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# Comparing Caucus and Registered Voter Support for the 2008 Presidential Candidates in Iowa

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As the 2008 presidential nominating process got underway, Iowa's coveted status as first-in-the-nation appeared increasingly in jeopardy, as states engaged in aggressive frontloading throughout 2006 and 2007. In the past, late March primaries in large states like Florida, New York, and California were irrelevant to the electoral outcome. To avoid a repeat in 2008, Florida moved its primary to January 29 and California moved to what is now being called "super duper Tuesday" on February 5 when nearly two dozen states will hold primaries. Under pressure from extra-early voting in Florida and other front-loading states, as we write this the Iowa caucuses are to be held on January 3, two days after New Year's. It seems possible that as a result of the nominating season becoming more condensed, there may be an increase in the importance of Iowa and New Hampshire, the opposite of what the states moving earlier wanted. If

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the first nominating events are now the starter's gun in a 50-meter dash rather than a mile run, who gets off the starting blocks first may well matter even more. As Hull (2007, 66) argues, Iowa's impact on New Hampshire and the national nomination process is a "wild, wired one." In this rapid sea of a changing nomination process we take a close look at the Iowa electorate, both statewide registered voters and a subset of likely caucus attendees, to shed light on the underpinnings of support for the presidential candidates in the early stages of the 2008 campaign, using unique rolling cross-sectional data to track opinion change over time.

Because Iowa has been a swing state in recent presidential elections, statewide attitudes towards presidential candidates should be relatively consistent with national opinion. However Iowa caucus attendees represent only a small subset of registered voters—generally 10–15%; 20% at best.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have argued that primaries and caucuses create ideologically polarized party nominees because the composition of the electorate excludes independents and moderates and varies demographically from general election voters (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2004; Donovan and Bowler 2004; but also see Norrander 1989). We draw on two unique statewide University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll surveys conducted in late March 2007 and late July through early August 2007, including representative samples of Democratic and Republican likely caucus attendees. We examine how the population of caucus attendees differs from statewide registered voters, and whether the Iowa caucuses are representative of the state as a whole as we examine the demographic and issue bases of candidate support in Iowa.

## University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll

Our data are from two statewide random sample surveys collected through the Social Science Research Center at the University of Iowa. The first survey was of 1,290 registered voters and likely caucus attendees between March 19–31,

2007, with a margin of error of  $\pm 3.0$  percentage points for the full sample.<sup>2</sup> The second survey used a split sample design of 907 registered statewide registered voters and a sample of 787 potential caucus attendees, 555 of which were deemed likely to attend. The survey was in the field from July 29 through August 5, 2007.<sup>3</sup> Results for statewide registered voter samples were weighted to match gender to statewide levels using the Current Population Surveys. Because gender distributions are unknown in the caucuses, caucus samples were unweighted. Student callers conducted both telephone surveys, averaging about 14 minutes each, with a completion rate of approximately 24% of contacts.<sup>4</sup>

## Iowa Registered Voters—March and July/August Polls

We begin by examining the results among our overall registered voter samples in March and August, and then turn to likely caucus goers specifically. While most of the country in March 2007 was giving little thought to the 2008 general election, in Iowa it was already a hot topic with less than a year until the lead-off Iowa caucuses. Registered voters, whether likely caucus goers or not, were asked who they would support in November 2008. As seen in Table 1, at that point all three of the top Democrats (Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, and Barack Obama, in that order) led all Republicans. Following Obama were Rudy Giuliani, John McCain, and Mitt Romney. No other candidate received more than 2%. It is not that no other candidate was running an active campaign—Republican candidates made 33 visits to Iowa in the first quarter of 2007; only seven of which were by Romney and McCain combined and with no visits by Giuliani. On the Democrats' side there had been 18 visits, eight of which had been by non-top tier candidates (Democracy in Action 2007). But voters, perhaps led by the media, focused only on the top three of each party.

**Table 1**  
**“If the 2008 presidential election were held today, who would you vote for president? Just tell me the name.” [Open Ended Question—All Names Given by Respondent, Percents]**

	All Respondents		Partisans Including Party Leanners			
			Democratic		Republican	
	March N = 1290	August N = 873	March N = 600	August N = 433	March N = 479	August N = 366
Don't Know	35.28	31.09	27.56	22.75	37.72	36.25
Clinton (D-NY)	12.88	18.14	24.42	29.93	.95	4.13
Edwards (D-NC)	12.41	9.07	23.08	16.31	1.20	1.90
Gore (D-TN)	.69		1.42			
Obama (D-IL)	10.75	14.08	16.56	20.67	3.62	7.07
Richardson (D-NM)	.96	3.56	1.56	5.57	.51	1.94
Brownback (R-KS)	.55	.45			1.37	1.06
Gingrich (R-GA)	1.65	.48			3.92	1.13
Giuliani (R-NY)	7.48	4.15	.42	17.65	9.27	
Huckabee (R-AR)	.34	.91			.86	2.16
Hunter (R-CA)	.07					
McCain (R-AZ)	7.32	1.03	1.21		15.29	2.20
Romney (R-MA)	5.19	9.17	1.00	.44	10.41	20.41
Tancredo (R-CO)		.99				2.35
Thompson, F. (R-TN)		2.29		.25		5.14
Thompson, T. (R-WI)	.86	.83			1.97	2.97
Other	3.57	2.52	2.76	2.15	4.53	3.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

By August, Iowa voter preferences shifted significantly. Clinton's support increased over 5 percentage points in March to more than 18%. Following Clinton was Obama (14%), who passed Edwards, while Romney and Edwards were virtually tied with just over 9% of the respondents supporting each candidate. Following them came Giuliani at only 4%, Richardson with 3.5%, and Fred Thompson with just over 2%. Since March, support for Republican candidates had shifted substantially with Mitt Romney the main beneficiary. Both Giuliani and McCain fell from March to August, with McCain's support all but disappearing, as is evident in Table 1. The Republican results were also affected by talk surrounding Fred Thompson's potential entrance into the campaign. The August data show the line between the early top tier candidates and the rest of the field was blurring. For the Democrats, Bill Richardson made gains to become a fourth major candidate as Edwards's support declined. On the Republican side, March "also ran" candidates Mike Huckabee and Tom Tancredo, along with potential candidate Fred Thompson, all received greater support among Republicans than did McCain.

