Mondale narrows gap

By Harold A. Stern

President Ronald Reagan’s lead over Walter Mondale has dwindled to nine percentage points in the latest Harris poll, the narrowest margin yet in the 1984 presidential campaign. The lead, a commanding thirteen points before the debate, has shrunk to three points.

Mondale’s strong showing in the presidential debate silenced critics who charged the challenger was uninspiring. The poll indicated a Mondale win, 61-19 percent. But it is unclear whether the Democratic ticket has gained votes. A regional poll taken by the Los Angeles Times showed that Mondale and his running mate Geraldine Ferraro have not gained any votes, although more people now have a favorable opinion of them.

Only minority groups stand solidly behind Mondale. Ninety percent of Hispanic voters support him over Reagan, while the Hispanic vote is now 55-45 percent in favor of the challenger.

The Mondale camp is closing the gap with the elderly vote. The president’s lead among voters aged 65 or above has shrunk to seven points. Mondale is even closer with voters over 65 years old — he is down by three points.

The Reagan camp has not been able to panic. White House pollster Richard Wirthlin claimed in the Boston Globe that Reagan’s poor performance “didn’t do his support.” He predicts a Reagan landslide of 400 of the 469 possible electoral votes.

Women voters continue to support the incumbent by a narrow 50-46 percent margin. This is surprising, as the Reagan campaign is facing a controversy over his anti-abortion stance. The Democratic registration of Ferraro as Mondale’s running mate appears set to have sway the female vote.

The president comes on very strong among younger voters. The 18-24 age group supported Reagan 55-42 percent, a greater margin than any other age group, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll taken after the debate.

In fact, Reagan is also doing well on college campuses, according to the Wall Street Journal. A student Republican group at Stanford University said a recent membership drive gained 229 new members, an increase much higher than that of previous years.

One Reagan official attributes this appeal to the president’s aura of strength and confidence. Mondale’s association with the Carter administration, which did little to inspire enthusiasm among younger voters, has hurt the challenger.

Economic self-interest in recent years has become more important to college students. Younger voters believe that they will benefit more economically by a Reagan presidency. In 1970, only thirty-nine percent of students indicated that economic well-being was important to them, while in 1983, nearly seventy percent did.

Polls show that most people will vote for the candidate they least dislike, a negative-vote measure. According to the October 15 poll, when many voters had confidence in neither Reagan nor Jimmy Carter.

The president and his opponent are both desperate to win. Reagan’s lead in these key states, which he needs 264 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win, is only six percentage points. Reagan’s appeal to the president’s aura of strength and confidence among younger voters is even greater.

Mondale is weakest in the South, where Reagan’s conservative stand on religious issues and abortion have attracted much support; he is strongest in the West, which Reagan carried almost hand-down in 1980.

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Tech photo by Diana ben-Aaron

Mechanical Engineering professor Woodie Flowers hands out project materials to students in 2.70 (Mechanical Engineering Design) last week. The kits contain, among other things, a spring, a pong ball, a plastic bag, and “approximately 8 cup of mixed fancy widgets.” The students will pit the machines they build against each other in the annual 2.70 contest in November.

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