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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner
From: Stanley B. Greenberg, Al Quinlan, James Carville, Andrew H. Baumann

Moving from the Old to New Politics: Macomb to Oakland

Report on post-election surveys conducted in Macomb and Oakland Counties, Michigan

In the summer of 2008, Barack Obama held a slim national lead over John McCain but his position was by no means secure. After a bruising primary battle, the Democratic base was fractured as many white, blue-collar Democrats – critical voters in Rust Belt swing states like Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania – held back from the new nominee. But Obama’s appeal, combined with other trends, presented him with an opportunity to add new voters in America’s suburbs. If Obama and his allies were to fulfill their potential they needed to bring traditional Democrats back into the fold while continuing to expand their appeal to new suburban voters. Last Tuesday, Obama did just that.

To better understand these dynamics, Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner conducted post-election studies of Macomb and Oakland Counties, two bellwether counties in Michigan that respectively represent the Democrats’ traditional blue-collar base and new white-collar voters.¹ These surveys follow on the heels of extensive research Democracy Corps and GQR has conducted in Macomb earlier in the cycle.²

Though McCain’s decision to pull out of Michigan in early October slightly exaggerates Obama’s support across the state, these two counties provide an informative look into how Obama succeeded. For more than 20 years, the non-college-educated white voters in Macomb County have been considered a “national political barometer,” as National Journal’s Ronald Brownstein described them during the Democratic convention. Going into the convention, Obama was lagging among these voters and trailing in Macomb by 7 points. But he managed to turn that around, consolidate his base and take the county by 8 points on Election Day.

¹ Based on Democracy Corps polls conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner of 750 voters in Macomb County, Michigan and 600 voters in Oakland County, Michigan, November 4-5, 2008.

² Democracy Corps surveys of 750 likely voters in Macomb County conducted July 14-22 and September 21-24, 2008 and 6 focus groups conducted with Democratic or Democratic-leaning voters from Macomb who were not then voting for Obama in June and July, 2008.

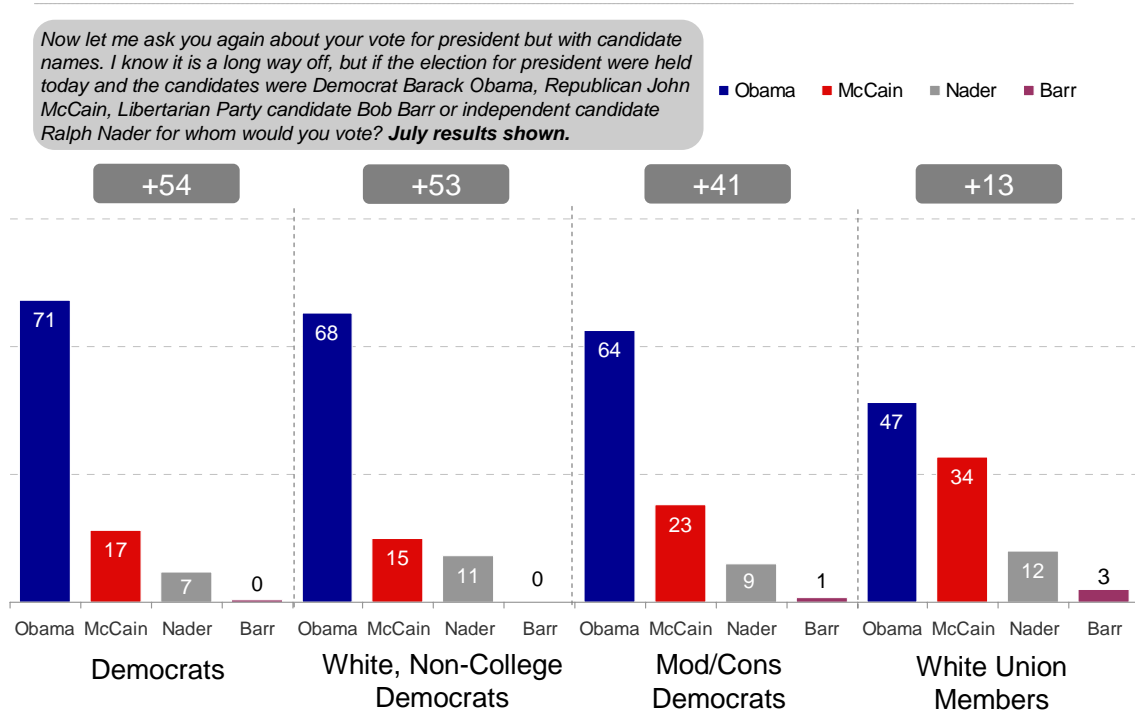


Meanwhile, next door Oakland County played an even bigger role in Obama’s election, changing from an evenly-matched battleground that John Kerry barely carried in 2004, to a Republican killing field that Obama carried by nearly 100,000 votes and that saw Democratic gains up and down the ticket. These extraordinary changes happening in places like Oakland are central to what is, perhaps, an emerging national Democratic ascendancy.

Challenges In Macomb

Macomb County is the home of the Reagan Democrats whose defection helped crash the national Democratic Party after the 1960s and whose partial return since Bill Clinton has made the county a battleground and enabled Democrats to carry Michigan in the previous four elections. But in July, Barack Obama was significantly underperforming in Macomb County. He trailed John McCain 46 percent to 39 percent, primarily because he had a large problem with “Reagan Democrats.” He was getting just 71 percent of Democrats in Macomb, dropping to 68 percent of white non-college Democrats, 64 percent of moderate and conservative Democrats and just 47 percent of white union members. Meanwhile, Ralph Nader was winning one in ten votes in these blocs. More troubling, barely 40 percent of Macomb voters were “comfortable” with the idea of Obama as President of the United States, far below the number who were comfortable with a nameless Democrat in the same role.

