

Date: October 2, 2008
To: Friends of Democracy Corps
From: Stan Greenberg and James Carville

Obama Emerges With First Real Lead

Voters Shift to Obama on Measures Key to Driving the Vote

Barack Obama has emerged with the first real, sustainable lead of the presidential race – with major gains in the battleground states for the Electoral College. In the new national Democracy Corps survey, Obama has taken a 4-point lead but more important, he leads by 6 points in the separate poll of the battleground states (50 to 44 percent).¹ Kerry lost these states by 4 points, meaning Obama is driving a 10-point swing in the battleground states – comparable to what the congressional Democrats did in 2006. The potential for a big election is now very real again.

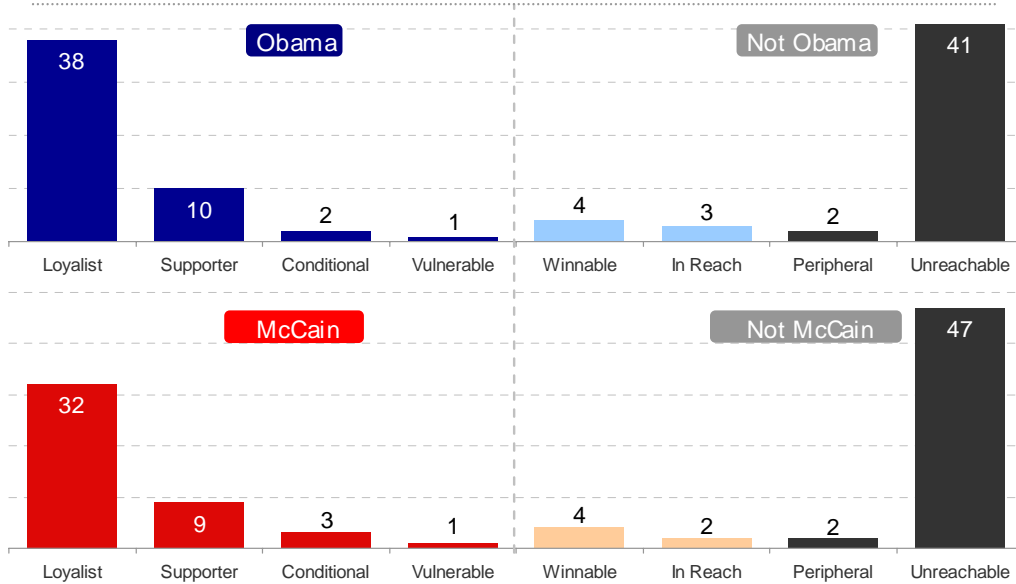
This race has changed in fundamental ways in the last two weeks – and not necessarily for the most obvious reason, the economy and financial crisis. Obama’s gains as a person and leader as well as gains on national security, contrasted with McCain’s negativity, political maneuvering and failure to take the Republicans with him, has changed the dynamic.

The change is most evident in our “voter choice scale” that shows the new landscape. What is most striking are the 47 percent of the electorate who are “unreachable” for McCain; the significantly higher number of Obama strong, “loyalist” supporters and the larger number of McCain supporters who are erodible. The playing field has tilted.

¹ Democracy Corps national survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted September 28-30, 2008 and Presidential Battleground survey of 1,044 likely voters conducted September 28-30, 2008 in CO, IA, IN, FL, MI, MN, MO, MT, NC, NH, NM, NV, OH, PA, VA, WI.



Battleground: Voter Choice Scales new tilted playing field



The debate and the last two weeks produced a complete consolidation of Democrats. Obama now does as well with Democrats as McCain does with Republicans. And Obama is clearly back to contesting independents. They are head to head here.

What Happened?

The financial crisis featuring George Bush and the House Republicans has taken a new toll on the Republican brand and reminded voters of the change dynamic that dominated earlier.

But there is something else that is more important. Voters who are following this election intensely have come to like Obama more and more, despite the crisis; at the same time, they have come to like McCain less. But this is not just about getting a beer: Obama has made gains compared to McCain on being a strong leader and who is a risk. The news over the last two weeks has made voters significantly more supportive of Obama and significantly less of McCain.² And Sarah Palin is crashing.

The debate, as we pointed out in our dial group of undecided voters, was a big event – with dramatic moments but also with dramatic effects. While we should be cautious about generalizing from 45 undecided voters, they pointed us to the strong positive response to Obama, the turnoff toward McCain and to Obama’s big gains on national security and strength issues, as well as energy.

² NPR bipartisan Presidential Battleground survey conducted by Public Opinion Strategies in conjunction with Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research on September 18 & 20, 2008 among 800 likely voters.

