

Turnout records fall even in GOP-friendly states

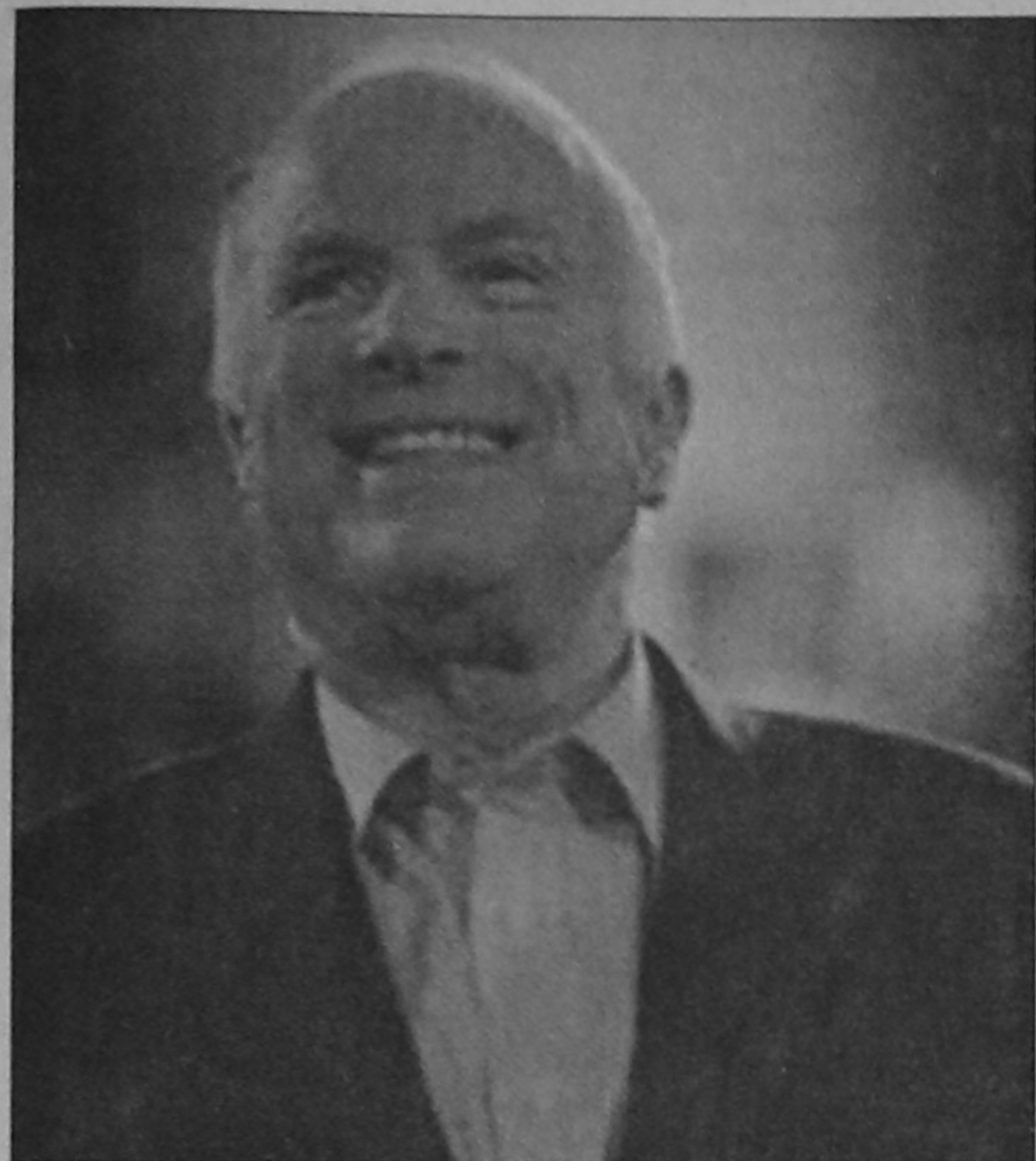


PHOTO: AFP
Republican presidential candidate John McCain speaks at a campaign rally at the Henderson Pavilion in Henderson, Nevada on Monday.

