

**Democratic Strategic Analysis**

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***Rock the Vote's second Battleground poll shows that young people want change and believe that change is best achieved by electing Barack Obama President and keeping Congress under Democratic control. The turbulent and historic primaries are over, the exciting and energetic conventions have come and gone, and the General Election is upon us, but young people remain firmly where they were earlier this year – in Obama's corner, focused on the economy and pocketbook issues, and highly interested in the election.***

***The good news for Democrats continues, but so too must the work. Obama leads by 27 points, his strong support is twice McCain's total support, the generic Democrat leads by 22 points in the Congressional trial heat, and Democrats have a 21-point advantage in partisan identification. February was the strongest Democrats have ever been since our two teams have polled for Young Voter Strategies and now Rock the Vote, and while this data shows a bit of shrinkage for Democrats, it is clear Republicans will have a difficult time finding any good news.***

***From a Democratic standpoint (with a capital D!) and from a democratic standpoint (note the lowercase d), this data set is very encouraging. More young people say they are registered today than in February, and those numbers are up across the racial, gender, and partisan board; and more young voters say they are likely to vote. Perhaps most impressively, young people are "opting-in" to this election. Eighty-nine percent say that word of mouth with friends and family is a source of political information, and 91% say they have spoken about the elections with friends and family. It used to be – with Generation X – that discussing politics was a sure way to lose friends. But this Millennial Generation is proving that politics and the energy around change are bringing people their age together and moving them toward record turnout this fall.***

***Democrats have a lot to gain this year and while the November election is now weeks away, the results are sure to be close. If Democrats are successful in targeting young voters, turning them out, and winning their support, the margins Obama needs among older swing voters are reduced. Young voters can be decisive for Democrats in this election and they deserve our attention, after all, it could only mean the Presidency.***

**Engaged, Talking, and Seeking Information**

***Across the board, young people are engaged in this election and registering to vote. More than eight-in-ten (85%) young adults say they are registered to vote. While these numbers are generally an over estimate, there is a measurable increase from earlier this year, when 78% said they were registered to vote. At the same point in 2006, only 80% were registered, and turnout among young people exceeded turnout from 2002. Currently, young women (88%) are more likely to say they are registered than young men (82%), and young adults age 17-22 (82%) are less likely to be registered than those between the ages of 23 and 29 (88%).***

However, registration among 17-22 year olds is up almost 20 points from February (was 63%), so they are catching up to the older members of their generation and becoming more engaged in the election. This is most likely driven by registration efforts among college students. Full-time students have gone from only 66% registered in February to 86% now. Democrats and Republicans are equally likely to say they are registered (87% and 88%, respectively), and even 83% of independents say they are registered.

For the first time since Rock the Vote has conducted opinion research, young African Americans (92%) are more likely to say they are registered than young whites (87%). Young Latinos still lag behind both these groups, though even 83% of this group says they are registered. This increase in registration among African Americans and Latinos has the potential to greatly benefit Democrats this fall. However, of the 13% of young people who are not currently registered but are eligible, more than half (52%) say they do not plan to register before the election.

***Vote likelihood numbers among young Americans are hitting new heights this year.*** More than two-thirds of young people say they are extremely likely to vote, with another 17% who say they are very likely to vote (86% total likely to vote). This number is also up compared to the same point two years ago (69%) and even February of this year (82%).

As we have repeatedly seen, young women (90%) are more likely to say they will vote than young men (83%). This is good news for Democrats since young women are both more likely to vote and more likely to vote *Democratic* than their male counter parts. Even better, Democrats (91%) are somewhat more likely than Republicans (87%) to say they'll vote in November. Young adults have been an important part of the Democratic base in recent elections and their continued enthusiasm is a step toward Democratic victory.

African Americans stand out as most likely to say they will vote, with nearly all saying they are likely to vote (94%). Eighty-eight percent of young whites and 82% of young Latinos are also likely to vote. These high numbers across demographic groups are good indicators that this election will continue the trend of growing turnout among young adults.

