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Poll shows more blacks could be backing Obama

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Not that long ago in Alabama, there was a lot of talk about black voters being split between Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama.

Now blacks appear to be less divided about whom they support in Tuesday's state Democratic primary.

Potential black voters have surged to Obama's side, according to a poll by Capital Survey Research Center, the polling arm of the Alabama Education Association. Their latest poll, which includes data through Tuesday night, shows Obama with 68 percent of the vote among likely black voters, up from 54 percent three weeks ago and more than double the 26 percent of likely black voters who said a year ago they would support Obama.

Clinton's support among likely black voters has plummeted from a high in September of 41 percent to 16 percent in the latest Capital Survey poll.

Overall, Obama now leads Clinton 40 percent to 35 percent, a dramatic increase for Obama, who in September trailed Clinton by 20 percentage points in the state. The margin of error in the poll is 5 percent.

Archie Edmonds of West End is one of the black voters who has moved into the Obama camp.

"I'm 78 and I still have to work to live," Edmonds said. "I have a sick wife at home and the insurance just isn't enough and neither is Social Security. There's something wrong in this country when you're 78 and have worked all your life and you still can't retire."

Edmonds said Obama gives him hope that his life will improve and Clinton does not.

"She was in there with Bill (Clinton) for eight years and had a chance to do something about all this and I'm still having to work," Edmonds said. "I'm proud that a black man can run for this and might win, but that's not why I support him. I say let somebody have a chance to fix what's wrong, and Obama is that somebody else for me," Edmonds said.

Divided loyalties:

For the past year, political insiders have talked about black voters having their loyalties divided between Obama, the first black candidate with a real chance of winning the White House, and Clinton, who was first lady to the man famously called the nation's first black president because of the attention so many blacks said he gave their problems during his eight years in office.

The Alabama Democratic Conference, which has long represented the black wing of the state's Democratic Party, is endorsing Clinton. The group's chairman, Joe Reed, said he believes voters are more prepared to elect a white woman than a black man.

The latest poll numbers in some ways support that contention. Obama's support from white voters has slipped by 1 percentage point from earlier this month and is now at 17 percent. Clinton's support has increased by 4 percentage points and now stands at 51 percent.

But the argument that Clinton is electable and a Clinton presidency would be good for black citizens isn't holding sway with all of ADC's members.

"I respect Joe (Reed), but I have problems with what he's said," said state Rep. A.J. McCampbell, D-Linden, an ADC member. "It's a view that disrespects the intellect of blacks but also the intellect of whites and Hispanic Americans, all Americans, and I don't understand it."

"Look, the system we have is designed to keep those in power who have been in power for years doing the same things we've been doing for years and that just hasn't worked, especially for those on the lower end of things," McCampbell said. "What we need is a new system, new leadership, and Obama gives us that chance."

Not yet colorblind:

Jefferson County Commissioner Shelia Smoot is supporting Clinton, but she knows that fellow blacks have moved dramatically to Obama's side in the race for votes on Tuesday.

"Both Hillary and Obama are great candidates," she said. "But what I'm looking for is someone who not only believes in improving the quality of life for Alabamians and Americans, but someone who has the experience and know-how to make it happen, and that person is Hillary Clinton."

Smoot said she thinks America and Alabama have made strides toward becoming more of a colorblind society when choosing leaders. But Smoot said that goal is far from realized.

"Look at who holds the top elected positions in this state and tell me if you think what people like Joe (Reed) have said is not true," Smoot said. "In recent years we have seen two outstanding members of the Alabama Supreme Court who happen to be African-American defeated in statewide elections against white opponents who might not have defeated a white incumbent."

Too close to call:

Paul Hubbert, longtime leader of the AEA and one of the state's best readers of all things political, said he expects the race between Clinton and Obama to be close. He predicted the winner will likely be the person who manages to peel off more votes from groups they are now losing - for Obama that would be white votes and for Clinton, black votes.

"She's getting roughly 20 percent of the black vote and he's getting about 20 percent of the white vote," Hubbert said. "Who manages to get a little more in each of those camps will probably decide this thing."

"If he jumps up and, say, gets a quarter of the white vote, I think he probably wins. If Hillary gets a quarter of the black vote, she probably wins. It's just that tight."

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