

ELEVATING WINNERS OR UNDERCUTTING MODERATES:  
QUANTIFYING IOWA'S IDEOLOGICAL IMPACT  
ON THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION PROCESS

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**Abstract**

Will John Edwards' surge to the Left gain him ground in Iowa that moves Democrats away from an electable candidate? Will Romney's surge to the Right ace out superstars like Giuliani, Thompson, and McCain in the Hawkeye State, as well? An extensive literature has found Iowa ideologically unrepresentative of the rest of the country, as well as wildly out of proportion in presidential primary attention. Yet the Caucus's defenders cite its well-informed party activists, arguing that caucus-goers are sophisticated enough to select electable candidates. So what does placing Iowa's grassroots-heavy, Midwestern Caucus first in the process mean to the actual nomination process writ large? Specifically, this paper addresses empirically whether electability or ideology dominates Iowa's Caucus, using statistical models based on an original 1976-2004 dataset of candidates to contest Iowa, containing national and state polling data, FEC fundraising information, and ideological and electability measures drawn from activist surveys. It finds that while ideology plays an undeniable role in determining caucus outcomes, electability also factors heavily into the state's results, suggesting that "strategic" voting has real-world effects in Iowa - and that 2008 candidates moving to the Right or Left may find that line of attack less rewarding than they might expect.

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In the quadrennial debate over the placement of Iowa's presidential caucus at the beginning of the nomination contest, a point consistently raised is the extreme ideological skew of the state's voters on both sides of the aisle. Christian conservatives on the right and anti-war activists on the left, many argue, favor polarizing candidates like Howard Dean in 2004 or Pat Robertson in 1988. Some, including former Democratic party chair Ron Brown, have concluded that the Hawkeye State is just a bad

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place to have a first-in-the-nation caucus as a result. (Winebrenner, 1998, 21).

That said, a substantial number of studies have indicated Iowa caucus voters are thinking strategically about their vote choice. (Stone, 1982, Stone and Abramowitz, 1983; Hutter and Schier, 1984; Abramowitz and Stone, 1984; Stone, Rapoport and Abramowitz, 1989; Stone and Rapoport, 1994) That literature finds that caucus-goers tend to weigh candidates not just by their proximity to the respondents' ideology, but by their ability to win in the Fall.

How does this dynamic look from a candidate's-eye view? That is, how do ideological and strategic factors play out in terms of aggregate candidate performance in the state?

The question is crucial in 2008, as former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) and former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards (D) have both staked out positions closer to the extremes of their parties and focused enormous resources on the state of Iowa. If ideology in fact rules in the state, they are likely to be rewarded for their moves to the extreme. If electability matters significantly, though, might they not harm their chances by portraying themselves as less in line with Main Street America?

This paper aims to find out.

### *I. Of Unrepresentativeness and Electability*

To begin, let's delve into the ideology-vs.-strategic voting debate in past studies.

#### *Strategic Voting*

On one wing, many have documented and catalogued Iowa's ideological skew (see for instance Winebrenner, 1998; Mayer, 2000). On the other wing, some have noted that the Iowa Caucus in particular brings out more voters, lessening caucuses' characteristic ideological unrepresentativeness, and also brings out sophisticated voters, these thinkers find, voters who are often willing to sacrifice ideology on the altar of ultimate electoral success - a contention known as the "Moderation Hypothesis" (Stone, 1982, Stone and Abramowitz, 1983; Hutter and Schier, 1984; Abramowitz and Stone, 1984; Stone, Rapoport and Abramowitz, 1989; Stone and Rapoport, 1994).

The mechanism at work in that hypothesis is the Iowa voters' assessment of a candidate's viability (chances of surviving the primary process to win the party's nomination) and/or electability (chances of becoming president if nominated).<sup>2</sup> Empirically, past studies found that the only significant effect was that of electability – that viability did not appear to be factored in to the voter-level Caucus decision.<sup>3</sup> That raises the interesting question whether we can find evidence of these individual (voter's-eye-view) mechanisms at work using an aggregate (candidate's-eye-view) model.

An Explanatory Model of Iowa Caucus success may help shed light on whether the demographic and ideological skew of Iowa Caucus-goers is indeed blurred by “strategic” voting of some kind. Some scholars find it at the individual level. Can we find it in the historical success of the campaigns themselves?

A final knock on Caucus voters is that they are not just ideologically unrepresentative, but demographically unrepresentative both of the parties and of the nation as a whole. The same theorists point this out who note Iowa's ideological skew (Mayer, 2000; Winebrenner, 1998), but some who defend Iowa ideologically grant its demographic unrepresentativeness (Stone, Rapoport, and Abramowitz, 1989), and still others grant that caucuses generally are less representative than primaries (Lengle, 1981).<sup>4</sup> By contrast, a few thinkers argue that it's important to define what one is comparing the state to, because depending on that decision, one can arrive at the conclusion that “the state of Iowa is not so unrepresentative a place for the first major authoritative expressions of candidate preference” (Wolfinger, 1989).<sup>5</sup>

Whether or not Iowa voters are unrepresentative is not central to determining who wins – unless, of course, it matters in selectively

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2 See Abramowitz, et al., “Activists in Presidential Nomination Process.”

3 Alan I. Abramowitz, “Viability, Electability, and Candidate Choice in a Presidential Primary Election: A Test of Competing Models,” *Journal of Politics* (1989) 51, 922-92. See also Walter J. Stone, Ronald B. Rapoport, and Alan I. Abramowitz, 1989, “How Representative are the Iowa Caucuses?” in Squire, *The Iowa Caucuses* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), 19-50.

4 James I. Lengle, *Representation and Presidential Primaries: The Democratic Party in the Post-Reform Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981), 112.

5 Raymond E. Wolfinger, “Who Is Vulnerable to the Iowa Caucuses?” in *The Iowa Caucuses and the Presidential Nominating Process* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), edited by Peverill Squire, 163.

disadvantaging some candidates, for instance those who are minorities. It seems worthwhile to investigate any significant average performance difference for the Jackson (1984 and 1988), Keyes (1996 and 2000) and Sharpton campaigns, controlling adequately for viability, electability, and ideology.