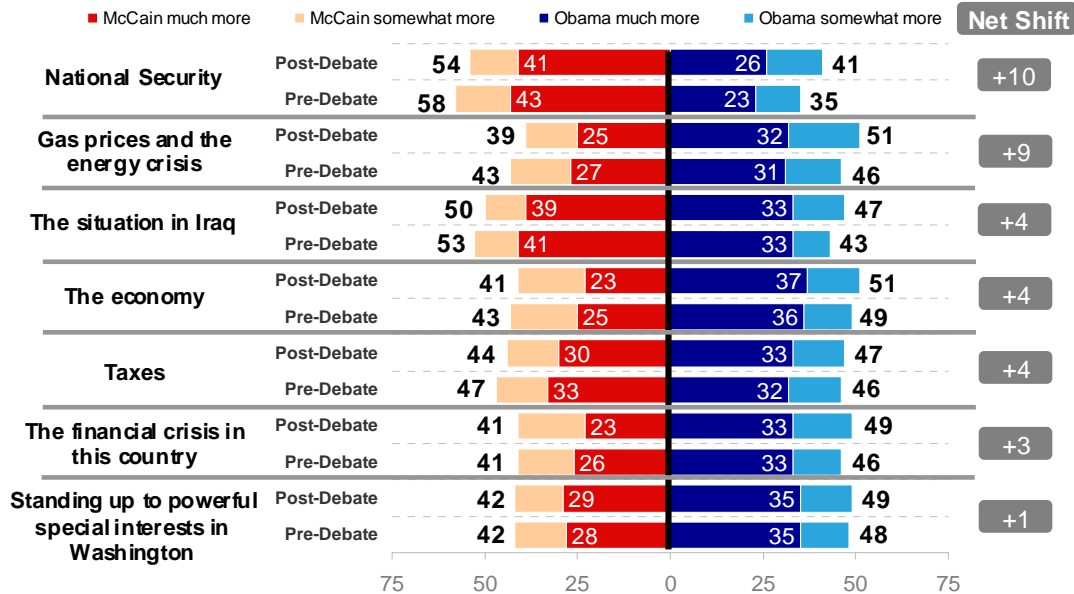


In these polls, Obama has cut McCain’s national security advantage in half and now stands equal to McCain on who is a strong leader. Obama got people’s attention on national security and Iraq where he also moved the argument to parity – on McCain’s signature issue. Obama’s gains on energy are related to national security and being a strong leader as well.

After debate, Obama gains most on national security and energy

Now I am going to ask you something different. I am going to read a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think Democrat Barack Obama or Republican John McCain would do a better job with this issue.

