

# *The Temple Poll*

## **Principle of Divided Government Popular in Pennsylvania, But Potential Impact Limited**

In recent days the McCain campaign has sought to use the prospect of Democratic control of Congress to benefit the Republican presidential candidate, taking advantage of the electorate’s inclination to divide control of Congress and the presidency between the parties. Senator McCain has called Senator Obama and the Democratic leaders of the House and Senate “a dangerous threesome,” and Governor Palin has warned of a Democratic “monopoly in Washington.”

The most recent Temple Poll shows that the Pennsylvania electorate, one in which McCain trails Obama by 9 percentage points, supports the principle of a divided federal government. A majority of likely voters in the Commonwealth—51 percent—believe control of the presidency and Congress should be split between the parties, while just 18 percent believe one party should control both branches. Twenty-eight percent say it does not matter whether or not government is divided.

The portion of the Pennsylvania electorate whose plans for the presidential election might be altered by an appeal to the principle of divided government is likely to be considerably smaller, however. Forty-seven percent of the state’s likely voters say they will vote for the Democratic candidate in their Congressional district and 40 percent say they will vote for the Republican, with 13 percent undecided. Those who support Democratic House candidates are less supportive than those who support Republican candidates of dividing control of government. Just 43 percent of those who support Democratic candidates believe control should be split.

Among voters who support both divided control and Democratic House candidates, 17 percent already intend to vote for McCain. Seventy-five percent intend to

<i>Percent of likely voters</i>		<u>Intended U.S. House vote</u>	
Control of presidency and Congress	Total	Democratic candidate	Republican candidate
Better when split	51	43	60
Better when unified	18	23	14
Doesn’t matter	28	29	23
Don’t know	4	5	3

Supporters of divided government only	<i>Percent of likely voters</i>	
	<u>Intended U.S. House vote</u>	
Intended presidential vote	Democratic candidate	Republican candidate
Obama	75	13
McCain	17	83

vote for Obama. All told, the group targeted by an appeal to divided government—Pennsylvanians who believe control of Congress and the presidency should be split but not intend to vote a straight Democratic ticket—amount to 15 percent of likely voters.

Although they support the idea that control of the federal government should be divided between the parties, a majority in the targeted group identify strongly with the Democratic Party. A total of 91 percent are Democrats. Only 5 percent are Independents, and only 4 percent are Republicans.

Supporters of divided government only	<i>Percent of likely voters</i>	
	<u>Intended votes</u>	
Party identification	Obama & Democratic candidate	McCain & Republican candidate
Democrats, strong	55	1
Democrats, not strong	19	1
Democrats, leaning	17	2
Independents	5	3
Republicans, leaning	2	18
Republicans, not strong	2	21
Republicans, strong	0	54

“It would be difficult for the McCain campaign to turn the election around in Pennsylvania by appealing to the principle of divided government,” said Michael Hagen, director of the Temple Poll. “In order to succeed, Senator McCain would have to persuade more than half the voters for whom the argument might make a difference to switch their presidential votes, and 9 in 10 of those voters identify themselves as Democrats—more than half of them as strong Democrats.”

The Temple Poll is sponsored by Temple University’s Institute for Public Affairs. For this Poll, a randomly selected sample of 1,001 Pennsylvanians registered to vote were interviewed by telephone between October 20 and 26, 2008. Once the interviewing was complete, the data were weighted to correct for unequal probabilities of selection and response, and to ensure that the demographic characteristics of the sample match the population of registered voters in Pennsylvania. The sample included 761 likely voters, identified on the basis of their voting history and engagement with the campaign. With samples of these sizes, the overall margin of error attributable to sampling is 3.1 percentage points for the sample of registered voters, 3.6 percentage points for the sample of likely voters. The sampling error for subgroups is larger.

For more information about the Poll, contact Dr. Michael G. Hagen, associate professor of political science and director of the Temple Poll ([michael.hagen@temple.edu](mailto:michael.hagen@temple.edu), 215 204 7798, or 610 662 7910) or Dr. Joseph P. McLaughlin, director of the Institute for Public Affairs and assistant dean for external affairs for the College of Liberal Arts ([jmclau@temple.edu](mailto:jmclau@temple.edu), 215 204 5059, or 215 510 3289).

Additional results from the Poll will be released over the next several days.