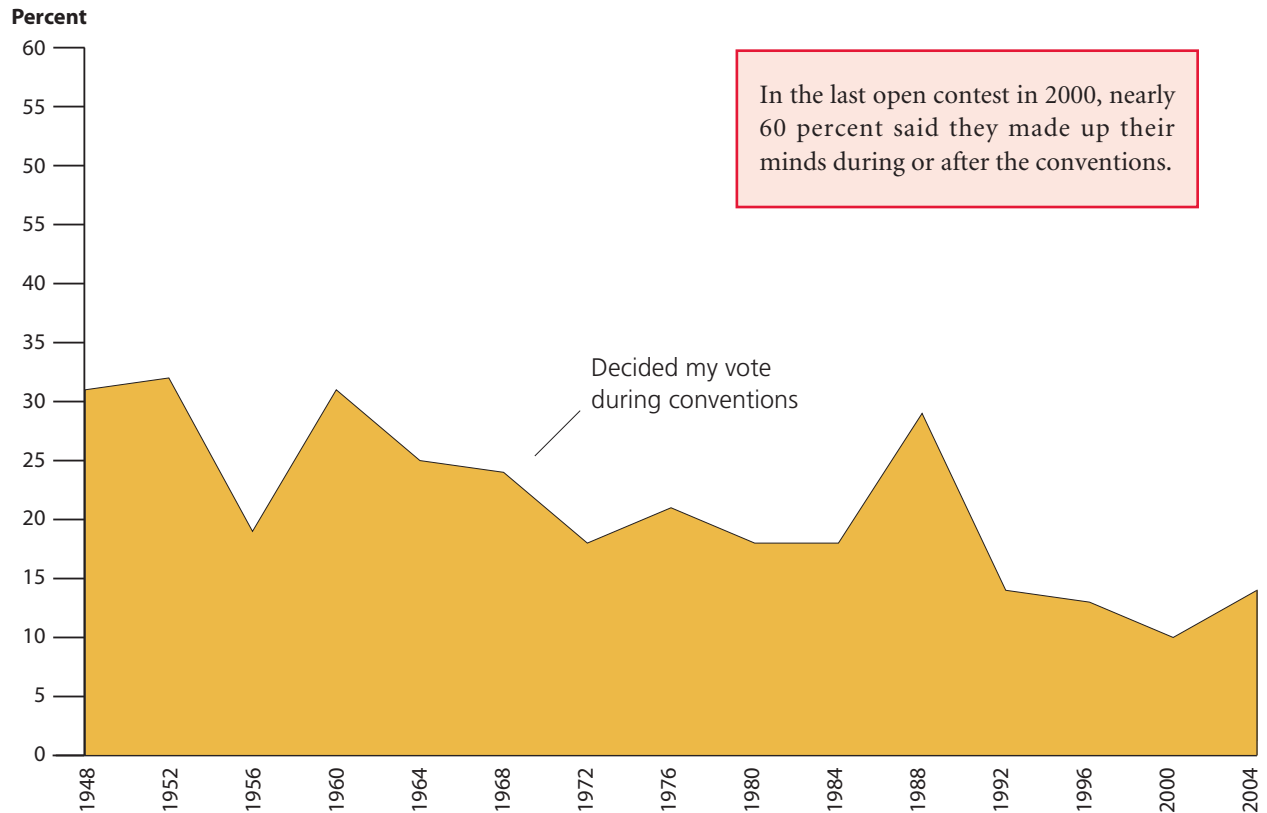


AEI Political Report

Convention Countdown

When the Democrats gavel their national convention to order in Denver on August 25, it will be the Democratic Party's forty-fifth political gathering. The Republicans' Minneapolis-St. Paul assemblage beginning on September 1 will be their thirty-ninth. How important are they? On one level, as the data below from the University of Michigan's National Election Studies show, a significant slice of the electorate makes its presidential decision during the conventions.

Q: How long before the election did you decide that you were going to vote the way you did?



	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Knew all along	41	32	45	25	18	21	33	20	20	30	15	19	28	12	33
When candidate announced	0	4	15	6	23	14	11	14	20	22	17	21	23	32	22
During conventions	31	32	19	31	25	24	18	21	18	18	29	14	13	10	14
Post-conventions	15	21	12	26	21	19	24	22	15	17	22	22	17	23	15
Last two weeks	10	9	7	9	9	14	8	17	17	10	12	17	12	18	13
Election Day	3	2	2	3	4	7	5	7	9	4	5	8	7	5	2

Source: American National Election Studies/University of Michigan.

