

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

Voters Turn On Bachmann while Strongly Supporting Coleman

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
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Michele Bachmann's controversial comments that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama "may have anti-American views" have put in jeopardy her campaign for re-election in Minnesota's 6th Congressional District, according to a Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute poll. Bachmann narrowly trails her Democratic rival, Elwyn Tinklenberg, 45 percent to 43 percent, which is within the margin of error and therefore should be considered a toss-up. Independence Party candidate Bob Anderson received 5 percent; 7 percent did not indicate support for a candidate. In 2006, Bachmann won the election by 8 points over her Democratic rival Patty Wetterling (50 percent to 42 percent).

Bachmann Struggles among 6th Congressional District Voters

Bachmann	Tinklenberg	Anderson	Undecided
43%	45%	5%	7%

Voters in the Republican-leaning 6th Congressional District are singling out Bachmann for retribution. In contrast to Bachmann's precarious position, **Republican U.S. Senator Norm Coleman enjoys a commanding 14 point advantage** over his Democratic rival, Al Franken, and Independence Party candidate Dean Barkley.

Coleman Enjoys Commanding Lead in 6th Congressional District

Coleman	Franken	Barkley	Undecided
44%	30%	17%	9%

Republican presidential candidate John McCain has a slight edge over Obama, 47 percent to 44 percent, which is within the margin of error. McCain's edge in the 6th Congressional District starkly contrasts with double-digit deficits in recent statewide polling in Minnesota.

McCain's Edge in 6th Congressional District

McCain	Obama	Other	Undecided
47%	44%	2%	7%

The survey was conducted of 430 Minnesotans living in the 6th Congressional District between October 21rd and October 23rd. The margin of error is 4.7 points. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

Punishing Bachmann

Likely voters in the 6th Congressional District are widely aware of Bachmann’s controversial comments, strongly disagree with them, and are politically punishing her as a result. **Eight out of 10 voters saw or heard the Congresswoman’s comments and nearly half of these Minnesotans are supporting Tinklenberg.**

Wide Awareness of Bachmann’s Comments

	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
Saw or Heard Bachmann’s Comments	79%	41%	48%
Unaware of Bachmann’s Comments	21%	51%	35%

Two thirds of voters disagree with Bachmann’s comments. Among critics, Tinklenberg enjoys a 3 to 1 margin (67 percent to 21 percent). Even among Bachmann’s supporters, a third disagree with comments (data not shown in table).

Strongly Disagree with Bachmann’s Comments

	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
Disagree with Bachmann’s Comments	68%	21%	67%
Agree with Bachmann’s Comments	22%	82%	8%

Voters are punishing Bachmann. Nearly 4 out of 10 voters report that they are now less likely to support the Congresswoman compared to 8 percent who indicate they are more supportive. Among those who report that her comments make no difference, the Republican has a strong advantage.

Bachmann Comments Draining Support

	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
More likely to vote for Bachmann	8%	84%	5%
Less likely to vote for Bachmann	37%	4%	82%
Makes no difference	53%	61%	32%

The reaction against Bachmann’s questioning of Obama’s patriotism has undermined support for her re-election. Among those who disagree with Bachmann’s remarks, 52 percent report that they are less likely to support her.

Rejection of Bachmann's remarks erodes support

	All Voters	More likely to vote for Bachmann	Less likely to vote for Bachmann	Makes no difference
Agree with Bachmann's comments	22%	29%	4%	65%
Disagree with Bachmann's comments	68%	1%	52%	45%

The backlash against Bachmann is recent. **Among the quarter of voters who made up their mind whom to support within the past week, Tinklenberg has a 37 point advantage over Bachmann.** Before the Congresswoman's controversial comments, she had the advantage. Put another way, a third of Tinklenberg's total support resulted from Bachmann's remarks (data not in table).

Turn Against Bachmann is Recent

Timing of Decision about whom to support	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
Decided within the last week	24%	27%	64%
Decided in the last month	20%	49%	42%
Decided Before that	54%	52%	46%

Bachmann faces significant hurdles over the final days of the campaign in reversing the damage of her comments. **Bachmann's support may be soft and susceptible to further erosion.** Nearly a fifth of voters indicate that they may change their minds about whom to support. Most of these uncertain voters are leaning toward the Democrat by a 53 percent to 36 percent margin. Although Bachmann and Tinklenberg's supporters are comparably certain, support for the third party candidate (Bob Anderson) seems quite soft and may be prone to shift toward Tinklenberg in the final days of the campaign (data not shown in table).

