

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

Pawlenty Under Fire for National Campaigning; DFL Legislative Majority at Risk

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
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Minnesota voters are unhappy with the national political activities of two-term Governor Tim Pawlenty. They oppose his campaigning for other candidates out of state and prefer Republican front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, over him, though they prefer Pawlenty to former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin. In one of the most striking findings, Pawlenty has lost the support of a large segment of Republican voters.

Voter backlash against incumbents is also threatening the DFL majorities in the legislature, which suffers from quite low ratings for its job performance and significant hurdles to winning re-election.

Minnesota is starkly split on a host of policy issues – from fiscal policy and immigration reform to gay marriage – in ways that defy rigid liberal or conservative pigeon-holes. A narrow plurality favors campaign contributions by businesses while a slight majority opposes unions providing financial support.

The survey was conducted of 750 likely voters in Minnesota between August 25 and 29, 2010. The margin of error ranges between +/-3.6 percentage points based on the conventional calculation and +/-5.3 percentage points, which is a more cautious estimate based on professional best practices. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger. The section at the end of this report, “About the Survey,” discusses the statistical calculations for the margin of sampling error and how to interpret it.

Pawlenty Backlash

Minnesota voters are not happy with Governor Pawlenty’s highly visible campaigning outside Minnesota, with 54% opposing it and only 31% supporting it. Pawlenty is losing the support of his own party: a large segment of Republicans – 37% -- disapprove of his out-of-state politicking along with a sizeable majority of independents (69%) and, less surprisingly, Democrats (69%). The resentment against Pawlenty’s national ambitions –

in conjunction with the difficult budget and economic circumstances – have also pushed his approval ratings below the symbolically significant 50% level – 46% of likely Minnesota voters approve of his job performance and 45% disapprove (9% do not know or refused to answer the question).

Voters (including Republicans) Disapprove of Pawlenty Out-of-State Campaigning

	Favor (31%)	Oppose (54%)	DK / Refused (15%)
Democrat	17%	69%	14%
Republican	46%	37%	18%
Independent	24%	69%	7%

With Pawlenty’s sagging approval and a backlash against his political activism out of state, a majority of voters (53%) report that they are unlikely to support him in the 2012 presidential election if he were to win the GOP nomination. In another sign of the disaffection of likely Republican voters, nearly a quarter (23%) are holding back their support as are a majority of independents (57%) who often swing elections.

Majority of Voters Won’t Vote for Pawlenty for President

	Likely to vote for Pawlenty (37%)	Unlikely to vote for Pawlenty (53%)	DK / Refused/Other (10%)
Democrat	7%	86%	7%
Republican	68%	23%	10%
Independent	21%	57%	22%

Former Massachusetts Governor, Mitt Romney, is capitalizing on Pawlenty’s political slippage in Minnesota by moving ahead 44% to 32% in the judgment of voters about who would make a better president among potential competitors for the 2012 Republican Party nomination. Pawlenty does easily beat back Sarah Palin among Minnesota voters, 59% to 24%. In one of the few areas of bipartisan agreement, 6 out of 10 Democrats and Republicans side with Pawlenty over Palin, though only a 45% plurality of independents do.

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Pawlenty Loses Out to Romney But Beats Palin

	Romney	Pawlenty	DK / Refused/Neither
Likely Voters	45%	32%	24%
	Pawlenty	Palin	DK / Refused/Neither
Likely Voters	59%	24%	18%

In a further sign of Pawlenty’s problems within his own party, 40% of Minnesota Republican voters favor Romney. (Fifty-five percent of independents and 45% of Democrats also back the former Massachusetts Governor.)

Number of Minnesota Republican Voters Desert Pawlenty

	Pawlenty (32%)	Romney (44%)	DK/Refused/Neither (24.%)
Democrat	22%	45%	31%
Republican	44%	40%	16%
Independent	17%	55%	28%

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Frustration with Minnesota Legislature

Voters’ sour mood is also haunting the DFL controlled Minnesota legislature. Only a quarter of likely voters approve of its job performance – far below the already low marks for Governor Pawlenty. This survey of likely voters finds lower approval ratings than polls earlier in 2008 and 2010 of the general population. The disapproval is widely shared: 6 out of 10 give the legislature low scores as do 45% of Democrats.

