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Clinton Poised for Victory in Puerto Rico Primary

To: Larry Sands

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Hillary Clinton is poised for a decisive victory in the June 1 Democratic presidential primary, according to a survey conducted for Univisión-Puerto Rico and El Vocero. The survey, done by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, a Washington-based polling firm, projects that the New York senator will win about 60 percent of the vote.

Among Puerto Rican adults, Clinton leads Barack Obama by 55 to 42 percent, with the remainder undecided. But among those who indicate they are certain to vote (37 percent of adults), Clinton leads 59 to 40 percent.

There is reason to believe, however, that Clinton may win by a larger margin. As turnout decreases, her vote inches up, since her supporters express a greater interest in the primary. At a turnout level of 34 percent (involving respondents who say they are certain to vote and who believe the primary is very or somewhat important in determining the Democratic nomination), she achieves 61 percent of the vote. If turnout falls to 25 percent (those who are certain to vote and consider the primary very important), Clinton reaches 62 percent.

On the other hand, if turnout were to exceed expectations and reach the very high levels seen in a few states this year, Clinton's margin will likely be more narrow.

The turnout models here are generally consistent with the rates that U.S. states have experienced for open primaries, factoring in local support for the Democratic Party in each locale. But turnout is especially difficult to project for the Puerto Rican primary. First, this is the first presidential primary in the island's history (in previous years, Puerto Rico held caucuses). As a result, there is no primary turnout history to consider. Second, there are factors that could influence voter participation in either direction. With Obama appearing to have the nomination sewn up, turnout could be depressed. On the other hand, the prolonged visit by Clinton this weekend could generate enthusiasm and drive up turnout, especially for her.

The Greenberg Quinlan Rosner survey fielded from May 8 to May 20 and included face-to-face interviews with 800 Puerto Rican adults. The margin of error on a random sample of 800 is 3.5 percent. The margins of error for various demographic groups and sets of likely voters are slightly higher.

The demographic splits that have been evident throughout the Democratic primary process are manifest in Puerto Rico as well:

- There is a large gender gap. Clinton leads by 22 points among women, but only by 4 points among men.
- The older the age group, the better Clinton does. For example, she leads by 36 points among voters over 64 and by just 3 points among those under 30.
- Clinton fares best among those without a college education, leading by 22 points among that segment. College graduates give her a 4-point edge.
- Obama does best with the most well-off. He leads by 5 points among those who earn at least \$18,000 a year (representing the top 30 percent wealthiest in Puerto Rico), but trails by 21 points among those who earn less than \$18,000 a year.

Puerto Ricans in Negative Mood

The Democratic primary comes as Puerto Ricans are in a particularly negative mood. Only 5 percent say that things in the island are going in the right direction, a level of dissatisfaction rarely seen anywhere in the world. Even the governor's supporters are unhappy with how things are going. Only 11 percent of supporters of Anibal Acevedo Vila think that Puerto Rico is going in the right direction.

The electoral environment is much more adverse for the incumbent government than it was in 2004. Three-quarters say they are not better off than they were four years ago, and two-thirds say they are worse off than they were in 2004.

A number of factors are driving the discontent, beginning with crime and the economy. A plurality of Puerto Ricans (44 percent) says that crime and drugs is one of their top two concerns, followed closely by high prices and the cost of living (41 percent). An overwhelming 85 percent say the recent increases in food prices have affected them a great deal.

After inflation, the next leading public concern is unemployment (36 percent).

PNP Enjoying Huge Advantage

Regardless of the public's presidential vote preferences in the Democratic primary, Puerto Ricans will favor the Democratic nominee over John McCain. By a 72 to 10 percent margin, survey respondents say they would vote for the Democratic candidate over McCain if they were eligible to vote in the presidential election in November.

This enthusiasm for the Democratic Party does not extend, at least for the time being, to the party often seen as having an affiliation with the Democrats, the PPD. Governor Acevedo Vila trails the PNP's Luis Fortuño by 37 points (64 to 27 percent) among likely voters for November's gubernatorial election.

The governor's remarkably poor standing at this stage of the race is due in part to defections from PPD sympathizers. One-fifth of those who say they identify with the PPD plan to vote for Fortuño. In contrast, Fortuño enjoys nearly unanimous support among PNP members.

Fortuño leads among all demographic groups, although Acevedo Vila does have pockets of strength. The governor trails by just 7 points among those over 64 years of age.

Acevedo Vila's problems are many. First, he is presiding during a period of profound dissatisfaction, as described above. Second, there is considerable disapproval of his performance as governor. Only 37 percent approve of how he is handling his job, and a 15-percent plurality (56 to 41 percent) want to go in a different direction than the PPD has taken Puerto Rico.

Third, the legal charges filed against the governor have raised serious concerns for many voters. The public is about evenly divided over whether the governor is guilty. A 37 to 34 percent plurality says he is innocent of campaign finance corruption and conspiracy to violate federal election laws; 29 percent are reserving judgment.

Whatever the public's view of the allegations against the governor, however, nearly two-thirds think he should not have run for re-election. And by a large margin (61 to 34 percent), most people reject his argument that the charges are a politically motivated attempt to undermine Puerto Rican democratic institutions.

Finally, Acevedo Vila faces the challenge of running against a popular candidate. A robust 71 percent approve of Fortuño's performance as resident commissioner, including 45 percent of PPD members. He also has a strong personal image, with 40 percent having a favorable impression of him and 33 percent having an unfavorable view. In contrast, many more people have an unfavorable (57 percent) than favorable impression (23 percent) of Acevedo Vila.

The governor's travails and the sour mood on the island have had a dramatic impact on the standing of the parties. The share of people who view the PNP favorably (36 percent) is nearly the same as the share that views it unfavorably (40 percent). The figures for the PPD are much more adverse (27 percent favorable; 51 percent unfavorable.)

Division over Environmental Protests

The survey also inquired about public feelings toward the recent protests by environmental organizations against some construction projects in Puerto Rico and found the public evenly divided. Equal shares said they agree and disagree with the protests. Support for the protests is strongest among young Puerto Ricans, namely those under 30, as well as those who are wealthier and have a college education.