AP, Montgomery, Alaska

Even in reliably red states where Barack Obama has little chance of winning, unprecedented numbers of registrations and early votes have been tallied yesterday, and elections officials are predicting a record turnout in places where neither candidate even bothered to campaign.

An aggressive and well-financed get-out-the-vote campaign helped Obama's campaign mobilise unprecedented numbers of African-American and new voters who could help decide the presidential election by swinging states like North Carolina and Virginia to the Democrat.

But even in states like Alabama, Utah, Nebraska and Oklahoma, Republican strongholds where John McCain could post double-digit wins, Obama's candidacy helped boost registration numbers, particularly in urban areas. Republicans countered by mobilising their own base, a process aided by McCain's vice presidential pick, Sarah Palin, who is popular among conservatives.

"It may not shift Alabama from red to blue, or shift Tennessee from red to blue," Ferrel Guillory, an expert in Southern politics at the

University of North Carolina, said of the turnout projections. "But it could have an effect over the long term."

And while these states have been comfortably in McCain's column for months, a record turnout could benefit candidates further down the ballot. As in swing states, the consensus among experts is that the trend favours Democrats.

In Alabama, a state that has gone consistently Republican in presidential elections since picking Ronald Reagan in 1980, Obama's army of volunteers conducted voter registration drives that helped push the state's voter rolls past 3 million for the first time, and they registered blacks at a faster rate than whites.

"Obama realised there was no way to wrestle Alabama away from McCain," but a higher African-American turnout is likely to benefit Democrats running for the state Supreme Court and other offices, said D'Linell Finley, a political scientist at Auburn University Montgomery.

The story is similar in Tennessee, which saw many more early voters than in 2004, especially in Democratic-leaning counties; and in South Carolina, where

records fell for both registration and absentee voting.

"There are going to be some tight races that normally were not going to be tight," said South Carolina's Republican Party chairman, Katon Dawson, who has no doubts about a McCain victory there but is worried about down-the-ballot contests.

"I think we have very good prospects to pick up a congressional seat or two," said his Democratic counterpart, Carol Fowler.

In Utah, Kentucky, Louisiana all solidly red states, this election has inspired intense interest.

Nebraska, which has given all five of its electoral votes to Republicans in every election since 1964, fell just 3,000 short of a record for voter registration, but Secretary of State John Gale was forecasting record turnout anyway.

And even there "Republicans are not gaining to the same degree as Democrats and independents," he said. "You definitely have to attribute it to the Obama campaign."

Nebraska is one of two states that can split its electoral votes, and Obama opened three offices in Omaha to try to shave off one of those votes.

