
THE TARRANCE GROUP

MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: ED GOEAS

RE: BATTLEGROUND POLL

DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 2008

In a historic campaign that has endured many twists and turns, this year's presidential election is sure to bring more surprises. Beyond the well reported historical truths present in this election (from the first open presidential election in eighty years, and the fact that either an African American President or a female Vice President will take the oath of office in January), there is yet another historical nuance that surfaces in this latest Battleground Poll. With seven weeks to go in the 2008 Election, this is the first Presidential race in the last twenty years that both candidates have a very positive image rating. Barack Obama has a fifty-seven percent (57%) favorable rating and a thirty-seven percent (37%) unfavorable rating. John McCain matches that with a fifty-eight percent (58%) favorable rating and a thirty-seven percent (37%) unfavorable rating. This net positive rating is also matched with both candidates' running mates; Sarah Palin has a net twenty-four point positive image, and Joe Biden has a net twenty-point favorable rating.

The traditional ballot match-up in this latest Battleground Poll (September 7-11, 2008), reports the McCain-Palin ticket leading the Obama-Biden ticket by four-points: 48% to 44%. (The latest Battleground Poll also reports Barr-Root and Nader-Gonzalez each receiving 1% of the ballot share respectively, while 5% is currently undecided.) In the more predictive "unaided" ballot, McCain-Palin leads Obama-Biden by six-points: 46% to 40%

The GOP ticket currently leads the Democrat ticket among several key demographics. A number of these Republican advantages are conventional, while a handful of others are some that would be less anticipated and illustrate the new environment in which McCain-Palin have found considerable traction.

MCCAIN-PALIN BALLOT SHARE: A CLOSER LOOK

REGION

- The McCain-Palin ballot share reaches more than 50% in the following regions: South (54%), South Central (56%), Central Plains (55%) and Mountain States (58%). McCain-Palin and Obama-Biden are tied in the Northeast with 46% respectively, while Obama-Biden's ballot share surpasses 50% in the Midwest region (51%) the West (53%).
- Obama had previously enjoyed a double digit advantage in the toss up states. However, this gap has narrowed to within the margin of error with McCain receiving 44% of this vote and Obama with 48%.
- McCain leads Obama in rural (53%-38%) and suburban areas (52%-41%), but trails Obama in urban regions (37%-56%).
- Unsurprisingly, the McCain-Palin ticket has a 9-point advantage in states with 2 GOP Senators (52%-41%), but also leads with a 7-point spread in states with a mixed U.S. Senate delegation (50%-43%), and is within the margin of error versus Obama-Biden in states that have 2 Democratic Senators (44%-48%).

GENDER

- McCain-Palin handily lead Obama-Biden among men (52%-41%), and are statistically tied among women (45%-47%). McCain leads among white women by 18-points (55%-37%) and married women by 14 points (53%-39%).
- What remains of a "gender gap" is ONLY evident among working women, where Obama maintains an advantage (39%-55%). McCain leads among women who are not employed (50%-40%).

AGE

- McCain-Palin lead Obama-Biden among all age groups, with the exception of 18-34 year olds – *a group that represents the lowest propensity of voters.*
- In the previous Battleground Poll conducted in August, Obama led McCain among voters ages 18-29 with a 23-point advantage and 60% of the ballot share. Obama's lead shows signs of erosion among 18-29 year olds in the latest Battleground Poll, as his ballot share has dropped 7 points with his critical "youth" voting bloc (60%-53%) and McCain's ballot share among these voters has increased 3 points (37%-40%), totaling a 10-point net change.

- McCain leads Obama with a 5-point advantage among voters ages 65 and older (48%-43%), and McCain's spread increases to 8 points with voters ages 70 and older (49%-41%).

PARTY INTENSITY

- This latest Battleground Poll represents the first time this year that Republicans are more enthusiastic than Democrats. Party support and base intensity is stronger and more decisive for McCain-Palin than Obama-Biden. Fully 91% of Republicans are currently voting for McCain, while 83% of Democrats are decided for Obama. Furthermore, McCain-Palin continue to lead among Independents with a 12-point advantage (47%-35%)!

