



***THE MSU-BILLINGS POLL:***

***NATIONAL, STATE,  
AND  
LOCAL ISSUES***

***OCTOBER 2008***



***DR. CRAIG WILSON, DR. SCOTT RICKARD  
DR. DAN LENNON  
CO-DIRECTORS***

**The following students participated in the survey project:**

Jose Araya Vega  
Jillian Barber  
Amanda Hudson  
Travis Light  
Glynn Maddox  
Justin Mohr

Nathan Morgan  
Jacob Rhoades  
Gregory Ryan  
David Thatcher  
James Reed  
Rachael Williams

## INTRODUCTION

The “MSU-Billings Poll” began in 1989. This year the twenty-third survey was completed. The Co-Directors of the Poll were Dr. Craig Wilson (Political Science), Dr. Scott Rickard (Director of the Center for Applied Economic Research) and Dr. Dan Lennon (Sociology).

This report summarizes the results of the statewide random sample telephone survey of adult Montanans who were likely to vote in this year’s election. The poll was conducted October 16 – 20. Students enrolled in Political Science 350, Public Opinion and Polling, completed the 403 interviews for this survey. One part-time assistant was employed to supervise/make phone calls to help ensure the project was completed in a timely manner. The survey was completed using random digit dial methodology, which selects both the phone numbers and members of a household to interview. The poll was conducted at MSU-Billings’ CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) Laboratory. Up to five attempts were made to reach selected households. The survey results have a +/- 5% margin of error at a confidence level of 95% (95% of the time the results will fall within the +/- 5% margin of error). Factors such as question order and wording can affect survey results. Statistical tests were employed to determine whether statistically significant relationships ( $p=.05$ ) existed between key variables.

## I. NATIONAL ISSUES

### 1. PRESIDENT BUSH'S OVERALL PERFORMANCE IN OFFICE

#### President George W. Bush's Overall Job Performance

This is the eighth year the “MSU-Billings Poll” has asked respondents the question: “At this point in time do you approve or disapprove of President George W. Bush’s overall performance in office?” This year a majority (60%) answered “disapprove.”

The President’s highest approval rating, 87%, was found in 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan. With the exception of 2006, his approval rating has decreased every year.

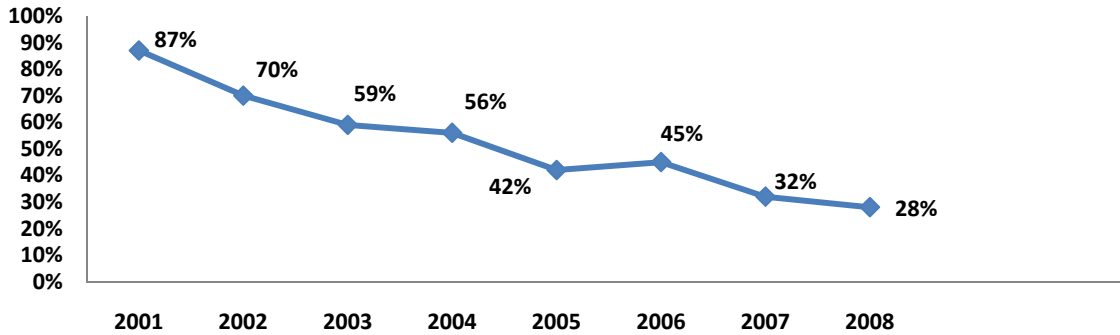
#### **2008 PRESIDENT BUSH'S OVERALL JOB PERFORMANCE**

| <u>Approve</u> | <u>Disapprove</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>28.3%</b>   | <b>60%</b>        | <b>11.7%</b>     | <b>100%</b>  |

#### Statistically Significant Relationships:

- Majorities of Democrats (92.4%) and independents (67.1%) disapproved of the President’s job performance, while a majority (58.1%) of Republicans said “approve.”
- Of those approving of the president, 78.8% backed the war in Iraq, while among those disapproving of the job the President is doing 77.6% opposed the war.
- When asked about the likelihood of a depression in the U. S., among those approving of the president a plurality (37.2%) felt a depression was “somewhat likely.” A plurality (38.2%) of those interviewed disapproving of the president also thought this economic problem was “somewhat likely.”
- Majorities of women (65.4%) and men (54.2%) disapproved on the President’s job performance..
- On a 1-5 scaled religiosity in people’s life question, where “5” represented “very important,” a majority of 57.5% of those approving of the President’s performance rated religion at “5.” In contrast, a plurality of 38.1% of those disapproving of the President rated religion “5.”
- A majority (52.6%) of those feeling Bush was doing a good job were pro-life, while a majority (78.3%) disapproving of him were pro-choice.

