Obama more likable than Romney in Florida, poll shows

By JENNA BUZZACCO-FOERSTER

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NAPLES —Being a likable guy matters, but experts said it's hard to say whether a favorable rating in August translates into more votes come November.

At least 50 percent of likely voters in the key battleground states of Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania said they would vote for President Barack Obama, a poll released Wednesday showed. The president also had a favorability rating of 50 percent or better among voters in all three states.

The president leads presumptive Republican nominee Mitt Romney by a margin of 51 percent to 45 percent in Florida in a random telephone poll conducted July 24 to July 30 by Quinnipiac University, CBS News and the New York Times.

Poll-takers surveyed 1,177 likely voters in Florida. The Florida poll has a margin of error of 2.9 percentage points.

While 50 percent of likely voters had a favorable opinion of the president, 46 percent had an unfavorable opinion. Forty-one percent of likely voters favored Romney, while 42 percent said they had an unfavorable opinion of him.

The president leads Romney with a 51 percent to 40 percent favorable rating in Ohio and 53 percent to 39 percent in Pennsylvania.

But experts said it's hard to tell whether those numbers are an accurate depiction of how Floridians will feel in November.

"The likability factor is something that's important to keep track of, and to keep track of over a period of time," said Peter Bergerson, a political science professor at Florida Gulf Coast University in Estero.

"It would be a mistake to make a judgment based on one poll that was released on Aug. 1 when we have (three months) left before the election."
Casey Klostad, a political science professor at University of Miami, said favorability is hard to gauge, especially when the question posed to respondents is vague.

"The question was not specific — it's a general impression," Klostad said of the Quinnipiac poll. "What that means is we don't know what the respondent was thinking about when they answered."

While the poll shows a snapshot of voter sentiment more than three months before the election, experts said they were surprised by Romney's unfavorable numbers.

Kevin Wagner, a political science professor at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, said the fact that more people said they had an unfavorable opinion of Romney was not good news.

"You don't want your unfavorables equal or greater to your favorables," Wagner said.

Bergerson agreed, but said those numbers will likely change as it gets closer to Election Day.

"I was surprised ... but those numbers are like a pingpong match," he said. "They're up and down."

Bergerson said if public opinion of Romney continues to be unfavorable, it could have a snowball effect come November. Turnout among Republicans, he said, could be lower if they believe the president is going to win.

But Bergerson, and other Florida experts, stressed the Quinnipiac poll was just the first of many to come this election cycle.

"I think it's important not to overemphasize or analyze one poll," Bergerson said. "It's not even a half-full glass. It's the first pour here."

___ The Associated Press contributed to this report.