

## Hatch Opens Narrow Lead Over Pawlenty

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Even though the race remains too close to call, Attorney General Mike Hatch has opened up a narrow 6 point lead over Governor Tim Pawlenty, 45 percent to 39 percent, with just over a week before Election Day. Independence Party candidate Peter Hutchinson is drawing 9 percent, with 7 percent still undecided. The Humphrey Institute survey of 663 likely Minnesota voters was conducted October 23-28, 2006 and has a 3.8 margin of error.

Hatch's edge results from three factors:

- The Minnesotan electorate is tilting toward the Democratic Party. Democrats are more fired up to vote and the Republican Party's "brand name" has been tarnished.
- Voters are adopting a more sour evaluation of the state's circumstances, the Governor's performance, and his personality compared to Hatch's. The concerns of voters are dominated by "Democratic issues" (health care, education, and the Iraq War); the issues promoted by the Governor and Republicans (illegal immigration, gay marriage, and terrorism) do not rank highly on voters' agenda.
- A backlash against President Bush and the Iraq War is hurting the Governor.

### Hatch's Edge

#### Horse Race Among Likely Voters

	Pawlenty	Hatch	Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
<b>Total</b>	39%	45%	9%	7%
<b>Republican</b>	87%	6%	4%	3%
<b>Independent</b>	26%	30%	23%	21%
<b>Democrat</b>	7%	78%	10%	5%

Hatch has widened his advantage from 2 points (44% to 42%) in the mid-September Humphrey Survey to 6 points in late October. Hutchinson's support has remained unchanged. (Previous surveys can be found at the Center's website:

[http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/cspg/elections\\_projects/polling\\_archives/2006\\_hhh\\_surveys.html](http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/cspg/elections_projects/polling_archives/2006_hhh_surveys.html))

The independent voter – that is, Minnesotans who do not identify with either the Democratic or Republican parties -- slightly favors Hatch over Pawlenty (30% to 26%). Hutchinson continues to come in third among voters who should be his political base, drawing only 23 percent of support from independents.

### **Election Outcome Can Still Change**

Although Hatch’s 6 point lead is greater than the margin of error (3.8%), there are three factors that can shift the outcome in the Governor’s favor during the final days of the campaign. First, **7 percent of likely voters have not made up their mind and 21 percent of independents remain undecided.** A sharp swing of these voters could tip the outcome of this close race.

Second, **more than 2 out of 10 Democrats remain unwilling to sign on with Hatch. By comparison, Pawlenty has about half as many potential defectors among Republicans. The defection of Democrats from Hatch could be an opportunity for Pawlenty.** Fourteen percent of likely Minnesotan voters who support Democratic Senate candidate Amy Klobuchar plan to support the Governor rather than Hatch. But the full effect of Democratic defections from Hatch is being dulled by Hutchinson’s candidacy, which is drawing 10 percent of Democrats.

Third, **more than 1 out of 10 likely voters who currently support Pawlenty or Hatch may change their mind and support a different candidate. About half of Hutchinson’s supporters indicate a willingness to consider another candidate.**

### **Some Voters May Switch Candidates**

	<b>Definitely</b>	<b>Might Change Mind</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
<b>Governor Vote</b>			
<b>Pawlenty</b>	86%	13%	1%
<b>Hatch</b>	88%	12%	0%
<b>Hutchinson</b>	48%	48%	4%

### **Changing Party Motivation and Support**

Although the contest for governor remains fluid, Hatch’s lead is anchored in significant developments. **The most important factor in the 2006 Minnesota elections is the Democratic tilt of voters.**

Minnesotans harbor different levels of devotion to the Republican and Democratic parties. The most loyal are individuals who outright declare themselves a member of one party or the other (what we call “strict partisans”). A somewhat less devoted group of partisans are the “leaners” who initially decline to indicate a party loyalty but when

prodded indicate that they “lean” towards one party. There is also a group of true independents who insist that they do not belong to either party.

**Among likely voters, Democratic voters (including leaners) hold an 11 point advantage over Republicans – 48 percent to 37 percent**, with 13 percent independent and 2 percent not willing to respond. Identification with the Democratic and Republican parties do change over time as new voters emerge, circumstances change, and Americans update their evaluations of the each party.

**Minnesotan Likely Voters (includes leaners)**

<b>Identification with Political Parties</b>	
<b>Republican (including leaners)</b>	37%
<b>Independent</b>	13%
<b>Democrat (including leaners)</b>	48%
<b>Don’t Know / Refused</b>	2%

Two factors explain the current Democratic advantage heading toward Election Day. First and most important, **the Democrats are more fired up than the Republicans. The strong interest of Democrats has substantially increased since mid-September, growing from a 6 point advantage over Republicans to a 13 point gap.** This disparity helps to explain why more Democrats than Republicans were identified as likely to vote in our survey. There is also a noticeable drop off in interest among independents since mid-September.

