

Election 2008: Florida Presidential Election

Florida: McCain Back Out Front 46% to 43%
Monday, August 18, 2008

John McCain has recaptured the lead over Barack Obama in Florida, besting his Democratic opponent 46% to 43% in the latest Rasmussen Reports telephone survey of voters in the state.

Counting “leaners,” McCain attracts 48% of the voter while Obama earns 46%. That advantage for McCain is well within the poll’s margin of sampling error.

While Obama remains close in the polls, he is viewed unfavorably by 48% of Florida voters, including 57% of white voters. Just 49% of all voters give the Democrat a favorable assessment. McCain is viewed favorably by 61% of Florida voters and unfavorably by 36%.

Last month, Obama held a statistically insignificant one-point lead on McCain following a month where Obama spent a reported \$5 million on television advertising while McCain spent nothing. That was the first time Obama had held an advantage of any kind over McCain in the Sunshine State. For the previous six months the Republican had been ahead anywhere from seven to 16 percentage points.

McCain regained sizable ground among unaffiliated voters in the new survey. After trailing among unaffiliateds by 23% in July, he has now drawn even with Obama among those voters. McCain earns the vote from 86% of Republicans while 78% of Democrats say they’ll vote for Obama.

Nationally, the race between Obama and McCain remains very close in the Rasmussen Reports daily Presidential Tracking Poll.

As he does nationally, Obama leads McCain among women voters. In Florida, he has a 52% to 41% advantage, roughly comparable to last month. McCain has an even larger spread among men, 51% to 33%. That represents a sizable gain since July.

Florida has been carried by the Republican presidential candidates in eight out of the last 10 elections, most notably in 2000 when it took a month to determine that George W. Bush was the winner. In 2004, Bush easily defeated Democrat John W. Kerry 52% to 47% in the Sunshine State. The closeness of the 2000 race, however, has given Florida the reputation of being a so-called swing state.

McCain’s ability to stay competitive in the race with the younger and more charismatic Obama is credited in large part to his championing of offshore oil drilling as one way to offset high gas and oil prices. The majority of voters in Florida, a state which is directly impacted by his position, favor lifting the congressional ban on such drilling. So do most voters nationwide.

A plurality of Florida voters (42%) rank economic issues as the most important in the current election cycle, down from 49% in July. For 26%, national security issues are the most important, an increase of seven percentage points in a month.

For the second month in a row, 57% favor drilling for oil off the coast of Florida while 29% are opposed. The latter number is down from 32% in July. Sixty percent (60%) say it is at least somewhat likely that Congress will approve offshore drilling in the next year, but 30% believe that is not likely to happen.

As for the price at the pump, 69% say gas is not likely to drop below \$3 a gallon this year, but the identical number (69%) say it isn't going above \$5 a gallon either by the end of December.

Most Florida voters (73%) say television is their primary source for information on hurricanes and other storms, followed by 22% who rely on the Internet and 4% who say radio. Nearly half (48%) say emergency services are now better prepared for these storms, too, while only two percent think they are less prepared. Forty-five percent (45%) say the preparation is about the same as always.

Fifty-two percent (52%) say the state's schools are getting worse, with only 13% saying they are improving and 27% saying there has been no change.

Still, half of the state's voters (50%) rate Republican Governor Charlie Crist's job performance as good or excellent, while only 10% give him poor marks. Seventy-nine percent (79%) expect the governor's recent marriage to make no difference in his governing.

For the second month running, President Bush's job performance gets good or excellent marks from 35% and is rated poor by 48%. Nationally, he continues to earn very low performance ratings.