

# Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

## Backlash Gives Franken Slight Edge, Coleman Lifted by Centrism and Faith Vote

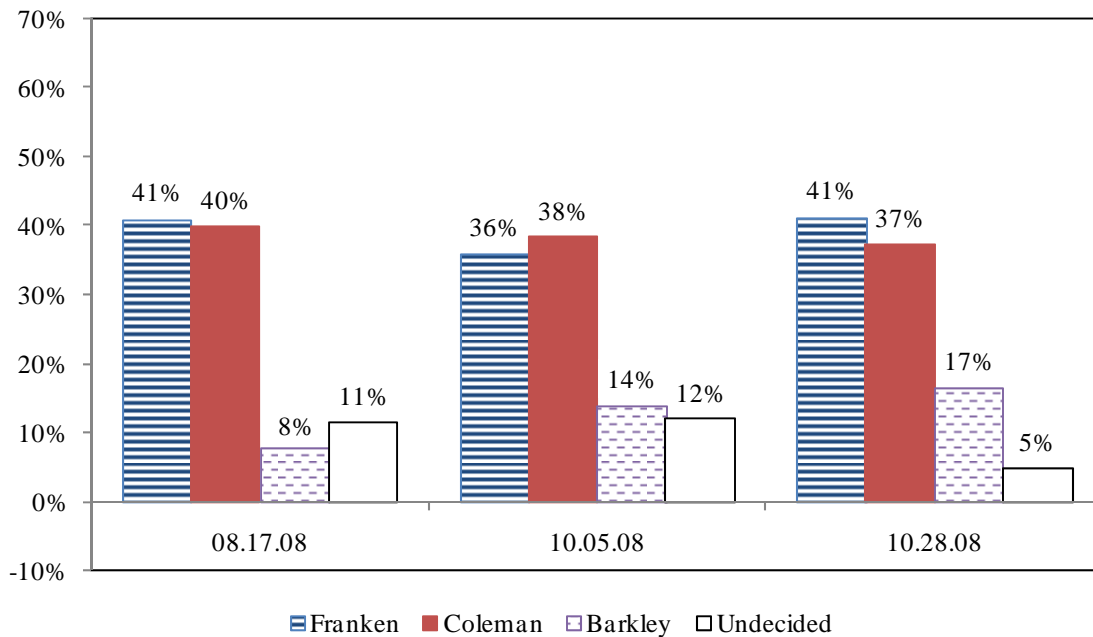
Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance  
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The latest Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute poll finds that the Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Al Franken holds a slight 4 point edge over Republican Senator Norm Coleman, which is within the margin of error and therefore is a toss-up. Independence Party candidate Dean Barkley received 17 percent. The contest has remained close since mid-August even as Barkley's support has increased and the number of undecided voters has declined.

### Slight Franken Edge



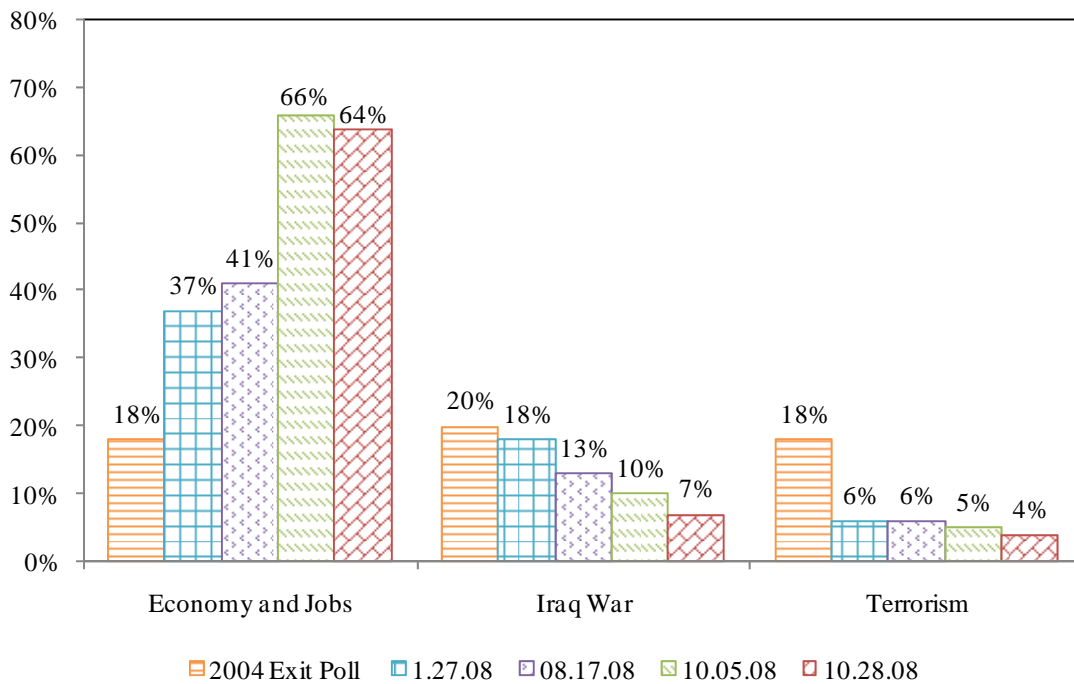
The race remains quite fluid and may well shift in the final days of the campaign. In addition to the 5 percent who are undecided, 13 percent who currently support a candidate indicate that they may change their minds. These uncertain voters appear to threaten all three candidates.

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.

**Franken Propelled by Economic Downturn and by Antipathy Against Bush**

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.

