

Forbes '08 Tracker

How The Democrats Stack Up: Obama Tops Clinton

David A. Andelman 03.18.08, 12:00 PM ET

And then there were two. With the Democratic race down to the final two candidates, the March edition of the Forbes '08 Tracker is taking a look at the traits--positive and negative--of Sens. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. And the results are striking.

In terms of overall appeal, Obama outpolls Clinton 45% to 29%, and her total appeal numbers are falling while his are rising. But even more striking is how the polled population assigns character traits to each of the Democrats. Barack Obama substantially outpolls Hillary Clinton on every positive trait, while Clinton surges past Obama on every negative.

[In Pictures: How The Democrats Stack Up](#)

The category of total appeal is a solid indication of how attractive a candidate is as a presidential contender. In this monthly study, 46 attributes are examined by Forbes.com and its partner, California-based E-Poll Market Research. Neither Forbes.com nor E-Poll defines any of the 46 attributes on which it polls its sample population--the same traits it has used to select its own high-level spokespeople for advertising campaigns for more than a decade.

Politics, like selling cars, television shows or any other product, has become a complex marketing process. The 46 attributes help define trends and key drivers that move a person to respond or react to the messaging and the messenger. In this case, the polled population is given the candidate's name, then asked to match whichever of the attributes it believes is appropriate for the candidate in question.

The concept of appeal is the closest the Forbes '08 Tracker will come to any sort of head-to-head popularity poll of the various announced or unannounced contenders.

The methodology polls a cross-section of Americans of voting age, asking first their awareness of each candidate, then their overall appeal, and finally asks those polled to attribute whichever of the 46 traits selected by E-Poll they feel describes the candidates.

Both Clinton and Obama are, by now, well recognized--more than 90% of our sample is aware that they are contenders for the presidency. But that's where their similarity halts.

For example, 30% of our sample population says Clinton is "cold," compared with just 5% who ascribe that trait to Obama. At the same time, 44% think Clinton is "aggressive," nearly triple the 15% score posted by Obama.

On the other end of the spectrum, 23% describe Obama as "charming," compared with 8% for Clinton. Five times as many people label Clinton "rude" than Obama (15% vs. 3%).

Both candidates score high on intelligence--Obama edging out Clinton, 57% to 51%. Neither, however, scores very high as a "good listener"; the score here is 17% for Obama and 13% for Clinton.

The encouraging news for both Democratic contenders is that their presumptive Republican opponent, Sen. John McCain, Ariz., scores only 31% on total appeal--and his numbers have remained little changed for months, hovering right around 30%.

At the same time, he does score below Clinton on a number of the negative traits--10% pick him as "cold"--twice Obama's ranking, but a third of Clinton's, while 22% consider McCain "aggressive"--higher than Obama, but half the level Clinton posts.

On the more positive attributes, McCain scores high on intelligence--49%. Still, he ranks lower than either Obama or Clinton as a "good listener"--just 10% assign that trait to him.

Of the three, Obama is seen as the most "activist" candidate, with 31% assigning that attribute to him, while just 14% say they consider Clinton and McCain activists.

Finally, if Americans consider that their President must be "classy," then both Clinton (at 18%) and Obama (17%) vastly outdistance McCain, who is labeled classy by just 7% of our sample.

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