

In Pennsylvania, 'Tis the Season

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by Dr. G. Terry Madonna and Dr. Michael Young

To everything there is a season, and for a couple of million now well-seasoned Pennsylvania voters, it can not come soon enough. After six weeks of candidates, commercials, and controversies, they are finally going to get to vote. But precisely where are Pennsylvania voters as they prepare to vote on Tuesday, April 22nd? In the glare of more national attention than any primary in the state's history, what are state voters thinking? What are they likely to do? A series of late season polls, including the *Franklin & Marshall College Poll*, provide some illuminating insights into the electorate's collective mind. Taken together they render a fascinating portrait of Pennsylvania and its Democratic electorate on the eve of a historic state election: the why, what, how, and where of the 2008 presidential race, Pennsylvania style.

What are the issues driving the race?

Towering personalities have dominated this contest, but to an extraordinary extent, this race also reflects voters' deep concern about the issues as well. Concerns about the economy continue to resonate as the issue Democrats most often cite as important in their vote choice this year (43%), followed by the Iraq War (23%), and healthcare (13%). On these key issues; however, voters view the candidates differently. Clinton is perceived as more credible on healthcare, while Obama is better known for his views on the war. (Source: *Franklin & Marshall College Poll, throughout*)

Who's winning the horse race?

Hillary Clinton is narrowly leading Barack Obama, but her one time large lead is shrinking. Out of likely Democratic voters, 46 percent now say they plan to vote for Clinton, while 40 percent say they will vote for Obama. But in March, Clinton led Obama by 16 points, so she has lost more than half her former lead. The question now is whether Clinton has stopped the hemorrhaging of her support with her impressive debate performance in Philadelphia last week—aided perhaps by lingering concerns about Obama's controversial statements regarding small town Pennsylvanians.

Where is support coming from?

Clinton continues to lead among her core constituencies. Critical for her have been women, older voters, Catholics, union households, voters with high school educations, and voters with incomes less than \$35,000. But Obama leads among younger voters, non-whites, voters with incomes over \$75,000, and liberals. The crucial male vote is evenly split between them. Neither candidate has altered the other's core support; however, Obama has been able to chip away at Clinton's once massive lead in most major demographics.

What's driving Obama's gains in the state?

Obama's surge has been bolstered considerably by his television advertising and his aggressive campaigning in the state during the past three weeks. Democrats (by a two to one margin) tell Franklin & Marshall pollsters that Obama's commercials are more effective than Clinton's. Certainly his ad buys are breaking state spending records for a primary, and they are working. Almost all Democrats (94%) have seen a television ad for the

Obama campaign. Part of Obama's gains can be attributed to his specificity about the issues, including how to help people with job training and education. Democrats who have watched his ads believe they know a lot about his ideas.

Will undecided voters be important?

They might be. One in seven (14%) likely voters are still undecided going into the final weekend. Moreover the number of undecided is larger for some key voter groups. For example, 17% of male voters are still undecided, 22% of union households are undecided, and a whopping 27% of self-identified conservatives are undecided. If the undecided were to break decisively for either candidate, a close race could be broken wide open.

How important will turnout be to the results?

The race could be determined by turnout. Voter support differs so much by gender, age, and especially region of the state that variable turnout rates across the state could determine who wins or loses. If women, older voters, or western Pennsylvanians turnout at high rates, that augurs well for Clinton since these demographic groups support her strongly. Conversely high turnout rates from younger voters (ages 18-34) or voters from southeastern Pennsylvania (Philadelphia and its suburbs) will enhance Obama's support. Particularly important will be any variation in regional turnout since both Clinton and Obama's strengths are strongly skewed on a regional basis. In particular there is a stark divide between the eastern and western parts of Pennsylvania.

Will new voters be significant in the outcome?

They might be, and if so it could be decisive. There has been a significant increase in the number of new Democrats registered to vote in Pennsylvania. All together there are roughly 300,000 newly registered Democrats in the state, a mixture of first-time voters and those switching parties. Franklin & Marshall polling shows nearly two in three (62%) new voters plan to vote for Obama. New voters tend to turnout at a high rate, clearly auspicious for Obama who gets most of them. The caveat is that many of the new voters are also younger voters who historically turnout at very low rates.

How will geography play into this race?

Pennsylvania is geographically vast with regional differences in its politics that are playing out strongly in this race. In this race regional differences are unusually sharp. Clinton leads in much of western Pennsylvania by margins as high as two to one, while Obama leads in Philadelphia and the Southeast by wide margins. Overall the western part of the state favors Clinton, and the eastern part of the state, especially Philadelphia, favors Obama. The regional battleground is the Philadelphia suburbs. If Obama is to win, it will happen in the Philadelphia suburbs.

Who is going to win?

This final unknown awaits the voters. The conventional expectation is that Clinton wins, albeit narrowly. The subtext to a narrow win for her is that her campaign likely collapses post Pennsylvania--bereft of hope, money, and rationale for going on. But there are many who paint a different ending. A few believe Obama's surge will

power him to an actual win. Others believe Clinton might still win big--extending the Democratic nomination fight well into the summer.

*Politically Uncorrected*TM is published twice monthly. Dr. G. Terry Madonna is a Professor of Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College, and Dr. Michael Young is a former Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at Penn State University and Managing Partner at Michael Young Strategic Research. The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any institution or organization with which they are affiliated. This article may be used in whole or part only with appropriate attribution. Copyright © 2008 Terry Madonna and Michael Young.