

## Polls Show Obama Gaining Among Bush Voters

Senator Barack Obama is showing surprising strength among portions of the political coalition that returned George W. Bush to the White House four years ago, a cross section of support that, if it continues through Election Day, would exceed that of Bill Clinton in 1992, according to the latest New York Times/CBS News polls.

Underscoring his increasing strength in the final phase of the campaign, Mr. Obama led Mr. McCain among groups that voted for President Bush four years ago: those with incomes greater than \$50,000 a year; married women; suburbanites and white Catholics. He is also competitive among white men, a group that has not voted for a Democrat over a Republican since 1972, when pollsters began surveying people after they voted.

Of potential concern for Mr. Obama's strategists, however, a third of voters surveyed say they know someone who does not support Mr. Obama because he is black.

Voters were also closely divided about Mr. Obama's ability to handle a crisis, a finding that came as Republicans seized on remarks by his running mate, Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware, that foreign leaders were likely to test him in the first months of his term if he is elected.

Over all, however, the poll found that Mr. Obama would defeat Mr. McCain if the election were held now, with 52 percent of those identified as probable voters saying they would vote for Mr. Obama and 39 percent saying they would vote for Mr. McCain.

Among registered voters in the latest poll, the spread is almost identical, with 51 percent saying they would vote for Mr. Obama and 38 percent saying they would vote for Mr. McCain. A New York Times/CBS News poll taken a week ago showed a similar margin of victory for Mr. Obama.

The latest nationwide telephone poll was conducted Sunday through Wednesday with 1,152 adults, of whom 1,046 said they were registered to vote. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus three percentage points.

To measure support for the candidates among specific voting blocs, The Times combined data from the latest poll with one conducted last week because some of the subgroups were too small to be statistically reliable when extracted from a single survey.

Despite Mr. McCain's continued questioning of Mr. Obama's readiness, the number of voters surveyed who say Mr. Obama has prepared himself well enough for the presidency was at its highest yet in the newest poll, 56 percent.

When The Times and CBS News first asked the question, more voters said they believed Mr. Obama was not ready, 49 percent, than believed he was, 44 percent. Mr. McCain still holds an advantage on that front, with 64 percent saying they believe he is prepared for the presidency.

There was also fresh evidence that Mr. McCain's attacks on Mr. Obama's character and qualifications in commercials, mailings, speeches and automated telephone calls were, if anything, harming Mr. McCain. The percentage of people who view Mr. McCain unfavorably was at its highest level since The Times and CBS began asking the question in 1999. Forty-six percent said they held unfavorable views of him, with 39 percent saying they viewed him favorably. Mr. Obama was viewed favorably by 52 percent of those surveyed, and unfavorably by 31 percent.

Voters were almost evenly split over Mr. Obama's ability to handle a crisis wisely: 49 percent said they were confident he could and 47 percent said they would be uneasy. Respondents showed less ease with Mr. McCain: 51 percent said they would be uneasy with his approach and 46 percent expressed confidence.

Mr. Obama fared better than Mr. McCain on economic matters: 65 percent said they were somewhat confident or very confident in Mr. Obama's ability to handle the economy; 47 percent said the same thing about Mr. McCain.

In spite of Mr. McCain's sustained attack on Mr. Obama's proposal to raise income taxes on households and businesses that earn more than \$250,000 a year, Mr. Obama's plan received significant support in the new poll. When voters were asked whether they supported the tax increase to help provide health insurance for those who are not covered, 62 percent said it was a "good idea" and 33 percent said it was a "bad idea."

Voters were evenly divided over Mr. McCain's plan to make permanent Mr. Bush's 2001 tax cuts.

In another area where Mr. McCain could take heart, the last two polls offered fresh evidence that his choice of Gov. Sarah Palin of Alaska as his running mate had helped to excite two traditional bases of support for Republican presidential candidates. White voters who say they attend church every week preferred Mr. McCain over Mr. Obama by 61 percent to 29 percent, and voters who live in the South preferred him over Mr. Obama by 51 percent to 40 percent.

But, over all, the percentage of those who view Ms. Palin unfavorably, 40 percent, was higher than those who view her favorably, 31 percent.

Senior strategists of both parties have viewed the unpopularity of Mr. Bush and the Republican Party as major drags on Mr. McCain's chances. Favorability ratings for both are at all-time lows. Mr. Bush's approval rating of 22 percent is tied for its worst in the history of the Times/CBS poll, and opinions of the Republican Party are at their lowest since the poll first included questions about the political parties in 1985. Only 36 percent expressed a favorable opinion of Republicans, compared with 56 percent who expressed a favorable view of Democrats.

That difference was reflected in comments from some respondents who said they had voted for Mr. Bush in 2004 but were planning to vote for Mr. Obama.

"I've always been a Republican, but I've switched in the last four years," said Helen Taylor, 63, of Los Fresnos, Tex., in a follow-up interview. "I voted for Bush because I knew more about him than Kerry, and I stuck with the Republican stance on things at that time. But I became concerned about things Bush was doing, and now I'm more in line with the Democratic platform. I also like Barack Obama because he has intelligence and class and the ability to think on his feet."

Mr. Obama has a 16-point advantage over Mr. McCain among women in the combined data of the last two polls; Senator John Kerry outpolled Mr. Bush by three percentage points among women in 2004, according to exit polls.

Mr. Obama is supported by 45 percent of white women, and Mr. McCain is preferred by 42 percent; Mr. Bush beat Mr. Kerry with 55 percent of the vote among white women, according to exit polls.

Mr. Obama is tied with Mr. McCain among white men, a group that President Bush won with 61 percent of their vote. Mr. Bush's father, George Bush, was favored by more white men than those who preferred Mr. Clinton when he won the White House in 1992.

Some voters ascribe racial motives to those opposing Mr. Obama. Among the 33 percent who said they knew someone who did not support him mainly because he is black was Robert Richter, a Democrat from Dunbar, Pa.

"Some people are prejudiced and don't want to vote for him, for one thing, because he's black and for another, because they feel he's a Muslim," said Mr. Richter, a gas station worker. "I think for some people saying Obama is a Muslim is their way of getting around the black issue."

Mr. Obama is a Christian, but e-mail has circulated falsely identifying him as a Muslim.

## Tracking Preferences

A comparison of groups' preferences in the 2004 presidential election with the groups' current support.

