**Dealing the Woman Card**

By Susan Milligan, *U.S. News & World Report*, April 29, 2016

Take it from Donald Trump, who is "very smart," "really, really rich" and has had "a life of victory," as the high self-esteem candidate has characterized himself: women don't like Hillary Clinton, and they aren't going to vote for her, even if it means missing a chance to elect the first woman to the Oval Office.

"The only card she has is the women's card. She's got nothing else to offer," Trump said, bursting with bravado after sweeping five states April 26. "And frankly, if Hillary Clinton were a man, I don't think she'd get 5 percent of the vote. The only thing she's got going for her is the woman's card, and the beautiful thing is, women don't like her."

That's a reliable applause line in certain Republican circles, where the "unlikable" moniker is thrown around to explain why Clinton will never make it to the Oval Office. And indeed, Clinton has high negatives in opinion polls. But when it comes to female voters, the polling shows that it's the Trump card, and not the so-called woman's card, that is influencing the female vote. And it's not helping the man who appears well-poised to win the GOP nomination.

"Demographically, it has all the potential in the world to be the driving factor this fall. We've had a gender gap forever in American politics, but the possibility right now of having a hyper divide is quite real," says Christopher Borick, director of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion in Allentown, Pennsylvania, predicting that the gap would affect down-ticket races as well.

"I don't think you're going to see a gender gap this fall" if indeed Clinton and Trump go on to become their party's respective nominees, adds Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. "You're going to see a gender chasm." And it's not going to be in Trump's favor, analysts say – a prediction that is backed up by early polling.

Nationally, the numbers don't look good for Trump. A Gallup tracking poll shows that Trump has a 70 percent disapproval rating among women — who, notably, have turned out in higher numbers than men in every election since 1980. A Washington Post/ABC poll puts the no-to-Trump number even higher, at 75 percent. Clinton has trouble winning women's approval as well, but it's nowhere near as bad. While Gallup has Trump 47 points underwater with female voters (the gap between approval and disapproval of the candidate), Clinton is just three points behind.

And a deep dive into the state-by-state polling shows even more vulnerability for Trump, and an improvement for Clinton since she first sought the presidency in 2008.

Trump has won 27 states, and owes none of them to female voters. In all but two states (Virginia and Wisconsin, where his share of the female primary vote was close to the overall primary votes in those states), Trump has done worse among women than the electorate as a whole (and he ended up losing Wisconsin). Clinton, meanwhile, can credit fellow women for catapulting her to victory in 25 states and improving her numbers, delivering delegates, even in states she lost.

Clinton has won the female vote in every single primary except three – Sen. Bernie Sanders' home state of Vermont, New Hampshire and Wisconsin, where Clinton lost but still was nearly even with Sanders. In every single state where exit polling was done, Clinton over-performed among women, meaning that she got a higher percentage of female voters than the individual primary electorates as a whole. That's true even in states she lost to Sanders.

Further, in almost every primary state so far, Clinton has captured higher percentages of the female vote than she did in those same primaries in 2008, including in states that could decide the general election. In Virginia, for example, Clinton took 39 percent of the female Democratic primary vote in 2008, and 70 percent this year. In another swing state, Florida, Clinton's share of the female primary vote went from 54 percent to 70 percent. In Nevada, Clinton went from 51 percent of the female vote in 2008 to 57 percent in February's caucuses, and in North Carolina, she improved from 43 percent of women voters to 59 percent this year.

Much of that is due to African-American women who cast votes for Barack Obama in 2008, notes Peter Brown, assistant director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. "Obama got the lion's share of African-American voters last time," including black women, he says. "Senator Sanders just doesn't have that appeal to the African-American community," he adds, so Clinton got those votes this year.

Clinton also has an age gap even within her base of female primary voters, with younger women preferring Sanders in the primaries. But that weakness among Millennial women didn't prevent her from winning commanding majorities of female Democratic voters.

"People say there's no passion for her. For older women, there's an excitement about having this well-prepared, experienced, brilliant woman as the first woman president," says Rep. Lois Frankel, a Florida Democrat who has endorsed Clinton.

But younger females? "I don't really think there's a sense of urgency among young people" to elect a woman to the White House, says Molly Roberts, a 22-year-old Harvard senior and Clinton backer. "That's a product of having grown up in a world where it's a lot easier to imagine a female president. Women my age underestimate how significant and important it could be, they ignore how far behind we still are," Roberts adds. There's a sense, too, among college-age women that there's something anti-feminist about taking Clinton's gender into account at all, Robert says, since the young voters believe it should not, ideally, be a factor at all.

But Roberts says her female friends who backed Sanders will indeed vote for Clinton in the fall – in no small part because Trump may well be the alternative.

Clinton has focused this campaign much more on matters such as equal pay, reproductive rights and other so-called "women's issues" than she did in 2008, when the then-senator appeared determined to make the race about issues and not gender. But it's in part Clinton's femaleness that brings a unique perspective to matters affecting not just women, but the whole country, says Marcy Stech, communications director for EMILY's List, a group that advocates for Democratic, pro- abortion rights female candidates.

"We are headed into unchartered territory for both parties, because we have never had a candidate who speaks so authentically about the challenges women face," Stech says. But Trump has provided a separate motivator for female candidates, she says, because of the personally insulting comments he has made.

Trump has called women "fat pigs" and slobs, called a woman "disgusting" for requesting a break to pump breast milk during a legal deposition, repeatedly attacked a female news anchor and said women who have abortions should be punished.

Those remarks have the potential to be more impactful than Trump's positions on issues, Sabato and others note, since they are personal. Americans might vote for someone they don't particularly like. But they tend not to vote for people who don't like them.

In 2012, Republican Rep. Todd Akin appeared well-positioned to defeat sitting Missouri Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill. Akin's position against abortion was well-known. But after Akin declared that women who are raped don't get pregnant because their bodies "have ways to try to shut that whole thing down," his support among women plummeted. He lost the female vote by a 58-36 percent margin – and with it, the election.

"We're all human. So if someone is making fun of us or attacking us, the last thing we're going to do is vote for them," Sabato says.

"Why does he have such a visceral negative response from so many people? It's because of his rudeness, the outrageous things he's been saying about women and minorities," Frankel says. "He'll try to repair it, but there are some things you can't take back."

Clinton will undoubtedly make that point on the campaign trail. And she's had added help of late from a unusual source: Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who announced he would make California businesswoman Carly Florin his running mate, and who chastised Trump for being unable to deal with "strong women."

Clinton herself says she isn't afraid to take on Trump when it comes to female voters and gender-related issues. If there's a woman card, Clinton told supporters primary night, "deal me in." With both front runners preparing for a general election, game on.

1. What does Donald Trump believe the general opinion of women voters on Hillary Clinton to be?

2. What does Larry Sabato argue will be the impact of the “gender gap” in this year’s election?

3. Trump has performed poorly with the female demographic across the 27 states he has won thus far. What were the two exceptions?

4. What evidence supports Hillary Clinton performing better among women this election cycle as opposed to 2008?

5. What do pundits like Sabato argue could be more impactful than Trump’s position on the issues?

6. Given this evidence on the role of women voters in the Presidential election, do you think Trump can win?