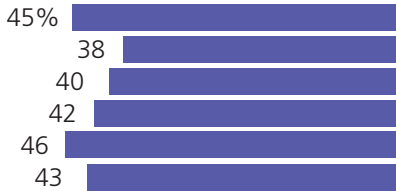
Best Man for the Job?

Barack Obama and John McCain have some clear strengths and weaknesses. McCain has a substantial advantage on handling terrorism while Obama leads on the economy, health care, taxes, gas prices, and energy. The polls are not clear about which candidate would do a better job on Iraq and immigration.

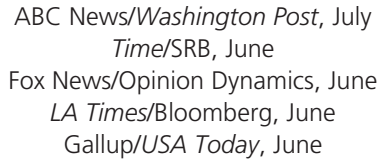
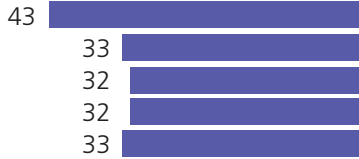
Barack Obama

John McCain

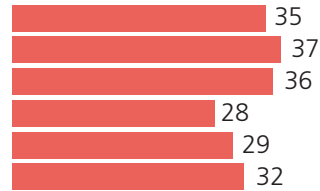
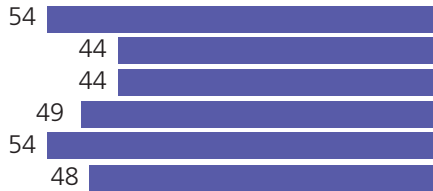
Situation in Iraq



Terrorism



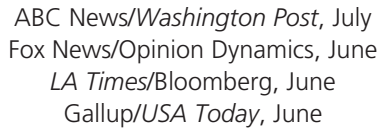
The Economy



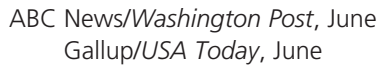
Health Care



Illegal Immigration



Taxes



Gas Prices



Energy Policy



Note: Question wordings vary.

Resume Report

Many Americans have at least one major reservation about Barack Obama as president. They are not sure if he is experienced enough for the job. In a recent *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg poll on candidate characteristics, Obama led John McCain in every category, including honesty and an ability to bring change to the nation, but he ran 20 percentage points behind McCain on having the right experience for the job.

The primary process tends to pull our political parties to their extremes. After the primaries are over, presidential candidates scramble for the all important political center where elections are won or lost. In what may be a potential problem for Obama, 30 percent of those surveyed called him *very* liberal while only 14 percent described McCain as *very* conservative. This could explain some of Obama's recent policy "refinements."

Q: *Regardless of your choice for president, who do you think . . . ?*

	Obama	McCain
Has the right experience to be president	27%	47%
Has more honesty and integrity	39	30
Will substantially change the way things are done in Washington	57	12
Would be best at building respect for the U.S. around the world	49	35
Cares more about people like you	50	23

Source: *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg, June 2008.

The "L" Word

Q: *How would you describe the views of _____ on most matters having to do with politics . . . ?*

	Very liberal	Somewhat liberal	Moderate	Somewhat conservative	Very conservative
Barack Obama	30%	26%	15%	4%	4%
John McCain	3	8	20	33	14

Source: *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg, June 2008.

Q: *Do you think _____ views on most issues are . . . ?*

	Too liberal	Too conservative	About right
Barack Obama	36%	5%	52%
John McCain	19	34	40

Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, June 2008.

A Black President?

