

Akron Buckeye Poll
Fall 2008
Combined Panel and Cross-Section Surveys

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Executive Summary

The major findings of two surveys conducted in the fall of 2008 (a panel study of 613 registered voters re-surveyed from July and March 2008, and a new survey of an additional 600 registered voters):

Obama Moves Ahead in Ohio Presidential Race. In October 2008, Barack Obama moved slightly ahead of John McCain in the Ohio presidential race. Obama was the choice of 44.6 percent of registered voters, McCain was the choice of 40.9 percent, and 14.5 remained undecided. The race was tied in July 2008.

Candidates Unify Their Parties. Obama and McCain made gains in unifying their fellow partisans in Ohio. In October, Obama was supported by 83.6 percent of Democratic voters and McCain received the backing of 92.5 percent of Republican voters. These figures were higher than in July.

Strength of Candidate Preference and Enthusiasm for the Campaign Increases. Both candidates benefitted from an increase in strong supporters and enthusiasm for the campaign

Vice Presidential Nominees May Influence the Race on the Margins. Overall, 38.9 percent of Ohio voters said that Joe Biden will make it more likely they will vote Democratic in the fall and 29.4 percent said Biden will make a Democratic vote less likely. Meanwhile, 39.0 percent of Ohio voters said that Sarah Palin will make it more likely that they will vote Republican and 45.2 percent said it will make a Republican vote less likely.

Variation in Down Ticket Races and Ballot Initiatives. Democrats have an edge in the generic ballot for Ohio congressional and state legislative races, and the margin is roughly equal to Obama's advantage in the presidential race. In terms of ballot issues, Ohio voters opposed regulating payday lending and were nearly evenly divided on casino gambling.

Ohio Voters Remain Focused on the Economy. In October 2008, 59.5 percent of Ohio voters said the economy was the top priority when it came to their presidential vote. This figure is much the same as in July 2008.

Obama Gains Edge on Specific Economic Issues. In October 2008, Ohio voters judged Obama to be better than McCain on a number of key economic issues, including the

economy and jobs, other domestic issues, energy and housing. These figures represent a change from July 2008.

Obama Posts Modest Gains on Experience, Vision. Although most Ohio voters said McCain was better on experience than Obama, this figure for Obama increased in October. A majority of Ohio voters said Obama was better on vision than McCain, a shift from July.

A Majority of Voters Continue to Believe Obama will win Ohio in November. As in July, 56 percent of Ohio voters believe Obama will carry the Buckeye state in the October survey.

The Survey

This report is based on two surveys: a panel study of 613 respondents re-interviewed from a March and July 2008 survey (an original 1500 respondent random sample of adult Ohio citizens 18 years or older), and a new survey of a random sample of an additional 600 registered voters. Both surveys were conducted by telephone by the Center for Marketing & Opinion Research, LLC of Canton, Ohio. The panel re-interviews took place between September 29 and October 19 and the new survey occurred between September 24 and October 15; a careful review of the results revealed only modest fluctuations over the field period. Both surveys were weighted to reflect the demographic characteristics of the Ohio adult population based on the U.S. Census. Each of these surveys had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.0 percentage points; the combined surveys have a margin of error of plus or minus 2.8 percent. All of these surveys are part of a broader election year study of Ohio voters undertaken by the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron.

Findings

Obama Moves Ahead in Ohio Presidential Race

Both the panel and new surveys found that Barack Obama had moved slightly ahead of John McCain in the Ohio presidential race. Obama was the choice of 44.6 percent of registered voters in Ohio, McCain was the choice of 40.9 percent, and 14.5 percent remained undecided.

The 3.7 percentage point difference between the candidates in October 2008 was within the margin of error of the panel for both the panel and new voter survey. However, when the two surveys are combined (for more than 1200 respondents), the 3.7 percentage point difference between the candidates is statistically significant. These data suggest that Obama has a slight lead among Ohio registered voters. Measures of likely voters reduce the Obama lead slightly, revealing the increased enthusiasm and commitment of McCain voters since July 2008 (see below).

