



Obama widens national lead in USA TODAY/Gallup Poll

By Susan Page, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Barack Obama has widened his lead nationally for the Democratic presidential nomination despite a furor over his comments about small-town Americans, a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll finds. Rival Hillary Rodham Clinton is getting more of the blame among those who say their contest has become too negative.

As the candidates make a final push for votes in today's Pennsylvania primary, Obama leads the survey by 50%-40% among Democrats and voters who lean Democratic. That's a bigger edge than the 7 percentage-point lead he held in the USA TODAY poll last month.

Efforts by Clinton and John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, to characterize Obama as elitist for his remarks at a San Francisco fundraiser seem to have failed. Seven of 10 say Obama "respects working-class Americans" rather than looks down on them — a slightly more positive reading than that for McCain or Clinton.

In words he later described as ill chosen, Obama said earlier this month that economic hard times had prompted Americans from small towns in Pennsylvania and elsewhere to "get bitter" and "cling to guns or religion or anti-pathology to people who aren't like them."

Meanwhile, President Bush set an unwelcome record, scoring the highest disapproval rating — 69% — in the history of the Gallup Poll, which dates to Franklin Roosevelt's tenure. Bush's approval rating is 28%, matching the low point of his presidency.

Harry Truman still holds the record for the lowest approval rating, at 23%.

A record number of Americans, 63%, now say the invasion of Iraq was a mistake.

In the survey, Obama edges McCain 47%-44% among registered voters. Clinton beats McCain 50%-44%. Both leads are within the margin of error.

Democrats are split on whether the continuing primary campaign is damaging the party's prospects in November.

Half say it is hurting the party and leaders should get together and back one of the contenders; half say it isn't hurting the party and should continue until a candidate clinches the nomination.

Democrats are divided, too, about whether the contest has become too negative. Among the half who say it has, 43% blame Clinton, 3% blame Obama. Fifty-three percent blame both equally.

Both campaigns have sharpened their attacks campaigning and in TV ads in Pennsylvania, where today's primary looms as a crucial test for Clinton's campaign. Statewide surveys show her ahead, but her onetime 20-percentage point lead has narrowed.

The telephone survey of 1,016 adults, taken Friday through Sunday, has a margin of error of +/- 3 points for the full sample. The error margin for the sample of 552 Democrats is 5 points.