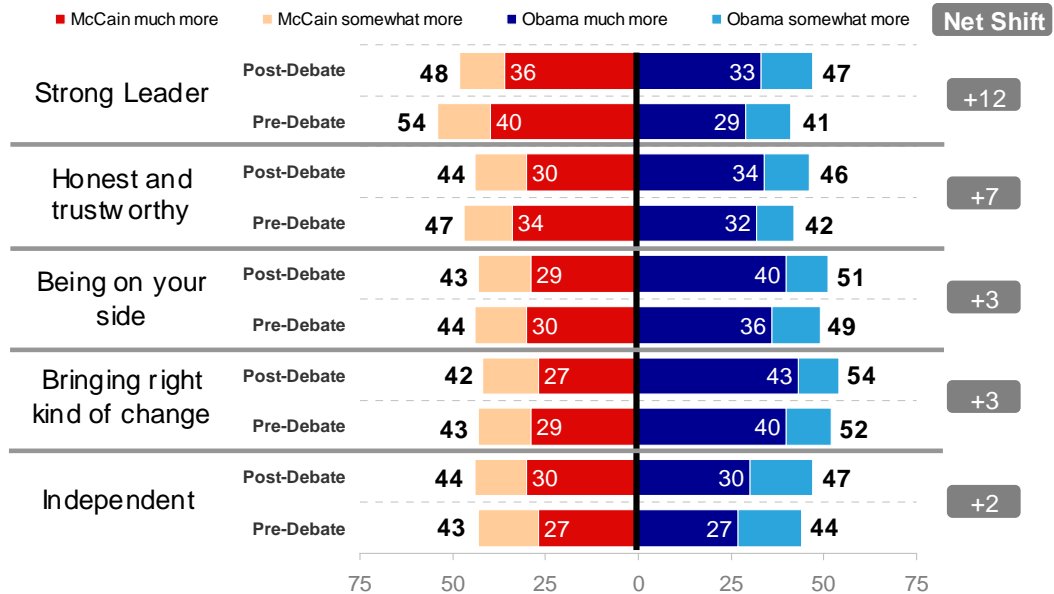
Battleground Data





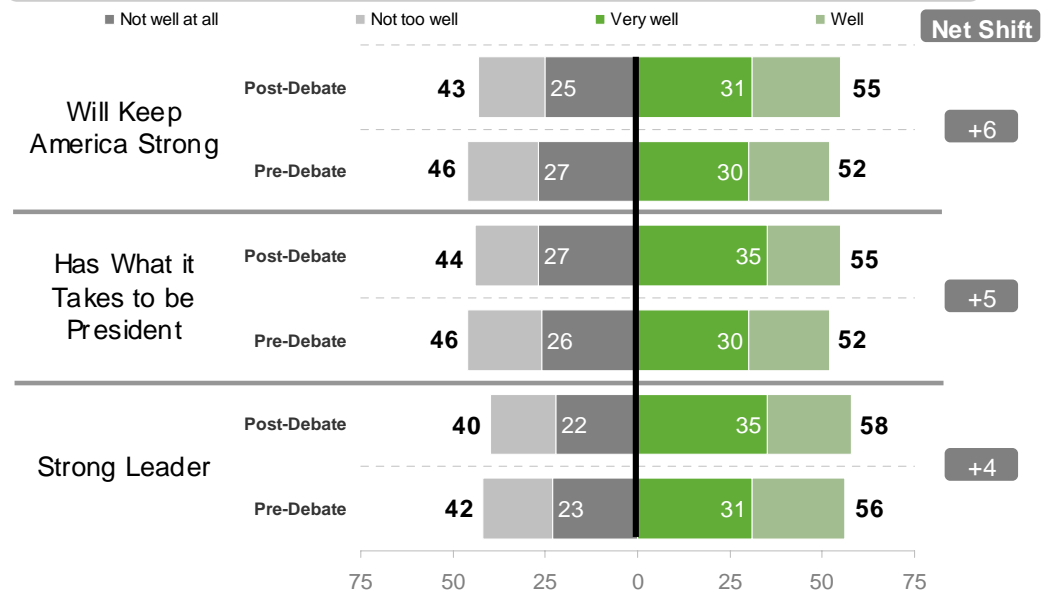
After debate, Obama increases on strong leader and trustworthiness

Now I'd like to ask you which presidential candidate you associate more with these terms, Barack Obama or John McCain. *Battleground Data*



After debate, Obama gains on strength & presidential qualities

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. *Battleground Data*



While the debate and the week did not produce big shifts on the economy, Obama has slowly moved into an 8-point lead nationally on the economy and an 11-point lead in the battleground. We should not rule out that Obama's heavy advertising on the economy –



directly to the camera – has had an impact in driving up his advantage. He has an 8-point lead there on managing the financial crisis and a 3-point lead on taxes – McCain’s central economic plank.³

But with over 80 percent nationally and in the battleground believing the country is off on the wrong track and wanting to vote for change, they are heavily focused on Obama and like what they see. In our regression model to identify the biggest drivers of the vote, feelings about Obama are two times as powerful a predictor as feelings about McCain and twice as important as party identification. In the midst of an ugly time with lots of negative advertising, Obama is improbably gaining in standing.

The strongest drivers of Obama’s thermometer score, we should note, are things that emerged in the debate and in response to the financial crisis. Changes on the following comparisons and attributes are strongly related to gains in Obama’s personal scores: ‘will keep America strong,’ ‘national security’ and ‘has what it takes to be president.’ He appears to have crossed some threshold while making these gains against McCain. Also important are ‘will bring the right kind of change’ where Obama has an 11-point advantage over McCain and ‘being on your side,’ where Obama is up 9 points. Obama’s focus on the middle class is also having an impact.

The strongest drivers of the vote include these measures focusing on strength, ‘has what it takes to be president,’ as well as Iraq. Obama brought that argument back to a draw, which has allowed the vote to move up. The other combination of attributes includes ‘shares your values,’ ‘being on your side’ and ‘honest and trustworthy’ – where the two candidates are now mostly close in part due to McCain having lost a lot of ground and credibility.

Obama’s gains have come across the board and represent a big shift in the dynamic. Only older white non-college voters seem to be holding back somewhat.

³ Dial tests conducted by Democracy Corps among undecided voters during the first presidential debate on September 27, 2008. <http://www.democracycorps.com/focus/2008/09/first-presidential-debate-obama-makes-important-personal-and-national-security-gains/>