

Sharpton's Endorsement

by Jim Chapin

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Al Sharpton's endorsement for mayor has been postponed by his unexpected stay in jail. But it is worth asking: just how big is the Sharpton constituency in New York City? How many voters can he influence?

The best evidence we have of Sharpton's electoral strength is his past performance. Sharpton has run in three Democratic primaries -- for senator in 1992 and 1994, and for mayor in 1997. There has been no candidate for office in the history of New York City with so defined a group of supporters as Al Sharpton.

The raw numbers show that Sharpton's New York City vote has stayed the same regardless of over-all turnout:

	Sharpton	Total	% Sharpton
1992	165,283	1,652,083	
1994	184,813	1,250,000	

The same is true of his numbers by borough. The only changes of as much as 2,000 votes were his drop of 3,000 votes each election in Queens and his 5,000 vote spike in 1994 in Manhattan (which, presumably, was anti-Moynihan liberals):

Bronx:			
	Sharpton	Total	% Sharpton
1992	59,567	1,076,400	
1994	59,842	1,042,000	
1997	62,918	1,018,000	
Brooklyn:			
	Sharpton	Total	% Sharpton
1992	61,902	1,257,000	
1994	61,325	1,125,000	

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1993	\$1,198,396
Manhattan:	
1992	\$1,505,167
1994	\$1,320,665
1997	\$1,238,847
Queens:	
1993	\$1,664,723
1994	\$1,718,262
1997	\$1,873,920
Staten Island:	
1992	\$20,752
1994	\$13,605
1997	\$5,112

Even at the Assembly District level, Sharpton's votes were remarkably consistent. In 44 of the 61 ADs, his vote never varied by as much as 500 from one election to the next.

It should be noted turnout across the board dropped 1992 to 1994, while between 1994 and 1997 white turnout declined further and minority turnout rose.

The stability of Sharpton's vote between 1994 and 1997, despite his sharp percentage declines in his best districts, came from the fact that these districts cast a higher percentage of the city vote in 1997. Looked at another way, the 48,000 largely anti-Sharpton whites who stayed home in 1997 were replaced by 40,000 largely anti-Sharpton minority voters, while 5,000 anti-Moynihan whites in 1994 shifted their votes away from Sharpton, so his over-all percentage in 1997 was only .7 percent below his 1994 showing.

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Conclusion: About 30,000 voters come out to vote for Sharpton and stay home if he does not run. Another 95,000 voters have voted for Sharpton all three times he has run.

That is about one-eighth of the voters likely to vote in this Democratic primary, a sizable chunk. Of course, just because these voters vote for Sharpton when he runs does not mean that they follow his endorsements when he doesn't.

But it is these voters the Democratic candidates are looking to influence when they court Al Sharpton.

Endorsements and Michael Bloomberg

By Susan Reefer

Endorsements matter, or not, depending on who you talk to.

They matter, or at least matter more, when the endorsement is unexpected; when the person making the endorsement rarely deigns to do so in other races; when the endorsement is based on a shared ideal, rather than a personal relationship; when the person making the endorsement is well-liked and well-trusted.

Endorsements have traditionally been more of an issue in Democratic primaries, were organizational and coalition politics traditionally play a bigger role.

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But even in Republican primaries, endorsements are worth noting.

The Republican mayoral primary in New York City is often an intellectual exercise, and this year will probably not be very different. The prohibitive front-runner is Michael Bloomberg, not because of his party credentials (he been a Republican just outside of six months) or his past electoral victories (he has none) or his long record of public service (ditto). But he does have a lot of money, and that will probably be enough to put him over the top.

So while the Republicans may not have much of a horserace, the endorsements are still an interesting commentary, if not on the candidates, then on the would-be kingmakers.

John McCain, it is rumored, will come to New York and campaign for and with Michael Bloomberg. McCain has his own interests, certainly; everything from another Republican Presidential run in 2008 to an independent bid in 2004 has been mentioned. So a McCain endorsement, whatever effect it would have on the outcome of the race, will certainly get McCain on the news for at least one 24-hour news cycle in the nation's largest media market.

But a McCain endorsement will have at least some small impact, in the form of credibility. McCain may be a maverick, and Republicans may be a little wary of his next move, but he is (at least at press time) a Republican, he is a bonafied American hero, and he is a duly elected United States Senator. He is the real thing, a modern American statesman. And he may lend some weight to the Bloomberg image, which despite a heavy media buy this month, is still in need of some definition.

New York City politics have a long tradition of creative alliances; this will make one more. But this and other endorsements will also be an interesting preview of things to come on the national scene.

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