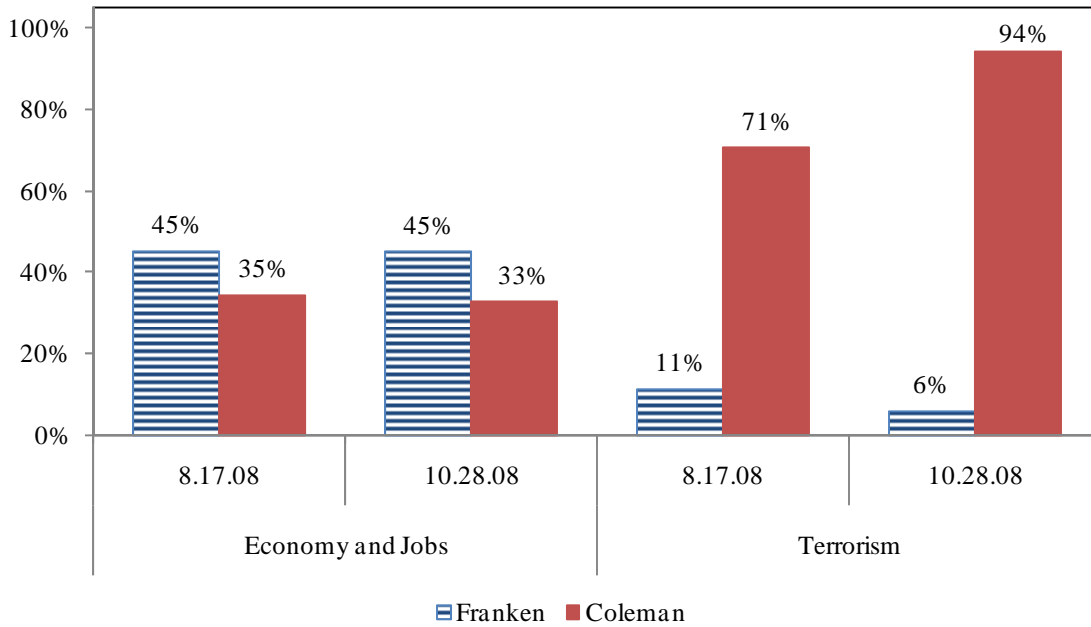
**An Economic 9/11**



Note: The 2004 Exit Poll was conducted in Minnesota on Election Day for a large media consortium by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky. The four 2008 polls were conducted by MPR News and the Humphrey Institute. The January 2008 survey was of Minnesotan adults; the remaining three polls were of likely voters. Full results can be found here -- <http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/cspg/reports.html>

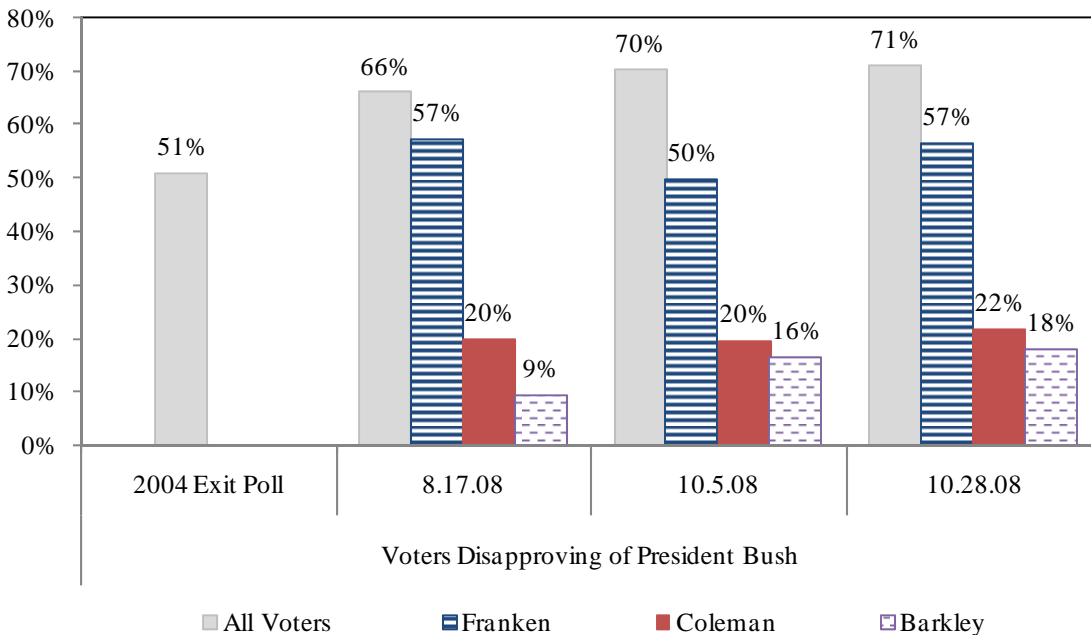
The dramatic change in the issues of greatest importance to voters has defined the debate during Minnesota’s U.S. Senate contest in ways that favor Franken. Among voters singling out the economy, Franken now enjoys a 12 point advantage (45 to 33) which is similar to his August lead. By contrast, Coleman has expanded on his already remarkable advantage among voters singling out terrorism from 60 points (71 to 11) to 88 points (94 to 6). In other words, if the 2008 campaign focused on national security and terrorism, the Coleman campaign would be in a stronger position.

**Franken leads on highly salient economic issues, Coleman dominates less salient issue of terrorism**



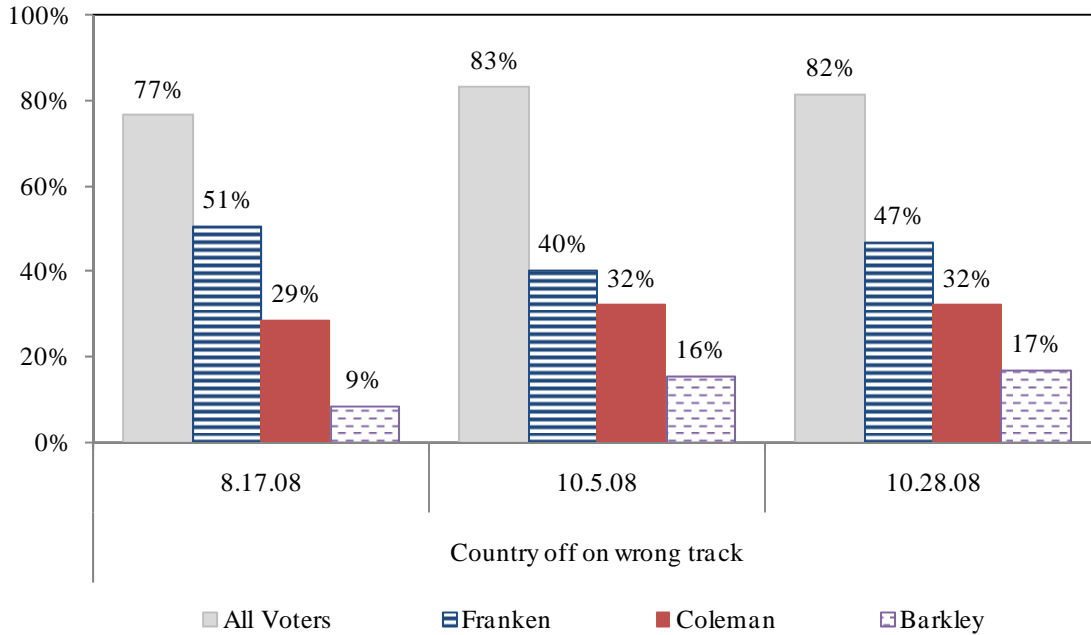
The malaise about the economy has combined with a deep disaffection with Bush. Disapproval of the President’s job performance has increased by nearly 50 percent since the 2004 elections. **Bush’s disapproval puts a significant drag on the Coleman campaign**, with three quarters of the critics punishing the Republican candidate by supporting Franken or Barkley.