**2001-2008 PRESIDENT BUSH’S OVERALL JOB PERFORMANCE**



**2. INTEREST IN UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTION**

In terms of the election, those interviewed were asked a 1-10 scaled question, where “1” represented “no interest” and “10” “great interest,” phrased “how interested are you in the upcoming general election?” Those replying 1-5 which was to some degree were not interested, while those answering 6-10 were to some degree interested in the election. A majority (57.8%) answered “10” to this question. The overall intensity of interest, measured by the mean response, was 8.9.

**INTEREST IN UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTION**

| <u>1-5</u><br><u>(Uninterested)</u> | <u>6-10</u><br><u>(Interested)</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>Mean</u><br><u>Response</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| 7.8%                                | 92.2%                              | 100%         | 8.9                            |

Statistically Significant Relationship:

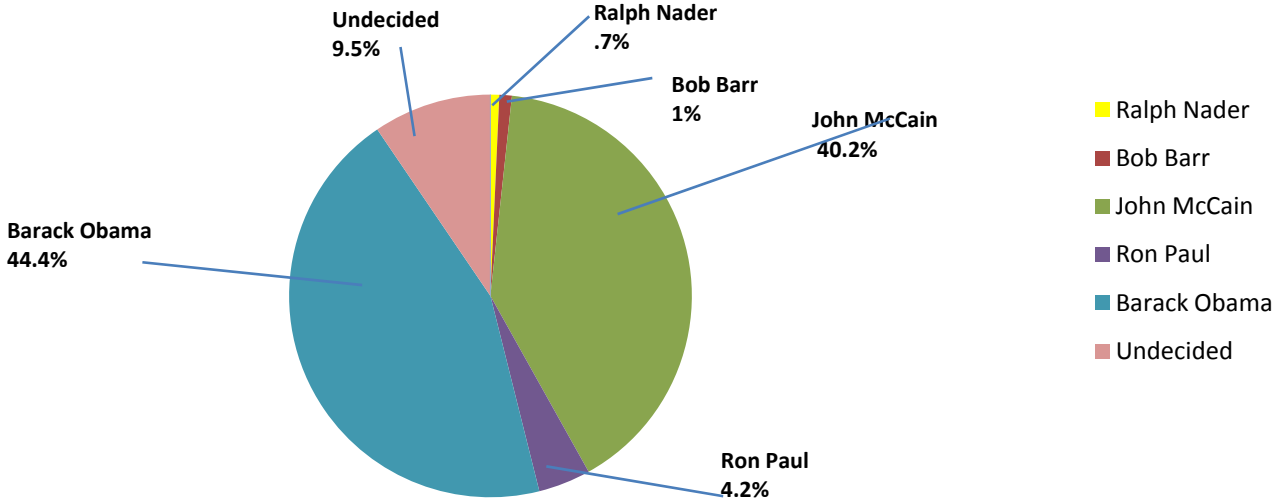
- On the 1-10 scaled question about interest in the election, majorities of Obama’s (63.1%), McCain’s (55.6%) and Paul’s (52.9%) supporters replied “10.”

**3. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION QUESTIONS**

**A. VOTE INTENT IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

The question regarding voting for President was phrased: “If this year’s presidential election Montana were being held today for whom do you think you would vote for.” The names of all the candidates were read and Barack Obama’s and John McCain’s names were rotated in the order in which they were read. A plurality (44.4%) of those polled said “Obama.” The results for this question fall within the +/- 5% margin of error for this survey.

## VOTE INTENT IN PRESIDENTIAL RACE



### Statistically Significant Relationships:

- **McCain's** supporters consisted of 66% Republicans, 29% independents, 3.1% Democrats and 1.9% of those undecided about their partisanship.
- **Obama's** voters were 60.5% Democrat, 36.7% independents, 2.3% Republicans, and .6% of those undecided about their partisanship.
- **Ron Paul's** voters were 70.6% independents, 11.8% Republicans, 0% Democrats and 17.6% of the voters undecided about their partisanship.
- A majority (60.9%) of McCain's voters were pro-life, while a majority (76.3%) of Obama backers and plurality (41.2%) of Paul supporters were pro-choice.
- A majority (54.3%) of those planning on voting for McCain rated religion a "5" in their lives, while a plurality (35%) of Obama supporters gave this same response.
- A majority (51%) of women backed Obama, a plurality (47.9%) of men McCain. More women (10.1%) than men (7.4%) were undecided regarding their vote.
- Age was not related to vote intention.