Obama initially underperformed with conservative Macomb Democrats



**Note: From Democracy Corps survey of 750 likely Macomb County voters conducted July 14-22, 2008.*

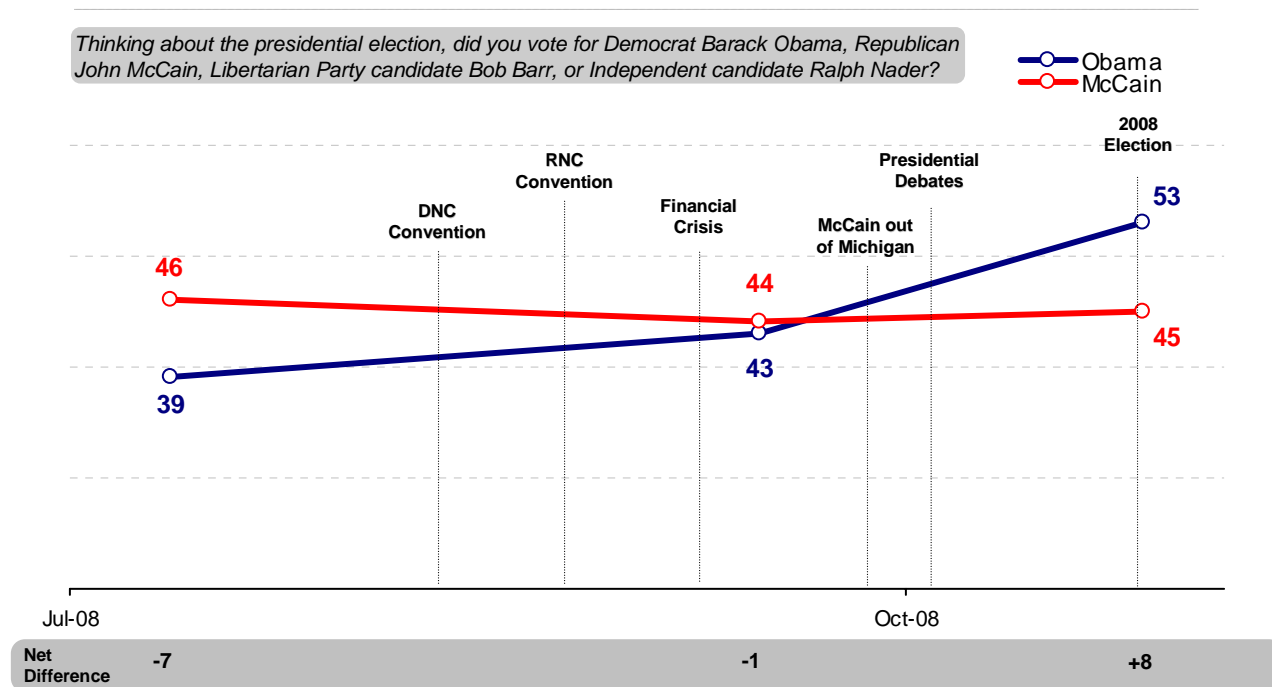


The conventional wisdom at the time was that Obama’s race would make winning over these voters a difficult task. After all, it was race-related issues such as welfare, busing and affirmative action that played a leading role in driving Reagan Democrats away from the Democratic Party and just two years ago, 68 percent in Macomb County voted to support a ban on affirmative action. But our research in July showed that race was a diminishing factor in the consciousness and politics of Macomb’s Reagan Democrats and that these voters were eminently winnable for Obama – if he offered them the right message. Yes, he needed to convince them that he would work for all Americans and not just minorities, but more important he had to reassure these voters that he was a patriot who would make America’s continued strength central to his purpose and find an economic message that connected with their middle class anger about lost jobs – an anger particularly acute in Michigan where the state’s long-depressed economy shapes how voters look at everything else.

Obama Succeeds In Consolidating Macomb Base

Of course, on Election Day Obama carried Macomb by 8 points, 53 percent to 45 percent. This improvement was driven almost entirely by his consolidation of the Democratic base. Obama merely split independents in Macomb, but after earning just 71 percent of the Democratic vote in July, he won 95 percent on Election Day, the same percentage McCain won among his much smaller Republican base.

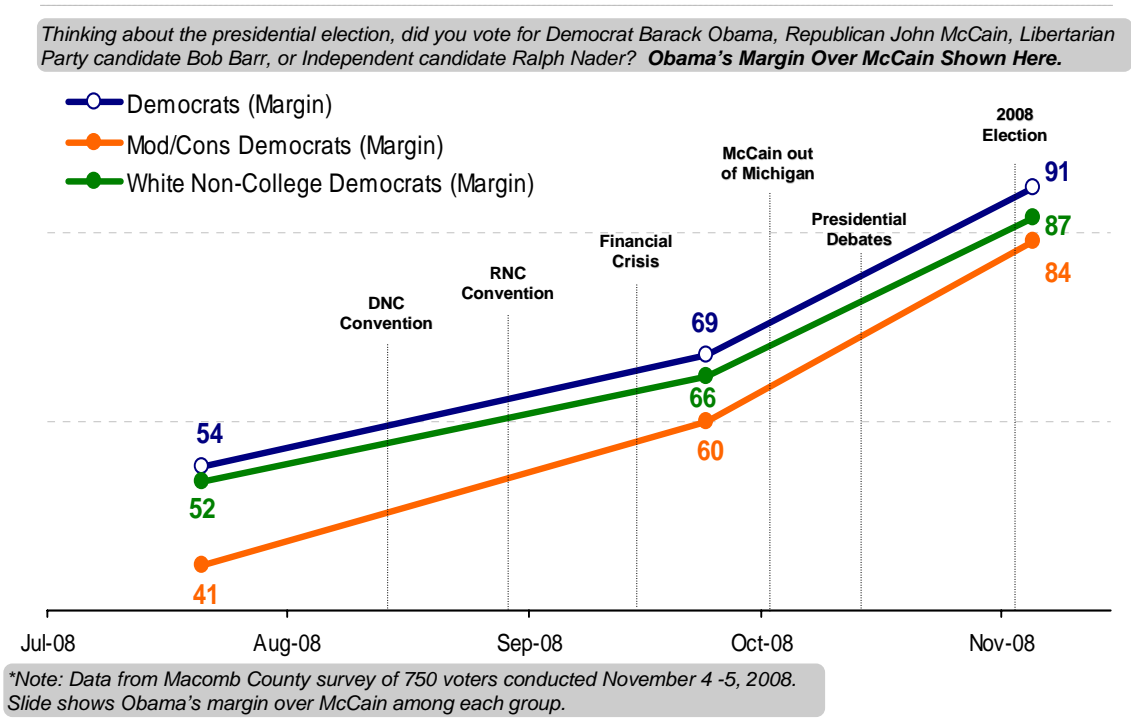
As campaign progressed, Obama gained in Macomb





Importantly, Obama was able to bring the once-wavering Reagan Democrats back into the fold. He won 91 percent of moderate and conservative Democrats, 93 percent of white non-college Democrats and an impressive 65 percent of white union members. And despite worries that McCain might have been able to pick off voters who supported Hillary Clinton in the primary (especially because of Obama’s absence in Michigan during the primary process), Obama won 93 percent of these voters.

