

Deepening crisis in Democratic Party ahead of California primary

By Patrick Martin
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With only five days remaining before the crucial June 7 primaries in California and five other US states, there are mounting signs of deep crisis in the campaign of Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton, whose poll numbers in the most populous US state suggest she may lose to Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders.

A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News/Marist poll released Wednesday afternoon found Clinton with a narrow 49-47 percent lead over Sanders among likely Democratic primary voters, within the margin of error. Among all those eligible to vote in the primary, Sanders actually held a one-point lead, 48-47 percent.

Sanders has sliced Clinton's earlier lead from 18 points to near-zero over the past few weeks. In the most recent poll, Clinton had a sizable lead among those who had already cast mail ballots, but Sanders is expected to lead by a wide margin among those who actually go to the polls next Tuesday.

Sanders led by a 2-1 margin among voters younger than 45, and by 68-26 percent among independents. Clinton led 57-40 percent among registered Democrats and 63-33 percent among voters 45 and older. Both candidates would swamp Republican nominee Donald Trump in California, with Sanders leading by 34 points, 62-28 percent, and Clinton by 24 points, 55-31 percent.

The Vermont senator has been holding increasingly large rallies up and down the state this week, topped by a huge crowd in Oakland estimated at anywhere from 20,000 to 50,000 people. The Sanders campaign says that he expects to address a total of 250,000 people at such rallies before the voting takes place next Tuesday.

The swelling interest in the campaign of Sanders, a self-described "democratic socialist" who has regularly denounced Wall Street billionaires as the cause of ongoing economic crisis, is expressed in a record influx of new voters, either registering for the first time or re-registering as Democrats or independents so that they can cast a vote in the presidential primary June 7.

The Institute of California reported that some 1.5 million

people have registered to vote since January 1, a figure that could grow to nearly 2 million once all jurisdictions report. This is a 218 percent increase compared to the same period in 2012. According to one analyst, Vince Vasquez, who spoke with ABC News, "That includes both brand-new voters and those that are re-registering. A large chunk of those voters are millennials, Democratic-leaning, and overall fit the demographic profile of Bernie Sanders supporters."

Hillary Clinton has cancelled scheduled appearances in New Jersey, which also votes on June 7, to fly back to California for a series of campaign events. The first, and most politically revealing, is a hurriedly arranged speech in San Diego Thursday on national security, an issue which has been avoided by both Clinton and Sanders in the primaries, but which Clinton hopes to use to her advantage in the general election. San Diego is a center of several military bases and is critical for US operations in the Pacific and Asia.

An email to the press from the Clinton campaign announcing the speech said that Clinton would "make clear the threat that Donald Trump would pose to our national security and to put forth her own vision for keeping America safe at home and leading in the world." The statement denounced Trump as "temperamentally unfit to serve as our commander in chief," while declaring that Clinton will "make the affirmative case for the exceptional role America has played and must continue to play" in the world.

This is nothing less than an appeal to the military-intelligence apparatus, and to a section of the Republican Party closely aligned with it, to close ranks behind the Democratic frontrunner—not just against Trump, her likely general election opponent, but against Sanders as well.

One of the most important audiences for the Clinton address is at the FBI, where officials are poring over documents detailing Clinton's use of a private email server to conduct official communications throughout her four years as secretary of state. An FBI task force is to decide later this summer, perhaps before the Democratic National

Convention, whether and when to summon Clinton for sworn testimony on how classified information was handled on her server. This could conceivably lead to an indictment, either on mishandling of classified material or for perjury, with incalculable effect on the 2016 campaign.

Besides the candidate herself, Bill Clinton has been dispatched to California as well, dropping his role as a surrogate in lesser states like New Mexico and Montana in favor of a last-ditch effort to prevent a humiliating defeat in the most populous US state, one which Hillary Clinton won in 2008 over Barack Obama.

The mounting signs of an electoral setback in California have led to increased press speculation over the consequences of such a defeat for the Clinton campaign overall. ABC News mulled the issue, “What Happens If Hillary Clinton Loses California to Bernie Sanders?” The British newspaper *The Independent* published a column headlined, “Hillary Clinton could lose Democratic nomination to Bernie Sanders.”

The *Wall Street Journal* editorial page published an op-ed column by an embittered former Bill Clinton political adviser, Douglas Schoen, under the headline, “Clinton Might Not Be the Nominee,” which suggested that a landslide loss in California might produce an outside intervention from the Obama White House, installing either Secretary of State John Kerry or Vice President Joe Biden as a substitute for Clinton.

Whatever the outcome on June 7, neither Clinton nor Sanders will have sufficient elected delegates to claim the nomination outright. Clinton currently leads in elected delegates by 1,769 to 1,501, and another 761 will be chosen through June 7. Sanders would not reach the 2,383 required for nomination if he won every single delegate. Clinton would have to win 81 percent, a practical impossibility given rules requiring proportional representation.

The nomination will thus be decided by the votes of the 712 superdelegates—governors, members of Congress, members of the Democratic National Committee, former presidents—who have expressed an overwhelming preference for Clinton, but do not actually cast votes until the Democratic National Convention meets July 25-28 in Philadelphia.

Sanders addressed this issue at campaign rallies Tuesday and Wednesday, warning supporters that the media might declare Clinton the winner of the nomination after the polls close at 8 p.m. Eastern Time in New Jersey. Such projections would assume no change of heart by any of the superdelegates who have publicly voiced support for Clinton.

“That is factually incorrect. It’s just not factually correct,” he said. Instead, the end of the primaries would mark a new

stage in the campaign, with each candidate competing for the allegiance of superdelegates, particularly those from states where the popular vote had gone one way, while the superdelegates had gone the other. In California, for example, there are 71 superdelegates, nearly all of them, like Governor Jerry Brown and Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, siding with Clinton.

Sanders has flatly rejected suggestions by Feinstein and other Clinton supporters that he halt his campaign and accept Clinton as the de facto nominee. A national poll released Wednesday found that 57 percent of Democrats and independents wanted Sanders to stay in the race—even in a polling sample that favored Clinton over Sanders by 46-42 percent.

Sanders may also be holding out in an effort to have greater influence in the selection of a vice presidential candidate. He is no doubt concerned that if Clinton does not pick someone with sufficient “left” credentials—perhaps Sanders himself—then it will be more difficult to convince Sanders’ supporters to vote for Clinton in the general election and to channel the social anger motivating those backing him into the Democratic Party.

While Clinton’s support is slipping among Democratic primary voters, there are at least two constituencies where her backing remains rock-solid. Fortune magazine reported Wednesday that the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies favored Clinton over Trump by 58 percent to 42 percent. The heavily Republican group cited Clinton’s support and Trump’s professed opposition to US trade agreements as the key issue.

And an oil industry consultant, speaking with CNBC ahead of Thursday’s much-anticipated meeting of the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries, said that OPEC favored Clinton, who is known to have advocated a more aggressive US intervention into the Syrian civil war. “It is no secret that the Saudis and other Gulf Sunni powers are rooting for Mrs. Clinton,” he said.

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