The three active candidates' relative liberalism and conservatism respectively, as well as perceptions that they could not win, would have a great deal of explanatory power over their performance. And of course, perceptions of viability and electability might be partially a proxy for racial proclivities on the part of either national polling subjects or Caucus-goers, so teasing out true assessments might be a challenge.

Those five Iowa campaigns run by three African-American candidates, one on the Republican side and two on the Democratic side, may give us a test of whether the Iowa demographic skew “matters” in terms of minority performance.

So who's right? Does the Explanatory Model tend to support those theorists who see only ideological skew, or those who see scheming based on viability and/or electability? Does it matter if a candidate is perceived to be struggling in the primary, or is it only those perceived to be at risk in the general election who suffer disproportionately? Do objective measures of viability like national fundraising create perceptions of inevitability or futility that effect Caucus performance? Does caucus-goers' demographic unrepresentativeness warp the Caucus' ultimate candidate choices, perhaps harming the chances of minority candidates?

Let us turn to the measures we'd need to answer such questions.

## II. How Can We “See” Strategic Voting in Iowa?

The operationalization of issues as sticky as ideology, viability, and electability is tricky. Below I have laid out in some detail my attempts at strategic voting measures. I believe the Ideological Crowding measure in particular would reward attention.

## *Ideology*

I obtained original raw ideology scores for each candidate from the Abramowitz *et al.* database (2001) for 1980-1992, which surveyed caucus attendees and party activists in key states (which, unfortunately, varied each cycle). For 1996, 2000 and 2004 the data come from the author's own survey of Iowa party activists, which was designed to mirror wordings from the Abramowitz, *et al.* database.

Specifically, using that data I calculated three factors I found most useful in characterizing ideological positioning among these bountiful Iowa fields of candidates. With so many at work in those fields, it is crucial to have properly tuned tools to distinguish between them, and I believe these three interrelated scalpels are useful in that regard.

The first measure is "Ideological Proximity," the distance between the candidate and the survey respondent, according to the respondent's own placements. It can be found simply by subtracting one from the other and taking the absolute value of the result. Appendix A contains the method of its calculation from survey data.

The second measure is "Ideological Vote Share," which is the percentage of the candidate's party members surveyed for whom the candidate had the nearest (smallest) Ideological Proximity, with proportional percentages allocated to tied Ideological Proximities with other candidates.

The Ideological Vote Share calculation laid out in Appendix A parcels out voters to the candidates they say they most resemble ideologically. If two candidates fall at equal distances from a given voter, each is awarded half of the voter; if three candidates tie, each gets a third of the voter. The variable is intended to provide a better measure of the space a candidate has opened between himself and his opponents ideologically, in the only currency that matters to him: proportions of voters.

"Ideological Crowding," then, is only the proportion of voters other candidates have captured – every voter *not* in a candidate's Ideological Vote Share. Ideological Crowding represents the proportion of those surveyed who placed another candidate either equidistant or nearer to them ideologically. Thus the factor is a useful measure of how ideologically hemmed-in a candidate is by other candidates within the community surveyed. In the case of my survey, of course, that community is politically active Iowans. So Ideological Crowding within this study is a measure of the degree to which a candidate has been

squeezed out by other candidates in terms of perceptions of his views. Appendix A contains a detailed description of how to calculate Ideological Crowding given survey data with liberal-conservative candidate placements and respondent self-placements.

Credit where credit is due: the high concept of an ideological crowding variable for the Caucus Model was suggested by Norrander, and this particular formulation was drawn from the technique using coders and cross-sections of voter data used by Cohen *et al.* (2004). Cohen *et al.*'s technique is an ingenious one for those without access to survey data, and comes highly recommended. For those with the luxury of using survey data, on the other hand, using Ideological Proximity, Ideological Vote Share and especially Ideological Crowding may be a more accessible technique, and may take Cohen *et al.*'s idea of calculating proportions of the voting public to which a candidate is closest a step closer to empirical reality.

The 2004 cycle provides a good glimpse into why these ideological measures would be superior to ideological placement scores alone. Figure 1 below maps the average ideological placement scores of the top Iowa contenders. Note that these are perceptions only – those familiar with Howard Dean's governorship in Vermont, for instance, would be astonished at how liberal Iowans finally decided he was.<sup>6</sup>

[Figure 1 about here](#)

The question is where we go from here. It does not matter so much what a candidate's philosophy is perceived to be, after all, but how that interacts with the electorate's philosophy. It is only when we examine relative ideology that we get finer gradations between the candidates.

Ideological Proximity – again, the percentage of those surveyed placing themselves at the same ideological point as a given candidate – clarifies the view of the field somewhat. (Figure 2) When we sort candidates by this factor, we see that Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.) and Kerry rank highest, trailed closely by Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) and a bit more distantly by Dean.

[Figure 2 about here](#)

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<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Clyde Wilcox for pointing this out in my dissertation defense.

Ideological Vote Share provides an even sharper view both theoretically and empirically, though in 2004 it actually deviates further from the ultimate Caucus results. Dean's Ideological Vote Share, notice, is considerably higher than his Ideological Proximity, relative to other candidates. The implication of that finding is that although there were fewer surveyed Democrats reporting that they were in synch with him ideologically, he had more elbow room among those who were. As we saw in the last figure, Dean was considered more to the left than any other candidate, so one imagines that many respondents on the far liberal fringe of the spectrum perceived that they had no closer alternative than Dean.

#### *Electability and Viability*

Prior research has demonstrated that a candidate's electability (in the fall) and viability (in the nomination) influence individuals' nomination candidate choice (Stone, Abramowitz, 1983). As with ideology, the original 1980-1992 electability and viability data in the model are from the Abramowitz, et al. database (2001), and from 1996 on the data all come from the author's own survey of Iowa party activists. The variables themselves come from questions about survey respondents' perceptions of the chances for each candidate to win the general election and gain the nomination, respectively.

