A Look Back and a Look Ahead: The Election of 2008 and What’s Next

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**Fundamentals**

**Pro-Obama**
- The economy / consumer confidence
- Right direction / wrong track
- Unpopular Republican president
- Dissatisfaction with the situation in Iraq
- A shift away from Iraq and toward domestic issues
- Lots of mobilization, high voter turnout during the nomination
- Party identification and registration trending Democratic
- Hard for a party to win three consecutive elections: Repubs 1980-1988 are the only example since FDR

**Pro-McCain**
- US is in two wars, and he has foreign policy credibility
  - Ike ‘52, Johnson ‘64, Nixon ‘72, Bush ‘04
- Three third-term losses were close: 1960, 1976, 2000
- Population shifts to Republican areas
- Dem difficulties getting over 50%
  - Only Johnson ‘64 and Carter ’76
- Obama relatively unknown
- Race?
Trend in Party Identification

Red: Republican  Blue: Democrat

Percent Independent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Republican</th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on registered voters.

Data from Pew Research Center
A Closer Look at Party Identification

Data from Pew Research Center
End of Democratic (8/28) and Republican Conventions (9/4)
Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac Seized by US Government (9/7)
Lehman Bros. looking for buyer (9/11), Merrill Lynch sold (9/14), LB files for bankruptcy filing (9/15)
AIG rescue (9/16), LB purchased by Barclays (9/17), Administration announces bailout/rescue (9/19)
Administration announces bailout/rescue plan (9/19); first presidential debate (9/26)
## Wisconsin Opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Top Priority for U.S.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving economy: 37% - June 2008</td>
<td>Obama 8 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most Important Problem Facing U.S.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy and Jobs: 64% - October 2008</td>
<td>Obama 31 pts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UW Dept. of Political Science/Wispolitics.com Poll, June; UW Big Ten Battleground Poll, Sept-Nov. polls.
Wisconsin Opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. is on wrong track</th>
<th>Percent of Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. economy has gotten worse over past year</th>
<th>Percent of Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closest States 2004 vs. October 5, 2008 Poll Standing

Bottom bar for each state is 2004, top is 2008: Obama led in all 12 in October

- Florida
- Colorado
- Oregon
- Minnesota
- Michigan
- Nevada
- Pennsylvania
- Ohio
- New Hampshire
- New Mexico
- Iowa
- Wisconsin
Red = Republican victory 2004 and 2008
Purple = Republican victory 2004, Democratic victory 2008
Blue = Democratic victory 2004 and 2008

Above diagonal: Obama outperforms Kerry
Below diagonal: Obama underperforms Kerry
Obama Support Among Social Groups (in %)
Dems +38 seats in East

Dems +41 seats in Midwest

Dems +25 seats in West

Dems +38 seats in East

Repubs +6 seats in South

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures
Will Obama be a transformational president?

- Very unusual in American politics: Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and FDR are the only three typically cited by political scientists. Each changed the fundamental nature of American politics
A transformational president?

- The transformational potential:
  - Generational divide
  - Racial politics
  - A new kind of non-partisan, or at least bipartisan, politics

- Importance of historical context.
Obama and Congress: historical context

- This is not 1933, despite the arguments of both liberals and conservatives.
  - Huge differences in the nature of the economic problems.
  - Republicans did not provide any alternative policies.
  - FDR was in a much stronger position politically in Congress.

Closer to 1993 in terms of the partisan split in Congress.
## Partisan splits in Congress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>House</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Repub.</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Repub.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>57*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>(1 vacancy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(assuming Franken is seated)*
Internal partisan politics

- Good news for Obama: largest Democratic majorities since 1993. Bad news: expanding the number of Democrats means bringing in more moderates. Role of the Blue Dogs – already grumbling about the deficits.

- Republican response: compromise and bipartisanship or repeat of the late 1980s and early 1990s? Can Senate moderates contain the more partisan House?
How will Obama govern?

- Many have talked about uniting the country and moving beyond partisan politics, but few have succeeded.
- Early signs are that Obama will govern from the center.
  - Cabinet appointments: not quite a “team of rivals” but very centrist.
  - Stimulus package and business tax cuts.
  - Recent comments on not investigating Bush officials.
The legislative agenda

- Top priorities: economic stimulus (infrastructure, state aid, alternative energy, tax cuts, education) and national security (start to bring troops home).

- Short term, easy fixes: women’s pay issues, embryonic stem cell research, “global gag rule” on abortion funding. More controversial – labor “card check” rather than secret ballots.

- Will wait a bit: health care, climate change, energy, immigration, trade (NAFTA revisions), gays in the military, and repeal of Bush’s tax cuts.