

Akron Buckeye Poll Summer 2008 Panel Study

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Executive Summary

The major findings of this panel study of 753 registered voters in the summer of 2008:

Presidential Race Close in Ohio. In terms of Ohio voter preferences, Obama and McCain were tied at 40 percent each, with 20 percent undecided. However, Obama had more strong supporters than McCain.

Primary Divisions Linger in Both Parties. Both Obama and McCain had not fully united their respective parties. For example, only 45 percent of Clinton primary voters were supporting Obama.

Obama Supporters more Positive about the Campaign. Obama's supporters are more satisfied with the candidates and enthusiastic about the campaign than McCain's supporters.

Economy Becomes a Higher Priority. In the summer of 2008, 56 percent of registered voters said the economy was their top priority, up 14 percent from the spring of 2008.

Obama Supporters Focus on the Economy, McCain Supporters have More Diverse Agenda. Three-fifths of Obama's supporters said the economy was top priority compared to 47 percent of McCain's supporters.

McCain seen as better on Experience, Foreign Policy; More Even Division Occurred on Other Matters. McCain is regarded as the better candidate on experience, foreign policy, and energy policy; Obama is better on the economy and social issues.

Ohioans Sharply Divided on Issues. Obama and McCain supporters were sharply divided on government services, abortion, and the Iraq War.

McCain's Age May Be a Bigger Factor than Obama's Race. McCain's age may be a bigger factor than Obama's race among Ohio voters.

A Majority of Registered Voters Believe Obama will win Ohio in November. A majority of registered voters say Obama will win Ohio in 2008, despite the fact that the candidates are tied in the level of support.

The Survey

This report is based on a panel study of 800 respondents drawn from a 1500 case random sample of adult Ohio citizens (18 years or older) interviewed for the Spring 2008 Akron Buckeye Poll. Both surveys were conducted by telephone by the Center for Marketing & Opinion Research, LLC of Canton, Ohio. The panel re-interviews took place between July 17 and August 17, 2008; a careful review 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. The panel survey produced 753 registered voters, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6 percentage points. This survey is 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

Presidential Race Close in Ohio

The panel study revealed that the 2008 presidential race was very close in the summer of 2008, leading up to the national party conventions. Among registered voters, Barack Obama and John McCain each drew support from 40 percent (including respondents with firm preferences and those leaning toward the candidates) with 20 percent undecided (see Table 1). These results were very stable over the field period.

These results are consistent with other polls released in Ohio during the same time period, including the *Columbus Dispatch* poll (August 12-21, with McCain 42 and Obama 41 percent); Public Policy Polling (August 12-14, with the race tied at 45 percent each), and the Quinnipiac Poll (July 23-29, with Obama at 46 percent and McCain at 44 percent). All these findings are within the margin of error of the results presented here.

Obama had a larger number of strong supporters than McCain (22 to 14 percent), while McCain had a larger number of weak supporters than Obama (26 to 18 percent).

Table 1 2008 Presidential Race in Ohio, Summer 2008

% Registered Voters

Support:		Strength of Support:	
<i>Obama</i>	40	<i>Strong Obama</i>	22
		<i>Weak Obama</i>	18
<i>Undecided</i>	20	<i>Undecided</i>	20
		<i>Weak McCain</i>	26
<i>McCain</i>	40	<i>Strong McCain</i>	14
Total	100	Total	100

Overall, the candidates' supporters reflected the typical demography of Ohio elections, with Obama drawing more support from women, African Americans, and residents of

northeast Ohio, and McCain drawing more support from men, higher-income persons, and residents of southwestern Ohio.

Partisanship Underlies Closeness of the Contest

Barack Obama was supported by 72 percent of self-identified Democrats, while McCain received the backing of 85 percent of self-identified Republicans (see Table 2). However, consistent with other polls in Ohio, Democrats outnumbered Republicans (39 to 28 percent, with 33 percent independents) in this sample, so that Obama received a larger number of supporters from among his partisans. McCain held an edge among Independents, with 37 percent compared to Obama’s 30 percent.

Overall, 45 percent of Democrats were strong Obama supporters and 27 percent were weak supporters. In contrast, 36 percent of Republicans were strong McCain supporters and 49 percent were weak supporters. Independents tended to be weak supporters of both candidates and 33 percent were undecided.

