

September 8, 2008

## Republicans' Enthusiasm Jumps After Convention

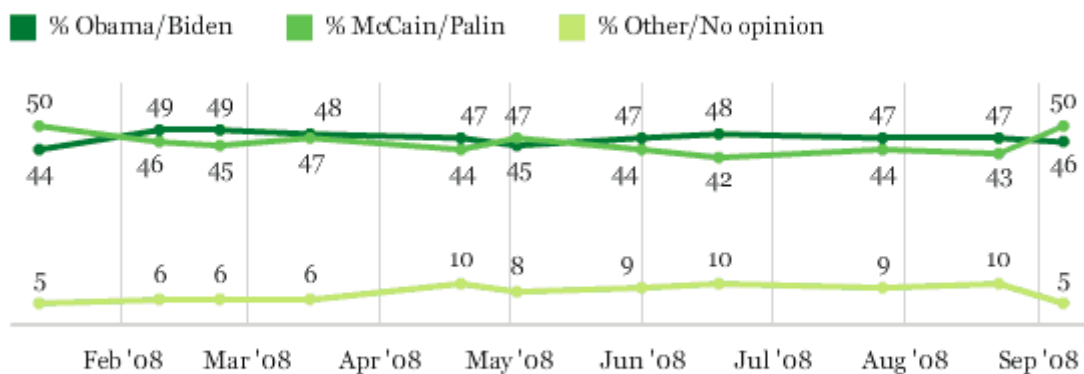
McCain edges ahead; Palin speech may be a factor

by Frank Newport

PRINCETON, NJ -- As the remarkable two-week stretch of back-to-back presidential nomination conventions ends, a weekend *USA Today*/Gallup Poll finds that the John McCain-Sarah Palin ticket has more than matched the Barack Obama-Joe Biden ticket's convention bounce of last week with a "rebound" bounce, and in the immediate aftermath of the GOP convention McCain and Palin now have a slight edge over their opponents.

### *2008 Presidential Election Preference -- Trend Since Jan. 2008*

Based on registered voters



USA Today/Gallup trends

GALLUP POLL

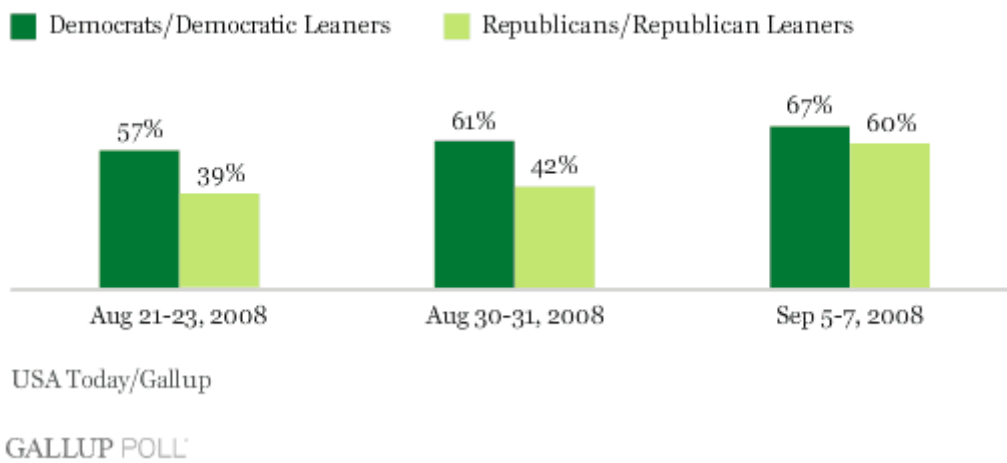
The presidential race was dead even at 45% to 45% among registered voters in Gallup tracking conducted prior to the Democratic convention. Then, by the *USA Today*/Gallup Poll conducted in the first few days after the Democratic convention (and also after McCain had made his announcement of Sarah Palin as his running mate), Obama had moved ahead by a 47% to 43% margin. (In Gallup Poll Daily tracking extending into the beginning of last week, Obama reached a point where he had 50% of the vote and an eight percentage point lead.) Obama's lead has now disappeared totally, and McCain sits on a 4-point advantage among registered voters in the Friday through Sunday poll. That's the largest advantage for McCain in either *USA Today*/Gallup Polls or Gallup Poll Daily tracking since May.

The convention and/or McCain's selection of Sarah Palin as his vice presidential running mate not only had the effect of moving the horserace needle in McCain's direction, but also increased several measures of enthusiasm for the GOP.