### **B. WHICH MAJOR PARTY CANDIDATE HAS RUN THE MOST NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN**

When queried regarding, "Which candidate do you feel has run the most negative campaign," a plurality (43.4%) of the interviewees replied "McCain."

**WHICH MAJOR PARTY CANDIDATE HAS RUN THE MOST NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN?**

| <u>McCain</u> | <u>Obama</u> | <u>Both the Same</u> | <u>Neither</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|---------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>43.4%</b>  | <b>19.2%</b> | <b>21.9%</b>         | <b>4.7%</b>    | <b>10.8%</b>     | <b>100%</b>  |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- A majority of Democrats (77.3%) and plurality of independents (47.6%) said McCain had run the most negative campaign. A plurality (39.5%) of Republicans answered Obama.
- While 78.8% of Obama’s likely voters felt McCain had run the most negative campaign, 42.6% of McCain’s supporters said the same about Obama.
- Gender and age were not related to opinions about negative campaigning by the major candidates.

**C. WHICH MAJOR PARTY CANDIDATE WOULD DO THE BEST JOB OF MANAGING THE U. S. ECONOMY?**

A plurality (47.6%) of the interviewees answered “Obama” when asked, “which major party candidate do you feel would do the best job of managing the U. S. economy?”

**WHICH MAJOR PARTY CANDIDATE WOULD DO THE BEST AT MANAGING THE ECONOMY?**

| <u>Obama</u> | <u>McCain</u> | <u>Both the Same</u> | <u>Neither</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>47.6%</b> | <b>42.4%</b>  | <b>2.4%</b>          | <b>7.1%</b>    | <b>.5%</b>       | <b>100%</b>  |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- A majority (89.7%) of Democratic voters and plurality (47.7%) of independents replied Obama, a majority (81.9%) of Republicans answered McCain.
- A majority (60%) of women thought Obama could best manage the economy, while a majority (58%) of men said McCain.
- While 92.2% of Obama’s voters thought he would best manage the U. S. economy, 87% of McCain’s voters felt he would do the best job.

**D. WHICH CANDIDATE WOULD DO THE BEST JOB OF MANAGING U. S. FOREIGN POLICY?**

A majority (51.9%) of those polled replied “McCain” when asked, “which candidate do you feel would do the best job of managing U. S. foreign policy?”

**WHICH MAJOR CANDIDATE WOULD DO THE BEST AT FOREIGN RELATIONS**

| <u>Obama</u> | <u>McCain</u> | <u>Both the Same</u> | <u>Neither</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------|---------------|----------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>41.6%</b> | <b>51.9%</b>  | <b>1.8%</b>          | <b>4.2%</b>    | <b>.5%</b>       | <b>100%</b>  |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- A majority (90.1%) of Republicans and plurality (48.1%) of independents favored McCain in this area, while a majority (79.7%) of Democrats replied Obama.
- A majority (57.2%) women thought Obama could best manage U. S. foreign policy, but a majority (52.3%) of men said McCain.
- 79.9% of Obama backers said he could best handle foreign affairs, while 93.8% of McCain voters felt he would do the best job.

**4. OTHER NATIONAL QUESTIONS**

**A. SUPPORT U. S. DECISION TO GO TO WAR IN IRAQ**

In reply to the question, “do you support or oppose the United State’s decision to go to war against Iraq,” a majority (55.8%) of the respondents said “oppose.” Last year in reply to this same question a majority (57.7%) of those polled also answered “oppose.”

**SUPPORT OR OPPOSE U. S. DECISION TO GO TO WAR IN IRAQ**

| <u>Support</u> | <u>Oppose</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>37.5%</b>   | <b>55.8%</b>  | <b>6.7%</b>      | <b>100%</b>  |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- A majority (68.5%) of Republicans backed the war, majorities of Democrats (84.9%) and independents (60.8%) did not.
- A majority (55.3%) of the respondents supporting the Iraq War rated religion a “5” in their lives, as did a plurality (37.1%) of the opponents of the war.



**B. SUPPORT \$700 BILLION FEDERAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PACKAGE?**

A majority (50.8%) of those interviewed replied “no” when asked the question: “Do you support or oppose the recent passage of the estimated \$700 billion federal economic assistance package designed to assist the financial industry in addressing its problems?”