Q: *Thinking about your neighbors and friends, do you think . . . ?*

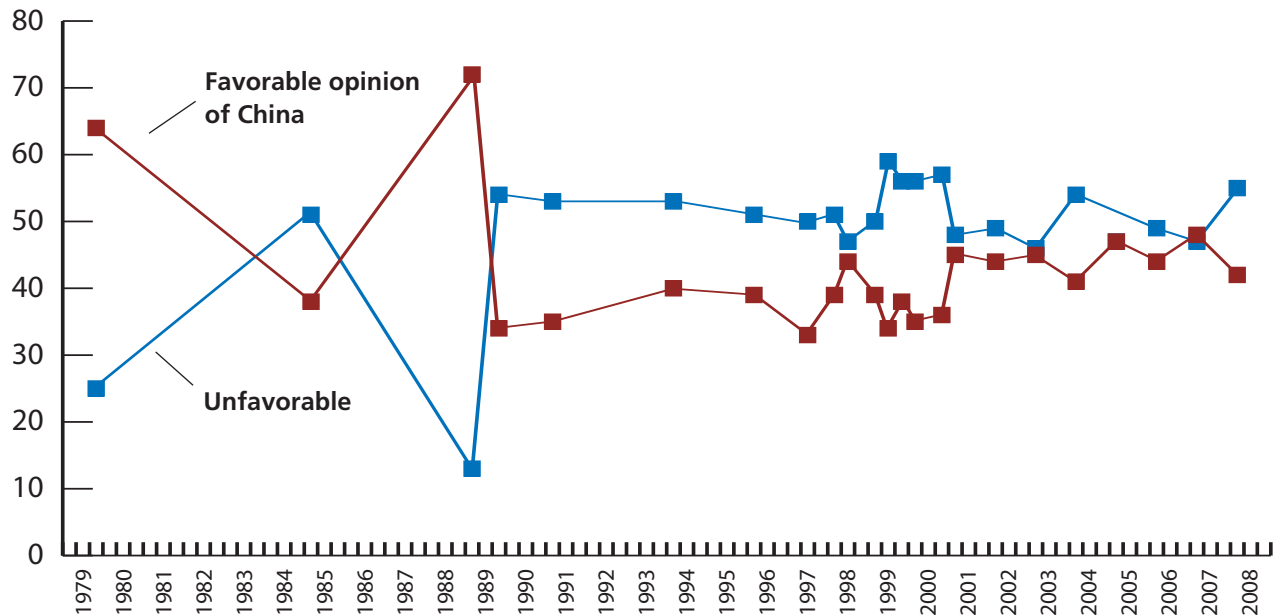
My neighbors and friends would have an easy time voting for Barack Obama because he is an African-American	63%
Difficult time	16
Don't know	21

Source: *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg, June 2008.

Checking in on China Before the Olympics

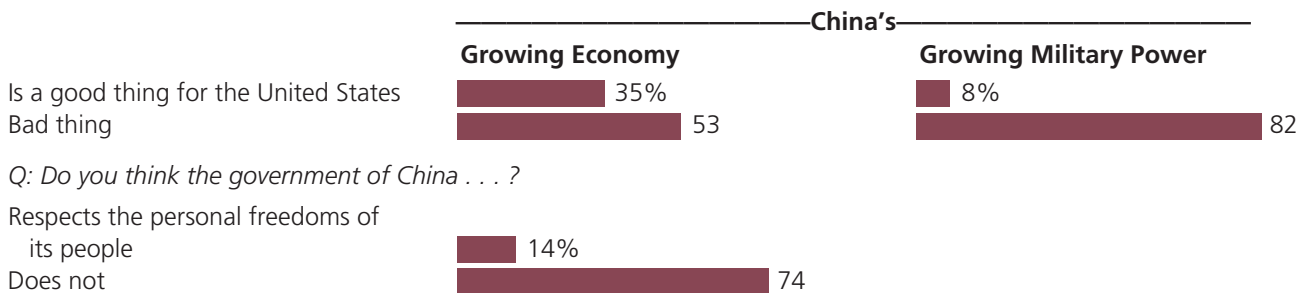
American opinion about China has fluctuated, sinking dramatically after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 and rising unevenly after that. In Gallup's latest poll, 42 percent had a favorable opinion and 55 percent an unfavorable one. Americans are worried about China's growing military and economic might, a concern many of its neighbors in the region share, as the data on the next page show.

Q: Is your overall opinion of China . . . ?



Source: The Gallup Organization.

Q: Overall, do you think that . . . ?



Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, April 2008.

(continued on the next page)



(continued from the previous page)

Asians on Their Neighbor

Q: Are you comfortable or uncomfortable . . . ?

Q: From your point of view, which of the following is the better economic system . . . ?

Q: Thinking about the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, do you think that China hosting the games will . . . ?

