

*The Morning Call*  
**Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion**

SURVEY OF PENNSYLVANIANS ON  
THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

## KEY FINDINGS REPORT

February, 2008

### KEY FINDINGS:

1. For the first time in decades a Pennsylvania Presidential Primary appears likely to play an important role in deciding a party's nominee. The April 22<sup>nd</sup> primary election in the Commonwealth has grown in importance as the race between Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton remains very tight. The results of this statewide poll indicate Clinton maintains a double digit lead over Obama with about two months until Election Day.
2. Pennsylvania voters were most likely to rank the economy as the key issue in terms of their vote for president in November, with the Iraq War and health care also prominently mentioned.
3. In match-ups of likely Republican and Democratic nominees, GOP frontrunner John McCain and Democratic candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are in statistical dead heats among registered voters in the Keystone State.
4. Clinton's current lead among Democratic voters in Pennsylvania is being buoyed by her substantial advantage among women voters in the state.
5. The ability to affect change is the most important characteristic that Pennsylvania voters seek in their presidential candidates.
6. President Bush continues to get very low approval marks from voters in Pennsylvania, with just over 1 in 4 voters giving the nation's chief executive positive marks in terms of his performance as president.

**METHODOLOGY:** The following key findings report summarizes data collected in a telephone survey of 588 registered voters in Pennsylvania from February 9 to 17, 2007. Individual households throughout the state were selected randomly for inclusion in the study. To attain a larger sample of Democratic voters in order to measure preferences in the Democratic Primary, an over sample of registered Democrats was included as part of the sampling methodology. After 500 surveys were conducted among a random sample of registered voters in the Commonwealth, an additional sample of Democrats was gathered through a screening process. The actual number of Democratic voters used to make estimates of voter preferences is 302. Estimates of the general voting population are based on a weighted sample that includes all 588 individuals surveyed. The sample of phone numbers used in the survey was generated by Genesys Sampling Systems of Ft. Washington, PA. This number of completions for the entire sample results in a margin of error of +/- 4.6% at the 95% confidence interval. However the margin of error for Democrats is +/- 5.6% at the 95%, and the margin of error for all sub groups (i.e. women, Republicans) is larger due to smaller sample size. Percentages throughout the

survey have been rounded to the nearest percentage, thus many totals in the results will not equal 100. The survey questionnaire was designed by Christopher Borick, Ph.D. of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion and Lanethea Mathews-Gardner Ph.D. of the Muhlenberg College Political Science Department in consultation with staff members of the *Morning Call*. Analysis and report writing were completed by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion under the direction of Dr. Borick.

## ANALYSIS

In a year in which Pennsylvania was primed to play its usual prominent role in the presidential election, the state has recently found itself inching towards relevancy in the Democratic primary race. It is with this backdrop that the latest Morning Call/ Muhlenberg College survey finds Hillary Clinton maintaining a lead over Barack Obama among state Democrats despite the Illinois Senator’s recent success in primaries and surging national poll numbers. The survey results also find the likely fall match ups between presumptive Republican nominee John McCain and either Obama and Clinton are in statistical dead heats, providing a very early indicator that Pennsylvania may once again live up to it’s billing as a key swing state.

## THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

The April 22<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania Primary Election appears increasingly likely to play a significant role in determining the eventual nominee of the Democratic Party. With Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama locked in an incredibly tight contest and only a handful of primary elections remaining before Pennsylvania voters get their chance at the ballot box, the race in the Commonwealth has appeared on the national radar. The results of the survey indicate that Clinton maintains a 14 point lead over her Senate counterpart among registered Democrats in the state, buoying her aspirations to garner her party’s presidential nomination. This lead, while substantial, is the narrowest for Clinton in terms of previous statewide polls on the Democratic Primary by independent polling organizations. For example late last year a poll by Quinnipiac University found Clinton maintaining a 28 point lead over Obama among registered voters in the Keystone State. This overall trend of a diminishing lead for Clinton is presented in Table One below.