These results are consistent with other polls released in Ohio during the same time period, with an average of the Ohio polls showing a two to four percentage-point advantage for Obama over McCain.

Table 1 Ohio Voters: Presidential Preferences, 2008

	Candidate Preferences		Generic Ballot	
	<i>October</i>	<i>July</i>		<i>March</i>
<i>Obama</i>	44.6	39.6	<i>Democrat</i>	57.4
<i>Undecided</i>	14.5	20.5	<i>Undecided</i>	10.5
<i>McCain</i>	40.9	39.9	<i>Republican</i>	32.1
Total	100.0	100.0		100.0

As Table 1 indicates, Obama posted a four-percentage point gain over July 2008 (44.6 to 39.5 percent) and McCain picked up one percentage point (40.9 to 39.9 percent). However, the Obama support in October was still considerably below the percentage of panel respondents who said they preferred that a “Democrat” win the White House back in March 2008 (57.4 percent).

Candidates Unify Their Parties

As shown in Table 2, Obama and McCain have made gains in unifying their fellow partisans in Ohio. For example, Obama was supported by 83.6 percent of Democratic voters in October 2008, compared to just 66.6 percent in July. Meanwhile, McCain received the backing of 92.5 percent of Republican voters in October compared to just 77 percent in July.

Table 2 Ohio Voters: Preferences and Partisanship

	October		
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
<i>Obama</i>	83.6	40.7	1.0
<i>Undecided</i>	10.2	27.5	6.5
<i>McCain</i>	6.2	31.8	92.5
ALL	100.0	100.0	100.0

	July		
	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
<i>Obama</i>	66.6	33.5	7.3
<i>Undecided</i>	21.7	23.1	15.7
<i>McCain</i>	11.7	43.4	77.0
ALL	100.0	100.0	100.0

Over the same time period, Independents moved toward Obama (40.7 percent in October compared to 33.5 percent in July) and away from McCain (31.7 percent in October from 43.4 percent in July).

Strength of Candidate Preference and Enthusiasm for the Campaign Increases

The percentage of Ohio voters that reported “strong” presidential candidate preferences increased to 63.8 percent in October 2008 from 46.4 percent in July 2008. McCain made larger gains, increasing to 60.3 percent from 37.6 percent. However, Obama increased as well, rising to 70.2 percent in October from 58.3 percent in July (Table 3).

Table 3 Ohio Voters: Strength of Preference

<i>% Strong Preference</i>	<i>October</i>	<i>July</i>
<i>Obama</i>	70.2	58.3
<i>McCain</i>	60.3	37.6
ALL	63.8	46.4

Enthusiasm for the campaign also increased among Ohio voters. Overall, the average score was 7.2 on a ten-point scale (where 1 means lowest enthusiasm and 10 highest enthusiasm). Both candidates posted increases in this regard: for Obama, the enthusiasm score rose from 7.2 in July to 8.0 in October, while for McCain the increase was larger, rising from 5.9 to 7.2 (Table 4).

Table 4 Ohio Voters: Enthusiasm for Campaign

<i>Average Score</i>	<i>October</i>	<i>July</i>
<i>Obama</i>	8.0	7.2
<i>Undecided</i>	6.0	3.8
<i>McCain</i>	7.1	5.7
Total	7.2	5.9

Despite these increases in strong supporters and enthusiasm, the favorability ratings of Obama and McCain changed only modestly between July and October 2008 (Table 5). Overall, Obama’s average favorability rating increased from 4.9 to 5.4 (on a ten-point scale where “10” was the highest favorability). Meanwhile, McCain’s average favorability increased from 4.9 to 5.0 (Table 5).

