

Anatole Kaletsky Forget the Obama glitz. Only one Democrat can be president

Two reasons why they must go with Hillary

After Tuesday's Ohio and Texas primaries, Barack Obama remains the firm favourite to win the Democratic nomination. But Hillary Clinton now seems more likely than Mr Obama to become the next president of the United States. In stating this paradox, I am not imagining some outlandish scenario, such as Mrs Clinton flouncing off and winning the presidency as an independent. All I am saying is that Mr Obama is much more likely than Mrs Clinton to be defeated by John McCain.

I know that describing Mrs Clinton as a stronger candidate in the general election than Mr Obama is at odds with the conventional wisdom of US political pundits. My view also differs from the findings of opinion polls.

The most recent poll showed Mr Obama beating Mr McCain by 51 to 41 per cent, while Mrs Clinton's margin of victory was four points narrower, at 48 to 43. Either way, it might seem that the Democrats had nothing to worry about, were it not that several other surveys, conducted only a few days earlier, showed Mr McCain beating both Democrats in a theoretical match. But in almost every such survey, Mr Obama did a few points better than Mrs Clinton: so why do I believe that nominating the former First Lady would give the Democrats a much stronger assurance of success on November 4?

Mrs Clinton has two qualities that have so far gone strangely unrecognised — at least in the media — to set against Mr Obama's glamour, charisma and reputed oratorical brilliance.



These women have got the message

Her first and most obvious quality is that she is a woman. While official opinion, especially in the US media, self-righteously insists that America is an egalitarian, multicultural society where gender and race should play no role in political allegiance or personal advancement, the fact is that this is nonsense. Everyone knows that women and blacks continue to lag far behind white male Americans by virtually every social and economic criterion.

Everyone also knows that what makes Mr Obama's candidacy so exciting is not his oratory or his good looks. It is his race. The possibility of a black president has electrified the world — and rightly so. President Obama would become an inspiring

role model, not only for black Americans, but for oppressed races around the world, not least in Africa.

But surely this is even truer of a woman becoming the world's most powerful human being. In any rational comparison of frustrated talent, women, who are half the world's population, have suffered far more from disempowerment than Africans, Hispanics, Jews or any other racial group.

And while economic advancement and political representation of racial minorities has moved forward in most parts of the world, the gap between men and women has scarcely narrowed, even in America.

Why then have American women failed to rally in sufficient numbers to Mrs Clinton? Many from her own 1960s generation have expressed contempt for her because, ironically, of her husband's sexual peccadillos. But whenever Mrs Clinton seemed on the verge of defeat, large numbers changed their minds and backed her, as if they suddenly realised that a defeat for Mrs Clinton would end their own feminist dreams.

Gloria Steinem, the iconic intellectual leader of the 1970s feminist movement, crystallised this reaction in a passionate call to arms that she issued to women voters after Mrs Clinton's defeat in Iowa: "Why is the sex barrier not taken as seriously as the racial one? Obama is seen as unifying by his race, while Clinton is seen as divisive by her sex. She is accused of playing the gender card when citing the Old Boys' Club, while he is seen as unifying by citing civil rights confrontations. We have to be able to say: 'I am supporting Hillary because she'll be a great

president and because she's a woman." This article, published in *The New York Times*, and syndicated across the country just before the New Hampshire primary, is credited by some commentators with having saved Mrs Clinton's candidacy.

If American women, who make up a clear majority of the electorate, united around Mrs Clinton as their symbolic standard-bearer in the same way that African-Americans have united around Mr Obama, she would be unbeatable in November. And there is considerable evidence of this effect, not only in the last-minute victories pulled off by Mrs Clinton after her near-death experiences, but even more significantly in her success in populous states such as California, Texas and New York.

Mrs Clinton has won by decisive

Other than on Iraq, she is ahead of Obama on almost every issue

margins in every big state that the Democrats must win to send their candidate to the White House. Mr Obama's lead in the delegate count is based on his success in small states with little electoral significance or in Republican strongholds such as Alabama and Nevada where the Democrats have no chance of success.

This brings us to Mrs Clinton's second big advantage over Mr Obama — John McCain. Had the Republicans nominated an extremist or obvious loser, the Democrats could have been confident enough of winning to choose a candidate who appealed to them emotionally, even if he did not have the pulling-power

in large states demonstrated by the Clinton machine. Now that calculation may change.

Mr Obama may have a better record on Iraq than Mrs Clinton, but on almost every other issue of importance to the American public she is clearly ahead. Moreover, she is a Clinton — and can hope to reassure voters with the record of successful centrist economic policies when she was First Lady in the White House. Mr Obama, by contrast, is on record as being the most consistently "liberal" (in the American sense) member of the Senate, with arguably the most left-wing economic and foreign policy platform since George McGovern was beaten by Richard Nixon, despite the revulsion against the Vietnam War.

Finally there is the matter of maturity and experience. This is Mr McCain's biggest gift to the Clinton campaign. An Obama-McCain contest would be seen as a match of inexperience against old age. Mr Obama hopes to win this competition by invoking the spirit of John F. Kennedy. What he forgets, however, is that Kennedy was swept to power on the crest of the baby boom, when the largest group of voters was in its twenties. Today these boomers are in their sixties or seventies — and will not take kindly to the change that Mr McCain is too old to be president. Given the high propensity to vote among the elderly, this election will not be decided by a baby boom but by a senility surge.

So the world should probably prepare for a President McCain or Clinton. President Obama may have to wait until 2012 or 2016.

