Recent polls in Pennsylvania show Senator Clinton’s lead over Barack Obama remains statistically significant but smaller than it had been weeks ago. The changes in the overall numbers are attributable to shifts in the underlying demographics - most importantly gender, race, and age. Fluctuations among these three key groups can explain why Senator Obama has been able to close the gap between him and Senator Clinton but not entirely. Leading up to the Pennsylvania Primary on April 22nd, stagnation among key groups Obama needs to improve upon signal that he is unlikely the win the contest outright but leaves the question of what margin Clinton may win by uncertain.

Before Clinton’s victories in Texas and Ohio on March 4th, and following Obama’s 12-state winning streak during February, Quinnipiac University had Clinton leading Obama by only 6 points, 49 to 43 in Pennsylvania. Among all reliable polling services, this was her smallest lead over any second place candidate since the campaign began in early 2007. Although she was losing the black vote to Obama 69 to 23, she was winning the white vote by 19 points, a much overwhelmingly more significant portion of the voting population. Her lead among women was 53 to 39, while Obama won men with a slightly smaller advantage. His strength among youth voters was also present in Pennsylvania, winning what Qunnipiac describes as “young voters” by 58 to 41.

However, post March 4th, Clinton widened her lead and returned to a double digit advantage, 53 to 41. One Democratic pollster, Public Policy Polling, had Clinton winning by 26 points, as she came close to breaking even with Obama on young voters, while padding her lead with women and whites. A Quinnipiac poll on March 18th confirmed this trend of Clinton gaining on Obama’s base, with Obama only winning men by a narrow margin of 3 points. By April 2nd, Clinton had cut his lead among young voters down to less than 9 points, and tied him among men. In nearly all of the polls in early April, Obama’s was getting about 70% of the black vote, which although seems impressive, is considerable lower than the 84% he got in Texas and 92% he got in Mississippi.

In the week leading up to the primary, Obama has narrowed the gap but still remains behind Clinton. He has caught up by reclaiming men, 51 to 43 in the latest Quinipiac poll and 53 to 34 in the most recent PPP poll, as well as by widening his lead among young voters, which is back up to 16 points. He also is winning the black vote 86 to 8, which is more inline with recent contests. However, while Obama has been able to recapture certain constituencies he has historically won in order to become competitive again, he has not been able to make inroads into Clinton’s base. For example, in no polls from Quinipaic or PPP since late February has Obama ever broken through 40% of the white vote. Similarly, aside from one poll where he was at 41%, Obama has been capped at 40% for women voters as well. Without any further improvement in his performance among whites and women, and considering Pennsylvania is an overwhelming white state (nearly 88%) with women voting at a higher rate than men, it would seem that Obama is going to have difficulty time to win the state.

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/25/schneider.pa/>

Quinnipiac University Polling Institute data from Feb. 28, Mar. 18, Apr. 8, & Apr. 15

Public Policy Polling data from Mar. 17, Apr. 2, Apr. 9, & Apr. 16