



MIKE DOWNS CENTER FOR INDIANA POLITICS

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 24, 2008

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How Much Respect Do Political Candidates Receive? It Depends

Do you respect John McCain or Barack Obama? Maybe you respect Governor Mitch Daniels or his challenger Jill Long Thompson? Surely you respect Mother Theresa?

In Indiana we elect more than 9,000 people who make decisions that effect our daily lives. Their decisions have wide-ranging implications for the health of our communities and state. Do they get the respect they deserve?

The Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics in partnership with SurveyUSA investigated the amount of respect people have for elected officials, candidates, and other public figures. Respondents were asked to rate public figures on a scale of 1 to 10 where “10 means you have the highest possible respect for the person and 1 means you have no respect for that person whatsoever.” Respondents were given an option to report that they had never heard of the public figure.

Among the elected officials, Senator Richard Lugar received the highest amount of respect (average = 6.3) followed closely by Senator Evan Bayh (average = 6.0). The respect for Lugar and Bayh cuts across party lines with 21% of self-identified strong Democrats rating Lugar as a 9 or 10 and 12% of the self-identified strong Republicans rating Bayh as a 9 or 10. Both are well respected by men with 18% rating both as a 9 or 10. Bayh does better among women (30% rating him a 9 or 10) than Lugar (18% rating him a 9 or 10). It could be argued that these two are the gold standard for respect for elected officials.

The elected official with the lowest rating was President George W. Bush (average = 4.5). Eighty percent of the self-identified strong Democrats rated him a 1 or 2 and only 29% of the self-identified strong Republicans rated him a 9 or 10. African Americans were more critical of the President (average = 3.2) than whites (average = 4.6).

We also wanted to know how much respect people had for the candidates at the top of the ticket this fall. Senators John McCain (average = 5.5) and Barack Obama (average = 5.6) are in a

virtual tie. The perception of Senator Obama appears to be more polarized than Senator McCain. Twenty-two percent of the respondents gave Obama the highest possible score while McCain received the highest score from only 13%. An additional 25% gave Obama the lowest possible rating while McCain received the lowest rating from 18%. Senator Obama also enjoys more enthusiastic support among loyal partisans than Senator McCain. Sixty-two percent of self-identified strong Democrats rated Obama a 9 or 10. Forty-four percent of self-identified strong Republicans rated McCain a 9 or 10. There is a slightly higher percentage of self-identified strong Republicans rating Obama a 1 or 2 (58%) than self-identified strong Democrats rating McCain a 1 or 2 (52%). This pattern of Obama having higher percentages at the extremes of the scale plays out in almost every demographic category.

Governor Mitch Daniels averaged a 5.7 and his challenger Jill Long Thompson averaged a 4.8. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents rated Daniels a 9 or 10 and an additional 23% rated him a 1 or 2. Only 14% rated him a 5. Ten percent of the respondents rated Thompson a 9 or 10 and 23% rated her a 1 or 2. However 29% rated her a 5. These results suggest that the voters are more decided in their opinion of Daniels than Thompson.

The non-political public figures included in the survey were Tony Dungy (average = 7.3), Oprah Winfrey (average = 4.8), and Mother Theresa (average = 8.5). While Dungy is well respected by all groups, he received his greatest support among Republicans, African Americans, and respondents in the central region of the state. Oprah Winfrey received her lowest ratings from Republicans, men, whites, and high school graduates. Mother Theresa consistently was rated 9 or 10 by the majority of respondents in every demographic category.

One significant difference between the candidates and the non-political figures that might influence how well respected they are, is that there are people who look for every opportunity to criticize the candidates. We do subject our elected officials and political candidates to a high level of scrutiny and that scrutiny is bound to provide us with information that might make us lose respect for the candidates. Given the level of significance of the decisions elected officials make, the scrutiny is worth the potential loss of respect.

N=1,772 Margin of error +/-2.4	Average	Highest Possible Respect	No Respect	Do Not Know the Person
Barack Obama	5.6	22%	25%	1%
John McCain	5.5	13%	18%	3%
George W. Bush	4.5	12%	37%	5%
Mitch Daniels	5.7	17%	18%	3%
Jill Long Thompson	4.8	6%	15%	3%
Richard Lugar	6.3	17%	9%	2%
Evan Bayh	6.0	17%	13%	2%
Tony Dungy	7.3	33%	7%	3%
Oprah Winfrey	4.8	11%	24%	2%
Mother Theresa	8.5	52%	4%	1%

What is the Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics?

The Mike Downs Center for Indiana Politics is a non-partisan organization that helps the people of Indiana understand the role of politics and government in their daily lives. By doing this, The Mike Downs Center hopes to encourage participation in political and public processes the same way its namesake, Professor Michael C. Downs, did for more than 34 years. The Mike Downs Center is located on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW).

Statement of Methodology: This SurveyUSA poll was conducted by telephone in the voice of a professional announcer. Respondent households were selected at random using a registration based sample (RBS) provided by Aristotle of Washington, DC. All respondents heard the questions asked identically. The calls were conducted on June 10, 11, and 12. The number of respondents who answered each question and the margin of sampling error for each question are provided. Where necessary, responses were weighted according to the voter registration database. In theory, with the stated sample size, one can say with 95% certainty that the results would not vary by more than the stated margin of sampling error, in one direction or the other, had the entire universe of respondents been interviewed with complete accuracy. There are other possible sources of error in all surveys that may be more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. These include refusals to be interviewed, question wording and question order, weighting by demographic control data and the manner in which respondents are filtered (such as, determining who is a likely voter). It is difficult to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. Fieldwork for this survey was done by SurveyUSA of Verona, NJ

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