"Viability Perception" specifically is the percentage of candidates' same-party respondents *not* saying they had no chance to win, that is, the percentage answering anything else but that the candidates were certain to lose, or whatever the worst rank was in the survey (though all meant something similar, some surveys used different constructions than "certain to lose," such as "definitely would lose").

"Electability" is slightly different - it is the percentage *not* responding that the candidate would more likely lose the general election, again among same-party respondents. Like Viability Perception, it is obtained by finding the percentage of those surveyed with electability concerns - but instead of including only those at the most pessimistic category, Electability uses all those who list any of the "lose" categories, including "probably would lose," "definitely would lose," etc.

The difference in modulation comes from existing literature, which has tended to discover that electability concerns, not viability concerns, matter most in dooming candidates (Stone, Abramowitz 1983). Thus Viability Perception is intended to catalogue those with the strongest possible feelings that it is not worth supporting a given candidate in the

primary, a sense of total futility in voting for him. Electability, by contrast, is intended to gauge all those with doubts about the ultimate success of a candidate in the Fall.

In 2004, the difference between viability and electability was relatively stark. With respect to the nomination, Iowa Caucus goers generally felt that Dean was the most likely to be successful. In particular, doubts centered on Edwards' chances of being the nominee, with fully 20% reporting that they felt he "probably would lose." That said, those surveyed generally gave the top four candidates some chance to win. Virtually no one reported that Dean, Kerry, Edwards or Gephardt would "definitely lose." (Figure 3)

#### Figure 3 about here

Not so with respect to the general election. Whereas only a handful thought Dean would likely lose the nomination, a substantial proportion of surveyed Iowa Democrats felt that he would lose in November to President Bush (Figure 4). And where Dean stood out to surveyed Iowa Democrats before the Caucus as the candidate least likely to lose the nomination, Kerry stood out as the candidate least likely to lose to Bush.

Many media reports raised the question of whether the perception that Dean might be more vulnerable against Bush cost him Iowa. The question before us empirically is whether such perceptions more generally could help explain the 2004 Caucus, and whether Electability and Viability matter significantly in winning Iowa, not just in 2004 but since 1976.

#### Figure 4 about here

#### *National Fundraising Share*

For the database, the 1976-2004 national fundraising data is drawn from the Federal Election Commission and adjusted into real (2004) dollars.<sup>7</sup> In all models, the basis of national fundraising is the candidate's receipts

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<sup>7</sup> The figures used to determine "real" spending figures come from the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. Specifically, I used the All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), U.S. city average, which puts 1982-84=100. Note that to get real (2002) dollars for instance, the number is divided by the CPI Index for the year it occurred, then multiplied by 179.9, the 2002 index.

for the third and fourth quarters of the pre-election year. The variable used specifically is a candidate's percentage of the total dollars raised by all major candidates<sup>8</sup> of his party during that period. (For a discussion of why only half-year totals were used, see Appendix A.)

National fundraising is commonly employed to gauge candidate performance during the Exhibition Season. Its relationship with a candidate's primary performance appears weaker than that with either Iowa or New Hampshire performance, but there still appears to be a correlation (Figure 5). As we will see, controlling for national polling strength and fundraising produces an interesting empirical result when estimating primary performance.

[Figure 5 about here](#)

With respect to cash raised, at least, on Caucus Day the 2004 Democratic Primary was no contest: Dean was winning (Figure 6). With over \$30 million raised in the second half of the pre-election year and a towering 41% of the total dollars raised by the field, he was virtually without second. Clark took in just under \$14 million, less than half what Dean raised. Kerry was under \$10 million for the period, Gephardt under \$7 million, Lieberman under \$6 million, and Edwards actually raised less than Kucinich, both coming in below \$5 million. Sharpton brought up the rear with about a quarter of a million dollars raised.

[Figure 6 about here](#)

Does the Iowa Caucus nurse on the mother's milk of politics? With National Fundraising data and (admittedly suspect) Iowa Spending data in the Explanatory Model, we can move a step closer to finding out.

#### *African-American Candidates*

To control for a demographic bias, I added a dummy variable for the five minority candidacies to my dataset as well. Its results would be analogous to testing a demographic Moderation Hypothesis: Does the fact that Iowa Caucus-goers are demographically unrepresentative translate into a proportionally worse performance for minority candidates, or does the unrepresentative demography of Iowa not in fact hamper minority candidates, *ceteris paribus*?

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<sup>8</sup> Defined as those who had non-zero results after rounding in *either* national polls or the Iowa Caucus. Al Sharpton is the only candidate included exclusively because of his profile.

### *III. Teasing Out Strategy from Ideology in Iowa*

The addition of Electability, Viability and Ideological Crowding to the Explanatory Model sets up a crude duel that helps test the mettle of the Moderation Hypothesis. If Ideological Crowding is statistically significant (and negative) and neither Electability nor Viability rises to that level, we know that at any given level of electability and viability perception, ideological factors outweigh "strategic" voting factors, holding the other factors in the model constant.

By contrast, if either Electability or Viability is statistically significant (and positive) and Ideological Crowding is not significant, we know that at any given level of ideological infringement, candidates get extra elbow room if they seem to be poised to succeed, again holding other factors constant. If none of the three is significant we can draw no firm conclusions; if all are significant, then each is playing a role holding the other constant and strategic voting of some kind is going on.

Granted, there is no "moderate" or "extreme" measure in this preliminary Explanatory Model. Merely pitting perceptions of potential success against ideology fails to take into account the direction of ideological distance. However, if Iowa voters choose strategically as some past accounts would have it, we may be able to find Electability or Viability remaining statistically significant controlling for Ideology, indicating strategic voting is taking place.

