



***The 2008 Election:
How Arab Americans Will Vote and Why***

A poll conducted by:
Zogby International

On behalf of:
The Arab American Institute

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Methodology

Zogby International conducted an omnibus telephone poll of Arab Americans nationwide between September 8th and September 13th, 2008.

The target sample is 501 interviews with approximately 46 questions asked. Samples are randomly drawn over national cds using Zogby International's list of Arab surnames in conjunction with a purchased surname list. Zogby International surveys employ sampling strategies in which selection probabilities are proportional to population size within area codes and exchanges. Up to six calls are made to reach a sampled phone number. Cooperation rates are calculated using one of AAPOR's approved methodologies¹ and are comparable to other professional public-opinion surveys conducted using similar sampling strategies.² Weighting by country of origin, religion, born in US, age and gender is used to adjust for non-response. The margin of error is +/- 4.5 percentage points. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

¹ See COOP4 (p.38) in *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates of Surveys*. The American Association for Public Opinion Research, (2000).

² *Cooperation Tracking Study: April 2003 Update*, Jane M. Sheppard and Shelly Haas. The Council for Marketing & Opinion Research (CMOR). Cincinnati, Ohio (2003).

Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percent*
Sample Size	501	100
East	148	30
South	122	24
Central/Great Lakes	166	33
West	65	13
18-29	89	18
30-49	198	40
50-64	124	25
65+	84	17
18-24	50	10
25-34	87	18
35-54	202	41
55-69	100	20
70+	56	11
<High School	16	3
HS Grad	68	14
Some College	98	20
College +	320	64
Roman/Eastern Catholic	175	35
Protestant/Orthodox	140	28
Muslim	120	24
Other/None	65	13
Male	250	50
Female	251	50

* Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent and might not total 100.

Key Findings

1. Shift in party identification continues. The Democrat/Republican break in 2000 was 40/38. Now it is 46/20.
2. Obama leads by 21 points in the two-way matchup with McCain (54-33). The margin drops to 14 points (46-32) when Barr and Nader are included.
3. The most important issues for Arab American voters are jobs/economy (far and away the greatest area of concern), followed by the war in Iraq/peace/foreign affairs, and health care.
4. Approval ratings given to the Bush Administration's performance are low: 23% for overall performance, 19% for economic policy and 31% for foreign policy.
5. Arab American voters in five battleground states (Michigan, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia) can be important. These states are home to 30% of the Arab American population, with the Arab American vote ranging from nearly 5% of Michigan's total to a percent and a half of Pennsylvania's.

Results Summary

1. In which party are you registered to vote or do you consider yourself a member?

Table 1. Party ID

	2008	2006	2004	2002	2000	1996
Democrat	46	45	43	39	40	38
Republican	20	31	32	31	38	36
Independent	19	19	16	14	28	23

A trend continues since 2002, with Arab American voters increasing their identification with the Democratic Party. At the same time, it appears that the bottom has fallen out for Republican identification, with the percentage of Arab Americans who say they are Republican now being about one-half of what it was in 2000.

2. If the election for President of the United States were held today and the candidates are Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain, for whom would you vote?

Table 2.1: Two-Way Horse Race

	Overall	Male	Female	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Obama	54	46	68	81	6	44
McCain	33	45	20	13	70	44
Other/NS	13	10	17	6	24	10

Table 2.2: Two-Way Horse Race

	Overall	Catholic	Orthodox	Muslim	18-29	30-49	50+
Obama	54	31	47	84	71	54	47
McCain	33	53	43	4	18	30	42
Other/NS	13	16	11	12	10	14	10

Obama holds a substantial lead over McCain. The Democrat appears to be underperforming, however, among some subgroups (like Catholics and independents), and there are signs that some of Obama's support is soft. In 2004, for example, John Kerry led by a substantial margin over George W. Bush in almost all subgroups of Arab American voters, including Catholics and independents. (In 2004, among Catholics it was Kerry 55, Bush 34; among independents it was Kerry 71, Bush 15.)

Results Summary (continued)

As with the general U.S. voter population, age and gender play a substantial role, with women and young voters supporting the Democratic candidate more strongly than other groups.

3. *If the election for President of the United States were held today and the candidates are Democrat Barack Obama, Republican John McCain, Libertarian Bob Barr, and independent Ralph Nader, for whom would you vote?*

Table 3.1: Four-Way Horse Race

	Overall	Male	Female	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Obama	46	36	57	69	5	35
McCain	32	42	22	11	74	43
Barr	1	1	--	--	--	3
Nader	6	9	4	5	4	8
Other/NS	16	12	18	15	17	11

Table 3.2: Four-Way Horse Race

	Overall	Catholic	Orthodox	Muslim	18-29	30-49	50+
Obama	46	30	38	75	70	39	43
McCain	32	56	37	5	18	32	38
Barr	1	--	2	--	--	--	1
Nader	6	3	6	9	3	8	5
Other/NS	16	11	17	11	8	22	11

When other candidates are added to the “horserace,” Obama loses strength (8 points), principally to Nader. Obama’s biggest losses are recorded among men, independents and voters over 30—where his support appears to be softest. He also loses almost 10 points among Muslim voters.

4a. Which of the following reasons best explains why you are voting for John McCain?

Table 4.1: Why McCain?

	Overall	Male	Female	Catholic	Orthodox	Muslim
I Vote Republican	12	11	15	14	9	--
Domestic Issues	19	12	32	20	17	--
Foreign Policy	16	14	19	23	3	--
I Like Him As a Man	30	36	18	29	34	--
Voting Against Obama/Democrats	18	21	12	7	34	--

4b. Which of the following reasons best explains why you are voting for Barack Obama?

Table 4.2: Why Obama?

	Overall	Male	Female	Catholic	Orthodox	Muslim
I Vote Democrat	12	11	12	20	6	15
Domestic Issues	40	37	43	49	40	41
Foreign Policy	3	4	9	9	--	13
I Like Him As a Man	12	9	13	12	24	4
Voting Against McCain/Republicans	20	27	14	8	26	23

When given a series of options to describe why they choose McCain, voters cite, “I like him as a man,” as the principal reason. One in five point to his stand on domestic issues, with the same number saying that their vote is a vote against Obama and the Democrats. 16% of McCain voters say they like his foreign policy.

At the same time, a substantial 40% of Obama supporters choose him for his stance on domestic issues—only 3%, on the other hand, point to his foreign policy. One in five of those preferring Obama are voting against McCain and the Republicans.

5. If you agree with Senator (McCain/Obama) on most issues but strongly disagree with him on his Middle East policy, is it very possible, somewhat possible, or not possible that you would vote for another candidate?

Table 5: Vote for Another Candidate If Disagreement on Candidate’s Foreign Policy

	McCain	Obama
Very Possible	11	7
Somewhat Possible	19	25
Not Possible	63	62

Almost one-third of both McCain and Obama supporters say that it is possible that they would change their vote if they disagree with their candidate’s Middle East positions.

6. In your own words, what are the two top issues facing the country today?

Table 6: Two Most Important Issues?

	Overall	Very Important to Your Vote	Handle Issue Best	
			Obama	McCain
Jobs/Economy	63	93	52	34
War In Iraq/Peace	37	77	48	39
Health Care	20	76	60	25
Gas Prices	16	**	**	**
Terrorism/Nat’l Security	10	77	38	49
Education	8	**	**	**
Taxes	6	66	50	37
Palestine	1	49	43	28
Lebanon	1	**	**	**
Civil Liberties	--	65	62	26

**Not Asked

When asked in an “open-ended” question to name the two most important issues in this election, jobs/economy was far and away most often mentioned, with over two-thirds of all Arab American voters highlighting this issue.

Next came the war in Iraq, peace and general foreign policy concerns. This set of concerns was followed by gas prices, terrorism and national security, and education.

When asked which candidate would handle these issues best, Obama bested McCain in six of the seven issues polled.

Results Summary (continued)

7. Of the following characteristics, which TWO are most important in your choice of a presidential candidate?

Table 7: Two Most Important Characteristics?

	Overall	Obama Voters	McCain Voters
Honesty	48	48	44
Change Washington	32	43	22
Moral Character	25	21	35
Strong Leader	21	17	23
Bring People Together	19	29	6
Makes Me Proud To Be An American	15	11	15
Experience	10	2	24
Consistency	10	10	14

Not unlike the general voting public, the two characteristics Obama voters identify with their candidate are his commitment to change Washington and his ability to bring people together. McCain supporters, on the other hand, ascribe to him qualities like being a man of moral character and experience.

8. Overall, how would you rate President Bush's job performance?

Table 8: President Bush Job Approval

	Overall	Obama	McCain	Dem	Rep	Ind	Cath	Orth	Muslim
Positive	23	4	49	9	63	19	32	36	7
Negative	76	95	51	90	37	81	67	63	91

9. Overall, how would you rate the performance of U.S. economic policy?

Table 9: U.S. Economic Policy

	Overall	Obama	McCain	Dem	Rep	Ind	Cath	Orth	Muslim
Positive	19	11	33	14	27	19	23	20	17
Negative	79	87	63	83	73	81	72	80	81

10. Overall, how would you rate the performance of U.S. foreign policy?

Table 10: U.S. Foreign Policy

	Overall	Obama	McCain	Dem	Rep	Ind	Cath	Orth	Muslim
Positive	31	19	53	22	48	25	46	34	19
Negative	67	80	47	76	52	75	53	65	79

The Bush Administration gets consistently low overall ratings from Arab Americans, almost across the board. Only Republicans gave the Administration a positive overall performance rating—but even here 37% of Arab American Republicans gave the President a negative rating. Almost three-quarters of Arab American Republicans hold a negative view of the Administration's economic policy—as do almost two-thirds of McCain voters—and slightly more than half of Arab American Republicans give the Administration's foreign policy a negative rating.

Note

About one-third of Arab Americans live in battleground states (Michigan, Virginia, Ohio, Florida and Pennsylvania), representing about 5% of the vote in Michigan to a percent and a half in Pennsylvania.

	Arab Americans as a Percent of Overall Voting Population
Michigan	5
Virginia	2
Ohio	1.5 – 2
Florida	1.5
Pennsylvania	1.5