

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

Democrats Lead in Elections for the State Legislature and Congress

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota

Lawrence R. Jacobs
Director, Center for the Study of Politics and Governance

Melanie Burns
Research Analyst, Center for Study of Politics and Governance

According to a Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute study of likely Minnesota voters, Democrats continue to enjoy double digit leads in the battle for federal and state legislative seats. Likely voters indicate that they are more likely to choose an unnamed Democratic candidate over an unnamed Republican candidate by 16 points in state legislative races and 20 points in congressional contests.

These results provide a broad gauge of the electoral environment facing Democratic and Republican legislative candidates; the qualities of the candidates themselves and their campaign also matter. The competitiveness of each race will also vary depending on a number of conditions including the partisan composition of the legislative district.

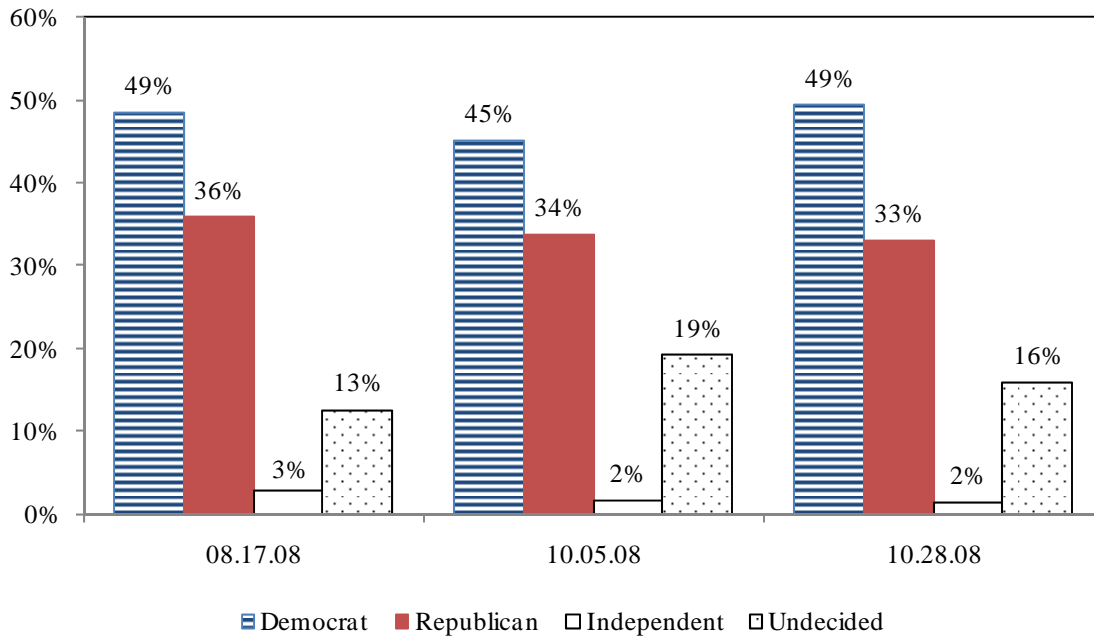
The MPR News/Humphrey Institute survey was conducted of 451 likely voters between October 24th and October 28th. The margin of error is 4.6 points. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

Democratic Advantage in Legislative Elections

With all seats in the Minnesota House of Representatives up for election, Democrats are seeking to hold the majority they currently enjoy (85 seats to the Republicans' 49) and, in addition, to pick up 5 net seats to be able to override the Governor's veto. (The Minnesota Senate, which is not up for election in 2008, already has a majority large enough to override the gubernatorial vetoes.)