**Very interested in the 2006 election (all Minnesotans 18 and over)**

	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Identification with Political Parties</b>			
<b>Republican</b>	58%	60%	2
<b>Independent</b>	54%	39%	-15
<b>Democrat</b>	64%	73%	9

Evidence that Democrats have more “fire in the belly” than Republicans has been consistently found at the national level. A recent study of registered voters by the non-partisan Pew Research Center reported an 18 point Democratic advantage in showing more enthusiasm about voting and an 11 point Democratic lead in having given a lot of thought to the election. (This is comparable to the Republican gaps before their sweeping victories in the 1994 congressional elections.)

**A second factor is that the Republican “name brand” has been tarnished in the eyes of likely Minnesotan voters.** The Democratic advantage stems from several factors. The most important is the erosion of Republicanism – **there is a four percentage point decline in affiliation with the Republican Party from 29 percent in mid-September to 25 percent in late October.** Rather than switching to Democrats, these Republicans appear to be gravitating toward thinking of themselves as independents.

**Independent voters are slightly more inclined to report that they lean toward the Democratic Party.** Minnesotan adults who report that they are independents who lean toward the Democratic Party have grown from 8 percent in mid-September to 10 percent in late October. The core support for the Democratic Party has not, however, increased, remaining stuck at 36 percent.

**Identification with Democratic and Republican Parties (all Minnesotans 18 and over)**

	September	October
<b>Identification with Political Parties</b>		
<b>Republican</b>	29%	25%
<b>Republican Leaning Independent</b>	9%	9%
<b>Independent / Other / No Response</b>	18%	20%
<b>Democratic Leaning Independent</b>	8%	10%
<b>Democrat</b>	36%	36%

The avalanche of bad news for Republicans from the Mark Foley scandal to Iraq has registered in the running tally that Minnesotans keep of the parties. **Minnesotan Republicans are becoming more hesitant and are shifting to calling themselves independents while independents are toying with the idea of calling themselves Democrats.**

**Impact of Minnesota Issues and Personalities**

Hatch is also being helped by the more sour evaluation of the state’s circumstances, the Governor’s performance, and his personality as well as by an agenda that is dominated by “Democratic” issues. Each of these advantages has been targeted, with only mixed results, by the Pawlenty campaign.

**Souring on Minnesota and Pawlenty:** Pawlenty has lost one of his strongest assets at the beginning the general election – a generally positive evaluation of Minnesota’s direction. **By late October, likely voters are split over the state’s direction – 46 percent report that Minnesota is off on the “wrong track” versus 44 percent that indicate it is heading in the “right direction.” This is a reversal from mid-September when 48 percent were optimistic compared to 43 percent who offered a more dire outlook.**

**More Pessimistic Evaluation of Minnesota’s Direction (likely voters)**

	September	October
<b>Direction of Minnesota</b>		
<b>Right Direction</b>	48%	44%
<b>Wrong Track</b>	43%	46%
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	9%	10%

**The stronger negative view of the state’s direction is boosting Hatch’s candidacy.** About three-quarters of Minnesotans who see the state off on the “wrong track” support the Attorney General. A similar proportion of likely voters who are optimistic about the state’s direction support the Governor. The problem for the Pawlenty campaign is that there are fewer optimistic voters.

**Concerns about Minnesota are echoed in a more tepid evaluation of the Governor’s performance. Since mid-September, the Governor’s approval has dropped by 6 points while his disapproval rating has risen by 7 points.** Although the trend is moving away from the Governor, a 50% approval rating during this election cycle is respectable and is a sign of Pawlenty’s enduring appeal. About three-quarters of likely voters who approve of the Governor’s job performance plan to vote for him.

**Tepid Approval of Pawlenty’s Job Performance**

	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>
<b>Pawlenty’s Job as Governor</b>		
<b>Approve</b>	56%	50%
<b>Disapprove</b>	40%	47%
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	4%	3%

**“Democratic” Issues Dominate Policy Agenda:** The issues that likely Minnesotan voters identify as the single most important challenges facing the state are health care (up 4 points since September), education, and the Iraq War (up 3 points). The issues promoted by the Governor and Republicans – illegal immigration, gay marriage, and terrorism -- have not become primary concerns of voters.