***Beyond intending to vote, young people are following this election closely in the news and talking with friends and family about it.*** Any conventional wisdom that young people are not engaged or do not talk about politics with other people their age or with family, is wrong. Eighty-seven percent are following this election closely, with 57% following it very or extremely closely. Coverage of this political contest has become nearly inescapable and young people are paying close attention.

NEWS AND INFORMATION SOURCES							
	Total	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	White	Latino	African American
Talk to friends and family	89%	94%	80%	90%	90%	94%	89%
Watch cable television news	81%	86%	77%	74%	82%	83%	89%
Watch local television news	79%	78%	79%	83%	75%	88%	89%
Watch national television news	79%	81%	60%	85%	75%	89%	85%
Read the newspaper	68%	74%	69%	62%	66%	72%	77%
Read the news online	63%	62%	56%	73%	69%	55%	51%
Watch comedy programs like "The Daily Show"	48%	53%	41%	41%	49%	56%	37%
Use campaign websites or get email updates from campaigns	25%	28%	12%	29%	27%	15%	31%
Get updates from campaigns on your cell phone	9%	13%	6%	6%	9%	3%	13%

**The most common way that young Americans keep track of this election and other news is by talking to friends and family.** It used to be that a good way to alienate people and lose friends was to talk about politics. It is clear now that talking politics is one of the better ways to engage young people. This is true across party and racial or ethnic groups.

The next most used news source is TV news. Among Democrats, cable news is preferred, while independents prefer local news and Republicans watch national network news. Young whites also watch cable news most, while Latinos prefer national news and African Americans watch local news. More than two-thirds say they read the newspaper, almost as many say they read the news online. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, fewer than half of young people say they use comedy programs like "The Daily Show" as news sources.

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN THIS ELECTION							
	Total	Dem.	Ind.	GOP	White	Latino	African American
Spoken with friends and family about the election	92%	94%	87%	92%	93%	87%	88%
Watched an online video of a candidate	56%	60%	45%	50%	57%	46%	50%
Visited a campaign website	40%	49%	27%	28%	39%	35%	37%
Forwarded or sent an email to a friend about a candidate	36%	43%	31%	27%	38%	26%	39%
Signed up on a candidate's email list	17%	22%	7%	16%	18%	10%	22%
Signed a petition	17%	18%	19%	17%	21%	12%	12%
Attended a political even or rally	16%	19%	7%	16%	17%	12%	18%
Volunteered with a political campaign or group	11%	11%	6%	12%	12%	9%	11%
Sent or received a text message from a candidate	8%	6%	3%	11%	9%	6%	10%

Again, when asked how they have been *involved* in the election, nearly all say they have been talking with friends and family about it. This election has permeated their daily conversations in a way we have not seen in recent years. More than half have watched a video of a candidate online, followed by 40% who have visited a campaign website and a third who have forwarded or sent an email to a friend about a candidate.

The common thread here is the internet. The internet is “opt in”. Young people are going there to seek out information about this election and are not waiting for the campaigns to reach out to them.

Democrats and Republicans are equally likely to be talking about the election, but Democrats are more proactive in seeking out information and engaging themselves in the political process. Independents are less likely to do each of the activities we tested, but nearly 9 in 10 are talking about the election.

The same is true of young Latinos. They are less likely than either young whites or young African Americans to engage in any of these activities, but they are still talking about the election and staying involved with word of mouth communication.

**Young people are more likely to be motivated this year by their collective power than by their individual power.** Seventy-six percent of young people strongly agree that “as a group, young people have the power to change things in this country,” which is higher than their agreement that “I have the power to change things in this country” (49% strongly agree). This is true across demographic groups.

**This is an historic election, no matter which candidate prevails, and young Americans are very aware of its significance.** Nearly three-quarters (71%) agree strongly that “this election is an opportunity to make history by electing the first African American president.” On the other hand, only 41% strongly agree that “this election is an opportunity to make history by electing the first woman vice president.”

Even among young women, only 42% strongly agree. Palin’s selection as the Republican vice presidential nominee has not changed the dynamics of this election among young people, even among young women. Outside Republicans, particularly Republican women, her candidacy is not creating the same sense of historical significance for young people that Obama’s candidacy is.

