

Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll

Democratic Advantage in Minnesota Legislative Elections and in Defining Budget Mandate, And the Politics of Rage

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance
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Minnesota may be an exception to the Republican dominance in 2010. According to the latest Minnesota Public Radio News and Humphrey Institute Poll, **Democrats enjoy a 10 point advantage among likely voters in contests for the Minnesota legislature.** Although Democrats lead in both the gubernatorial and legislative races, **a solid plurality of likely voters prefers to have control over Minnesota government split between the parties.**

Voters appear poised to provide Democratic gubernatorial candidate Mark Dayton with a mandate to raise taxes to balance the state budget. A majority favors increasing income taxes on wealthier Minnesotans and an additional 13% favors expanding the sales tax to include clothing and other services to fix the budget deficit. The proposal by Republican gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer to rely on spending cuts to balance the budget is attracting support from only 1 out of 5 likely voters.

2010 may be remembered as the angry election, with majorities distrusting and expressing anger at Washington. Economic hard times, disapproval of President Barack Obama, and the mobilization of the Tea Party have all contributed to the rage among many Minnesotan voters.

Today's political and economic uncertainty is depressing the approval ratings of both Republican Governor Tim Pawlenty and Democratic U.S. Senator Al Franken. Only Democratic U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar enjoys strong support among voters for her performance in office.

The survey was conducted of 751 likely voters in Minnesota between October 21 and October 25, 2010. The margin of error ranges between +/-3.6 percentage points based on the conventional calculation and +/-5.5 percentage points, which is a more cautious estimate based on professional best practices. For smaller subgroups the margin of sampling error is larger. The section at the end of this report, "About the Survey,"

discusses the statistical calculations for the margin of sampling error and how to interpret it.

Democratic Advantage in Elections to Minnesota Legislature

As Minnesota Democrats have matched or exceeded Republicans in their enthusiasm and interest in the November elections, they have revived their party’s prospects for maintaining their majorities in the Minnesota Legislature. When Minnesota voters are asked whether they would support an unnamed Democratic or Republican candidate for the State Legislature in November, 46% expressed support for the Democrat and 36% for the Republican (18% did not offer a preference). The Democratic lead has grown from 2 points in August to double digits this fall (11 points in September and 10 points in October). Democrats also hold an edge among “leaners”: when the nearly 1 out of 5 voters who did not initially indicate which party’s candidate they would support were pressed to choose, 51% chose the Democratic candidate and 38% selected the GOP option. It is important to note, though, that this generic ballot is a crude measure that fails to take account of individual races and candidates.

Democratic Edge in Minnesota Legislative Elections

	August 2008	Early October 2008	Late October 2008	August 2010	September 2010	October 2010
Democratic candidate	49%	45%	49%	41%	48%	46%
Republican candidate	36%	34%	33%	39%	37%	36%
DK/Refuse	13%	19%	16%	20%	15%	18%

Three factors account for the Democratic lead. First, **voters are less critical of the Democratically-controlled legislature.** Their evaluation of its job performance remains negative (a plurality of 47% disapprove) but the criticism has abated (it has fallen by 11 points since last month). In addition, the Republican advantage for handling the state budget has been neutralized.

Improving Ratings for Legislature and Democratic Budget Performance

	January 2008*	May 2010*	August 2010**	Sept. 2010**	Oct. 2010**
Evaluation of Minnesota Legislature					
Approve of legislature's job performance	46%	37%	25%	27%	34%
Disapprove of legislature's job performance	44%	52%	57%	58%	47%
DK/Refuse	10%	12%	18%	15%	19%
Handling of State Budget					
Democrats Do Better Job Handling State Budget			27%		34%
Republicans Do Better Job Handling State Budget			37%		32%
DK/refused			36%		34%

*Representative sample of all adults were interviewed.

**Representative sample of likely voters were interviewed

Second, the **Democrats are unifying behind their party’s legislative candidates to a greater degree than Republicans are unifying behind their party’s candidates, and independents favor the Democratic candidate over the Republican by almost a 2 to 1 margin.** Among independents who can be important to tipping competitive districts, the Democrats hold a 14 point edge (32% to 18%) though half of independents have not yet decided on a candidate.