As one would expect, Obama and McCain voters each have more favorable views of their candidate than his opponent. Both candidates posted increases in average favorability among their voters of about the same magnitude (for Obama from 7.8 to 8.3, and for McCain from 7.2 to 7.8).

Table 5 Ohio Voters: Candidate Favorability

Average Score	October		July	
	Obama	McCain	Obama	McCain
Obama	8.3	2.8	7.8	2.9
Undecided	3.7	4.2	3.1	4.0
McCain	2.9	7.8	2.9	7.2
Total	5.4	5.0	4.9	4.9

Vice Presidential Nominees May Influence the Race on the Margins

In October 2008, 38.9 percent of Ohio voters said that Joe Biden will make it more likely that they will vote Democratic and 29.4 percent said Biden will make a Democratic vote less likely (Table 6).

Table 6 Ohio Voters: Impact of Biden Nomination

	Biden will make Democratic vote:			Total
	more likely	no difference	less likely	
Democrats	61.9	23.8	14.3	100.0
Independents	37.2	34.9	27.9	100.0
Republicans	12.6	38.2	49.2	100.0
ALL	38.9	31.7	29.4	

	Biden will make Democratic vote:			Total
	more likely	no difference	less likely	
Obama	65.7	26.0	8.3	100.0
Undecided	23.8	38.7	37.5	100.0
McCain	14.4	35.8	49.8	100.0
ALL	38.8	31.8	29.4	

Among Democrats, 61.9 percent said the Biden nomination will increase their likelihood of voting Democratic and 14.3 percent said it will make a Democratic vote less likely.

Among Independents, 37.2 percent said Biden will increase the likelihood of a Democratic vote and 27.9 said it will make such a vote less likely.

Among Republicans, 12.6 percent saw Biden as a positive and 49.2 percent as a negative factor when it came to the likelihood of voting Democratic.

Very similar patterns held for Obama and McCain voters. However, 37.5 percent of undecided voters on balance reported that Biden will make it less likely that they will cast a Democratic ballot.

In October 2008, 39.0 percent of Ohio voters said that Sarah Palin will make it more likely that they will vote Republican and 45.2 percent said it will make a Republican vote less likely (Table 7).

Table 7 Ohio Voters: Impact of Palin Nomination

	Palin will make Republican vote:			Total
	<i>more likely</i>	<i>no difference</i>	<i>less likely</i>	
<i>Democrats</i>	12.1	14.2	73.7	100.0
<i>Independents</i>	38.6	15.7	45.7	100.0
<i>Republicans</i>	71.9	17.8	10.3	100.0
ALL	39.0	15.9	45.2	

	Palin will make Republican vote:			Total
	<i>more likely</i>	<i>no difference</i>	<i>less likely</i>	
<i>Obama</i>	10.6	12.5	76.9	100.0
<i>Undecided</i>	28.6	22.6	48.8	100.0
<i>McCain</i>	73.2	17.0	9.8	100.0
ALL	39.1	15.8	45.1	

Among Republicans, 71.9 percent said the Palin nomination will increase the likelihood they will vote Republican and 10.3 said it will make a Republican vote less likely.

Among Independents, 38.6 percent said Palin will increase the likelihood of a Republican vote and 45.7 said it will make such a vote less likely.

Among Democrats, 12.1 percent saw Palin as a positive and 73.7 percent as a negative factor when it came to the likelihood of voting Republican.

Here too, very similar patterns held for Obama and McCain voters. However, 48.8 percent undecided voters on balance reported that Palin would make it less likely that they would cast a Republican ballot.

Variation in Down Ticket Races and Ballot Initiatives

In October 2008, Ohio voters were asked their vote for Ohio congressional and state legislative candidates using a generic ballot question (i.e. a “Democratic” versus a “Republican” candidate for these offices). Most respondents claimed to be undecided (45.3 percent on the congressional ballot and 51.3 percent on the state legislative ballot).

