



## Palin's Speech A Small Step Forward

**Minneapolis, MN, September 3, 2008.**

On the night Governor Sarah Palin sought to quiet critics of McCain's choice of a vice-presidential running-mate. The Alaska Governor impressed some women voters and allayed some doubts, but for many did not succeed in answering fundamental questions about her qualifications for this office or her plans for this country among both married and unmarried women. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Democracy Corps conducted qualitative research commissioned by the Women's Voices, Women Vote Action Fund in the swing state of Nevada among 22 undecided voters or weak supporters of either candidate who watched Palin's speech. Half were married women and half were unmarried. Both groups included a number of women who supported Hillary Clinton in the primary, but have not committed to either nominee. Participants answered a series of questions about the election, the candidates, the major issues in this campaign, Sarah Palin in particular and the impact she had on these voters' judgment of John McCain. They then watched Sarah Palin's speech live, followed by another series of questions on many of the same topics. Two follow-up focus group discussions conducted separately among married and unmarried women explored reactions to the speech in detail. This is a qualitative exercise – only based on 2 focus groups - and not a representative survey, but some of the movement in attitudes toward Palin revealed both where she exceeded expectations and where she fell short.

- After viewing the acceptance speech of the first female vice presidential candidate for the Republican party, there was no positive electoral movement toward the Republican ticket among either married or unmarried women in these groups. Some unmarried women moved toward the Republican ticket, but an equal number moved against McCain and Palin. Notably, the Obama speech which we reported on last week did change electoral positioning for some focus participants. This outcome is particularly notable among Hillary supporters, where she also failed to move voters. This speech clearly succeeded in the convention hall and was generally well received in the groups, but among these women, it did not fundamentally change the character of the race.
- Fundamental to the unmarried women in these groups, however, she did not sufficiently address key issues in their lives. This is particularly true of the economy, where unmarried women claim to have heard almost nothing of relevance to their economic standing. One single woman said point-blank "I didn't get anything about the economy."
- Palin did have some success. On a scale of 0 to 100, she improved her favorability scale roughly 10 points among both married and unmarried women.. We also saw improvement in

the number of women who believe she was ready to be vice president. Focus group comments suggest she connected with these voters in a way that made her seem authentic, independent and strong.

- Her recitation of her experience and accomplishment failed to answer fundamental questions about her selection. In the discussion, many women, particularly unmarried women, just did not believe she qualified herself to be vice president or president. (These comments were often preceded by opinions on McCain's age and health).
- This candidate provoked a fascinating discussion of gender roles and politics and the challenges this nominee faces. Many women, especially married women, openly questioned her ability to both serve and raise a family, particularly a family involved such a young, special-needs baby. These women acknowledged the obvious double standard ("we would not ask that if she were a man"), but the question lingered. Some even noted, "let's face it, we (women) do the nurturing."

Palin took some positive steps in Minneapolis last night. She demonstrated political talent most of the country had not yet see and improved her standing among the women in the groups. But she also left these women wanting to know more, to know more about what qualifies her for this office and what she will do to change their lives. These questions precluded a moment in this campaign where she could have changed the election.

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