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Groundbreaking Winthrop-ETV Poll of S.C. African Americans Gives Edge to Obama Over Clinton

Quick Facts

- Results of a Winthrop/ETV poll were released during the Sept. 13 edition of South Carolina ETV's "The Big Picture."
- The poll was conducted among 657 randomly selected African Americans in South Carolina.

COLUMBIA, S.C. - The results of a groundbreaking **Winthrop/ETV poll**, conducted exclusively with S.C. African Americans between Aug. 19 and Sept. 9 – as the Democratic presidential candidates battle for top spot and the talk was of Gen. Petraeus' impending testimony – are in.

The results were released during the Thursday, Sept. 13, edition of South Carolina ETV's "The Big Picture." ETV is the public television and radio network in South Carolina.

The Winthrop/ETV poll was conducted among 657 randomly selected African Americans in South Carolina and has a margin of error of plus/minus 3.82 percent. (NOTE: As is true with all survey data, reported results that use only a subset of the data will have a slightly higher margin of error.)

Discussing the pioneering nature of the survey, **Dr. Scott Huffmon**, director of the **Winthrop/ETV poll initiative**, said, "This poll is groundbreaking because it samples the general African-American population, not just likely voters, and because of the breadth of the topics it covers. We felt that the African-American population is vastly underserved when it comes to having its opinions recorded. This is our attempt to address that issue."

Commenting on the results themselves, Huffmon, who designed the survey with the assistance of Winthrop University's co-director of African American Studies, Dr. Adolphus Belk, Jr., said the horse race results show that, "Early on, African Americans threw their support to Hillary Clinton, primarily based on the Clinton legacy. However, as African-American voters have gotten to know Barack Obama, support for him has increased significantly. The real tipping point in the Democratic primary election may be undecided African-American female voters – there are many more African-American female undecideds than males, and Clinton and Obama are dead even among African-American women. It may literally come down to whoever gets the African-American female vote. Clearly support for Edwards, etc. is coming from white voters. On another note, among African Americans in South Carolina right now, George Bush is proving to be a much more polarizing figure than the Confederate flag."

Adds Belk, "The survey results show that there is considerable dissatisfaction within the African-American community regarding the war on terrorism – in particular the struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly 90 percent of the respondents said that they disapproved of President George W. Bush's handling of the war in Iraq. What is more, only 7.3 percent of the respondents believed that the war in Iraq has made America safer, while 82.5 percent felt that it has created additional threats to our security. About 84 percent of those surveyed said that they disapproved of the president's handling of the war in Afghanistan."

Among the Winthrop/ETV Poll Findings:

The horse-race results take on added significance by the fact that historically, African Americans have made up to 50 percent of voters in Democratic primaries in South Carolina.

When the question was asked: "If the Democratic presidential primary election were held today, which of these candidates would you vote for?" and broken down among both genders, male only, female only, and those who feel their race or ethnic background contributes a great deal to their identity, Barack Obama emerges as the winner in three-out-of-the-four match-ups, trailing Clinton in the fourth match-up (taken of women only) by .3 of one percentage point. (Among all respondents for this question the margin of error is 4.24 percent.) Subsets who responded to this question have a slightly higher margin of error as well.

Coming in third in the field, with only 3 percent in his column, John Edwards and his fellow Dems just don't seem to be registering with African Americans –although almost 30 percent count themselves as still undecided. Interestingly, Edwards, in the first Winthrop/ETV poll released in late May – taken among registered voters of all races – was the top choice of 10.7 percent of the respondents back then.

Of the 10 Republican candidates, only newcomer Fred Thompson made inroads, with a 20.9 percent showing. Importantly though, of the 657 polled, a mere 45 individuals said they would vote in the Republican primary in January, and of those, almost half (46.5 percent) were still undecided whom they would vote for. This means all remaining Republicans received such a tiny fraction of positive responses, that the numbers they accrued are statistically insignificant.

When asked, "Do you think white Americans would be willing to vote for an African American for president?" almost 60 percent agreed they would, with an additional 10.4 percent either unsure about, or unwilling to, offer an opinion.

With news of the surge dominating headlines this week, the vast majority of respondents, 61.3 percent, felt that the troop surge has been either somewhat unsuccessful or very unsuccessful.

When it comes to whether African Americans feel they are being asked to assume too much of the burden of fighting the war in Iraq, those who say yes, and those who say no, are separated by a mere 4.1 percent (39.4 versus 43.5 percent, respectively). Another 16.1 percent are unsure.

Among the Additional Findings:

Fifty-three percent of respondents felt that the Republican Party was working to attract African-American voters. And of those, some 61 percent feel that the party is either very effective, or somewhat effective, in their efforts. At the same time, 56.2 percent of respondents felt that the national Democratic Party, and 57.1 percent of the respondents felt that the SC Democratic Party were taking their votes for granted.

While almost 50 percent of respondents felt the Confederate flag was primarily either a symbol of racism or hate, almost 20 percent saw it as symbolizing both pride in heritage and symbolic of racism and hate, while 11.3 percent saw it as neither.

Almost 87 percent disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president.

Even though almost 75 percent of those polled felt that sex between two adults of the same sex was strongly unacceptable, or somewhat unacceptable, 47 percent also said they have a family member who is openly gay or lesbian, and almost 50 percent said they have a close friend in one of those categories.

Over 73 percent of respondents felt that sexually explicit lyrics in rap music cause males to be sexually explicit with females, while almost 75 percent say that violent Rap music and videos do lead people to be more violent. Still, almost 72 percent feel that some rap music has positive themes that have the ability to uplift and empower people.

While almost 40 percent of those who took the poll describe South Carolina public schools as doing a good or excellent job in educating students in the state, an additional 38.4 percent rated SC public schools as only fair, while 16.6 percent said they did a poor job. When it comes to looking at only African-American children who are in school, those who feel they're receiving a good or excellent education drops to 27.5 percent, while 40.5 percent selected "only fair" to best describe their opinion, and one-fourth, or almost 26 percent, thought the state was doing a poor job of educating black youth.

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