With these thoughts in mind, below is an OLS Iowa Explanatory Model with Strategic Factors broken out from among the controls.

$$\text{CAUCUS VOTE}_{yi} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{IDEOLOGICAL CROWDING}_{yi} + \beta_2 \text{ELECTABILITY}_{yi} + \beta_3 \text{VIABILITY}_{yi} + \beta_4 \text{FUNDRAISING}_{yi} + \beta_5 \text{AFRICAN-AMERICAN}_{yi} + \beta_{5\dots n} \text{CONTROLS}_{yi} + u_{yi}$$

Where

y is the year of the contest,

i is the candidate, and

CONTROLS are spelled out in the estimation in Table 1.

Given this model, we can return to the questions we posed earlier in the paper.

1. Does the Explanatory Model tend to support those theorists who see only ideological skew, or those who see scheming based on viability and/or electability?
2. Does it matter if a candidate is perceived to be struggling in the primary, or is it only those perceived to be at risk in the general election who suffer disproportionately?
3. Do objective measures of viability like national fundraising create perceptions of inevitability or futility that effect Caucus performance?
4. Does caucus-goers' demographic unrepresentativeness warp the Caucus' ultimate candidate choices, perhaps harming the chances of minority candidates?

With the data and variables available, I hypothesized that:

1. Both Ideological Crowding and Electability would be statistically significant, the former negative and the latter positive, supporting those who believe strategic voting is taking place.
2. Viability would *not* be statistically significant at  $p = .05$  controlling for Electability, supporting prior findings that it is the latter not the former that matters in strategic voting.
3. National fundraising would be statistically significant and positive, not only because it would point toward the resources to compete effectively in the primary, but also because it would bolster perceptions of inevitability or futility which would in turn affect candidates' Caucus performance.
4. The African-American dummy variable would be significant and negative, indicating that Iowa's demographic unrepresentativeness was damaging minority candidates, even controlling for ideology, electability and viability.

With those hypotheses in mind, let's revisit the estimation of the Explanatory Model, this time looking not at tactics, but at strategic voting factors. (Table 1)

[Table 1 about here](#)

How did the hypotheses hold up?

*The Strategic Voting Dynamic Dominates Presidential Candidates' Outcomes*  
My first hypothesis was that both Ideological Crowding and Electability would be statistically significant, the former negative and the latter positive. That hypothesis was correct, supporting theorists like Abramowitz, Rapoport and Stone who believe strategic voting is taking

place. Specifically, Ideological Crowding was significant at  $p = 0.025$ , with an estimated regression coefficient of  $-0.849$ , meaning that for every additional percentage point of those surveyed *not* listing the candidate at least tied in ideological proximity to themselves, we would expect a candidate's vote share in the Iowa Caucus to drop by about 0.85 of a percentage point.

This is no isolated, marginal effect. The model is estimating a constant of 77.5% in the Caucus, which is not statistically significant but only by the slightest hair, with a  $p$ -value of 0.051. That is, in the nonsensical case where a candidate had zero ideological crowding, zero viability, no campaign effects, and a zero percentage of the field, etc., the model estimates that candidate would receive 77.5% of the Caucus vote (though technically we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the constant is in fact zero since it is not statistically significant).

Instead, of course, all those values are non-zero for each candidate, and according to the Explanatory Model, Ideological Crowding is the central mechanism pulling candidates down from that 77.5% share to what we would ordinarily expect a candidate to get. (The mean vote share in Iowa from 1976-2004 for all 69 candidates who reached the Caucus is just under 17.4%.)

To get some gauge of the size of Ideological Crowding's effect – and the damage it can wreak on a candidate – let's look at fmr. Gen. Wesley Clark, the candidate with the highest degree of Ideological Crowding in the 2004 field, with 91% of those surveyed placing another candidate closer to themselves than him (as always, including a proportional shares of ties).

According to these estimates, Clark would expect to lose a towering 77 percentage points of his vote share in Iowa just based on his Ideological Crowding. Before the reader immediately begins checking my math remember this: given a constant of 77.5%, the predicted value of 0.5% in the Caucus (77.5%-77%) is almost exactly what Clark actually got – which was virtually nothing. And that quick and dirty estimate ignores the entire remainder of the model.

That said, the fact is that there is usually a fair amount of Ideological Crowding in a field as large as Iowa's. Thus the 2004 candidate with the least Ideological Crowding, then-House Majority Leader Dick Gephardt, had fully 83% of those surveyed report another candidate as closer to them than he was. According to the Explanatory Model, we would estimate Gephardt would lose about 70 percentage points of his Caucus

vote due to Ideological Crowding, putting him at 7.5%, about three percentage points lower than what he actually received.

Which brings us to the second factor in the mix here: Electability. The Electability factor also proved statistically significant in the model, at  $p = 0.041$ , with a regression coefficient of 0.248. That estimate implies that for every additional percentage point of those surveyed *not* responding that the candidate would more likely than not lose the general election, we would expect the candidate's vote share in Iowa to rise by about a quarter of a percentage point.

To return to the example of the 2004 race, Clark was actually perceived as a mid-tier candidate with respect to Electability, with 61.4% of those surveyed on the positive side of the ledger on his chances of capturing the White House were he nominated. (Again, not 61.4% saying he would win; 61.4% *not* saying he would more likely lose.) According to the Explanatory Model's estimate, Clark would receive a boost of about 15 percentage points in the Caucus based on this high an Electability score, all else equal.

Again, before the reader rushes to point out that he received nothing of the kind, let's quickly factor in the other significant variables in the model: First, he would lose 7.5 percentage points from being under the Democratic Viability Threshold. Also, would lose another 5.6 percentage points given that he was 91% below the average number of days in Iowa during the 2004 cycle. (Since he spent nothing on television, there would be no effect from the TV spending metric.) This puts our Clark estimate at about 2.4% in Iowa, not so very far off the mark for a model intended to explain rather than predict outcomes.

Gephardt's 80.4% Electability factor, we would estimate, would award him about 20 points in Iowa. Factoring in campaign effects, he, too, would lose 7.5 percentage points from being under the Democratic Viability Threshold; he would gain about 3 points from his 49% above the average number of Days in Iowa; and he would lose about 11 percentage points from running too much television, given that he alone accounted for 26.3% of the total – giving him about 12% in Iowa, which is only 1.3% off from his actual total of 10.7%.

