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MAGAZINE

## African American Vote Significant in Presidential Primaries

*By David A. Bositis*

With the presidential primary season now in full swing, the significance of the African American vote, particularly in choosing the Democratic nominee, has become increasingly clear. While not particularly significant in the two states that traditionally go first in the process, Iowa and New Hampshire, the black vote will be critical in the primaries in Michigan (Jan. 15), South Carolina (Jan. 26), and Florida (Jan. 29). And on Feb. 5, when voters in states from New York

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## The African American Climate Change Crisis: Quiet Nightmare or Subtle Opportunity?

*By M. K. Dorsey*

We live in a moment in the United States where civil rights are enshrined in the law and racial epithets are considered especially offensive. Ironically, when the attacks on people of color and low-income citizens are of an environmental nature, they are seldom met with condemnation, or modest redress, like remediation or clean-up, let alone prosecution. This reality comes after a decade of data revealing that race, not income, is the best predictor of exposure to hazardous waste, toxic chemicals and environmental harms in general. Researchers from across the country name

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## “WHICH WAY FORWARD? THE NATION PREPARES TO DECIDE”

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# SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTE IN PRIMARIES

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to California cast their ballots, African American voters could determine the victors in several of the races.

The recent Joint Center National Survey of Likely Black Presidential Primary Voters, a national survey of 750 black likely primary/caucus voters sponsored by the AARP and conducted between Oct. 5 and Nov. 2, 2007, found an extremely high level of engagement among African Americans. More than 80 percent of the respondents said they were closely following news coverage of their party's presidential candidates, and about two-thirds said they were extremely likely to participate in their states' primaries or caucuses. As expected, 87 percent of those surveyed said they would participate in the Democratic nominating process.

A major reason for this high level of engagement is concern about key issues that currently confront the country. More than two-thirds of those surveyed named the war in Iraq, health care issues, and jobs and the economy as the most important problems. This is a significant change from the previous two presidential elections. In a 2000 Joint Center survey, education, health care, and crime and violence were the top three issues. In 2004, employment and the economy far out-paced the war in Iraq, with health care a close third. In the current survey education and crime and violence ranked fifth and sixth, behind the top three and a category labeled other/none/don't know. The one constant in all three polls has been the high level of concern about health care. Given the wide racial disparities in infant mortality and in life expectancy, this concern should not be surprising.

However, interestingly, a slight majority of black voters (51 percent) rated character as more important than a candidate's position on the issues. When the answer to this question is broken down by gender, black women voters split about evenly on

the question, yet black men by a wide margin (60 percent) indicated that character was more important.

Concern about the direction of the country was indicated by the fact that approximately twice as many respondents rated commitment to change as more important than experience for a candidate. This is consistent with the finding that 81 percent of those surveyed feel that the country is headed in the wrong direction.

Although the survey did not ask respondents to indicate for whom they planned to vote, it did ask about favorable and unfavorable ratings of the candidates. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) received the highest

## MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF THOSE SURVEYED NAMED THE WAR IN IRAQ, HEALTH CARE ISSUES, AND JOBS AND THE ECONOMY AS THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS.

favorable ratings in the survey, followed closely by Senator Barack Obama, (D-Ill.) Senator Clinton was rated favorably by 83 percent of the respondents, while fewer than 10 percent rated her unfavorably. Senator Obama was rated favorably by nearly 75 percent of black voters, while 10 percent rated him unfavorably. The only other Democratic candidate within striking distance of the top two is former Senator John Edwards (D-N.C.), who was rated favorably by 45 percent and unfavorably by just under 20 percent.

On the Republican side, not a single candidate had higher favorable than unfavorable ratings among the

**TABLE 1. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING THE COUNTRY TODAY?**

	BLACK ADULTS		LIKELY PRIMARY/ CAUCUS VOTERS
	2000 %	2004 %	2007 %
EDUCATION	26	7	9.8
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS/ HEALTHCARE	18	20	20
CRIME, VIOLENCE, DRUGS	16	1	5.8
EMPLOYMENT/ ECONOMY (JOBS, POVERTY, HOMELESSNESS, HUNGER)	14	31	14.7
SOCIAL SECURITY/ MEDICARE	8	1	2.4
MORALS/ MORAL CRISIS (FAMILY VALUES, CORRUPTION, SCANDALS)	4	-	2.3
GUN CONTROL	3	-	1.1
RACE RELATIONS/ RACISM	2	1	3.0
TAXES	2	-	-
TERRORISM	1	10	2.0
WAR IN IRAQ	-	22	28.2
OTHER/NONE/ DON'T KNOW	6	7	10.7
(N =)	850	850	750
<b>2004 AND 2006 DATA ARE FROM JOINT CENTER NATIONAL OPINION POLLS.</b>			

respondents. Former Senator Fred Thompson (R-Tenn.) had the least unfavorable ratings with nearly 30% rating him unfavorable and just under 20 percent rating him favorably. The highest unfavorable rating among the Republicans was accorded to Rudy Giuliani, who was viewed unfavorably by nearly 43 percent of the respondents and favorably by 27 percent.