Democratic Advantage Among Independents

	Support Democratic Candidate for Minnesota Legislature	Support Republican Candidate for Minnesota Legislature	Somebody/DK/Refuse
Republican	7%	84%	9%
Independent	32%	18%	50%
Democratic	86%	2%	12%

Third, **Democratic candidates have an edge among the more motivated voters.** Democratic candidates hold a 6 point advantage over their GOP rivals among voters who are extremely or very enthusiastic about the elections (49% to 43%).

Motivated Voters Particularly Supportive of Democratic Legislative Candidates

	Support Democratic Candidate for Minnesota Legislature	Support Republican Candidate for Minnesota Legislature
Enthusiastic (Extremely or Very) (36%)	49%	43%

Voters Prefer Divided Government

Although Minnesota Democrats are bucking the national trend by moving ahead in the gubernatorial race and on the generic legislative ballot, **a strong plurality of Minnesotans would prefer not to see Democrats assume control over both the governor’s office and the state legislature.** Forty-seven percent believe that it is better to have party control split as compared to 21% who prefer to have both bodies unified under the same party. A third of voters expressed no preference.

Support for divided government defies partisan gamesmanship, especially among Democrats who appear poised to control both the executive and legislative branches. Perhaps not surprisingly, majorities of Republicans (55% to 21%) and independents (54% to 13%) prefer divided party control of state government. What is striking is that a **plurality of Democrats favors splitting party control by a 38% to 23% margin.**

Broad Support for Splitting Control over Minnesota Government

	Prefer Split Control Over Governorship and Legislature (47%)	Prefer One Party Control Over Governorship and Legislature (21%)	DK/Refused (32%)
Democrats	38%	23%	38%
Independents	54%	13%	33%
Republicans	55%	21%	24%

Budget Mandate

As voters prepare to cast their ballots, they appear to embrace a pragmatic fiscal conservatism. A majority prefers smaller government that provides fewer services over a larger government that delivers more services by a 52% to 35% margin. Although a majority of Dayton supporter prefers larger government, it is striking that more than a quarter favor small government as do a majority of Horner supporters.

Fiscal Conservatism – Smaller Government with Fewer Services

	Prefer smaller state government, fewer services	Prefer larger state government, more services
Likely Voters	52%	35%
Support Emmer	86%	10%
Support Dayton	27%	58%
Support Horner	56%	35%

Although a majority of voters believe that tight economic times require smaller government, **there is equally strong commitment to raising taxes to help pay for government’s expenses for existing programs.** Only 22% support relying on spending cuts to balance the state budget while nearly two-thirds favor raising taxes – 52% back increasing income taxes on higher income earners and 13% are inclined toward widening the sales taxes to clothing and other services.

A Dayton win would signal a clear mandate with regard to fiscal policy. Three quarters of his supporters favor increasing income taxes on the wealthiest to balance the state budget while only 6% favor cutting spending as the primary tool. Among those who are facing bad financial circumstances at home or have seen their circumstances worsen, nearly 6 out of 10 favors taxing wealthier Minnesotans.

Dayton Supporters Favor Raising Taxes

	Cut Spending to Balance State Budget	Increase Income Tax to Balance State Budget	Expand Sales Tax to Clothing and other Services
Likely Voters	22%	52%	13%
Support Emmer	53%	22%	13%
Support Dayton	6%	76%	10%
Support Horner	16%	31%	41%

In addition to raising revenue from income and sales taxes, 6 out of 10 voters back an expansion of casino gambling off of Indian reservations in order to help balance the state's budget. Only a third opposes this and backers of all three major gubernatorial candidates provide similar levels of support.

The Angry Election

2010 may be remembered as the angry election. Three quarters of Minnesota likely voters never or only sometimes trust the government in Washington to do the right thing. Even 56% of Democrats distrust the federal government. **Voters are more than distrustful; they are angry.** Seventy-six percent report that they know people personally who are more angry with the federal government than in the past and 53% indicate that they themselves are more angry at the federal government than they used to be.