Both from these estimates and from the examples we can see that Electability is playing a major counterbalancing role to Ideological Crowding. Though the broad outlines of candidates' outcomes are attributable to their ideological position, they can easily run up (or drop)

a couple dozen extra percentages points based exclusively on the perception they will win (or lose) the White House.

To conclude, let us look at the two perhaps most interesting examples from 2004, rather than the extremes: former Gov. Howard Dean and Sen. John Kerry.

Dean and Kerry's Ideological Crowding was identical at 85%, giving them both a base of support in Iowa of only about 5.5% to build upon. Dean would have lost more by overloading the airwaves, given that he racked up 32.3% of the television spending in the 2004 cycle (-13 points), as opposed to Kerry's 24.2% (-10 points). But he would have gained more by spending more time in Iowa, given that his total was 69% above the average (+4 points) and Kerry's was only 62% above it (+3.5 points). That means factoring in both Ideological Crowding and campaign effects, we are left with two candidates in the red: Dean's pre-Electability base of support, as it were, was -3.5%; Kerry's was -1%.

In a sense, then, it came down to Electability. Dean's 83.9% Electability rating, we can estimate, won him 20.8 percentage points in Iowa. Kerry's Electability rating of 88.6% won him almost 22 points – enough to put him another half-length ahead of Dean.

The Explanatory Model would therefore place Dean at about 17.3%, which is nearly exactly what he got – 18%. However, note that the Explanatory Model would put Kerry at only 21% in Iowa, which is 16 points below his actual total, 37.6%. Though it may explain most of the variation in Caucus vote share, the model obviously is neither capturing all of Kerry's surge, nor is it a reliable predictor of candidates' outcomes more generally.

As a final caveat, recall that these results rely upon suspect Iowa spending data. Though the factor is not statistically significant, it plays an important role in both the model and in the estimates for Dean and Kerry in particular. Its inclusion makes television spending statistically significant, a result we must continue to regard as tentative until the data can be improved.

That aside, we can say with reasonable confidence that Ideological Vote Share and Electability are dominating forces in presidential candidate performance in Iowa. Strategic voting is apparent at the aggregate level of candidate performance.

#### *Viability Does Not Matter, Controlling for Ideology and Electability*

My second hypothesis was that viability would not be statistically significant controlling for Electability. That hypothesis was also correct, supporting prior findings that it is the latter, not the former, that matters in strategic voting. The Viability Perception factor is not significant at  $p = 0.631$ . It appears from this analysis that a candidate's likelihood of winning the primary is virtually absent from caucus-goers' strategic calculations. Instead, it is the candidate's likelihood of winning the general election that has a dramatic impact on their choices.

#### *National Fundraising Does Not Significantly Affect Caucus Outcomes*

My third hypothesis was that national fundraising would be statistically significant and positive. That hypothesis was not correct. The National Fundraising factor is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.550$ ), controlling for the other variables in the Explanatory Model. Apparently, having the resources to compete effectively in the Caucus is already included in the model through Iowa Spending, the Television Spending Metric, and the retail politics factors, and viability and electability already reflected through the survey-based metrics of their perception.

#### *Minority Candidates May Face No Downside, Controlling for Ideology and Electability*

My final hypothesis was that the African-American dummy variable would be significant and negative. That hypothesis was also incorrect. The factor was not significant ( $p = 0.514$ ), and was in fact positive. The indication of this finding is that Iowa's demographic unrepresentativeness does not damage the prospects for minority candidates, controlling for their ideology, electability and viability. A challenge could be raised that perceptions of ideology, electability and viability may themselves be tainted by Iowans' racial attitudes, which bears further investigation.

#### ***IV. Strategic Voting in Iowa is a Fact***

The main question of this paper was whether we could find in candidates' Iowa Caucus performance the same "strategic" voting that has been identified in voter-level investigations. This analysis appears to have provided an answer. The Explanatory Model found that electability had an impact on candidate success in spite of ideology's tectonic role, at least in statistical terms.

Does that perception of electability necessarily flow from moderation? No. Additional investigations must take place to ascertain if there are satisfying interactions between moderation, electability and ideological vote share – and those investigations will take place.

But nonetheless, the Explanatory Model has discovered an engine that could drive a moderation hypothesis: strategic voting by the Caucus writ large for more-electable candidates holding their ideology constant. Further investigations will also be required to see whether candidates with higher perceptions of electability are generally more moderate. Yet the results seem to reinforce the findings of earlier scholars (Stone, 1982; Stone and Abramowitz, 1983; Abramowitz and Stone, 1984; Stone and Rapoport, 1994) that caucus-goers choose candidates strategically.

Another finding of interest was that Viability did not matter to Caucus outcomes, controlling for Electability and Ideology. The implication of this finding is that party activists seem to be reserving to themselves the decision of whether the candidate will win the primary. That is, it's up to the party who gets the nomination, so even if a candidate is struggling in the primary, activists still feel free to support that candidate – granted that he or she is close enough to them ideologically relative to other candidates, and that the activist believes that if nominated, the candidate would have a good shot at the White House.

Also, it appears that National Fundraising does not significantly affect Caucus outcomes, controlling for other factors in the model. Apparently national fundraising's impact on perceptions of inevitability or futility are captured directly through the Electability and Viability factors in the model, and the impact of additional resources is captured directly through Iowa Spending, Television Spending, and Retail Politics factors.

Finally, the Explanatory Model also provides no evidence of systematic demographic bias. According to its findings, the overwhelmingly white populace of Iowa does not seem to slight African-American candidates, all other factors being equal. Though this is far from proof, it raises the possibility of a demographic moderation hypothesis – that Iowa's white voters might be willing to gravitate toward a viable, well-organized minority candidacy. This finding may ameliorate one aspect of the criticism of Iowa's demographically unrepresentativeness as found in Winebrenner (1998) and Mayer (2000).