The traditional preference among black voters for the Democratic Party probably is intensified by the lack of

**TABLE 8A. WHICH OF THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES DO YOU THINK HAS THE BEST POSITION ON: [DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY VOTERS N = 655]**

	CLINTON %	OBAMA %	EDWARDS %		OTHER %	D/K %
DEALING WITH IRAQ	35.4	22.1	4.0	0.7	2.2	35.4
STRENGTHENING SOCIAL SECURITY	41.0	18.6	4.1	0.9	0.9	34.4
AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE	47.3	18.7	2.9	0.1	0.3	30.6

**TABLE 8B. BASED ON WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, WHICH CANDIDATE DO YOU FEEL HAS THE BEST ABILITY TO BREAK THROUGH SPECIAL INTERESTS AND PARTISAN GRIDLOCK TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS IN ENSURING THAT ALL AMERICANS HAVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE QUALITY HEALTHCARE AND LIFETIME FINANCIAL SECURITY?**

	CLINTON %	OBAMA %	EDWARDS %		OTHER %	D/K %
	47.2	21.8	4.3	0.6	0.7	25.5

**TABLE 7. I'M GOING TO READ A LIST OF THE LEADING CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT. I'D LIKE YOU TO RATE YOUR FEELINGS TOWARD EACH ONE AS EITHER VERY FAVORABLE, FAVORABLE, UNFAVORABLE, OR VERY UNFAVORABLE. IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD ABOUT SOMEONE OR DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THEM TO RATE THEM, JUST SAY SO.**

	FAVORABLE			NEUTRAL %	UNFAVORABLE			D/K	(N)
	VERY %	%			VERY %				
<b>DEMOCRATS</b>									
HILLARY CLINTON	51.0	32.0	(83.0)	4.8	5.4	4.3	(9.7)	2.5	750
BARACK OBAMA	40.3	34.1	(74.4)	8.4	6.1	4.0	(10.1)	7.2	750
JOHN EDWARDS	12.2	32.9	(45.1)	18.4	13.2	6.5	(19.7)	16.9	750
BILL RICHARDSON	4.5	12.9	(17.4)	17.6	20.0	7.2	(27.2)	37.8	750
<b>REPUBLICANS</b>									
RUDOLF GUILIANI	7.0	20.1	(27.1)	15.7	29.3	13.4	(42.7)	14.5	750
FRED THOMPSON	4.7	14.9	(19.6)	18.8	19.6	9.0	(28.6)	33.1	750
MITT ROMNEY	4.2	11.9	(16.1)	18.2	22.7	9.9	(32.6)	33.1	750
MIKE HUCKABEE	4.4	7.5	(11.9)	17.7	18.2	8.9	(27.1)	43.2	750

**TABLE 2. PLEASE TELL ME WHICH ONE OF THESE WILL BE MOST IMPORTANT [SECOND MOST IMPORTANT] TO YOU PERSONALLY IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?**

	MOST IMPORTANT %	SECOND MOST IMPORTANT %
Situation in Iraq	35.7	19.1
Health Care/Prescription Drugs	18.7	22.2
Economy and Jobs	13.8	19.5
Education	9.4	11.0
Future Financial Security/Social Security	7.8	7.2
Terrorism/National Security	6.4	11.7
Immigration	2.2	2.2
Moral Values	2.3	1.6
Taxes	1.5	3.2
Other/None/Don't Know	2.1	2.3
(N = )	750	750

support for President Bush. Only 11 percent of the respondents thought that the president was doing an excellent or good job, while 87 percent gave him negative marks, including 58 percent who rated his work as poor. This tracks with the finding noted earlier that 81 percent think that the country is going in the wrong direction.

Although Congress, now controlled by Democrats, also fared poorly in the favorability ratings (81 percent negative), increasing numbers of African American voters appear to be moving left on the political spectrum. In Joint Center surveys of black adults conducted during the 1990s, between 35 percent and 40 percent of respondents described themselves as conservative in their political orientation. In the current survey only 21 percent describe themselves as conservative, while 41 percent describe themselves as liberal and 36 percent describe themselves as moderate.

The Joint Center will be closely watching the state-by-state results of the primaries and will post analyses of the results on its web site as soon as possible after these results. □

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### About the Joint Center/AARP Poll

The 2007 Joint Center National Survey of Likely Black Presidential Primary Voters, which was sponsored by AARP, is a national survey of 750 black likely primary/caucus voters, conducted between Oct. 5 and Nov. 2, 2007. Randomized procedures were used to select respondents within each household reached by telephone, and after the initial call, there were at least eight call-backs if no interview was completed. The results of this survey should be interpreted with a statistical margin of error of ±3.7 percentage points.