Anger at Washington

Never or only some of the time trust the government in Washington to the right thing	74%
People they know are more angry with federal government than in past	76%
Personally more angry with federal government than in past	53%

Three factors appear to be driving the anger and distrust.

Economic Pain Breeds Distrust and Anger: Anger and distrust are being fuelled by the tough economic times. Approximately 8 out of 10 of the 92% of voters who report that national economic conditions are fair or poor distrust the federal government, as do 85% of those who say that their household financial situation has worsened in the past two years. In addition, 57% of the 6 out of 10 who report that their current financial situation is fair or poor and 65% of the nearly 4 out of 10 who indicate that their household finances have worsened over the past two years are more angry at the federal government than they used to be.

Bad Economic Times Fuelling Government Distrust

	Trust Government Always or Mostly	Trust Government Only Sometimes or Never
National Economic Conditions		
Excellent or good (7%)	62%	38%
Fair or poor (92%)	22%	77%
Household financial conditions		
Better (12%)	44%	56%
Worse (37%)	14%	85%

Obama Fuelling Anger: President Barack Obama has also stirred anger. Among the 44% of likely voters in Minnesota who disapprove of Obama’s performance, nearly 8 out of 10 indicate that they are angrier at the federal government than in the past.

Disapproval of Obama Fuels Anger at Federal Government

	Personally more angry at federal government than in past	Not more angry at federal government than in past
Approve of Obama’s job performance (50%)	33%	65%
Disapprove of Obama’s job performance (44%)	78%	19%

The Tea Party Revolt: The Tea Party movement has both sparked the anger and distrust and been fuelled by it. Nearly 1 out of 5 voters support the Tea Party (17%). More than 9 out of 10 of these Tea Party supporters distrust Washington and report that people they know are angrier with the federal government than in the past. Eighty percent of Tea Party supporters themselves are angrier at the federal government than they used to be.

Tea Party Supporters Favor Emmer: Eight in 10 of the 17% who support the Tea Party say they are going to vote for Emmer, compared to 3% for Dayton and 10% for Horner. Among the 32% who oppose the Tea Party, 75% say they are going to vote for Dayton, compared to 7% for Emmer and 8% for Horner.

The Upside of Anger: The angry election of 2010 has motivated voters to engage. The 53% of voters who are angrier at the federal government than they used to be are also more attentive to the election (by a 39 to 29 point margin) and more enthusiastic about it (by a 40 to 32 point margin) than those who are not angrier than they used to be.

Where’s the Hope? In an age of rage, it may not be surprising that hope is in short supply. Even here in Minnesota, 9 out of 10 likely voter reports that they are somewhat, not too, or not at all hopeful based on what state government has done over the past four years. Only 8% are extremely or very hopeful.

Turbulent Waters for Governing

Senior government officials are lightning rods for voter anger. Governor Pawlenty’s approval rating has fallen among likely voters from 46% in August to 41% in October. A majority of independents (52%) and nearly 1 out of 5 Republicans (16%) disapprove of his job performance.

U.S. Senator Al Franken’s job rating remains below the symbolically salient 50% level -- 48%. His rating is pulled down not only by 63% of Republicans who disapprove of his performance but also by 13% of Democrats and 28% of independents who are critical.

U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar continues to enjoy the strongest approval ratings among Minnesota's leading government officials, with 64% giving her favorable ratings. She draws wide support from independents (62%) and even a plurality of Republicans (44%).

Klobuchar Enjoys Strongest Job Ratings

Klobuchar	Evaluations of Job Performance
Approval	64%
Disapproval	22%
Franken	
Approval	48%
Disapproval	34%
Pawlenty	
Approval	41%
Disapproval	50%

About the Survey

This survey is a collaboration between Minnesota Public Radio News and the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. The survey was analyzed by the Center. The research team was Lawrence R. Jacobs (Center Director) and Joanne M. Miller (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science). Charles Gregory provided research assistance.

The survey was fielded by the Information Specialists Group (ISG) and is based on a landline random digit dial survey in Minnesota. ISG called a sample of telephone exchanges that was randomly selected by a computer from a list of active residential exchanges within Minnesota. Within each exchange, random digits were added to form a complete telephone number, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers. Within each household, one adult was selected to be the respondent for the survey.