**Bush Drag**



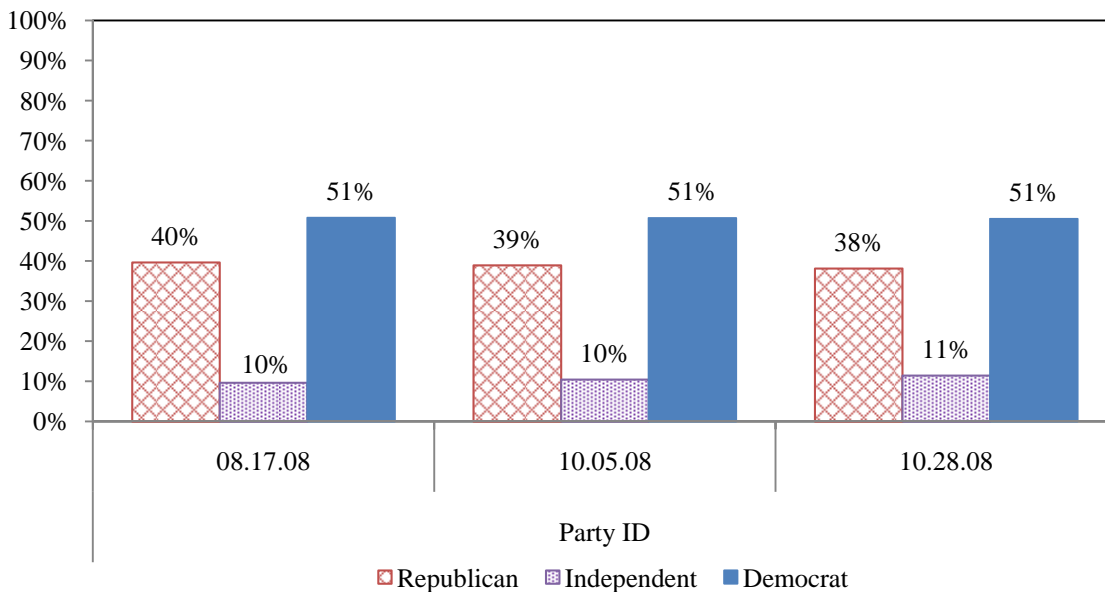
**More than 8 out of 10 voters indicate that the country is heading off on the wrong track, an increase since August. Among these disgruntled voters, Franken now enjoys a 15 point advantage over Coleman (47 to 32). This is an increase from early October but a fall off from mid-August owing to Barkley's impact in securing 17 percent of the disaffected voter.**

**Franken captures voters disgruntled with the country's direction**



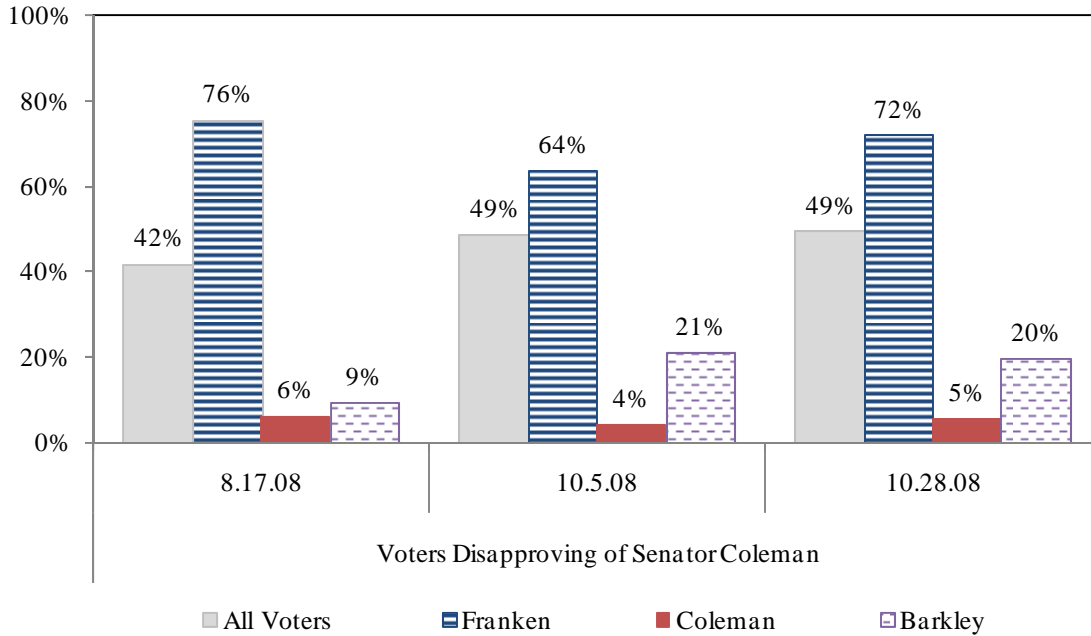
The confluence of the economic downturn, Bush's unpopularity, and concern that the country is off on the wrong track has tarnished the Republican Party's reputation. Democrats hold a consistent double-digit advantage among Minnesotan voters.

**Democratic Advantage**



The combination of voter frustration with the country and its Republican president along with Senator Coleman’s own conduct has depressed his approval ratings below the symbolically significant 50 percent level throughout 2008. Disapproval of the Senator’s job performance has risen from 42 percent in January to 49 percent now. Among these critics, Franken is receiving about three quarters of their support. In short, Coleman’s sinking popularity has buoyed his Democratic rival.

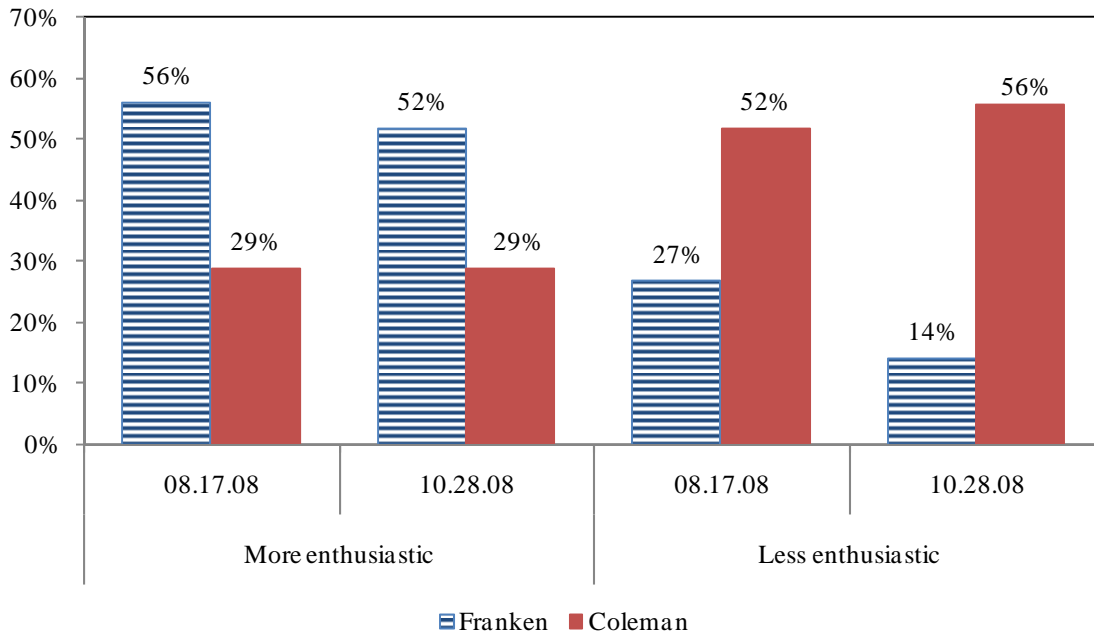
**Disapproval of Coleman Fuels Franken’s Support**