Uncertain Voter May Desert Bachmann

	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
Definitely made up mind about whom to support	82%	48%	48%
Might change mind about whom to support	17%	36%	53%

Another hurdle is that **Bachmann has offended a significant portion of her base. A fifth of Republicans in this GOP-leaning District have bolted from her.** The defection among her base has led a fifth of Coleman and McCain voters to withhold their support by backing another candidate or by remaining undecided. This could be a sign that a critical portion of Bachmann's base will be splitting their ticket by voting Republican in the presidential and senate races and then not voting for Bachmann.

Cracks in Bachmann's Base of Support

	Bachmann	Tinklenberg	Anderson	Undecided
Republicans (44%)	79%	10%	6%	6%
Independents (14%)	51%	23%	5%	21%
Democrats (42%)	3%	90%	3%	4%
Supporting McCain	82%	9%	4%	5%
Supporting Obama	3%	87%	5%	5%
Supporting Coleman	80%	11%	2%	7%
Supporting Franken	2%	87%	6%	5%
Supporting Barkley	29%	61%	10%	0%

Bachmann's comments damaged her re-election bid in an election year that is already quite difficult for Republicans. In elections around the country, the economy and jobs are the overwhelming concern of voters and this issue is working decisively for Democrats. A similar dynamic is evident in the GOP-leaning 6th District: 70 percent single out economic problems and these voters tilt toward Tinklenberg. Other issues that break for Bachmann (namely, terrorism and taxes) are being drowned out by the economic maelstrom.

Single Most Important National Problem	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
The economy and jobs	70%	38%	50%
Health Care	7%	35%	60%
Terrorism	7%	95%	5%
The war in Iraq	5%	14%	79%
Taxes	5%	87%	13%
Education	3%	50%	25%

Women are decisively breaking against Bachmann by a 14 point margin; 50 percent of women support Tinklenberg compared to 36% for Bachmann. The Congresswoman leads among men by 11 points.

Women Oppose Bachmann

	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
Male	51%	40%
Female	36%	50%

B. Potential Backlash Against Media

The potential may exist for a backlash against the intense scrutiny of Bachmann's comments and the perception of political piling-on as financial contributions for Tinklenberg have surged.

About half of voters are convinced that Bachmann has not been treated fairly by the media, with these voters breaking decisively for the Republican. Nearly 6 out of 10 are also convinced that the episode has been mostly politics rather than a serious matter. Nearly two thirds of these voters favor Bachmann.

Doubts about media and political gamesmanship

	All Voters	Bachmann	Tinklenberg
Media has treated Bachmann Fairly	47%	11%	81%
Media has treated Bachmann Unfairly	47%	73%	14%
Episode is serious matter	36%	9%	87%
Episode is mostly politics	58%	62%	24%

About the Survey

This survey is 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 research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (director) and Joanne M. Miller (Department of Political Science). Melanie Burns was the team's research and data analyst.

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.

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 election for the U.S. House of Representatives were being held today, would you vote for ... (READ CHOICES 1-3) (IF DK/REF: If you had to choose today, for whom would you vote?)

permutation -> 2	
Democrat Elwyn Tinklenberg.....	01
Republican Michele Bachmann	02
Independent Party candidate Bob Anderson.....	03
Somebody Else (specify)	80
Won't vote (vol).....	97
Don't know (vol.).....	98
Refused (vol.)	99

Will you definitely vote for <Q3>, or might you change your mind?

Definitely	01
Might Change Mind.....	02
Don't Know (vol).....	98
Refused (vol)	99

When did you make your decision about the race for the House of Representatives? (READ CHOICES 1-4)

In the last three days	01
In the last week	02
In the last month	03
Before that	04
Don't Know (vol).....	98
Refused (vol)	99

Have you seen or heard anything about the controversial comments Congresswoman Michele Bachman made about Barak Obama on a television talk show last weekend?

Yes.....	01
No	02
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99

Does Congresswoman Bachmann's comments make you more likely to vote for her, less likely to vote for her, or make no difference?

More likely	01
Less likely.....	02
Makes no difference	03
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99

As you may know, Congresswoman Bachmann questioned presidential candidate Barack Obama's patriotism and suggested that members of Congress be investigated to determine which ones are "anti-American."

Do you happen to agree or disagree with the comments made by Congresswoman Bachmann? (PROBE: STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT AGREE/DISAGREE)

Strongly agree.....	01
Somewhat agree.....	02
Somewhat disagree	03
Strongly disagree	04
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99

Do you think this news is: (READ CHOICES 1-2)

permutation -> 2	
a serious matter about Congresswoman Bachman's political views	01
mostly politics	02
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99

Do you think the media has treated Congresswoman Bachmann fairly or unfairly?
(PROBE: VERY/SOMEWHAT FAIRLY/UNFAIRLY)

Very fairly	01
Somewhat fairly.....	02
Somewhat unfairly.....	03
Very unfairly	04
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99