While there were some 18 declared candidates across the two parties at various points in time, only the top three or

four in each party ever got much press or voter support throughout 2007, limiting voters' awareness of alternatives, even though many voters were looking. In particular, the top Republicans did not seem to be a good fit for a conservative Iowa Republican party. Table 2 tabulates satisfaction with the then current choice of candidates by respondent partisanship.<sup>5</sup> It is immediately clear that Republicans were generally much less satisfied with their choices than Democrats. While there was improvement for Republicans from March to August, even many strong Republicans remained unhappy with their options. On the other hand, the data suggests that the most partisan of Democrats were comfortable that they could find a candidate from among those already declared, while those less partisan may have been more open to alternatives. All Republicans, on the other hand, appeared open to other options.

Perhaps the most interesting point of comparison between March and August levels of satisfaction is among pure independents. While we focus on the nomination process, it is interesting to examine those in our sample who will probably have no say in the nomination for either party. Pure independents were even more likely than Republicans to show a lack of satisfaction with the available choices. Over half of pure independents in the

August sample said they were not satisfied with their choices, an increase from March. This is quite consistent with the idea that this relatively small group of pure independents may be unsatisfied in general with the two-party system (Donovan, Parry, and Bowler 2005; Donovan and Bowler 2004).

### Candidate Support in the Iowa Caucus

Of course only caucus attendees get to choose nominees in Iowa. Measuring opinions of this small subset of voters is an art as well as a science, and commercial polls use a variety of techniques to find them. We used three screening questions: whether the respondents had participated in the 2000 or 2004 caucuses; whether they said they were likely or very likely to attend the 2008 caucuses; and whether they could name the party where they would caucus.<sup>6</sup> Individuals who reported they were very or somewhat likely to attend but could not name the party were removed from the

likely caucus sample since one chooses a party to actually caucus.

Caucus attendees are believed to be more partisan than non-attendees—disproportionately coming from the strongest party members. Our results in Table 3 confirm this. While strong Democrats make up 24% of our overall March sample, they make up more than 36% of likely caucus attendees. For Republicans, the difference is not so stark—strong Republicans are 19% of the total March sample, and 21% of all likely caucus attendees. But in both cases, strong partisans are overrepresented, while all other groups (except weak Democrats) are underrepresented. We see the same in August, with both strong Democrats and strong Republicans accounting for a larger percentage of likely caucus attendees than their percentage of registered voters. Embedded in these data is more support for the idea that Republicans were less content with their options—and the political environment—than were Democrats. Overall, Republicans of all stripes represent 42% of the overall March sample, but only 37% of all likely caucus attendees. Democrats, on the other hand, are 42% of the overall sample, but 62% of all caucus attendees. The typical Democrat was far more likely to claim he or she would attend the caucus than the typical registered Republican voter.

**Table 2**  
**Satisfaction with Current Choices of Candidates by Respondent's Partisanship**  
**"Given the people who now say they are running for president in 2008, how satisfied are you with your choices. Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied?"**

	Democrats						Independents						Republicans					
	Strong		Weak		Leaning		Strong		Weak		Leaning		Strong		Weak		Leaning	
	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August
Very Satisfied	37.83	43.85	19.99	22.22	18.97	24.70	13.29	5.36	12.28	7.35	7.78	7.08	11.40	21.96	7.78	7.08	11.40	21.96
Somewhat Satisfied	56.18	49.76	61.88	64.50	66.96	60.66	49.76	42.58	56.49	58.92	62.16	61.78	58.98	58.43	62.16	61.78	58.98	58.43
Not Satisfied	5.99	6.40	18.13	13.28	14.08	14.64	36.95	52.05	31.23	33.73	30.06	31.14	29.62	19.61	30.06	31.14	29.62	19.61
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

However, within both parties' individual caucuses, strong partisans dominate in roughly equal percentages. Of all Republican likely caucus attendees in the March data, 57% are strong Republicans; for the Democrats the share is virtually the same, 57%. Results from the August data show strong Democrats as 62% of the likely Democratic caucus attendee sample, an increase over the March results, while strong Republicans make up 56% of the likely Republican caucus attendee sample, a slight decrease from March.

### *The Bases of Candidate Caucus Support*

While registered voters preferred Clinton in March, the story was different for likely caucus attendees, for whom Clinton was not the Democratic leader, and Giuliani shared his support with McCain, as is clear in Table 4. In March, Edwards led among likely Democratic caucus goers even though Clinton led among all registered Democrats, and Romney led among Republicans. There was a great deal of volatility between March and August. For the Democrats, while Edwards held a nearly seven-point lead over Clinton in March, with Obama seven points behind Clinton, by August he had declined as a frontrunner, falling from 35% to 26.7%, leaving him nearly tied with Clinton. Clinton also showed a small drop in support, from 29% to 25%. The beneficiary of these declines seemed to be Richardson, whose support surged by more than 8.5 points. Caucus attendees are clearly a different electorate, at least in their candidate preferences—while Clinton's support among registered Democrats increased from March to August by nearly 6%, her caucus support slipped by 4%. More substantially, Edwards was polling 10% better among likely caucus attendees than among registered Democrats in August.

