

2008 Presidential Election Exit Polling Exercise
John Adams Elementary School
Precinct No. 345, Alexandria, VA

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Graduate Certificate Program, Survey Design and Data Analysis
STAT 238
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On November 4, 2008, we arrived at John Adams School at approximately 10:45 a.m. Upon arrival, the line of waiting voters extended approximately one-tenth of a mile, with about 100 – 150 people waiting to cast ballots. Approximately 40 ft from the entrance/exit was a seating area for seniors and the disabled. Polling officials provided this group, never exceeding more than 20 voters during the 2-hour polling window, with voting assistance and beverages. A single vending table was set up about 100 ft from the entrance, where women sold donuts and juice. There were no other pollsters on the campus; however, there were unofficial observers who asked questions and roamed the campus. Within the vicinity of the entrance and exit, there was no one distributing campaign literature.

The temperature was approximately 50 degrees and the sky was filled with gray clouds that provided an intermittent, but hardly obstructive, drizzle. Before beginning the poll, we introduced ourselves to polling officials inside of the school’s gymnasium, where voting actually occurred. Due to the volume of voters and the pace at which the line was moving (at this point that was a very moderate pace), polling officials could not provide the total number of persons having voted that morning.

In the first polling cycle, 11 a.m. – Noon, Jason served as interceptor and Adam as observer. With the line moving at a moderate pace, the decision was made to change the sampling interval from every seventh person to every third person exiting the building. Until about 11:30, the line remained moderately long, surrounding the building at some points; and, the pace at which voters exited the building remained moderate. However, at 11:30, the pace at which voters exited the building increased significantly. For consistency, we continued sampling every third person, and with one person intercepting at the time it was an enormous challenge. Of the 30 people approached, 16 consented to interviews and 14 refused.

Adam experienced similar conditions. Weather conditions remained the same from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. The course’s teaching assistant, Ali Mushtaq, arrived shortly after 12:00 and provided assistance with replenishing clipboards and collecting completed surveys, which allowed us to focus on intercepting, enlisting participation and adhering to the sampling protocol. By 12:30, the pace at which voters were exiting the building began to wane and the line was a small fragment of its length an hour before. To remain consistent in methodology, the same sampling interval was used. Of the 36 people approached, 22 consented to interviews and 14 refused.

The collective non-response rate was 42.4% among eligible voters in the sample (excluding non poll workers, delivery people, campaign volunteers, misses, etc.). T-tests conducted on non-response rates between interviewers indicated there was no statistical significance between the response rates of both interviewers. No mathematical adjustments were necessary to adjust for non-response rates.

Response Rate: Adam Felder and Jason Greer

	Adam	Jason	Total
Interviews	22	16	38
Refusals	14	14	28
Total	36	30	66
	61.1% response rate	53.3% response rate	57.6% response rate
	38.9% refusal rate	46.7% refusal rate	42.4% refusal rate
Probability that populations came from same sample: 53.2%			

Question Analysis

1. Question: Vote for President

The results of this horse race question favored Barack Obama approximately 11:1. Possibly, Democratic voters are more likely to vote during the traditional lunchtime hours; however, historical Alexandria voting data suggests the city has trended Democratic at least since the 1996 Presidential election. Our findings simply reinforced that fact.

president	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
d	34	91.89	34	91.89
r	3	8.11	37	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

2. How enthusiastic are you about the Presidential candidate you voted for?

1 – Very Enthusiastic 2 – Somewhat Enthusiastic 3 – Not at all Enthusiastic

The overwhelming majority of Obama voters were enthusiastic (33/34), which would seem to reflect the national energy surrounding his candidacy. Two-thirds of sampled John McCain voters were enthusiastic, but we noted that of the 3 respondents only 2 were enthusiastic about his candidacy, which could be a sign of the strength of McCain’s strength on Election Day. Still, given the exceedingly low representation of McCain voters we cannot make inferences based on this observation.

enthusiasm(enthusiasm)
president(president)