As is common with public opinion surveys, the data were weighted. In the first stage, the data were weighted based on the number of potential survey respondents and the number of landline telephone numbers in the household. In the second stage, data were weighted according to cell phone usage, as well as gender, age, race, and Hispanic ethnicity to approximate the demographic characteristics of the population according to the Census.

Results are based on a model that accounts for the likelihood of a respondent voting based on the following factors: self-reported probability of voting in the upcoming election, voting in the 2006 gubernatorial election as reported by the respondent, interest in the 2010 election, and whether the respondent reported being registered to vote. The general model projects a turnout of 58%. A model that projects a turnout of 71% yielded similar results.

The key characteristics of the sample's likely voters in Minnesota are the following:

	Likely Voters
Republican	38%
Independent	16%
Democrat	45%
Men	47%
Women	53%
High School or less or Some College	52%
College Graduate or Postgraduate Training	48%
Less than \$50,000 More than \$50,000	41% 59%

(Percentages here and above may round to higher than 100% due to rounding.)

Party identification percentages are calculated by first asking respondents: “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” Respondents who identify as an Independent or as a member of another party, as well as those who say “I don’t know” or refused to answer the question, were asked a follow-up question: “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or Democratic Party or neither?” Respondents who think of themselves as closer to the Republican Party are counted as Republicans and those who think of themselves as closer to the Democratic Party are counted as Democrats. The only respondents who are counted as Independents are those who say that they do not lean toward one of the two major parties.

751 likely voters living in Minnesota were interviewed by telephone October 21 and October 25, 2010. The margin of error ranges between +/-3.6 percentage points based on the conventional calculation and +/-5.5 percentage points, which is a more cautious estimate that takes into account design effects in accordance with professional best practices. The conventional calculation of the margin of sampling error is primarily based on the number of respondents and, critically, assumes that all respondents selected for interviewing were actually reached. No public opinion survey successfully contacts the entire sample and therefore the professional best practice is to adjust for the actual response rate and for other design effects, producing a higher margin of sampling error. In this report, we use the conventional calculation to determine the minimal level of significance and the more cautious calculation to reach a higher level of confidence in the results.

Using the design-effect calculation of the margin of sample error, in 19 cases out of 20 the results among Minneapolis voters will differ (in theory) by no more than +/-5.5 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all likely voters in the election. The response rate is 29 percent (based on AAPOR response rate calculation 4).

The results of properly conducted scientific surveys of candidate support estimate the most probable relative positions at the time of the interviewing. The margin of error indicates a range of support with unequal probabilities of accuracy. For example, assume a poll reports that Candidate A received 55% and Candidate B received 45% of support with a margin of error of +/-5 percentage points. Based on normal sampling distribution, the 55% to 45% result is the best or most probable standing at the time of the survey. Taking into account the margin of sampling error, however, we can estimate the lower boundary of support for Candidate A as 50% and the upper boundary of support for Candidate B as 50%. These results are possible but are less probable.

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.

This survey invested considerable resources in a set of procedures to reduce distortions. The sample of interviewees was drawn using comprehensive lists of phone exchanges. In addition, the interviewers were carefully trained and monitored to maintain consistency in implementing the questionnaire. Further, several steps were used to capture as much of the sample as possible including call backs to numbers when no one appeared to be at home or when the initial request to conduct the interview was not accepted.

Questions

Generally speaking, how enthusiastic are you about the upcoming election for governor?
(READ CHOICES 1-5)

- 1 Extremely enthusiastic
- 2 Very enthusiastic
- 3 Somewhat enthusiastic
- 4 Not too enthusiastic
- 5 Not enthusiastic at all
- 8 Don't know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

How much attention have you paid to information about the campaigns for governor this year? [READ CHOICES 1-3]

- 1 A lot of attention
- 2 Some attention
- 3 Not much attention
- 8 Don't know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

If the November elections for the Minnesota State Legislature were being held today, would you vote for? [READ CHOICES 1-2] [ROTATE]

