
McClatchy Washington Bureau

 [Print This Article](#)

Posted on Sun, Apr. 20, 2008

Poll: Clinton margin in Pa. won't cut Obama's delegate lead

Steven Thomma | McClatchy Newspapers

last updated: April 20, 2008 06:42:55 AM

WASHINGTON — Hillary Clinton leads among bowlers, gun owners and hunters in Pennsylvania, a blue-collar trifecta that is helping her hold an edge over rival Barack Obama heading into Tuesday's pivotal primary there.

Clinton leads by solid margins in all three slices of working-class Pennsylvania — the political battleground where the two Democrats have waged war for control of the state, according to a new poll conducted for McClatchy Newspapers, MSNBC and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

The one group where she does not have a solid lead is among beer drinkers; they split evenly between her and Obama.

Overall, Clinton leads Obama by a margin of 48-43 percent, with 8 percent still undecided. The telephone survey of 625 likely Pennsylvania voters was taken April 17-18 and had an error margin of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

"Clinton leads in Pennsylvania," said Brad Coker, the managing partner for Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, which conducted the poll.

"However, the lead doesn't indicate she's going to win by a large enough margin to make a serious impact on Obama's overall delegate lead."

Clinton leads among women, whites, Roman Catholics and Jews, voters older than 35, those looking for experience and those who rank Iraq, the economy or health care their top issues.

She also leads in central and rural Pennsylvania as well as the Pittsburgh area.

"She's a woman, that's the main reason," said Catherine Nichols, a retired receptionist from New Providence, explaining why she prefers Clinton. "And she has the experience from being in the White House for so many years."

Obama leads among blacks, voters younger than 35, Protestants, and those looking for change or honesty.

He leads in the Philadelphia area.

"I'm getting tired of the same old thing over and over. It's time for a change," said William Allen, a retiree from Philadelphia. "He just has a different way of thinking and bringing people together."

Despite Obama's solid support in some areas, Coker said that Pennsylvania's demographics make it difficult for him to win, given his inability to draw more support from whites, the working class, or older voters. Obama pulled just 33 percent of the white vote, but 83 percent of the black vote.

"I would be surprised if Obama won Pennsylvania," Coker said. "There are not enough African-American and young voters. It's one of the older states."

Ever since the two clashed in Ohio in early March — where she won with heavy support from the white working class — the two candidates have sparred over that key voting bloc in Pennsylvania.

Their campaign's been marked by sharp disagreements over his comments claiming that small-town Pennsylvanians cling to religion and guns out of bitterness over their economic anxiety, as well as inflammatory sermons by Obama's pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

They've also offered dueling photo opportunities, with Obama bowling on camera, and Clinton downing a shot of whiskey and a beer.

Many voters dismissed such efforts as silly or superficial — or said they had the opposite effect than the campaigns intended.

Most saw clips of Obama bowling, for example, and several noted that he was bad at it.

"I saw the gutter ball. Why make an idiot of yourself?" said John Ferko, a retired postal worker from Phoenixville, Pa., who supports Clinton.

Indeed, Clinton seems to have won the better part of the culture clash, leading among hunters by a margin of 56-31 percent, among bowlers by 54-33 percent, and among gun owners by 53-28 percent.

Her shot and a beer gambit apparently didn't pay off, however; self-identified beer drinkers split 44-44 percent between the two. Coker said one reason could be that beer drinkers include more African-Americans — Obama supporters — than the bowlers, gun owners or hunters.

While Pennsylvanians seemed to divide along those lines, several voters said they were angry at the way the campaigns and news media played up the flashpoints more than such issues as the war in Iraq or the economy.

"A lot of that little stuff is being blown way out of proportion," said Calvin Dolan of King of Prussia, who supports Clinton because of her intelligence and experience.

A majority of likely voters said they watched the candidates debate last week on ABC, yet just 7 percent said it influenced their vote.

Oscar Hilton, a retired hospital driver from Philadelphia who supports Obama, said he didn't like the way the debate moderators spent the first half of the debate asking about Obama's ties to his pastor or a 1960s radical before getting to other issues.

"For 45 doggone minutes, that's all they talked about," Hilton said. "They tried to bait him and set him up. But he tried to stick to the most important things. We want to know what they're going to do about the issues."

Hilton's issues? Stopping illegal immigration and getting U.S. troops out of Iraq, both of which he said would help American paychecks and the economy.

HOW WE POLL

The McClatchy-MSNBC-Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Poll is a snapshot of voter opinion at the time it was conducted. It is not a prediction of how people will vote on Tuesday.

The Mason-Dixon poll of 625 likely Democratic primary voters in Pennsylvania was conducted by telephone April 17-18.

Those interviewed were selected by a random variation of telephone numbers from a cross section of telephone exchanges. That means anyone in the state with a phone line had the same odds of being called as anyone else, except for people who use cell phones only. Cell phone numbers are not in the exchanges.

The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percentage points. That means that 95 percent of the time, the correct numbers could be up to 4 percentage points above our poll's percentage point findings, or up to 4 percentage points below them, although the most likely outcome is the one the poll reports. The other 5 percent of the time, the correct numbers could vary even more.

The sampling margin of error does not include other variables that could affect results, including the way questions are worded or the order in which they are asked.

McClatchy Newspapers 2008