On the Republican side, McCain and Giuliani were nearly tied in March with Romney third among likely caucus attendees. However, while "don't knows" received more support from registered voters than any frontrunner (38%), caucus attendees were more likely to have a preference (only 24% were "don't knows"). The August data show how things were changing for Republicans. Both Giuliani and McCain's support shrank considerably from March, with Giuliani falling by 10 percentage points and McCain all but collapsing to just over 3%. Romney emerged as the clear frontrunner with 28%. Fred Thompson, Sam Brownback, and Tom Tancredo were all beneficiaries of Giuliani and McCain's drop in support, though by smaller amounts. Within days of the

completion of the August survey, Republicans held their Straw Poll in Ames, which Romney won, but Mike Huckabee came in a surprisingly close second. Yet, Huckabee had not even registered 2% support in the August survey. This points out one of the severe difficulties of polling the Iowa caucuses; so much depends on hidden "on the ground" efforts of the campaign to get believers out to events like the Straw Poll and the caucus itself.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps counter-intuitively, the percentage of likely Democratic and Republican caucus attendees who did not know which candidate they would support increased from March to August. These numbers, however, were still much lower than the percentage of registered voters who did not know who to support. Two things are clear. First and not surprisingly, caucus attendees are more likely to have an early candidate preference than are those who are less likely to attend. Second, those who did not have a general election preference but who were likely caucus attendees primarily supported Edwards (for Democrats) or Romney (for Republicans). When those voters were asked to focus on the more immediate caucus rather than the November 2008 general election, they did have a preference, and that preference shook up the horserace, especially for the Democrats.<sup>8</sup>

### **Comparing Registered Voters and Caucus Attendees**

Survey marginals tell us that at a particular time there was a particular distribution of support for candidates—but that by itself is not the whole story, since campaigns are dynamic events that carry the possibility of change all the way through to Election Day. However, our Iowa surveys included questions that allow us to go much further. First, we can examine the underlying bases of support for candidates in terms of strength of partisanship, which should provide some sense of each candidate's core supporters. Second, because we examined samples of likely caucus attendees as well as registered voters, we can draw comparisons between likely caucus attendees and registered voters as a whole, letting us consider how caucus voters may differ from other voters in Iowa.

### *Partisan Strength and General Election Presidential Preference*

Table 5 examines our general election preference question using the March 2007 data by the strength of partisanship of registered voters on the standard 7-point

**Table 3**  
**Partisan Strength and Likely Caucus Attendance**

	% of Sample		% of All Likely Caucus Attendees		% of Own Party Sample		% of Own Party Likely Caucus Attendees	
	March	August	March	August	March	August	March	August
Strong Democrat	24.1	22.4	36.2	35.4	46.5	43.6	56.7	61.6
Weak Democrat	12.6	12.5	13.7	10.0	24.2	24.3	21.2	17.3
Independent—Leaning Democrat	15.2	16.5	11.8	12.1	29.3	32.3	18.4	21.1
Independent	6.3	9.3	1.5	2.4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Independent—Leaning Republican	10.3	10.2	6.4	6.4	24.5	26.0	16.1	15.9
Weak Republican	12.9	11.7	9.0	11.4	30.9	29.9	21.3	28.5
Strong Republican	18.6	17.4	21.4	22.3	44.6	44.1	56.9	55.6

For March survey, N = 1170 for entire sample, N = 489 for likely caucus sample.

For August survey, N = 844 for entire sample, N = 555 for likely caucus sample.

**Table 4**  
**“If your caucus was TODAY, who would you support for president at your caucus? Just tell me the name.” [Asked of Likely Republican and Democratic Caucus Attendees Only]**

Likely Democratic Caucus Attendees	Percent			Likely Republican Caucus Attendees	Percent		
	March	August	Change		March	August	Change
Edwards	35.34	26.67	-8.67	Giuliani	21.61	11.87	-9.74
Clinton	28.72	24.72	-4.0	McCain	21.19	3.28	-17.91
Obama	21.18	21.60	+0.42	Romney	18.12	28.37	+10.25
Richardson	1.06	9.63	+8.57	Thompson, F.		8.13	+8.13
Don't Know	11.88	14.42	+2.54	Brownback	2.08	4.08	+2.0
Others	1.82	2.94		Tancredo		5.59	+5.59
				Thompson, T.	5.10	2.42	+2.68
				Gingrich	3.27	.86	-2.41
				Don't Know	23.52	27.61	+4.09
				Others	5.13	7.79	

**Table 5**  
**Partisan Bases of Support for 2008 Presidential Candidates, March Data [Percents]**

	Clinton	Edwards	Obama	McCain	Giuliani	Romney	Don't Know
<i>Partisan Strength</i>							
Strong Democrat	43.98	35.47	29.01	5.51	7.14	9.53	14.02
Weak Democrat	16.41	18.76	15.21	7.50	7.44	6.27	9.36
Independent—Leaning Democrat	18.54	21.57	20.12	8.95	4.59	13.43	12.82
Independent	3.13	6.50	7.11	3.79	3.98	7.44	15.54
Independent—Leaning Republican	5.09	5.90	8.35	22.51	16.83	11.30	8.16
Weak Republican	7.20	7.52	9.68	21.99	16.86	15.73	21.08
Strong Republican	5.65	4.28	10.52	29.77	43.17	36.31	19.00
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

scale<sup>9</sup>—but from an unusual perspective. Instead of examining which candidates are supported by strong Democrats, strong Republicans, etc., we look at the bases of each candidate’s support. So, for

instance, we learn that Hillary Clinton got nearly half (44%) her support from strong Democrats, far greater than either of the other top Democrats. Equally striking is how much of Obama’s general

election support came from voters who are *not* Democrats. More than one-third of all his support (35.6%) came from people who *cannot* stand up for him in the Iowa caucuses (unless they are

willing to register as Democrats) while about 24% of Edwards supporters and 21% of Clinton supporters were not Democrats. While Obama could rightfully claim to be the Democrat who drew the most crossover support in Iowa, crossover voters are not the ones who choose nominees. Clinton, on the other hand, clearly mobilized strong Democratic partisans, while John Edwards fell somewhere in between Clinton and Obama.