**TABLE ONE**

**Pennsylvania Democratic Primary  
Obama vs Clinton**

	Obama	Clinton	Undecided /Other	Spread
Quinnipiac (11/26 to 12/03)	15%	43%	42%	28%
Franklin and Marshall (1/8 to 1/14)	20%	40%	40%	20%
Quinnipiac (2/06 to 2/12)	36%	52%	12%	16%
Muhlenberg/MCall (2/09 to 2/17)	31%	45%	24%	14%

As has become a dominant theme in exit polling from other states, gender appears to be a major factor in the Democratic primary in Pennsylvania. While Senators Obama and Clinton are splitting the votes of male Democrats in the Commonwealth, the former First Lady holds a large 28 point lead among Pennsylvania's female Democratic voters.

**TABLE TWO**

**Pennsylvania Democratic Primary  
Candidate Preference by Gender**

(n=302)	Obama	Clinton	Undecided /Other	Spread
Male	38%	38%	27%	Even
Female	26%	50%	23%	Clinton +24%

It has also been argued that Senator Clinton has strong appeal among working class and blue collar workers, and that these voters would help her in more traditionally industrial states such as Pennsylvania. The results of this survey find a strong relationship between the educational background of Democratic voters and their preferences among their party's candidates. As can be seen in Table Four below, Hillary Clinton holds significant leads among voters with lower levels of educational attainment, while she runs almost evenly with Obama among Commonwealth Democrats with at least a four year college degree.

**TABLE THREE**

**Pennsylvania Democratic Primary  
Candidate Preference by Gender**

(n=302)	Obama	Clinton	Undecided /Other	Spread
High School or Less	25%	49%	26%	Clinton +24%
Some College/Technical School	27%	50%	23%	Clinton +23%
4 Year College Degree	36%	39%	25%	Clinton +3%
Graduate Degree	39%	41%	20%	Clinton +2%

**THE GENERAL ELECTION**

With the apparent triumph of Senator John McCain in the Republican primary race and the narrowing of the Democratic field down to Obama and Clinton, the fall match-up in the general election has become clearer. The survey results show that Pennsylvania is living up to its reputation as a swing state, with McCain running neck-in-neck with his likely challengers on the Democratic side.

## McCain vs. Clinton

In a contest between McCain and Clinton the candidates are locked in a tight contest with the Republican leading his Democratic counterpart by only one percentage point. This single point lead is well within the poll's margin of error and is consistent with other statewide polls showing a tight race between Clinton and McCain among Keystone State voters.

**TABLE FOUR**

**2008 Presidential Election  
Pennsylvania Registered Voters  
Clinton vs McCain**

	Clinton (D)	McCain (R)	Undecided/ Other	Spread
Muhlenberg/MCall (5/15 to 5/21)	36%	44%	20%	McCain +8
Franklin and Marshall (8/24 to 9/02)	50%	42%	8%	Clinton +8
Quinnipiac (11/26 to 12/03)	43%	43%	14%	Tie
Quinnipiac (2/06 – 2/12)	46%	40%	14%	Clinton +6
Muhlenberg/MCall (2/09 to 2/17)	42%	43%	15%	McCain +1

The tightness of the race between Clinton and McCain is being underscored by their ability to hold strong majorities within their parties while running even among the Commonwealth's independent voters. Despite discontent among many conservatives throughout the nation, McCain is able to garner almost 3 out of 4 Republican voters in Pennsylvania in a match-up with Clinton. Meanwhile the Senator from New York wins a smaller portion of her party's voters than McCain does in his (66% to 72%), but capitalizes on the numeric advantage of Democratic voters in Pennsylvania to maintain her position in a dead heat with her GOP opponent.

**TABLE FIVE**

**2008 Presidential Election: Clinton vs McCain  
By Party Affiliation of Voter**

	McCain (R)	Clinton (D)	Undecided/ Other	Spread
Democrat	20%	66%	14%	Clinton +44%
Republican	72%	11%	18%	McCain +61%
Independent	37%	38%	24%	Clinton+1%

As may be expected given the historical nature of Hillary Clinton’s candidacy, gender is one of the most discussed aspects of this year’s race for the White House. The poll findings show that gender does play a role in voter’s preferences in a Clinton-McCain contest. In particular Clinton holds a 13% lead among female voters in the Commonwealth but trails by 18% among Pennsylvania’s male voters.