**Enthusiasm and core demographic groups lift Franken**

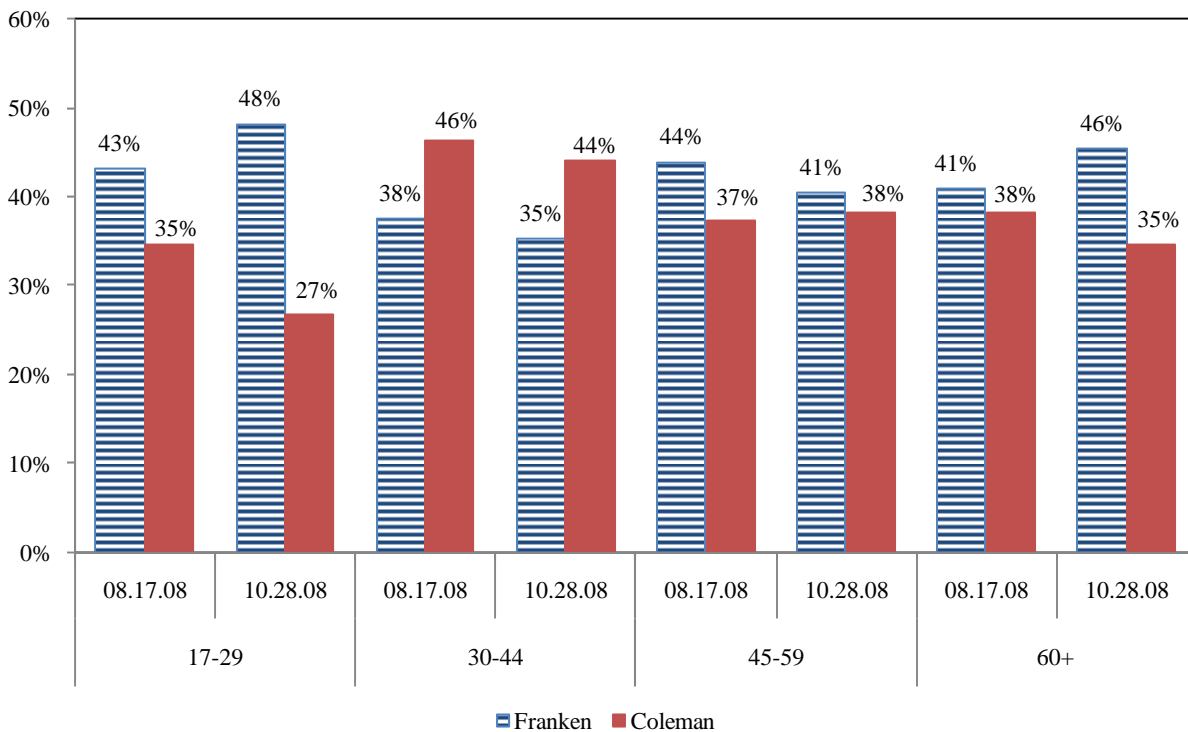
In addition to benefiting politically from the backlash against Republicans, **Franken enjoys a substantial and stable advantage of twenty points or more among voters who are extremely or very enthusiastic about the election.** By contrast, Coleman draws more support from voters who are only somewhat or not enthusiastic about this election. This depressed engagement among Coleman’s backers could be a leading indicator of a drop off in turn out.

### Franken's Enthusiasm Bonus



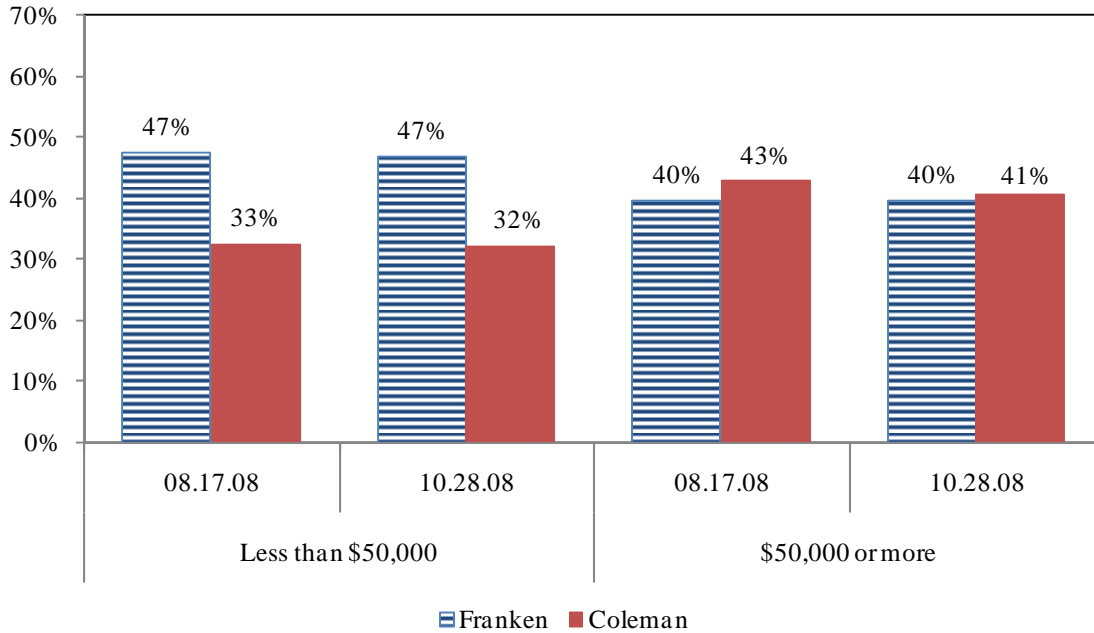
**Franken is also drawing critical demographic groups to his campaign.** His support among youth has dramatically grown from 8 points this summer to 21 points (48 to 27). Seniors also now favor him by a double digit margin (46 to 35). Coleman's only clear advantage is among 30 to 44 year olds.

### Franken advantages among youth and seniors



Franken is well-positioned among different income brackets. The Democrat is ahead by a stable 15 points among voters earning \$50,000 or less per year while neutralizing what should be a Coleman advantage among higher income voters.

