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**THE ELECTABILITY ARGUMENT: THE CASE OF 2008**

**Abstract:** In the historic Democratic presidential primaries of 2008, Hillary Clinton’s major argument for staying in the contest long after she had a realistic chance of winning the nomination was that she was more electable in the general election than Barack Obama. But, an examination of states’ primary results compared to the general election outcome between Obama and John McCain shows Clinton’s argument did not bear out. Through the use of case studies, I show that Barack Obama was successful against McCain in large, traditionally Democratic “base states”, industrial states with large working class populations, and states with a high percentage of Latinos. Hillary Clinton’s electability argument is disproven in this study.

**INTRODUCTION**

“Could we possibly have a nominee who hasn’t won any of the significant states – outside of Illinois?” (Montanaro 2008), Hillary Clinton’s chief strategist Mark Penn famously asked in a memo following the 2008 Super Tuesday primaries. “That raises some serious questions about Senator Obama” (Montanaro 2008), Penn continued. As the campaign wore on, Clinton began making a larger argument about her primary victories. She argued that she was winning in states the Democrats needed in November’s general election.

Clinton’s argument about her victories can be divided into three categories of states. She argued she was winning the electorally-rich states of California, New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, all Democratic “base states” carried by every one of the party’s presidential candidates in general elections since 1992. The next category is the “blue collar” states, including Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, where Clinton also performed well. Ohio and Pennsylvania have been hotly contested states in recent cycles, with the former deciding the outcome of the 2004 race between George Bush and John Kerry. Clinton’s husband carried all three in his 1992 and 1996 electoral landslides. The third category of Clinton’s victories came from states with large Hispanic populations. Clinton won Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, the Texas primary, and Florida (although no candidates campaigned in Florida due to DNC sanctions, and no delegates were originally awarded). Given the outcome of the general election, I hypothesize Clinton’s argument that primary victories can predict general election outcomes is incorrect. Obama ended up carrying the vast majority of the states mentioned above in his fight against John McCain, the Republican nominee for president in 2008.

In this paper, I will provide case studies in each of the three categories above. I will examine the 2008 general election results and compare them to each state’s Democratic primary winner. Was there any correlation between Clinton’s victories and who won those same states in November? Was Hillary Clinton correct in her argument that she would have performed better as a general election candidate in the states she won? I also plan to look at the results of all the Democratic primaries and caucuses in the country in 2008, and then compare those results to the outcome of the general election in those states between Barack Obama and John McCain. I use a difference of means test for that analysis.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The 2008 Democratic primary was historic for so many reasons. Regardless of the outcome, it soon became clear the Democratic Party was either going to nominate the first woman or the first African American to lead the party as its presidential candidate. It was also notable for being the first primary season in generations to remain competitive through contests in all fifty states, plus U.S. territories that had never played a significant role in presidential nominations. After the first several contests, it became easy to predict which states would be friendly to either Clinton or Obama. Nothing illustrates this point more than the events of May 20, 2008. On the very day Obama had secured a majority of pledged delegates, primaries were being held in both Oregon and Kentucky. As expected, Clinton trounced Obama in Kentucky, while Obama scored a large victory in Oregon (Burden 2010, 39).

Much of the relevant literature deals with the events and historic nature of the 2008 Democratic primaries. Burden (2010) and Theodoridis (2010) review all of the important moments of the primary campaign. Burden (2010) examines all the major events that took place before and during the primary season from the candidates’ first debate, which consisted of eight candidates vying for the Democratic nomination, to Clinton’s concession and endorsement of Obama. Theodoridis (2010) specifically looks at the nominating rules and how both Clinton and Obama used them to their advantage or detriment. Included in this assessment is a discussion of the sanctions against Florida and Michigan by the Democratic National Committee for breaking party rules by holding their primary contests before the eligibility window opened (Theodoridis 2010). Walker (2008) writes about the historical aspect of insurgent candidates performing so well in 2008, looking at how the two major parties bucked the establishment and nominated Obama and self-proclaimed maverick, John McCain. This research focused on the historical grassroots nature of Obama’s campaign, as well as his impressive fundraising abilities. Birnbaum (2008) took a hard look at how unprepared Hillary Clinton’s campaign was to face off against Obama, examining his campaign’s mastery of delegate allocation, and its use of the internet for voter mobilization and raising money. The Clinton campaign’s dependence on large donors hurt the campaign once it got into financial trouble as the contest went along, whereas Obama could keep tapping smaller donors who had not given the maximum amount of cash set by the Federal Election Commission (Birnbaum 2008). The Democratic battle was played out on a field where everything pointed to a Democratic victory in November’s general election (Campbell 2010). Between the extreme unhappiness with the way things were going in the Iraq war, historically low levels of approval for outgoing president George W. Bush, and finally, the Wall Street crash in September, prospects for a Democratic president never had looked better for the party (Campbell 2010). Contributing to what already appeared to be the Democrats’ election to lose, the economic meltdown was “the ‘October surprise’ that struck in mid-September” (Campbell 2010, 226).