We turn now to a comparison between likely caucus attendees and registered voters in order to examine the extent to which the two differ on dimensions other than partisanship and candidate preference. We are interested here in the “internals” of support for the candidates, that is the degree to which their bases came from different demographic and issue groups. Thus in Tables 6 and 7 the column percentages sum to 100%, allowing us to compare support for each candidate to the overall distribution of demographics and issues within the registered voter and likely caucus attendee samples (these baselines are shown in the first two data columns of both tables.) Table 6 reports support for the top three Democrats while Table 7 shows the Republican candidates using the March data. Given space limitations we will highlight only the most interesting differences in demographic and issue importance support for each candidate in March 2007—respondents were simply asked how important particular issues were to their presidential vote in 2008.

## Bases of Support for Democratic Candidates

*Education.* About one-third of registered Democrats in Iowa have no more than a high school diploma, while just over 39% have at least a college degree. But those who say they will caucus are better educated—nearly half hold a college degree or higher, while only a quarter are high school graduates or less. Here we have our first indicator of why Clinton led among registered Democrats but not among caucus attendees. Among registered Democrats, 41% of Clinton’s support came from the lowest education levels (a deviation of 7.3 over the base), a group less likely to caucus. Only 30% of Edwards’s base came from this group, as did 24% of Obama’s. At the same time Clinton’s support relied less on the best educated while Edwards’ support was heavily dependent on this group (31% compared to 47%; baseline of 39%) as was Obama’s (49%). Yet, among likely caucus attendees, Clinton’s support was evenly balanced and mirrors the actual baseline for this group. But

Obama did better among the most educated caucus attendees than among registered voters with over 53% coming from those with at least a college degree, while only 13.6% came from those with a high school diploma or less, far below the 26.7% caucus attendee baseline. In the end the demographics of the caucus electorate dramatically reduced the importance of the least educated for Clinton (−16.77) and Obama (−10.48) but increased it for Edwards (+4.22).

*Income.* As with education, caucus attendees are skewed towards higher income levels. For registered voters, just under one-third report household incomes of \$75,000 and over, while about a quarter report less than \$30,000. But nearly 41% of likely caucus attendees are in the highest income group, while 16% are in the lowest group. The deviation from the registered voter baseline was not large for any of the candidates. But among caucus attendees, we again see differences that could account for the relative change between Clinton and Edwards among likely caucus attendees. While Clinton got over 27% of her registered voter support from those making less than \$30,000 a year, less than 14% of her caucus support came from that group (about 2.3% below the caucus baseline). But she saw an increase among the wealthiest, with support nearly 6% over the baseline. Edwards and Obama, whose income bases were similar among registered voters, diverge when we look at caucus attendees. Obama’s support became heavily upper income; nearly 50% of all his supporters make over \$75,000. Edwards became more dependent on middle income voters; he was disproportionately supported by those with \$30–75,000 incomes, about 8% more than Clinton and 15% more than Obama.

*Gender.* Not surprisingly, Clinton’s base was heavily female—about two-thirds of her supporters in both samples were women, while women were only 57% and 58.6% of the two baselines samples respectively. Obama, on the other hand, drew disproportionately from men, with 55% of his caucus support base made up of male voters, well above the 41.4% baseline. Edwards’s support in March 2007 was almost perfectly in line with the baseline of both registered voters and caucus attendees.

*Marital Status.* Marital status, like gender, seems to have little impact on the likelihood of attending the caucus—both samples have roughly the same distributions on this demographic. Interestingly, Edwards drew disproportionately from the married subpopulation, especially among caucus attendees.<sup>10</sup> Both Clinton (in registered voter and

caucus samples) and Obama (in caucus samples) gained more support (compared to the baseline) from non-married voters.

*Age.* Likely caucus attendees are slightly older than registered voters overall, but this difference is not at all large. Clinton and Edwards drew similar support from all age groups—similar to each other and close to the baseline for both registered voters and caucus attendees. But they both drew less support from the youngest group. Obama apparently picked up that support, receiving disproportionately more from the young (+3.5% for registered voters and +8.1% for caucus attendees) and less from the old (60 and up category). While 18–29 year olds make up only 6.8% of likely caucus attendees, they were nearly 15% of all Obama caucus supporters. An important caveat was evident for Obama—while young people might say they are likely to caucus, much would depend on the effectiveness of the Obama campaign in actually getting them to show up on a cold January night.<sup>11</sup> Parallels between Obama and Howard Dean’s 2004 campaign in terms of mobilizing the young were evident throughout 2007.

*Religion.* Likely caucus attendees do not differ much from registered Democrats on basic religious preference.<sup>12</sup> Clinton’s registered voter support base was more dependent on Protestants than were the other two; 68.3% of Clinton supporters were Protestant compared to 58.2% for Edwards and 60.2% for Obama. Obama, however, relied heavily on support from Protestant caucus attendees while Edwards appeared to be the favored Democrat among Catholics; he was the only candidate to receive a higher percentage of support from Catholics than the baseline. This is stronger in the caucus sample, where Edwards got almost a quarter of all his support from Catholics, an increase of 5.1% over the sample population.

None of the Democratic candidates drew much support from born-again and evangelical Christians, but of course most Democrats do not identify themselves as such.<sup>13</sup> Edwards’s numbers jump out. He received just 12.9% of his support from born-again and evangelical Christians among registered Democrats (−7% versus the baseline) and only 6.6% of his caucus support from them (−10.22%).