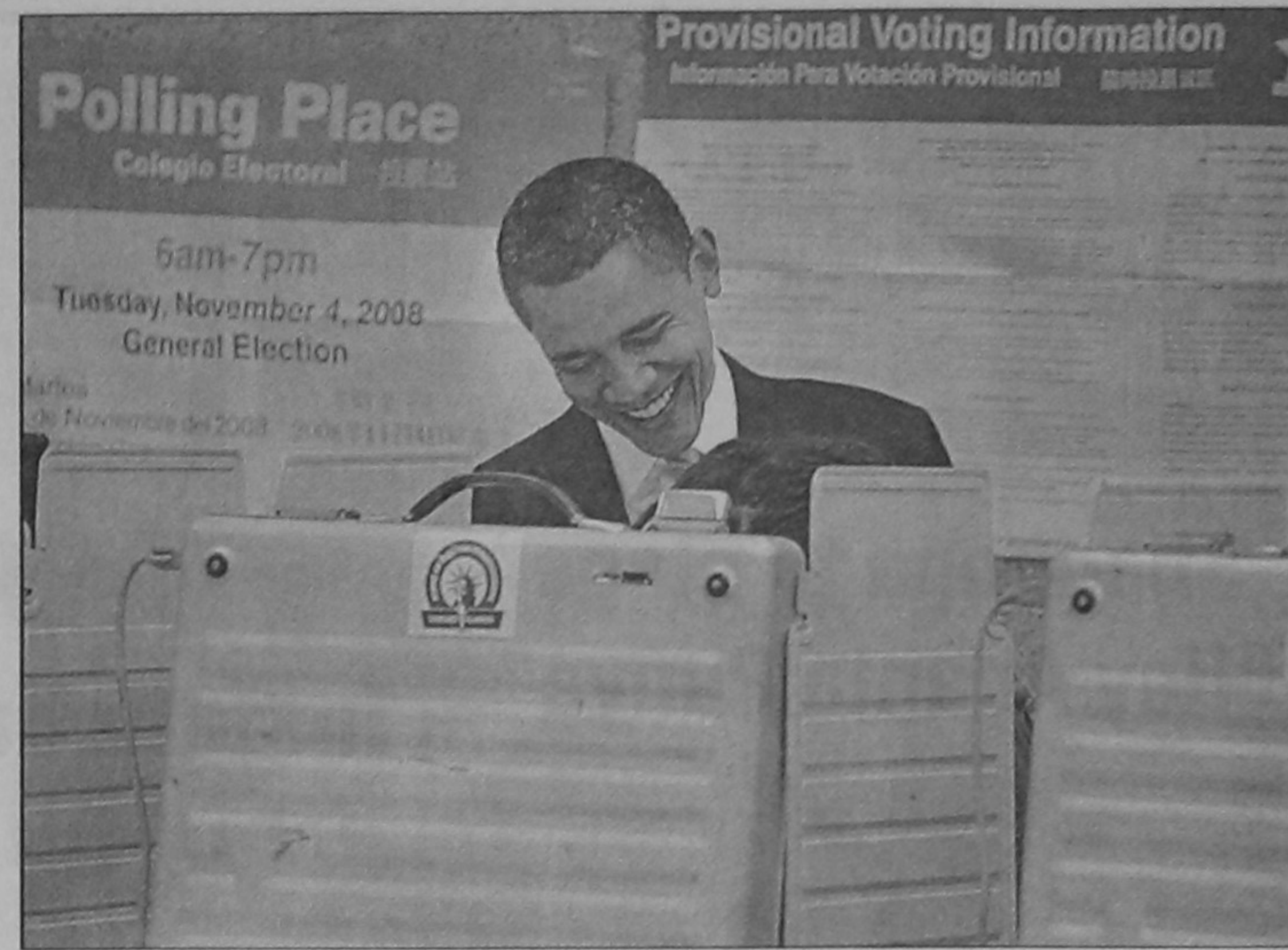


PHOTO: AFP
US Democratic presidential candidate Illinois Senator Barack Obama casts his vote in the 2008 presidential elections in Chicago, Illinois yesterday.