**Education and Health Care Dominate as Single Most Important Problems**

	<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>
<b>Most Important Issue</b>		
<b>Education</b>	23%	22%
<b>Health Care</b>	23%	27%
<b>The economy</b>	15%	15%
<b>The war in Iraq</b>	12%	15%
<b>Illegal Immigration</b>	7%	7%
<b>Gas Prices</b>	5%	2%
<b>Terrorism</b>	5%	4%
<b>Gay marriage</b>	4%	4%
<b>Don't Know / Other / Refused</b>	6%	6%

**Hatch Enjoys Large Advantage on Voters' Top Issues:** The Attorney General holds a commanding 10 to 15 percentage point lead over Pawlenty on the two issues singled out most by likely Minnesotan voters – health care and education – and is reaping 8 out of ten voters who are optimistic about the job he will do in these areas. On handling the economy, Hatch has fought the Governor to a draw even as the economy has grown.

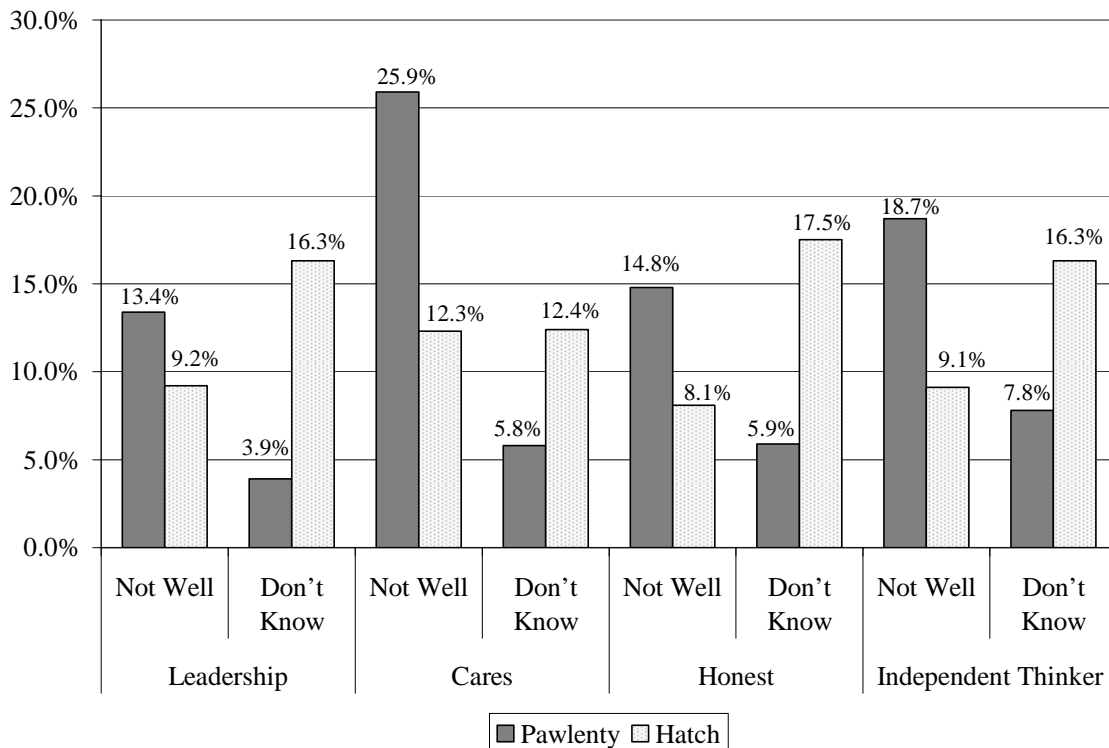
**Hatch Holds Commanding Advantage on the State's Two Top Problems**

	Total	Plan to vote for Pawlenty	Plan to vote for Hatch	Plan to vote for Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
<b>Candidate Expected to do Better Job on:</b>					
<b>Health Care</b>					
<b>Pawlenty</b>	30%	94%	3%	2%	2%
<b>Hatch</b>	46%	8%	84%	5%	4%
<b>Hutchinson</b>	8%	10%	19%	65%	6%
<b>Education</b>					
<b>Pawlenty</b>	32%	92%	4%	2%	3%
<b>Hatch</b>	45%	8%	83%	6%	3%
<b>Hutchinson</b>	8%	9%	28%	59%	4%
<b>The Economy</b>					
<b>Pawlenty</b>	39%	88%	7%	3%	2%
<b>Hatch</b>	39%	3%	90%	4%	4%
<b>Hutchinson</b>	8%	6%	25%	64%	6%

**The Governor enjoys substantially larger advantages on terrorism, gay marriage, and illegal immigration. The problem is that they are not salient and therefore fail to influence many voters.**

**The Unexpected Personality Twist:** The Pawlenty campaign set out to capitalize on what it saw as Hatch’s slashing personal style and reap the benefits of the Governor’s popularity. This strategy has not worked.

