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Women Key to Growing Clinton Lead Among Democrats

Educated women, unmarried women among groups showing greatest increases

by Jeffrey M. Jones

PRINCETON, NJ -- Gallup polling has in recent months demonstrated a definite increase in support for Sen. Hillary Clinton as the favored 2008 Democratic presidential nominee. Her support has increased from roughly 4 in 10 Democrats and Democratic leaners to close to half of this group, including a high reading of 50% in the most recent *USA Today*/Gallup poll. As a result, her lead over second-place Sen. Barack Obama has grown to 29 percentage points, the largest of the campaign.

An analysis of Gallup Poll data reveals that most Democratic subgroups show increased support for Clinton during the last two months compared with the summer. Her support has grown more among Democratic women than men, but the increases have been especially great among college-educated women and unmarried women. Other Democratic subgroups that have shown considerable movement toward Clinton's candidacy in recent months include rural residents, young adults, and those without children under 18.

These findings are derived from two aggregated data sets of Gallup polling on 2008 Democratic presidential nomination preferences. The first data set spans three polls conducted from mid-June through July -- just before the increase in Clinton support was first evident. Clinton averaged 40% of the Democratic vote in those polls. The second data set includes the four most recent Gallup election polls, all conducted in September and October, when Clinton averaged a 48% share of the Democratic vote.

Nearly every Democratic subgroup has shown some increase in support for Clinton over the past several months. Two that have not are blacks and Midwesterners -- which are two of Obama's stronger constituencies.

The largest increases in support for Clinton have come among the following Democratic subgroups: rural residents (+20), women with a college degree (+15), single women (+13), younger women (+12), and those with no children under 18 (+12). Obviously there is much overlap in membership among these groups, but clearly, a stronger appeal to certain subgroups of women within the Democratic Party has been a key to Clinton's expanded lead.

Overall, 52% of women who identify themselves as Democrats or lean to the Democratic Party rate Clinton as their top choice for the party's 2008 presidential nomination, compared with 41% of Democratic men. Clinton's support is slightly higher among unmarried women (55%), women without a college education (55%), and younger women (54%), which rate as some of Clinton's strongest constituencies.

Democrats residing in low-income households (56%) and Eastern residents (53%) also rank among the subgroups showing the highest levels of support for Clinton.

Her weakest showing among any of the subgroups analyzed is among college-educated men -- just 34% support her candidacy. Even so, Clinton maintains a slim advantage over Obama (who receives 30% support) among this group of Democrats.

Notably, her support varies little according to Democrats' self-reported political ideology -- 50% of conservative Democrats, 48% of liberal Democrats, and 46% of moderate Democrats choose Clinton as their preferred nominee.