**TABLE SIX**

**2008 Presidential Election: Clinton vs McCain  
By Gender of Voter**

	McCain (R)	Clinton (D)	Undecided /Other	Spread
Male	50%	32%	18%	McCain +18%
Female	37%	50%	13%	Clinton +13%

Because of the prominence of gender in the presidential campaign poll respondents were asked what effect they thought gender would play in Hillary Clinton’s bid to become the nation’s 44<sup>th</sup> President. While there is a gender gap in terms of support for Hillary Clinton, there is little difference between men and women in terms of how they view the impact of gender on the presidential race. As can be seen in Table Seven, a plurality of men and women voters think the fact that Clinton is a woman won’t make a difference in the outcome of the election. Similarly a third of both male and female voters in the state think that Hillary Clinton’s gender will hurt her chances at winning the White House.

**TABLE SEVEN**

**The Effect of Hillary Clinton Being a Female on her Presidential Aspirations  
By Gender of Voter**

	Will Help Her	Will Hurt Her	Won’t Make a Difference	Not Sure
Males	20%	32%	42%	5%
Females	19%	34%	40%	7%

But even though men and women are in agreement about the impact of Hillary Clinton’s gender on the election outcome, there is a difference in perception regarding the effect of Clinton’s gender on the way she is being treated in the election. Most notably, female voters are nearly twice as likely as male voters to say that the New York Senator is being held to a higher standard because she is a woman.

**TABLE EIGHT**

**Voter Perceptions of the Effect of Hillary Clinton’s Gender  
on Her Treatment as a Presidential Candidate  
By Gender**

	Held to a higher standard because she is a woman	Is being treated less critically because she is a woman	Gender is not a factor	Not Sure
Males	18%	11%	64%	7%
Females	34%	5%	51%	8%

**McCain vs. Obama**

With Barack Obama’s tremendous run in February primaries and caucuses there has been increased attention given to his potential in the general election. In this poll we find Obama and McCain engaged in a very tight contest, with the Arizona Senator holding a small 3% lead over his Senate counterpart from Illinois. Once again this small lead is well within the poll’s margin of error.

**TABLE NINE**

**2008 Presidential Election  
Pennsylvania Registered Voters  
Obama vs McCain**

	Obama (D)	McCain (R)	Undecided /Other	Spread
Muhlenberg/MCall (5/15 to 5/21)	36%	39%	23%	McCain +3
Quinnipiac (2/06 – 2/12)	39%	41%	20%	McCain +2
Muhlenberg/MCall (2/09 to 2/17)	39%	42%	21%	McCain +3

As with the role of gender in Hillary Clinton’s contests, race has been a central point of discussion in Obama’s bid for the White House. Obama’s standing as the most successful African-American presidential candidate in history has brought the impact of race into the spotlight. In this poll we find that white voters in the Commonwealth are more likely to support John McCain than Obama (45% to 35%), while minority voters in the state favor Obama by a margin of 3 to 1. It’s important to note that these racial divides in voter preferences are not unique to this race, but in fact are fairly common in many statewide elections in Pennsylvania.

**TABLE TEN**

**2008 Presidential Election  
Obama vs McCain  
By Racial Identification of Voter**

	McCain (R)	Obama (D)	Undecided /Other	Spread
White	45%	35%	19%	McCain +10%
Non-White	20%	65%	15%	Obama +45%

**VOTER PRIORITIES in the 2008 PRESIDENTIAL RACE**

One of the fundamental questions in any political campaign revolves around the priorities of voters. What are voters looking for in terms of the candidates and the issues? The survey results indicate Pennsylvania voters have highly diverse preferences in terms of the qualities they most want to see in their presidential candidates, and these preferences are strongly related to factors such as partisanship and age of the voter.

One of the most commonly used words in the discussion of the 2008 presidential race is “change.” It appears all candidates are stressing their ability to affect change if elected, but is that what voters most want to hear. The results presented in Table Ten below indicate that one out of three Pennsylvania voters identified the ability to “bring about needed change” as the most important quality they seek in a presidential candidate. While the ability to bring change was the most common factor identified in the poll, substantial portions of voters noted other priorities such as the candidate with best experience or the candidate that says what they believe.

