

The Bush Drag: Kennedy Trails Klobuchar in U.S. Senate Race

Lawrence R. Jacobs
Director, Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota

Joanne M. Miller
Research Associate, 2006 Elections Project
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
University of Minnesota

September 21, 2006

The Democratic Party nominee for U.S. Senate, Amy Klobuchar, holds a commanding advantage over the Republican Party nominee, Mark Kennedy, according to a Humphrey Institute survey of 1,023 Minnesota voters in the week following the primary. Kennedy's campaign is being badly hurt by President George Bush's unpopularity and by deep concerns about the direction of the country and state. Klobuchar is strongly benefiting from extraordinary concern over Iraq and a huge lead among women voters even as she holds her own among men. The issue of terrorism works strongly for Kennedy but it is not playing a dominant role in voters' minds as they weigh the country's challenges. Kennedy's difficulties are not at this time pulling down Republican Tim Pawlenty in his bid for reelection as Governor. Voters who support Klobuchar are crossing party lines to support Pawlenty. The survey was conducted between September 13 and 18, 2006. (Primary elections were held on September 12th.)

Large Lead for Klobuchar: The Democratic Party nominee leads Kennedy, 52 percent to 36 percent. In a reversal of the normal pattern, Republican support for Kennedy is weaker than Democratic support for Klobuchar: 14 percent of Republicans have drifted from Kennedy compared to 8 percent who have wandered from Klobuchar. Adding to Kennedy's difficulties, he is trailing Klobuchar by 22 points among independents (49 to 27).

Klobuchar Holds Commanding Lead

	Klobuchar	Kennedy	Fitzgerald	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Total	52%	36%	7%	6%
Republican	7%	86%	2%	5%
Independent	49%	27%	20%	5%
Democrat	92%	3%	1%	4%

Independent Party candidate Robert Fitzgerald is receiving support from 7 percent of Minnesota likely voters. He faces several challenges. He is currently lagging behind Kennedy and, especially, Klobuchar in winning over independent voters. What support that Fitzgerald has attracted may be soft. Four out of 10 Fitzgerald supporters indicate that they might change their mind. By contrast, over 80 percent of Klobuchar and Kennedy supporters report that their decisions are "definite."

Bush Baggage: President Bush’s unpopularity and voter concerns about challenges facing Minnesota and nation are weighing down Kennedy’s campaign. Among the 60 percent who disapprove of the President’s overall job performance, 77 percent favor Klobuchar. (Among critics of the President, the support of Mike Hatch – the Democratic Gubernatorial nominee – was 9 points lower.) On Iraq, 62 percent disapprove of the President’s handling of the War (50 percent of them strongly disapprove) and 76 percent of these voters support Klobuchar. A similar pattern of voter discontent with the President’s performance weighing down Kennedy is evident across a range of policies.

The Backlash from an Unpopular President and Concerns about the Country

	Total	Plan to vote for Klobuchar	Plan to vote for Kennedy	Plan to vote for Fitzgerald	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Bush’s Job as President					
Approve	38%	13%	77%	6%	4%
Disapprove	60%	77%	11%	7%	6%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	42%	17%	17%	25%
Bush’s Job Handling Iraq War					
Approve	36%	12%	78%	6%	5%
Disapprove	62%	76%	12%	7%	6%
Don't Know / Refused	2%	15%	69%	0%	15%

Voter concerns about the direction of Minnesota and the nation are also dragging down Kennedy. Among the 70 percent of voters who see the country heading in the wrong direction, two thirds plan to vote for Klobuchar.

Kennedy is not getting as much of boost from positive evaluations as the state’s top Republican up for reelection, Governor Tim Pawlenty. Kennedy’s support among the 38 percent who approve of Bush’s job is 7 points lower than the boost enjoyed by Pawlenty (77 percent for Kennedy versus 84 percent for Pawlenty). Kennedy’s backing among the 26 percent of Minnesota voters who see the country as heading in the right direction is 10 points lower than experienced by Pawlenty (79 percent for Kennedy versus 89 percent for Pawlenty). Kennedy’s support among the 48 percent who indicate that the state is heading in the right direction is 13 points lower than Pawlenty’s (57 percent for Kennedy versus 70 percent for Pawlenty). These differences may reflect distinctions between state and national levels as well as voters’ lower evaluations of Kennedy’s capabilities compared to the Republican Governor.