Other authors examined the role of race in the 2008 Democratic primary. In the *Political Quarterly* article titled “Black and White Unite? The Clinton-Obama Campaigns in Historical Perspective,” Michael Dunne (2008) examines the historical implications that the two frontrunners for the Democratic nomination in 2008 were a black man and a white woman. Even though Clinton refused to campaign as the “woman’s candidate,” just as Obama preferred not to be considered the “candidate of African Americans,” the symbolism played an important part in the campaign (Dunne 2008, 354). As the battle between Clinton and Obama continued month after month, questions began emerging as to whether the eventual Democratic winner would be successful in the upcoming general election among women voters, be able to capitalize on the faltering economy, and whether the candidates would tear each other apart (Dunne 2008). The article ends with an Obama quote after his loss in the Pennsylvania primary. Obama said, “the Democratic Party is going to recognize that, as soon as we have a nominee, there is too much at stake for us to be divided” (Dunne 2008, 362). Similar to this argument, Ford, Maxwell, and Shields (2010) examine the role of racism following the nomination contest in the general election contest between Obama and McCain. Exit poll data from both Arkansas and Georgia showed that even though both states ended up in the McCain column, different forces were at play in each state driving up McCain’s performance in Arkansas and assisting the Obama efforts in Georgia (Ford, Maxwell, and Shields 2010). But, the authors argued that the Symbolic Racism Theory was, in fact, a significant factor in both states during the general election (Ford, Maxwell, and Shields 2010).

Much of the other relevant literature is historic, looking at the divisive primary hypothesis, which many scholars have attempted to update or tweak through the decades. One of the studies on the hypothesis was conducted by Kenney and Rice (1987), who found contested primary battles do indeed have a negative effect on a party’s ability to perform well in the general election. Kenney and Rice (1987) looked at divisive presidential primaries, taking into account whether primaries in both parties were contested, or in just one party. Their evidence suggests the divisive primary hypothesis has the most effect when just one of the parties is holding a contested primary, much to the detriment of the party competing in the divisive primary (Kenney and Rice 1987). This research contradicted a study done 12 years earlier. Pierson and Smith (1975) looked at nearly 14-hundred U.S. gubernatorial elections where primary battles took place, finding little relationship between divisive primaries and the general election outcomes. More recently, Atkeson (1998) revisited the divisive primary hypothesis. Using two models to test the theory, including a state-by-state examination and a national election model, both using regression analysis, the results showed a modest impact from divisive primaries on general election results at the state level, but generally not an impact so great it affected the general election outcome (Atkeson 1998). But, when the hypothesis was tested on a national-level model, very little evidence was found supporting the hypothesis at all (Atkeson 1998). The author argues that the impact is mostly due to indirect effect on candidate evaluations following the primary. Similarly, Adams and Merrill (2008) found that primaries can often increase a party’s chances of winning general elections, particularly in races where candidate support is based on a combination of their policy positions, campaigning abilities, and competence. Primaries give parties the ability to seek out high-quality campaigners with the stamina for a general election battle (Adams and Merrill 2008).