In summary, while there were interesting differences between the three top Democrats in their demographic bases of support, we find relatively little difference between registered Democrats statewide and likely Democratic caucus attendees on most demographics, with the exception of education and income. While we saw earlier that those who caucus are

**Table 6**  
**Support for Democratic Candidates: Registered Democrats vs. Likely Democratic Caucus**  
**Attendees, March Data, Column Percents**

	Sample Baseline		Clinton		Edwards		Obama	
	Registered	Caucus	Registered	Caucus	Registered	Caucus	Registered	Caucus
<i>Education</i>								
H.S. Diploma or Less	33.81	26.74	41.14	24.37	30.05	34.27	24.07	13.59
Some college (4 Year or Technical)	26.83	23.72	27.71	27.51	22.65	15.07	27.00	32.97
Bachelors	21.89	24.43	18.27	25.38	26.16	24.54	24.66	23.53
Post-Bachelors	17.47	25.10	12.87	22.74	21.15	26.12	24.27	29.91
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Income</i>								
Less than 30k	24.43	16.33	27.04	13.94	20.61	13.39	20.73	17.62
30k to under 50k	28.06	26.76	30.87	29.09	26.07	27.08	26.74	20.62
50k to under 75k	14.88	15.95	10.37	10.12	17.23	20.70	13.37	12.26
75k and up	32.63	40.96	31.72	46.85	36.09	38.83	39.15	49.50
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Gender</i>								
Female	57.08	58.62	64.81	67.11	56.94	57.99	52.49	44.77
Male	42.92	41.38	35.19	32.89	43.06	42.01	47.51	55.23
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Marital Status</i>								
Not Married	28.72	28.26	30.09	36.59	23.57	19.40	27.58	32.88
Married	71.28	71.74	69.91	63.41	76.43	80.60	72.42	67.12
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Age</i>								
18–29	5.07	6.81	4.46	6.33	2.93	2.14	8.63	14.95
30–44	16.35	11.19	16.57	7.96	18.31	13.34	18.29	10.71
45–59	38.55	39.84	36.19	40.86	38.41	40.33	39.03	39.25
60 and up	40.03	42.16	42.79	44.86	40.35	44.20	34.05	35.09
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Religion</i>								
Protestant	62.62	63.06	68.33	66.05	58.23	57.56	60.16	67.33
Roman Catholic	22.24	19.45	20.82	18.37	23.43	24.51	21.91	16.72
Other	15.14	17.49	10.85	15.58	18.34	17.93	17.94	15.95
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Born Again</i>								
Yes	19.98	16.80	19.64	14.57	12.91	6.58	16.22	19.43
No	80.02	83.20	80.36	85.43	87.09	93.42	83.78	80.57
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Issues (% who say issue is "very important" for their presidential vote)*</i>								
Immigration	41.29	40.13	41.13	41.96	45.32	40.80	35.54	39.14
Iraq	38.52	42.16	36.95	33.96	43.29	49.34	39.63	46.39
Abortion	29.88	32.17	30.36	37.63	33.56	31.01	20.87	18.29
Gay Marriage	14.52	15.04	15.55	15.92	13.68	14.84	15.62	15.80
Economy	11.42	9.71	10.85	4.20	9.12	12.02	13.34	8.58
Terrorism	2.12	2.62	4.19	5.83	1.34	.87	1.35	1.44

\*Issue marginals (last six rows) are the result of multiple questions, thus the categories do not add up to 100%. Immigration, abortion, and gay marriage percentages are the result of two questions and should not be compared directly to totals on Iraq, economy, or terrorism. All cross-tabs are statistically significant with a 95% confidence interval using a Chi-Square test.

clearly stronger partisans, there are few other differences between these two groups of Democrats, perhaps laying to rest some of the concerns that caucus goers are substantially unrepresentative of Iowa partisans, at least for Democrats.

### *Policy Issues*

We now look at a brief examination of six issues voters might consider important to their presidential vote (see Norrander 1986).<sup>14</sup> Turning first to registered

Democrats, immigration was considered very important by more than 41%, more than any other issue. Iraq followed with 38.5% and abortion at 29.9%. Gay marriage, the economy, and terrorism were well behind, at 14.5%, 11.4%, and 2.1%

**Table 7**  
**Support for Republican Candidates: Registered Republican vs. Likely Republican Caucus**  
**Attendees, March Data, Column Percents**