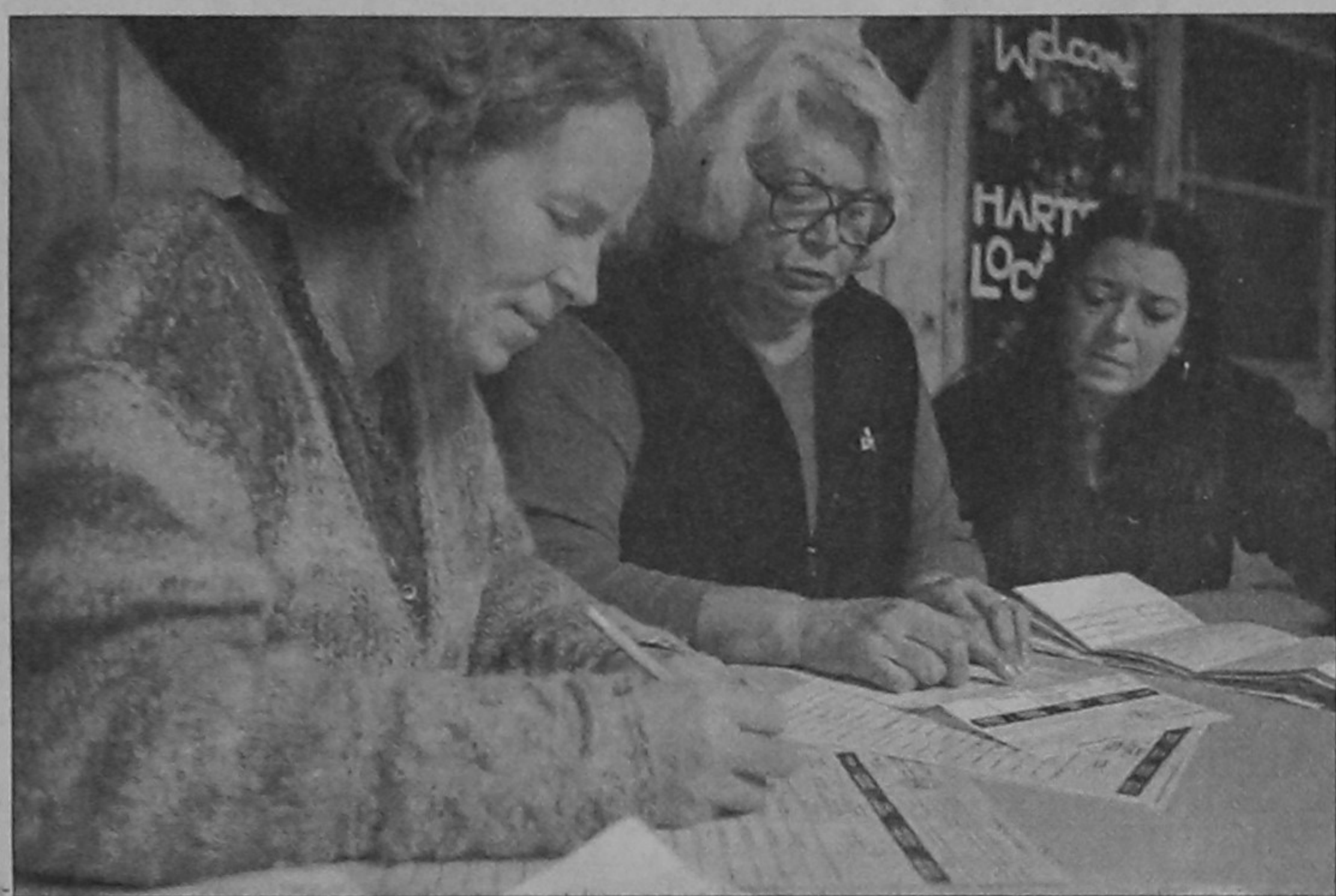


PHOTO: AFP
Election officials Nancy Ritger (L), Carolyn King (C) and Karen Faxon (R) tally up the votes in the US presidential election at a polling station just after midnight yesterday in Hart's Location, the smallest town in the northeastern state of New Hampshire. Residents of two tiny towns in New Hampshire, Hart's Location and Dixville Notch, symbolically kicked off voting in the US presidential election on Tuesday, casting ballots just after midnight.

Democrats aim for powerful majority in Senate

CNN, Washington

Democrats have a chance of taking filibuster-proof control of the US Senate as Election Day dawns, late polls show.

They'll need to add nine seats to their current roster of 51 (49 Democrats and two independents allied with them) to gain the three-fifths majority that will enable them to invoke cloture, a device to end filibusters, the unlimited floor speeches by an opponent that can prevent legislation from coming up for a vote.

Of the 35 Senate seats on the line this year, 23 are held by Republicans. Five Republican senators are retiring: Pete Domenici of New Mexico, Wayne Allard of Colorado, John Warner of Virginia, Larry Craig of Idaho and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska.

Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, said Democrats have a good shot at reaching a 60-seat majority.

"The fundamentals of this

election year could not be more Democratic," Sabato said. "You've got a terrible economy, a deeply unpopular president and an unpopular war. You put those elements together and it's going to produce a Democratic victory. ... The only question is, what size?"

CNN political analyst Stuart Rothenberg reports Democrats seem poised to pick up eight Republican seats in Alaska, Colorado, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon and Virginia.

According to Rothenberg's analysis, the lynchpin for Senate control may be Minnesota, where incumbent Republican Sen. Norm Coleman was locked up with Democrat Al Franken, a former "Saturday Night Live" star and liberal radio talk show host, and Independence Party candidate Dean Barkley, who filled one Minnesota Senate seat for two months in 2002 when Democrat incumbent Sen. Paul Wellstone was killed in a plane crash just before Election Day.

Democrats are looking for bigger House majority

AP, Washington

Democrats reached for a blowout at the polls Tuesday in heavy early congressional balloting that could add more than 20 seats to their House majority.

