

September 4, 2008

Assessing the Impact of Sarah Palin on the Women's Vote

Unmarried women have unanswered questions

To: Interested Parties

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research
Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund

The nomination of Sarah Palin for Vice President gave the Republican Party and John McCain a real jolt at the heels of a Democratic Convention watched by tens of millions of Americans. Commentators and advocates made strong arguments that Palin's historic place on the ticket indicated a serious bid to woo women voters, particularly disaffected Hillary Clinton voters. Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund (WVWVAF), a group dedicated to bringing unmarried women into the electorate, wanted to gauge if Palin is generating enthusiasm among women, both in terms of their participation in the election and for the GOP ticket itself.

In a national survey of 1356 women - 1295 likely women voters - conducted between September 2-3 and focus groups conducted following Palin's acceptance speech by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for WVWVAF, we found mixed results. Overall, while the selection of Palin is seen positively by women voters, it is also the case that her selection has given little lift to the Republican ticket and significant questions remain about her to be answered. Women voters – married and unmarried alike – were impressed with Palin's poise and confidence, but wonder what she stood for and how she would address America's most pressing problems.

Just as important, Palin's nomination further highlighted the ongoing importance of marital status in understanding American politics. There are deep differences in how women react to Palin, depending on whether or not they are married. Above all, unmarried women are much more skeptical about Palin and significantly less likely than married women to believe that she is an asset to the Republican ticket. In fact, in the period after the Democratic Convention and Palin's nomination, the margin for Obama among unmarried women increased from +28 to +36 points, largely because of a drop for McCain.

Highlights from the national survey include:

- Both conventions are generating great interest and women voters are following both closely. At the same time, more women voters paid attention to the Democratic convention (66 percent following very or somewhat closely) than to the Republican convention (55 percent following very or somewhat closely). Of course, this survey finished prior to the Palin and McCain acceptance speeches and it is possible that the Republican numbers improve as the week progresses.
- Women voters report that what they saw and heard at the Democratic Convention made them more likely to support Barack Obama (52 percent much more or somewhat more, 30 percent much or somewhat less). This number increased to 59 percent among unmarried women, 13 points higher than married women. Again, the Democratic Convention appears to have had a bigger positive impact for Obama than McCain – with 33 percent reporting that the Republican Convention made them much or somewhat more likely to support McCain and 41 percent reporting that – so far – it has made them much or somewhat less likely to support McCain. Married women are divided (39 percent much or somewhat more likely, 36 percent much or somewhat less likely), while unmarried women are clearly turned off by the Republican Convention (27 percent much or somewhat more, 45 percent much or somewhat less) .
- Obama currently leads among women likely voters by 15 points, 54 to 39 percent. This Democratic margin is driven by unmarried women who are likely voters, who currently give Obama 63 percent of the vote. This represents an 8 point increase in the gap for Obama, largely because McCain's support dropped to 27 percent among unmarried women¹. Married women are more divided, giving McCain a 4 point edge (46 percent for Obama and 50 percent for McCain). This number is unchanged since July, when married women gave McCain a 5 point margin, 45 to 50 percent.
- Unmarried younger women are particularly supportive of Obama much more so than married younger women – once again the marriage gap is evident in the age break. Among unmarried women under 50, Obama leads 75 to 17 percent; among married women under 50, McCain leads by 2 points, 49 to 47 percent. Obama also leads among white unmarried women, 55 to 32 percent while he trails by 15 points among white married women (39 to 55 percent).
- Palin's nomination does not appear to have sparked more enthusiasm relative to Joe Biden. Forty nine percent of women voters – 53 percent among unmarried women, 44 percent among married women – say that Biden makes them more likely to support Obama while 40 percent – 46 percent among married women, 34 percent among unmarried women – say that Palin makes them more likely to support McCain.
- Going into Palin's acceptance speech, she was known by 72 percent of women voters and her ratings were middling at 29 percent warm, 29 percent cool. It is entirely possible that Palin improved her standing with women voters after her acceptance speech. In fact, in two focus groups conducted after the speech, we found that indeed Palin did improve her standing. Married and unmarried women alike found her confident, poised and comfortable

¹ Democracy Corps survey conducted among 1004 likely voters July 21- 24, 2008

in her own skin. Their expectations were relatively low at the outset and they were favorably impressed with her strong performance.

- At the same time, there was no net electoral movement in these two focus groups in response to her speech. Women who began supportive of Obama at the outset remained that way, as did McCain supporters. Undecided voters also remained largely uncertain of their choice.
- This lack of electoral movement may stem from the fact that for many women in these groups – especially unmarried women - Palin did not sufficiently address key issues in their lives. This is particularly true of the economy, where unmarried women claimed to have heard almost nothing of relevance to their economic standing. One unmarried woman said point-blank “I didn’t get anything about the economy.”