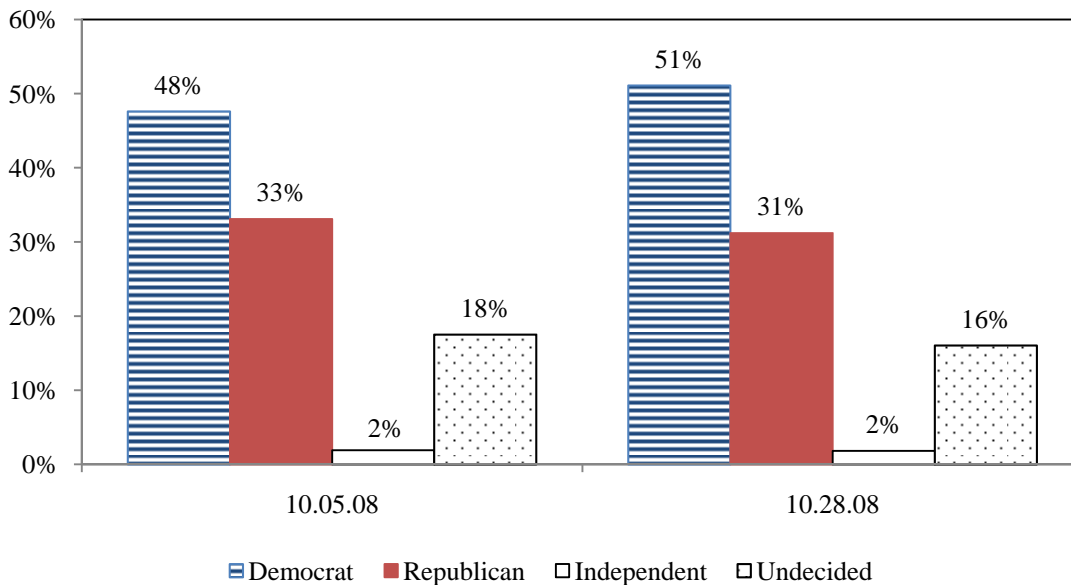
Forty-nine percent of likely voters in Minnesota indicate that they prefer the Democratic candidates in state legislative contests as compared to 33 percent who prefer the Republican candidates. This 16 point Democratic advantage is a slight increase from the Party's 11 point lead earlier this month. This form of "generic" question is widely used nationally to track the broad landscape for congressional races because it provides a general gauge of how the political winds will impact less visible election contests. Although it is not possible to predict the outcome of individual races or estimate how many seats Democrats may win, this is a notable Democratic advantage given the number of very close Minnesota elections in 2006. (A mere seven thousand votes determined the outcome of 17 close races won by Democrats in 2006.)

Edge for Democratic Candidates for Minnesota Legislature



Evidence from the generic ballot for Minnesota’s congressional contests is quite similar. Democratic candidates lead the GOP rivals by 20 points (51 to 31). This represents a slight widening of the 15 point Democratic margin earlier this month.

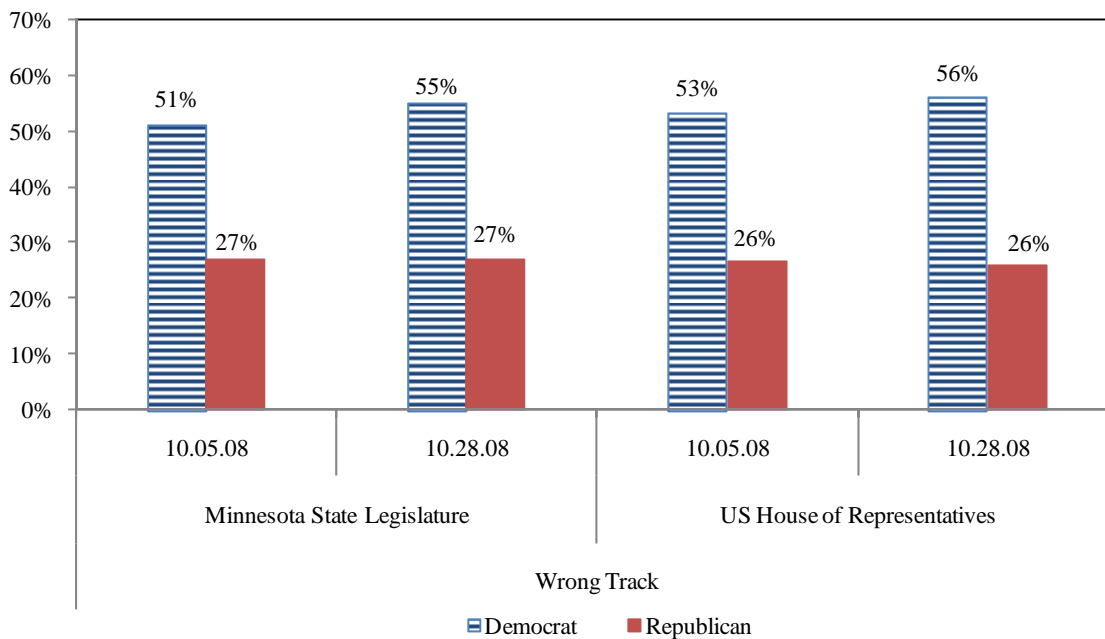
Edge for Democratic Candidates for U.S. House Seats



Democratic candidates boosted by frustration with economy and country's general direction