- 1 The Democrat Party candidate [GO TO Q13b]
- 2 The Republican Party candidate [GO TO Q13b]
- 3 Somebody Else (volunteer and Specify) [GO TO Q13a]
- 4 Won't vote (vol.) [GO TO Q14]
- 8 Don't Know (vol) [GO TO Q13a]
- 9 Refused (vol) [GO TO Q13a]

[KEEP ORDER OF CHOICES 1-2 IN Q13a THE SAME AS IN Q13]

Are you leaning more toward: [READ CHOICES 1-2]

- 1 The Democrat Party candidate [GO TO Q14]
- 2 The Republican Party candidate [GO TO Q14]
- 3 Somebody Else (volunteer and Specify) [GO TO Q14]
- 8 Don't Know (vol) [GO TO Q14]
- 9 Refused (vol) [GO TO Q14]

Are you certain that you will vote for <INSERT ANSWER TO Q13 HERE> for the Minnesota State Legislature, or do you think you may change your mind between now and the November election?

- 1 Certain
- 2 May change mind

- 8 Don't know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Al Franken is handling his job as US senator?

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Amy Klobuchar is handling her job as US senator?

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Minnesota Legislature is handling its job?

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Do you think it is better when one party controls the Governorship and the Minnesota State Legislature, better when control is split between the Democrats and Republicans, or doesn't it matter?

- 1 Better when one party controls both
- 2 Better when control is split
- 3 Doesn't matter
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

[RANDOMIZE THE ORDER OF QUESTION SETS 18/18a, 19/19a, AND 20/20a]

When you think about the things the Minnesota state government has done during the last four years, how angry does that make you feel? [READ CHOICES 1-5]

- 1 Extremely angry
- 2 Very angry
- 3 Somewhat angry
- 4 Not too angry
- 5 Not angry at all [GO TO Q19]
- 8 Don't Know (vol) [GO TO Q19]
- 9 Refused (vol) [GO TO Q19]

When you think about the things the Minnesota state government has done during the last four years, how hopeful does that make you feel? [READ CHOICES 1-5]

- 1 Extremely hopeful

- 2 Very hopeful
- 3 Somewhat hopeful
- 4 Not too hopeful
- 5 Not hopeful at all [GO TO Q20]
- 8 Don't Know (vol) [GO TO Q20]
- 9 Refused (vol) [GO TO Q20]

If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller state government that would provide fewer services, or a larger state government that would provide more services?

- 1 Smaller
- 2 Larger
- 3 Depends (vol)
- 4 Keep as is (vol)
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

There are a number of proposals about balancing the state budget. Please tell me which one of the following three proposals comes closest to what you think should be done? (READ choices 1-3) [ROTATE]

- 1 Cut spending on transportation, health care services, and city services.
- 2 Increase incomes taxes on families earning more than \$150,000 and individuals earning more than \$130,000.
- 3 Begin a sales tax on clothing and other services.
- 4 None (vol)
- 5 Combination (vol)
- 8 Don't know
- 9 Refused

22a. PROBE [If "none/combination"]: I'll record that, but if you had to choose one of these options, which would you choose?

Which party do you think is doing a better job of handling the state budget? (READ choices 1-2) [ROTATE]

- 1 Democrats
- 2 Republicans
- 3 About the same
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Do you favor or oppose proposals to help balance Minnesota's state budget by expanding casino gambling to places in the state other than Indian reservations?

- 1 Favor
- 2 Oppose
- 3 Depends (vol)
- 8 Don't know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right - just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

- 1 Always
- 2 Most
- 3 Some
- 4 Never (vol.)
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Does it seem to you that the people you know personally are more angry with the federal government than they used to be?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Are you, personally, more angry at the federal government than you used to be?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Do you support the Tea Party movement, do you oppose it, are you undecided, or haven't you heard enough about it yet to form an opinion?

- 1 Support
- 2 Oppose
- 3 Undecided
- 4 Haven't heard enough to form an opinion
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

If a candidate running for office in Minnesota was endorsed by the Tea Party Movement, would this make you more likely to vote for the candidate, less likely to vote for the candidate, or wouldn't it make a difference?

- 1 More likely
- 2 Less likely
- 3 No difference
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)