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct	enthusiasm		Total
	d	r	
1	28 75.68 93.33 82.35	2 5.41 6.67 66.67	30 81.08
2	5 13.51 100.00 14.71	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	5 13.51
3	1 2.70 50.00 2.94	1 2.70 50.00 33.33	2 5.41
Total	34 91.89	3 8.11	37 100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

3. What party (if any) do you associate yourself with?

Democratic Republican Independent/Undecided Other

Obama took 100% of self-identified Democratic voters but McCain split the two self-identified Republican voters. It would be pure speculation, minus any statistical value, to draw conclusions based on the latter observation fact due to the exceedingly low numbers of self-identified Republicans. More interesting is the fact that Obama took nine of the eleven voters who did not identify themselves as Democratic or Republican.

		party id (party id)		
		president (president)		
Frequency		d	r	Total
Percent				
Row Pct				
Col Pct				
d		24	0	24
		64.86	0.00	64.86
		100.00	0.00	
		70.59	0.00	
i		6	1	7
		16.22	2.70	18.92
		85.71	14.29	
		17.65	33.33	
o		3	1	4
		8.11	2.70	10.81
		75.00	25.00	
		8.82	33.33	
r		1	1	2
		2.70	2.70	5.41
		50.00	50.00	
		2.94	33.33	
Total		34	3	37
		91.89	8.11	100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

4. When did you decide who you would vote for?

- 1- November 4 2 – Within a week of the election 3 - Within a month of the election
 4 – Between 1 and 3 months before the election 5 – Any period beyond that

No voter reported being undecided prior to November 4. Most Obama voters made up their minds before September 26, 2008, the date of the first debate. Due to the dearth of McCain voters, no credible inferences can be drawn from the data collected.

**decision(decision)
 president(president)**

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct	d	r	Total
2	3 8.11 75.00 8.82	1 2.70 25.00 33.33	4 10.81
3	4 10.81 100.00 11.76	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	4 10.81
4	7 18.92 87.50 20.59	1 2.70 12.50 33.33	8 21.62
5	20 54.05 95.24 58.82	1 2.70 4.76 33.33	21 56.76
Total	34 91.89	3 8.11	37 100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

5. How did McCain's selection of Sarah Palin as his running mate influence your likelihood to vote for McCain?

Selection of Palin made them:

1 – More likely to vote for McCain

2 – Less likely to vote for McCain

3 – Did not influence their decision

4 – Unsure

It is important to note that respondents could indicate that they were more likely to vote for McCain as a result of Palin, yet still vote for Obama, and vice versa. Perhaps most interesting is that the Sarah Palin selection had an impact on all voters in the sample; no respondent indicated they were unsure how the Palin selection influenced them. No Democratic voter said that the Palin selection made them more likely to vote for McCain; in fact, the majority of Democratic voters said that Palin made them *less* likely to vote for McCain. Among Republican voters, Palin made two of three more comfortable voting for McCain, which could reflect the enthusiasm her candidacy introduced after the Republican National Convention.¹

		palin(palin)		president(president)			
		d		r		Total	
Frequency	Percent						
Row Pct	Col Pct						
1		0	2			2	
		0.00	5.41			5.41	
		0.00	100.00				
		0.00	66.67				
2		21	1			22	
		56.76	2.70			59.46	
		95.45	4.55				
		61.76	33.33				
3		13	0			13	
		35.14	0.00			35.14	
		100.00	0.00				
		38.24	0.00				
Total		34	3			37	
		91.89	8.11			100.00	

Frequency Missing = 1

¹ National Public Radio. (September 5, 2008). Palin's Impact on Presidential Race Analyzed. All Things Considered.

