

Colorado turns purple in polls

Electorate's great divide is by age and geography

By Burt Hubbard

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A political battle for the ages may become a battle *of* the ages.

Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama are neck-and-neck in Colorado, solidifying the state as a key, swing area that will be pivotal in deciding who becomes the next president of the U.S., according to a *Rocky Mountain News*/CBS4 News poll released Friday.

"It's a heck of a horse race in Colorado," said pollster Lori Weigel. "We're officially a purple state now."

The poll revealed sharp divisions among voters by age and geography, with the candidates' approaches to economic issues a key to winning the state.

"There is a huge generational divide," said analyst Craig Hughes, who consulted on the poll. "You really are poised to see this battle of the ages, where this youth vote can swing it."

Overall, Coloradans favored McCain 44 percent to 41 percent, but the gap was within the poll's margin of error of plus or minus 4.38 percentage points. McCain also had a slightly higher approval rating, 55 percent to 53 percent, also within the margin of error.

Generation gaps

Libertarian candidate Bob Barr received 3 percent and independent candidate Ralph Nader was favored by 2 percent of voters with 8 percent undecided.

That was the conclusion of 500 registered voters polled between Monday and Wednesday by Public Opinion Strategies.

Public Opinion Strategies generally polls for Republican candidates. RBI Strategies, a firm that generally works with Democratic candidates, consulted on the creation of the questionnaire and its analysis.

The poll found huge gaps between the youngest and oldest voters in Colorado.

Obama led McCain 56 percent to 34 percent among voters under 35 years of age and McCain led Obama 51 percent to 34 percent among those 65 and older.

"We see a massive generational split," said Weigel, partner with Public Opinion Strategies.

Weigel said there is a chance that young voters for the first time this election might be a larger voting segment than seniors.

She said Obama even loses popularity among Democrats based on age.

"Obama has a little bit of a problem with older Democrats," Weigel said.

His support among Democrats 45 years old and younger is 89 percent compared with 68 percent of those over age 45, she said.

Compass points all over

Geographical differences also abound.

Obama lags on the plains and Western Slope, but dominates in Denver. McCain is favored in the southern suburbs, while Obama is ahead in the northern suburbs.

Jobs and the economy were the No. 1 issue in Colorado voters minds when deciding whom to support for president, the poll said.

Among those voters, Obama had a slight edge - 44 percent to 38 percent.

However, voters who listed energy and gas prices as the top presidential issue favored McCain by 50 percent to 34 percent.

Both affect voters personally and will play a large role in who wins the state, said Hughes, director of research for RBI Strategies.

"In looking at the presidential race, it's how it's going to affect my life and my family," he said.

The poll had good news for both candidates, Weigel said.

The fact that McCain is neck-and-neck in a swing state where two thirds of the voters don't like the incumbent Republican is a good sign, she said.

"These are great numbers for McCain," she said, adding it shows he is projecting himself as a maverick.

Hughes said that is key for a McCain victory.

"If he is perceived as a third term for George Bush, he will lose," he said. "If McCain is perceived by voters as a man of ideas, he is well-positioned to win Colorado."

For Obama, the poll shows him leading 47 percent to 40 percent among suburban women, a key swing group in any election, Weigel said.

They also tend to be more influenced by advertising and wait until late into the election to make up their minds, she said.

"Those tend to be the segment of the electorate who are very, very open to new information."