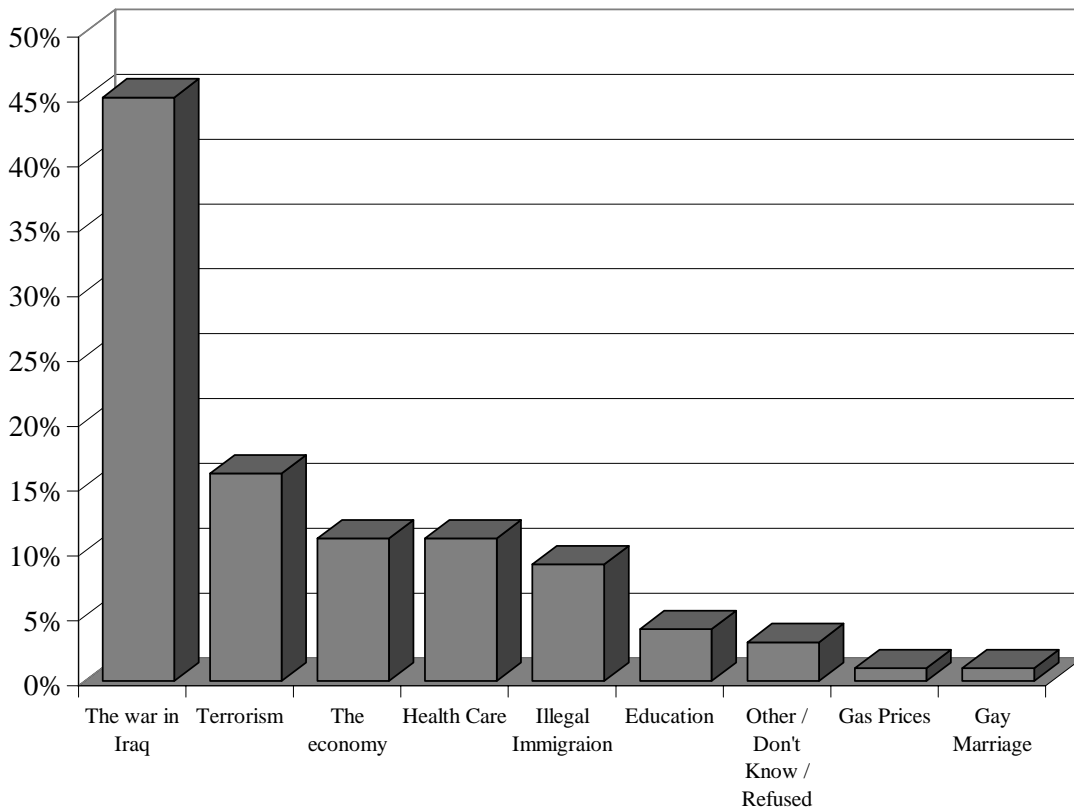
The Backlash from National and Minnesota Worries

	Total	Plan to vote for Klobuchar	Plan to vote for Kennedy	Plan to vote for Fitzgerald	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Direction of the United States					
Right Direction	26%	10%	79%	7%	3%
Wrong Track	70%	67%	20%	7%	6%
Don't Know / Refused	5%	42%	42%	3%	13%
Direction of Minnesota					
Right Direction	48%	29%	57%	8%	7%
Wrong Track	43%	77%	14%	5%	4%
Don't Know / Refused	9%	52%	33%	7%	9%

Voters are distinguishing between state and national conditions. They are more optimistic about the direction that Minnesota is heading in compared to the nation's direction (48 percent versus 26 percent).

The Political Cost of the Iraq War: Iraq is the preeminent issue facing the country in the minds of likely voters and Klobuchar holds a commanding advantage on it. When asked to identify the single most important national issue, nearly half (45 percent) identify the War in Iraq. Although Republicans are less concerned about Iraq (26 percent identify it as the nation's most important issue compared to 31 percent who identify terrorism), it is the dominant concern of 47 percent of independents – a politically important swing vote. (59 percent of Democrats rank Iraq as the nation's top challenge.)

Iraq Dominates as the Nation's Most Important Issue



Iraq's dominance in the publics' thinking is staggering. First, it is unusual for one issue to dominate to this degree. Second, domestic issues and specifically the economy have typically topped the list of public concerns. In an extraordinary development, 61 percent of likely Minnesota voters identify the Iraq War and terrorism as the top issues, with the usually dominant domestic issues lagging far behind – the economy and health care are identified by 11 percent each. The effect is to crowd out other contenders for voter attention -- illegal immigration, education, gas prices and gay marriage.

Kennedy’s political problem is that on the preeminent national issue on the minds of voters (Iraq), voters much more strongly support Klobuchar. Among the large plurality identifying Iraq as the single most important national issue, 67 percent support the Democrat and only 23 percent favor Kennedy. **Kennedy holds an even larger advantage on terrorism (72 percent to 21 percent) but voters are substantially less concerned about it 5 years after the 9/11 attacks.**

Klobuchar Dominates on Top Voter National Concern (Iraq), Kennedy Holds Advantage on Terrorism

		Plan to vote for Klobuchar	Plan to vote for Kennedy	Plan to vote for Fitzgerald	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Single Most Important National Issue	Total Identifying Issue as Most Important				
War in Iraq	45%	67%	23%	5%	6%
Terrorism	16%	21%	72%	3%	4%
Economy	11%	59%	28%	7%	6%
Health Care	11%	64%	27%	5%	5%
Illegal Immigration	9%	16%	58%	25%	2%

