

[Elections Home](#)

## Extreme Endorsements Could Sway Moderate Vote

**Unwanted endorsements have dogged both candidates throughout the election season and could hurt their chances with undecided voters.**

By Jennifer Lawinski  
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With the election just a week away, most of the country's newspapers have turned in their endorsements, and the presidential candidates have been happy to receive them.

But you won't find Barack Obama and John McCain bragging about *all* of their supporters.

Some of America's most outspoken enemies have endorsed Obama, saying they hope the Democrat's election will clear the way for them to cozy up to the United States.

McCain has had unwanted endorsements, too. The Republican has been embraced by some religious leaders who have made anti-Islamic and pro-Hitler statements, and he was praised last week by a Web site that supports Al Qaeda.

But do the opinions of terrorists matter to Americans?

"The first thing that this brings to mind is Ronald Reagan's old statement. They endorse me, I don't endorse them," said Christopher C. Hull, adjunct professor of government at Georgetown University.

"I think that, in general, voters discount endorsements by people with which they don't believe the candidate sympathizes," he said. "But there is certainly the potential for some harm there. It depends on the degree to which there is concern about the candidate's sympathies."

And newspaper endorsements don't carry the weight that they once did, Hull said, as circulation dwindles and readers look elsewhere for their news.

"Ideologues used to look to newspapers for their cues. Now there are thousands of cues out there from more partisan news sources, and that includes the blog community, it includes columnists and right-leaning or left-leaning television and radio hosts. There's a lot more clutter in the endorsement game than there used to be," he said.

Obama has been endorsed by the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Anchorage Daily News, the hometown paper of Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin.

McCain has picked up endorsements from papers including the Columbus Dispatch, in the battleground state of Ohio, and the Dallas Morning News.

A paper's bias influences how its endorsement is perceived by moderates, Hull said.

"For liberals, the New York Times is enormously influential. Not that there's going to be anybody voting for John McCain in that city anyway. But for liberals across the country, the New York Times is enormously influential," he said. "If you agree with where they're coming from, you are more likely to listen to them than a paper that's more neutral."

Middle-of-the-road and independent voters are especially vulnerable to influence by extreme endorsements, Hull said.

Obama has been endorsed by groups and countries that could trouble moderates and independents who are afraid the candidate has had too many ties to radicals in his past.

"Certainly, if asked, a candidate would want to establish distance between himself and a group that has endorsed him if he disagrees with that organization or individual's positions," Hull said, "You don't really want to mention in a speech if you're Barack Obama that you've been endorsed by Hamas."

The Obama campaign declined to comment for this story. The McCain campaign did not respond to a request for comment.

Hamas has had an on-again, off-again preference for Obama, first endorsing the candidate in April when Hamas political adviser Ahmed Yousef said the Mideast terrorist group supports Obama's foreign policy positions.

"We don't mind -- actually we like Mr. Obama. We hope he will [win] the election and I do believe he is like John Kennedy, great man with great principle, and he has a vision to change America to make it in a position to lead the world community but not with domination and arrogance," Yousef told conservative radio host John Batchelor and WorldNetDaily reporter Aaron Klein.

Obama adviser David Axelrod told the American Spectator the comparison to Kennedy was flattering, but that admiration of the former president was where the similarities between Obama and Hamas end.

Hamas yanked its support in June when Obama made a pro-Israel speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Reuters reported. But last week Yousef told Batchelor and Klein that Hamas would send Obama a congratulatory letter "the moment that he will win the election."

Obama has also gotten a nod of approval from Iran.

The country's parliament speaker said on Oct. 22 that Iran would prefer an Obama presidency. "We are leaning more in favor of Barack Obama because he is more flexible and rational, even though we know American policy will not change that much," Ali Larijani told Agence France-Presse.

Chosun Shinbo, a newspaper based in Japan that is a mouthpiece for the North Korean government, wrote in an editorial in June: "We will see a better relationship between the U.S. and the Korean Peninsula with Obama, who sternly criticizes Bush and who would meet the leader of Chosun without pre-conditions, than with the 'Bush clone' and scarecrow of the neocons McCain."

In February, Investors Business Daily reported that while not endorsing Obama, Colombian guerilla terrorist organization FARC's chieftain Raul Reyes has said he wants to see him in the White House. He told supporters that he met "two gringos" who said "the new president of their country will be Obama and that they are interested in your

compatriots. Obama will not support "Plan Colombia" nor will he sign the TLC (Free Trade Agreement)." Plan Colombia is the U.S. program funding the war on drugs and giving military support to the Colombian government.

Obama has even garnered the praises of Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam. "You are the instruments that God is going to use to bring about universal change, and that is why Barack has captured the youth. And he has involved young people in a political process that they didn't care anything about. That's a sign. When the Messiah speaks, the youth will hear, and the Messiah is absolutely speaking," Farrakhan said.

Fidel Castro has also jumped on the Obama bandwagon, saying Obama "without doubt is, from the social and human point, the most advanced candidate" running for the U.S. presidency, Reuters reported in May.

Both Obama and McCain have at one point been favored by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, who also told The Economist magazine that he would not take sides.

McCain, too, has received unsavory endorsements that could damage his reputation with moderate Democrats and independents, Hull said.

On Oct. 20, a group supporting Al Qaeda posted a message on a password-protected al Hesbah Web site that said McCain would be a better choice for president because he was more likely to continue the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Associated Press reported.

"This requires presence of an impetuous American leader such as McCain, who pledged to continue the war till the last American soldier," the AP reported. "Then, Al Qaeda will have to support McCain in the coming elections so that he continues the failing march of his predecessor, Bush."

McCain welcomed the endorsement of Texas megachurch preacher John Hagee, but later rejected it after tapes surfaced of Hagee saying that God sent Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust to help the Jews reach Israel.

"Then God sent a hunter. A hunter is someone with a gun, and he forces you. Hitler was a hunter. ... How did it happen? Because God allowed it to happen. Why did it happen? Because God said, 'My top priority for the Jewish people is to get them to come back to the land of Israel,'" Hagee said in a sermon posted on the Huffington Post.

Hagee has also called the Roman Catholic Church "the great whore" and a "false cult system," and he said Hurricane Katrina was God's punishment for homosexuality.

McCain accepted Hagee's endorsement in April, but changed his tune a month later, when he also rejected the endorsement of Ohio preacher Rod Parsley of the World Harvest Church, who has been a critic of Islam, calling the religion violent.

Hull said the best thing the candidates can do is distance themselves from groups or individuals who endorse them if they disagree with their positions on the issues.

"[Making] a statement of where the candidate stands with respect to Hamas or Chavez would be legitimate and an understandable response. Whether or not Hamas has endorsed Obama, Obama has a position towards Hamas and that position doesn't change based on the endorsement," Hull said. "The same is true of John McCain and the pastors."

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