There has been a very substantial jump in the percentage of Republicans saying they are more enthusiastic about voting in this election, from 42% a week ago (after the Democratic convention, but before the Republican convention) to 60% today. Democrats still retain a slight lead on this measure, having increased their enthusiasm slightly this last week as well. But the enthusiasm gap, which has been so much a part of the story of the

presidential election so far this year, has dwindled from 19 points in the Democrats' favor a week ago to only seven points today.

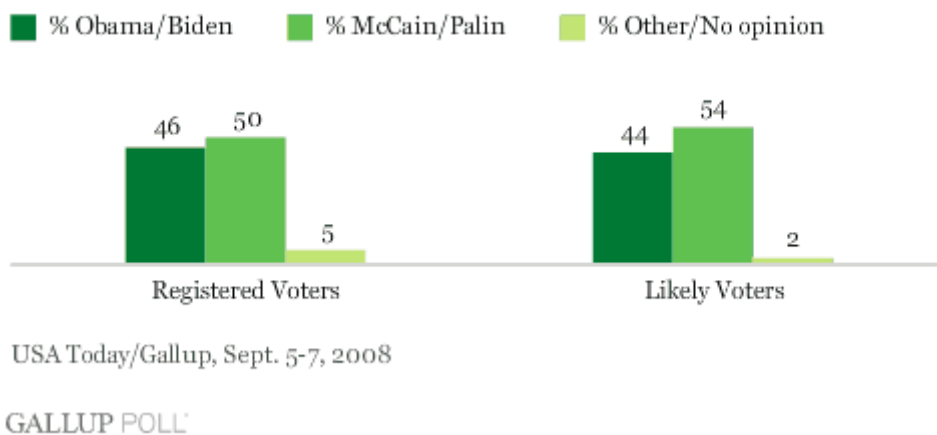
*Percentage "More Enthusiastic" Than Usual About Voting -- Recent Trend*



**Likely Voters**

The gap between registered voters and likely voters has once again enlarged in the McCain-Palin ticket's favor in this poll. While the Republican ticket leads by 50% to 46% among registered voters, that lead stretches to a 54% to 44% lead among those Gallup sees as most likely to actually turn out and vote.

*Presidential Preference Comparison -- Registered Voters vs. Likely Voters*



This difference between likely voters and registered voters indicates that *if the election were held today*, McCain would benefit from a differential advantage over the Democrats in terms of those voters actually likely to turn out and vote -- as has often been typical of recent presidential elections

McCain also had a similar likely voter advantage in the *USA Today*/Gallup Poll conducted in the immediate aftermath of Barack Obama's foreign tour, July 25-27, interpreted at the time as a significant partisan reaction to the visibility given Obama by that tour. That advantage for the GOP did not appear in the *USA Today*/Gallup Poll conducted about a month later as the conventions began, but has appeared again in this poll.

Thus, these trends suggest that the Republican ticket has the *potential* for a significant turnout advantage on Election Day, but that it appears to be very dependent on the election environment and is by no means certain.

### The Palin Factor

Candidates typically receive a bounce in their standing in the polls after their party's convention, so McCain moving into a lead over Barack Obama by a slim margin is not unexpected. Obama received a bounce from his convention, and now McCain has received a bounce from his own.

One of the most remarkable things that occurred during the last week, of course, was McCain's highly unexpected selection of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin on Aug. 29 as his vice presidential running mate. That selection, and Palin's speech on Wednesday night at the convention (coupled with her appearance on a number of different national magazine covers in the days that followed) certainly could be hypothesized to have added a little extra energy to standard convention bounce.

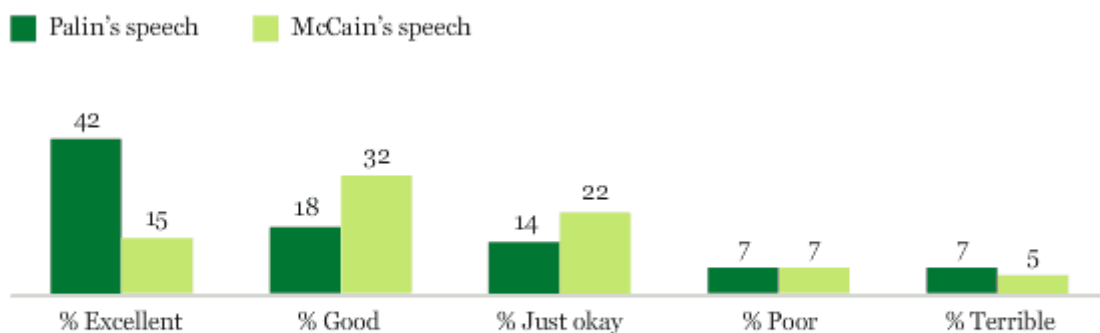
The weekend poll included a number of questions addressing the Palin factor.

