

Clinton, McCain rise in poll ranks

by: RANDY KREHBIEL World Staff Writer
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Huckabee slips to second place among likely GOP voters.

Hillary Rodham Clinton improved her position among Oklahoma's Democratic voters during the past month, while the Republican side of the presidential primary race remained volatile, the latest Oklahoma Poll indicates.

The survey of 757 likely Oklahoma voters, conducted Jan. 27-30 by SoonerPoll.com for the Tulsa World and KOTV, channel 6, also found that the economy is now the foremost issue among Oklahoma voters as they head to the polls.

While Clinton widened her lead heading into the state's Tuesday primary, U.S. Sen. John McCain of Arizona jumped ahead in the GOP race after trailing former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee by double digits just four weeks earlier.

McCain was the choice of 40 percent of Republicans surveyed, up from less than 17 percent in December. Huckabee, meanwhile, dropped from 29 percent in December to 19 percent in the most recent poll.

"What's significant to me is the meteoric rise of John McCain and meteoric disaster of Rudy Giuliani," said poll consultant Al Soltow, University of Tulsa vice president for research. "McCain was at 23.2 in April, at 17 percent a month ago, and now he's at 40."

Giuliani, who led all Republicans by a wide margin in April, dropped to 12 percent in December and 5 percent in the most recent poll. The former New York City mayor dropped out on the last day of polling.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney was at 17 percent, up from 9 percent in December, while U.S. Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, the fourth remaining active candidate, was unchanged at 3 percent.

"I don't think anybody is enamored of the choices we have," said Republican Geraldine Voorhees of Broken Arrow. "The reason Obama and Clinton have done so well is that Republicans have such poor choices."

McCain was significantly weaker in the Tulsa metropolitan area than in Oklahoma City and the rest of the state, drawing just 29 percent here compared to the mid-40s everywhere else.

Huckabee was at 26 percent in Tulsa, about his December level, while Romney jumped from 11 to 22 percent.

For Huckabee, a Baptist preacher, the bad news was that even evangelical Christians were more likely to support McCain. Only the most ardently religious -- those who attend services several times a week -- favored Huckabee.

Still, Huckabee's background and populist message have some enthusiastic followers.

"He seems to make more sense than the rest of them," said Charles Schmitt of Tulsa. "He seems to speak more on my level. I like the fact he's Southern Baptist. I'm a Southern Baptist."

Tamra Johnson of Pryor said she is socially conservative like Huckabee and has received good reports about him from family members in Arkansas.

"He doesn't stutter over what he says. He seems to be more honest," Johnson said.

McCain supporters emphasized his experience, both in the military and as a long-term member of Congress.

Besides the four active candidates, California U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunter, Colorado U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo, former Tennessee U.S. Sen. Fred Thompson, Jerry Curry, Daniel Gilbert and Alan Keyes will be on Oklahoma's GOP ballot on Tuesday.

Among Democrats, the percentage planning to vote for Clinton increased from 34 to 41 percent. Former North Carolina U.S. Sen. John Edwards, who suspended his campaign on the last day of polling, remained steady in the mid-20s, while U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois improved slightly, to 17 percent from just under 15. Sixteen percent statewide still were undecided.

"It appears that Clinton will be the winner in the Oklahoma primary," Soltow said. "What happens to Obama is largely dependent on where Edwards' votes go.

"Regardless of where they go, it doesn't change the likely outcome. The only thing it will do is determine who picks up the most delegates."

At least one of those Edwards supporters said he probably will stay home on Tuesday.

"I think I may save my vote until the general election," said Sam Henry of Bixby. "The Democrats aren't going to have anyone I want to vote for."

Henry said McCain now is his first choice.

The decision between Clinton and Obama seems to be a matter of weighing Clinton's experience against Obama's charisma.

"I'm not worried about experience," said Jim Sewell of Tulsa. "Look what experience got us with (Dick) Cheney and (Donald) Rumsfeld. I just think Obama's a sharp guy. If he's elected -- and I don't think he will make it -- his image alone would change the world's opinion of us."

Sandra Berenson sees it differently.

"To not look at someone's resume is unthinkable," the Broken Arrow woman said. "Not that Mr. Obama isn't a wonderful person, but he just hasn't been around long enough."

Clinton's support was uniform statewide, but Obama polled 10 percentage points better in Oklahoma City than in Tulsa or the nonmetropolitan areas.

