

Clinton campaign in crisis over email controversy, declining poll numbers

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The presidential campaign of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was hit by twin blows this week: a harshly critical report by the State Department inspector general over her use of a private email server while in office, and polls showing that Vermont Senator Bernie Sander had closed the gap in California, the most populous US state and one of six holding primaries or caucuses on June 7.

The report by Inspector General Steve Linick, an Obama appointee, criticized Clinton's decision to route all her work-related email, during four years as Obama's Secretary of State, through a private server located at her home in Chappaqua, New York. Clinton never used an official State Department email account, a fact that was no secret, since all her emails to subordinates, other administration officials, the media and Capitol Hill, came from her personal domain @clintonemail.com, not from state.gov.

While Clinton has offered evasive and contradictory accounts for her reasons for using a private email server, the real motive is clear: to retain control over email traffic and avoid having it subject to the federal Freedom of Information Act. This became particularly critical as Bill and Hillary Clinton cashed in on his presidency—and her future political prospects—amassing a \$150 million fortune by trading on their contacts with Wall Street and corporate America more generally.

The Inspector General found Clinton had violated State Department rules for information handling, which had been tightened under the Bush administration, as email became the principal means of day-to-day communication. They were further tightened under the Obama administration, which has waged a ferocious struggle against whistleblowers who have exposed government criminality, like Edward Snowden, Julian Assange, and Chelsea Manning.

In particular, Clinton did not turn over all her email when she left office in February 2013 because it was stored on her home server. She only turned over printed copies of 30,000 emails in November 2014, under pressure from Republican congressional investigators, after purging another 30,000 emails which she claimed were of a personal nature and not work-related.

The IG report found that when two members of the IT staff for the State Department questioned Clinton's use of a nongovernmental email address in 2010, their boss told them “never to speak of the secretary's personal email system again.”

For Clinton's political adversaries within the ruling elite, including the Republican Party and its presumptive nominee Donald Trump, the email scandal is a political weapon for pursuing disputes over policy and positions of power. Their criticism is completely cynical—Trump himself has refused to release a single year of his tax returns, for example, and Republican administrations have been just as secretive and manipulative about concealing communications from public scrutiny.

This does not negate, however, the significance of the abuse itself. Presuming that Clinton is eventually nominated, her Republican opponents will no doubt use it to reaffirm the broadly felt sentiment that the Clintons operate on the basis of secrecy and corruption.

The crisis that the report is creating for the Clinton campaign can be measured by the response in the media. The *New York Times*, which has endorsed Clinton, wrote a worried editorial on Thursday under the headline, “Hillary Clinton, Drowning in Email.” The IG report “is certain to fuel doubts about Mrs. Clinton's trustworthiness, lately measured as a significant problem for her in public polls,” the newspaper wrote.

“There are so many flaws in her argument... I don’t see how this is anything but devastating,” NBC chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell said on MSNBC Thursday morning. Asked if Clinton was lying, Mitchell added, “It doesn’t hold up, including her response” to the report.

More important than the IG report is the ongoing FBI investigation into the private email server, which could lead to the filing of charges against Clinton or her aides for the mishandling of classified information. There is also a lawsuit by the right-wing anti-Clinton group Judicial Watch, which has led to court-ordered depositions of top Clinton aides. Cheryl Mills, former chief of staff at the State Department, gave testimony in this suit Friday, but a federal judge barred release of the video, limiting the release to the transcript only.

In the primary contest for the Democratic presidential nomination, Clinton is less than 100 delegates short of the 2,383 needed, and would collect at least 300 on June 7 even if she loses all six primaries and caucuses, because of proportional representation.

Her delegate lead, however, combines a relatively narrow lead among elected delegates, 1,769 to 1,499, and a top-heavy margin of 541 to 43 among the unelected superdelegates, party officials and officeholders. In the end, her lead in elected delegates alone will not be sufficient to give Clinton the nomination.

Sanders is favored to win the four smaller contests on June 7, in South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana and New Mexico, with 83 delegates combined, and Clinton to win New Jersey, with 126 delegates, leaving California, with 475 elected delegates, the main prize. In each of the states, delegates will be divided based on the share of the popular vote for each candidate, with no winner-take-all provisions.

Even if Sanders were to sweep all six contests by large margins, however, he would not overtake Clinton either in elected delegates or in total popular vote. Currently Clinton leads Sanders with about 13 million votes in all primaries and caucuses combined, compared to 10 million for the self-described “democratic socialist.”

A Sanders victory in California would nonetheless both represent a staggering political setback for Clinton and raise questions about the viability of her nomination, particularly when combined with the email

scandal.

A poll released this week showed that Sanders has erased the 18-point lead once enjoyed by Clinton in the state, and placed the contest within the margin of error, with Clinton leading only 46 to 44 percent. The poll, by Public Policy Priorities, found Clinton and Sanders running even among minority voters, in contrast to her large leads in many other states.

The Clinton campaign has been forced to abandon its pretense that the nomination contest was over, pouring in money and manpower in an increasingly desperate effort to block a Sanders victory in the state. Unlike the mid-Atlantic states that Clinton swept last month, California permits independent voters to cast ballots in the Democratic primary, and the Sanders campaign has been appealing to voters registered in the Green Party and the Peace and Freedom Party to reregister as Democrats or independents so they can vote for the Vermont senator.



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