The conclusion? Sarah Palin certainly appears to have made a strong impression with her convention speech, but other indications in the data show that her selection has engendered an overall polarizing effect -- with both high positives and high negatives.

Here are some of the key points:

1. Sarah Palin's speech Wednesday night was clearly a success. Her speech was very positively received and reaction to it overwhelmed the tepid response to John McCain's speech on Thursday night.

#### *Rating of Sarah Palin's and John McCain's Acceptance Speeches*



USA Today/Gallup, Sept. 5-7, 2008

GALLUP POLL

Barack Obama's speech before 80,000 people in the football stadium at the Democratic convention a week and a half ago was not rated in this most recent weekend poll, but was rated in a one-night poll on the evening of Aug. 29, the day after his speech. Obama's speech received very positive ratings, but slightly lower than Palin did in this weekend's poll.

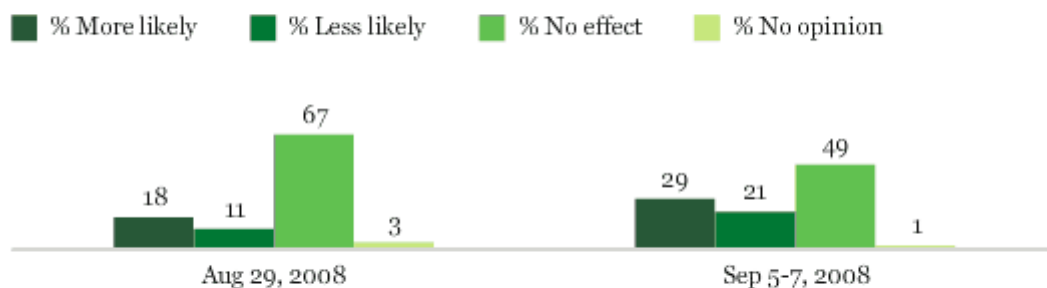
2. Other measures included in the weekend poll show a positive rating for aspects of Palin's selection, as well as a pattern of responses that reinforces the conclusion that McCain's choice may have been risky in some respects.

The 36% of voters who said McCain's selection of Palin was "excellent" was higher than was measured in reaction to Obama's selection of Biden. But, and this is a big caveat, at the same time the percent of voters who rated McCain's selection of Palin as "poor" -- 24% -- is also high. Compared to a one-night poll conducted Aug. 29, the percentage of Americans rating the selection of Palin as excellent has risen, as has, to a lesser degree, the percentage who rated it poor.

3. The important question of asking voters whether McCain's selection of Palin influenced their vote in either direction showed a similarly polarizing pattern of responses, with relatively high positives, but also high negatives.

*Does having Sarah Palin as his running mate make you more likely to vote for John McCain in November, less likely, or will it not have much effect on your vote?*

Based on registered voters



USA Today/Gallup

GALLUP POLL

Does having Sarah Palin as his running mate make you more likely to vote for John McCain in November, less likely, or will it not have much effect on your vote?

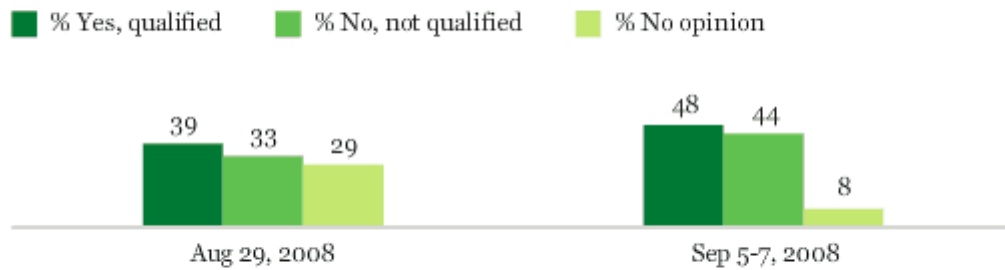
Gallup asked Americans about the selection of Palin in a one-day poll on Aug. 29, and since that time voters have both become more positive about the impact of the selection on their vote, and also more negative. The "net" difference between the two reactions has remained almost exactly the same over the last week.

