



***The 2008 Election:
The Arab American Vote
October 2008***

A poll conducted by:
Zogby International

On behalf of:
The Arab American Institute

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Methodology and Sample Characteristics

Methodology

Zogby International conducted an omnibus telephone poll of likely Arab American voters nationwide between October 10th and October 15th, 2008.

The target sample is 504 interviews with approximately 41 questions asked. Samples are randomly drawn over national congressional districts 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.

***Report also includes data from a September survey of 455 likely Arab-American voters.**

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	504	100
East	101	20
South	125	25
Central/Great Lakes	201	40
West	77	15
18-29	90	18
30-49	200	40
50-64	125	25
65+	85	17
18-24	48	10
25-34	99	20
35-54	201	40
55-69	87	17
70+	65	13
<High School	9	2
HS Grad	54	11
Some College	148	29
College +	293	58
Roman/Eastern Catholic	176	35
Protestant/Orthodox	141	28
Muslim	120	24
Other/None	65	13
Male	252	50
Female	252	50

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

Key Findings

1. The shift in party identification among Arab Americans continues, with Arab American who consider themselves Democrats now outnumbering Arab Republicans two-to-one.
 - a. In the year 2000, the Democratic/Republican break was 40/38, while today it is 54/27.
2. Obama leads McCain by a three-to-one margin in both the two-way match-up and the four-way match-ups. In the two-way match-up, Obama leads 64/23, while in the four-way (adding Barr and Nader), Obama leads 62/22. This represents the greatest support ever recorded for a Presidential candidate among Arab American voters. (Projections are now for Obama to reach 68% by Election Day.)
3. Far and away the most important issue for Arab American voters is the economy, followed distantly by Iraq and health care. In all of the principle areas of concern to Arab American voters, they indicate, by margins of almost two-to-one, their belief that Obama is better equipped to handle those issues than McCain. (This includes Terrorism/National Security and taxes—thought to be McCain’s strong suits.)
4. With almost two-thirds of Arab Americans having been impacted by the recent economic crisis, it is no surprise that fewer than one-in-five believe that the country is on the right track, and only one-in-ten give President Bush a positive job approval rating.
5. Joe Biden’s significantly high favorable rating contrasts with Sarah Palin’s equally high unfavorable rating. Biden out-performs Palin among all groups, including Arab American Republicans, with Biden’s margin being 58/31 and Palin’s 58/39.
6. 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	54	45	43	39	40	38
Republican	27	31	32	31	38	36
Independent	17	19	16	14	28	23

The percentage of Arab Americans identifying as Democrats has been steadily increasing since 2002, while the percentage of those identifying as Republican has been declining. While up to the year 2000, Democrats held merely a slight edge over Republicans among Arab Americans, today twice as many Arab Americans identify themselves as Democrats than as Republicans.

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
	Oct.	Sept.					
Obama	64	55	54	75	86	37	45
McCain	23	35	32	13	1	62	25
Other/NS	13	10	15	11	13	2	30

Table 2.2: Two-Way Horse Race

	Overall		Catholic	Orthodox	Muslim	18-29	30-49	50+
	Oct.	Sept.						
Obama	64	55	51	58	89	84	62	58
McCain	23	35	31	30	2	13	19	30
Other/NS	13	10	19	12	9	3	19	11

In the direct head-to-head matchup with John McCain, Barack Obama leads by a three-to-one margin. This is, by far, the most substantial lead any Presidential candidate has ever held over his opponent among Arab American voters. In addition, it is important to note that Obama now leads among all subgroups, except among Arab American Republicans—but, even here, McCain only garners 62 percent of the vote. Also, note the overwhelming lead Obama holds among Arab American Muslims, women, and young voters.

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
	Oct.	Sept.					
Obama	62	46	51	72	80	36	47
McCain	22	32	31	14	<1	61	25
Barr	1	1	<1	2	2	--	<1
Nader	6	6	8	4	7	2	8
Other/NS	10	16	10	9	11	2	20

Table 3.2: Four-Way Horse Race

	Overall		Catholic	Orthodox	Muslim	18-29	30-49	50+
	Oct.	Sept.						
Obama	62	46	49	52	88	74	61	57
McCain	22	34	29	30	2	13	18	30
Barr	1	1	--	4	<1	6	<1	<1
Nader	6	6	8	2	7	6	4	7
Other/NS	10	14	14	12	3	1	17	6

When the other candidates are added to the horserace, Obama still leads by a three-to-one margin, and maintains a decisive lead among all subgroups of Arab American voters (except, of course, among Republicans). Note that Ralph Nader, an Arab American, draws about 6 percent of the vote. If those who are undecided do not vote or, if the breakout of their vote is as appears to be indicated by their leanings, the final Obama-McCain vote among Arab Americans should be 68 percent Obama, 24 percent McCain, and 7 percent Nader.

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

Table 4.1: Why McCain?

	Overall	
	Oct.	Sept.
I Vote Republican	4	12
Domestic Issues	26	19
Foreign Policy	28	16
I Like Him As a Man	10	30
Voting Against Obama/Democrats	25	18

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

Table 4.2: Why Obama?