Obama consolidates key Democratic groups during past few months

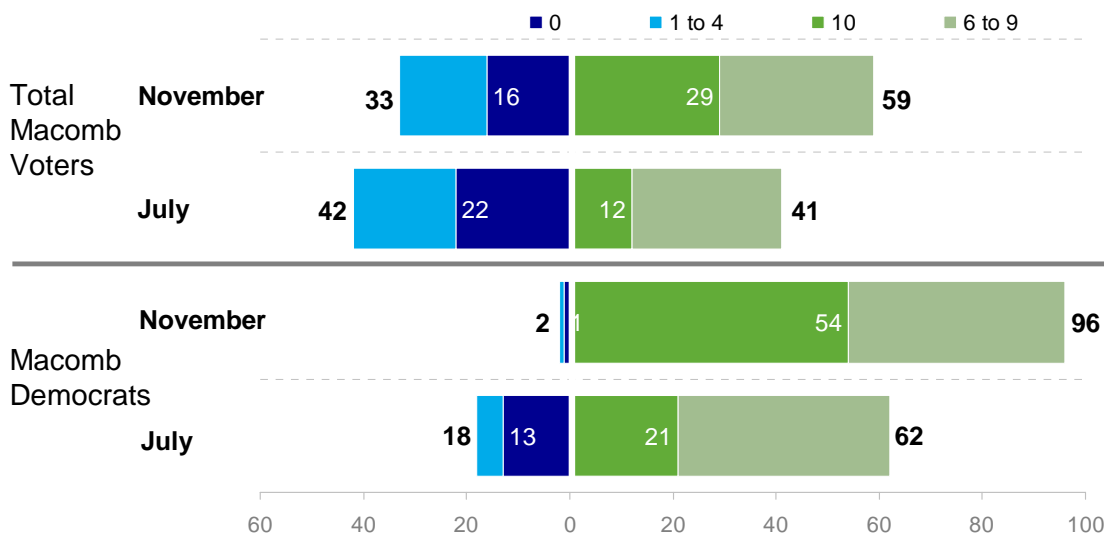


Obama owes his increased share of the vote primarily to an improvement in his own standing, rather than a general decline in McCain’s. McCain actually saw his personal favorability ratings increase marginally in Macomb between July and November, but these gains were dwarfed by Obama’s. In July just 37 percent of Macomb voters viewed Obama favorably (compared to 40 percent unfavorably). By Election Day this situation had reversed dramatically, with 53 percent viewing Obama favorably and just 36 percent unfavorably. The change was starkest among Democrats, where the percent having a favorable view of Obama jumped from just 58 percent to 86 percent. Moreover, on Election Day nearly 60 percent of Macomb voters said they were “comfortable” with Obama as president - up nearly 20 points from July and, importantly, identical to the number who were comfortable with a nameless Democrat. Again, the shifts were largest among Democrats with 96 percent saying they were comfortable with Obama on Election Day, up from 62 percent in July.



Democrats, all Macomb voters now much more comfortable with Obama

On a scale of zero to ten, how comfortable would you feel with **Barack Obama** as your President? A ten would mean you feel very comfortable. A zero would mean you feel not at all comfortable.



*Note: A response between 6 and 10 indicates that a voter is "comfortable" with Obama. A response between 0 and 4 indicates a voter is NOT "comfortable" with Obama.

Obama Crossed Thresholds on Security, Race; Connected on the Economy

Taking a deeper look at the data reveals that Obama’s large personal gains were largely made possible because he accomplished the three main tasks we identified in our July report (reassuring that he would be a president for all Americans, crossing a threshold on security and connecting to voters’ economic anger). These voters, like voters elsewhere, watched Obama intently and became confident he would work for all Americans. In the end, nearly 60 percent in Macomb said Obama shared their values while two-thirds rejected the notion that he would put the interests of black Americans ahead of others, up from 60 percent in July and on par with the results in less conservative Oakland County. Among wavering Obama voters in Macomb (those who voted for Obama but considered McCain), just 13 percent thought Obama would put blacks first; among wavering McCain voters (who voted McCain but considered Obama), just 33 percent thought this was true, about the same proportion as the electorate as a whole. Clearly, these voters were not wavering because of racial concerns.