Long lines formed as polls opened before daybreak in about a dozen Eastern seaboard states. Democrats were counting on heavy turnouts to capture more than 15 GOP seats, and they had a good chance to wrest away another two dozen seats. Republicans had fewer than a dozen Democratic targets they had any hope of defeating.

"I knew the lines were going to be really long," Jennifer Howard, 51, of Hemdon, Virginia, told reporters as she got ready to vote. "I'm a nurse and I had to be at work on time," said Howard, who showed up 55 minutes before her polling place in Virginia opened.

Annie Bright, elections director in Clayton County, Georgia, said that

"our plan is to vote every voters that's in line in the time period that's allotted. We're doing anything we can to get them all voted. Even if it takes all night."

It could be the first time in more than 75 years that Democrats would ride large waves of victory to bigger congressional margins in back-to-back elections. In 2006, they won 30 seats and control of Congress in a surge powered by voter anger over the Iraq war.

This year it's the sour economy and public antipathy for President Bush that posed the biggest challenges for Republican candidates. A wave of GOP retirements and huge financial and organizational disadvantages compared with Democrats made a grim fight even tougher.

Democrats were counting on Barack Obama's coattails to transform a wave of victories into a tsunami to propel them to a gain of 35 House seats or more. They now control the House by a 235-199 margin, with one

vacancy.

GOP lawmakers at risk include Alaska's Rep. Don Young, Rep. Marilyn Musgrave of Colorado, Rep. Tom Feeney of Florida, and Michigan Reps. Tim Walberg and Joe Knollenberg. Rep. Lee Terry of Nebraska, once considered a safe bet for re-election, is also in major trouble in a state Obama is actively contesting.

Republican Party strategists expect to lose several GOP-held seats left open by Republican retirements or departures, including in Arizona, Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, and two each in New Mexico and New York.

Democrats aren't expecting a clean sweep. Rep. Tim Mahoney, D-Fla., who is under investigation by the FBI and a House panel after admitting to two adulterous affairs, is all but certain to lose his re-election race. Other Democrats most at risk of losing include Reps. Paul E. Kanjorski in Pennsylvania and Nick Lampson in Texas.

World hopes for a 'less arrogant America'

AP, Berlin

A world weary of eight years of George W. Bush was riveted Tuesday by the drama unfolding in the United States. Many were inspired by Barack Obama's focus on hope, or simply relieved that whoever wins the current administration is coming to an end.

From Berlin's Brandenburg Gate to the small town of Obama, Japan, the world gears up to celebrate a fresh start for America.

In Germany, where more than 200,000 flocked to see Obama this summer as he moved to burnish his foreign policy credentials during a trip to the Middle East and Europe, the election dominated television ticker crawls, newspaper headlines and Web sites.

Hundreds of thousands prepared to party through the night to watch the outcome of an election having an impact far beyond America's shores. Among the more irreverent festivities planned in Paris: a "Goodbye George" party to

bid farewell to Bush.

"Like many French people, I would like Obama to win because it would really be a sign of change," said Vanessa Doublin, shopping Tuesday on the Champs-Elysees. "I deeply hope for America's image that it will be Obama."

Obama-mania was evident not only across Europe, where millions geared up for all-night vigils, but even in much of the Islamic world, where Muslims expressed hope that the Democrat would seek compromise rather than confrontation.

The Bush administration alienated Muslims by mistreating prisoners at its detention center for terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and inmates at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. Human rights violations also condemned worldwide.

"I hope Obama wins (because) of the need of the world to see the US represent a more cosmopolitan or universal political attitude," said Rais Yatim, the foreign minister of

mostly Muslim Malaysia.

"The new president will have an impact on the economic and political situation in my country," said Muhammad al-Thaheri, 48, a civil servant in Saudi Arabia. Like so many around the world, he was rooting for Obama "because he will change the path the US is on under Bush."

Nizar al-Kortas, a columnist for Kuwait's Al-Anbaa newspaper, saw an Obama victory as "a historic step to change the image of the arrogant American administration to one that is more acceptable in the world."

Yet John McCain was backed by some in countries such as Israel, where he is perceived as tougher on Iran.

Israeli leaders, who consider the US their closest and most important ally, have not openly declared a preference. But privately, they have expressed concern about Obama, who has alarmed some by saying he would be ready to hold a dialogue with Tehran.