	Sample Baseline		McCain		Giuliani		Romney	
	Registered	Caucus	Registered	Caucus	Registered	Caucus	Registered	Caucus
<i>Education</i>								
H.S. Diploma or Less	32.97	29.15	33.04	21.96	24.15	28.97	26.85	25.69
Some college	27.20	27.85	33.5	27.45	25.74	20.51	28.24	35.93
Bachelors	27.50	27.85	20.25	32.94	37.11	32.31	28.08	28.13
Post-Bachelors	12.33	15.15	13.21	17.65	13.00	18.21	16.83	10.24
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Income</i>								
Less than 30k	15.89	14.16	15.77	14.37	12.59	11.91	21.24	18.22
30k to under 50k	27.00	21.35	21.35	12.98	26.47	13.17	23.30	5.42
50k to under 75k	21.93	24.36	25.43	19.47	20.65	23.67	26.08	40.13
75 to under and up	35.18	40.13	37.45	53.17	40.29	51.25	29.38	36.23
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Gender</i>								
Female	46.75	38.33	38.60	44.44	43.61	32.69	37.08	31.19
Male	53.25	61.67	61.40	55.56	56.39	67.31	62.92	68.81
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Marital Status</i>								
Not Married	17.92	17.28	20.57	24.18	18.21	25.56	16.55	6.42
Married	82.08	82.72	79.43	75.82	81.79	74.44	83.45	93.58
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Age</i>								
18–29	5.29	6.47	6.21	4.44	5.57	10.77	4.70	3.82
30–44	18.59	15.81	19.05	26.41	17.12	16.15	10.29	14.07
45–59	33.93	32.60	38.18	36.21	36.09	24.74	32.38	47.55
60 and up	42.19	45.12	36.56	32.94	41.22	48.33	52.63	34.56
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Religion</i>								
Protestant	75.53	81.79	70.16	70.54	77.16	81.99	80.97	83.66
Roman Catholic	16.48	12.13	20.68	21.49	16.73	13.19	11.91	8.17
Other	7.99	6.08	9.16	7.97	6.11	4.82	7.11	8.17
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Born Again</i>								
Yes	43.45	43.64	37.40	25.14	33.89	41.06	45.70	38.79
No	56.55	56.36	62.60	74.86	66.11	58.94	54.30	61.21
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Literal Bible Interpretation</i>								
Yes	63.52	61.75	60.73	44.22	60.21	63.23	65.49	63.07
No	36.48	38.25	39.27	55.78	39.79	36.77	34.51	36.93
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Issues (% issue is "very important" for their pres. vote)*</i>								
Immigration	56.02	63.09	55.39	40.37	64.12	79.49	54.28	66.67
Abortion	44.38	41.64	41.73	28.63	42.42	35.51	52.68	50.00
Gay Marriage	38.89	41.60	40.93	36.21	32.98	31.15	41.24	44.80
Terrorism	19.15	26.71	15.94	9.93	31.23	50.51	21.64	25.69
Iraq	13.21	11.80	13.67	18.69	10.04	6.41	12.19	7.65
Economy	12.42	10.03	12.00	2.22	12.61	19.36	14.09	16.67

\*Issue marginals (last six rows) are the result of multiple questions, thus the categories do not add up to 100%. Immigration, abortion, and gay marriage percentages are the result of two questions and should not be compared directly to totals on Iraq, economy, or terrorism. All cross-tabs are statistically significant with a 95% confidence interval using a standard Chi-Square test.



among Democrats. For those who planned to actually caucus, the important issues remained the same—the top three were Iraq, immigration, and abortion, at 42.1%, 40.1%, and 32.2% respectively. Likely caucus attendees do not seem especially different on issues from Democrats overall in Iowa.

The issue of the war in Iraq somewhat differentiated the Democrats in March 2007. Among registered voters who supported Edwards, 43.4% considered Iraq to be very important, about 5% over the baseline. The difference was larger among caucus attendees where 49.3% of Edwards supporters felt this way, 7.2% over the baseline. For Obama, 46% of his caucus supporters considered Iraq to be very important, but for Clinton only 34% of her supporters did. The flip side was terrorism, which few Democrats considered very important. Clinton supporters, however, were much more likely to cite terrorism—nearly 6% of her caucus supporters called it very important, compared to 1.4% for Obama and less than 1% for Edwards. Clinton did very well with those few Democrats who focused on terrorism generally, as opposed to the war in Iraq.

## Bases of Support for Republican Candidates

*Education.* Just under 40% of registered Republican voters in Iowa have at least a college degree, while about a third have no more than a high school diploma. Likely caucus attendees are skewed a bit towards the better educated, but not nearly so much as the Democrats. But there were clear differences among the candidates in their bases. Only 33.7% of the registered Republicans who supported McCain have a college degree or higher, 6.1% below the baseline. Giuliani and Romney, on the other hand, both drew a better educated base among registered voters—Romney a little more than 5% above the baseline and Giuliani more than 10% above. Support shifted when looking at only likely caucus attendees. McCain and Giuliani drew more caucus support from the better educated (both about 8.5% above the baseline) while Romney's caucus support was based more among those less educated—he received the *lowest* level of support from the most educated. This highlights how divergent caucus support appeared to be from registered support for the Republican presidential candidates, at least in early 2007.

*Income.* As with the Democrats, Republican caucus attendees have higher incomes than registered Republicans overall. Yet the caucus samples for both

parties are quite similar at the high and low ends; about 16% of Democrats and 14% of Republicans who plan to caucus report incomes below \$30,000, while around 40% of both groups report incomes over \$75,000. In this sense the likely Republican caucus attendee is actually more representative of all registered Republicans than is a Democratic caucus attendee relative to other Democrats.

Across the Republican candidates, there was relatively little variation when comparing registered voters. But as with education, there were some large differences when we examine likely caucus attendees. Both McCain and Giuliani drew heavily on wealthy voters; McCain received over 53% of his caucus support (13% over the baseline) from those with higher incomes, while Giuliani got about 51% of his caucus support from this group (+11.1%). Romney was the least reliant on support from the wealthy, drawing disproportionately from the lower income voters.

*Gender.* The gender gap was alive and well among Iowa Republican partisans, as it is nationwide. Among registered Iowa Republicans, 53.3% are male while 61.7% of likely caucus attendees are male. So where Democratic caucus attendees slightly over-represent Democratic women, the Republican likely caucus attendee sample is heavily male. Both Giuliani and Romney relied heavily on men for their caucus support, both about 6–7% above the baseline. Women formed a larger share of McCain supporters relative to the others, more than six points over that caucus attendee baseline.

*Marital Status.* Among registered voters, married Republicans form about the same support base for each of the candidates, none of which differ much from the baseline. And both married and unmarried Republicans say they will attend their caucus in equal proportions to their representation among registered voters. However, among Romney caucus supporters, more than 93.5% were married, well above the 82.7% caucus attendee baseline. Unmarried Republicans were simply not supporting Romney, relative to the other candidates.