4. Voters have also -- on balance -- not changed their views of Palin's qualifications to be president. These views remain decidedly mixed.

In Gallup's Aug. 29 poll, the spread between those saying that Palin was qualified and those saying she was not qualified was six points. Now, in the weekend poll, although both percentages have risen, the spread is an almost identical at four points.

*Based on what you know about Sarah Palin, do you think she is qualified to serve as president if it becomes necessary, or not?*

Based on registered voters



USA Today/Gallup

GALLUP POLL

5. A question asking about the implications of the choice of Palin on McCain's ability to make important presidential decisions shows that while 55% of voters say it reflects favorably on his ability to make important decisions, 40% say it reflects unfavorably.

#### **GOP Convention Highly Watched, but Americans' Reactions Not Unusual**

Despite the bounce McCain has received from the convention, in a direct question asking voters if the convention affected their vote for McCain in either direction elicited responses roughly on par with other recent conventions, and slightly more negative than the responses to the Democratic convention this year. (This is despite the fact that more respondents reported watching the Republican convention in the weekend poll than reported watching the Democratic convention. In fact the self-reported viewership for the GOP convention was higher than any other recent convention Gallup surveyed.)

*Does what you saw or read of this week's Republican National Convention in St. Paul make you more likely or less likely to vote for John McCain?*

|                             | <b>More<br/>likely</b> | <b>Less<br/>likely</b> | <b>No<br/>difference<br/>(vol.)</b> | <b>No<br/>opinion</b> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
|                             | %                      | %                      | %                                   | %                     |
| 2008 Sep 5-7                | 43                     | 38                     | 13                                  | 6                     |
| For Comparison:             |                        |                        |                                     |                       |
| Post-Dem Convention 2008 †  | 43                     | 29                     | 19                                  | 8                     |
| Post-GOP Convention 2004    | 41                     | 38                     | 15                                  | 6                     |
| Post-Dem. Convention 2004 ^ | 44                     | 30                     | 18                                  | 8                     |
| Post-Dem. Convention 2000 ^ | 43                     | 28                     | 19                                  | 10                    |
| Post-GOP Convention 2000 ^  | 44                     | 27                     | 15                                  | 14                    |
| Post-Dem. Convention 1996   | 44                     | 29                     | 19                                  | 8                     |
| Post-GOP Convention 1996 ^  | 45                     | 34                     | 13                                  | 8                     |
| Post-Dem. Convention 1992 ^ | 60                     | 15                     | 17                                  | 8                     |
| Post-GOP Convention 1988 ^  | 43                     | 27                     | 16                                  | 14                    |
| Post-Dem. Convention 1988 ^ | 56                     | 21                     | 9                                   | 14                    |
| Post-Dem. Convention 1984 ^ | 45                     | 29                     | 12                                  | 14                    |

^ Asked in a list of items; † USA Today/Gallup poll asked on Gallup tracking survey  
(vol.)=volunteered

GALLUP POLL

## Implications

At least in the short-term, McCain appears to have used the Republican convention to neutralize the bounce Obama received following the Democratic convention, to the point where McCain now has a slight advantage over Obama among registered voters and a larger advantage among likely voters. It remains to be seen whether or not McCain can hold on to his advantage in the days ahead as news coverage continues to shift from the conventions to the race itself.

The Republican convention certainly appears to have energized the Republican voting base, visible not only in the data showing a major 18-point jump in enthusiasm among Republicans, but also from the fact that McCain's advantage over Obama increases in this poll when just likely voters are taken into consideration. Again, the issue is whether or not this advantage can be sustained.

Republican vice presidential nominee Palin's speech at the Republican convention on Wednesday night received a highly positive response, significantly more so than her running mate McCain received for his speech. Other indicators suggest that the selection of Palin was a polarizing move by McCain, generating significant positives and negatives. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that the long-term impact of the Palin selection may not be fully understood until her visibility increases further, including the important planned debate with Joe Biden in early October in St. Louis.

(Gallup will explore the impact of the conventions on the images of the two candidates, and on the political parties, in stories to be posted on [gallup.com](http://gallup.com) Monday afternoon and Tuesday).

### **Survey Methods**

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,022 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Sept. 5-7, 2008. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3$  percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on land-line telephones (for respondents with a land-line telephone) and cellular phones (for respondents who are cell-phone only).

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.