Since the 2008 nomination battle, scholars have begun to apply the divisive primary hypothesis to that year’s contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Wichowsky and Niebler (2010) examined competitive 2008 primary states, and found no relationship between the levels of competition and negativity in the primary contests to the general election outcome. Surprisingly, Obama was actually helped in the general election in states with the most competitive primary contests (Wichowsky and Niebler 2010). A multivariate analysis found that as levels of competitiveness went up in primary states, Obama’s general election vote totals in those same states increased (Wichowsky and Niebler 2008). The authors credit three conditions of the 2008 primary battle that helped Obama in the general election including a popular position on the Iraq war among many Democrats, the Obama campaign’s stellar organization and fundraising prowess, and a Democratic Party that was essentially unified against the Republicans despite the hard-fought primary (Wichowsky and Niebler 2008, 1067). But despite Obama’s general election victory, other researchers disagree with these findings, arguing other factors were at play. Makse and Sokhey (2010), for example, argue the divisive primary did impact the general election in 2008, creating a lower turnout among some voters, less participation among some of the party faithful, and more defections to John McCain and the Republicans. This research specifically analyzed Franklin County in the eternal tossup state of Ohio, looking at voters who supported Clinton in the primary and following their actions through the general election, analyzing polling data, voter retention from the primary to the general election, and even yard signs. The study found under different circumstances, these voters could have cost Obama the general election to McCain (Makse and Sohkey 2010). The authors hypothesize that Obama may have won the general election because the economic collapse may have ended up pushing the disaffected Clinton voters into the Obama camp (Makse and Sokhey 2010).

While all these studies are valuable to understanding the 2008 Democratic nomination fight, so far none of the existing literature specifically examines the electability argument continuously made by Hillary Clinton as a reason for staying in the race so long. Much of the research deals with the historic nature of the 2008 presidential election, the role of race and gender in the campaign, and reexaminations of the primary divisiveness hypothesis. Did either Clinton or Obama’s primary election victories provide a signal about who would carry those states in the general election? By examining the states Hillary Clinton was specifically referring to in her argument, I hope to provide that analysis and fill a gap in the literature. Using a case study approach, I will divide many of Clinton’s significant primary victories into three categories, including large Democratic “base states”, states with large working-class populations, and states with high numbers of Hispanic residents. I will examine whether Obama struggled in any of these states as he took on John McCain in the general election.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this paper, I will conduct case studies of the three categories of states critical to Hillary Clinton’s argument of electability in 2008. I will examine three to five states in each of the following categories central to the electability argument: the Democratic “base states” of New York, California, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, the blue-collar states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, and finally, states with large Latino populations, including Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, and Florida. In the 2008 Democratic primary, Clinton won all 12 states mentioned above, but Obama won nine of them comfortably in the general election battle with John McCain. Examining the primary vote in each of these states, I will then compare the results to the general election totals in the same states. I also hope to provide some historical evidence from each state regarding its political leanings in past presidential elections. For example, Obama won New York and California by huge margins, but lost West Virginia. But, looking at the results from the past five presidential elections, I find Democrats have done very well in the former two states in each of the five elections, while the latter has gone Republican since the 2000 election. I will examine my research findings, looking for any correlation between Clinton and Obama’s primary victories and who won those same states in November.

While the largest portion of this research will use qualitative case studies, I will also test my hypothesis using a difference of means test of all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C, to examine the relationship between the Democratic primary or caucus winners and Obama’s general election success in those states in 2008. Using the Democratic primary or caucus winner as the independent variable and Obama’s average general election vote percentage as the dependent variable, I will compare Obama’s vote percentage against McCain, between the states Obama carried in the primary and the states Clinton won. The statistical evidence will incorporate the vote totals of all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The case studies and statistical analysis both support my hypothesis.

**DATA AND ANALYSIS**

**The “Base States”**

The states of California, New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey have all been carried by every Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton’s electoral landslide in 1992. At no point in the 2008 contest were these states ever seriously in doubt. Although Hillary Clinton carried all of these states comfortably against Barack Obama in the Democratic primaries, it did not appear to cost him in the general election. In fact, Obama carried many of these states by greater margins than any Democratic candidate in recent previous elections. In California from 1992 to 2004, the Democratic candidate’s margin of victory ranged from ten percent in 2004 to 13 percent in both 1992 and 1996 (Federal Election Commission [FEC] 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). In 2008, these numbers were shattered. Obama won California over McCain by a whopping 24 points, after losing the state months earlier in the primary against Clinton by eight percentage points (FEC 2008a, 2008b).