**SUPPORT \$700 BILLION FEDERAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PACKAGE**

| <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|------------|-----------|------------------|--------------|
| 28.2%      | 50.8%     | 21%              | 100%         |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- Majorities of Republicans (57.3%) and independents (51%) supported the program, while a plurality (40.3%) of Democrats opposed it.
- The greatest support for the economic package came from those aged 18-29 (42.9%), while the greatest opposition was expressed by those aged 30-39 (68.3%).
- In terms of education, respondents with a grade school (71.4%) or some college education (71.4%) opposed the plan to the greatest extent, while its greatest support existed among individuals with a post-graduate degree (41.7%).
- Majorities of Ron Paul’s (82.4%) supporters and John McCain’s (56.8%) voters opposed the bailout plan. A plurality (38.5%) of Obama voters expressed this same opinion.

**C. THINK THERE WILL BE ECONOMIC DEPRESSION IN U.S.**

In answering the question, “given the problems facing the U. S. economy, how likely do you feel it is that there will be an economic depression,” a plurality (39.5%) of the respondents replied “somewhat likely.” When added together the “somewhat likely” and “very likely” responses totaled 70% of those surveyed.

**LIKELIHOOD OF U. S. DEPRESSION**

| <u>Very Unlikely</u> | <u>Somewhat Unlikely</u> | <u>Somewhat Likely</u> | <u>Very likely</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 7%                   | 20.5%                    | 39.5%                  | 30.5%              | 2.5%             | 100%         |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- A plurality (40.3%) of Democrats thought a depression was “very likely.” Pluralities of Republicans (39.5%) and independents (35.7%) viewed this eventuality as “somewhat likely.”

- More women than men felt that an economic depression was both “somewhat likely” (45.2%-33.7%) and “very likely” (34.1%-26.3%)
- Respondents with some college education felt an economic depression was “very likely” (42.9%) to the greatest extent, while individuals with a post-graduate education were most apt to think this eventuality “very unlikely” (6.7%).
- Pluralities of Obama (44.1%) and McCain (37.7%) voters thought a U. S. depression “somewhat likely.”

### **III. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

#### **1. MONTANA GRAY WOLVES ON ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST**

A majority ( 60.6%) of the respondents answered “no” when asked: “Do you believe that the gray wolves which now live in Montana should be on the federal government’s list of endangered species?”

In last year’s poll of majority (64%) of those interviewed replied “yes” when asked a different question: “Do you believe that states should be allowed by the federal government to terminate wolves as part of a wolf control plan.”

#### **SHOULD GRAY WOLVES BE ON ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST?**

| <u>Yes</u>   | <u>No</u>    | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>25.1%</b> | <b>60.6%</b> | <b>14.3%</b>     | <b>100%</b>  |

#### Statistically Significant Relationships:

- Majorities of Republicans (78.2%) and independents (60.1%) and a plurality (42%) of Democrats did not support endangered status for Wolves.
- More males (71.1%) than females (51%) opposed the endangered species status and women (21.2%) were also more likely than men (6.8%) to be undecided on this issue.
- While a plurality (40%) of those with a post-graduate degree supported endangered species status, majorities of every other educational cohort opposed it.

#### **2. SUPPORT PRIVATE SNOWMOBILES IN YELLOWSTONE PARK**

In answer to a question phrased, “do you support or oppose the use of snowmobiles by private individuals in Yellowstone National Park,” a plurality (49.7%) of the interviewees answered “support.”

## SUPPORT PRIVATE SNOWMOBILES IN YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

| <u>Support</u> | <u>Opposed</u> | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>49.7%</b>   | <b>38.2%</b>   | <b>12.1%</b>     | <b>100%</b>  |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- A majority (66.1%) of Republicans backed snowmobiles in the Park, while pluralities of Democrats (46.2%) and independents (46.9%) opposed this idea.
- A majority (58.4%) of males supported the proposal, a plurality (43.9%) of women opposed it.
- A majority (58.3%) of respondents with a post-graduate degree opposed having the machines in the park, while a majority or plurality of all other educational groupings supported letting the machines in.

### 3. AMOUNT OF DRILLING FOR OIL IN OFFSHORE WATERS

A majority (70.9%) of the likely voters interviewed said “yes” when asked “do you believe there should be more or less drilling for oil in offshore ocean waters controlled by the U.S.”

#### AMOUNT OF OIL DRILLING IN OFFSHORE U. S. WATERS

| <u>More</u>  | <u>Less</u>  | <u>Undecided</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| <b>70.9%</b> | <b>18.8%</b> | <b>10.3%</b>     | <b>100%</b>  |

Statistically Significant Relationships:

- Majorities of Republicans (91.9%), independents (68.5%) and Democrats (50.4%) backed more drilling.
- More males (80.5%) than females (62%) backed increased drilling and more women (15.9%) than men (4.7%) were also undecided about the issue.
- The highest support for drilling (100%) was found among individuals with a grade school education, the least backing (35%) existed among interviewees with a post-graduate degree.