



Press Release

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DWU Tiger Poll: Economy on mind of voters in Dakotas, Democrats prefer Obama, N.D. potential blue state

MITCHELL, S.D. – The economy is weighing heavily on the minds of voters in the Dakotas, and Democrats in both states prefer Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton. In a theoretical general election matchup, Obama trails John McCain in South Dakota but the race is too close to call in North Dakota, according to researchers at Dakota Wesleyan University.

The poll of 527 North and South Dakota voters conducted from March 24 to April 3 indicated that 46 percent of South Dakota Democrats would vote for Obama in the upcoming June 3 primary, 34 percent for Clinton, and 10 percent are undecided. Of the remaining 10 percent, 6 percent said they would not vote and 4 percent said they would vote for someone else.

Last month, the South Dakota Democratic Party discussed the possibility of allowing Independents to vote in the Democratic primary. The DWU Tiger Poll indicates that independent voters participating in the primary might have increased the margin of victory for Obama. Among South Dakota Independents surveyed, 38 percent indicated they would vote for Obama, 29 percent for Clinton, 29 percent would not vote and 5 percent remained undecided.

North Dakotans do not register to vote by political party, however, among those contacted who identified themselves as Democrats, Obama received 54 percent compared to 29 percent for Clinton in a theoretical North Dakota Democratic primary election and 12 percent were undecided. Of the remaining 5 percent of Democratic voters, 4 percent said they would not vote and 1 percent said they would vote for someone else. The 25-point margin favoring Obama is almost identical to the 24 percent margin of victory that he received during the North Dakota Democratic Party caucuses on February 5.

Among independent voters surveyed in North Dakota, in a theoretical Democratic primary election that included independent voters, 43 percent said they would vote for Obama, 23 percent for Clinton, 21 percent were undecided, 11 percent would not vote and 2 percent would vote for some other candidate.

In general election match-ups in the Dakotas between Obama and McCain, the data suggests McCain would easily win South Dakota, 51 percent to 34 percent, with 9 percent undecided, 4 percent who would not vote and 3 percent voting for someone else. In North Dakota, however, McCain and Obama appear to be in a statistical dead heat. The DWU Tiger Poll shows McCain with a slight lead over Obama, at 44 to 38 percent, but within the poll's statewide margin of error, with 12 percent still undecided, 3 percent who would not vote and 3 percent voting for someone else.

The DWU Tiger Poll appears to confirm the results of a SurveyUSA poll conducted in early March that indicated the race in North Dakota is very close, with Obama beating McCain by 46 percent to 42 percent in that state. As with the DWU poll, the SurveyUSA outcome was within the survey's margin of error, surprising results given the fact that North Dakota has not favored a Democrat in a presidential election since 1964.

Clinton did not fare well in either of the Dakotas in a theoretical general election contest. In a Clinton versus McCain matchup in South Dakota, McCain's support increases to 59 percent compared to Clinton's 30 percent. Of the remainder of South Dakota voters, 6 percent are undecided, 3 percent would not vote and 3 percent would vote for someone else.

In North Dakota, Clinton polled slightly better against McCain in a general election than she did in South Dakota. McCain's advantage, however, remains formidable at 53 percent compared to Clinton's 33 percent. Of the remainder of surveyed voters, 10 percent of North Dakotans were undecided, 3 percent said they would not vote and 1 percent indicated they would vote for someone else.

Among Democratic voters in South Dakota who said they would vote for Obama in the upcoming June primary, 33 percent said they would vote for McCain over Clinton in the general election, 50 percent would vote for Clinton over McCain, 4 percent would vote for another candidate, 2 percent would not vote and 10 percent did not respond.

Of South Dakota Democrats who said they would vote for Clinton in the upcoming June primary, 22 percent said they would vote for McCain over Obama in the general election, 61 percent would vote for Obama over McCain, 8 percent would vote for another candidate and 8 percent did not respond.

Among Democratic voters in North Dakota who said they favor Obama over Clinton, 31 percent said they would vote for McCain over Clinton in the general election, 53 percent would vote for Clinton

over McCain, 10 percent would not vote and 7 percent did not respond.

Of North Dakota Democrats who said they favor Clinton over Obama, 17 percent said they would vote for McCain over Obama in the general election, 57 percent would vote for Obama over McCain, 13 percent would vote for another candidate and 13 percent would not vote.

DWU Tiger Poll data also indicates that the economy, not the war in Iraq, will be very much on the minds of Dakotans when they cast their ballots this year. While only 15 percent of North and South Dakotans identified the war in Iraq as the "most important problem facing our country today," more than twice that number, 37 percent, identified the economy as the biggest problem our country faces. Eight percent of respondents identified healthcare and 7 percent, gas and fuel prices. Thirty-three percent listed something else or did not respond.

Among Democrats in North and South Dakota, 42 percent said the economy was the country's most pressing problem, 21 percent said the war in Iraq, 10 percent said healthcare, and 5 percent said gas and fuel prices, 2 percent national debt, 1 percent terrorism and 18 percent said something else or did not respond.

When asked the same question, 31 percent of Republicans identified the economy, 10 percent said the war in Iraq, 9 percent said gas and fuel prices, 7 percent healthcare, 6 percent terrorism, 4 percent immigration, 3 percent national debt, 2 percent taxes and 29 percent listed something else or did not give a response.

Independents in both states were more concerned than Democrats or Republicans about the state of the economy, with 45 percent saying it is the most important problem, 11 percent said the war in Iraq, 9 percent said gas and fuel prices, 7 percent said the national debt, 2 percent healthcare, and 2 percent education, with immigration, global warming and no response each receiving 1 percent. Twenty-two percent listed something else.

Despite the concern about the economy, North and South Dakotans maintain a generally positive view of the quality of life in their respective states. Twenty-five percent say quality of life in their state is excellent, 49 percent say it is good, 21 percent fair, and 4 percent poor.

Seventy-five percent of South Dakotans said the quality of life in their state was excellent or good compared to seventy-three percent of North Dakotans, which is statistically insignificant. However, the percentage of South Dakotans who view the quality of life in their state as good or excellent has dropped 10 percentage points over the past twelve months, according to DWU researchers. When asked the same question in 2007, more than 85 percent of South Dakotans responded that the quality of life in their state was good or excellent. Since 2008 is the first year DWU has conducted a poll in North Dakota, no comparative data about quality of life in that state is available.

The DWU Tiger Poll is a joint project of the McGovern Center for Leadership and Public Service and the DWU Mathematics Department. Donald Simmons, Michael Catalano, and Rocky Von Eye form the faculty research team for the DWU Tiger Poll. Student research coordinators for the 2008 DWU Tiger Poll are Nicole Dufek, Geddes; Andrew Frank, Mitchell; Katrina Jarding, Alexandria; and Marcus Vontz, Cambridge, Neb. Student statisticians are Nick Gates, Mitchell; Courtney Arseneault, Custer; and Andrew Leggott, Johnson Lake, Neb.

The poll's margin of error is plus or minus 4 percent for the entire sample, with entire statewide sample margins of error at plus or minus 6 percent. Subset sample margins of error vary depending on selected sample sizes. Totals may not equal 100 percent as all percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

More detailed information about the poll results is available online at www.mcgoverncenter.com/poll2008.