Voters in 11 states electing governors

CNN ONLINE, Washington

Along with electing a president, voters in 11 states are choosing their state's executives yesterday.

Leading up to Election Day, the most competitive gubernatorial race of 2008 was a rematch from four years ago. In Washington, Democratic incumbent Christine Gregoire faced Republican opponent Dino Rossi, a former state senator, who she edged out by a narrow margin of 133 votes after a 51-day recount.

On election night in 2004, state election officials certified Rossi as the winner, but a manual recount requested by Gregoire uncovered a number of previously uncounted ballots in heavily Democratic King County. Republicans contested the results in court for months, even after Gregoire took office.

During the Washington primaries, where all 10 contenders were on the ballot at the same time, Gregoire edged Rossi as the winner with 48 percent to 46 percent.

US press hail historic presidential vote

AFP, Washington

After the longest and most expensive US presidential campaign ever, newspaper headlines on Tuesday reflected both the historic importance of the occasion and relief that the outcome will soon be known. Here are some sample headlines:

The Washington Post: "The Final Push" read the main front page headline. There were two articles, one on each candidate, along with their photographs, and articles on each of their final day of campaigning.

The New York Times: "The '08 Campaign: A Sea Change for Politics as We Know It." The paper's main story focused not on the final moments of the electoral horse race but rather on a broader view of how unique this year's election campaign was.

The Wall Street Journal looked ahead at the next president's biggest challenge: "New Economic Ills Will Force Winner's Hand... Calls for Swift Action to Loom Over Next

President."

USA Today: "Decision is in voter's hands: US history will be made today by electing McCain or Obama." The news story is accompanied by a separate story headlined "Where is everybody? Maybe standing in line at the polls" that focuses on an expected drop in productivity on Tuesday as voters wait in long lines to cast ballots.

"America on edge as election's outcome nears," said the online edition of the Los Angeles Times. "Emotions are high as the nation awaits an end to a historic campaign."

The Chicago Tribune looked ahead to the planned election night party held by the Obama campaign, a complex logistical task for authorities in the Democratic candidate's city. "An unprecedented event," it called the rally.

The tabloid New York Post, reflecting the famously Democratic sympathies of city voters, had a large photo of Barack Obama with his hand raised in front of a US flag. The headline reads simply: "Brink of History."



PHOTO: AFP
File photo dated 1979 shows US Senator from Illinois and presidential nominee of the Democratic Party in the 2008 US presidential election, Barack Obama (C) with his maternal grandparents Stanley and Madelyn Dunham after his high school graduation in 1979.

Obama suffers election-eve heartache with grandma's death

AFP, Charlotte

US presidential front-runner Barack Obama suffered heartache Monday with the death of his grandmother, losing his last beloved link to the family who raised him, just hours from election day.

A tearful Obama, who stands on the historic threshold of becoming the first black US president, told 25,000 supporters here that Madelyn Dunham had passed away in her sleep at her Hawaii home after a long battle with cancer.

Shewas 86. The Democrat lauded Dunham, who raised him when his anthropologist mother was studying in Indonesia, as one of America's "quiet heroes," and delivered an impassioned vow to work for all such heroes if elected to the White House.

The news broke on the campaign's final day as Obama blitzed through Florida and North Carolina before a concluding late-night rally in Virginia - all Republican states that he is bidding to flip into his column.

Obama had dashed to his grandmother's side in Hawaii two weeks ago, fearing she

would not live to see what polls suggest may be his triumph against Republican John McCain Tuesday's election.

His voice thick with grief, the 47-year-old Illinois senator thanked McCain for an "incredibly gracious" statement of condolence, and said this was a "bitter-sweet time for me."

"She is going home," he said. "So there is great joy as well as tears."

Obama recapped his grandmother's life from her birth in 1922 and her marriage to his grandfather, their struggles through the Great Depression and with his infant mother through World War II.

"She was one of those quiet heroes that we have all across America," said Obama, who was criticised for remarking on his grandmother's latent racial prejudice after a storm over incendiary sermons by his former pastor.

"They're not famous. Their names aren't in the newspapers," he said.

"But each and every day they work hard. They sacrifice for their children and their grandchildren. They aren't seeking the limelight. All they try to do is just do the right thing."

