



## 'Maverick' McCain Loses Middle As Conservatives Also Hold Back

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Despite worsening economic conditions and a news backdrop that supposedly favors Democrats, presumed Republican standard-bearer John McCain remains only 3 points behind rival Barack Obama in the latest IBD/TIPP Poll.

But the poll also shows McCain isn't pulling as well as expected from the independents and moderates to whom his "maverick" reputation was thought to appeal. He also has yet to close the sale with his party's conservative base.

In a poll of 854 registered voters taken last week, Obama leads 40% to 37% with 18% undecided and 4% refusing to say. The 3-point spread is the same the Illinois senator enjoyed in last month's IBD/TIPP survey.

It's also the same registered by other polls taken during the same period, notably ABC News-Washington Post, Rasmussen and Newsweek. But 6-, 7- and 9-point Obama leads registered by CBS-New York Times, Reuters-Zogby and Quinnipiac, respectively, raised the week's average as calculated by RealClearPolitics to 5 points.

IBD/TIPP's polling found McCain doing better among Republicans (78% to 7% for Obama) than Obama is doing among Democrats (72% to 10% for McCain). Those spreads are narrower than a month ago.

Among independents, however, Obama has pulled ahead and opened up a 42% to 28% lead. Last month, McCain had a 38%-37% edge among these important voters. Independents who haven't made up their minds jumped to 26% from 19%.

Obama's lead among self-described "moderates" is even larger — 46%-22% — with 29% unsure.

Compared with the 78% support that McCain has with Republicans in general, conservatives back him by 67%, with 17% still undecided. Obama polls 13% among conservatives.

In sharp contrast, liberals favor Obama by 85%-7% , with just 4% of them undecided.

Although McCain has acted in recent weeks to align himself more with conservatives, his conservative bona fides continue to be challenged by some right-wing pundits and radio talk-show hosts.

Some note, for example, that while the senator now supports drilling for oil on the Outer Continental Shelf, he remains opposed to energy development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

It should be noted, however, that George W. Bush at this point in the 2004 presidential campaign was pulling only 65% of conservatives.

Among another key Republican voting group — at-least-once-a-week churchgoers — McCain is polling 50% vs. Obama's 26%. Obama is favored by those who say they attend church a few times a month (36%-29%) and a few times a year (51%-33%). Those who never go to church support the Democrat by 60% to 25%.

By region, Obama and McCain are in statistical dead heats in the Northeast, Midwest and South (with Obama holding slight leads in the first two and McCain narrowly up in the South). In the West, however, Obama enjoys a commanding 50% to 29% advantage.

In "blue" (Democratic-trending) states, Obama is ahead 51% to 30%; in "red" (GOP-trending) states, McCain leads 41% to 32%. In the all-important "swing" states, they are statistically tied.

Obama does better with urban voters (50%-31%) than McCain does with suburban (41%-36%) and rural (44%-28%) voters.

As for income levels, McCain polls better the higher the bracket, progressing from 28% among those earning below \$30,000 to 44% to those above \$75,000. Obama is getting 44% of the former and 42% of the latter.

Perhaps surprisingly, investors are split nearly equally between Obama (41%) and McCain (40%).

Obama seems to have the votes of single women wrapped up, with 54% backing him vs. 27% for McCain. Married women are more evenly split — 41% Obama vs. 38% McCain — and white women give McCain the nod 41% to 37%.

Men favor McCain, 40%-35%, an advantage that widens to 47%-31% for white men only. The number of blacks and Hispanics sampled was too low to be statistically valid.

Raghavan Mayur, president of TechnoMetrica Market Intelligence, IBD's polling partner and the firm that had the best record of all pollsters in the 2004 election, said this year's race is "nearly on balance."

"The momentum Obama had a few weeks back has petered out," Mayur added.

"For Obama to advance, he must make further inroads among white Americans, men in general, higher-income people and suburbanites."

"For McCain to advance, he must make further inroads among conservatives, where he has more room to grow relatively easily. Also, he must advance with independents, where Obama is now doing fairly well."

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