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The Battleground: The Presidential Race in Iowa

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This Marist Poll reports:

Presidential Race in Iowa:

- **Advantage, Obama...Double-Digit Lead Among Likely Voters:** Although the presidential race between Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain is a close contest among Iowa's registered voters, the Democratic candidate leads his Republican opponent by double digits among voters likely to vote on Election Day. 46% of Iowa's registered voters say they support Obama while 41% say they back McCain. But, Obama widens his lead among likely Iowa voters including those who are undecided yet leaning toward a candidate. Obama receives 51% to McCain's 41% among these voters. Here's how the contest breaks down along party lines. 92% of Iowa's likely Democratic voters report they support Obama. 85% of the state's likely Republican voters say they back their party's candidate, McCain. Independent voters likely to vote in November divide 44% for Obama to 42% for McCain. Iowa is one of three states that switched party columns from 2000 to 2004 and by the narrowest of margins. Al Gore carried the state in 2000. President Bush defeated former Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry in 2004. Right now, Obama is poised to change Iowa's electoral make-up yet again.

Question Wording: If November's presidential election were held today, whom would you support if the candidates are:

	John McCain/ Sarah Palin the Republicans	Barack Obama/ Joe Biden the Democrats	Other	Undecided
Registered voters	41%	46%	2%	11%
Likely voters w/ leaners	41%	51%	2%	6%
Democrats	6%	92%	<1%	2%
Republicans	85%	9%	1%	5%
Independents	42%	44%	3%	11%

- Iowa Voters -- Commitment Phobic?** Regardless for whom they are planning to vote, 69% of the state's registered voters say they strongly support their candidate. One in five say they somewhat support their choice, and 11% say they might vote differently or are unsure. 62% of voters who are McCain's supporters firmly back the GOP candidate while 76% of Obama's backers are strongly behind him. 14% of McCain's backers say they might change their minds by Election Day while just 5% of Obama's supporters say they might switch their support.

Question Wording: Would you say that you strongly support [ticket], somewhat support them, or do you think you might vote differently on Election Day?

Registered voters	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Might Vote Differently	Unsure
September 2008	69%	20%	9%	2%
McCain/Palin supporters	62%	22%	14%	2%
Obama/Biden supporters	76%	18%	5%	1%

- Obama Tips the Scales of Excitement:** Just a slim majority of Iowa's registered voters -- 51% -- are enthusiastic about the choices they have for president. More voters in Obama's camp, however, are energized compared with those in McCain's camp. 68% of Obama's backers say they are enthused compared with only 46% of McCain's. In fact, a majority of McCain's backers -- 53% -- say they are *not* excited about the choices they have for president.

Question Wording: Are you excited or not excited about the choices you have for president?

Registered voters	Excited	Not Excited	Unsure
September 2008	51%	47%	2%
McCain/Palin supporters	46%	53%	1%
Obama/Biden supporters	68%	32%	<1%

- The Economy is Front and Center:** As Congress hammers out the details of a \$700 billion bailout of the nation’s financial institutions, the economy is the main issue on the minds of registered voters in Iowa. 48% say the economy is the number one issue they consider when it comes to picking a candidate. Social issues like abortion or same sex marriage are most important for 9% of the Iowa electorate with health care following closely behind with 8%. Supporters of both John McCain and Barack Obama agree that the economy is the key issue in this presidential race, but it’s more important for backers of the Democratic candidate. 60% of Obama’s supporters report the economy is their top priority compared with 37% of John McCain’s. More McCain backers -- 18% -- say social issues are at the core of this election while just 3% of voters for Obama see these issues as major concerns. For 9% of registered voters in the Obama camp, health care tops their priority list followed by the war in Iraq and education.

Question Wording: When deciding your vote for president, which one of the following *issues* is most important to you:

Registered voters	Sept. 2008	McCain/ Palin Supporters	Obama/ Biden Supporters
Economy	48%	37%	60%
Social issues like abortion or same sex marriage	9%	18%	3%
Health care	8%	6%	9%
Education	7%	5%	8%
War in Iraq	7%	6%	8%
Security against terrorism	7%	13%	3%
Illegal immigration	4%	6%	2%
Taxes	4%	5%	1%
Environment	3%	<1%	5%
Unsure	3%	4%	1%

- Voters Think Obama Has Better Economic Plan... Divide Over Better Record:** So, which candidate do Iowa voters think has the better *plan* to turn the economy around? Half -- 50% -- of registered voters in the state say it is Barack Obama; 37% think John McCain has the answer. Looking at party lines, 87% of Democrats favor Barack Obama's vision while 71% of Republicans think John McCain is on the right course. Obama enjoys a slight edge, though, among Independents 46% to 40%. When it comes to the candidate with the better *record* to bring about economic change, Iowa's registered voters divide. 45% say McCain's record is stronger on the issue while 40% think Barack Obama's is.

Question Wording: Which presidential candidate do you think has a better *plan/record* for handling the economy?