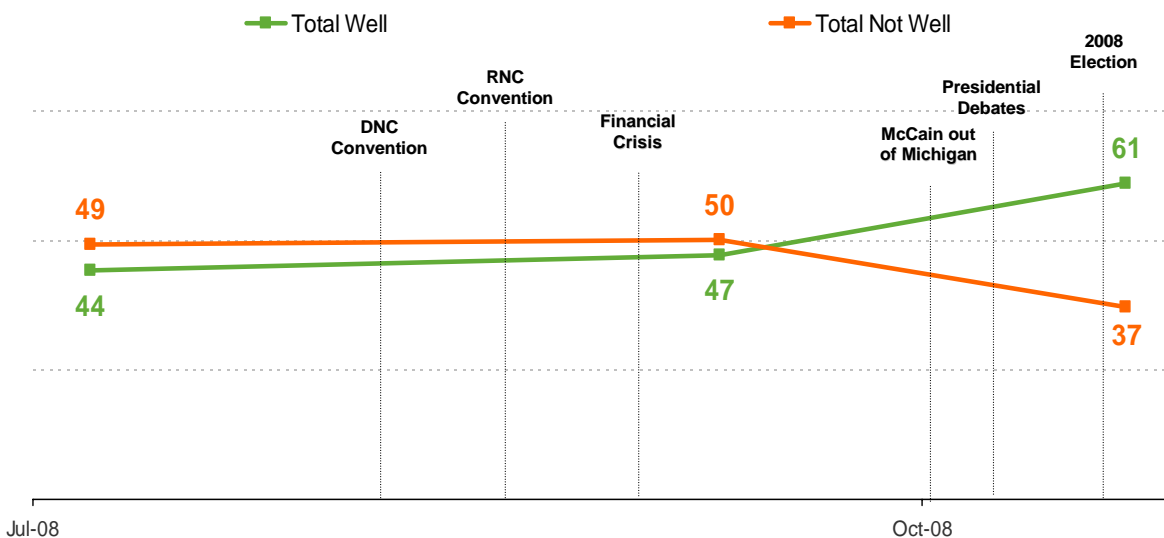
In July, we noted that Obama had yet to cross a threshold on issues of patriotism and national security with the more conservative Macomb Democrats that were hesitant to support him. On Election Day he still trailed McCain badly on national security, losing a matchup on the issue to McCain by 30 points. Yet, Obama clearly crossed the needed threshold. Over 60 percent of Macomb voters now say that he “has what it takes to be president,” and 67 percent



call Obama patriotic, a solid uptick from the 59 percent that said the same thing in July. Most impressive, 61 percent of Macomb voters now agree that Obama “will keep America strong.” That represents a 17-point increase since July, most of which occurred over the last five weeks of the campaign. Again, Obama’s largest gains on all of these issues are among the blue-collar Democrats who were holding back in July. Between his response to the financial crisis and his strong performance in the debates, Obama proved to these voters he could be the steady leader the times require.

Macomb: Obama crosses threshold on keeping American strong

Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases which people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes Barack Obama very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.will keep America strong



**Note: Data from Macomb County survey of 750 voters conducted November 4 -5, 2008.*

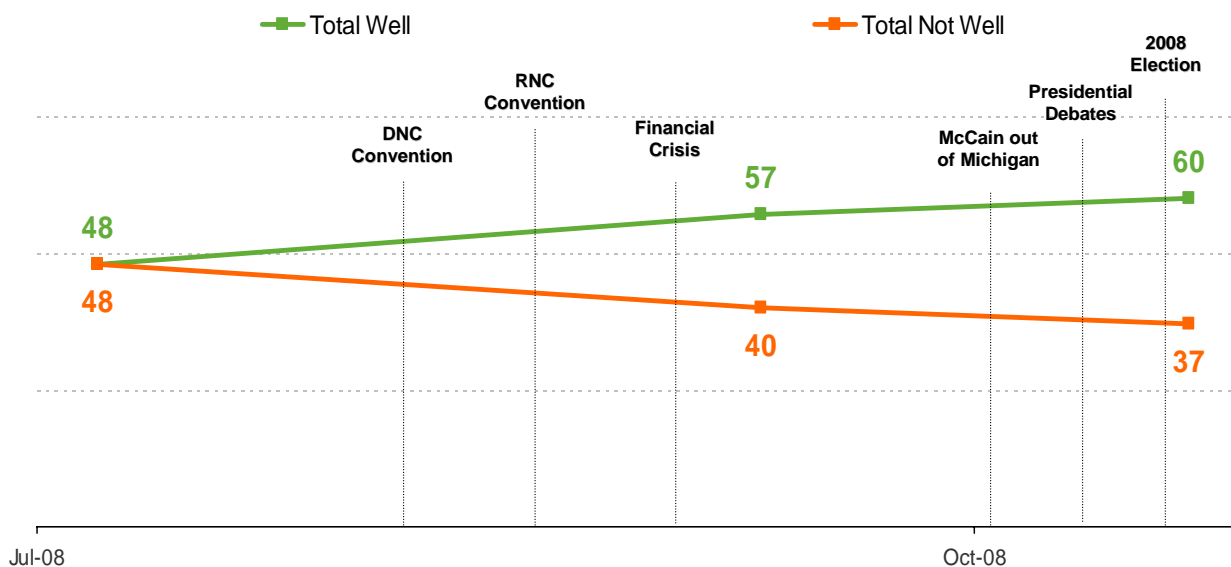
Crossing the threshold on patriotism, security and strength earned Obama a hearing among Macomb voters on the issue that was far and away most important to their vote – the economy. Before the conventions, however, Obama had failed to connect with these disaffected voters’ anger over job losses, the declining middle class and the betrayal of the elites who sold out American workers. But by Election Day, using a renewed focus and sharp comparative ads on outsourcing, jobs and McCain’s abandonment of the middle class, Obama rectified this situation. In doing so, Obama expanded his lead on who would better handle the economy from 8 to 14 points. Moreover, in September Macomb voters sided with Obama by just 4 points on the central economic debate of the election, with 49 percent saying they were more concerned that McCain would “continue the economic policies that cost us jobs and caused higher prices” and 45 percent saying they were more concerned that Obama would “raise taxes and increase government spending.” But by November, Obama had tripled his margin on this key measure to a 53 percent to 41 percent advantage.



In the homestretch, Obama’s core economic message decisively beat McCain’s attacks on taxes, spending and redistributing wealth. But more than that, Obama’s sharper focus convinced voters that he understood their economic anger. In July, just 48 percent agreed that Obama was on their side, with an equal number disagreeing. By Election Day, 60 percent felt Obama was on their side.

Macomb: Obama now viewed decisively as “on your side”

Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases which people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes Barack Obama very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.on your side



**Note: Data from Macomb County survey of 750 voters conducted November 4 -5, 2008.*

New Frontiers: Oakland County

Obama’s achievements in Macomb are impressive, and his ability to consolidate once-wavering Democrats in Macomb and similar communities throughout Rust Belt swing states like Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Pennsylvania was an important part to his election. But focusing solely on the ways that Macomb County has become more “normal” would miss the extraordinary changes taking place next door in Oakland County — a place that played a bigger role in Obama’s success and perhaps in an emerging national Democratic ascendancy.