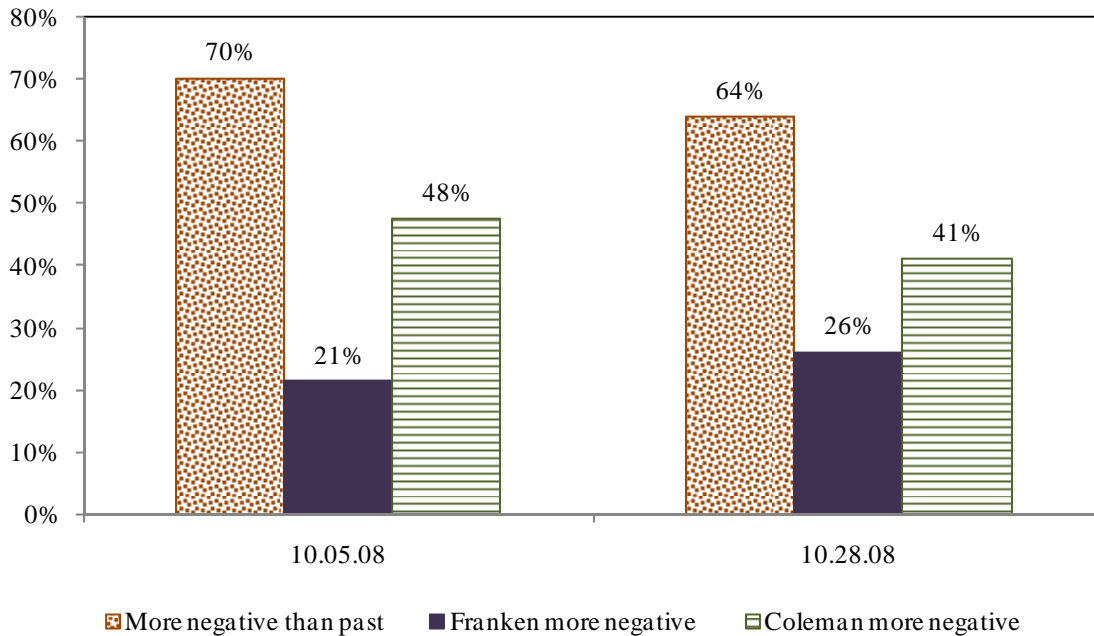
**Franken leads among the less affluent while drawing among the more affluent**



**Coleman Strategy to Undermine Franken Backfires**

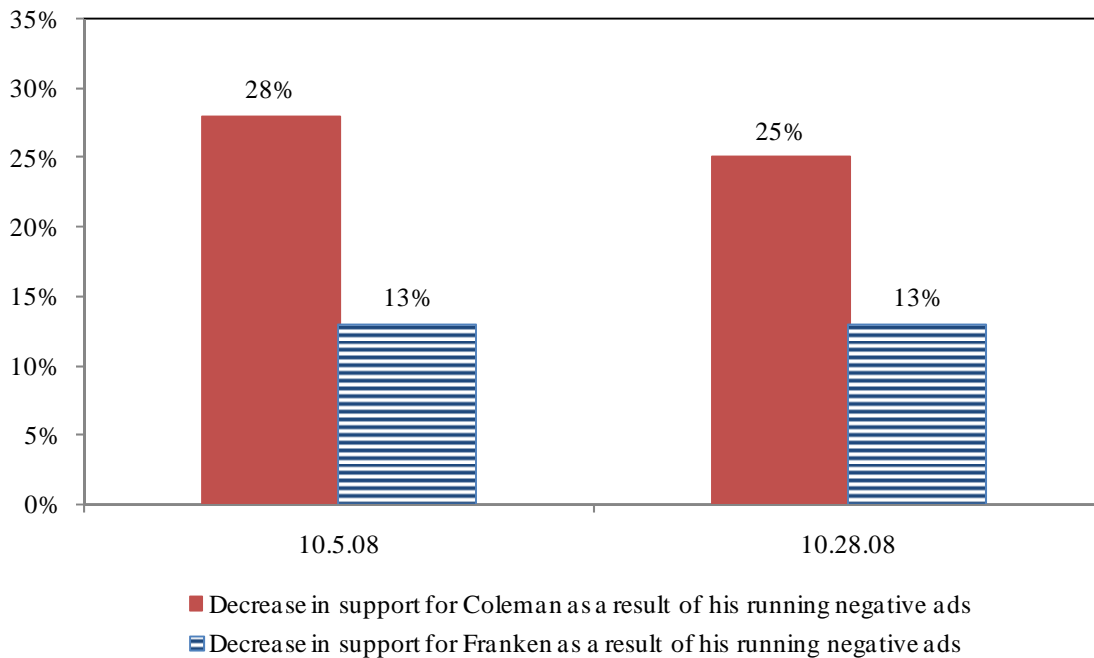
**Franken’s strengths prompted Coleman to go negative, which in turn backfired.** About two thirds of Minnesotans report that the campaign is more negative than in past Senate races. Coleman is seen as considerably more negative than Franken by 15 points (41 to 26). Coleman’s distinction for negativity has declined by 12 points since earlier this month when he declared the suspension of negative ads. Despite this improvement, Coleman’s declaration has not removed his reputation for negativity and, as we suggest next, this reputation continues to drain support.

### Coleman singled out for going negative



Coleman loses twice as much support as Franken because of his negative television advertisements. According to our most recent survey, there is a 25 percent reduction in support for Coleman owing to his negative ads as compared to a 13 drop in Franken support because of his negative ads. A similar dynamic was evident earlier in the month.

