

Hillary's Man Problem

di Jon Wiener

A lot of men don't like Hillary. A lot of men say they don't want to vote for Hillary--even Democratic men. The new Los Angeles Times/ Bloomberg poll, released December 28, shows that only 19 per cent of Democratic men favor Clinton in upcoming caucuses and primaries--less than one in five. The implications for Hillary are ominous: since she can't expect Republican men to vote for her, how can she win the election?

That poll focused on likely voters in the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primaries, but other polls asking a national sample about the November election have come up similar results. A Washington Post-ABC poll in November found that, in a Clinton-Giuliani matchup, men preferred Giuliani 51 to 44. In a CNN poll in October, only 41 per cent of men said Clinton is someone they admire (compared to 57 per cent of women).

Why do so many men dislike Clinton? Is it simply because she's a woman? Susan Carroll, Senior Scholar at the Rutgers University Center for the American Woman and Politics, told me that politics provides a more important explanation than sexism: "Men are more likely than women to identify as Republicans," she explained. "Men are more likely than women to prefer Republican candidates and their policy positions. Men's partisan preferences are the main reason why many of them wouldn't vote for Clinton. Many of the men who say they won't vote for Clinton wouldn't vote for any Democratic candidate, man or woman."

But that doesn't explain the Democratic men who won't vote for Clinton. Some of them disagree with her on the issues, especially her vote for the Iraq war--but for others, the explanation may lie in simple hostility to the idea of any woman as president.

Even if some Democratic men won't vote for her in November, Clinton could still get elected if she won enough votes from Republican women. In fact that's what the Clinton campaign is predicting. Mark Penn, a Clinton senior strategist and pollster, told reporters in October that Clinton could win 24 per cent of Republican women.

With that gain, Hillary could win the election even if 20 per cent of Democratic men voted Republican, according to DailyKos. However recent Rasmussen polls show Clinton winning only 18 per cent of Republican women, rather than the required 24, while losing 20 per cent of Democratic men. That's not enough Republican women to get Clinton elected.

Clinton advocates point out that if she got 44 per cent of the male vote in November -- the figure in that Washington Post poll matchup with Giuliani -- she'd end up ahead of Kerry, who got only 41 per cent of men in 2004. She also would end up ahead of Al Gore, who got 42 per cent of men in 2000.

Amazingly, if she got that 44 per cent of men in November, she'd be doing better than Bill Clinton, who got only 43 per cent of the male vote when he won his reelection race in 1996. According to the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers, Bill Clinton's 43 per cent of men is the best a Democratic candidate has done in the last 25 years.

That suggests Hillary's man problem is not very serious -- but it still might bring her defeat in November. Of course Kerry and Gore would have won if they'd had more votes from men, and Bill Clinton won only because Ross Perot siphoned off conservative (i.e. male) votes from the Republicans. The December polls show Hillary beating Giuliani, but only by one or two points -- too close for comfort -- and losing to McCain by a frightening five points.