6. How did Obama's selection of Joe Biden as his running mate influence your likelihood to vote for Obama?

Selection of Biden made them:

1 – More likely to vote for Obama

2 – Less likely to vote for Obama

3 – Did not influence their decision

4 – Unsure

More than 50% (18/37) of respondents said that the Biden selection made them more likely to vote for Obama., with 43 percent suggesting the Biden nomination had no impact on their decision. The latter finding is aligned with a Gallup poll conducted in August 2008 where 72% of respondents said Biden had no affect on their decision to vote for (or against) Obama.²

		biden(biden)		president(president)			
		d		r		Total	
Frequency	Percent						
Row Pct	Col Pct						
1		18	0	18		18	
		48.65	0.00	48.65		48.65	
		100.00	0.00				
		52.94	0.00				
2		0	1	1		1	
		0.00	2.70	2.70		2.70	
		0.00	100.00				
		0.00	33.33				
3		16	2	18		18	
		43.24	5.41	48.65		48.65	
		88.89	11.11				
		47.06	66.67				

² August 23, 2008 Biden Does No Harm but May Not Help Much www.gallup.com/poll/109783/Biden-Does-Harm_May_Help_Much.aspx

Matrix of Issues

The following issues are components of a set of questions that address issues thought to influence voters' selection of a candidate. Voters could select the degree of importance using a 1-5 scale where 1 indicated the issue was not very important to the voter and 5 indicated the issue was very important to the voter. Respondents who chose 3 were perceived to be neutral regarding the issue. The answers were not mutually exclusive; a voter could score every issue with a 5, indicating that every issue was very important.

7. How important is the economy as an issue?

More than 70% of this sample indicated that the economy was a very important issue. According to PBS, the economy “shaped the electoral map” allowing Obama to win in traditionally Republican states such as Virginia, North Carolina, Indiana and Colorado.³

		economy(economy)		
		president(president)		
Frequency	Percent	d	r	Total
1	3	0	3	3
	8.11	0.00	8.11	
	100.00	0.00		
	8.82	0.00		
3	1	0	1	1
	2.70	0.00	2.70	
	100.00	0.00		
	2.94	0.00		
4	6	1	7	7
	16.22	2.70	18.92	
	85.71	14.29		
	17.65	33.33		
5	24	2	26	26
	64.86	5.41	70.27	
	92.31	7.69		
	70.59	66.67		
Total	34	3	37	
	91.89	8.11	100.00	

Frequency Missing = 1

³ November 4, 2008 WETA. PBS coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election results.

8. How important is foreign policy as an issue?

It is worth noting that one voter failed to respond to this question (indicated by the -9999 scoring). Nearly half of voters who responded indicated that foreign policy influenced their choice for President. The distribution of this variable could be due to Alexandria's proximity to Washington DC.

		foreign(foreign)		
		president(president)		
Frequency		d	r	Total
Percent				
Row Pct				
Col Pct				
-9999	1	0		1
	2.70	0.00		2.70
	100.00	0.00		
	2.94	0.00		
1	2	0		2
	5.41	0.00		5.41
	100.00	0.00		
	5.88	0.00		
2	1	1		2
	2.70	2.70		5.41
	50.00	50.00		
	2.94	33.33		
3	5	0		5
	13.51	0.00		13.51
	100.00	0.00		
	14.71	0.00		
4	10	1		11
	27.03	2.70		29.73
	90.91	9.09		
	29.41	33.33		
5	15	1		16
	40.54	2.70		43.24
	93.75	6.25		
	44.12	33.33		
Total	34	3		37
	91.89	8.11		100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

9. How important is energy policy as an issue?

A majority of voters indicated energy policy was very important to them, more important than foreign policy (43.24%), but not as important as the economy (70.24%).

		energy(energy)		president(president)		
Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct		d	r		Total	
-9999	1	2.70	0.00	0	2.70	1
		100.00	0.00			
		2.94	0.00			
1	2	5.41	0.00	0	5.41	2
		100.00	0.00			
		5.88	0.00			
2	3	8.11	0.00	0	8.11	3
		100.00	0.00			
		8.82	0.00			
3	3	8.11	2.70	1	10.81	4
		75.00	25.00			
		8.82	33.33			
4	8	21.62	2.70	1	24.32	9
		88.89	11.11			
		23.53	33.33			
5	17	45.95	2.70	1	48.65	18
		94.44	5.56			
		50.00	33.33			
Total		34	3		37	
		91.89	8.11		100.00	