While Macomb County is home to the white middle class that America’s auto industry made possible, Oakland County is home to the affluent, business-oriented suburbanites of Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills, some of the richest townships in America. With a median household income of nearly \$66,500 (\$11,000 more than in Macomb), Oakland County is the 4th richest county in the nation with a population of over 1 million people. Meanwhile, just about a

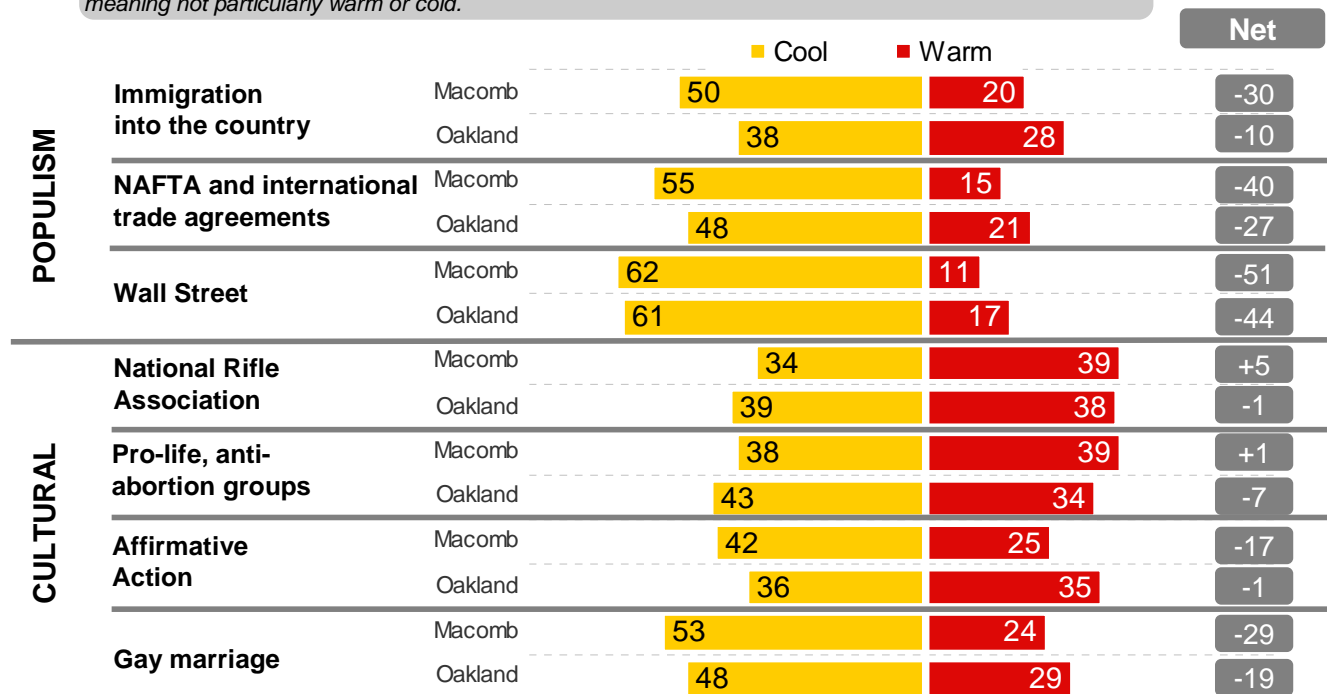


quarter of Macomb County residents have college degrees, but more than 40 percent do in Oakland.

Over the past two decades, Oakland County began to change, as an influx of many in professional occupations, including teachers, lawyers and high-tech workers began to outnumber the county’s business owners and managers. Macomb has been slow to welcome racial diversity, but almost a quarter of Oakland’s residents are members of various racial minorities. These changes have produced a more tolerant and culturally liberal (though less economically populist) population in Oakland, uncomfortable with today’s Republican Party. Voters in Oakland are much more open than their blue-collar neighbors to the east on issues such as abortion, gay marriage, immigration and affirmative action and this is assuredly part of the reason they have such divergent views on the two parties. And they have much more positive feelings about the Democratic Party (47 percent favorable and 36 percent unfavorable) than of the Republicans (just 33 percent favorable and 49 percent unfavorable).

Oakland less populist, conservative than Macomb

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.





Obama, Democrats Clean Up in Oakland

Oakland County had formed part of the Republican heartland in Michigan and the country. From 1972 to 1988, Democratic presidential candidates in their best years lost the county by 20 points. From Bill Clinton to John Kerry, however, Democrats began to achieve a draw, with Kerry eking out a 3,000-vote (or 0.5 percent) win in 2004. Last Tuesday, however, Obama smashed McCain 57 percent to 42 percent, for a margin of 96,000 votes. In fact, Obama's 93,000-vote improvement on Kerry's margin was over twice his improvement in Macomb County and 3 times his improvement on Kerry's margin in Detroit. Meanwhile, Democrats also made significant gains in Oakland down-ticket; Gary Peters defeated 16-year incumbent Joe Knollenberg 52 to 43 percent in the Oakland-based 9th congressional district, Democrats netted one state legislative seat in Oakland, picked up the offices of County Prosecutor and Treasurer for the first time in decades and came within 126 votes of flipping the long-Republican-held county commission.

Table 1: Presidential Vote Totals

	Total Votes	Obama Votes	McCain Votes	Obama Margin	Kerry Margin (2004)	Change in Margin
Michigan	5,006,550	2,875,308	2,050,655	824,653	165,437	+659,216
Oakland County	656,660	372,694	276,881	95,813	2,754	+93,059
Macomb County	417,178	223,754	187,645	36,109	-6,006	+42,115
Detroit	337,155	325,508	8,891	316,617	285,915	+30,702

As in Macomb, Obama was successful in consolidating Democrats in Oakland (winning 93 percent), but he was able to improve on his margin in Macomb by besting McCain among the county's independent voters by 12 points, 55 percent to 43 percent. Oakland voters were more enthusiastic about Obama than their neighbors in Macomb, 58 percent viewing him favorably, twice the number who viewed him unfavorably – and 5 points more than the number who viewed him favorably in Macomb. As in Macomb, about 60 percent of Oakland voters were “comfortable” having Obama as their president and while fully half said that Obama is similar to John F. Kennedy, just 22 percent say that he is similar to Jesse Jackson. Nearly two-in-five voters in Oakland never considered voting for McCain – 10 points more than ruled out Obama from the start. While they were more than open to Obama, for a significant portion of Oakland's electorate, McCain was simply not an option in this county, which has a base rather than swing feel about it.

