

The Swamp

'Gender-gap' favoring Obama: Experts

by Mark Silva

The "gender gap" in support for Barack Obama and John McCain is particularly pronounced in some of the "battleground" states where the Democrat and Republican are vying for the presidency.

And the apparent initial impact that Sarah Palin -- the first female Republican nominee for vice president - had on support for McCain among women is "settling out" now, according to a scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "It seems the effect of Sarah Palin is not one that seems to be long-lasting," the center's Susan Carroll said today.

In Florida, for instance, a state which few Democrats - and only Southern Democrats - have carried since the 1960s, Obama's apparent advantage over McCain is buoyed by women - women sided with Obama over McCain there by a 12-point margin in a recent Quinnipiac University poll, Obama 57 percent, McCain 42 among women surveyed.

Obama also held a nine-point edge over McCain among women in Pennsylvania and seven-point edge among women in Ohio in recent Quinnipiac surveys in those states. And a new network television poll today is showing an 11 percentage point gender gap favoring Obama in Ohio.

"A review of recent polls in 14 states where the contest is expected to be very close finds gender gaps in every state," the Center reports. "In each case, women voters support the Democratic ticket more strongly than men do. Even where voters overall are equally split or favor the Republican ticket, a majority of women voters favors the Democrats."

Nationally, that gap has appeared somewhat smaller - 49-45 for Obama among women in a CBS News-New York Times poll taken before the debate between Palin and Obama running mate Joe Biden. It was 56-47 for Obama among women in an ABC News-Washington Post poll a few days before that.

Yet that tends to correspond with the gender gap between the parties in past elections, the center notes - "Despite all the talk of disaffected Hillary Clinton voters and the fact that Sarah Palin might pull some women voters from the Republican ticket to the Democratic ticket," notes Carroll, a senior scholar at the center, part of the Eagleton Institute for Politics at Rutgers.

She predicted today that the "gender gap" will fall in Obama's favor somewhere between four and 11 percentage points on Election Day .

And how about those polls that showed white women in particular shifting toward McCain after Palin's nomination was announced?

"I think the best we can tell is that mostly is in fact settling out," Carroll said in a conference call today. "White women tend to either divide evenly between Democratic or Republican candidates or vote slightly more in the Republican direction.... 55 percent of white women voted for George Bush... it's not surprising to see a tendency of white women to be a little more supportive of the Republican..."

"I think there was some shifting around," she said. "But certainly when you look at the overall results, there is a gender gap now that looks pretty much like it has in past elections. It seems the effect of Sarah Palin is not one that seems to be long-lasting."

Debbie Walsh, director of the center, said: "What we saw when Sarah Palin was first put on the ticket was a real interest in her narrative." Since then, she said, people have focused more on issues such as "her preparedness to be president.... All of those things are starting to come to the forefront."

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