Table 8: Ohio Voters: Generic Down Ticket Ballots

	Vote for:	
	Congress	State Legislature
<i>Democratic</i>	28.7	26.0
<i>Republican</i>	24.4	21.0
<i>Other Candidate</i>	1.6	1.7
<i>Undecided</i>	45.3	51.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Among Ohio voters who had a preference on these generic ballots, the Democratic brand name enjoyed an advantage—28.7 to 24.4 percent for the congressional races and 26.0 to 21.0 percent for the state legislative races. These differences (4.3 and 5.0 percentage points) are comparable to the difference between Obama and McCain in the presidential race in October. These figures suggest that the presidential race could have a small but significant coattail effect on congressional and state legislative races in Ohio.

Respondents were also asked about the Ohio attorney general race, and 70.1 percent said they were undecided. Among the minority of Ohioans who had a preference in this race, 17.2 percent favored Democrat Richard Cordray and 10.6 percent favored Republican Mike Crites.

The large number of undecided voters in the congressional, state legislative, and attorney general races reveal the capacity for substantial changes in the outcome during the final weeks of the campaign.

Ohio voters were also asked about state ballot propositions and the results were mixed. On the issue of regulating payday lending, 35.3 percent of registered voters opposed to regulating payday lending, 26.7 supported the regulation, and 38 percent were undecided.

On the issue of casino gambling, 41.7 percent of Ohio voters were in favor of casino gambling. 40.0 percent were opposed to casino gambling, and 18.4 percent were undecided.

A ballot initiative mandating paid sick leave for employees was withdrawn from the ballot before the fall campaign, but the survey asked Ohio voters about the basic issue. Overall, 43.9 percent favored paid sick leave for employees, 29.6 percent opposed, and 26.4 percent were undecided.

Further analysis of the survey suggests that these figures may reflect a heightened concern for economic issues among Ohio voters.

Ohio Voters Remain Focused on the Economy

In October 2008, 59.5 percent of Ohio voters said the economy was their top priority when it came to their presidential vote. This figure was larger than other issue priorities, including other domestic issues (such as government spending and taxes, 17.0 percent), foreign policy issues (such as the Iraq War and terrorism, 14.2 percent), and social issues (such as abortion and same-sex marriage, 9.3 percent).

Table 9: Ohio Voters: Issue Priorities

most important issue

	October	July
Economic issues	59.5	56.2
Domestic issues	17.0	14.3
Foreign policy issues	14.2	19.5
Social issues	9.3	10.0
Total	100.0	100.0

The focus on the economy was only slightly higher than in July 2008, when 56.0 percent of Ohio voters gave the economy top priority. Over the same time period, there was a modest decline in foreign policy concerns (from 19.5 to 14.2 percent).

A more important change was the connecting of economic priorities with presidential preferences. In October 2008, 55.6 percent of Ohioans who gave the economy top priority supported Obama, compared to 31.6 percent who backed McCain. This represents a change from July 2008, when 44.6 percent of voters with economic priorities supported Obama (the McCain figure was 33.9 percent).

Table 10: Ohio Voters: Issue Priorities and the Vote

	October			Total
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>	
<i>Economic issues</i>	55.6	12.8	31.6	100.0
<i>Domestic issues</i>	24.3	16.5	59.2	100.0
<i>Foreign policy issues</i>	33.7	21.0	45.3	100.0
<i>Social issues</i>	26.8	10.7	62.5	100.0
ALL	44.6	14.5	40.9	
	July			Total
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>	
<i>Economic issues</i>	44.6	24.5	33.9	100.0
<i>Domestic issues</i>	28.6	15.2	56.2	100.0
<i>Foreign policy issues</i>	46.0	17.3	36.7	100.0
<i>Social issues</i>	25.3	15.2	59.5	100.0
ALL	39.5	20.5	39.9	

In October 2008, McCain enjoyed an advantage over Obama among voters with other kinds of issue priorities, including other domestic issues (59.2 to 24.3 percent), foreign policy issues (45.3 percent to 33.7 percent), and social issues (62.5 percent to 26.8 percent). In each of these issue areas, McCain opened a wider lead over Obama compared to July 2008. For example, in July 50.4 percent of Ohio voters who gave priority to other domestic issues (such as government spending and taxes) favored McCain and in October 2008, 56.2 favored McCain.