That said, before a final conclusion was reached on that score, it would be crucial to measure the extent to which primary voters surveyed were

building race into their assessments of viability, electability, and ideology. Perhaps the significance of race in the Explanatory Model is masked by holding these three perceptions constant – perceptions potentially colored by bias. In fact, one initial stab at exploring this question found that race had a significant correlation with perceptions of electability. If it can be shown in future research that surveyed Iowans merely discount the electability and/or viability of minority candidates, or place them at greater ideological distances from themselves all things equal, then the Explanatory Model’s initial finding on race might be moot.

The bottom line here is that 2008 candidates like Mitt Romney and John Edwards, who have moved closer to the ideological extremes of their parties in search of votes, as well as placed major bets on Iowa’s presidential caucus, may find that the results are not as great as they might expect.

Thus candidates perceived to be more electable such as Hillary Clinton or Rudy Giuliani will certainly suffer in the state from their vote for the Iraq War or stand for abortion, respectively. But their ultimate success or failure in the Caucus may also ride on an ability to demonstrate that they hold the key to the White House.

## Appendix A

### *Ideological Vote Share and Ideological Crowding*

In equation form, Ideological Proximity can be expressed:

$$IP_A = |I_A - I_r|$$

Where:

$IP_A$  is the respondent’s reported Ideological Proximity from Candidate A,  $I_A$  is the respondent’s ideological placement of Candidate A on a five-point scale, from “Extremely (or Very) Liberal” (1) to “Extremely (or Very) Conservative” (5), and  $I_r$  is the respondent’s placement of him or herself on that same scale.

The process for obtaining Ideological Vote Share was as follows. I first obtained the Minimum Ideological Distance for every survey respondent for each cycle, simply by calculating

$$\text{MIN}(IP_A, IP_B, \dots IP_k)$$

for Candidates A, B, and others up to the final,  $k$ -th candidate in the field.

Using that information, I created a dummy variable for each candidate to indicate if that candidate was at that Minimum Ideological Distance to the respondent, making certain that all system-missing values were re-set to zero (which makes Ideological Vote Share a slightly more conservative estimate of a candidate’s support; however, the final step would not work mathematically otherwise). That is, I designated

$$MID_A, MID_B, \dots MID_k$$

Where  $MID_A$  is a dummy variable for whether or not Candidate A is at the Minimum Ideological Distance from the respondent,  $MID_B$  is variable for Candidate B, and a similar variable is calculated for each candidate up to the final,  $k$ -th candidate in the field.

Next, I summed all those dummy variables for each respondent for each cycle to obtain the total number of candidates at Minimum Ideological Distance from each respondent that year. That is, I calculated

$$CAM_r = \Sigma (MID_B, \dots MID_k)$$

where  $CAM_r$  is the number of candidates at Minimum Ideological Distance from respondent  $r$ , for each respondent.

I then obtained Respondent Ideological Vote Shares for each candidate for each respondent by dividing the Candidate at Minimum Ideological Distance dummy variables by the Total Number of Candidates at Minimum Distance variable one at a time. Put in equation form, I obtained this statistic for each candidate for all respondents (the values for each candidate for can be computed at once, obviously):

$$RIVS_A = MID_A / CAM_r$$

$$RIVS_B = MID_B / CAM_r$$

...

$$RIVS_k = MID_k / CAM_r$$

where  $RIVS_A$  is the share of the respondent’s ideological vote for Candidate A,  $RIVS_B$  is the share for Candidate B, and a similar variable is calculated for each candidate up to the final,  $k$ -th candidate in the field.

Note the theoretical importance of the Respondent Ideological Vote Share value: It is the share of the respondent's vote the candidate would expect to receive were that vote to be both 1) divisible between candidates, and 2) allocated proportionately to candidates on the basis only of the respondent's ideological placements.

Now hopefully the reader sees where this is leading. Taking the crosstabulation between respondents of the candidate's party and the Respondent Ideological Vote Share (RIVS) variable for each candidate yields the percentage of same-party respondents granting that candidate a given share of their vote – 100%, 50%, 33%, etc.

For example, in 2004, 4.8% of surveyed Democrats had a Dean RIVS of 100%. In other words, 4.8% of Democrats had placed Dean as the candidate closest to them ideologically, and placed no other candidate closer or equidistant. Gephardt had the highest percentage of Democrats with an RIVS of 100% for him, at 5.3%. For Kucinich the figure was 3.6%, for Clark 1.3%.

Now note something interesting: For Kerry the figure is only 2.8%. So Gephardt's percentage of those placing themselves closest to him was almost double Kerry's. Yet Kerry got more than twice Gephardt's vote. Perhaps electability was at work there.

Finally, multiplying each of these crosstab percentages by each RIVS value and summing those partial percentages into a single percentage created the final Ideological Vote Share score for each candidate. The results for Dean's 15.7% Ideological Vote Share are presented in Table 6-1 below to clarify the final calculation. Table A-11 about here

That brings us to the variable used in the Explanatory Model, Ideological Crowding. Ideological Crowding is just 1-Ideological Vote Share, that is, it is calculated as:

$$\begin{aligned} IC_A &= 1 - IVS_A \\ IC_B &= 1 - IVS_B \\ \dots \\ IC_k &= 1 - IVS_k \end{aligned}$$

Where  $IC_A$  is Candidate A's measure of Ideological Crowding,  $IVS_A$  is Candidate A's overall Ideological Vote Share among surveyed partisans,

and  $IC_B$  and  $IVS_B$  are the same measures for Candidate B, and a similar variable is calculated for each candidate up to the final,  $k$ -th candidate in the field.