In New York, the story was similar. From 1992 to 2004, the Democratic candidate received a vote total in the Empire State ranging from 50 percent in 1992 (in a three-man race) to 60 percent in 2000 (FEC 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). But in 2008, Obama did slightly better with 61 percent (FEC 2008a). Obama’s impressive vote totals in New York came nine months after losing Hillary Clinton’s adopted home state in the Democratic primary by 17 percent (FEC 2008b). One state over in New Jersey, Democrats have also performed well in recent presidential elections. From 1992 to 2004, the Democratic candidate received vote percentages ranging from just two percent in 1992 to 18 percent just four years later (FEC 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). Obama in 2008 came much closer to the 1996 totals with a 15-point victory over John McCain (FEC 2008a). Obama had lost the New Jersey primary to Hillary Clinton by ten points (FEC 2008b). Massachusetts is often considered one of the most reliably Democratic states in the country. From 1992 to 2004, Democratic presidential candidates enjoyed victories ranging from 19 points in 1992 to 33 points in 1996 (FEC 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). Obama found himself right in the middle of that spread, scoring a 26-point victory against John McCain in 2008 (FEC 2008a). Obama lost the Democratic primary in Massachusetts to Clinton by 15 points (FEC 2008b).

In examining these four states, there is no evidence that Obama’s primary losses ended up hurting him in the general election. Obama’s winning percentages ranged from 15 to 27 points in these four “base states”. Despite losing all four states in the primary battle with Clinton, Obama won the states in the general election with an average to better-than-average Democratic performance in each state, compared to elections since 1992. The “base state” electability argument simply did not hold up.

**The Working Class States**

The “blue collar” states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia have unquestionably been tougher terrain for Democrats in recent elections. While Pennsylvania has gone Democratic in presidential elections since 1992, it has always been competitive and hard fought. Ohio appears to have become the nation’s bellwether, having sided with the eventual winner in every election since 1964 (FEC 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). Ohio has been one of the most, if not the most, competitive states in recent elections, and became the critical state in 2004 between George W. Bush and John Kerry. West Virginia was once a reliably Democratic state, even supporting Jimmy Carter in 1980 and Michael Dukakis in 1988 (FEC 1980, 1988). But, since 2000, it has been awarding its electoral votes to Republicans (FEC 2000, 2004, 2008a).

Even though Pennsylvania has lit up Democratic blue in every presidential election since 1992, it is often very competitive. John Kerry won the state by just three percent in 2004 (FEC 2004). Al Gore won it by five (FEC 2000). Bill Clinton may have appealed more to Pennsylvania voters than Gore or Kerry, and won the state by nine points in both of his runs (FEC 1992, 1996). Obama actually topped Clinton’s totals by a point, defeating John McCain by ten points, 54 to 44 percent in 2008 (FEC 2008a). The Pennsylvania primary, held late in the primary season, ended with Hillary Clinton soundly defeating Obama by nine points (FEC 2008b).

If Pennsylvania had been a challenge for Democrats, Ohio was downright daunting. Bill Clinton carried Ohio by slim margins in 1992 and 1996, by two and six points respectively (FEC 1992, 1996). But, George W. Bush also won the state twice, winning by four points in 2000, and by two points in 2004 (FEC 2000, 2004). Hillary Clinton heralded her ten-point primary victory in Ohio over Obama as proof she would have a better chance in the state against John McCain (FEC 2008b). But, Obama ended up winning Ohio by a four-point margin, 51 to 47 percent against McCain (FEC 2008a).

Nobody gave Obama a chance in West Virginia, and rightly so. Just a week after Obama won the North Carolina primary, and nearly topped Clinton in Indiana, pundits declared the race essentially over. But voters in West Virginia had their own idea, handing Obama a 41-point thrashing in the state’s primary (FEC 2008b). Clinton trounced Obama 67 to 26 percent (FEC 2008b). While West Virginia would have likely once been considered a Democratic “base state” (Bill Clinton won it in 1992 and 1996 by 13 and 15 points, respectively), the state has been trending Republican since 2000 (FEC 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004). Al Gore became the first Democrat to lose the state since 1984, doing so by five points (FEC 2000). Four years later, John Kerry lost the state by 13 percent, the same percentage by which McCain carried it over Obama in 2008 (FEC 2004, 2008a).

