

Newsweek Poll
Post Super Tuesday
Princeton Survey Research Associates International

FINAL SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

February 8, 2008

After Super Tuesday, the NEWSWEEK poll shows Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton statistically tied for support among registered Democrats and Democratic leaners nationwide. Obama is the first choice of 42% of Democratic voters, while 41% prefer Hillary Clinton. A large number (17%) are undecided at this point. The co-frontrunners have different appeals – Obama is the choice of those looking for change and a more inspirational, unifying candidate. Clinton is the favorite of voters who see her as more experienced, a more effective leader, and someone who cares about their problems. Democratic voters overall are closely divided on whether experience and hard work or ability to inspire and bring people together is more crucial to getting things done in Washington.

On the Republican side, with Romney's withdrawal, John McCain is in a strong position to capture the nomination. Based on interviews completed on Thursday night only, McCain leads the GOP race by 51% to 32% for Huckabee and 6% for Ron Paul. When voters are asked to choose between McCain and Huckabee, the Arizona Senator beats the former Arkansas Governor by 20 points, 57%-37%. There is less enthusiasm among GOP voters for McCain than there is among Democrats for Obama and Clinton. Nonetheless, three-quarters (76%) of all Republican voters and two-thirds (69%) of self-described conservatives say they are okay with McCain as the GOP nominee.

THE DEMOCRATIC RACE

In the coming primary contests, we would expect this pattern to continue – Hillary Clinton generally doing better in closed primaries limited to registered Democrats and Barack Obama doing better when Independents can participate as well.¹ Hillary Clinton runs stronger among those who self-identify as Democrats. She leads by 45%-40% among registered Democrats. Barack Obama carries the smaller subgroup of Independent voters who lean Democratic by a wide margin, 49% to 31%. Differences in candidate support by ideology are small. Obama has a marginal lead among liberals (44%-40%); Clinton has a marginal lead among moderate to conservative Democratic voters (43%-40%).

OBAMA AND CLINTON SUPPORTERS DIFFER DEMOGRAPHICALLY

Demographically, candidate support among Democratic horserace divides along the lines of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and age. Obama's best groups are African-Americans (68%), college graduates (49%), and men (47%). Clinton does best among those with a high school education or less (48%), whites (44%), women (44%), and those aged 60 and older (44%).

The age patterns in support now evident are somewhat different than those seen earlier in the campaign when Obama's backers were so concentrated among younger voters. With the field reduced to a two-person race, Obama does at least as well as the mostly boomer 40-59 age group (leading by 44%-37%) as he does among voters under 40 (45%-44%). As noted above, Clinton has an edge with voters age 60 plus. The exit polls sponsored by national media organizations showed similar age patterns in the Super Tuesday vote.

¹ While Independents were permitted to vote in the California Democratic Party, the process made it difficult for many of them to actually vote.

IMPACT OF GENDER AND RACE

The NEWSWEEK poll probed further to examine how Democratic voters are influenced by gender and race – specifically, the opportunity to elect the first woman president or the first black president. Democratic voters’ response is not entirely predictable. Gender seems less powerful in swaying women voters than race does in swaying African-Americans. Overall, one-third (33%) say Clinton’s gender makes them more likely to vote for her, 12% much more likely. But women are NOT significantly more likely than men to say Hillary’s gender makes them much more likely to support her candidacy (13% vs. 12%).

As far as Obama’s race, a quarter (26%) of all Democratic voters say they are more likely to vote for the Illinois Senator because he would be the first African-American to serve. Eleven percent of all voters say this makes them much more likely – close to the number who say Clinton’s gender has such impact. Just over a quarter (28%) of black voters say they are much more likely to vote for Obama for this reason.

The bottom line is that gender and race seem to have a similar impact with Democratic voters overall – and neither candidate would appear to have a big advantage because of “identity politics.”