Sagging Public Support for DFL-Controlled Minnesota Legislature

	Handling Job in January 2008*	Handling Job in May 2010*	Handling Job in August 2010**
Approve	46%	37%	25%
Disapprove	44%	52%	57%
No Opinion	10%	12%	18%

*Representative sample of all adults were interviewed.

**Representative sample of likely voters were interviewed

Republicans appear to have squeaked out a narrow win in the budget wars. Thirty-seven percent of likely voters report that the Republicans did a better job handling the state budget compared to 27% who gave the edge to Democrats; a third are unwilling to single out either party for their fiscal work. Not surprisingly, each party’s partisans are most supportive of their team’s budget work but Democrats are less supportive (59% as compared to 70% of Republicans) and most ambivalent (36% did not rate a party). Two thirds of independents abstained from rating either party’s handling of the budget, perhaps in disgust with both.

Republicans Better Handle Budget

	Likely Voters
Democrats are better able to handle the budget	27%
Republicans are better able to handle the budget	37%
DK/Refused	36%

Frustration with the DFL legislature has made the contest in the 2010 election to control the Minnesota Legislature a toss-up. Forty-one percent report that they favor the Democratic Party candidate and 39% indicate they support the Republican rival. This is the most perilous position of DFL legislative candidates among likely voters during the past several years and suggests that they face a stiff challenge in maintaining their majorities. Legislative candidates are drawing loyal support from their partisans: 86% of Democrats and 78% of Republicans are backing their party's nominee. Many legislative races may be swung by independents voters, 59% of whom do not report a preference at this point.

Toss-Up For Minnesota Legislative Elections Among Likely Voters

	August 2008	Early October 2008	Late October 2008	August 2010
Democratic candidate	49%	45%	49%	41%
Republican candidate	36%	34%	33%	40%
No Opinion	13%	19%	16%	19%

Swirling Discontent

On the biggest issues facing the state, voters are fundamentally divided. They resist being pigeon-holed into extreme liberal and conservative positions, posing a challenge to candidates who seek to use them in their appeals to voters.

On fiscal policy, a majority of 56% (including a quarter of Democrats and two thirds of independents) prefer smaller government providing fewer services over a larger government with more services. And, yet, to balance the state budget, two-thirds of likely voters prefer tax increases over cuts in transportation, health care, city services, and more prefer raising taxes on the affluent over expanding sales taxes to clothing by a 45% to 22% margin. In another sign of how sharp partisan divides among elites are not necessarily shared by Minnesota voters, notable segments of Emmer supporters and Republicans favor more revenue from income and sales taxes: increasing taxes on the more affluent attracts the support of a fifth of Emmer voters and a quarter of Republicans (54% of independents as well), and broadening sales tax draws an additional fifth of Emmer voters and Republicans.

Majorities Favor Smaller Government and More Tax Revenue

	Prefer smaller state govt & fewer services	Prefer larger state govt & more services		DK/refuse
Likely Voters	56%	31%		14%
	Cut spending on transportation, health care, city services	Increase income taxes on families earning more than \$150,000 & individuals earning more than \$130,000	Begin a sales tax on clothing	
Likely Voters	28%	45%	22%	6%

Family policy toward gays reveals ambivalence. A slight majority of voters (including third of Dayton supporters and Democrats) oppose gay marriage by a 51% to 40% margin. But a stronger majority of 64% (including 56% of Emmer supporters, 55% of Republicans, and 56% of independents) favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples (30% of likely voters oppose this option).

On the controversial issue of **immigration**, the Arizona law that directs police to ask people they stop or arrest for proof they are legal residents if they suspect they might not be is supported by a 57% to 30% margin (including a third of Dayton supporters and Democrats and 60% of independents). But Minnesota voters are split on rewriting the 14th Amendment to prevent children born in the U.S. from becoming citizens here unless their parents are also U.S. citizens (45% favor it while 43% oppose it). The opposition to the constitutional amendment includes a third or more of Emmer supporters, Republicans, and independents as well as a majority of Democrats and a plurality of Dayton supporters.