Figure 1: Change in vote Pre and Post Convention

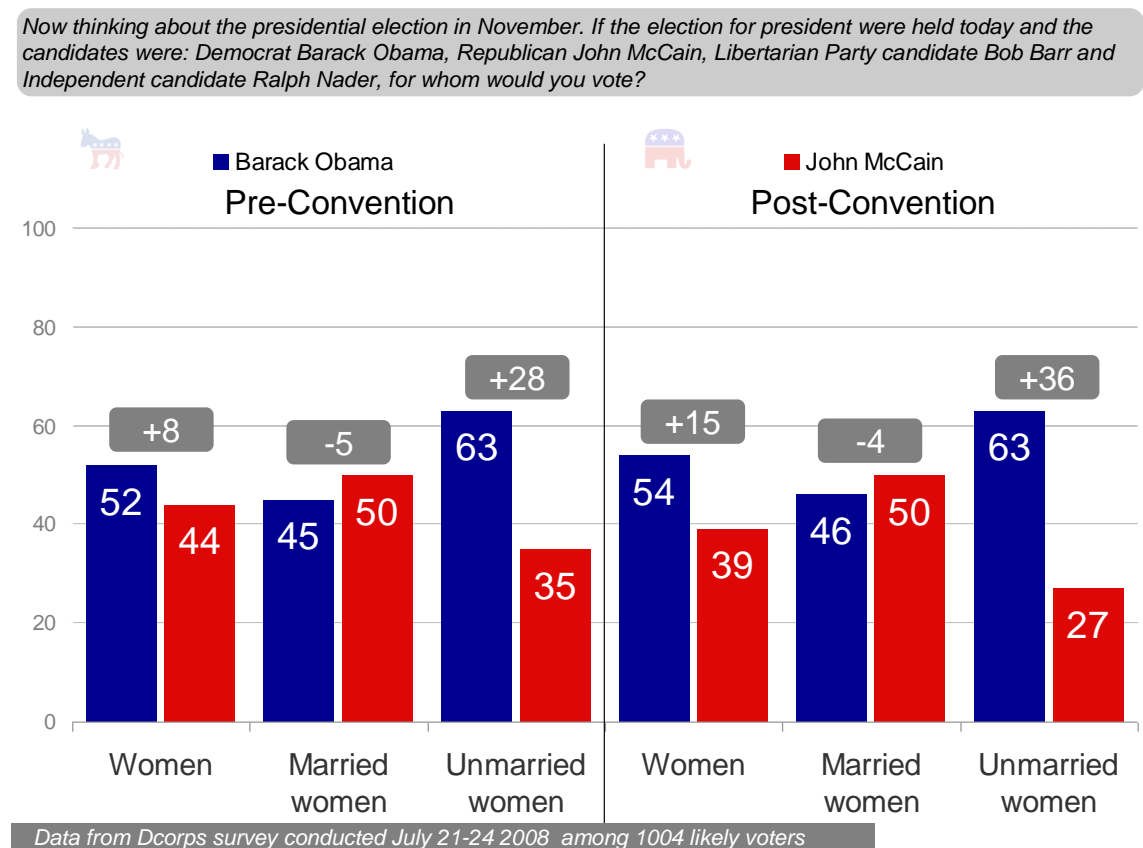


Figure 2: Young Unmarried Women show Strong support for Obama

Now thinking about the presidential election in November. If the election for president were held today and the candidates were: Democrat Barack Obama, Republican John McCain, Libertarian Party candidate Bob Barr and Independent candidate Ralph Nader, for whom would you vote?

