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Tracy Manforte
UNH Media Relations

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Recommended Citation

Manforte, Tracy, "Poll: Bradley Closes Gap on Gore" (1999). *UNH Today*. 3136.
<https://scholars.unh.edu/news/3136>

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Poll: Bradley Closes Gap on Gore

EDITORS and NEWS DIRECTORS: For more information, sub-group analysis or a specific breakdown of polling results and questions, contact Andrew Smith, UNH Survey Center, at (603) 862-4367.

By [Tracy Manforte](#)
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- Vice President Al Gore has lost much of his lead over former New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley among New Hampshire Democratic primary voters. Bradley's supporters are more certain in their vote than Gore supporters, and Bradley is now viewed more favorably than Gore.

These findings are based on the latest **WMUR / CNN Poll**, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The WMUR / CNN Poll is sponsored by WMUR-TV, Channel 9 in Manchester, NH, and CNN.

Bradley Cuts Into Gore's Lead

Labor Day is the traditional start of the campaign season, and this year looks to be an exciting one for the candidates vying for the Democratic nomination for President. With five months remaining until the New Hampshire first-in-the-nation Presidential Primary, Vice President Al Gore's once substantial lead over former New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley has shrunk to 5 percent. In the latest WMUR / CNN Poll, 46 percent of likely New Hampshire Democratic primary voters favor Gore, 41 percent favor Bradley, 4 percent favor some other candidate, and 9 percent are undecided.

Support for Bradley has almost doubled since the May WMUR / CNN Poll when Gore was favored by 68 percent of New Hampshire democratic primary voters and Bradley was favored by 23 percent.

Bradley has been campaigning hard in the Granite State raising money and working to make himself seen as a viable candidate. His challenge for the Democratic nomination is now a serious threat to Gore, a prospect that many in the Democratic party hoped to avoid. The battle for the Democratic nomination is now likely to be costly and divisive for the party and could damage their chances of retaining the Presidency.

Independents Lean to Bradley

One of the reasons for Bradley's surge is his support among voters who are registered as Independents, but say they plan to vote in the Democratic primary. Among this important group of swing voters, 44 percent favor Bradley, 42 percent favor Gore, 3 percent favor some other candidate, and 11 percent remain undecided. Gore holds a 50 to 39 percent lead over Bradley among registered Democrats.

A second reason Bradley has narrowed the gap with Gore is that his supporters are more committed to him than are Gore's. Among Bradley supporters, 43 percent say they are **certain** to vote for Bradley, and 57 percent say they may change their minds. Among Gore supporters, only 34 percent say they are certain to vote for Gore, and 66 percent say they may change their mind.

Favorability Ratings

A third problem for Gore is that his favorability ratings among Democratic primary voters have dropped significantly. Sixty-nine percent of likely Democratic primary voters have a favorable opinion of Gore, 24 percent have an unfavorable opinion of him, 6 percent are neutral, and 1 percent don't know enough about him to say. This results in a net favorability rating of +45. In the May WMUR / CNN Poll, Gore's net favorability rating was +72.

By contrast, Bradley has risen in the eyes of likely Democratic primary voters. In the latest WMUR / CNN Poll, 60 percent said they have a favorable opinion of Bradley, 8 percent have an unfavorable opinion, 12 percent are neutral, and 21 percent don't know enough about him to say. His net favorability rating of +52 is higher than Gore's and has risen from +44 in the May WMUR / CNN Poll.

Clinton Fatigue?

The race between Gore and Bradley is not dividing the Democratic party on traditional Liberal-Conservative lines. Gore, the more moderate candidate, is running stronger among self-identified Liberals than is Bradley, the more Liberal candidate. Also, older Democratic voters, who are generally more moderate than younger voters, are strongly supporting Bradley. This may be an indication of Gore being linked with Bill Clinton. Older voters give Bill Clinton lower approval ratings than do younger voters, while Liberals more strongly approve of Clinton than do Moderates or Conservatives.

Can Gore Beat Bush?

Another possible reason that Democrats are moving away from Gore is that he continues to trail the leading Republican candidate, George W. Bush, in a hypothetical race for President in 2000. Democrats are becoming increasingly concerned that he cannot beat Bush. Among likely primary voters, 56 percent say they will vote for Bush, only 35 percent favor Gore, 6 percent favor some other candidate, and 2 percent are undecided. Gore has not been able to cut into Bush's lead since May.

No Clamor for a Third Choice

In recent weeks, Republican Pat Buchanan has been debating whether to leave the Republican party and run for President as a candidate from the Reform Party. Several months ago, New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith did leave the Republican party and declare his intention to run for President as an Independent. These two prominent defections have led many observers to think there is strong, grass roots support for a Third Party challenge in 2000. And there is some support among New Hampshire voters for a Third Party. In the latest WMUR / CNN Poll, 11 percent said they are "very likely" to vote for a Third Party candidate in 2000, 12 percent are "fairly likely," 26 percent are "somewhat likely," 37 percent are "not very likely," and 13 percent say that it depends on the candidate.

While these results do not indicate that a Third Party candidate will win in 2000, Third Party voters could be crucial in a tight election by drawing support from either the Republican or Democratic candidate. Currently, Democrats are just as likely as Republicans to say they might vote for a Third Party candidate in 2000.

These findings are based on the most recent WMUR/CNN Poll, conducted by the UNH Survey Center Sept. 5 through 11. A random sample of 702 likely New Hampshire Primary voters was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, statewide estimates will be accurate to plus or minus 3.7 percent. In addition, a sub-sample of 325 likely Democratic Primary voters was interviewed as part of this sample. In 95 of 100 cases, statewide estimates for the sub-sample will be accurate to plus or minus 5.4 percent.

September 13, 1999

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