

# Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

## Third Party Option Attractive to Minnesotans

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance  
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs  
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According to a Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute poll, politically significant segments of voters are supporting third party candidates for President and U.S. Senate, and supermajorities of likely Minnesotan voters would consider voting for third party candidates. Although no third party candidate appears poised to win at this point, they are drawing enough support to play the role of King Maker by drawing enough support from one candidate to allow the other to win a close contest. The survey was conducted of 763 likely voters between August 7, 2008 and August 17, 2008; the margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points.

### Third Party Candidate Support

Already third party candidates for U.S. Senate and President are registering enough support to potentially tilt these races in Minnesota. **Five percent of voters in the presidential contest support the third party candidacies of Ralph Nader, Libertarian Bob Barr and other options, and 8% support Independence Party candidate Dean Barkley in the U.S. Senate race.** This may disproportionately hurt Democratic candidates; these third party supporters tend to be the kind of disaffected voters who have been trending toward Democratic candidates.

### Presidential Choice of Likely Minnesota Voters

	<b>Obama</b>	<b>McCain</b>	<b>Nader</b>	<b>Barr</b>	<b>Somebody Else</b>	<b>Don't Know or Refused</b>
<b>Likely Voters</b>	48%	38%	3%	1%	1%	10%
	<b>Franken</b>	<b>Coleman</b>	<b>Barkley</b>			
<b>Likely Voters</b>	41%	40%	8%			11%

**Large Potential Pool of Third Party Supporters**

Seventy-seven percent of likely Minnesota voters report that they would consider voting for an independent or a third party candidate for president. There are two potential implications of this receptivity. First, independents seem particularly drawn to third party candidates, which may prove decisive in close elections that are decided by these voters. Second, Republicans appear a bit more inclined than Democrats to consider an alternative, which could potentially drain away critical support from GOP candidates in a difficult election year.

**Voters Open to Third Party Candidates**

	<b>Consider voting for third party candidate for president</b>	<b>Will Not consider voting for third party candidate for president</b>	<b>Don't Know or Refused</b>
<b>Likely Voters</b>	77%	21%	3%
<b>Republicans</b>	80%	19%	2%
<b>Independents</b>	86%	10%	4%
<b>Democrats</b>	74%	25%	2%
<b>Extremely enthusiastic for the 2008 presidential election (18% of likely voters)</b>	67%	29%	4%
<b>Very enthusiastic (26%)</b>	72%	26%	3%
<b>Somewhat enthusiastic (33%)</b>	78%	19%	3%
<b>Not too enthusiastic (15%)</b>	89%	10%	2%
<b>Not enthusiastic at all (8%)</b>	86%	14%	0%

Of particular potential importance, voters without enthusiasm for the presidential election are especially receptive to third party candidates. Nearly 90% of voters who are not at all or not too enthusiastic about the presidential contest are willing to consider candidates who are neither Democratic nor Republican. These voters could be drawn to a third party candidate that stirred their interest.

Electoral viability appears to be a critical factor for drawing and keeping support. Third party candidates can lose support as Election Day approaches and voters begin to worry about “wasting” their vote. Indeed, when Minnesotans who said they would not consider voting for a third party candidate were probed for their rationale, 61% of these voters reported that their major reason for hesitating was concern that it would “waste” their vote. The implication is that support for third party candidates could increase if they are able to convince voters that they are viable and could win.

**Fears of “Wasting” A Vote is Main Drag on Third Party Support**

	<b>Doesn't like any of the third party candidates</b>	<b>Likes one of the one major party candidates</b>	<b>Thinks it's a wasted vote</b>	<b>Don't Know or Refused</b>
<b>Likely Voters</b>	8%	29%	61%	2%

Note: Asked of 21% of likely Minnesota voters who indicated that they would not consider voting for an independent or third party candidate in the presidential election.

## 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 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 sample was 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.

The distribution of party identification among Minnesotan residents in the full sample is as follows:

	<b>August 2008</b>
<b>Republican</b>	39%
<b>Independent</b>	10%
<b>Democrat</b>	50%

1,093 residents of Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between August 7, 2008 and August 17, 2008; the margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points. In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minnesota residents will differ by no more than 3.6 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the state. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

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.

## Question Wording

Q1. Generally speaking, how enthusiastic are you about the upcoming Presidential election? (READ CHOICES 1-5)

Extremely Enthusiastic .....	01
Very Enthusiastic.....	02
Somewhat Enthusiastic.....	03
Not Too Enthusiastic .....	04
Not Enthusiastic At All.....	05
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99

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Q3. If the 2008 presidential election were being held today, would you vote for ... (READ CHOICES 1-4) (IF DK/REF: As of today, who do you lean more towards?) (Rotate choices)

Democrat Barack Obama.....	01
Republican John McCain.....	02
Independent Ralph Nader .....	03
Libertarian Bob Barr.....	04
Somebody Else (specify).....	80
Won't vote (vol).....	97
Don't know (vol.).....	98
Refused (vol.) .....	99

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QD5. Would you consider voting for an independent or a third party candidate for president - that is, a candidate who is neither Democratic nor Republican?

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

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If No to QD5,

QD6. Which statement comes closest to your reason for not voting for a third party candidate. Would it be because you don't like any of the third party candidates, you like one of the major party candidates, or because you think it is a wasted vote?

Doesn't like any of the third party candidates.....	01
Likes one of the one major party candidates .....	02
Thinks it's a wasted vote.....	03
Don't Know.....	98
Refused.....	99

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