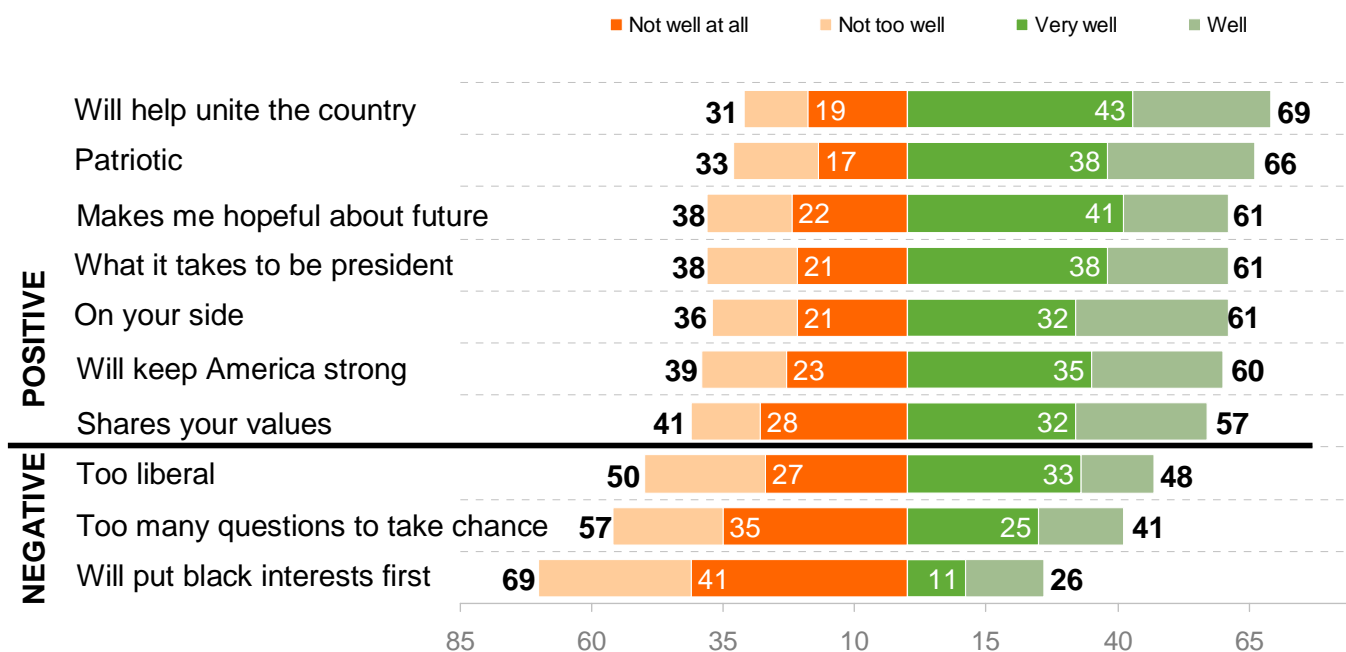


Obama Strong on Attributes, Issues

Oakland voters rated Obama highly on almost every attribute we tested, giving the Democratic nominee very similar ratings to those received in Macomb on Election Day. On the most important attributes; including “shares your values,” “on your side,” “will keep America strong” and “has what it takes to be president;” Obama scored at or near the 60 percent level and he received even higher marks on being seen as patriotic and being able to unite the country. Meanwhile, 57 percent of Oakland voters reject the notions that there are “too many questions” to take a chance on Obama as president (5 percent more than do the same in Macomb).

Oakland: Obama given high marks on all key attributes

Now, I am going to read you a list of words and phrases which people use to describe political figures. For each word or phrase, please tell me whether it describes Barack Obama very well, well, not too well, or not well at all.



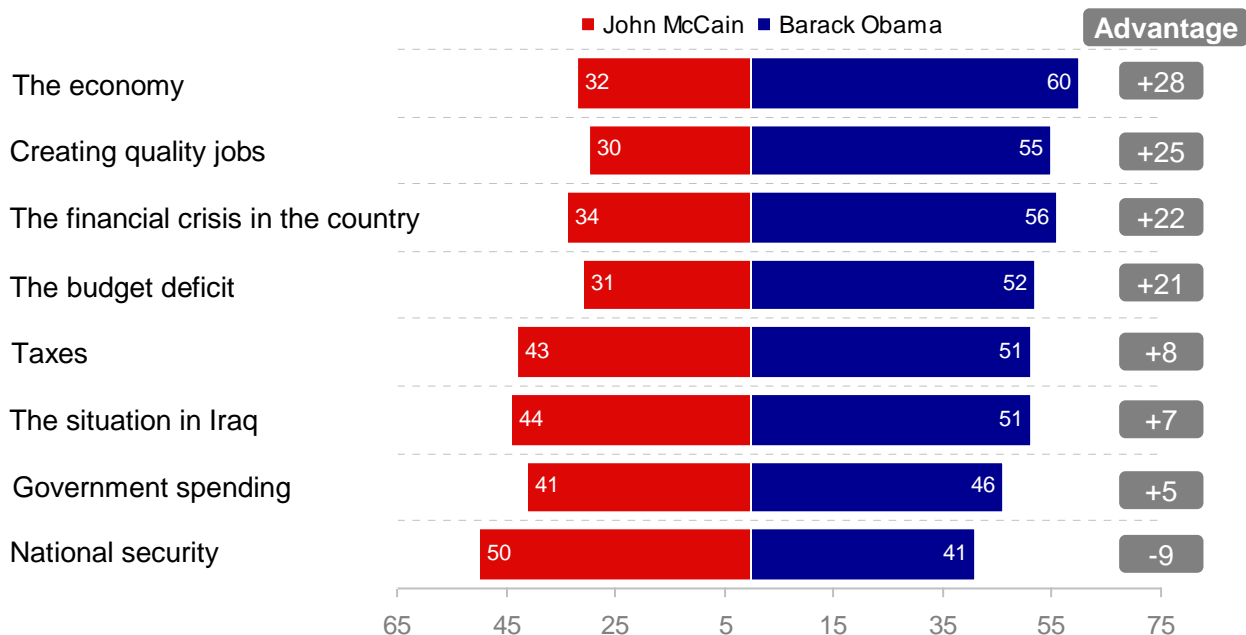
*Note: Data from Oakland County survey of 600 voters conducted November 4 -5, 2008.