ADDITIONAL BALLOT POINTS

- McCain-Palin currently have the support of a quarter of Hispanic voters (25%), while 65% are now preferential toward Obama-Biden on the ballot.
- Despite Democrats' historical strength among the most educated in our society, McCain-Palin currently lead Obama-Biden among college graduates with an 8-point advantage (51%-43%).
- Parents are more likely to vote for McCain-Palin, as the GOP ticket leads among fathers (50%-46%) and mothers (48%-43%).
- In addition to leading among mainline Protestants (58%-37%), Baptists (53%-40%) and Fundamentalists/Pentecostal church denominations (64%-44%), McCain-Palin lead in the much sought after Catholic vote (46%-43%) – a denomination that is historically very supportive of the Democratic ticket.
- Undecided voters on the generic Congressional ballot support McCain-Palin by more than a 2-1 advantage over Obama-Biden (54%-21%).
- Obama-Biden have a significant lead in the ballot among those who think the economy and jobs are the most important issue (36%-56%). However, McCain-Palin have nearly solidified support with a 3-1 margin among those who think gas and energy prices (also a leading issue this cycle) are the most important issue to deal with (74%-23%).
- Three-quarters of voters disapprove of the job Congress is doing (72%). And in addition, McCain-Palin lead Obama-Biden with a 10 point advantage among this group (51%-41%).
- The McCain-Palin ticket enjoys a 10-point advantage among voters who have a “favorable” opinion of both McCain AND Obama (49%-39%).

TURNOUT MODELING

- If the ballot were to be readjusted to not include voters who are “not at all comfortable voting with an African American”, Obama’s ballot share drops a full percentage point from 44.2% to 42.8%. Should the ballot be taken a step further and readjusted to not include those who are “unsure” about their feelings on voting for an African American, Obama’s ballot share would then decrease even further to 39.2%.
- If we were to anticipate that young people are likely to account for 16% of total turnout based upon previous presidential year election results the ballot increases only 1 point for the Obama-Biden ticket (44% to 45%).
- It is our analysis, however, that to the extent either of these two factors have an effect in this year’s presidential election: they largely cancel each other out.
- Should 80% of this polling sample (those who are “most likely to vote”) were to turn out at the polls on Election Day, McCain would handily defeat Obama in a national contest with 53% of the ballot share, versus 46% for Obama.

ISSUE HANDLING

ISSUES AND QUALITIES	MCCAIN	OBAMA
Is a strong leader	51%	37%
Shares your values	45%	46%
Fights for people like me	42%	48%
Will unite the country	39%	47%
Will bring change to Washington	34%	52%
Says what he believes	42%	42%
Handling the health care issue	34%	52%
Can reduce gas and energy prices	38%	37%
Will keep America prosperous	43%	44%
Will create jobs and improve the economy	39%	47%
Keeping America safe and secure	57%	33%

- A key determinant of electability in the issue handling series has traditionally been the “strong leader” measure. In this respect, McCain currently enjoys a 14-point lead, highlighting his concentrated advantage over Obama in handling both domestic and foreign policy issues.
- McCain and Obama are statistically tied in “shares your values”. The numbers shift among white voters, with McCain enjoying a 15-point advantage over Obama (53-38). In addition, McCain leads Obama among Independents by 12 points (48%-36%).
- “Fights for people like me” is traditionally strong in favor of Democrats. However, Obama now leads McCain by a narrow six points. Obama’s share of this measure is unchanged from the previous Battleground Poll conducted in August, while McCain is up three points. McCain and Obama are statistically tied among Independents, with 39% believing McCain better represents “fights for people like me”, versus 42% who think this measure is more suited for Obama.

- McCain has significantly closed the gap when it comes to which candidate voters think is best able to “reduce gas and energy prices” – a key issue in this cycle. In May, Obama led McCain in this measure with a 19-point advantage (50%-31%). Throughout the course of the summer and early fall, McCain has managed not only to catch up to, but surpass Obama in being viewed as the candidate most equipped to handle the gas and energy crisis.
- The Democrat ticket has not won a presidential race without having an 11 point advantage in “keeping America prosperous”. McCain has neutralized, and is statistically tied with, Obama on this measure. McCain leads among white voters with a 14-point advantage (50%-46%) and is tied with Obama among Independents (44%-43%).
- Obama had a 21 point lead over McCain in May in the “jobs and economy” measure. Historically, the “jobs” component has typically given Democrats a significant edge. However, McCain now trails Obama by only 8 points, and the candidates are statistically tied among Independents (McCain 47%, Obama 48%).
- The intense recognition of John McCain’s war and foreign policy experience is evident in this issue handling series. McCain leads Obama with a double digit advantage when voters are asked who is best suited to keep American safe and secure (McCain +24 points).

CONCLUSION

With seven weeks left in this volatile Presidential cycle, we have seen tumultuous changes on both sides and anticipate nothing less in these remaining days. Regardless, this latest collection of data reports results that neither the pundits nor the news media could have predicted. Presidential candidate John McCain and his running mate Sarah Palin have reignited GOP intensity. This has, in effect, influenced the environment enough to produce a very close race and potentially ensure a continued Republican edge through November.

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