<b>%Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Historic because of woman VP</b>	<b>Historic because of African American President</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Independents</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>68%</b>
<b>Republicans</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Republican women</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>White women</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>Married women</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>74%</b>

***In short, all measures show that young adults are engaged in this election and preparing to participate in large numbers in the fall. They are registering, seeking information, and preparing to help make history. The good news for Democrats is that, not only does this age group generally perform well for Democrats, but the young Democrats, young women, and other groups that are key parts of the Democratic base are among the most energized and the most tuned into this election.***

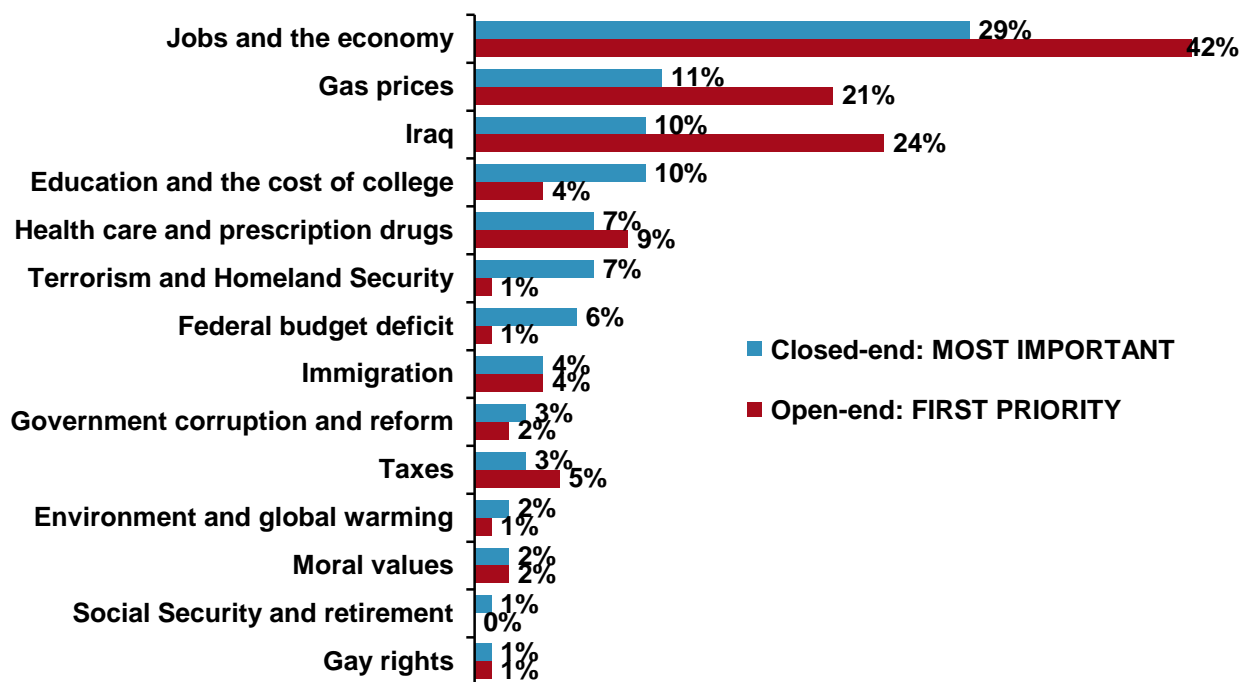
### **Focused on the Economy and Looking for Change**

**Young Americans are overwhelmingly pessimistic about the direction in which the country is headed, and this is one of the key indicators that they are looking for change.** More than two thirds (69%) of young adults think the country is headed down the wrong track. Only a quarter think things are going in the right direction (26%).

This desire for change cross gender, race, age, and education lines. Only among strong Republicans does a majority believe things are going in the right direction.

Undecided voters in the presidential election are decidedly pessimistic about the way things are going (68%). Despite Republican's best efforts, Democrats still own the change dynamic in this election, so this sense that things have gone wrong over the last 8 years benefits Democrats in this data and should benefit them at the ballot box in November.