Clinton, Edwards and Obama, along with Connecticut U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, Ohio U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and Jim Rogers will be on the Democratic ballot.

Asked to name the issue that mattered the most in their decision about a presidential candidate, 22 percent said the economy, up from less than 11 percent just one month ago. The war in Iraq, named by one-third of the respondents in an April Oklahoma Poll and by 22 percent in December, came in second at 19 percent.

Candidate characteristics, such as honesty or experience, ranked third at 11 percent.

Interestingly, a number of hot-button issues such as abortion, gun control, Social Security and ideology barely registered. Immigration was named by only 5 percent, and moral and religious issues dropped from 11 to 6 percent.

Concerns about the economy were uniform across party and ideological lines, but Republicans were less likely to be concerned about the war than Democrats and independents. Republicans, on the other hand, were more likely to cite national security as their top issue.

The poll also asked which candidate is the strongest leader, best understands problems of voters, is most honest and trustworthy and has the best experience to become president.

If the presidential primary election were held today, who would you vote for?

REPUBLICANS

John McCain 40%
Mike Huckabee 19%
Mitt Romney 17%
*Rudy Giuliani 5%
Ron Paul 3%
Other 2%
Don't know/Refused 14%

DEMOCRATS

Hillary Clinton 41%
*John Edwards 24%
Barack Obama 17%
Other 2%
Don't know/Refused 16%
* withdrew

What is the single most important issue to you in your choice for president?

Economy 22%
War in Iraq 19%
Candidate quality issues 11%
National security 7%
Morals/religious issues 6%
Health care 6%
Immigration 5%
Other/Don't know/refused 24%

About the Oklahoma Poll

Soonerpoll.com conducted the scientific telephone survey Jan. 27-30 of 757 voters registered in Oklahoma.

The respondents consisted of 306 Republicans, 426 Democrats, 24 independents and one Libertarian selected randomly from voters who have established a frequent voting pattern. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.56 percentage points.

For questions asked of all 306 Republicans, the margin of error is plus or minus 5.6 percentage points. For questions asked of all 426 Democrats, the margin of error is plus or minus 4.75 percentage points.

For questions asked only of the 290 Republicans planning to vote in the Tuesday presidential primary, the margin of error is plus or minus 5.75 percentage points.

For questions asked only of the 405 Democrats planning to vote Tuesday, the margin of error is plus or minus 4.87 percentage points.

The Oklahoma Poll is sponsored by the Tulsa World and KOTV, channel 6.

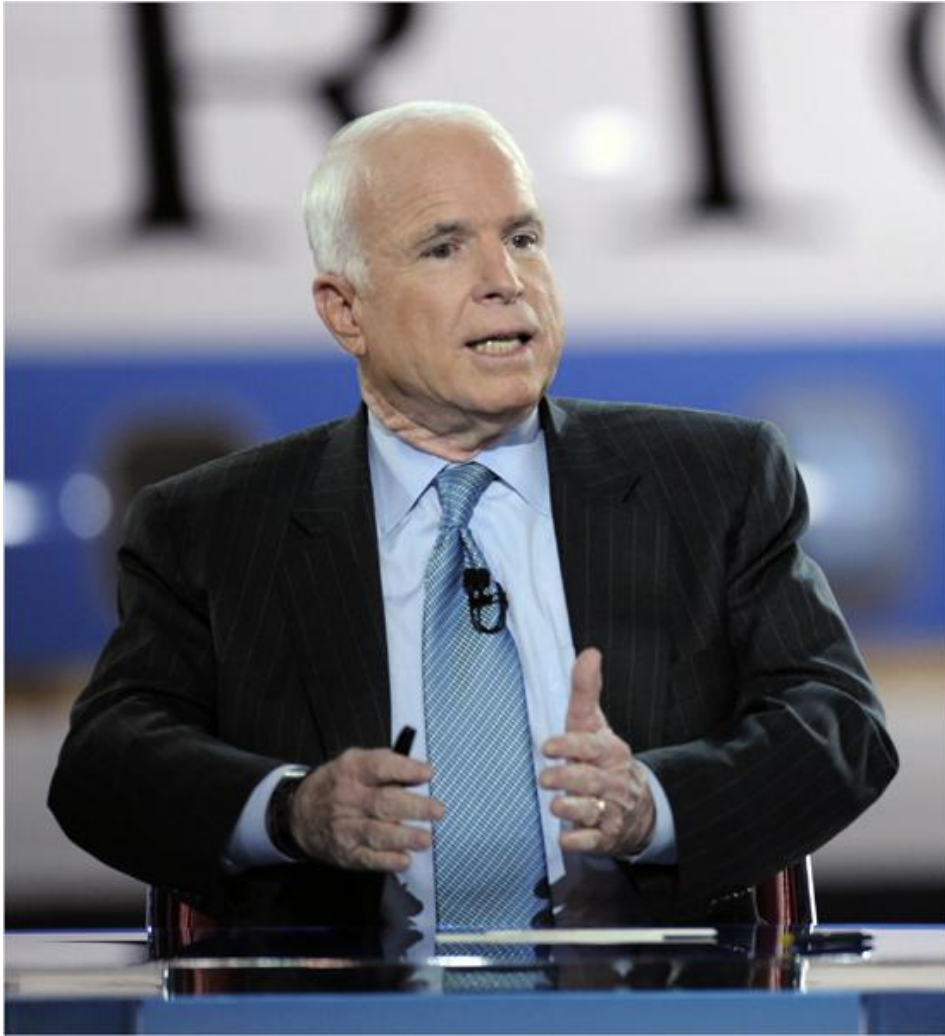
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Associate Images:



Sen. John McCain of Arizona



Sen. John McCain of Arizona



Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois



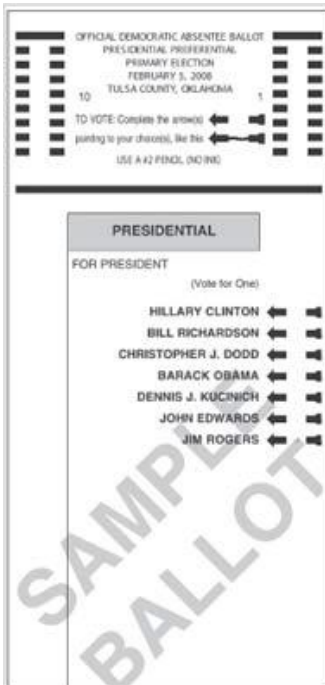
Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York



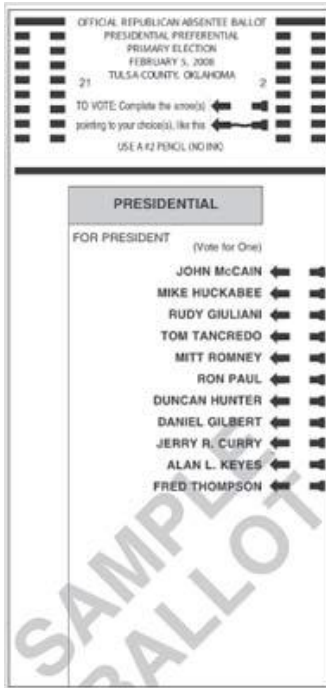
Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney



Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee



Sample ballots for Tuesday's presidential primary election are shown here. Only registered Democrats and Republicans may vote in the Oklahoma presidential primary. Area school districts are also electing board members, and all voters may vote in those elections. Related story on A-16. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Voters may also cast ballots at the Tulsa County Election Board, 555 N. Denver Ave., Monday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.



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REPUBLICANS	Strongest leader		Understands you		Honest and trustworthy		Best experience	
	Jan. '08	Dec. '07	Jan. '08	Dec. '07	Jan. '08	Dec. '07	Jan. '08	Dec. '07
*Rudy Giuliani	6%	20%	3%	8%	2%	5%	8%	19%
Mike Huckabee	14%	26%	27%	32%	27%	30%	7%	14%
John McCain	45%	17%	32%	16%	32%	20%	55%	29%
Ron Paul	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	1%	1%
Mitt Romney	19%	13%	15%	9%	13%	11%	17%	10%
Don't know/Refused/Other	13%	21%	19%	31%	23%	30%	12%	27%

DEMOCRATS	Strongest leader		Understands you		Honest and trustworthy		Best experience	
	Jan. '08	Dec. '07	Jan. '08	Dec. '07	Jan. '08	Dec. '07	Jan. '08	Dec. '07
Hillary Clinton	47%	48%	39%	29%	27%	18%	62%	53%
*John Edwards	19%	18%	25%	22%	30%	25%	14%	15%
Barack Obama	21%	15%	18%	17%	16%	15%	7%	4%
Don't know/Refused/Other	13%	19%	18%	32%	27%	42%	17%	28%

* *withdraw*