But, would Clinton have performed better than Obama in these states versus John McCain? While it is certainly possible, Obama definitely held his own in Pennsylvania and Ohio, performing better in both states than most recent Democratic candidates. Given Bill Clinton’s success in West Virginia in 1992 and 1996, and his wife’s own popularity there given her primary success, she likely would have kept the margin closer. Would she have won West Virginia? No one can be sure, but she would have likely been more competitive there. But, as far as the electability argument goes, Obama did what was required of him in the electoral vote-rich states of Ohio and Pennsylvania, further undermining Clinton’s electability argument.

**States with Large Hispanic Populations**

The final category of states Hillary Clinton would often use to make her electability argument included states with large Hispanic populations. Over the course of the primary battle, Clinton won primaries in Arizona, New Mexico, Florida, and Texas. Clinton also won the Nevada caucus early in the primary season. Nevada was the only caucus she would win. Arizona is a state that has been very difficult for Democrats in recent years, but the climbing Hispanic population has made it more competitive. In 1996, Bill Clinton became the first Democrat since Harry Truman in 1948 to carry Arizona, after Clinton lost the state in 1992 by just two points (FEC 1992, 1996). But in the two elections that followed, Republicans resumed their winning ways. Al Gore and John Kerry lost Arizona by six and eleven points, respectively (FEC 2000, 2004). In 2008, most experts predicted Obama would have made a much bigger play for Arizona, but was held back by the fact it was John McCain’s home state. Even so, Obama managed to slightly best John Kerry’s vote percentage in Arizona four years earlier. Obama lost Arizona by eight points, 53 to 45 percent (FEC 2008a). In the primary, Hillary Clinton won the state by eight percent, largely due to her appeal with Hispanic voters (*CNN* 2008a).

New Mexico was one of the closest states in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, and one of just three states to switch allegiances in those two elections. After very narrowly handing its electoral votes to Al Gore in 2000, it did so by a margin not much wider to George W. Bush in 2004. Bill Clinton carried the state more comfortably by nine and seven points in his two races (FEC 1992, 1996). In typical fashion, New Mexico was extraordinarily close in the Democratic primary as well, with Clinton eeking out just a one-point victory over Obama (FEC 2008b). In the general election, New Mexico was a blowout with Obama defeating John McCain by 15 points, 57 to 42 percent (FEC 2008a).

No Democratic candidate for president has carried Texas since Jimmy Carter in 1976. The closest a Democrat has come to winning Texas in more recent years was Bill Clinton, who lost the state by just four points in both 1992 and 1996 (FEC 1992, 1996). With favorite son George W. Bush on the ballot in 2000 and 2004, the Republican margin of victory was much wider. Bush won the state by 21 and 24 points in 2000 and 2004, respectively (FEC 2000, 2004). But in 2008, Barack Obama cut the Bush margin in half, holding John McCain to an eleven-point win in 2008, 55 to 44 percent (FEC 2008a). In the hotly contested Democratic primary in Texas, Hillary Clinton managed to best Obama by three percent (FEC 2008b). But because of a process widely known as the “Texas two-step”, where both a primary and a caucus figure into how delegates are allocated, Obama ended up winning five more delegates in the state by trouncing Clinton in the caucus (*New York Times* 2008).

Florida was the deciding state in the 2000 presidential election. When all the votes were counted (and recounted), Al Gore officially ended up losing the state by just more than 500 votes (FEC 2000). Four years earlier, Bill Clinton managed to carry the state, the first Democrat to do so since Jimmy Carter 20 years earlier (FEC 1996). Clinton lost the state by just two points in 1992 (FEC 1992). By 2004, the state was once again trending Republican, handing George W. Bush a five-point victory (FEC 2004). But in 2008, the tide had turned again, with Obama winning the state over McCain 51 to 48 percent (FEC 2008a). Earlier that year, the Democratic National Committee punished Florida for holding its primary ahead of the state’s eligibility window, and stripped the state of its delegates. The candidates agreed not to campaign or spend money in the state. But Clinton ended up winning the thought-to-be meaningless contest 50 to 33 percent (FEC 2008b). Near the very end of the primary season, after Obama had effectively locked up the nomination, the DNC reinstated half of Florida’s delegates, based on the state’s primary election results (Theodoridis 2010).