Table 2 2008 Presidential Support by Partisanship, Summer 2008

% Registered Voters

	Obama	Undecided	McCain	Total
<i>Democratic</i>	72	18	10	100
<i>Independent</i>	30	33	37	100
<i>Republican</i>	5	10	85	100
ALL	40	20	40	100

	Strong Obama	Weak Obama	Undecided	Weak McCain	Strong McCain	Total
<i>Democratic</i>	45	27	18	6	4	100
<i>Independent</i>	13	17	33	29	8	100
<i>Republican</i>	0	5	10	49	36	100
ALL	22	18	21	26	14	100

Primary Divisions Linger in Both Parties

Both Obama and McCain were strongly supported by respondents who reported voting for them in the 2008 Ohio presidential primary. Obama was supported by 88 percent of his primary backers and McCain was supported by 81 percent (see Table 3).

However, neither candidate enjoyed the same level of support from respondents who reported voting for their primary opponents. Obama was backed by just 45 percent of those who reported voting for Hillary Clinton and by 71 percent of those who backed another Democratic candidate. McCain was supported by 70 percent of those who voted for another Republican in the primary.

Table 3 2008 Presidential Support and Primary Vote, Summer 2008

% Registered Voters

Support:	Democratic Primary:			Support:	Republican Primary:	
	<i>Clinton</i>	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>McCain</i>	<i>Other</i>
Obama	45	88	71	Obama	4	3
Undecided	26	5	25	Undecided	15	27
McCain	29	7	4	McCain	81	70
ALL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Obama has not Taken Advantage of General Democratic Strength

In the spring of 2008, three-fifths (59 percent) of this sample of registered voters said that they preferred the Democrats to take control of the White House and two-fifths wanted the Republicans to stay in control (see Table 4).

In the summer of 2008, 64 percent of the voters who said they wanted a Democrat in the White House backed Obama, while 22 percent were undecided, and 14 percent supported McCain. In contrast, 80 percent of those who said that they wanted a Republican in the White House backed McCain, 15 percent were undecided, and 5 percent supported Obama.

Table 4 Generic Party Ballot Spring 2008 and Presidential Support Summer 2008

% Registered Voters

Should win:	All 2008	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>	Total
Republicans	41	5	15	80	100.0
Democrats	59	64	22	14	100.0

Obama Supporters more Positive about the Campaign

Obama supporters reported a more positive view of the 2008 campaign. For example, they were more satisfied with the candidates, scoring an average of 6.7 on a ten-point satisfaction scale (with 10 the most satisfied). McCain supporters scored an average of 4.6, and the undecided were the least satisfied with an average of 2.4 (see Table 5).

The Obama supporters were also more enthusiastic about the campaign, scoring an average of 7.2 on a ten-point enthusiasm scale (with 10 the most enthusiastic). In contrast, McCain’s backers scored an average of 5.7, and the undecided an average of 3.8.

Obama supporters reported a slightly higher intention to vote in the November general election, with an average of 9.7 on a ten-point vote intention scale (with 10 the most likely to vote). McCain supporters were not far behind with an average of 9.6, but the undecided voters were markedly lower, with an average of 7.5.

If these measures were used to estimate likely voters in November, Obama would enjoy about a four percentage point lead (46 to 42 percent), a bit larger than the margin of error of the survey.

Table 5 2008 Presidential Support and Views of the Campaign

Average Score, 1 to 10 scale

Support:	<i>Satisfied with the candidates</i>	<i>Enthusiastic about election</i>	<i>Intention to vote in 2008</i>
Obama	6.7	7.2	9.7
Undecided	2.4	3.8	7.5
McCain	4.6	5.7	9.6
All	5.0	5.9	9.2

Economy Becomes a Higher Priority

In the summer of 2008, a majority (56 percent) of Ohio registered voters said that economic issues would be most important to their presidential vote (see Table 6). This figure is greater than other domestic issues (such as government spending and taxes, 14 percent), foreign policy issues (such as the Iraq War and terrorism, 20 percent), and social issues (such as abortion and same-sex marriage, 10 percent).

These figures represent a 14 percentage point increase in the priority assigned to economic issues compared to the spring of 2008 (when 42 percent of the registered voters gave economic issues top billing).

Table 6 Issue Priorities, Summer and Spring 2008

Most important issue:	Summer 2008	Spring 2008
Economic	56	42
Domestic	14	17
Foreign Policy	20	28
Social	10	13
Total	100	100

Obama Supporters Focus on the Economy, McCain Supporters have More Diverse Priorities

More than two-fifths (44 percent) of registered voters with economic priorities supported Obama, and about one-third supported McCain (34 percent, see Table 7). McCain drew a majority of registered voters who gave other domestic issues (56 percent) and social issues priority (59 percent). One surprise was that voters with foreign policy priorities favored Obama over McCain (46 to 37 percent).