	Comfortable with the idea of China being the leader of Asia	Better Economic System		Olympics increase China's prestige
		An economy defined by open markets and competition	An economy defined by broad intervention and control	
United States	27%	80%	16%	49%
China	—	68	25	86
Japan	10	61	31	56
South Korea	21	87	11	82
Indonesia	27	46	41	65
Vietnam	56	71	23	85

Source: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, June 2008.

Impressions of Iraq

Q: Do you think . . . ?

The United States was wrong in going to war with Iraq



It was right



Source: Time/ABT/SRBI, June 2008.

Q: Do you think . . . ?

The U.S. is winning the war in Iraq



Jan. 2007



Losing



Neither/Tie



Source: ABC News/Washington Post.

Q: Obama has proposed a timetable to withdraw most U.S. forces from Iraq within 16 months of his taking office. McCain has opposed a specific timetable and said events should dictate when troops are withdrawn. Which approach do you prefer . . . ?

Prefer Obama's timetable



Prefer McCain's position



Source: ABC News/Washington Post, July 2008.

The Mood

The University of Michigan/Reuters Index of Consumer Sentiment hovered just above its fifty-year low in the preliminary July reading. Consumers' assessments of their own finances were "especially bleak," and the expectations component of the index was also very low. Other surveys mirror these findings, with roughly three-quarters saying the country is in a recession.

Q: *Would you say the country is better off because of George W. Bush's economic policies than when he became president almost _____ years ago, or worse off, or is the country about the same as it was then?*

	Jun. 2008	Jun. 2006	Aug. 2004
Better	22%	43%	60%
Worse	42	18	10
Same	26	34	29

Source: *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg.

Q: *Do you think . . . ?*

	Late Jun. 2008	Jan. 2008	Sep. 1992
The economy is in a recession	75%	61%	79%
No	25	37	19

Source: CNN/ORC, June and January 2008; Gallup/CNN/USA Today, September 1992.

Q: *As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to . . . ?*

	Followed this story very closely
The rising price of gasoline	62%
News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	25
The current situation and events in Iraq	25
Recent major ups and downs in the U.S. stock market	22
The military effort in Afghanistan against Taliban fighters	19
The rescue of fifteen hostages held by rebels in Colombia	17

Note: Pew reported that for the week of June 30 to July 6, the percentage of actual news coverage devoted to each story was as follows: gas prices (7 percent), 2008 election (26 percent), hostage rescue (8 percent), the situation in Iraq (8 percent), the stock market (1 percent), Afghanistan (2 percent).

Source: Pew Research Center, June 30–July 6, 2008.

Candidate Standing Around Labor Day

A recent Gallup release noted that in six of the last nine competitive presidential elections, the candidate who was leading in July ended up losing. Polls taken closer to actual elections have a better track record as the results from polls taken around Labor Day show.

	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Gallup	Carter	Reagan	Bush*	Clinton	Clinton	Bush*	Bush
ABC/WP	Reagan*	Reagan	Bush	Clinton	Clinton	Tie	Bush
CBS/NYT	Carter*	Reagan	Bush	Clinton	Clinton	Gore*	Bush
NBC/WJSJ	Reagan	Reagan	Bush*	Clinton	Clinton	Gore*	Bush*

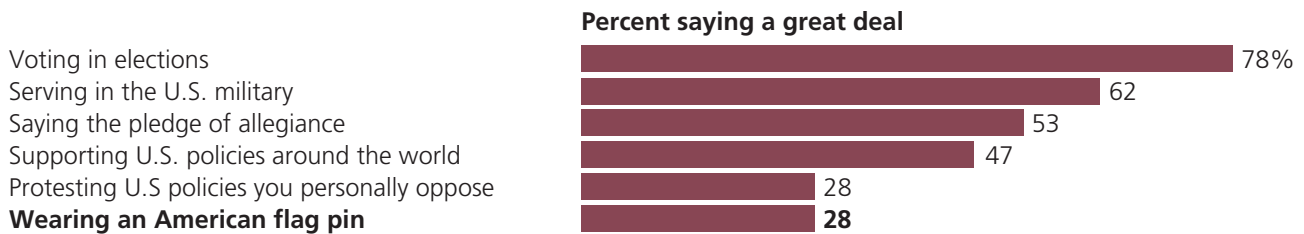
Note: * The margin was 5 percentage points or less.