### Coleman loses more support due to negative campaigning

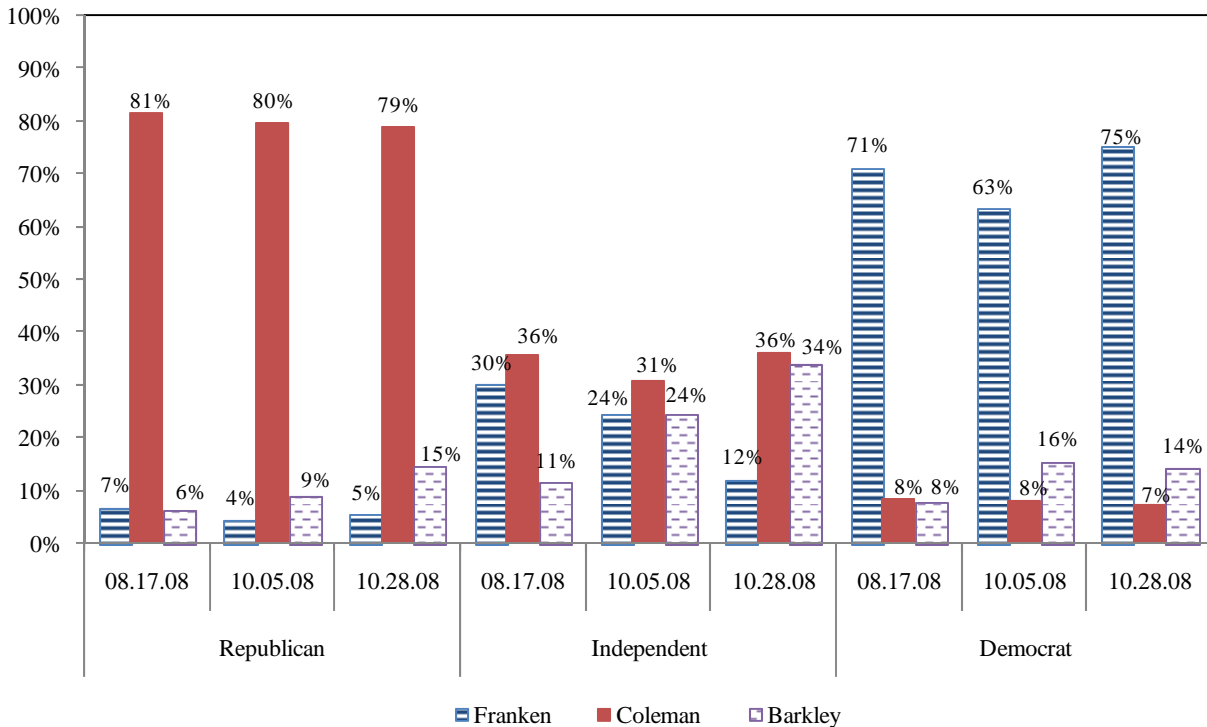


In short, Coleman’s decision to go negative early in an attempt to truncate Franken’s resurgence has backfired by draining more support from Coleman.

**The Barkley Factor**

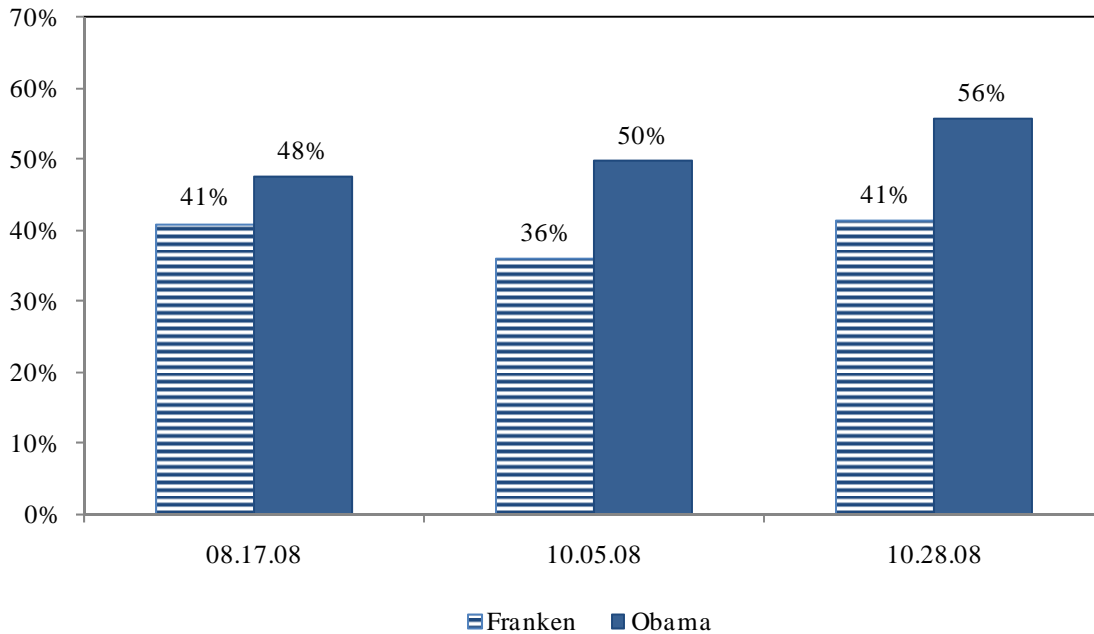
Dean Barkley has jumbled the U.S. Senate race by convincing about 15 percent of Republicans and Democrats to defect from their party’s candidate to support him. With the growth in the number of Democrats, Franken can afford to lose some partisan supporters, Coleman cannot. Barkley’s fiscal conservative message appears to be luring Republicans who are dismayed with Coleman. In addition, Barkley is drawing a third of independent voters; this has both sucked away support from Franken (whose support among independents has declined from 30 percent to 12 percent) and has denied Coleman a pocket of needed voters.

**Barkley drawing Republicans, Democrats and Independents**



Franken’s struggle to unify Democrats is particularly striking given the effectiveness of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama. Franken’s loss of a quarter of Democrats helps to account for why he now lags behind Obama by 15 points (56 to 41), a greater gap than earlier in the campaign when it was 7 points (48 to 41).

