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## Connecticut Favorites

### It's Clinton And McCain By Big Margins, Poll Says

By MARK PAZNIOKAS

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Republican John McCain and Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton hold double-digit leads among likely voters in the Connecticut presidential primaries on Feb. 5, according to a poll commissioned by The Courant.

McCain's rise is a dramatic turn in a state where former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani was the favorite last fall before fading in the early decision states of Iowa, New Hampshire and Michigan.

After being widely written off last year, McCain now is preferred by 39 percent of Republicans, compared with 16 percent for Giuliani and 11 percent for former Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, according to the poll by the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut.

In the Democratic race, Clinton is favored by 41 percent of Democrats, compared with 27 percent for Barack Obama and 9 percent for John Edwards. One in five Democrats is undecided, an audience Obama is trying to reach with television ads that began Saturday.

The polling shows that Clinton, consistently the favorite among Connecticut Democrats since last year, has lost little ground even as Obama won the Iowa caucuses and finished a solid second in New Hampshire.

But Clinton and Obama, groundbreakers as the first woman and the first black candidate to seriously contend for the presidency, are nearly tied on one measure: electability.

Sixty-seven percent of Democrats say the party's chances would be "very" or "extremely" good with Clinton, and 64 percent have the same assessment of Obama. Edwards generates such confidence among only 35 percent.

"Republicans, on the other hand, seem less pleased with their choices and relatively less concerned with the eventual outcome of the presidential race," said Monika L. McDermott, the center's research director.

McCain, 71, the Arizona senator once dismissed as too old and too estranged from the GOP's conservative base to be credible, is seen by Connecticut Republicans as the party's only chance to retain the White House.

Slightly more than half of Republicans say they are upbeat about winning in November if McCain is the nominee, and fewer than 30 percent see the party as strongly competitive with Giuliani or Romney at the top of the ticket.

With the Republican base in Connecticut heavily weighted toward the New York suburbs of Fairfield County, Giuliani quickly received endorsements last year from the legislature's Republican leaders, Rep. Lawrence Cafero of Norwalk and Sen. John McKinney of Fairfield.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell, a Republican who is friendly with McCain, resisted the urge to quickly back Giuliani. Her patience is likely to be seen as prescient.

The new poll is based on a phone survey conducted from Jan. 9 to 17 of 403 likely Democratic voters and 401 likely Republican voters. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percentage points.

Last November, a poll by The Courant and the research center found Giuliani positioned to win Connecticut, a state no Republican has carried since 1988. In head-to-head matchups, Giuliani trailed Clinton by only 2 percentage points, and he led every other Democrat.

McCain's resurgence in Connecticut reflects his rebound nationally, especially in states where evangelical Christians and other social conservatives do not dominate GOP politics. He won the Connecticut primary eight years ago.

"McCain does well in Connecticut for two reasons," McDermott said. "First, his maverick image sells well among likely Republican voters here, only half of whom call themselves conservatives."

The other factor, she said, is that conservatives in Connecticut have not rallied behind a candidate. Their votes are divided among Romney, Fred Thompson of Tennessee and Mike Huckabee of Arkansas.

"By splitting their votes among three conservative alternatives, they effectively elect McCain," she said.

McCain is a strong supporter of the war in Iraq and an opponent of abortion, but his stands on immigration, global warming and campaign finance reform have turned off conservatives.

His support in Connecticut is 20 percentage points lower among self-described conservatives (29 percent) than non-conservatives (49 percent.)

The poll found that the Republican race has been fluid, perhaps reflecting that voters were browsing last year. More than half of those who support a candidate say they have changed their mind at least once.

Unlike Giuliani and Romney, who derived little benefit from once holding office in neighboring states, Clinton benefits from being a familiar figure as a New York senator and former first lady, McDermott said.

She polls strongest among voters on the lower end of the education and income ladders, McDermott said.

Fifty-two percent of women favor her, compared with 21 percent for Obama and 6 percent for Edwards.

One piece of good news for Obama, a first-term Illinois senator: The more primary coverage voters see, the better he does. Among voters who say they have been following the campaign closely, Obama trails by 10 percentage points.

The number is 25 percentage points among voters who say they have followed the race somewhat closely or less.

Contact Mark Pazniokas at [mpazniokas@courant.com](mailto:mpazniokas@courant.com).

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