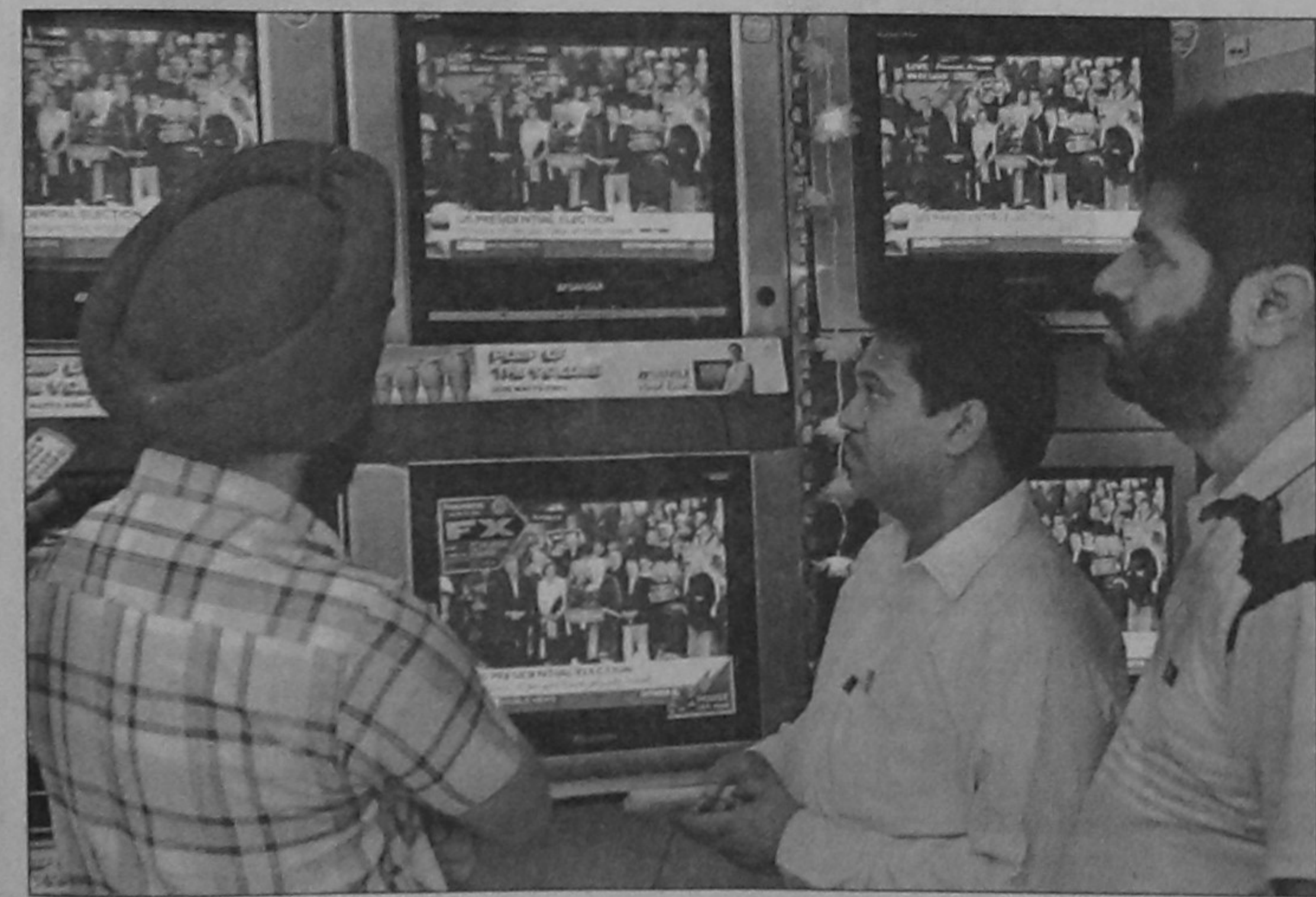


PHOTO: AFP
Indian men watch US presidential election coverage on television at an electronics showroom in Amritsar yesterday. Americans vote in an election of rare historic potential, with front-running Democrat Barack Obama seeking to become the first black president and Republican John McCain hoping for a poll-defying comeback.