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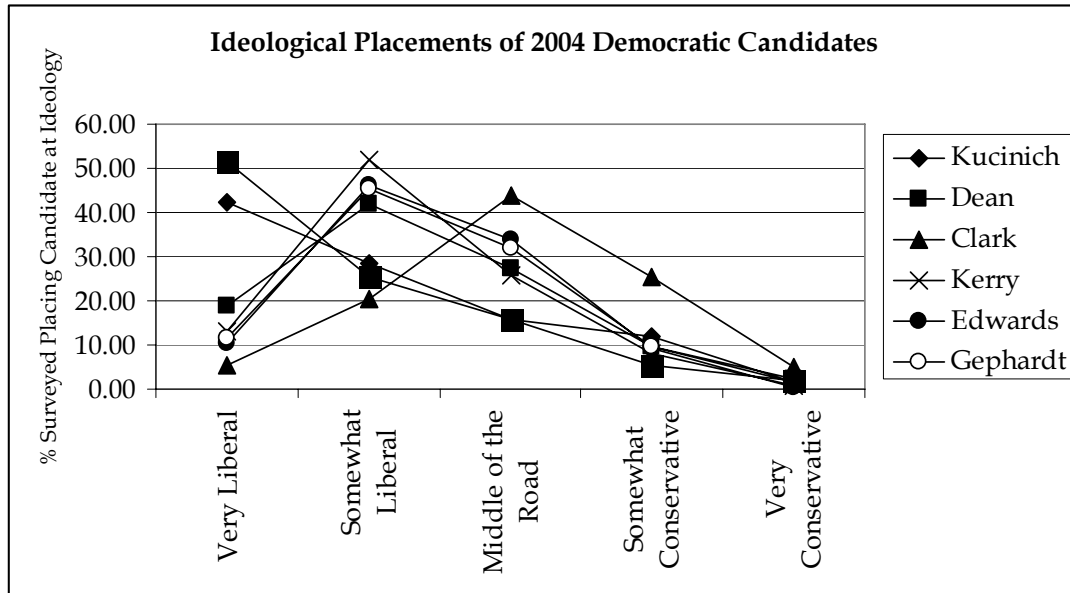
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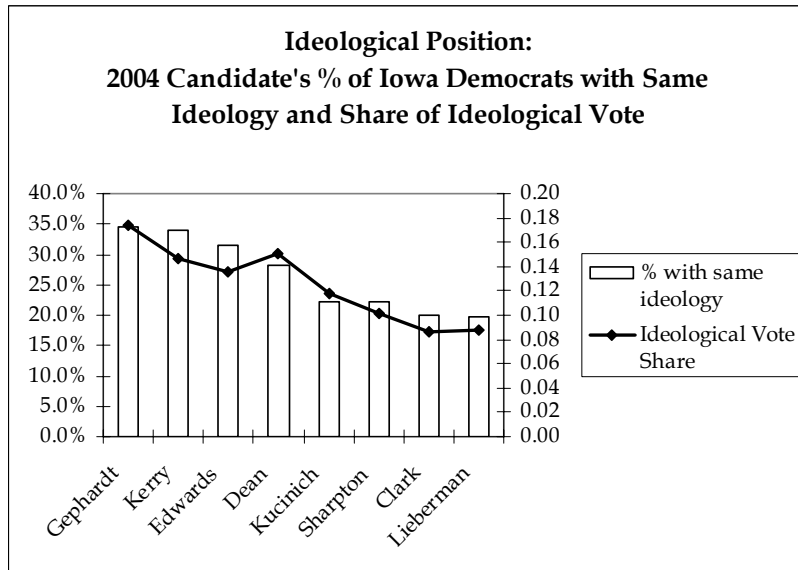
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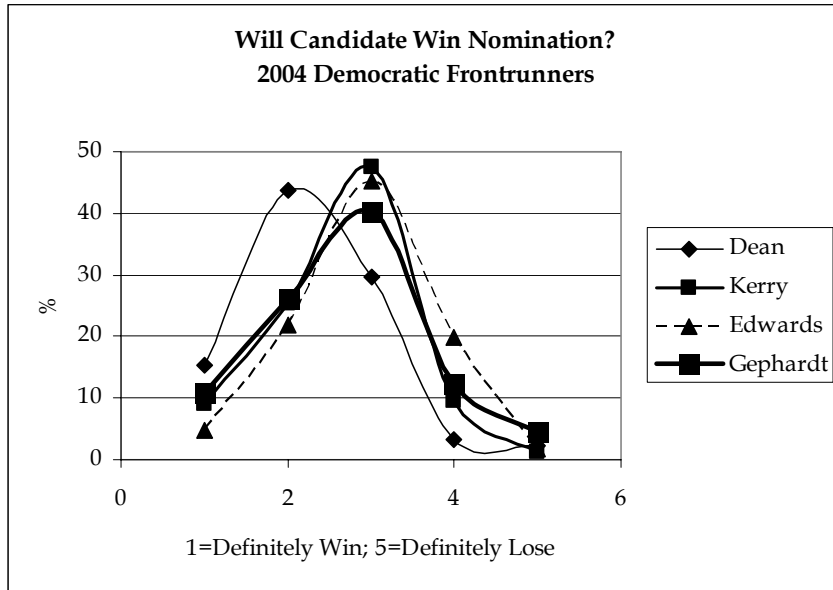
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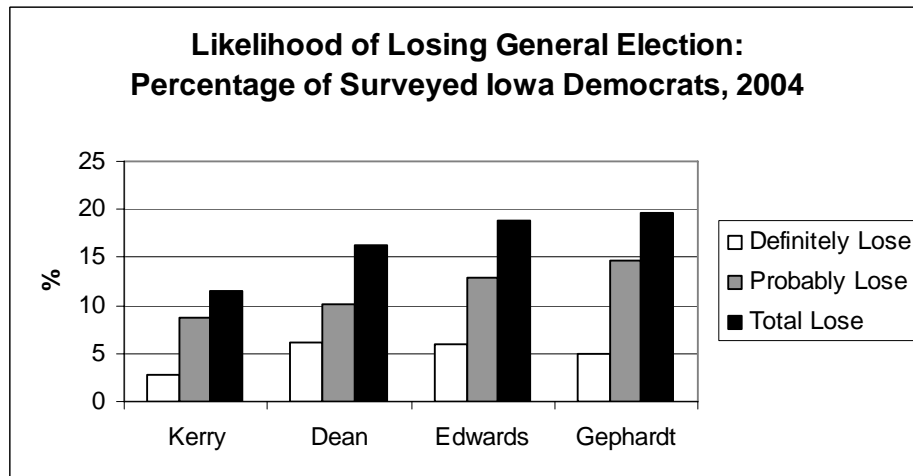
**Figure 1: Ideological Placement Scores.** Percentages of surveyed Democrats placing each of the 2004 Democratic Candidates at each ideological point.