**The Governor is consistently perceived far more negatively than Hatch on a range of personality traits** – from leadership to “caring about people like you,” honesty, and independent thinking. By contrast, **the Pawlenty campaign has failed to “define” Hatch in negative terms for a number of likely voters:** by more than 2 to 1, more voters report that they “don’t know” about Hatch’s personality than they do about Pawlenty’s personality.



**Backlash Against President Bush and Iraq War**

Mid-term elections are usually run as local affairs that focus on state personalities and issues. The 2006 elections are departing from this common pattern. National personalities and issues are hurting Republican candidates and Governor Pawlenty in particular.

President Bush remains quite unpopular, with 62% disapproving of his job performance (52 percent strongly disapprove). **Two thirds of likely voters who disapprove of the President's handling of his job plan to vote for Hatch.** Only 11 percent of these Bush critics support Pawlenty, this is a 5 percentage point decline since mid-September.

**Bush's Unpopularity Rubs Off on Pawlenty**

	Total	Pawlenty	Hatch	Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
<b>President Bush's handling of his job</b>					
<b>Approve</b>	37%	86%	5%	4%	5%
<b>Disapprove</b>	62%	11%	69%	13%	7%
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	1%	43%	14%	14%	29%

**The President's handling of the Iraq War is also a liability for the Governor.** Sixty-four percent disapprove of the President's handling of Iraq (56 percent strongly disapprove). Only 16 percent of these War critics support Pawlenty.

**Disapproval of Bush's Handling of Iraq War Weighs Down Pawlenty**

	Total	Pawlenty	Hatch	Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
<b>President Bush's handling of Iraq War</b>					
<b>Approve</b>	34%	84%	6%	5%	5%
<b>Disapprove</b>	64%	16%	66%	11%	7%
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	2%	18%	27%	27%	27%

**Mark Foley's inappropriate behavior toward congressional pages along with the corruption scandal involving Jack Abramoff also appear to be casting a bit of a cloud over the Governor's campaign.** By a 2 to 1 margin, Minnesotan likely voters perceive the Democrats in Congress as more ethical than congressional Republicans. Only 8 percent of those who view the Democrats as more ethical support Pawlenty.

	Total	Pawlenty	Hatch	Hutchinson	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
<b>More Ethical Party</b>					
<b>Democrats in Congress</b>	41%	8%	79%	10%	4%
<b>Republicans in Congress</b>	21%	89%	4%	4%	4%
<b>Don't Know / Refused</b>	38%	47%	30%	12%	11%

**Modest Gender Gap:** The swirl of partisan, state, and national issues are creating a modest gender gap. **Women favor Hatch over Pawlenty by 9 points. The Governor’s 7 point advantage among male voters in mid-September has disappeared by late October.**

	<b>Pawlenty</b>	<b>Hatch</b>	<b>Hutchinson</b>	<b>Don't Know/ Other/ Refused</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
<b>Male</b>	40%	41%	11%	7%
<b>Female</b>	39%	48%	7%	6%

## About the Survey

The Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs designed the survey. The Center and Humphrey Institute are non-partisan academic institutions that are committed to rigorous research that contributes to informed discussions of elections and public affairs more generally.

The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (director) and Joanne M. Miller. Melanie Burns provided superior research assistance. Jacobs and Miller are responsible for designing and analyzing the survey. No statements of fact, interpretations, or conclusions should be attributed to the Humphrey Institute.

The survey was fielded by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA) at the University of Connecticut, which has extensive national and state experience conducting non-partisan surveys on politics and government policy. CSRA called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within the State of Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. The sample was designed to represent different regions of the state in proportion to the number of adults living in each region. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

1,186 residents of Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between October 23 and October 28, 2006, and 663 were determined to be likely to vote. Results are based on a model that adjusts responses according to the likelihood of a respondent voting. Likelihood to vote is based on the following factors: the likelihood of voting as reported by the respondent, voter registration, past voting behavior, and interest in the election. In addition, the results have been weighted to reflect the number of adults in a household and the number of telephone lines reaching the household as well as the demographic characteristics of Minnesota based on region, sex, age, education, and race.

The distribution of party identification among likely voters analyzed in this survey is as follows:

Republican	37%
Independent	13%
Democrat	48%
Don't Know / Refused	2%

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among likely voters will differ by no more than 3.8 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the state. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.