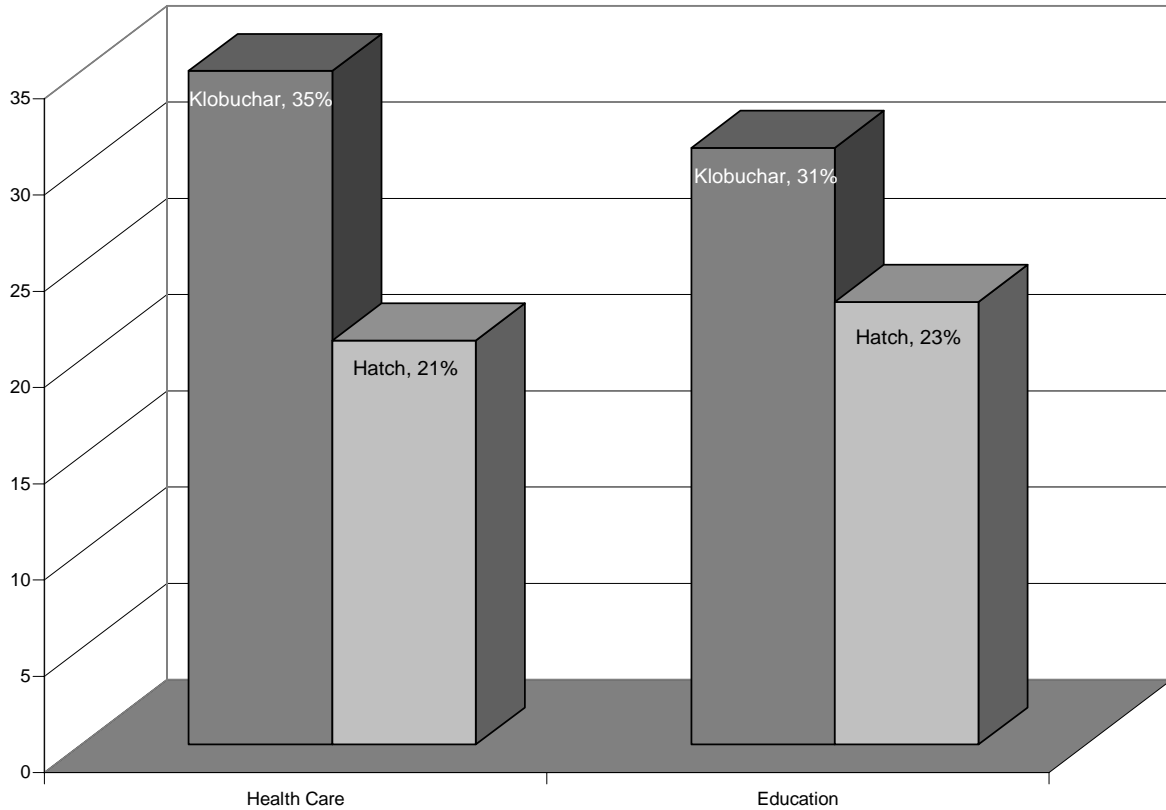
The Gender Gap: Kennedy is suffering from a huge deficit among women voters. Although Democrats often do better among women, Klobuchar has an unusually large 26 point advantage (59 to 33). Five years after the 9/11 attacks, the Democrat appears to be benefiting from the tendency to view women candidates as less prone to use military force and to take care of the home front. Even among men (who tend to support Republican candidates), Klobuchar enjoys a small lead. The gender gap does work against Pawlenty in his gubernatorial campaign, but it is considerably smaller (11 points versus Kennedy’s 26 point deficit).

Klobuchar Enjoys Huge Advantage Among Women Voters

	Plan to vote for Klobuchar	Plan to vote for Kennedy	Plan to vote for Fitzgerald	Don't Know/ Other/ Refused
Male	45%	40%	11%	5%
Female	59%	33%	2%	6%

The boost that gender is giving Klobuchar is evident by contrasting her advantage and Hatch’s over their respective Republican opponents on the state’s top two issues as identified by likely voters. On health care, Klobuchar enjoys a 35 point advantage over Kennedy compared to Hatch’s 23 point lead over Pawlenty. A similar Klobuchar edge is evident on education – 31 points for Klobuchar versus 23 points for Hatch. In other words, the two Democrats are both ahead of their Republican opponents on health care and education but gender is widening Klobuchar’s advantage.

Democratic Candidate Lead over Republican on State’s Top Issues: The Advantage of Gender



Split Ticket Voting Helps Pawlenty: Kennedy’s difficulties are not pulling down Republican Governor Tim Pawlenty. At this point, a significant number of voters are not turning to Democrats across the board. Among voters who have selected a candidate, **13 percent of Klobuchar supporters are crossing party lines to support Pawlenty.** This is one of the most important dynamics of this fall’s campaign to follow closely.

Split Ticket Voting Helps Governor Pawlenty

	Plan to vote for Pawlenty	Plan to vote for Hatch	Plan to vote for Hutchinson
Plan to vote for Klobuchar	13%	81%	6%
Plan to vote for Kennedy	91%	5%	4%
Plan to vote for Fitzgerald	22%	15%	63%

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.

1,023 residents of Minnesota were interviewed by telephone between September 13 and 18, 2006. 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	30%
Independent	23%
Democrat	37%

In theory, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among likely voters will differ by no more than 3.9 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.