

Date: December 3, 2008  
To: Friends of Democracy Corps  
From: Stanley B. Greenberg, James Carville and Andrew H. Baumann

## **The President-Elect's Standing: Now and 1992**

*Report on new national survey*

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The latest national survey from Democracy Corps finds an electorate that gives President-elect Barack Obama strong marks – even stronger than on the last occasion when the country turned to a Democrat to lead in 1992 – and with even higher expectations. The decade of polarization and the intense election just completed leaves Obama with more intense support and the potential to build upon it. Nonetheless, a large portion of the public is waiting to decide whether Obama is doing a good job, and the country is more determined than in 1992 and early 1993 that the Congress play a role advancing the new agenda.

This memo is based on a national survey of 1,000 likely voters conducted November 19-23, 2008. But uniquely, this survey compares the current results to surveys Greenberg-Lake: The Analysis Group conducted for President Bill Clinton at a comparable point after his election in 1992.

### **Obama's Standing**

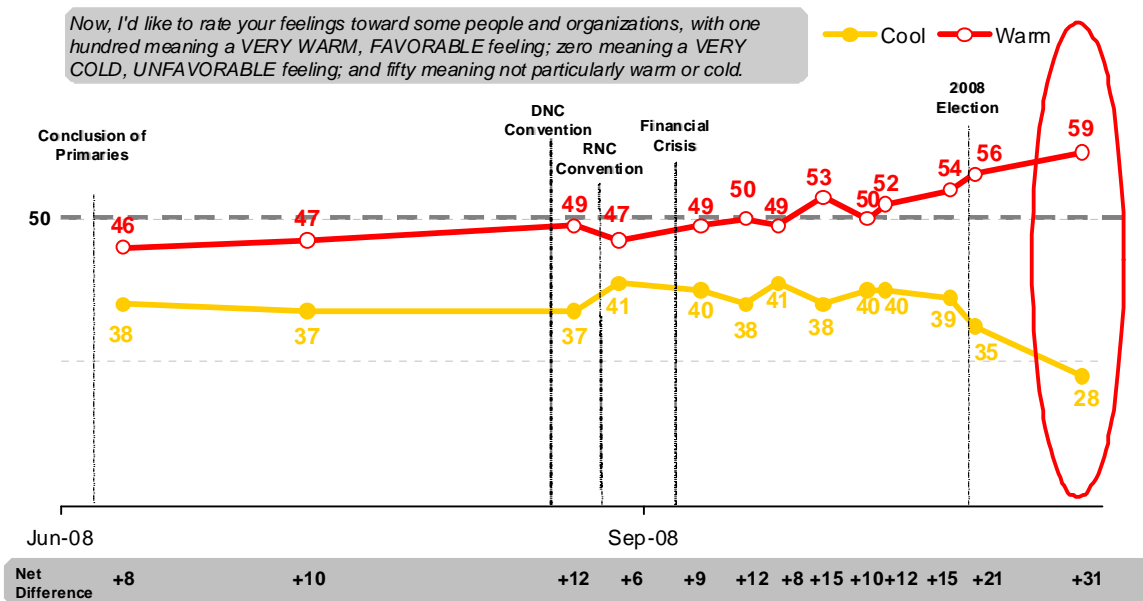
Obama currently holds a mean thermometer score of 62.9, about 3 degrees higher than Bill Clinton's rating of 60 in 1992. At 59 percent warm and just 28 percent cool, this is an uptick from Obama's Election Day rating of 56 percent warm and 35 percent cool. Obama's favorability is at its highest point, beyond the honeymoon numbers in our election night poll.

A majority (53 percent) of voters approve of the job Obama is doing as president-elect, while just 19 percent disapprove. We used a different scale in 1992, so it is hard to compare Obama's standing directly to Clinton's. In 1992, 49 percent said Clinton was doing an "excellent" or "good" as president-elect.

Michele Obama's favorability rating has also moved up considerably, and is indeed close to the ratings for her husband. She has a mean thermometer of 59.9 degrees (50 percent warm and 26 percent cool). This represents a slight uptick since mid-October (48 percent warm and 32 percent cool), and a remarkable increase from her ratings during the heat of the primary campaign in April when just 30 percent viewed Michelle Obama warmly and 36 percent viewed her coolly.



### President-elect Obama's favorability jumps since the election



Also, two-thirds say they support Obama's policies and goals for the country, with a near majority supporting them strongly. Meanwhile, just about a quarter of the electorate opposes Obama's goals and policies. In early 1993, with the transition and cabinet further advanced, a slightly larger majority (72 percent) supported Clinton's goals and policies, but he did not enjoy nearly the same intensity of support, with just 17 percent strongly supportive.