	Overall	
	Oct.	Sept.
I Vote Democrat	16	10
Domestic Issues	42	43
Foreign Policy	13	7
I Like Him As a Man	4	11
Voting Against McCain/Republicans	15	20

When given a series of options to explain why they choose McCain, Arab American voters are split among three options: support for his foreign or domestic policies, and simply voting against the Democrats. Note that, since October, the percentage of Arab Americans who indicate their vote for McCain is a function of “liking him as a man” has dropped from 30 percent to only 10 percent.

Meanwhile, Barack Obama’s supporters still, largely choose him because of his stance on domestic issues—that remains unchanged since September.

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

Table 5: President Bush Job Approval

	Overall		Obama	McCain	Dem	Rep	Ind	Cath	Orth	Muslim
	Oct.	Sept.								
Positive	11	19	2	38	2	26	7	10	18	5
Negative	89	77	98	60	98	73	93	90	80	94

Arab American voters continue give President Bush an extremely low job approval rating, with even 73 percent of Arab American Republicans giving him a negative rating. It is worth noting that 38 percent of likely McCain voters give the President a positive rating.

6. Overall do you believe things in the United States are headed in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?

Table 6: Direction of the Country

	Overall		Obama	McCain	Dem	Rep	Ind	Cath	Orth	Muslim
	Oct.	Sept.								
Right Track	19	25	12	48	12	29	24	30	15	11
Wrong Track	76	64	84	49	82	68	71	65	79	84

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

Table 7: Two Most Important Issues?

	Overall		Handle Issue Best	
	Oct.	Sept.	Obama	McCain
Jobs/Economy	79	63	69	23
War In Iraq/Peace	38	37	65	31
Health Care	19	20	68	17
Gas Prices	8	16	**	**
Terrorism/Nat'l Security	7	10	56	36
Education	3	8	**	**
Taxes	5	6	65	24
Palestine	<1	1	**	**
Lebanon	--	1	**	**
Civil Liberties	<1	--	68	21

**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 the most frequently mentioned—up 16 percentage points since September. The second and third most important issues are the Iraq war and health care, with the percentage of Arab American voters saying each is virtually unchanged since September. When asked which candidate would handle these issues best, Obama wins handily in all six—even in areas some consider McCain’s strong suits (i.e., Terrorism/National Security, and taxes), Obama clearly bests McCain.

8. *What is your overall impression of the Democratic nominee for Vice President, Senator Joe Biden?*

Table 8: Favorability of Senator Biden

	Overall	Male	Female	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Favorable	65	64	69	78	58	49
Unfavorable	15	25	6	7	31	20
Not Familiar	18	10	25	6	16	18
Not Sure	1	1	<1	15	10	30

9. *What is your overall impression of the Republican nominee for Vice President, Governor Sarah Palin?*

Table 9: Favorability of Governor Palin

	Overall	Male	Female	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Favorable	29	32	26	11	58	41
Unfavorable	62	58	66	77	39	49
Not Familiar	7	7	8	9	2	9
Not Sure	2	4	<1	3	1	1

Joe Biden’s numbers are almost four-to-one in his favor. By contrast, Sarah Palin’s unfavorable rating is twice that of her favorable rating. Especially significant are Palin’s high negatives among Arab American women, and the fact that Biden’s favorable/unfavorable ratio among Republicans is actually better than that of the Republican Vice Presidential nominee.

10. When it comes to your vote for President, would you say that you are excited about the choices, you are satisfied about the choices or are you voting for the lesser of two evils.

Table 10: Opinion of Candidates

	Obama	McCain
Excited	40	10
Satisfied	32	25
Lesser of Evils	27	54
Not Sure	1	12

It is noteworthy that more than half of John McCain's support comes from Arab Americans who view him as the lesser of two evils. Among Arab American voters, four times as many Obama supporters are enthusiastic about their candidate than McCain supporters.

11. The Congress recently pass and the President signed into law a \$700 billion dollar economic stimulus package to address the current economic downturn. Do you support or oppose this plan?

Table 11: Support for Stimulus Package

	Overall	Male	Female	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Support	54	44	65	54	52	56
Oppose	35	42	29	36	42	26
Not Sure	11	15	6	11	6	18

12. How would you describe the impact of recent economic events on your personal situation?

Table 12: Impact of Economy on Your Personal Situation

	Overall	Male	Female	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Greatly	28	35	20	33	24	18
Somewhat	38	33	44	43	33	34
Not Much	18	18	18	15	23	21
Not at all	16	14	18	10	19	27
Not Sure	<1	1	--	<1	<1	<1

13. Have you done any of the following?

Table 13: Campaign Participation

	Overall	Obama	McCain	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Made contribution this cycle	11	11	6	13	5	11
Made contribution in previous cycle	13	12	21	11	13	22
Worked or volunteered this cycle	8	6	14	6	3	20
Hosted or attended event	8	8	5	11	4	5
None	67	65	72	60	81	63

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