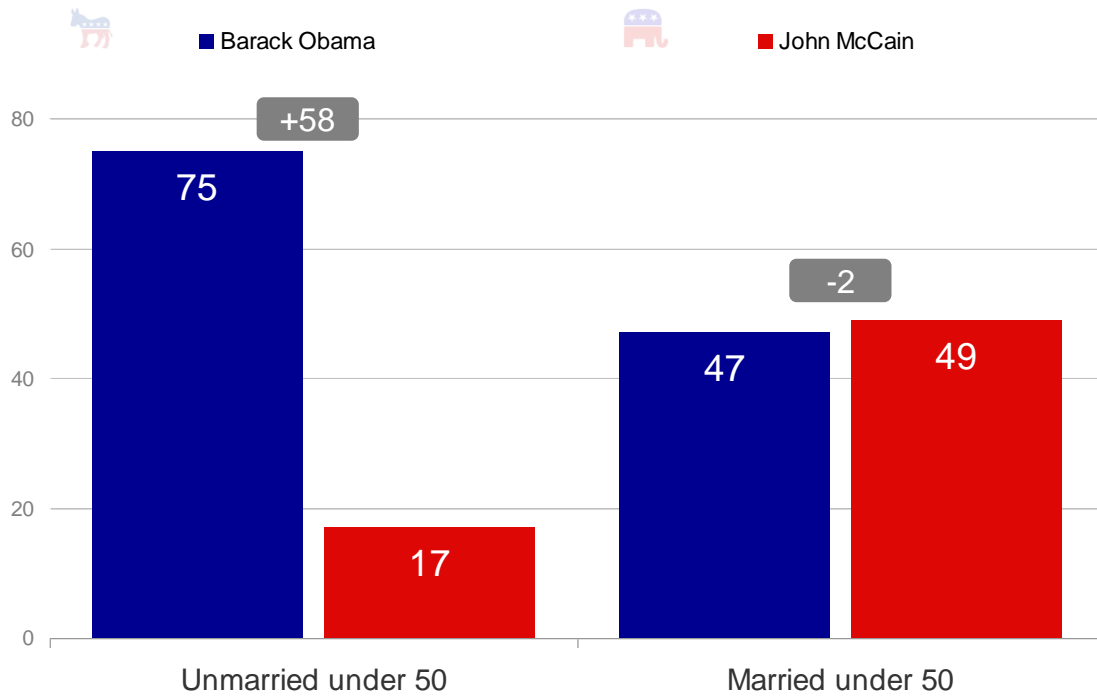
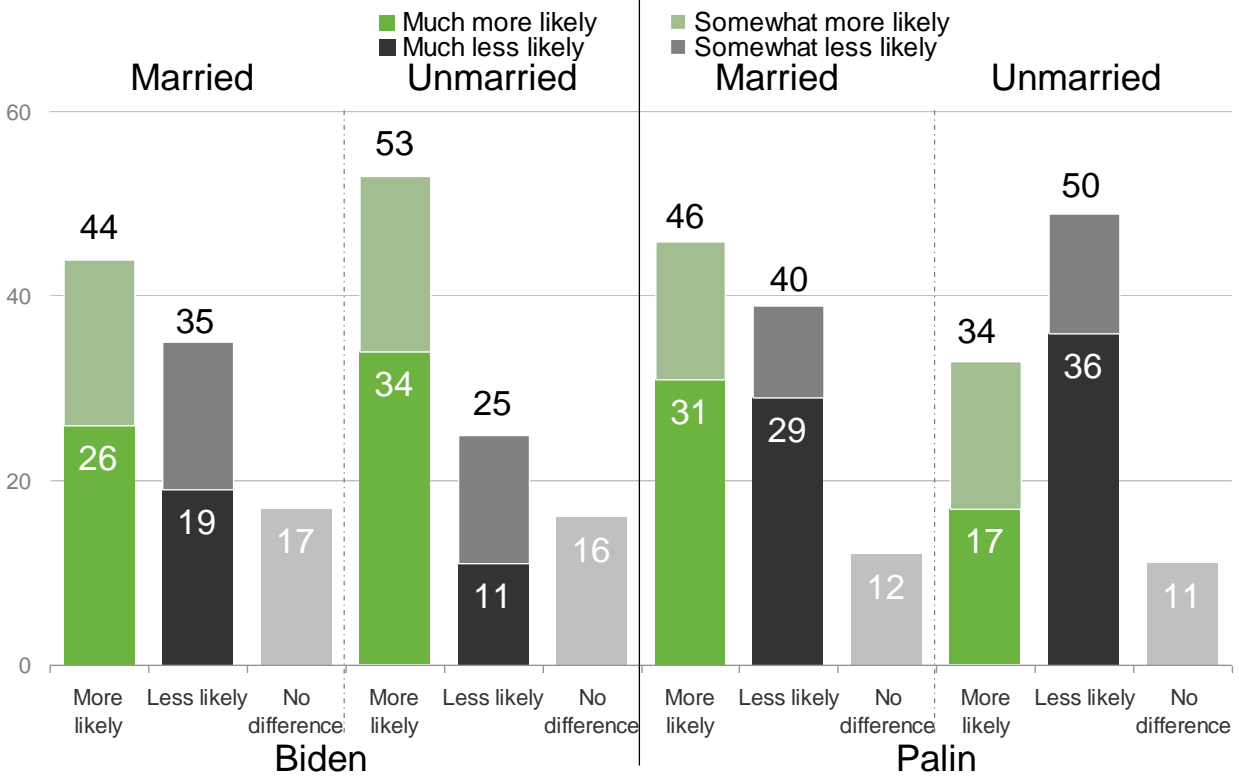


Figure 3: More Enthusiasm for Biden

As you may know, Senator Barack Obama selected Delaware Senator Joe Biden to be his vice presidential running mate. Does this make you more or less likely to support Barack Obama for President?

After hearing this does Alaska Governor Sarah Palin running as vice president make you more or less likely to support John McCain for President?



Appendix A: Methodology

Survey

The following memo is based on a nationally representative telephone survey of 1356 women ages 18 and older, including 848 married women and 496 unmarried women. The data were weighted by age, race, education, marital status, voter registration, and region to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 507 women, including 259 married women and 244 unmarried women. The overall margin of error is +/- 2.7 percentage points. The research was conducted September 2nd-3rd, 2008.

Focus Groups

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research 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.