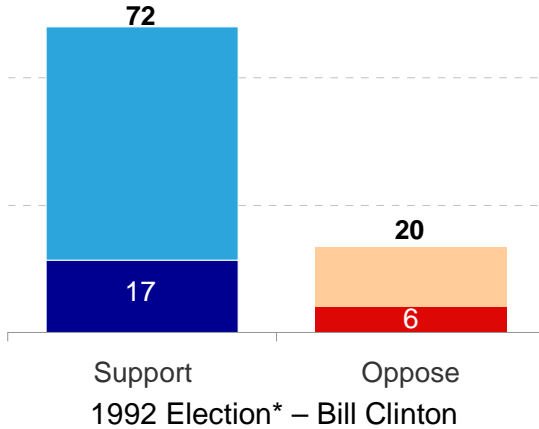
The prospect for greater breadth of support is evident in the 85 percent of moderates, two-thirds of independents (67 percent) and nearly one-third of McCain voters (30 percent) who support Obama's goals and policies. Notably, Obama's support is strong among women (75 percent), union households (76 percent), unmarried women (84 percent) and Catholics (68 percent); also, at 69 percent, support for the president-elect's policies is even stronger among older voters (those 50 and over) than it is among younger voters.



### Nearly same level of support for Obama's policies/goals as Clinton's in '92

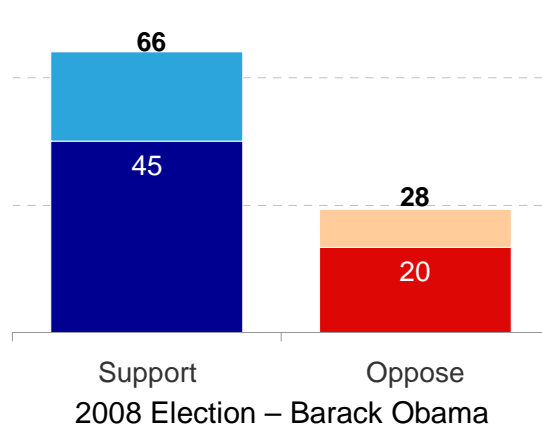
From what you have seen and heard so far about **Bill Clinton's** policies and goals for the country, would you say that you strongly support his policies and goals, generally support them, generally oppose his policies and goals, or strongly oppose them?

- Strongly support
- Generally support
- Strongly oppose
- Generally oppose



From what you have seen and heard so far about **Barack Obama's** policies and goals for the country, would you say that you support or oppose his policies and goals?

- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Strongly oppose
- Somewhat oppose

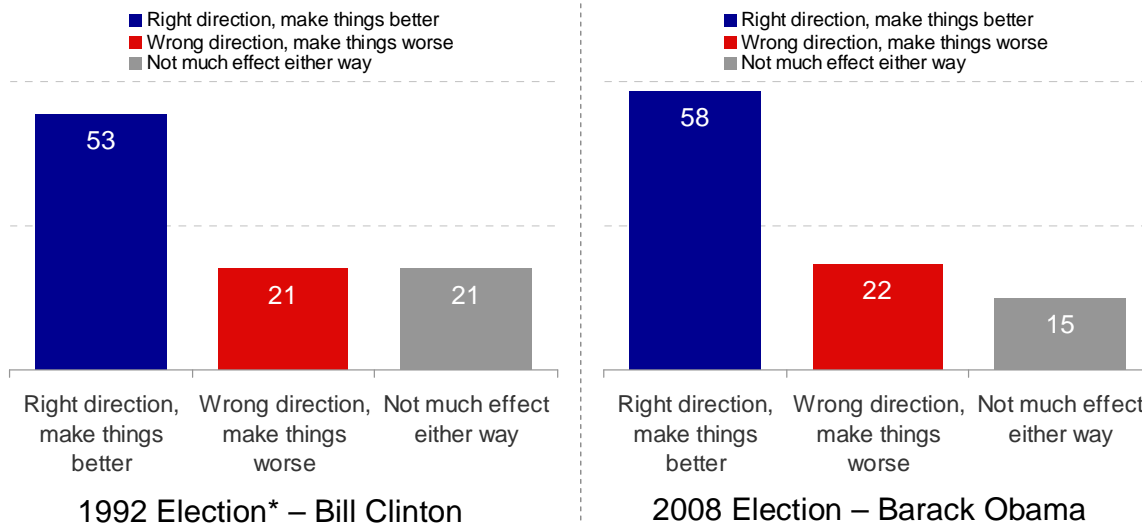


1992 was also a change election, and afterwards we found that a majority both expected that Bill Clinton would lead the country in the right direction and that he would really make things better. But even though the wrong track and worries about the economy are much worse now, a daunting 58 percent expect Obama to lead in the right direction and make things better for the country. This shows high expectations in difficult times.



## High expectations for Obama

And though it's hard to tell for sure at this stage, do you think that **Bill Clinton / Barack Obama** will lead the country in the right direction as president and change things for the better, take the country in the wrong direction and change things for the worse, or not really have much effect either way on the direction of the country?



As strong as Obama’s numbers are, voters do not necessarily want Congress to allow the new president to set the agenda without input or checks from the legislative branch. In 1992, voters were conscious of divided and failed government on domestic issues, and voters were looking for the Congress to support the new president. But today, voters seem as much concerned about one-party or one-branch rule as they are about gridlock, and they want the Congress to play a role in shaping legislation. With many new Democrats elected to the Congress, voters are looking for them to contribute to the process of making new policies.