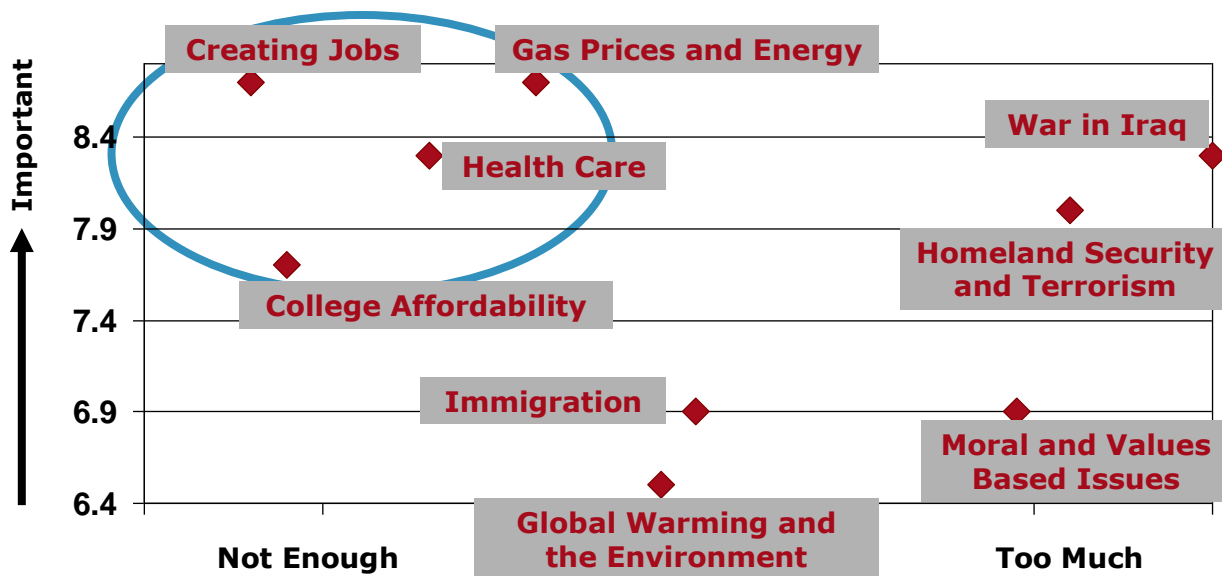
**Young people have become even more focused on the economy in the last 6 months.** In February, just 17% cited it as the most important issue for the next president to address. Now, that number is nearly doubled to 29%. This increase is present across demographic groups. Young people have been focused on the economy for some time – as far back as Spring 2006, so their increased focus is no surprise given the recent news.



Whether asked what the most important issue is for the president to address with a list of options or asked an open question about the *first* thing the president should tackle once he is sworn into office, young Americans are focused on the economy, and that focus is even sharper when they are not reminded of other issues that are in play. The economy is the most top of mind issue for young people in this election, and it has been for quite a while. It cuts across demographic and voter groups. It is the top issue for both men (31%) and women (28%); Democrats (38%), Independents (26%), and Republicans (17%); whites (25%), Latinos (30%), and African Americans (41%); and Obama voters (34%), McCain voters (18%), and undecided voters (32%).

Notably, for young independents, the cost of college (19%) comes right behind the economy (26%) as their top issue. This issue will be key to reaching out to these swing voters, more than a third (36%) of whom are still undecided in the presidential race.

**There is a stumbling block, however, between young people’s focus on the economy and Democratic victory; young people are not hearing enough about these pocketbook issues that will determine their vote. Hearing about the crises in the news is one issue, but hearing real solutions from the candidates – including Democratic candidates – is another.** A majority of young Americans believe they are not hearing enough about college affordability (65%), creating jobs (64%), health care (56%), and gas prices and energy (55%). These are all issues that determine whether they are able to make ends meet and are all tied to their concern about the economy. If they are not hearing enough about these issues, they will not feel that candidates on either side of the aisle understand their concerns and the Democratic advantage on the issue can evaporate or result in little gain. Among undecideds in the presidential race, the top issues they are not hearing enough about are the same as for young voters overall. For independents, the focus is more on creating jobs (69% not hearing enough), gas prices and energy (62%), and immigration (61%). These issues will be key to tapping swing voters as well.