Oakland County’s resistance to the McCain (and, more generally, Republican) message is best evidenced by Obama’s decisive margins here on the critical issues of this election. While his attributes scores were not significantly higher in Oakland than they are in Macomb, Obama does markedly better when matched against McCain on the issues. On the economy, he dominated McCain by 28 points, double his margin in Macomb, and his 21-point margin on the budget deficit was triple his advantage in Macomb. He also did better here on creating jobs and handling the financial crisis.



Oakland: Obama leads with economy, creating quality jobs

I am going to read you a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think Democrat Barack Obama or Republican John McCain had better ideas on this issue.



**Note: Data from Oakland County survey of 600 voters conducted November 4 -5, 2008.*

Perhaps most astonishing, however, Obama trailed McCain by just 9 points on the issue of national security in Oakland (compared to 30 points in Macomb and 21 points nationally).³ Oakland County’s complete rejection of McCain’s quite standard Republican message is a bad sign for Republicans who are hopeful that Obama’s strength in the more affluent and growing suburbs might merely be a one-time aberration.

Desire for Change and Unity; Rejection of Palin Key to Oakland Results

In the end, voters in Oakland supported Obama because they believed he would not only change course in Iraq and on the economy, but also change a broken political system in Washington to get things done. They rejected McCain as an agent of the same failed policies and had a very harsh view of his selection of Sarah Palin as running mate.

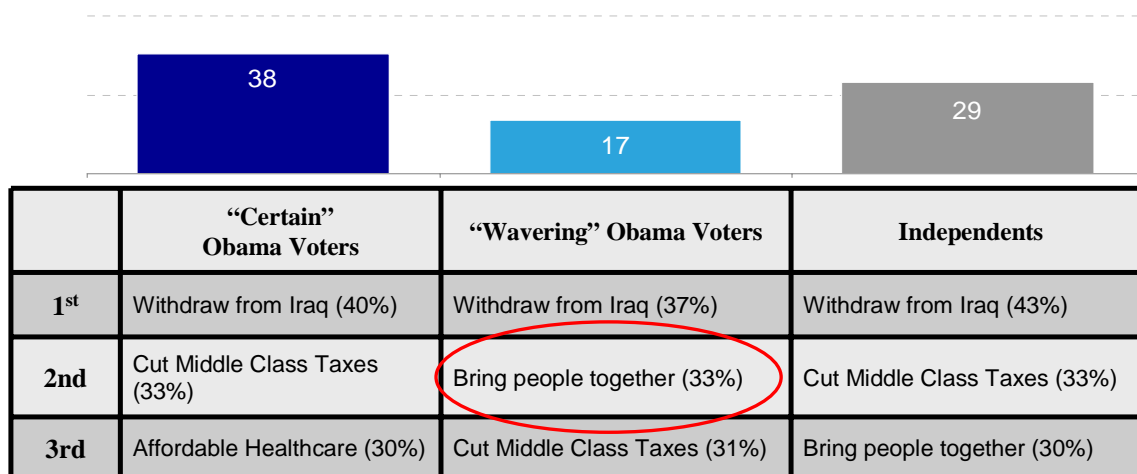
³ All national numbers based on a Democracy Corps/Campaign for America’s Future national post-election survey of 2,000 voters conducted November 4-5, 2008.



We asked those who voted for Obama to pick their top three reasons for doing so from a list of 13 possible choices. At the top of the list was his promise to withdraw troops from Iraq, followed by his support for tax cuts for the middle class and affordable health care for all, and the idea that he will bring people together, end the old politics and get things done. The first three items were also at the top of list for voters in Macomb and nationally, but the strength of the fourth – Obama’s promise to move beyond partisanship to get things done – was uniquely strong in Oakland. In fact, 33 percent of wavering Obama voters, the important swing voters who considered McCain but ended up pulling the lever for Obama, cited this as one of their top reasons for supporting Obama, 2nd highest only to his position on Iraq. This was also one of the top reasons cited by independents in Oakland.

Oakland: Reasons for supporting Barack Obama

Now let me read you a list reasons to support Barack Obama. Which THREE describe the most important reasons why you voted for Barack Obama?