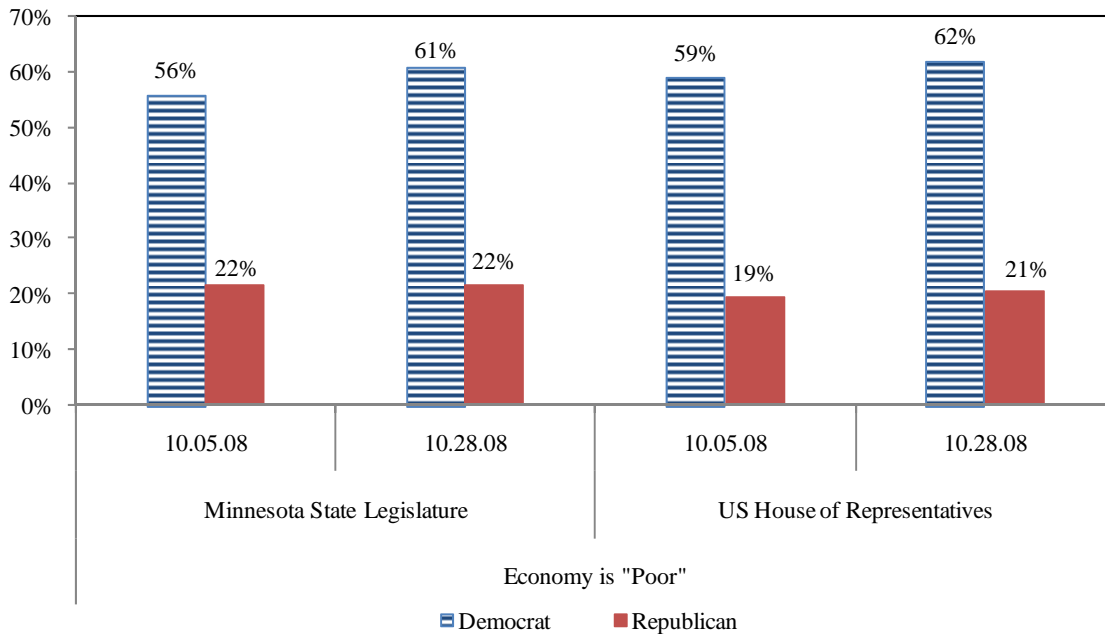
Democratic candidates for Congress and the state legislature continue to benefit from the malaise in the country and the particular excitement of its supporters. Among the 82 percent who see the country as heading off on the wrong track, 55 percent favor the Democratic candidates for the Minnesota House and only 27 percent support Republicans. This 28 point advantage for Democratic candidates in state legislative races mirrors the 30 point gap enjoyed by the Democrats seeking congressional office (56 to 26). These effects are similar to what was found in the previous MPR News/Humphrey Institute poll of likely voters between September 29 and October 5, 2008.

Democrats winning voters who see country heading in the wrong direction



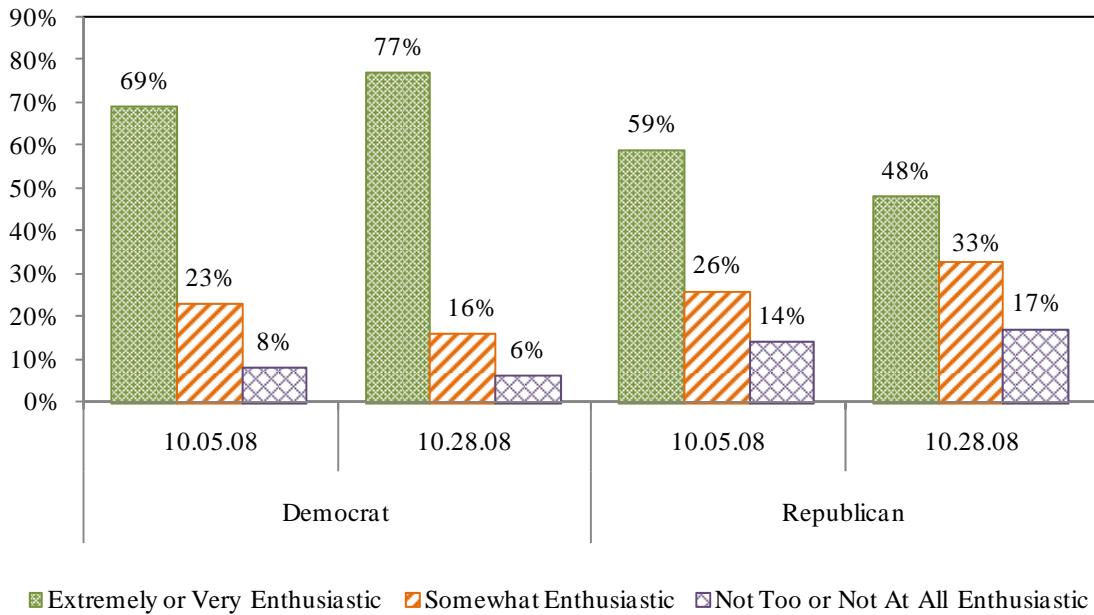
Worries about the economy are a major driver of Democratic support in legislative races.