Source: The Gallup Organization.

Looking at Lapels

Roughly three in ten Americans say wearing an American flag pin on your lapel says a great deal about whether or not you are patriotic. Thirty-five percent of those fifty-years-old and above say that a lapel pin indicates a “great deal” that a person is patriotic while only 19 percent of those aged nineteen to twenty-nine agree. Nearly 40 percent of those with less than a high school education think it says a great deal, while only 16 percent of those with a postgraduate education agree.

Q: How much does each act indicate that a person is patriotic . . . ?



Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2008.

Feelings about Race

Q: If you honestly assessed yourself, would you say . . . ?

	June 2008		October 1999	
	I have some feelings of racial prejudice	Do not	I have at least some racist feelings	Do not
National	30%	69%	34%	66%
Whites	30	69	32	67
Blacks	34	65	40	60

Source: ABC News/Washington Post.

AEI POLITICAL REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

Karlyn Bowman, Senior Fellow; John Fortier, Research Fellow; Norman Ornstein, Resident Scholar; Michael Barone, Resident Fellow; and Ben Wattenberg, Senior Fellow.

Research Assistants: Adam Foster, Editor; Tim Ryan; Jessica Leval.

Interns: Fowler Brown, Matt Waring, David Waterman.

The Latest Polls

	Approve	Disapprove
Bush	28%	69%
Congress	23	71
Democrats in Congress	35	57
Republicans in Congress	25	69

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, July 2008.

States in Play on Election Day

At this point in the presidential contest, pundits start to look at states that may be in play on Election Day. Most will scrutinize the myriad state-level polls looking for clues about the competitiveness of various states.

An alternative approach is to look not at polls, but how states have voted in past elections. Is Georgia a reliably Republican state? Is Ohio always a swing state?

Below, we order a number of key states based on their vote for president in the past five elections. The ranking produced thirteen states that, through recent history, have been competitive. For each state, we calculate the degree to which the Democratic candidate ran ahead of (or behind) his party's national result. For example, John Kerry won 51.7 percent of the two-party vote in Michigan, while he won only 48.8 percent of the national vote, and so Michigan "leaned" toward the Democrats by 2.9 points in 2004. Looking at the past five elections, we put four states in the pure toss-up category.

While we expect all of the states below to be competitive, we believe this election could turn the electoral arithmetic on its head given its unique features including the first black major party nominee.

A longer version of this paper is available from the authors and will be published in an upcoming volume by Texas A&M University Press.

—John Fortier and Timothy Ryan

State (Electoral Vote)	Avg. Democrat lean, last five cycles	Kerry Vote, 2004 (excluding third parties)
Likely Republican (32 EV)		
Florida (27)	-3.0%	47.5%
Nevada (5)	-3.0	48.7
Leaning Republican (13 EV)		
Colorado (9)	-2.4	47.6
New Hampshire (4)	-2.0	50.7
Toss-ups (46 EV)		
Ohio (20)	-1.4	48.9
Missouri (11)	-0.1	46.4
New Mexico (5)	0.6	49.6
Wisconsin (10)	1.5	50.2
Leaning Democratic (52 EV)		
Michigan (17)	1.8	51.7
Pennsylvania (21)	1.9	51.3
Iowa (7)	2.2	49.7
Oregon (7)	2.5	52.1
Likely Democratic (15 EV)		
New Jersey (15)	2.6	53.4

Note: Three states—Arkansas, Louisiana, and West Virginia—fit the model, but we did not include them here because of particular historical circumstances, especially Bill Clinton's strength in the South in 1992 and 1996. The three states are probably firm GOP territory.

The Latest National Polls

	Obama	McCain
Gallup Daily Tracking, Jul. 17–19	45%	42%
CBS/NYT, Jul. 7–14	45	39
ABC/WP, Jul. 10–13	50	42

Note: Samples are registered voters.

Flip Flops in Fashion

Q: Please tell me whether the following statement applies to . . . ?

He's been flip-flopping on the issues

Barack Obama	49%
John McCain	47

Note: In the July CBS News/*New York Times* poll 51 percent said John McCain had changed his position on an important issue to get elected while 56 percent said the same of Barack Obama.
Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, July 2008.

Q: In general, do you . . . ?

Think candidates for president change their positions in order to get elected

Very/somewhat often	88%
Not too often/not at all	11

Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, July 2008.

