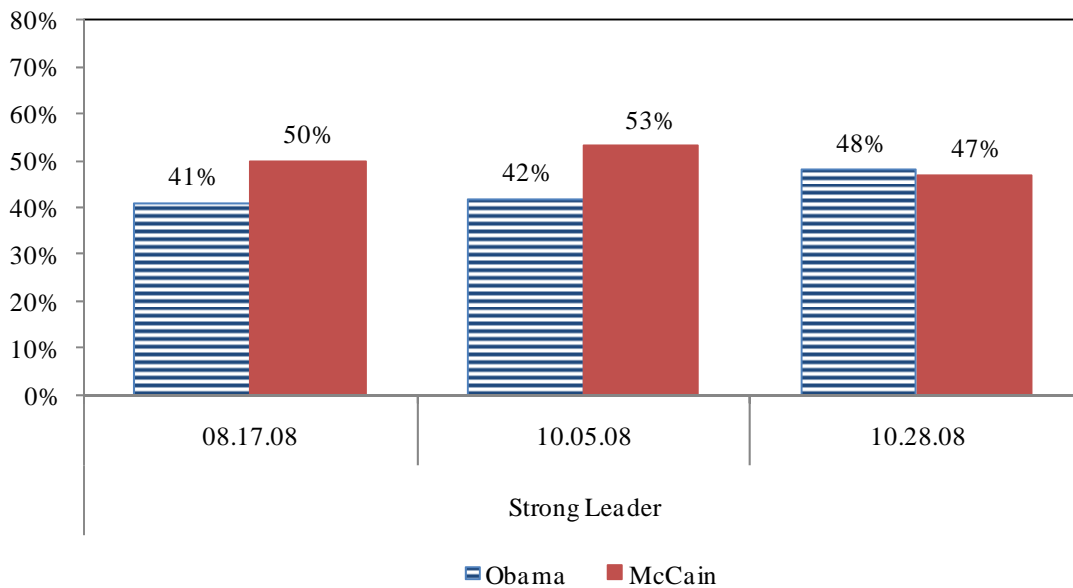


By contrast, the Obama campaign has hammered McCain for continuing President Bush's policies. Only half of voters accept this argument.

## Candidate Strengths Remain

The strengths of each candidate have remained fairly stable since August. Senator McCain holds the advantage for experience while Obama is seen as more committed to bringing about change, caring, independent thinking, and honesty.

Strong leadership is a notable exception owing to Obama's gains. While McCain enjoyed an advantage of about 10 points earlier in the campaign, Obama has now neutralized his edge.



## About the Survey

This 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 samples were 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.

Results are based on a model which adjusts responses according to the likelihood of a respondent voting. Likelihood to vote is based on the following factors: self-reported probability of voting in the upcoming election, voting in previous elections as reported by the respondent, enthusiasm for the 2008 election, and incorporates differential turnout levels in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In addition, 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 adults in Minnesota based on region, sex, age, education, and race.

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.