DESIRE FOR CHANGE VS. LEADERSHIP AND EXPERIENCE

As the campaign moves on, neither candidate has an advantage in strength of support. Six in 10 Obama (60%) and Clinton (62%) supporters feel strongly about their choice. When asked to name the main reason they favor their candidate, Obama supporters are most likely to cite the feeling that he can bring about change (42%). In contrast, about half of Clinton supporters attribute their support to the New York Senator’s experience (26%) or leadership ability (21%).

As far as issues, Democratic voters see the economy and jobs (46%) as most important, followed by health care (21%) and Iraq (17%). But issues seem less important in this contest. Just 14% overall say they are choosing a candidate primarily on the basis of issues. Obama voters and Clinton voters are about equally likely to put the economy first (48% vs. 47%). Obama voters are more likely to give the Iraq war a priority (20% vs. 12%).

CANDIDATES’ PERSONAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES SHARPLY DEFINED

The keys to the two candidates’ appeal is evident in a question series asking Democratic voters to match candidates and qualities. Barack Obama is significantly more likely to be viewed as the candidate who:

- * Inspires and excites people (63% vs. 25%)
- * Can bring the country together (50% vs. 34%)

In contrast, Hillary Clinton is more often seen as the candidate who:

- * Has the right experience for the job (62% vs. 22%)
- * Can get things done (50% vs. 31%)

Which of these traits is more important to voters? It is quite close. Overall, 50% think the ability to inspire and bring people together is more important to getting things done in Washington. But nearly as many (45%) think experience and hard work is more important.

EXPERIENCE VS. JUDGMENT

On the campaign trail, Obama has questioned the value of experience and argued that judgment is more important than experience in a president. Most Democratic voters (62%) agree that judgment matters more. But when asked which candidate’s judgment they would trust more in a crisis, Hillary Clinton is named more often than Obama by a 43%-35% margin. Does Clinton’s greater experience in foreign policy and military matters make the difference? Maybe not – when asked which candidate would make the better Commander-in-Chief, about as many voters name Obama as Clinton (40% vs. 42%).

DEFINING CHANGE -- NEW ECONOMIC POLICIES IN DEMAND

Change has been a buzzword in this year's presidential campaign. Although Obama's voters tend to give higher priority to change in choosing a candidate, Obama does not have a big advantage with Democratic voters overall in being seen as the candidate that can "bring about needed change" (44% Obama vs. 38% Clinton).

What kind of change are Democratic voters most interested in? Economic policies that do more to help the needy and middle class come first (44%), followed by ending the war in Iraq (27%). Obama and Clinton both put economic policy changes at the top of their agendas. Surprisingly, Clinton supporters are somewhat more likely to cite ending the war (33% vs. 23%). Obama voters are more likely than Clinton supporters to give priority to reducing the influence of lobbyists and special interests (16% vs. 6%).

DEMS SATISFIED WITH EITHER CANDIDATE

Despite the very competitive campaign for the nomination, it may not be too difficult for the eventual winner to unite the party. Eighty-four percent of all Democratic voters say they would be satisfied with Obama, and the same number (84%) would be satisfied with Clinton as their party's nominee. Seventy percent of Obama supporters would be satisfied with Clinton; 69% of Clinton voters would be satisfied with Obama.

THE REPUBLICAN RACE

Now that Mitt Romney has left the race, there is much focus on whether he can unite the party and get the conservatives and Evangelicals on board. There is no question that McCain is not as popular with the right wing of the GOP. In a showdown with Mike Huckabee, his last serious challenger, John McCain wins the moderate to liberal vote by a huge margin (73%-25%) but manages only a marginal lead among conservatives (49%-43%).²

Huckabee wins the Evangelical vote, who make up about four in 10 GOP voters overall by a 54%-44% margin. But McCain captures the non-Evangelical GOP vote by a huge margin (66%-26%). As seen in Super Tuesday primary results and exit polls, McCain runs strongest among Independents (68%) and outside the South (61%). What's more, McCain voters are now more likely to strongly support their candidate (47%) than Huckabee's supporters (35%). The bottom line is that Huckabee needs Evangelical votes to win states, and McCain is likely to win remaining primaries and caucuses where Evangelicals are not a force.