Registered voters	McCain	Obama	Unsure
Better plan	37%	50%	13%
Democrats	6%	87%	7%
Republicans	71%	11%	18%
Independents	40%	46%	14%
Better record	45%	40%	15%
Democrats	15%	72%	13%
Republicans	80%	6%	14%
Independents	47%	36%	17%

- A Matter of Trust:** When it comes to the *quality* most registered voters in Iowa want in a candidate, 26% say their next president should be honest and trustworthy. A candidate who shares their values is most important to 19% of Iowa's electorate while 18% want a president who will bring about change. Change is by far more important to Barack Obama's supporters than to John McCain's. 30% of Obama's supporters think it's most important when deciding who to vote for compared with 6% of voters for McCain. For McCain's supporters, a candidate who shares their values is the most important characteristic in a candidate. That quality is rated the highest among supporters of the Republican candidate -- 30%, but by only 13% of Obama's backers.

Question Wording: When deciding your vote for president, which one of the following qualities is most important to you? A presidential candidate who:

	Sept. 2008	McCain/ Palin Supporters	Obama/ Biden Supporters
Registered voters			
Is honest and trustworthy	26%	24%	21%
Shares your values	19%	30%	13%
Will bring about change	18%	6%	30%
Is closer to you on the issues	16%	15%	20%
Is a strong leader	14%	16%	13%
Has experience	4%	6%	2%
Unsure	3%	3%	1%

- Face the Change:** A majority of Iowa’s registered voters believe Barack Obama has the better *plan* to bring about change. 53% believe Obama is the better architect of change while 35% think McCain is the candidate to take the nation in a different direction. There is party loyalty on this issue. 69% of Republicans think McCain has the better plan while 88% of Democrats believe Obama has the better vision. 49% of Independents think Barack Obama can script a new storyline for the nation while 37% favor McCain’s approach. However, Iowa’s registered voters divide over which candidate has the better *record* to bring about change. 44% think John McCain has the better record to change the direction of the country. That’s compared with 40% who say Barack Obama has the track record to bring about change.

Question Wording: Which presidential candidate do you think has a better *plan/record* to bring about change for the country?

Registered voters	McCain	Obama	Unsure
Better plan	35%	53%	12%
Democrats	6%	88%	6%
Republicans	69%	14%	17%
Independents	37%	49%	14%
Better record	44%	40%	16%
Democrats	13%	74%	13%
Republicans	82%	7%	11%
Independents	47%	32%	21%

- Voters Want Shared Values:** 49% of registered voters in Iowa say if they had to choose, they would prefer a candidate who shares their values over one who shares their positions on issues. 42% say they would prefer the opposite -- a candidate who shares their positions on issues but who does not share their values. 55% of John McCain's supporters say they prefer someone who has their values. Half of Obama's supporters have the opposite preference. They want a candidate who shares their positions on the issues over someone who shares their values.

Question Wording: If you had to choose, would you prefer:

	Sept. 2008	McCain/ Palin Supporters	Obama/ Biden Supporters
Registered voters			
A candidate who shares your positions on the issues but does not share your values	42%	35%	50%
A candidate who shares your values but not your positions on the issues	49%	55%	46%
Unsure	9%	10%	4%

- Voters View Both McCain and Obama Favorably:** A majority of Iowa's registered voters have a positive impression of both presidential candidates. 54% of Iowa's registered voters view John McCain favorably while 58% have a positive impression of Barack Obama.

Question Wording: Overall, do you have a favorable or an unfavorable impression of [candidate]?

Registered voters	Favorable	Unfavorable	Unsure
John McCain	54%	40%	6%
Barack Obama	58%	36%	6%

- Positive Perception of Vice Presidential Candidates:** Half -- 50% -- of registered voters in Iowa have a favorable impression of Barack Obama's running mate, Joe Biden. John McCain's running mate, Sarah Palin, shares a similar favorability rating of 49%. Reflecting the gender differences between the parties, 53% of women have a favorable impression of Joe Biden while 46% of men see him positively. The proportion reverses when it comes to Sarah Palin. 46% of women view her favorably compared with 53% of men.

Question Wording: Overall, do you have a favorable or an unfavorable impression of [candidate]?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Unsure
Registered voters			
Sarah Palin	49%	35%	16%
Democrats	20%	61%	19%
Republicans	83%	8%	9%
Independents	51%	30%	19%
Men	53%	32%	15%
Women	46%	37%	17%
Joe Biden	50%	30%	20%
Democrats	76%	11%	13%
Republicans	23%	52%	25%
Independents	46%	32%	22%
Men	46%	37%	17%
Women	53%	24%	23%

Nature of the Sample: 714 Iowa Registered Voters

This survey of registered voters in Iowa was conducted from September 18th through September 21st, 2008. Registered voters were interviewed by telephone in proportion to the voter registration in each county in Iowa and adjusted for turnout in statewide elections. Results are statistically significant at $\pm 4\%$. There are 467 likely voters. The results for this sub-sample are statistically significant at $\pm 4.5\%$. The error margin increases for cross-tabulations.