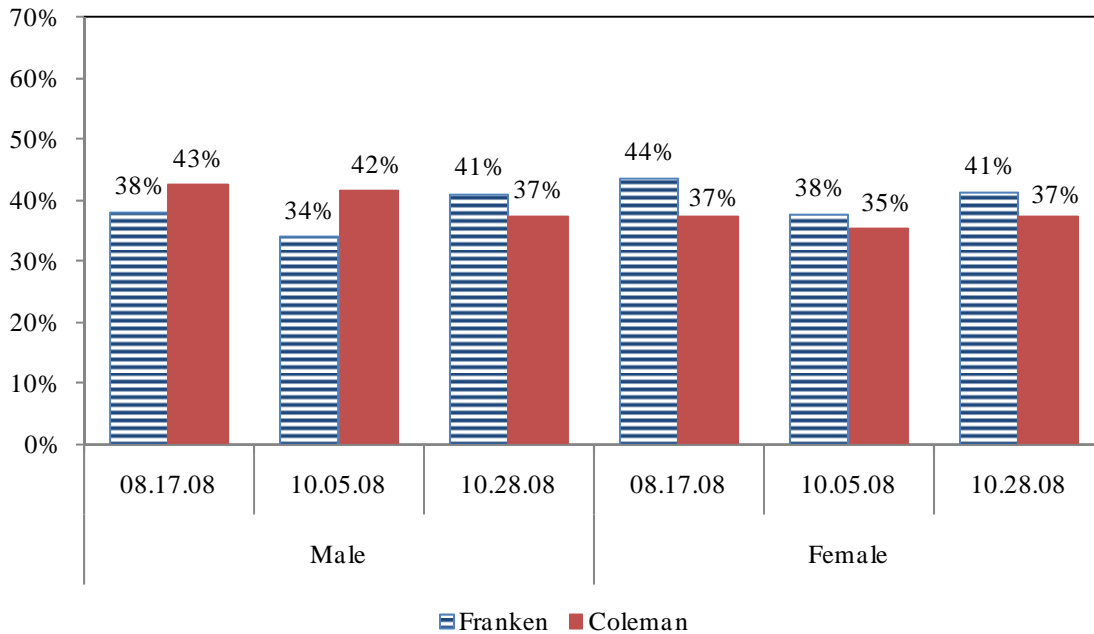
### Franken Lags Behind Obama



### Franken Struggling among Core Democratic Constituents

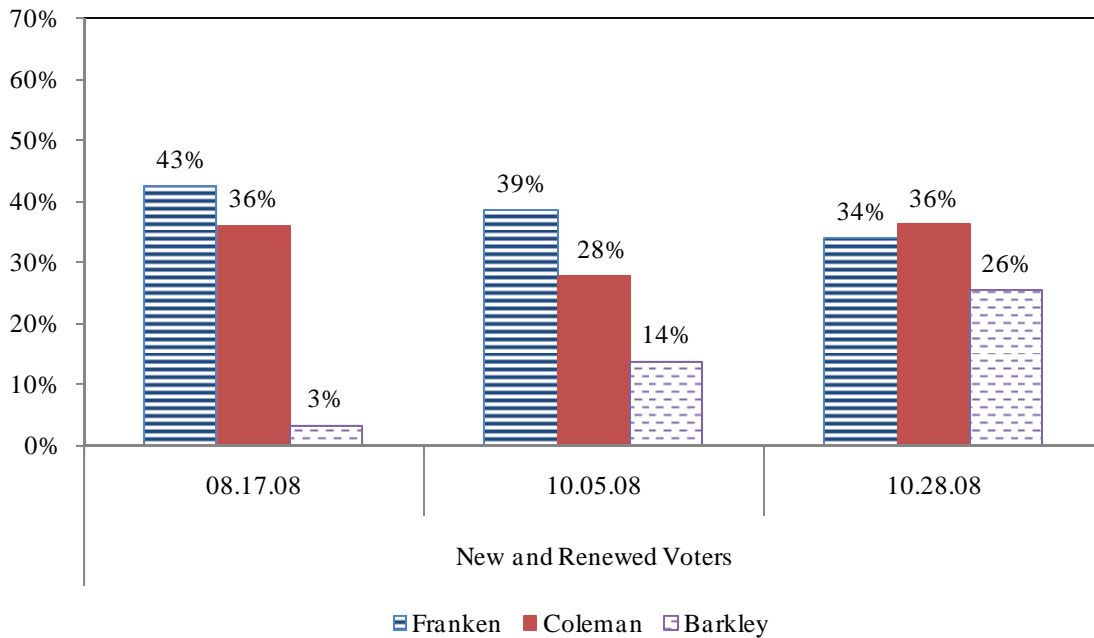
Franken’s struggles among Democrats is mirrored by his troubles among core elements of the coalition that are typically necessary to win election in Minnesota. Democrats typically need large leads among women voters; **Franken only leads by 4 points (41 to 37) among women**, his narrowest margin since August. **Franken has offset the tepid support of women by reversing Coleman’s earlier 5 points edge among men** (male voters commonly favor Republican candidates).

### Franken's edge among women and men defies expectations



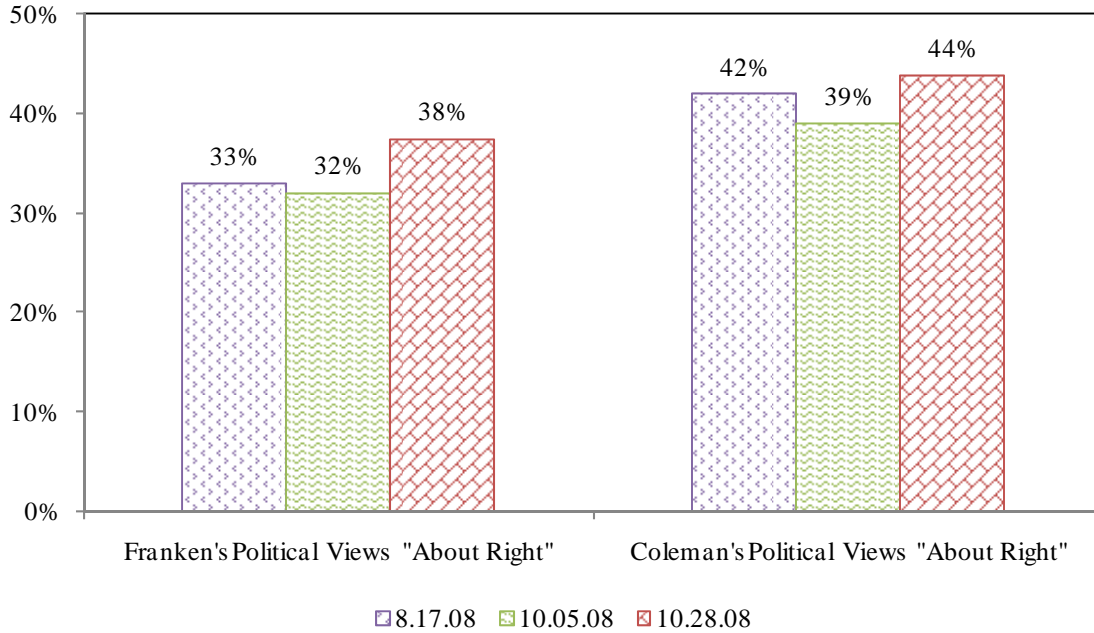
Franken might also be expected to lead among new or lapsed voters given the support of young voters and the enthusiasm boosting his candidacy. The reality, though, is that **Franken's 7 point lead among newer voters (43 to 36) has been replaced by a 2 point Coleman advantage (36 to 34)**. In part, this neutralizing of Franken's advantage stems from the increased attraction of Barkley among these newly engaged voters from 14 percent earlier this month to 26 percent.