Up until 2008, Nevada had been very close in presidential elections since 1992. Bill Clinton won the state very narrowly in 1992 and 1996. George W. Bush won the state too, by slightly wider margins in 2000 and 2004. But fueled by success with the state’s growing Hispanic population, Obama carried Nevada by 12 points, 55 to 43 percent over John McCain (FEC 2008a). In the state’s nominating caucus, Hillary Clinton had success with that same group of voters. In what would become the only caucus she would win, Clinton defeated Obama by six points, a victory powered largely by the Hispanic vote in Las Vegas (*New York Times* 2008). Entrance polls showed Clinton won 64 percent of the state’s Hispanic voters in the caucus (*CNN* 2008c).

While Hillary Clinton no doubt had immense support from Hispanic voters, the results above show that Obama was able to successfully harness their support into his column during the general election campaign. Obama was able to perform better in all five states than John Kerry and Al Gore in the previous two elections. Obama’s percentage in Texas was identical to the percentage Bill Clinton received in 1996. Both received 44 percent of the vote (FEC 1996, 2008a). And even though Bill Clinton narrowly won Arizona in 1996, his level of support was just two points better than Obama’s total in 2008 , in John McCain’s home state (FEC 1996, 2008a).

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| **Figure 1.** | *2008 Democratic Primary Winner to 2008 General Election Winner* | | | | | | | | |  |
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| **Obama to Obama** |  |  |  | **Obama to McCain** | | | |  |  |  |
| Colorado\* | Maryland |  |  | Alabama | | Montana | |  |  |  |
| Connecticut | Minnesota\* |  |  | Alaska\* | | Nebraska\* | |  |  |  |
| Delaware | North Carolina |  |  | Georgia | | North Dakota\* | |  |  |  |
| District of Columbia | Oregon |  |  | Idaho\* | | South Carolina | |  |  |  |
| Hawaii\* | Vermont |  |  | Kansas\* | | Utah | |  |  |  |
| Illinois | Virginia |  |  | Louisiana | Wyoming\* | | |  |  |  |
| Iowa\* | Washington |  |  | Mississippi | | |  |  |  |  |
| Maine\* | Wisconsin |  |  | Missouri | | |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | | |  |  |  |  |
| **Clinton to Obama** |  |  |  | **Clinton to McCain** | | | |  |  |  |
| California | New Jersey |  |  | Arizona | | West Virginia | |  |  |  |
| Florida\*\* | New Mexico |  |  | Arkansas | |  | |  |  |  |
| Indiana | New York |  |  | Kentucky | |  | |  |  |  |
| Massachusetts | Ohio |  |  | Oklahoma | |  | |  |  |  |
| Michigan\*\*\* | Pennsylvania |  |  | South Dakota | |  | |  |  |  |
| Nevada\* | Rhode Island |  |  | Tennessee | |  | |  |  |  |
| New Hampshire |  |  |  | Texas | |  | |  |  |  |
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| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | \*Caucus State |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | \*\*Due to DNC sanctions, no primary campaigning was conducted in Florida. Originally, no delegates | | | | | | | |  | | were awarded. |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | \*\*\*Due to DNC sanctions, no primary campaigning was conducted in Michigan. Obama's name did | | | | | | | |  | | not appear on the primary election ballot. Originally, no delegates were awarded. | | | | | |  |  |  | | **The Nation as a Whole** | | | | | | | |  | | The table on the previous page (Figure 1) shows that of the 30 primaries and caucuses Obama won in his battle with Hillary Clinton, he was able to keep 16 in his column during the general election, losing 14 to John McCain. Of Clinton’s 21 primary wins, 13 were won by Obama in the general election, including the electoral-vote rich states of California, New York, and Ohio. The table shows Obama had no real trouble carrying states won by Hillary Clinton in the primary. Of the Clinton and Obama states won by McCain in the fall were mostly Republican base states, with just a handful that ended up in the Democratic column during one or both of Bill Clinton’s elections, including Arkansas, Tennessee, and West Virginia. But, Obama added nine states to his total that John Kerry had lost in 2004, including Indiana and Virginia which had not voted Democratic since 1964, and North Carolina, which had not gone Democratic since 1976.  A difference-of-means test also shows Obama faring no worse in states that Hillary Clinton carried in the primary than states he carried. Figure 2 below shows virtually no difference between Obama’s general election performance in states he carried and the states Clinton carried. In the states Obama won in the primaries or caucuses, he received an average of 51.6 percent of the vote in the general election. In the states Clinton carried, he received an average vote of 50.9 percent.   | **Figure 2.** *Difference of Means Test* | | | | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Report** | | | | | Obama General Election Percent | | | | | Democratic Primary WInner | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | | Obama | 51.6467 | 30 | 12.70286 | | Clinton | 50.9048 | 21 | 8.54438 | | Total | 51.3412 | 51 | 11.08733 |   **Figure 3.