*Age.* As with Democrats, Republican likely caucus attendees are not substantially different in age than registered Republicans overall, they may be just a little bit older. Age did condition support for the candidates however, both among registered voters and caucus attendees. Among registered voters, McCain's support was more reliant on middle-aged voters between 45–59 (38.18%, 4.25% over the baseline), while Romney got

extra support from older voters (60 and up category), who provided 52.62% of his base. Interestingly, older registered Republicans were a smaller part of McCain's base, 5.5% less than the baseline, despite the fact that he is by far the oldest of the three candidates. Yet, when we look at likely Republican caucus attendees, age effects shift substantially for Romney, whose strength among caucus attendees was in the 45–59 group, 15% above the baseline, while his support among the oldest group dropped to 34.5%, nearly 10% below. No other candidate showed such a dramatic shift, although Giuliani's caucus base was somewhat older than his registered voter support.

*Religion.* McCain was the candidate least reliant on Protestants for his support among both registered voters and caucus attendees. In turn, McCain got substantially more support from Catholics. Giuliani's support more or less mirrored the proportions overall for both registered voters and likely caucus attendees. Romney was the most reliant on Protestants, with more than 80% of his support in both samples from this group.

The Republican samples have double the percentage of born-again and evangelical Christians than Democrats. Among registered Republicans, Romney led with 45.7% of his support from this group. The caucus sample, however paints a different picture, with Giuliani most reliant on them, at 41.1% of his base. Although this was the highest percentage among the three candidates, it was still *below* the sample baseline, signifying that many had yet to settle on any of the leading candidates and were disproportionately undecided. McCain got less of his support from born-again and evangelical Christians than did the other two, 18.5% below the baseline for caucus attendees. A similar story is found among those who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, who make up more than 60% of both Republican groups.<sup>15</sup> Among registered voters Romney had the greatest support here, while Giuliani did the best among likely caucus goers. While McCain did better than he did among born-again Christians in the registered voter sample, he still got the lowest share of his caucus support from this group (44.2%, which is 19% lower than Giuliani and 18.8% lower than Romney). It is probably safe to conclude McCain was not the favored candidate among conservative Christians.

Summarizing the demographic bases of support for the candidates, we can conclude that likely Republican caucus attendees, who like Democrats are stronger partisans, are slightly better educated,

wealthier, more likely to be male, and a little bit older than registered Republicans as a whole in Iowa. We find that the Republican candidates did in fact rely on different bases for their support, especially in the caucus, more so than the Democrats. While Democratic caucus attendees differ only slightly from registered Democrats, Republicans who caucus do not look as much like registered Republicans statewide.

## Policy Issues

While Iraq and immigration were tied for Democrats as very important issues, for registered Republicans immigration was cited by more than 56% as very important, followed by abortion (44.4%), gay marriage (38.9%), terrorism (19.2%), Iraq (13.2%), and the economy (12.4%). Given that Republican candidate rhetoric downplayed Iraq and played up terrorism (an especially potent issue for Giuliani) this is not surprising. Immigration was (and is) a hot button issue in Iowa where the farm economy and the meatpacking industry rely on Latino immigrants, and abortion and gay marriage are key issues for the conservative Republican base. Likely Republican caucus attendees were even more focused on immigration as a very important issue, with over 63% citing it. These voters were also much more likely to see terrorism as very important than registered Republicans

The candidates' bases of support by issues tracked quite well with their general overall approaches to the nomination campaign. McCain focused more on Iraq—albeit generally in support of the war—than did the other two and more than 18% of McCain's caucus supporters called Iraq very important, versus under 12% of all likely caucus attendees. On the other hand, McCain supporters were much less likely to think *any* of the other five issues were very important, compared to the caucus attendee baseline.

Among those who considered terrorism very important, Giuliani was winning hands down. Among registered voters, 31.2% of Giuliani supporters said terrorism was very important, a difference of almost +10% compared to the other two leading Republicans. This dif-

ference was heightened among likely caucus goers, with over 50% of Giuliani's supporters focused on terrorism. Giuliani supporters also considered immigration to be very important—a full 79.5% of his caucus supporters reported this, compared to 63% of all caucus attendees. In the minds of many, these two issues probably hung together well, as they might well have considered illegal immigration might to be a national security issue.

Turning to the social issues—abortion and gay marriage—Romney supporters considered these to be very important to a much greater degree than supporters of either of the other two candidates. This was especially true among the likely caucus attendee sample, where 44.8% of Romney voters called gay marriage important (compared to 41.6% overall) and 50% considered abortion to be a very important issue (versus 41.6% overall, and only 28.6% of McCain voters). Giuliani seemed to be capitalizing on “tough guy” issues—drawing heavily on terrorism and immigration. Romney appeared to be riding social and moral issues like gay marriage and abortion. McCain, though, was different. The only issue he seemed to draw an abnormally high amount of support from was the Iraq war.

## Conclusion

Our intent in this paper is to illuminate some of the differences between voters who are likely to attend the Iowa caucuses and registered voters statewide, and to compare who supports the presidential candidates for both parties over time. These data provide a window into opinion change and candidate preferences over the course of a campaign, and also allow us to compare across categories of voters (politically active caucus attendees to regular voters). The Iowa caucuses play a key role in the presidential nominating process (Squire 1989; Adkins and Dowdle 2001; Stone, Rapoport, and Abramowitz 1992), and as such it is useful to understand both the basic nature of those most likely to caucus and the wellsprings of support for candidates as they began the long haul towards the nomination.

While Clinton and Giuliani emerged as frontrunners among statewide Iowa voters early in the season, the analysis reveals why Obama, Edwards, and Romney could mount credible challenges in Iowa, with Obama gaining support among the most educated and wealthy Democrats, as well as the young and those opposed to the Iraq war. However, the young may be the least likely to turn out at the caucuses, which may hurt Obama relative to Edwards and Clinton. Romney led among social and religious conservatives and earned support across income and education groups. Edwards gained support from the middle of the income and education spectrums. Only one candidate in each party gets to “win” the Iowa caucuses, yet more than one candidate may do “better than expected” and in doing so propel him or herself to the nomination.