### Coleman neutralized Franken draw among newer voters



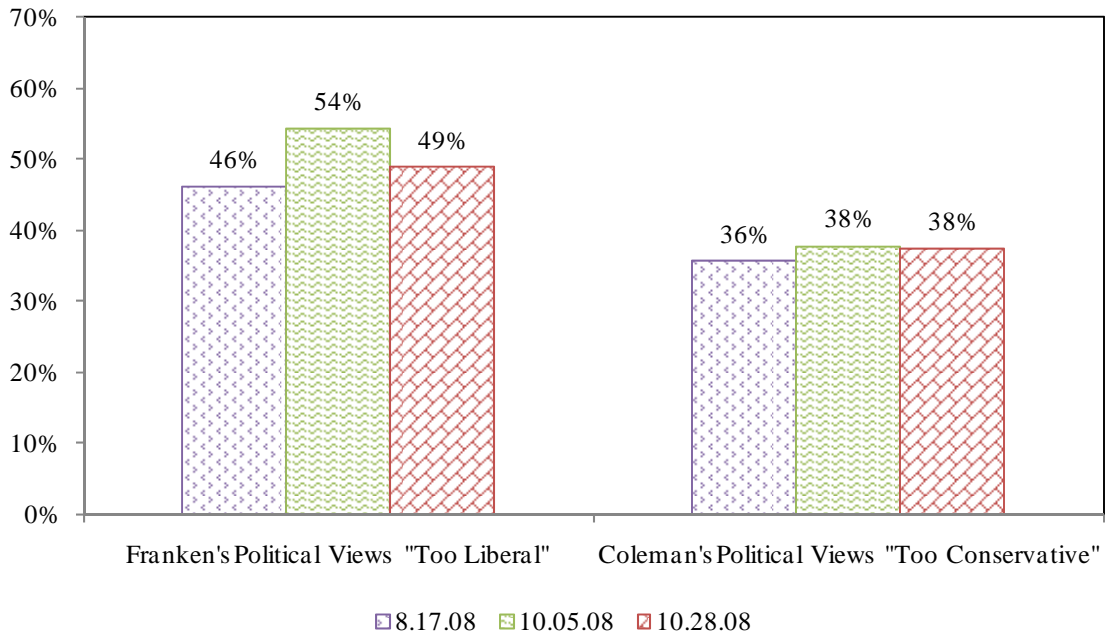
Although Coleman is running in an election year that is decidedly difficult for Republican candidates, he retains some significant areas of political strength. Voters have consistently seen Coleman’s political attitudes as “about right” rather than “too conservative” or “too liberal.” Coleman currently holds a 6 point advantage over Franken for this centrist image (44 to 38), a slight dip from the 9 point lead he enjoyed in August (42 to 33).

**Perception of Coleman as centrist**



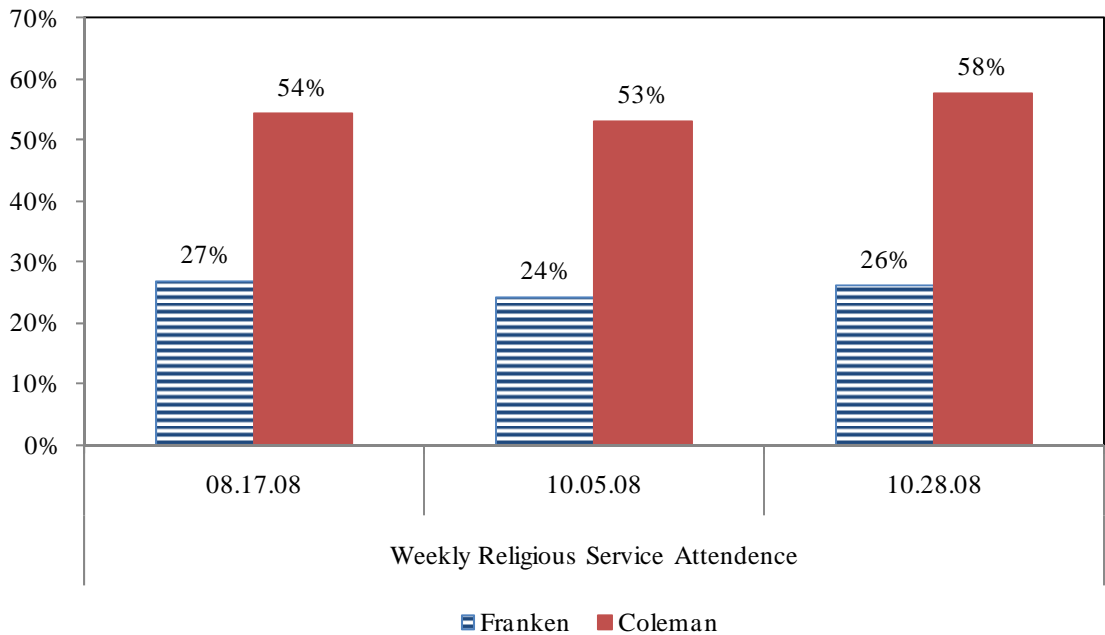
In addition, Coleman is perceived as less ideologically extreme. While half of voters see Franken as “too liberal,” 38 percent perceive Coleman as “too conservative.” This is a pattern that has persisted since August.

**Franken seen as more ideologically extreme than Coleman**

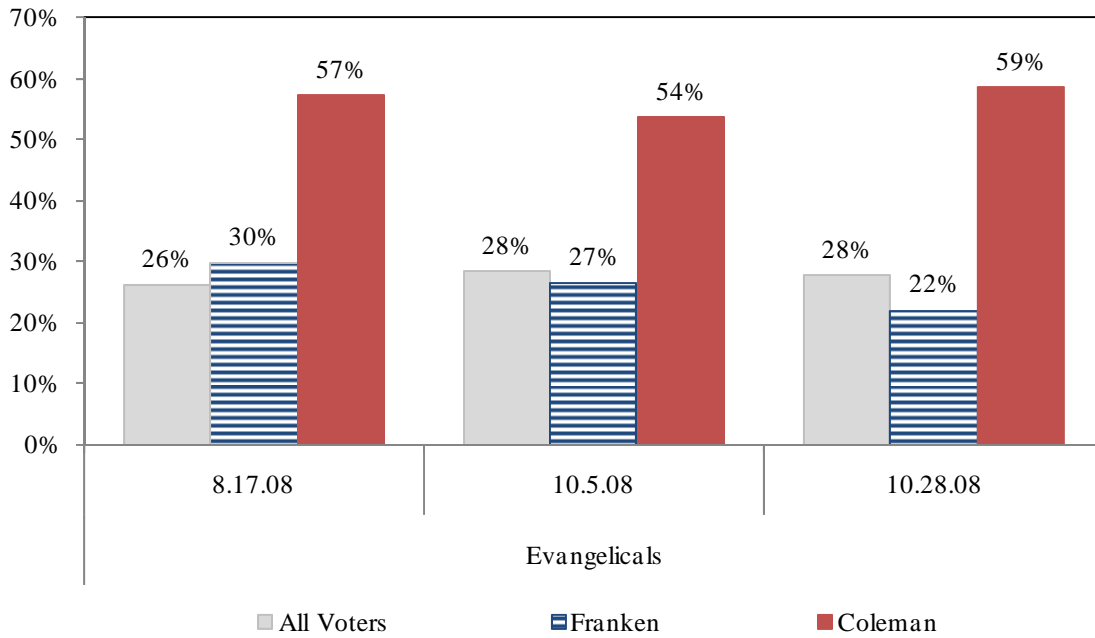


The political activism of the religiously observant is an important base of Coleman’s support. Among voters who attend religious services every week, the Senator enjoys a 22 point advantage over Franken (58 to 26). This is Coleman’s widest gap since August when he was ahead by 17 point among these faith voters.

**Religiously observant strongly support Coleman**



**Coleman has also benefited from increased support from evangelicals**, who make up 28 percent of likely voters. Among evangelical voters, Coleman widened his advantage over Franken from a 27 point lead (57 to 30) to a 37 point gap (59 to 22).



## 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.