**  *Difference of Means Bar Graph*    Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the prolonged primary battle between Obama and Clinton appeared to have little impact on the general election results. The fact that Obama received just more than half of the general election vote in his primary states, less than one percent better than he performed in Clinton’s primary states, shows very little evidence of hard feelings among Hillary Clinton supporters. At the very least, if there were hard feelings, Obama appears to have made up the difference. More importantly, it shows Obama was almost every bit as electable in Hillary Clinton’s primary states than he was in his own. The results of this statistical analysis further damage Hillary Clinton’s electability argument.  **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**  Of the many arguments Hillary Clinton used to defend her seemingly futile attempt to continue contesting the Democratic nomination in 2008 long after she had a realistic chance of winning, her electability argument became more and more prominent in her campaign. Supporters of Clinton and the candidate herself often implied, or at times said flat out, nominating Obama would be risky in terms of his general election electability. But, the results of this research show that simply was not the case.  The case studies I presented above show Obama had the ability to secure many of Hillary Clinton’s voters in his general election contest with John McCain. The Democratic “base states” of California, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts stayed firmly in the Democratic camp in 2008. In fact, Obama’s popular vote total in many of these states exceeded the totals other recent Democratic candidates for president had received, including Clinton’s husband. After Hillary Clinton had secured huge victories in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, questions emerged about Obama’s ability to do well among working class voters. In fact, Obama won Pennsylvania with 54 percent of the vote, better than both John Kerry and Al Gore, who both also carried the state in their presidential runs (FEC 2008a, 2004, 2000). Obama’s ten-point margin of victory was also slightly better than former President Clinton’s performance in Pennsylvania (FEC 2008a, 1996, 1992). Obama also won Ohio by four points, a state that Gore and Kerry both lost, and with it, their ability to defeat George W. Bush (FEC 2008a). Obama was clobbered by Hillary Clinton in West Virginia, but ended up receiving the same percentage of votes in the general election received by John Kerry four years earlier (FEC 2008b, 2008a, 2004). In the heavily Hispanic-populated states of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Florida, and Nevada, Obama also performed well. He won New Mexico and Nevada by double digits, and also won Florida, the first time a Democrat had carried the state since 1996. In Texas, Obama cut the Bush margins from 2000 and 2004 in half, and did surprising well in Arizona despite it being his opponent’s home state. A difference of means test using Obama’s general election vote percentage average in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. shows Obama performed just seven tenths of a percent better in states he carried in the primary than he did in states won by Hillary Clinton.  Even though Obama obviously overcame questions over his electability, questions also continued among pundits and political aficionados on how Hillary Clinton would have performed against John McCain. There is an argument to be made she may have performed better in some states, specifically the working class states she carried in the primary. Would Clinton have won Ohio and Pennsylvania by wider margins? Possibly. Could Hillary Clinton have carried Arkansas or West Virginia? It is also possible, considering the magnitude of her success in those primaries, Barack Obama’s distinct lack of popularity in those states, and Clinton’s husband’s ability to put both states in his column in 1992 and 1996. But to get a complete picture of Clinton’s possible success in a general election, one must also consider states Obama was able to compete in that Clinton may not have carried. Obama was able to add North Carolina, Virginia, and Colorado to his general election tally. Obama found surprising support in these states that had traditionally shunned Democratic candidates for president. Hillary Clinton may not have had the unique appeal that Obama did to these voters. Each candidate had his or her own “map” to 270 electoral votes, consisting of several states that either Obama or Clinton, but not both, would be able to contest in the general election. Given Obama’s success in states that were central to Hillary Clinton’s electability argument, this research project demonstrates Barack Obama was not only electable in 2008, but also that his level of success in many of these states surpassed the performance of other recent Democratic presidential candidates, including Clinton’s husband. | | | | | | | |  | | **REFERENCES** | | | | |  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | | | | | | | | | |  |

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