As can be seen in Table Eleven below, the age of the voter has an impact on their preferences in candidate qualities. For example, while the desire for a candidate to bring about change decreases as a voter gets older, the level of demand for a candidate with the best experience grows higher with age.

**TABLE ELEVEN**

**Most Desired Qualities in Presidential Candidates  
By Age Group of Voter**

	Overall	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and Older
Can bring about needed change	35%	50%	44%	34%	23%
Cares about people like you	13%	8%	13%	14%	15%
Has the best experience	20%	5%	13%	21%	30%
Says what they believe	25%	38%	25%	23%	20%

Table Twelve provides an indication that a voter’s partisan affiliation is connected to what they most desire in a presidential candidate. For example, Democratic and independent voters in the Commonwealth were most likely to seek a presidential candidate that could bring about needed change, while Republicans were most likely to seek a candidate that says what they believe. In fact, GOP voters in the Keystone State were twice as likely as Democrats and three times as likely as Pennsylvania’s independent voters to rank candidates who say what they believe at the top of the characteristics they most want in their presidential characteristics.

**TABLE TWELVE**

**Most Desired Qualities in Presidential Candidates  
By Party Affiliation of Voter**

	Overall	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Can bring about needed change	35%	38%	27%	45%
Cares about people like you	13%	16%	8%	14%
Has the best experience	20%	21%	21%	18%
Says what they believe	25%	17%	36%	12%

One theme that has resonated throughout the Democratic campaign this year is that of experience. In particular, Barack Obama’s limited experience at the national level and Hillary Clinton’s background in the administration of Bill Clinton has been much discussed in the election discourse. A majority of Pennsylvania voters indicated that Senator Obama’s relatively new arrival in national politics will hurt his chances at the White House, with only 16% of survey respondents stating that his “newness” will aid his presidential bid.

**TABLE THIRTEEN**

**The Effect of Barack Obama Being Relatively New to National Politics on his  
Presidential Aspirations  
By Party Affiliation**

	Will Help Him	Will Hurt Him	Won’t Make a Difference	Not Sure
Overall	16%	51%	29%	5%
Democrat	14%	47%	34%	5%
Republican	14%	58%	24%	4%
Independent	26%	44%	23%	6%

Hillary Clinton’s experience in her husband’s administration is generally perceived as a positive by Pennsylvania voters. Almost half (47%) of the voters surveyed indicated that Senator Clinton’s experience as part of Bill Clinton’s administration will help her bid to reach the same office that her husband achieved in 1992. Not surprisingly, the party affiliation of voters plays a significant role in determining their views about the impact of Hillary Clinton’s background in the Bill Clinton White House, with Democrats and Independents much more likely than Republicans to see this type of experience as a positive attribute.

**TABLE FOURTEEN**

**The Effect of Hillary Clinton’s Experience in Bill Clinton’s Administration  
on her Presidential Aspirations  
By Party Affiliation**

	Will Help Her	Will Hurt Her	Won’t Make a Difference	Not Sure
Overall	47%	28%	21%	4%
Democrat	55%	20%	21%	4%
Republican	34%	38%	23%	4%
Independent	60%	22%	14%	4%

Finally, Pennsylvania voters have placed the economy a top the list of most important issues in deciding their presidential vote. One out of three voters surveyed indicated that the economy was the number one issue that they will consider as they cast their vote for president later this year. The results in Table Fifteen demonstrate that Commonwealth voters across varied partisan affiliations rank the economy as the most important issue on their minds during this election year. However as we go down the list of issues in terms of importance the differences in priorities among individuals from different parties becomes apparent. In particular, Democratic voters in the Keystone State were substantially more likely than their Republican counterparts to identify either health care or the Iraq War as their highest presidential election priorities.