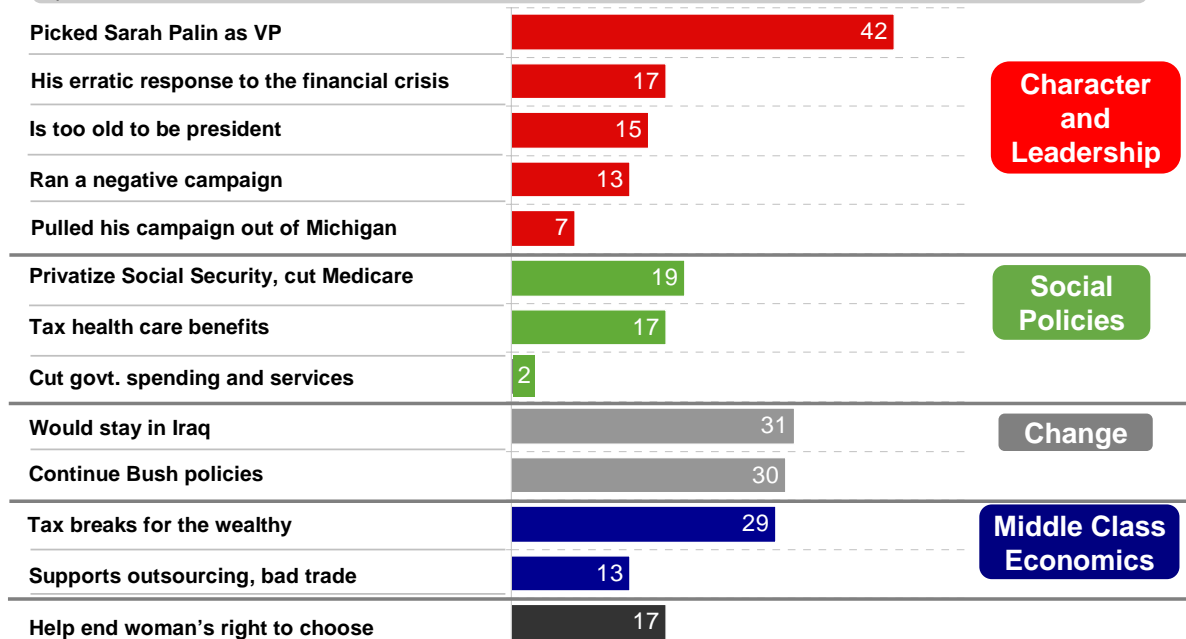
Note: Data from Oakland County survey of 600 voters conducted November 4 -5, 2008. “Certain” Obama voters voted Obama and did not consider voting for McCain. “Wavering” Obama voters did consider supporting McCain. All percentages reflect percentages within their category.

Meanwhile, McCain’s choice of Palin clearly sticks out as a driver of the vote against the Arizona Senator in Oakland. A full 42 percent of voters who opposed McCain or voted for McCain but considered Obama (wavering McCain Voters) cited Palin as one of their top reasons to vote against McCain, about 5 points more than did the same in Macomb or nationally. More important, 58 percent of wavering Obama voters cited Palin. Clearly Palin played a key role in keeping these fence-sitters in Obama’s camp; her brand of culture warfare did not play well with these more tolerant suburban voters. Opposition to McCain was not solely driven by Palin, of course. McCain’s support of a continued presence in Iraq and his support of a continuation of Bush’s policies were both chosen by about 30 percent of all respondents and were at the top of the list of wavering Obama voters as well. In addition to rejecting Palin, Oakland voters agreed with Obama that McCain would simply be too much of the same to elect as president.



Oakland County: Reasons *not* to support John McCain

Let me read you a list of doubts about John McCain. Regardless of how you voted, which THREE describe the most important reasons NOT to vote for John McCain?



*Note: Asked only of those not voting for McCain or who voted for McCain but considered Obama; data from Oakland County survey of 600 voters conducted November 4 -5, 2008.

Bridging Macomb and Oakland: The Future Democratic Coalition

Obama’s decisive national victory was built on a coalition that holds great promise of a long-term Democratic ascendance: Hispanics, African Americans and Asians, younger votes, unmarried women, blue-collar Democrats (including union households) and more white-collar suburban voters. All but the last two are outside the scope of this report (but are covered in detail in a separate report from Democracy Corps and the Campaign for America’s Future).⁴ However, the results in Macomb and Oakland portend well for Democrats’ ability to continue to win both blue collar Democrats and white-collar suburbanites.

Democrats are unlikely to start winning all blue-collar whites any time in the near future; in fact, Obama won only 42 percent of non-college whites nationally, a small improvement on Kerry’s performance in 2004 and Al Gore’s performance in 2000 with this group. But as this election clearly showed, they can form a winning, and even dominant, coalition without them as long as they hold their ground with blue-collar Democrats. The results in Macomb show that

⁴ “The New Politics and New Mandate,” from Democracy Corps and the Campaign for America’s Future. <http://gqrr.com/index.php?ID=229>. November 12, 2008.



Democrats can continue to hold these voters by crossing a threshold of comfort on cultural and security issues (which was a particularly steep challenge for a presidential candidate named Barack Hussein Obama) and engaging them with a strong populist message on the economy. This was particularly critical here in Michigan where voters' fears about the economy are much deeper and longer-held than anywhere else in the country.

Meanwhile, the more affluent and white-collar suburbanites epitomized by Oakland County are likely to move only more firmly into the Democratic fold as they continue to reject the Republicans' extreme cultural conservatism, especially if the GOP moves further right as it retrenches into a mostly southern party. If Democrats can successfully bridge the old Reagan Democrats of Macomb and the new suburban progressives of Oakland, while continuing to grow the other elements of their coalition, they could remain on top for some time to come.



Appendix A: Presidential Vote History in Macomb, Oakland and Michigan

	Macomb County		Oakland County		Michigan Statewide	
	Dem - Rep	Net	Dem - Rep	Net	Dem - Rep	Net
1960: Kennedy - Nixon	63 - 37	+26	45-54	-9	51-49	+2
1964: Johnson - Goldwater	75-25	+50	61-38	+23	67-33	+34
1968: Humphrey - Nixon	55-30	+25	45-45	0	48-41	+7
1972: McGovern – Nixon	35-63	-28	34-64	-30	42-56	-14
1976: Carter – Ford	47-51	-4	40-59	-19	46-52	-6
1980: Carter - Reagan	40-52	-12	36-55	-19	43-49	-6
1984: Mondale - Reagan	33-66	-33	33-67	-34	40-59	-19
1988: Dukakis – H.W. Bush	39-60	-21	38-61	-23	46-54	-8
1992: Clinton – H.W. Bush	37-42	-5	39-44	-5	44-36	+8
1996: Clinton – Dole	50-39	+11	48-44	+4	52-38	+14
2000: Gore – W. Bush	50-48	+2	49-48	+1	51-46	+5
2004: Kerry – W. Bush⁵	49-50	-1	50-49	+1	51-48	+3
2008: Obama – McCain	53-45	+8	57-42	+15	57-41	+16

⁵ Past vote totals collection from US elections atlas at uselectionatlas.org.