



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on August 2, 2012

Obama Leading Romney in Swing States?

According to a Quinnipiac University/CBS/*New York Times* poll released the morning of Wednesday August 1, President Obama leads Republican challenger Mitt Romney among likely voters in three swing states.

The poll was taken between July 24 and July 30 and shows the president leading Romney by 11 points in Pennsylvania, six points in Ohio, and six points in Florida. In Pennsylvania, 53 percent of likely voters support Obama as opposed to only 42 percent who support Romney. In Ohio and Florida, Obama leads Romney 50 percent to 44 percent, and 51 percent to 45 percent, respectively.



The poll indicates that Obama is ahead of Romney because of the president's support among women, independents, and, in Florida, Hispanics. However, the results of this poll are questionable.

For one, though Romney hopes to be competitive in Pennsylvania, the Keystone State isn't exactly a "swing" state: No Republican presidential candidate has carried it in 24 years. So, at the very least, a more accurate reading of this poll would have Obama leading Romney in two swing states.

But even this is doubtful, for the sample upon which the poll is centered is heavily weighted in favor of Democrats: Democrats have an advantage over Republicans by nine percentage points. It assumes that Democrats will constitute 36 percent of likely voters, while 27 percent of voters will be Republican. Independents are even allotted a five-point advantage over Republicans. The trouble with this is that it is based on voter turnout in the election of 2008. Yet that is perhaps among the worst of elections from which to forecast the next, for 2008 was a particularly challenging time for the Republican Party.

First, in 2008, Republican President George W. Bush was completing his second term in office with an approval rating hovering around 30 percent.

Second, Bush's party was even more unpopular than was Bush himself, a fact that couldn't be denied after Republicans lost both houses of Congress just two years earlier in the midterm elections of 2006.

Third, the Republican presidential nominee was the uncharismatic John McCain. The long-time Senator from Arizona and the GOP base had much friction between them, which had existed for a long time. In other words, Republican voter enthusiasm was low in 2008.

Fourth, Democrat enthusiasm, in glaring contrast, was exceptionally high. For that matter, so was the enthusiasm among independents.

Fifth, the enthusiasm among Democrats and independents would have been high regardless of who the Democratic nominee was, for Democrats were anxious to wrestle complete control away from their rivals. However, that relatively little was known about Barack Obama at the time made him that much more appealing a candidate.



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Obama was the first serious black presidential candidate, a great orator who mesmerized crowds with rhetorical generalities — like “Hope” and “Change” — that fueled his carefully crafted persona of a youthful idealist. This persona was that much more credible when the young senator from Illinois was considered in juxtaposition with the obviously aged, career politician who was his rival.

However, it is no longer 2008. The political climate has changed significantly over the last four years. So has the economy changed — and not for the better.

Furthermore, Obama, who pummeled McCain by a decisive six-point margin, now has a record to be judged by. This record is not impressive, a fact that even this Quinnipiac poll reveals: the likely voters that it samples believe that Romney’s policies stand a better chance than those of the president’s to help them financially. Voters are also more disposed to think that it is more probable that Obama’s policies will harm them financially.

That Obama inherited a recession is undeniable. Still, this can no longer be used by the president as an excuse for the abysmal condition of the American economy. Other presidents — including his immediate predecessor, George W. Bush — have inherited recessions but have managed to turn them around. For example, in spite of having assumed the office of the presidency in the midst of a recession, and in spite of 9/11, the average unemployment rate for the eight years of the Bush 43 presidency was 5.2 percent.

In stark contrast, during Obama’s first term the unemployment rate exceeded nine percent and has been lingering above eight percent for well over a year.

There have been other dramatic changes over the course of Obama’s first term that this poll ignores. For starters, Obama had an 86-percent approval rating at the time that he was inaugurated. Today, that approval rating is well under 50 percent. There is no president whose approval rating fell as rapidly and precipitously as did Obama’s.

Another turning point in American politics occurred with the rise of the Tea Party. Sensing that Obama’s pledge to “fundamentally transform” their country was more than just rhetoric, large numbers of Americans banded together to form a movement of a sort, a movement committed to preserving their inheritance, to “taking their country back.” It was the Tea Party — and the millions of Americans who sympathized with it — that accounted for another major event that this poll neglects: the midterm elections of 2010.

The midterm elections of two years ago comprised a historically unprecedented victory out for Republicans. And the enthusiasm that Republicans exhibited then does not appear to have abated in the least.

If this latest poll is accurate, then what this means is that both Republican and Democratic voter enthusiasm is exactly the same as it was in 2008 — a proposition that must be met with incredulity.

In any event, Romney hasn’t even selected his running mate yet, and campaign finance laws prevent him from spending the immense resources that he has elicited in campaign donations until August 27, when the GOP will have its national convention in Tampa, Florida.

Besides, it is only after Labor Day that the electorate will start paying attention to the presidential race. Between now and November 6, anything can happen.





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