The empirical evidence also revealed similarities and differences between the preferences of likely caucus attendees and Iowa registered voters. On policy issues, likely caucus attendees map closely to statewide voters within each party. However, the divergence among Democrats—with Edwards leading in the caucus while Clinton led among all registered Democrats—provides fodder for critics that the existing system produces polarized candidates. The analysis also highlights some socioeconomic and partisan biases of caucus attendees relative to the Iowa electorate; in particular individual wealth and education matter and affect one's likelihood of caucusing and presidential candidate preferences. The current presidential nomination system requires that each candidate compete in a handful of early nominating states (Iowa, Nevada, and New Hampshire), win the favor of political activists, and be electable in the general election. In the midst of aggressive frontloading, the 2008 elections may be the last before the states default to some pseudo-national primary. We share the findings of the Iowa electorate as a marker in the midst of rapid change of state election laws governing the presidential nomination process with larger more comprehensive election reforms looming on the horizon.

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## Notes

\*The University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll is co-directed by David Redlawsk and Caroline Tolbert. It was administered with the support of the University of Iowa Social Science Research Center, Director Kevin Leicht, and funded by the University of Iowa Office of the Provost and the College of Liberal Arts and Science. We thank

all these people along with the team of graduate and undergraduate students who worked with us on the survey project.

1. Those who are not registered party members may choose to register at their caucus, so they may participate that evening. In 2004, approximately 20% of registered Democrats at-

tended; the number was much smaller for Republicans who did not have a nominating contest that year.

2. Of the 1,290 poll participants 32% were Republican, 36% Democrat, and 32% independent, which closely matches the actual party registration of Iowa voters. Nearly three-quarters

were married. Women made up 62% of the raw sample. Of the full sample, 508 were identified as likely caucus attendees. Of these, 310 planned to attend the Democratic caucus while 198 planned to attend the Republican caucus. The margin of error for all likely caucus attendees is  $\pm 4.4\%$ , 5.5% for the Democratic sub-sample, and 6.5% for the Republican sub-sample.

3. Of the statewide registered voter sample, 29.1% of the participants were Republican, 34.9% were Democrat, and 36% were independent. Nearly 70% were married. Women made up 57% of the raw sample. In the caucus sample, 542 were identified as likely caucus attendees. Of these, 319 planned to attend the Democratic caucus while 223 planned to attend the Republican caucus. The statewide poll had a margin of error of  $\pm 3.25$  percentage points. The margin of error for all likely caucus attendees is  $\pm 4.4\%$ , 5.5% for the Democratic sub-sample, and 6.5% for the Republican sub-sample.

4. The poll survey was administered using WinCATI, a computer aided telephone interviewing system. Paid student callers were used for the August survey while student callers received class credit for their involvement in the March survey and were trained ahead of time to follow a specified script. The pedagogy of this project is interesting in itself, but space precludes discussion here.

5. "Given the people who now say they are running for president in 2008, how satisfied are you with your choices. Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied?"

6. Question 1: "As you know, the Iowa caucuses are the first test of presidential candidates in 2008. I'd like to ask you some questions about the caucuses. First, did you attend a presidential caucus in either 2000 or 2004?" with

responses including "yes", "no" and "does not know/cannot remember."

Question 2: "Many people find it difficult to attend the caucuses because it takes a lot of time. How likely are you to attend your Caucus in January 2008? Are you very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?"

Question 3: "Which party's caucus do you plan to attend, the Democratic Party Caucus or the Republican Party Caucus? Democratic Caucus, Republican Caucus, or does not know." Respondents providing a valid response to Question 1, who noted "very likely" or "somewhat likely" to attend the caucuses in Question 2 and who knew which parties caucus they would attend, question 3, were coded as likely caucus attendees.

7. As we write this we are analyzing results from our third survey, in late October 2007. Huckabee's momentum coming off the Straw Poll is evident, in the most recent survey he was at just under 12%, tied for second behind Romney at about 36%. By the time this is published we will know if his momentum continued to caucus day.

8. In March, while 49% of the Democrats who initially could not choose a general election candidate remained undecided in their caucus preference, Edwards received support from nearly 60% of the previously undecided who name a caucus preference, while Clinton and Obama split most of the rest. All three candidates retained more than 92% of their general election supporters as well. On the Republican side, all three major candidates maintain at least 90% of their support, while 72% of those undecided in the general election remained undecided. McCain got about half of those previously undecided who chose a caucus preference.

9. "In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?" Follow-up questions asked "Do you consider yourself a strong Republican or not a strong Republican?" and "Do you consider yourself a strong Democrat or not a strong Democrat?" Independent leaners were measured by the question "As of today, do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?"

10. "What is your marital status? Are you married or with a committed partner, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?"

11. As we write this in early November 2007, one of the major unknowns is what will happen with college student attendance. In the past caucuses were held while classes were in session at most colleges; in 2008 virtually every student will be on winter break, and most likely in their home community rather than their college town. In addition, at the University of Iowa, more than 40% of undergraduates are from out of state and will presumably not be in Iowa on January 3.

12. "What is your religious preference?" The response was recorded and then summarized into the broad categories used here.

13. "Would you describe yourself as a "born again" or evangelical Christian, or not?"

14. "How important is [terrorism] to your vote for president in 2008? Is it very important, somewhat important, or not that important?" Identical question wording was used for Iraq War, economy, abortion, gay marriage, immigration, health care, energy policy, environment, and education. Responses also included "refuses to say" and "does not know."

15. "Do you believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible?" Respondents could answer yes or no.

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