Obama Gains Edge on Specific Economic Issues

In October 2008, more Ohio voters said Obama was better on a number of key economic issues than McCain. This represents a small but significant across the board shift from July 2008.

Table 11: Ohio Voters: Economic Issues and Candidates

Which candidate is better:

	Economy	
	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	41.4	43.8
<i>Obama</i>	53.5	48.4
<i>Neither</i>	5.1	7.8
Total	100.0	100.0

	Domestic Issues	
	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	44.7	48.4
<i>Obama</i>	52.3	46.0
<i>Neither</i>	3.0	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0

	Energy	
	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	39.7	47.0
<i>Obama</i>	49.3	40.5
<i>Neither</i>	11.0	12.5
Total	100.0	100.0

	Housing	
	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	39.3	43.7
<i>Obama</i>	47.9	43.6
<i>Neither</i>	12.8	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0

For example, on the “economy and jobs” 53.5 percent of respondents said Obama was better than McCain in 2008—an increase from 48.4 percent in July 2008.

On other domestic issues, Obama was favored by 52.3 percent in October 2008, an increase from 46.0 percent in July.

On energy and gasoline prices, Obama was favored by 49.3 percent in October 2008, an increase from 40.5 percent in July.

On housing and the mortgage crisis, Obama was favored by 47.9 percent in October 2008, an increase from 43.6 percent in July.

Table 12: Ohio Voters: Other Issues and Candidates

Which candidate is better:

Iraq War

	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	57.5	60.2
<i>Obama</i>	36.9	35.1
<i>Neither</i>	5.6	4.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Terrorism

	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	62.3	65.5
<i>Obama</i>	30.4	28.9
<i>Neither</i>	7.3	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Social Issues

	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	43.2	43.3
<i>Obama</i>	47.3	47.5
<i>Neither</i>	9.5	9.2
Total	100.0	100.0

In contrast, there was very little change on foreign policy issues or social issues between October and July 2008. On the Iraq war and terrorism, Ohio voters saw McCain as better than Obama in both time periods, and on social issues, Ohio voters consistently saw Obama better than McCain.

Obama Posts Modest Gains on Experience, Vision

In October 2008, 64.2 percent of Ohio voters said that McCain was better on the experience needed to be president, while 29.4 percent said Obama was better. However,

McCain lost ground (down from 72.7 percent) and Obama gained ground (up from 20.6 percent) compared to July.

Table 13: Ohio Voters: Traits and Candidates

Which candidate is better:

Experience

	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	64.2	72.7
<i>Obama</i>	29.4	20.6
<i>Neither</i>	6.4	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Integrity

	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	45.2	51.7
<i>Obama</i>	43.2	41.5
<i>Neither</i>	11.6	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Vision

	October	July
<i>McCain</i>	43.1	50.2
<i>Obama</i>	50.7	44.8
<i>Neither</i>	6.2	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0

On the question of integrity, Ohio voters split almost evenly on which candidate was better, with 45.2 percent favoring McCain and 43.2 percent favoring Obama. However, there was a decline for McCain from July 2008 (down from 51.7 percent).

In October 2008, a bare majority of Ohio voters said that Obama was better than McCain on the vision needed to be president (50.7 to 43.1 percent, respectively). This pattern marks a reversal from July 2008, when a bare majority thought McCain was better on vision (50.2 to 43.1 percent, respectively).

A Majority of Voters Continue to Believe Obama will win Ohio in November

In October 2008, 56 percent of Ohio voters believed that Obama would win Ohio in November. This figure was unchanged from July 2008.