**TABLE FIFTEEN**

**Most Important Issue in Presidential Election  
By Party Affiliation**

	Overall	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
The Economy	33%	32% (1)	32% (1)	35% (1)
Health Care	16%	23% (2)	10% (t2)	7% (3)
The War	15%	19% (3)	10% (t2)	23% (2)
Terrorism	5%	3% (t4)	8% (4)	4% (t4)
Taxes	4%	1% (6)	7% (5)	4% (t4)
Education	2%	3% (t4)	0%	4% (t4)
Environment	2%	2% (5)	2% (6)	0%
Other	16%	14%	23%	10%

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**Morning Call/Muhlenberg College**

**Institute of Public Opinion**

**2008 Pennsylvania Presidential Election Survey**

Field Dates: 2/09/08 – 1/17/08

Total Completions: 588 Registered Pennsylvania Voters

Margin of Error: +/- 4% at 95% Level of Confidence

(Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding)

**Question 4 (DEMS ONLY)**

If the 2008 Democrat Primary Election for President was being held today would you vote for Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama?

HILLARY CLINTON.....45%  
BARACK OBAMA.....31%  
NEITHER/OTHER..... 7%  
NOT SURE.....17%

**Question 5**

Thinking ahead to the November 2008 presidential election, what is the single most important issue in your choice for president?

	Overall
The Economy	33%
Health Care	16%
The War	15%
Terrorism	5%
Taxes	4%
Education	2%
Environment	2%
Other	16%

**Question 6**

If the 2008 election for President was being held today and the race was between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mike Huckabee, who would you vote for?

BARACK OBAMA.....43%  
MIKE HUCKABEE.....33%  
NEITHER/OTHER.....10%  
NOT SURE.....14%

Question 7

If the 2008 election for President was being held today and the race was between Republican Mike Huckabee and Democrat Hillary Clinton, who would you vote for?

MIKE HUCKABEE.....36%  
HILLARY CLINTON.....46%  
NEITHER/OTHER.....8%  
NOT SURE.....11%

Question 8

If the 2008 election for President was being held today and the race was between Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama, who would you vote for?

JOHN MCCAIN.....42%  
BARACK OBAMA.....39%  
NEITHER/OTHER.....5%  
NOT SURE.....15%

Question 9

If the 2008 election for President was being held today and the race was between Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican John McCain, who would you vote for?

HILLARY CLINTON.....42%  
JOHN MCCAIN.....43%  
NEITHER/OTHER..... 5%  
NOT SURE.....10%

Question 10

Which one of the following qualities is most important to you when deciding whom to support for president. That the candidate  
(READ LIST)

CAN BRING ABOUT NEEDED CHANGE.....34%  
CARES ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE YOU.....14%  
HAS THE BEST EXPERIENCE.....21%  
SAYS WHAT THEY BELIEVE.....24%  
NONE/OTHER..... 4%  
NOT SURE..... 4%

Question 11

If Barack Obama is the Democratic nominee for president, do you think his being African American will help him, hurt him, or it won't make a difference to voters?

WILL HELP HIM.....15%  
WILL HURT HIM.....19%  
WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE.....56%  
NOT SURE.....10%

Question 12

If Barack Obama is the Democratic nominee for president, do you think his being relatively new to national politics will help him, hurt him, or it won't make a difference to voters?

WILL HELP HIM.....16%  
WILL HURT HIM.....51%  
WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE.....29%  
NOT SURE..... 5%

Question 13

If Hillary Clinton is the Democratic nominee for president, do you think the fact that she is a woman will help her, hurt her, or it won't make a difference to voters?

WILL HELP HER.....19%  
WILL HURT HER.....34%  
WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE.....40%  
NOT SURE..... 6%

Question 14

If Hillary Clinton is the Democratic nominee for president, do you think her experience in Bill Clinton's administration will help her, hurt her, or it won't make a difference?

WILL HELP HER.....47%  
WILL HURT HER.....28%  
WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE.....21%  
NOT SURE.....4%

Question 15

From what you have seen and heard, do you think that Hillary Clinton, compared to other candidates  
(READ LIST)

IS BEING HELD TO A HIGHER STANDARD BECAUSE SHE IS A WOMAN.....	28%
IS BEING TREATED LESS CRITICALLY BECAUSE SHE IS A WOMAN.....	8%
YOU DON'T THINK HER GENDER IS A FACTOR.....	56%
NOT SURE.....	8%

Question 16

Do you approve or disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as President of the United States?

APPROVE.....	27%
DISAPPROVE.....	65%
NOT SURE.....	8%