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## Oprah effect didn't really sway voters

### Talk show host's effort might even have backfired, poll says

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Oprah might just as well have stayed home and hung out with her gal pal Gayle.

It was hoped her recent appearances on the campaign trail to promote the presidential aspirations of her friend Barack Obama would have dazzled women voters. But noooo . . .

Or so says a new poll released Wednesday by Lifetime Networks and Zogby International. The pollsters interviewed 500 New Hampshire women -- to look at the views in this early primary state - - and 1,000 other women across the nation to determine their perspectives on the upcoming presidential election.

And what the pollsters found was that Oprah made little difference in the way women are looking at the candidates.

In fact, with some groups of women, Oprah's efforts actually backfired.

In New Hampshire, pollsters found one-third of the women under 30 said Oprah "stumping actually made them less likely to support Obama." Seventy-three percent of the other women said it made no difference to their campaign choices at all.

Voters don't want "to have their entertainment figures involved in political support," explained Fritz Wenzel, director of communications at Zogby International.

The poll was taken during the Dec. 8 weekend when Oprah was on the stump for Obama in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

In New Hampshire, pollsters found Clinton leading Obama by 14 points -- 39 percent to 25 percent, although 40 percent of the respondents said they still had not made up their minds.

### More women head to polls than men

The point is the effort by Clinton's campaign to make her seem warm and cuddly may not even be necessary.

Women say they don't feel obliged to support Clinton because she is a woman; they support her because she is a strong, smart woman and a role model, according to the poll.

That is especially true for minority women who say they are more interested in supporting Clinton because she is a woman than they are in voting for Obama because he is a minority candidate.

And because more women head to the polls than men, the voting gender gap may also help Clinton outpace her rivals.

The gap was greater than ever before during the 2004 presidential election, with 67.3 million women voting compared with 58.5 million men, said Debbie Walsh, Director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

"There is great potential for women to play a major role in seeing who will become the next president of the United States," Walsh told reporters during a phone conference Wednesday about the Lifetime/Zogby poll.

Pollsters found 89 percent of New Hampshire women say they are likely to vote in their state's primary on Jan. 8.

## **Iraq isn't top concern for women**

Sixty percent of all the women interviewed say this presidential election is more important than any other one in their lifetimes. They are concerned more about education, jobs and the economy and health care than the war in Iraq. (Although for New Hampshire women, the war was still the No. 1 concern.)

Other interesting data also emerged from the poll. For Republican women living in New Hampshire, there is a so-called Iowa effect -- pollsters found women there are more likely to switch candidates if the one they support does not do well in Iowa.

For Democrats it's a different story. The majority of New Hampshire Democrats will stay with the candidate they originally choose, despite his or her showing in Iowa.

Voters were asked which presidential candidates they trusted the most. For Republican women, Mike Huckabee came in first with 18 percent. Mitt Romney and John McCain were tied at 16 percent.

About 32 percent of Democratic women trusted Clinton, followed by Obama at 19 percent. Obama was seen by 25 percent as the candidate who most represents change. But Clinton was seen by 23 percent as a candidate of change.

The revelation of the Lifetime/Zogby poll is that women are going to be a huge factor not only for the caucuses and primaries but in the general election. Which is why Michelle Obama -- mother, career woman and keeper of Obama's socks -- is out on the trail so frequently pitching to women and why Clinton and Obama have formed women's groups.

Now we just have to get more women elected at all levels of government if we really want to make a difference. You go girls!

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