A plurality of voters (49 to 42 percent) are more concerned that the Democratic Congress will be too much of a rubber stamp than they are that Congress will prevent Obama from enacting the changes he thinks are needed; these results are reversed from early 1993. We observed similar results (48 to 43 percent) when we asked this question a different way, adding partisanship into the mix by asking if voters were more worried about the Democratic Congress being a rubber stamp or the Republicans in Congress obstructing Obama.

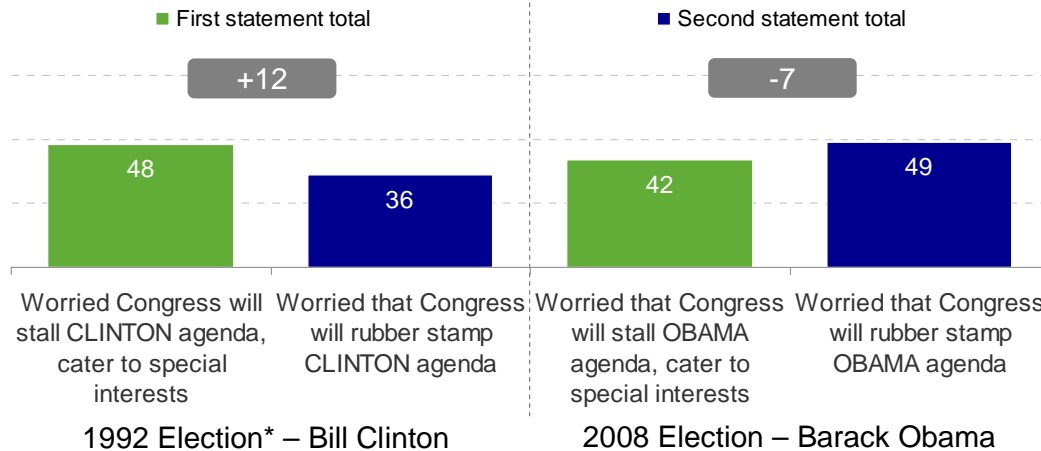


### More worried Congress will rubber stamp Obama's agenda

Now I'm going to read you a pair of statements. After I read the pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.

**Statement 1:** I'm more concerned that Congress will prevent Bill Clinton / Barack Obama from making the kinds of changes he thinks are needed, by playing politics and catering too much to the special interests.

**Statement 2:** I'm more concerned that the Democratic Congress will be too much of a rubber stamp for Bill Clinton / Barack Obama, and will push through Obama's/Clinton's programs whether they are good or bad.



Voters are split on who should set the agenda; 49 percent say that Congress should support Obama's agenda as much as possible, but a statistically similar number (47 percent) say that Congress should have an independent agenda even if it conflicts with Obama's. In early 1993, voters preferred that Congress allow Bill Clinton to set the agenda by a 47 to 37 percent margin.

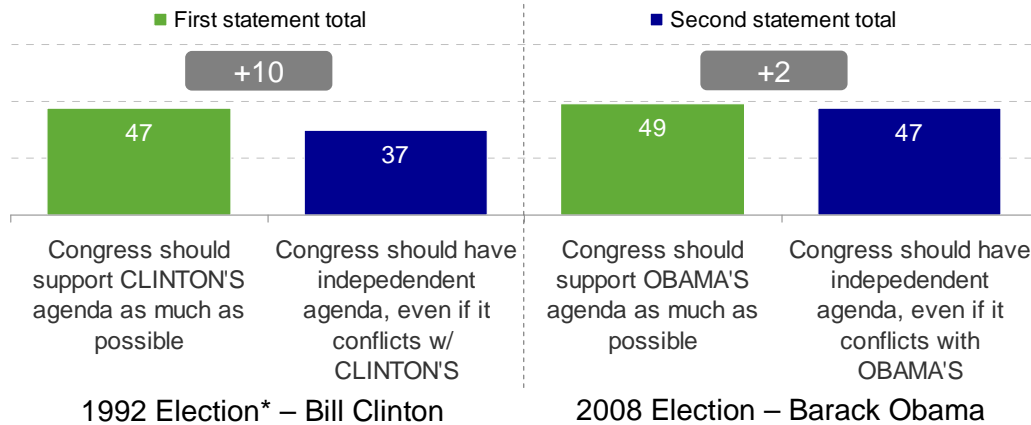


### More say Congress should have independent agenda than in 1992

*Now I'm going to read you a pair of statements. After I read the pair, please tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.*

**Statement 1:** Congress should support Barack Obama's/Bill Clinton's agenda as much as possible and help the Obama/Clinton administration get its programs passed so the new president has a chance to make the kinds of changes he thinks the country needs.

**Statement 2:** While Congress should consider what Barack Obama/Bill Clinton wants, it should have an independent agenda and pass its own alternatives for dealing with the country's problems, even if they are in conflict with Obama's/Clinton's agenda.



These results pre-date the introduction of Obama's economic and national security teams, which could have a major impact on the willingness to trust the direction of the new president. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the voters who created these two wave elections want to see all their leaders come together to bring the change the country needs.