

## Topic: The Significance of Polls

The gap between some poll numbers is widening in favor of Obama, while some poll numbers show McCain closing the gap. With just three weeks before Election Day, how reliable and significant are today's poll numbers? Is it possible that many of the polls are dead wrong and McCain runs away with the election? Is it possible that Obama's lead is being underestimated?

**John Hinshaw, associate professor of history at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pa.,** said, "I think the polls have gotten a lot better over time and they are largely right. The most famous dead wrong poll was Dewey Beats Truman in 1948."

"The closest parallel to this election was another transformational election in 1980," said Hinshaw. "Then, President Carter had a polling advantage over his untested rival, Ronald Reagan. Carter painted Reagan as a dangerous extremist, but once Reagan convinced Americans he was genial, it was game over for Carter and the aging Democratic coalition. The polls, up to that point, underestimated the challenge that Reagan represented."

"If there is a Reagan in this race, his name is Barack Hussein Obama," adds Hinshaw. "Young voters are both embracing Obama and refusing to identify with this century's most unpopular president and party since Harry Truman in 1948. Hispanic voters, once courted by Bush, are supporting Obama by wide margins and working-class whites are also slowly shifting back to the Democrats."

Hinshaw said the polls understate the level of support for Obama; in many states, you can add a point or so to Obama's numbers for undercounted votes, plus the ground game that Obama put together.

"The media has an interest in seeing this election as a horse race. In the spring, it was clear that Hillary had lost, the voting coalitions that Obama and Clinton had put together were stable and there were no surprises coming in the state elections and caucuses," said Hinshaw. "Yet, the media and pundits kept breathlessly examining every twist and turn of Clinton's desperate efforts to change the calculus to win. Basically, she blew her money and infrastructure in Iowa and she didn't have a long-range plan."

"McCain made some of the same mistakes as Hillary. McCain underestimated Obama, and his appeal, especially in the sense that while talking in soft focus about change, Obama was putting together a broad-based ground war effort in far more states than previously attempted. While Hillary and Obama traded body blows, McCain dithered, and he's paying the price now," said Hinshaw.

Hinshaw said McCain blew the advantages he had, such as being a pragmatic centrist, after his failed effort to showcase Obama as a lightweight. McCain is now haunted by his choice of vice president. After the attention of Palin died down, McCain was criticized for not picking a real centrist, such as Lieberman.

"McCain is now left with the religious right, the die-hard republicans and the redneck vote. His rallies have become a liability as his frustrated supporters yell out that Obama is a Muslim, a terrorist and even 'off with his head.' That's not the way to reach out to soccer moms or independent voters," said Hinshaw.

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Dick Jones Communications helps Lebanon Valley College with its national public affairs work.