Support for Arizona Immigration Law; Opposition to Revision of 14th Amendment

	Favor	Oppose	DK/Refused
Arizona Immigration Law	57%	30%	13%
Revise 14th Amendment	45%	43%	12%

Voters Support Political Contributions by Businesses But Not by Unions

Minnesota voters did not share the strong opposition among some groups to the decision of Minnesota businesses to contribute to an organization that ran ads supporting the campaign of GOP gubernatorial candidate, Tom Emmer. A slight plurality considers it appropriate for businesses to contribute to campaigns; supporters of the candidates split sharply (68% of Emmer voters favor it while 53% of Dayton backers oppose it). Strikingly, 51% viewed political contributions by unions to be inappropriate as compared to 39% who viewed them more positively. While 56% of Emmer supporters oppose union contributions, Dayton supporters are evenly divided.

Voters Accept Business Contributions to Campaigns; Oppose Union Contributions

	Appropriate	Inappropriate	Refuse/DK
Contributions by Businesses	48%	42%	10%
Contributions by Unions	39%	51%	10%

About the Survey

This survey is a collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio News 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 (Center Director) and Joanne M. Miller (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science). Charles Gregory provided research assistance.

The survey was fielded by the Information Specialists Group (ISG) and is based on a landline random digit dial survey in Minnesota. ISG called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

As is common with public opinion surveys, the data were weighted. In the first stage, the data were weighted based on the number of potential survey respondents and the number of landline telephone numbers in the household. In the second stage, data were weighted according to cell phone usage, as well as gender, age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity to approximate the demographic characteristics of the population according to the Census.

Results are based on a model that accounts for the likelihood of a respondent voting based on the following factors: self-reported probability of voting in the upcoming election, voting in previous elections as reported by the respondent, interest in the 2010 election, and registration to vote. The model estimates a turnout of 59%, which we expect to increase during the fall as interest and self-professed interest in voting increase.

The key characteristics of the sample's likely voters in Minnesota are the following:

	Likely Voters
Republican	46%
Independent	13%
Democrat	41%
Men	49%
Women	52%
18-40	26%
41-50	24%
51-63	25%
64 and older	25%

(Percentages here and above may round to higher than 100% due to rounding.)

750 likely voters living in Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between August 25 and 29, 2010. The margin of error ranges between +/-3.6 percentage points based on the

conventional calculation and ± 5.3 percentage points, which is a more cautious estimate based on professional best practices. The conventional calculation of the margin of sampling error is primarily based on the number of respondents and, critically, assumes that all respondents selected for interviewing were actually reached. No public opinion survey successfully contacts the entire sample and therefore the professional best practice is to adjust for the actual response rate and for other design effects, producing a higher margin of sampling error. In this report, we use the conventional calculation to determine the minimal level of significance and the more cautious calculation to reach a higher level of confidence in the results.

Using the design-effect calculation of the margin of sample error, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minneapolis voters will differ (in theory) by no more than ± 5.3 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the election. The response rate is 26 percent (based on AAPOR response rate calculation 4).

The results of properly conducted scientific surveys of candidate support estimate the most probable relative positions at the time of the interviewing. The margin of error indicates a range of support with unequal probabilities of accuracy. For example, assume a poll reports that Candidate A received 55% and Candidate B received 45% of support with a margin of error of ± 5 percentage points. Based on normal sampling distribution, the 55% to 45% result is the best or most probable standing at the time of the survey. Taking into account the margin of sampling error, however, we can estimate the lower boundary of support as 50% for Candidate A and the upper boundary of support for Candidate B as 50%. These results are possible but are less probable.

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.

This survey invested considerable resources in a set of procedures to reduce distortions. The sample of interviewees was drawn using comprehensive lists of phone exchanges. In addition, the interviewers were carefully trained and monitored to maintain consistency in implementing the questionnaire. Further, several steps were used to capture as much of the sample as possible including call backs to numbers when no one appeared to be at home or when the initial request to conduct the interview was not accepted.