Frequency Missing = 1

10. How important is healthcare as an issue?

The majority of voters saw this as a very important issue, coming second only to the economy for this question.

healthcare(healthcare)
president(president)

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct	d	r	Total
-9999	1 2.70 100.00 2.94	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	1 2.70
1	3 8.11 100.00 8.82	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	3 8.11
2	2 5.41 100.00 5.88	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	2 5.41
3	2 5.41 100.00 5.88	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	2 5.41
4	2 5.41 40.00 5.88	3 8.11 60.00 100.00	5 13.51
5	24 64.86 100.00 70.59	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	24 64.86
Total	34 91.89	3 8.11	37 100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Demographic Information – Respondents were asked to self-identify their gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and income.

11. What is your gender?

There was almost a 1:1 ratio of male to female voters. It is worth noting that each of the 18 male voters selected Obama as their pick for President. Our finding is in contrast to nationwide results where Obama did better among women than men, capturing 56 and 49 percent of their respective voting blocks.⁴

Table of gender by president

		gender(gender)		president(president)	
Frequency	Percent				
Row Pct	Col Pct	d	r	Total	
f		16	3	19	
		43.24	8.11	51.35	
		84.21	15.79		
		47.06	100.00		
m		18	0	18	
		48.65	0.00	48.65	
		100.00	0.00		
		52.94	0.00		
Total		34	3	37	
		91.89	8.11	100.00	

Frequency Missing = 1

⁴ **Behind Obama's Victory: Women Open Up a Record Marriage Gap,**
<http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/2008/11/05/behind-obamas-victory-women-open-up-a-record-marriage-gap.html>

12. Question: What is your race?

The majority of voters sampled were white (wh), with African-American (bl) voters having the second-highest representation. Obama, who took well over ninety percent of African-American voters nationwide, took 100% of such voters in the sample. Nationally, Obama secured 43% of the white vote.⁵

Table of race by president

race(race)		president(president)		
Frequency		d	r	Total
Percent				
Row Pct				
Col Pct				
as	1	0		1
	2.70	0.00		2.70
	100.00	0.00		
	2.94	0.00		
bl	9	0		9
	24.32	0.00		24.32
	100.00	0.00		
	26.47	0.00		
ot	4	1		5
	10.81	2.70		13.51
	80.00	20.00		
	11.76	33.33		
wh	20	2		22
	54.05	5.41		59.46
	90.91	9.09		
	58.82	66.67		
Total	34	3		37
	91.89	8.11		100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

⁵ <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15297.html>

13. Question: What age group do you fall into?

1 - 18-34 2 - 35-54 3 - 55+

There was an even distribution among the three age groups. Obama took all 14 votes from those identifying as 55+, while in the actual election he failed to make similar gains among whites in that age group.⁶ (True, but why are we talking about white old people? The crosstab only compares age to vote, not age+race to vote.)

Table of age by president

age(age)		president(president)		Total
d	r	d	r	
1	8	3		11
	21.62	8.11		29.73
	72.73	27.27		
	23.53	100.00		
2	12	0		12
	32.43	0.00		32.43
	100.00	0.00		
	35.29	0.00		
3	14	0		14
	37.84	0.00		37.84
	100.00	0.00		
	41.18	0.00		
Total	34	3		37
	91.89	8.11		100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

⁶ <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15297.html>

14. What is your highest level of education?

1 – GED 2 – Some college 3 – Bachelor’s degree 4 – Postgraduate degree

Nearly 100% of respondents had some college experience. More than half of those with college experience possessed a Bachelor’s or post-graduate degree. The skew in education illustrates that this sample is not representative of the nation; rather, this sample reflects the large proportion of college-educated individuals in the Washington DC metropolitan area. It is worth noting that level of education was not a reliable indicator of Presidential candidate selection.