When asked to rate these same issues on a scale of 0 to 10 indicating how important these issues are to their vote, the issues they are not hearing enough about are exactly the ones that will decide their vote. They also say that the war in Iraq and homeland security are important to their vote, but they say they’re hearing too much about these issues at the expense of more pocketbook concerns like jobs and college costs. Candidates who want to reach out to young voters need to speak to these economic issues.

**Young people have been focused on pocketbook concerns and the day to day cost of living for a long time, and this focus is now razor sharp. Concern over the economy has even doubled since just 6 months ago. Speaking to pocketbook issues will give candidates a clear advantage among young people, but so far young people feel that there is a lack of attention to the things they care about and want to see fixed.**

### The Candidates

**As the election nears, Barack Obama maintains a huge advantage in personal image over John McCain. In fact, Obama has a net-favorable image while McCain’s image has**

**become net-unfavorable. Both candidates have experienced some increase in negative ratings over the past 6 months as the campaign has heated up. Both vice presidential nominees are less known, and neither has really changed the dynamic of the race among young people compared to where it was in February.**

**Barack Obama is still very popular among young Americans.** More than two-thirds have a favorable impression of him, and nearly half (47%) have a very favorable impression of him. This intense favorable opinion is up 9 points from February. His popularity is not only strong among young Democrats, but also among young independents. Under the scrutiny of the general election campaign, his negative ratings are up 7 points, but overall he remains the most popular figure tested in the survey or on the ballot in November.

Barack Obama			
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Net (Fav – Unfav)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>+42</b>
<b>Men</b>	66	30	+36
<b>Women</b>	72	24	+48
<b>Age</b>			
<b>17-22 Years Old</b>	71	33	+48
<b>23-30 Years Old</b>	68	30	+38
<b>Race</b>			
<b>White</b>	63	34	+29
<b>African American</b>	91	8	+83
<b>Latino</b>	70	23	+47
<b>Party</b>			
<b>Democrats</b>	94	4	+90
<b>Independents</b>	66	25	+42
<b>Republicans</b>	27	68	-41
<b>Education</b>			
<b>Non-College Men</b>	65	31	+34
<b>Non-College Women</b>	70	26	+44
<b>College Men</b>	70	27	+42
<b>College Women</b>	76	19	+57
<b>Marital Status</b>			
<b>Married Men</b>	63	36	+27
<b>Married Women</b>	64	32	+32
<b>Unmarried Men</b>	68	26	+42
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	77	19	+58

**Joe Biden is a strong addition to the Democratic ticket. His is well liked by young adults.** Nearly half (49%) have a favorable impression of him, and a quarter have a very favorable impression. Only one-in-five (19%) have a negative impression of him, and about a third (32%) do not yet have an opinion of him. Biden has a net-positive image among both Democrats (+66) and independents (+13).

**John McCain's image among young Americans is slipping.** In February and now, 44% of young people have a favorable impression of him, but now nearly half (48%) have an

unfavorable impression of him, up 15 points since February. However he is liked by more than just Republicans. Older young adults, young whites, college educated young people, and married young people all have net-positive impressions of McCain—just not as positive as their impression of Barack Obama. However, even among those who like John McCain (with the exception of Republicans), Obama has a large popularity advantage.