MCCAIN VOTERS CITE PERSONAL QUALITIES OVER EXPERIENCE

McCain backers base their support most on experience (29%), leadership qualities (20%), and straight talk (says what he believes – 25%). Only 4% of McCain supporters are drawn to him mainly because on his positions on issues. Huckabee's backers differ in that they are much more likely to attribute their support to belief that he shares their moral or religious values (37%). And Huckabee backers are much more likely than McCain backers to cite issues (16% vs. 4%).

² This question was asked on both days of interviewing, before and after Romney's exit.

ECONOMY TOP GOP ISSUE, BUT HUCKABEE VOTERS DIFFER

The economy rates as the top issue among Republican voters (35%) but it has more competition than it does on the Democratic side. Terrorism/national security (19%), illegal immigration (13%), and Iraq (12%) come next on GOP voters' list of issue priorities. McCain voters are more likely than Huckabee voters to put the economy first (38% vs. 23%). Terrorism comes next among McCain voters (25%). For Huckabee voters, social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage matter about as much as the economy (22% vs. 23%). And Huckabee backers feel more strongly about illegal immigration – 16% of his supporters, compared with just 5% of McCain voters say this issue matters most to them.

MCCAIN'S CONSERVATIVE CREDENTIALS BIGGEST WEAK SPOT

McCain has a huge margin over Huckabee in being perceived as more electable (77%-12%), better able to get things done (62%-22%), a more able Commander-in-Chief, (69%-19%) and having the right experience for the job (63%-21%). Even on the immigration issue, more GOP voters think he would do a better job than think Huckabee would (47%-31%). He seems most vulnerable on the issue of his conservative credentials. By a 47%-26% margin GOP voters overall are more likely to see Huckabee as the true conservative. By a two-to-one margin (53%-22%), self-described conservatives are more likely to see Huckabee rather than McCain as the true conservative, and another 14% think neither fills the bill.

GOP VOTER PRIORITIES MOSTLY FIT MCCAIN CANDIDACY

Most of the priorities that GOP voters feel very strongly about would seem to work for John McCain. More than six in 10 (64%) Republican voters think it is very important that their candidate will end pork barrel spending. And just over half (53%) think it is very important for the candidate to favor making the Bush tax cuts permanent, something McCain has promised to do. A similar number (52%) think it is very important that their party's nominee favor keeping U.S. troops in Iraq as long as is necessary, another McCain rallying point. Half (49%) also say opposing abortion and same-sex marriage is very important, which is also reasonably consistent with McCain's voting record.

Where McCain doesn't fit so well is the GOP voter demand for a candidate opposing amnesty for illegal immigrants (50% very important) and who is of the belief that the Bible is the actual word of God (51% very important). GOP voters who take a hard line on immigration and religious conservatives who don't feel a connection with him – as they do with Huckabee and did with George W. Bush – may be his biggest challenge.

NO MUTINY YET

What are the chances that the GOP rank-and-file will unite around McCain? While McCain has some work to do, it certainly doesn't seem impossible. There is less enthusiasm among Republican voters for McCain than there is for Obama and Clinton among Democratic voters. However, three-quarters (76%) of all Republican voters say they would be satisfied with the Arizona Senator as the Republican nominee. Conservatives are somewhat more reluctant, but still about two-thirds (69%) say they can live with McCain. Evangelicals are about as likely as non-Evangelicals to be accepting of John McCain (74% vs. 77%).

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,394 adults, age 18 and over, including 1,214 registered voters. Interviewing was conducted February 6-7, 2008. The overall margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on registered voters and all adults. Results based on smaller subgroups are subject to larger margins of sampling error. The margin of error is plus or minus 5 percentage points for results based on 602 registered Democrats and Democratic leaners, and 463 registered Republicans and Republican leaners. In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting surveys can also introduce error or bias to poll results.