Table 7 2008 Presidential Support and Issue Priorities, Summer 2008
Priorities by Candidates

% Registered Voters

Summer 2008 Most important issue:	2008 Presidential Support:			
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>	<i>Total</i>
Economic	44	22	34	100
Domestic	29	15	56	100
Foreign Policy	46	17	37	100
Social	25	16	59	100
ALL	40	20	40	100

Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of Obama’s supporters focused on economic issues, while less than one-half of McCain’s supporters did (47 percent, see Table 8). The undecided voters also focused on economic issues (64 percent).

Table 8 2008 Presidential Support and Issue Priorities, Summer 2008
Candidates by Priorities

% Registered Voters

Summer 2008 Most important issue:	2008 Presidential Support:			
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>	ALL
Economic	61	64	47	56
Domestic	10	11	20	14
Foreign Policy	22	17	17	19
Social	7	8	16	11
Total	100	100	100	100

McCain’s backers included smaller groups of voters with other domestic (20 percent), foreign policy (17 percent), and social issue priorities (16 percent), while the Obama supporters contained a group of voters with foreign policy priorities (22 percent).

McCain seen as better on “Experience” and Foreign Policy; More Even Division on Other Issues

When asked which candidate was “better” on a range of issues and characteristics, a large majority of registered voters chose McCain as better on “experience” (73 percent to 21 percent for Obama, see Table 9). McCain was also seen as better on terrorism (66 to 29 percent), the Iraq War (60 to 35 percent), and energy (47 to 40 percent).

On other issues, voters were more evenly divided. Obama was seen as better on economy and jobs (48 to 44 percent) and on social issues (48 to 43 percent). The candidates were essentially even on other domestic issues, energy, and housing.

These patterns represent something of a change from the spring of 2008 when these registered voters were asked about which party was better on several of these issues. For example, more than three-fifths (64 percent) of the respondents said the Democrats were better on the economy and jobs, and almost three-fifths (59 percent) said the Democrats were better on other domestic policies. At that time, the registered voters saw the GOP as slightly better on foreign policy in general.

On social issues, there was little change between the spring and summer, with a 48 to 43 percent margin in favor of both the Democrats and Obama.

As one might expect, Obama and McCain supporters tended to see their candidate as better in all these regards. However, the undecided tended to lean toward McCain on many of these matters.

Table 9 Which Candidate is Better on Issues and Characteristics 2008

BETTER ON:	Summer 2008		Spring 2008	
	Obama	McCain	Democrats	Republicans
Economy and Jobs	48	44	63	33
Domestic Issues	46	48	59	38
Energy and Gas Prices	40	47		
Housing and Foreclosure	44	44		
Foreign Policy			44	50
Iraq War	35	60		
Terrorism	29	66		
Social Issues	48	43	48	46
Experience	21	73		
Integrity	42	52		
Vision	45	50		

Ohioans Sharply Divided on Issues

There appear to be sharp differences in issue positions of the Obama and McCain supporters in Ohio (see Table 10a to 10d). These opinions were asked in the spring of 2008, so the results must be viewed with some caution since it is possible that the respondents' views may have changed. However, additional evidence from this survey and from other surveys suggests only modest changes in these opinions between the spring and summer.

Government Services. Obama was preferred by a plurality of those registered voters who said in the spring of 2008 that they wanted a “much larger government with many more services” (46 percent) or “somewhat larger government with a few more services” (59 percent). In contrast, registered voters who said they wanted “much smaller government with many fewer services” currently back McCain (52 percent) as well as those who wanted “somewhat smaller government with a few less services” (49 percent). The undecided leaned slightly toward larger government.

Table 10a Government Services and 2008 Presidential Support

Government Services	2008 Presidential Support:			Total	ALL
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>		
Much larger government, many more services	46	27	27	100	17
Somewhat larger government, a few more services	59	15	26	100	25
Somewhat smaller government, a few less services	33	15	52	100	44
Much smaller government with many fewer services	18	33	49	100	14
ALL	40	20	40		100

Iraq War. Ohioans were also divided on the Iraq War, with a large majority of those who said the war was a mistake and the troops should be withdrawn favoring Obama (72 percent). In contrast, a large majority of those who said the war was the right decision and the troops should stay backed McCain (76 percent). The undecided voters leaned toward staying in Iraq.

Table 10b Iraq War and 2008 Presidential Support

Iraq War	2008 Presidential Support:			Total	ALL
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>		
Wrong decision, withdraw troops	72	17	11	100	41
Wrong decision, keep troops	48	29	23	100	10
Right decision, withdraw troops	14	32	54	100	17
Right decision, keep troops	9	15	76	100	32
ALL	40	20	40		100

Abortion. Ohioans were also divided over abortion, with a majority of those who said abortion should be legal in all cases favoring Obama (65 percent) and a majority of those who said abortion should be illegal in most cases or all cases favoring McCain (55 and 50 percent, respectively.) The undecided leaned toward opposing abortion.

Table 10c Abortion and 2008 Presidential Support

Abortion	2008 Presidential Support:			Total	ALL
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>		
Legal in all cases	65	16	19	100	15
Legal in most cases	44	20	36	100	35
Illegal in most cases	30	15	55	100	32
Illegal in all cases	18	32	50	100	18
ALL	40	20	40		100

Ideology. Given these patterns on key issues, it is not surprising that Ohioans were divided on ideology as well, with a large majority of those who said their political views were “very liberal” supporting Obama (73 percent) and a large majority of those who said their political views were “very conservative” favoring McCain (73 percent). The undecided leaned in a conservative direction.

Table 10d Ideology and 2008 Presidential Support

Ideology	2008 Presidential Support:			Total	ALL
	<i>Obama</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>McCain</i>		
Very Liberal	73	21	6	100	6
Somewhat Liberal	70	13	17	100	16
Moderate	38	25	37	100	40
Somewhat Conservative	26	16	58	100	25
Very Conservative	4	23	73	100	13
ALL	40	20	40	100	100

Obama supporters gave themselves an average of 6.8 on a ten-point liberalism scale (where 10 was the most liberal response and 1 the most conservative response, see Table 11), and they gave Obama an average rating of 6.9. Thus the Obama voters’ views of their own political views closely matched their assessment of Obama.

In contrast, the McCain supporters gave themselves an average of 3.9 on a ten-point scale of liberalism (where 10 was the most liberal response and 1 the most conservative response), and gave McCain an average rating of 4.5. So the McCain supporters see themselves as a bit more conservative than their candidate.

The undecided voters gave themselves an average of 4.6 on a ten-point liberalism scale (where 10 was the most liberal response and 1 the most conservative response). This rating nearly matched their 4.8 average rating they gave McCain, but was quite different from the 6.4 percent average rating they gave Obama.

Table 11 Ratings of Self and Candidate Ideology

Average, 1 to 10 scale (10=most liberal)

Support:	<i>Respondent's Liberalism</i>	<i>Obama's Liberalism</i>	<i>McCain's Liberalism</i>
Obama	6.8	6.9	3.8
Undecided	4.6	6.4	4.8
McCain	3.9	7.9	4.5
ALL	5.2	7.2	4.3

McCain's Age May Be a Bigger Factor than Obama's Race in the Election

The panel respondents were asked if McCain's age and Obama's race would make them less likely or more likely to vote for the candidates, or if these factors would make no difference. Because of the sensitivity that many voters have about these issues, the survey also asked them to assess if these factors would matter to other people in their community or in the state of Ohio as a whole (see Table 12).

Overall, 40 percent of registered voters said McCain's age would make them less likely to vote for him, a figure that increased to 52 percent for their communities and the state as a whole. Roughly one-quarter said the McCain's age is a reason why they and others would be more likely to vote for him.

Overall, 19 percent of registered voters said Obama's race would make them less likely to vote for him, a figure that increased to 47 percent for their community and 42 percent for the state of Ohio. At the same time, 22 percent said Obama's race would make them more likely to vote for Obama, a figure that increases to 31 percent for their community and 37 percent for the state of Ohio.

One can draw three conclusions from these results. First, McCain's age may be more of a factor at the polls than Obama's race. Second, Ohioans generally have a more negative view of their communities and the state as a whole regarding the impact of age and race than they view themselves. Third, an accurate assessment of the impact of age and race on the election probably lies somewhere between the self assessment and the assessment of communities and the state as a whole.

Table 12 McCain's Age and Reported Impact on the Vote

McCain's age:

	<i>Respondent View of Self</i>	<i>Respondent's view of own community</i>	<i>Respondent's view of Ohio</i>
Less likely to vote for him	40	52	52
No difference	35	19	19
More likely to vote for him	25	29	29
Total	100	100	100

Obama's race:

	<i>Respondent View of Self</i>	<i>Respondent's view of own community</i>	<i>Respondent's view of Ohio</i>
Less likely to vote for him	18	47	42
No difference	60	22	21
More likely to vote for him	22	31	37
Total	100	100	100

Table 13 reports the self assessments of the impact of age and race by candidate choice. It also calculates a net impact (subtracting the “less likely” from the “more likely” responses). Here a negative number means a net loss for the candidate and a positive number means a net gain.

These calculations show that McCain’s age may have a substantial negative effect among the strong and weak Obama supporters, and may have a smaller positive effect on the strong and weak McCain supporters.

These calculations show that Obama’s race may have a smaller impact. It may generate a positive impact among strong Obama supporters and a smaller negative effect among the undecided and strong McCain supporters. A key factor here is the relatively large number of Obama supporters who say race will *increase* their likelihood of voting for Obama.

Given the differences between the self-assessment of voters and their assessments of their communities, the impact of age and race may be higher than shown in Table 13.

Table 13 2008 Presidential Support and Reported Effect of McCain's Age

McCain's age:	2008 Presidential Support:			Weak McCain	Strong McCain	ALL
	Strong Obama	Weak Obama	Undecided			
Less likely to vote for him	71	59	30	23	10	40
No difference	23	28	44	42	42	35
More likely to vote for him	6	13	26	35	48	25
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>NET</i>	-65	-46	-4	12	38	-15

Obama's Race:	2008 Presidential Support:			Weak McCain	Strong McCain	ALL
	Strong Obama	Weak Obama	Undecided			
Less likely to vote for him	11	14	22	21	24	19
No difference	41	71	69	60	66	59
More likely to vote for him	48	15	9	19	10	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>NET</i>	37	1	-13	-2	-14	3

Few Registered Voters Report Knowing “A Lot” about Obama and McCain

Only about one-fifth of registered voters said they knew “a lot” about the views of Obama and McCain, with nearly a majority saying they knew “a fair amount,” and less than one-third reporting they knew “just some” or “very little” about the candidates (see Table 14).

Overall, more Obama supporters said they knew “a lot” about their candidate (32 percent) compared to McCain’s supporters (26 percent).

Two ways voters can learn more about the candidates are the campaign itself and coverage of the campaign (see Table 15). Overall, nearly two-fifths (39 percent) of registered voters said they had heard “a great deal” from the presidential campaigns and more than one-half (54 percent) said they had heard “a great deal” about the campaigns from the news media.

Overall, registered voters reported hearing more from and about Obama than from or about McCain. This pattern held for campaign contacts (59 percent heard more about Obama and 21 percent heard more about McCain) as well as the news media (63 to 6 percent).

Table 14 Knowledge of the Candidates, Summer 2008

Knowledge of McCain

	2008 Presidential Support:			
	ALL	Obama	Undecided	McCain
A lot	22	20	18	26
A fair amount	50	47	47	56
Just some	19	17	22	18
Very little	9	16	13	0
Total	100	100	100	100

Knowledge of Obama

	2008 Presidential Support:			
	ALL	Obama	Undecided	McCain
A lot	23	32	18	18
A fair amount	46	54	33	44
Just some	21	13	25	29
Very little	10	1	24	9
Total	100	100	100	100

When asked how helpful these sources of information were, more than one-fifth (23 percent) said that campaign information was “very helpful” and more than one-quarter (28 percent) felt that the news media was “very helpful.”

Table 15 Information from the Campaigns and the News Media

How much heard from:

	Campaigns	News Media
A great deal	39	54
A moderate amount	48	32
Not very much	13	14
Total	100	100

Heard more from:

Obama	59	63
McCain	21	6
Both, Neither, Don't Know	20	31
Total	100	100

How helpful was information?

Very helpful	23	28
Somewhat helpful	48	51
Not very helpful	29	21
Total	100	100

A Majority of Registered Voters Believe Obama will win Ohio in November

A majority (56 percent) of the registered voters said that they believe Obama will win Ohio in the general election (see Table 16). Nearly three-quarters of Obama supporters hold this view (73 percent), a majority of the undecided (56 percent), and almost two-fifths of McCain supporters (39 percent). In the spring of 2008, 69 percent of these regular voters thought the Democrats would win the election and 31 percent thought the Republicans would win.

Table 16 Who will Win Ohio in 2008?

	ALL	Obama	Undecided	McCain
Obama	56	73	56	39
McCain	44	27	44	61
Total	100	100	100	100