Among the 67 percent of voters who identify the economy as poor, the Democratic congressional candidates enjoy a 41 point advantage (62 to 21) and the Democratic state legislative candidates lead by 39 points (61 to 22).



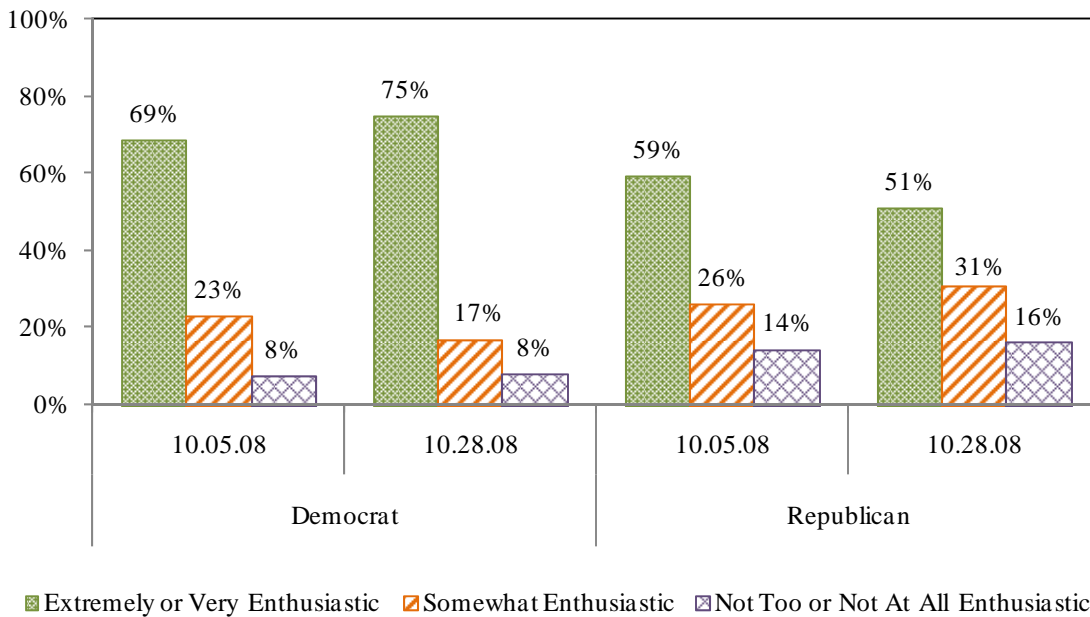
Democrats may also benefit from higher turnout. Voters supporting Democratic legislative candidates are more enthusiastic than those favoring Republican candidates. While 77 percent of voters backing Democrats are extremely or very enthusiastic, only 48 percent of those supporting Republicans share the same passion for the election. This 29 point enthusiasm gap that favors the Democratic candidates nearly triples the Party's advantage earlier this month. The large and apparently growing enthusiasm for Democratic candidates may be a leading indicator that turnout for Democratic candidates may be higher, which (like in 2006) could impact closely contested races.

Supporters of Democratic Candidates for State Legislature are More Enthusiastic



A nearly identical pattern of elevated enthusiasm is boosting Democratic candidates for Congress. The Democrats now have a 24 point enthusiasm gap (75 to 51), a gap that is a bit larger than earlier this month.

Supporters of Democratic Candidates for Congress are More Enthusiastic



About the Survey

This survey is a collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio and the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The survey was analyzed by the Center.

The survey was fielded by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, which has extensive national and state experience conducting non-partisan surveys on politics and government policy. CSRA called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within the State of Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. The samples were designed to represent different regions of the state in proportion to the number of adults living in each region. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

Results are based on a model which adjusts responses according to the likelihood of a respondent voting. Likelihood to vote is based on the following factors: self-reported probability of voting in the upcoming election, voting in previous elections as reported by the respondent, enthusiasm for the 2008 election, and incorporates differential turnout levels in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In addition, the results have been weighted to reflect the number of adults in a household and the number of telephone lines reaching the household as well as the demographic characteristics of adults in Minnesota based on region, sex, age, education, and race. Our analysis indicates that 70% percent of Minnesotans who are 18 or over are likely to vote in November.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

Questions

If the 2008 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives were being held today, would you vote for... (READ CHOICES 1-2)

Democratic Party candidate.....	01
Republican Party candidate	02
Somebody Else (Specify)	80
Won't vote (vol.).....	97
Don't know (vol.).....	98
Refused (vol.)	99

Q7. If the 2008 elections for the Minnesota State Legislature were being held today, would you vote for... (READ CHOICES 1-2)

Democratic Party candidate.....	01
Republican Party candidate	02
Somebody Else (Specify)	80
Won't vote (vol.).....	97
Don't know (vol.).....	98
Refused (vol.)	99