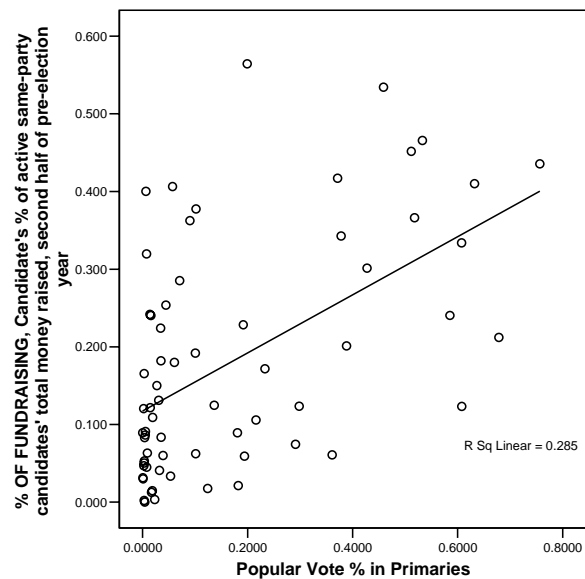
**Figure 2: Relative Ideological Position.** Percentages of surveyed Democrats placing each of the 2004 Candidates at the same ideological point as themselves, and share of the surveyed voters for whom a candidate is ranked ideologically closest with ties allocated proportionally.



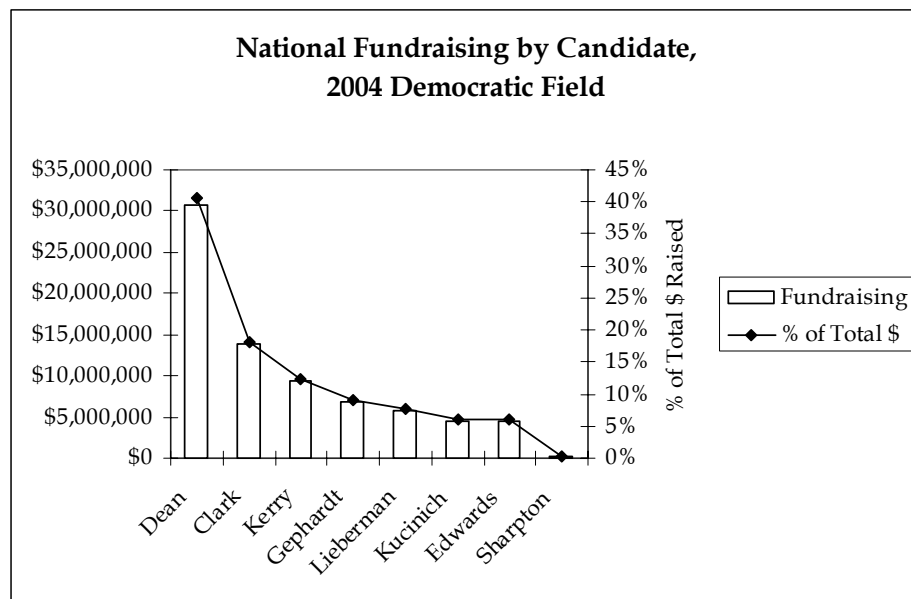
**Figure 3: Likelihood of Top Candidates Winning Nomination.** Percentages of surveyed Democrats placing each of the top four 2004 Candidates at a given likelihood of winning.



**Figure 4: Likelihood of Top Candidates Losing General Election.** Percentages of surveyed Democrats placing each of the top four 2004 Candidates at a given likelihood of losing.



**Figure 5: Relative Fundraising Performance and Primary Popular Vote Share**



**Figure 6: Candidates' National Fundraising, Real \$ and % of Total.** Fundraising totals in the third and fourth quarters of 2003 (the pre-Caucus year) in real dollars and percentages of the sum of those totals, by candidate.

<b>Table 1: Iowa Explanatory Model Estimation</b>			
<i>Strategic Voting Factors</i>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
IDEOLOGICAL CROWDING	-0.849*	(0.369)	0.025
ELECTABILITY	0.248*	(0.118)	0.041
VIABILITY PERCEPTION	0.068	(0.140)	0.631
% of FUNDRAISING TOTAL	0.088	(0.148)	0.555
AFRICAN-AMERICAN	0.033	(0.049)	0.514
<i>Controls</i>			
UNDER 15% VIABILITY THRESHOLD	-0.075**	(0.027)	0.008
% DIFFERENCE FROM AVG. DAYS IN IOWA	0.061*	(0.028)	0.034
% OF TV SPENDING METRIC	-0.406*	(0.191)	0.039
% OF FIELD	-0.111	(0.326)	0.736
RALLY, ALL PARTISANS	-0.273	(0.239)	0.258
CONTACT, ALL PARTISANS	-0.026	(0.068)	0.709
% OF TOTAL PRESS COVERAGE	0.060	(0.101)	0.553
% of IOWA SPENDING TOTAL	0.254	(0.158)	0.114
HOME STATE NEXT TO IOWA	-0.003	(0.028)	0.913
INCUMBENT PRESIDENT	0.095	(0.090)	0.296
FAVORITE SON (HARKIN '92)	0.242	(0.123)	0.054
RUNNING VS. FAVORITE SON (VS. HARKIN '92)	-0.034	(0.048)	0.477
RUNNING VS. INCUMBENT PRESIDENT	0.045	(0.070)	0.521
(Constant)	0.775	(0.388)	0.051
Dependent Variable: CAUCUS VOTE SHARE %			

R<sup>2</sup>: .867      Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>: .820      F Statistic: 18.152      Sig. < .001