Table of education by president

education(education)
president(president)

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct			Total
	d	r	
1	1 2.70 100.00 2.94	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	1 2.70
2	11 29.73 91.67 32.35	1 2.70 8.33 33.33	12 32.43
3	7 18.92 87.50 20.59	1 2.70 12.50 33.33	8 21.62
4	15 40.54 93.75 44.12	1 2.70 6.25 33.33	16 43.24
Total	34 91.89	3 8.11	37 100.00

Frequency missing = 1

15. What is your annual income?

1 – < \$35,000 annually 2 – \$35-49,999 3 – \$50-74,999 4 – \$100-149,999 5 – \$150,000 +

The bands for this question differ from most questions measuring income because the annual median income in Alexandria exceeds the national average. According to Bureau of the Census, the median income in Alexandria in 2006 was approximately \$56,000, compared to a median income in the US of about \$47,000. In this sample, there was a slight skew toward the lower income bands, but there was no indicator that income determined Presidential vote.

Table of income by president

income(income)		president(president)		
Frequency	d	r		Total
Percent				
Row Pct				
Col Pct				
1	8	1		9
	21.62	2.70		24.32
	88.89	11.11		
	23.53	33.33		
2	4	1		5
	10.81	2.70		13.51
	80.00	20.00		
	11.76	33.33		
3	8	0		8
	21.62	0.00		21.62
	100.00	0.00		
	23.53	0.00		
4	8	0		8
	21.62	0.00		21.62
	100.00	0.00		
	23.53	0.00		
5	4	0		4
	10.81	0.00		10.81
	100.00	0.00		
	11.76	0.00		
6	2	1		3
	5.41	2.70		8.11
	66.67	33.33		
	5.88	33.33		
Total	34	3		37
	91.89	8.11		100.00

Frequency Missing = 1

Lessons Learned

As illustrated in the tables above, McCain votes on cross-tabulations are scarce, making it exceedingly difficult and statistically imprudent to make inferences about the McCain voters. For future polling projects, we offer the following lessons learned with improvement recommendations:

- **Maximize and increase the sample size.** – A low “n” makes it difficult to draw inferences about the population you wish to study. Instead of polling for two hours, we recommend polling throughout an entire voting day. A longer day would help mitigate against possible bias caused by interviewing exclusively at one time of day. Given that Alexandria trends overwhelmingly Democratic, it would be better to allocate resources such that one polling group covers Alexandria while other groups venture to other areas in Virginia with voting trends that are more similar to the voting trends of the nation as a whole.
- **Work in teams instead of pairs.** – Over the course of an entire voting day, additional team members would be indispensable in order to operate efficiently. When Ali arrived, we were able to process surveys more smoothly because the intercepting team could focus on the sampling and intercepting while a third person could assist with reloading clipboards and collecting surveys. In addition to alleviating the workload, we contend that more interviewers would improve the usefulness and accuracy of results because extra persons bring extra expertise and manpower for quality control. It would be remiss to not consider the context of our polling exercise as we discuss time and labor. Time and labor are both finite, and one cannot focus on a single precinct to the detriment of other precincts.
- **Have a clear objective reflected in the questionnaire.** – A survey that confirmed Alexandria’s Democratic trend and the impact of the economy on the 2008 election, in hindsight, seems redundant and lacking in curiosity. A more focused objective that would have allowed for more meaningful analysis about the reasons for voter behavior, or the collection of data that addressed the House and Senate races. This type of data may have resulted in a more robust analysis.
- **Build multiple opportunities for pre-testing into survey management.** – Despite tweaking the wording of certain questions (i.e. the Palin and Biden questions) after pre-testing confirmed respondents may be confused by the wording, the intent of the questions was not easily conveyed to the respondents even after the language was altered. Another example of needed questionnaire tweaking would be the decision to use the Likert Scale to measure the important issues. As indicated by the question analysis, the majority of respondents indicated that all of the major issues presented were important, making it virtually impossible to differentiate vote from issue. More testing of the survey could have improved ability to collect more appropriate and more substantive data that could lend itself to further investigation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – SURVEYS

APPENDIX B – OBSERVATION INSTRUMENTS

APPENDIX C – MAP OF JOHN ADAMS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL