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Taubman Center for Public Policy

R.I. Survey: Obama Leads McCain by 20 Percent

Sen. Barack Obama leads Sen. John McCain by 20 percentage points in the U.S. presidential race, according to a new Brown University survey of registered Rhode Island voters. The survey also found that nearly 80 percent of respondents believe both the nation and the state are heading on the wrong track. The poll was conducted August 18-20, 2008.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. [Brown University] — Sen. Barack Obama is ahead of Sen. John McCain in the race for the U.S. presidency, according to a new statewide survey conducted by researchers at Brown University.

The survey was conducted August 18-20, 2008, prior to the Democratic National Convention, at Brown University by Marion Orr, the Fred Lippitt Professor of Public Policy and Political Science and director of the Taubman Center for Public Policy and the John Hazen White Public Opinion Laboratory. It is based on a statewide random sample of 548 registered voters in Rhode Island. Overall, the margin of error is about plus or minus four percentage points.

If the election were held today, 50 percent of the registered voters in Rhode Island say they would vote for Barack Obama, 30 percent for John McCain, and approximately 20 percent are undecided. Of those who plan to vote for Obama, 75 percent say that they are "satisfied" or "excited," whereas 52 percent of McCain voters say the same. In addition, nearly 45 percent of McCain supporters say that they would vote for him as the "lesser of two evils." Twenty percent of Obama supporters say they would vote for him as the "lesser of two evils."

When asked about what things most concern them about McCain, 41 percent of respondents named "continuing George Bush's policies." When asked about what things most concern them about Obama, 35 percent of respondents believed that he is too inexperienced and is not ready to be president. When asked to choose between a candidate who is more experienced *or* a candidate who will bring greater change to current national policies, 58 percent of respondents said they want someone who will bring greater change. Twenty-nine percent said a more experienced and tested person was preferable.

The survey found that 57 percent of respondents who voted for Sen. Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic Primary said they plan to vote for Obama in the general election. McCain was favored by 23 percent of those who supported Clinton. Eighty-nine percent of respondents said they were likely to vote in November.

Ranking the issues voters think should be the top priority for the next president and Congress, respondents listed job creation and economic growth (26 percent), the war in

Iraq (12.9 percent), the cost of energy and gasoline (10.3 percent), healthcare (8.5 percent), and illegal immigration (5 percent).

Findings also show that only 11 percent of Rhode Island voters believe the nation is headed in the right direction, while 79 percent feel it's on the wrong track. Attitudes were very similar on a state-level: 78 percent of respondents believe things in Rhode Island are on the wrong track, while 11 percent feel things are going in the right direction.

The survey also asked participants what qualities McCain and Obama should look for in a vice presidential candidate. [Note: the survey was conducted before Obama named Joe Biden as a running mate]. Thirty-nine percent believed that Obama should choose someone with experience in the military or foreign affairs, and 29.7 percent believed that someone with economic expertise was important. For McCain, 41.7 percent believe his running mate should have experience in foreign affairs and the military, and 15 percent believed he should choose someone with knowledge and experience on economic matters.

For more information, contact Marion Orr at 401-863-9436.

Survey Questions and Responses

1. All in all, do you think that things in the nation are headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track? *10.8% headed in right direction; 79.2% off on the wrong track; 7.1% mixed; 2.0% Not sure; 0.9% no answer*

1b. Generally speaking, would you say things in Rhode Island are going in the right direction, or have they gotten off on the wrong track? *11.1% right direction; 78.0% wrong track; 6.9% mixed; 3.7% Not sure 0.4% no answer*

2. How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing as president? *2.2% excellent; 8.8% good; 20.8% only fair; 67.1% poor; 0.4% don't know; 0.4% no answer*

3. Do you generally approve or disapprove of the job that George W. Bush is doing in handling the economy? *11.8% approve; 80.3% disapprove; 6.8% not sure; 1.1% no answer*

4. In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job that Congress is doing? *13.7% approve; 67.2% disapprove; 17.4% not sure; 1.7% no answer*

5. How likely are you to vote in this year's November election? *89.9% very likely; 5.0% somewhat likely; 2.2% not very likely; 1.7% not at all likely; 1.3% no answer*

6. Now I'm going to read you the names of several public figures, and I'd like you to rate your feelings toward each one as very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative. If you don't know the name, please just say so.

George W. Bush: 5.1% very positive; 9.5% somewhat positive; 10.3% neutral; 18.9% somewhat negative; 55.2% very negative; .9% dk/na

John McCain: 10.1 very positive; 21.2 somewhat positive; 21.4 neutral; 21.2 somewhat negative; 21.2 very negative; 4.8 dk/na

Barack Obama: 25.8 very positive; 23.6 somewhat positive; neutral; 19.2 somewhat negative; 13.7 very negative; 13.7; 4.0 dk/na
Michelle Obama: 21.1 very positive; 15.6 somewhat positive; neutral; 25.1 somewhat negative; 10.5 very negative; 12.8; 14.9 dk/na
Cindy McCain: 5.0 very positive; 13.9 somewhat positive; 41.0 neutral; 10.7 somewhat negative; 7.9 very negative; 21.4 dk/na

7. Let me list some issues that have been debated in Washington. Please tell me which one of these issues you think should be the top priority for the federal government.

Job creation and economic growth 26.2%
Energy and the cost of gas 10.3%
The war in Iraq 12.9%
Health care 8.5%
Terrorism 3.1%
Illegal immigration 5.4%
The environment and global warming 3.9%
The mortgage and housing situation 3.1%
Other 0.2%
All equally 24.5%
None of these 0.7%
Don't know/No answer 1.1%

7a. [Only for respondents who chose a priority in Question 7] And which of these issues do you think should be the next highest priority for the federal government to address?

Job creation and economic growth 16.1%
Energy and the cost of gas 16.3%
The war in Iraq 14%
Health care 7.1%
Terrorism 4%
Illegal immigration 5%
The environment and global warming 3.3%
The mortgage and housing situation 4.6%
Other 0.6%
All equally 23.2%
None of these 2.7%
Don't know/No answer 2.9%

8. Thinking about this year's presidential election, which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view?

Statement A: This is a time when it is important to look for a more experienced and tested person even if he brings fewer changes to the current policies.
Statement B: This is a time when it is important to look for a person who will bring greater changes to the current policies even if he is less experienced and tested.

Statement A: Time for a more experienced and tested person: 29.1%
Statement B: Time for a person who will bring greater changes: 58%
Depends: 3%
Not sure: 6.9%
Don't know/No answer 3.1%

9. If the next election for president were held today, would you vote for: 30%
Republican John McCain; 50.6% Democrat Barack Obama; depends 3.7%; neither/other 6.4%; Don't know/No answer 9.2%

10. When it comes to your vote for [candidate chosen in Question 9], would you say that you are excited to be voting for him, you are satisfied to be voting for him, or you are voting for him as the lesser of two evils? *26.2% excited; 29.3% satisfied; 25.6% lesser of two evils; 5.9% not sure; 12.9% Don't know/No answer*

11. Did you vote in the Democratic primary for president? *53.9% yes; 43.9% no; 2.2% Don't know/No answer*

11a. [For primary voters only] For whom did you vote in the primary —Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, or someone else? *30% Barack Obama; Voted for 36.3% Hillary Clinton; Voted for 1.7% someone else; 28.5% did not vote in Democratic primary; 3.4% not sure*

12. Would having Hillary Clinton as Obama's vice presidential running-mate make you more likely to vote for the Democratic ticket in November, more likely to vote for the Republican ticket, or wouldn't it make much difference in your vote? *32.3% Democratic ticket; 12.1% Republican ticket; 47.9% wouldn't make much difference; 3.9% would not vote; 3.8% Don't know/No answer*

13. Would having Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed as Obama's vice presidential running-mate make you more likely to vote for the Democratic ticket in November, more likely to vote for the Republican ticket, or wouldn't it make much difference in your vote? *34% Democratic ticket; 8.1% Republican ticket; 49.9% wouldn't make much difference; 1.5% would not vote; 6.5% Don't know/No answer*

For each of the following candidates, please tell me whether that person has 1) a background and set of values that you can identify with, or 2) whether he does not have a background and set of values that you can identify with.

14a. John McCain: *48.5% identify with values; 40% do not identify with values; 11.5% Don't know/No answer*

14b. Barrack Obama: *51.2% identify with values; 32.1% do not identify with values; 16.6% Don't know/No answer*

15. I'm going to read you some qualities that a candidate for vice president might have. Of these qualities, which one or two do you think it is most important for Barack Obama's vice presidential choice to have?

Is an expert in military or foreign affairs: 39.7% Is an expert on the economy: 29.7%

Has experience in the business world: 3%

Has served as a member of Congress: 3.4%

Has served as governor of a state: 4%

Is liberal on social issues: 5.1%

None: 5.7%

Don't know/No answer: 9.5%

15a. [Second choice for Question 15]

Is an expert in military or foreign affairs: 16.6%

Is an expert on the economy: 30.8%

Has experience in the business world: 10.3%

Has served as a member of Congress: 7.1%

Has served as governor of a state:

Is liberal on social issues: 4.4%

None: 12.9%

Don't know/No answer: 14%

16. I'm going to read you some qualities that a candidate for vice president might have. Of these qualities, which one or two do you think are most important for John McCain's vice presidential choice to have?

Is an expert on the economy: 15.4%

Is an expert in military or foreign affairs: 41.5%

Has experience in the business world: 6.5%

Has served as a member of Congress: 4%

Has served as governor of a state: 3.1%

Is conservative on social issues: 7.7%

None: 7.3%

Don't know/No answer: 14.4%

16a. [Second choice for Question 16]

Is an expert on the economy: 14.3%

Is an expert in military or foreign affairs: 17.7%

Has experience in the business world: 13%

Has served as a member of Congress: 5.4%

Has served as governor of a state: 4.9%

Is conservative on social issues: 6.3%

None: 20.1%

Don't know/No answer: 18.3%

17. Do you know what Barack Obama's religion is? 48.4% yes; 38.2% no; 13.4% Don't know/No answer

17a. [For those answering Yes in Question 17] What religion is he? 28.5% Protestant (includes United Church of Christ, Baptist, Lutheran); 17.2% Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and other Christians; 6.2% Catholic; 0% Jewish; 11.6% Muslim; Mormon/LDS/Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; 2.8% other; 6.5% none; 27.1% not sure/refused

18. I'm going to read you several things that some people have said concern them about John McCain's candidacy. Please tell me which one or two of these, if any, cause you the most concern.

It seems likely that he would continue George W. Bush's policies: 41.8%

He is too committed to keeping a high troop presence in Iraq: 11.9%

His economic policies would only benefit the wealthy: 4.6%

He does not take a strong enough stance on illegal immigration: 5.7%

He is too old to be president: 8.8%

He is not conservative enough on social and moral issues: 1.3%

He flip flops and changes his mind too much on issues: 5.4%

None of these cause concern: 14%

Don't know/No answer: 6.5%

18a. Second concern, from Question 18:

It seems likely that he would continue George W. Bush's policies: 10%

He is too committed to keeping a high troop presence in Iraq: 20.1%

His economic policies would only benefit the wealthy: 14.3%

He does not take a strong enough stance on illegal immigration: 4%

He is too old to be president: 4.4%

He is not conservative enough on social and moral issues: 3.2%

He flip flops and changes his mind too much on issues: 5.6%

None of these cause concern: 21.1%

Don't know/No answer: 17.3%

19. I'm going to read you several things that some people have said concern them about Barack Obama's candidacy. Please tell me which one or two of these, if any, cause you the most concern.

He is too inexperienced and is not ready to be president: 35.6%

He would not be strong and forceful enough in dealing with America's enemies: 5.2%

He flip flops and changes his mind too much on issues: 7.9%

He is too committed to quickly withdrawing troops from Iraq: 5.8%

He is too liberal on social and moral issues: 3.8%

He would have tax-and-spend economic policies: 6.3%

He does not have mainstream American values: 1.7%

None of these cause concern: 25.2%

Don't know/No answer: 8.5%

19a. Second concern, from Question 19:

He is too inexperienced and is not ready to be president: 6.2%

He would not be strong and forceful enough in dealing with America's enemies: 11.8%

He flip flops and changes his mind too much on issues: 9.9%

He is too committed to quickly withdrawing troops from Iraq: 8.8%

He is too liberal on social and moral issues: 3.6%

He would have tax-and-spend economic policies: 5.2%

He does not have mainstream American values: 3.9%

None of these cause concern: 34.5%

Don't know/No answer: 16.1%