Q: Do you think . . . ?

Says what he believes

Barack Obama	43%
John McCain	46

Says what people want to hear

51%
49

Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, July 2008.

The Skinny on State House Races

When a party gains a large number of Congressional seats, it also usually picks up state legislative seats and chambers as well. In 1994, when Republicans swept to power in Congress, they gained 380 state legislative seats. In 2006, when Democrats returned to power in Congress, they took over 325 state legislative seats. Democrats now control 3,994 legislative seats to 3,310 for the Republicans.

With gains for Democrats very likely in the U.S. Congress this fall, look for more Democratic pickups in state legislatures. Another good year for Democrats will stall long-term Republican gains in the South. Over time, the largely Democratic state legislatures in the South have moved into the Republican camp. But there are still southern states that vote Republican in presidential elections but have never had Republican legislatures—Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas.

A good Democratic year will also deepen the Northeast's move toward the Democratic Party. Of special interest will be the New York State Senate. For many years, Republicans have controlled the Senate and Democrats the House there, and redistricting plans have been drawn to keep each party in power in its respective chamber. But Republicans now control the Senate by only one vote. If they lose the upper chamber, Democrats could dominate the redistricting process in New York State in 2012.

Democrats currently control fifty-seven chambers to the Republicans thirty-nine. Democrats control both

houses in twenty-three states, Republicans in fourteen, and Democrats control both chambers *and* the governorship in fourteen states compared to ten for the Republicans.

According to Tim Storey of the National Conference of State Legislators, Democrats could gain the state senates in Montana, Nevada, and New York; and the houses in Alaska, Arizona, Delaware, Montana, Ohio, and Texas. Republicans have a shot to take houses in Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee, and the state senates in Oklahoma and Iowa.

Number of State Legislators by Party

	Democrat	Republican
1990	4,428	2,959
1992	4,318	3,022
1994	3,838	3,508
1996	3,884	3,470
1998	3,944	3,543
2000	3,819	3,531
2002	3,622	3,688
2004	3,661	3,651
2006	3,986	3,316
2008	3,994	3,310

Note: Figures from 1990 through 2006 are post-election numbers. Figures from 2008 are pre-election.
Source: The National Conference of State Legislatures and the U.S. Census.

The Public's Prediction

Q: Regardless of how you intend to vote for president in 2008, who do you . . . ?

	Expect to win in November			
	National	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
McCain	30%	52%	14%	31%
Obama	53	26	77	47

Note: Sample is registered voters.
Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, July 2008.

Current Commentary

“Leaders Ignore Science Shortfalls to the Peril of America’s Future”

AEI resident scholar Norm Ornstein argues that America is not investing in science and research to the detriment of its own economy and future.

<http://www.aei.org/publication28286/>

“Ensuring a Seamless Transition”

AEI research fellow John Fortier analyzes the dos and don’ts of transitioning into office for potential Obama and McCain administrations.

<http://www.aei.org/publication28285/>

“Congress and the Next President Should Repeal the War Powers Act”

AEI resident fellow Michael Barone contends that the War Powers Act is unconstitutional and counterproductive to American interests.

<http://www.aei.org/publication28300/>

It’s Not Over Yet

Q: Is your . . . ?

	National response	—Response of people— who plan to vote for	
		Obama	McCain
My mind is made up	72%	73%	70%
Is not	28	26	29

Note: Sample is registered voters.
Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, July 2008.

Upcoming Election Watch: July 31

AEI’s [Election Watch series](#), which began in 1982, is the longest-running election program in Washington. It brings together AEI’s nationally renowned team of political analysts: Michael Barone, Karlyn Bowman, John C. Fortier, and Norman J. Ornstein to discuss 2008 campaign developments. To sign up for the breakfast sessions please register online at <http://www.aei.org/electionwatch>.

If you have any questions, contact Adam Foster at afoster@aei.org or Jessica Leval at jessica.leval@aei.org.

Erratum

In the June issue of *Political Report* on page 6, we made an error. The ABC/*Post* numbers on defections should have been reversed to read that 14 percent of Democrats intended to defect and vote for McCain, while 9 percent of Republicans intended to vote for Obama.

Watch For

“The Definitive Guide to the Convention Bounce,” a forthcoming publication from AEI’s Political Corner.