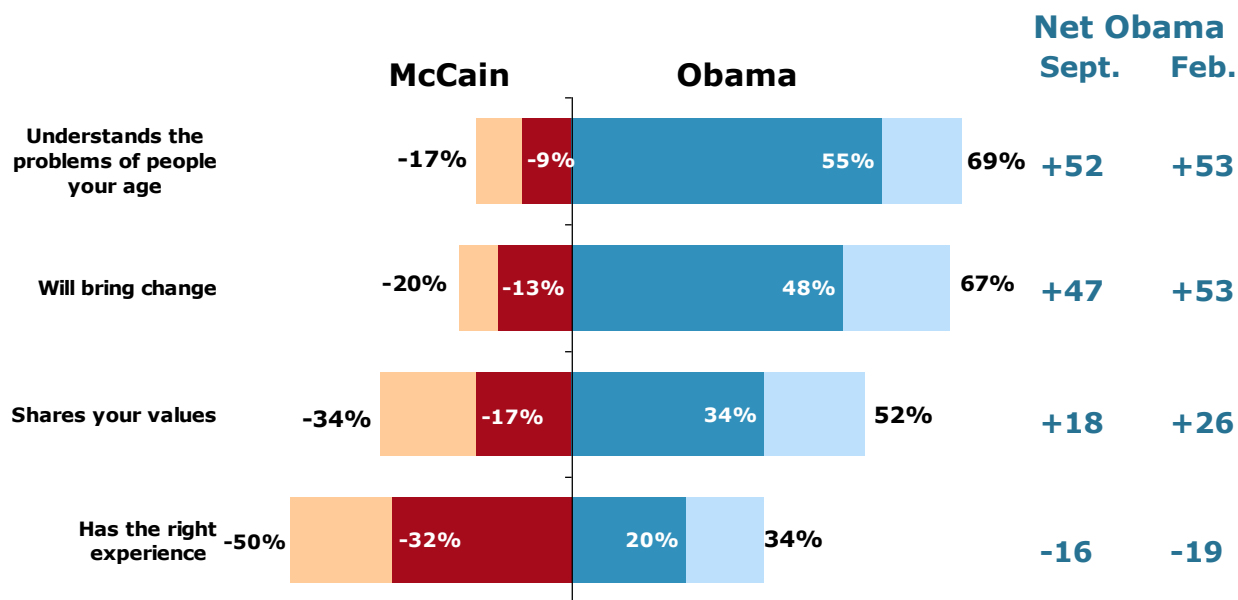
John McCain			
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Net (Fav – Unfav)
<b>TOTAL</b>	44	48	-4
<b>Men</b>	46	46	-1
<b>Women</b>	42	50	-8
<b>Age</b>			
<b>17-23 Years Old</b>	35	53	-19
<b>23-30 Years Old</b>	51	45	+6
<b>Race</b>			
<b>White</b>	52	41	+11
<b>African American</b>	15	79	-64
<b>Latino</b>	41	47	-6
<b>Party</b>			
<b>Democrats</b>	19	76	-57
<b>Independents</b>	58	34	+23
<b>Republicans</b>	86	9	+76
<b>Education</b>			
<b>Non-College Men</b>	44	47	-3
<b>Non-College Women</b>	40	52	-12
<b>College Men</b>	53	45	+8
<b>College Women</b>	47	45	+2
<b>Marital Status</b>			
<b>Married Men</b>	58	40	+17
<b>Married Women</b>	54	39	+15
<b>Unmarried Men</b>	39	50	-11
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	35	56	-22

**Sarah Palin's addition to the Republican ticket has had little positive impact for the Republican ticket among young adults.** Just over a third (37%) have a favorable impression of her (19% very favorable), while 40% have an unfavorable impression of her (25% very unfavorable). Even among young women, she only breaks even (38% favorable and 38% unfavorable). However, young Republicans rate her 76% favorable to 7% unfavorable, and young Republican women give her the same very positive ratings.

**Obama has a strong advantage on the traits that young adults are looking for in a candidate.** A majority say that Obama beats McCain on sharing their values (52%), understanding the problems of people their age (69%), and bringing change (67%). McCain, on the other hand, has an advantage on having the right experience (50% McCain better, 34% Obama better). These gaps have narrowed since February, when Obama had a 53-point advantage on change and McCain had a 20-point advantage on experience, but not much has

changed since then. Young people felt they had a good sense of Obama then, and that positive image has held up since.

These strengths go beyond partisanship. Among independents, Obama has sizeable advantages over McCain on “understanding the problems of people your age” (+44), “will bring change” (+31), and “shares your values” (+4) and has gained a lot of ground on experience among independents since February (-34 then to -14 now)



Importantly, Obama’s advantages are on the qualities that young Americans care about most in deciding for whom they will vote. On a scale of zero to ten, where 0 is not at all important and 10 means extremely important to their vote, young adults rated change as the most important characteristic in a candidate (mean 8.5, 55% rated it a ‘10’). This is followed by sharing your values (mean 8.3, 43% rated ‘10’), the right experience (8.2, 42%) and understanding the problems of people your age (8.2, 42%). Despite their best efforts, Republicans have not been able to capture the change theme and as a result, Obama and Democrats will go into the election with a huge advantage on the trait that young voters value most.

### The Ballots

**Senator Obama continues to hold a commanding lead over Senator McCain.** Currently, the Obama/Biden ticket leads the McCain/Palin team by 56% to 29%. Obama has held steady since February, when 57% of voters supported him, and McCain has inched up from 27%. One in ten young people remain undecided, so the race could very well close depending on how they break. Nonetheless, it remains impressive that more young people strongly support Obama (48%) than support McCain in total (29%).

Quite simply, Senator Obama’s lead is overwhelming. Only Republicans and young people in smaller metro or non-metro areas choose the Senator from Arizona. Obama leads in every region, among both men and women, with younger and older people in this group, among college graduates and non-college graduates, and among whites, African Americans, and Latinos. In some cases, Obama’s lead is smaller than it was in February among a couple of key groups. He led by 41 points among women in February, and now leads by 36, and he led by 40

points among Latinos and now leads by 29. One of his more significant drops is among white women, where both his win over Clinton and the selection of Palin may have an impact (he led by 31 points in February, down to 24 points today).

Obama vs. McCain				
	Obama	McCain	Undecided	Net (Obama-McCain)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>+27</b>
<b>Men</b>	50%	33%	13%	+18
<b>Women</b>	61%	25%	13%	+36
<b>Age</b>				
<b>17-22 Years Old</b>	57%	24%	15%	+34
<b>23-30 Years Old</b>	54%	32%	12%	+22
<b>Race</b>				
<b>White</b>	48%	36%	13%	+12
<b>African American</b>	93%	2%	3%	+91
<b>Latino</b>	56%	27%	14%	+29
<b>Party</b>				
<b>Democrats</b>	91%	4%	3%	+87
<b>Independents</b>	33%	25%	36%	+8
<b>Republicans</b>	7%	76%	16%	-69
<b>Education</b>				
<b>Non-College Men</b>	50%	31%	14%	+19
<b>Non-College Women</b>	62%	25%	13%	+37
<b>College Men</b>	51%	39%	9%	+12
<b>College Women</b>	59%	26%	14%	+32
<b>Marital Status</b>				
<b>Married Men</b>	44%	40%	14%	+4
<b>Married Women</b>	49%	37%	14%	+12
<b>Unmarried Men</b>	54%	29%	13%	+25
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	68%	18%	13%	+50

**Democrats have a commanding lead over Republicans in a generic Congressional match-up as well, and young voters can help them hold onto control of Congress this November** Among young adults, Democrats have a 22-point lead over Republicans in a generic Congressional match-up (49% to 27%, respectively). That matches the partisan identification advantage (+21 Democrats), but represents a 3-point slip since February when Democrats led by 25 points. It is less about Republican gains, as they still receive less than 30% support, and more about a bit of Democrats coming back to the fold when they had 52% support in February. However, the 21-point advantage today matches the 19-point advantage in April 2006, the year young voters were instrumental in Democrats taking back control of Congress.

While there is a gender gap among young voters, Democrats win both young men (+16) and young women (+28) by significant margins. Although there is more slippage with young women – as Democrats were leading by 35 points in February. Democrats win 87% of the vote among

self-identified Democrats, while Republicans lag behind at winning only 78% of the self-identified Republicans. African American young people are most likely to vote Democratic on the Congressional race (78% Democrat to 9% Republican), but Democrats also win convincingly among young Latinos (61% to 20%) and young white voters (40% to 33%). Democrats led by 12 points among whites under age 30 and now that lead is at 7 points. Blue collar voters also hold strong for Democrats (+24 in February and now).

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