

November 21, 2019

Hawkeye Poll: Iowans support making caucuses more open, even if it means losing first-in-the-nation status

According to a recent Hawkeye Poll — conducted by University of Iowa faculty and students between Oct. 28 and Nov. 10 — a majority of Iowans (62.3%) support some sort of reform to improve access to the Iowa caucuses. Current rules require participants to attend a caucus in order to register their preference for their party's Presidential nominee. A proposal from the Iowa Democratic Party to improve access via virtual caucuses was not implemented due to concerns from the Democratic National Committee. Yet Iowans support a variety of reforms to improve access: when asked to indicate their top choice among three options, 21.6% selected access via telephone, 19.8% chose participation online, and 20.9% selected participation via absentee ballot. Just 33.3% wanted to keep things as they are and 4.4% did not report a preference.

Preferences varied by party. Democrats were more open to improving access, with 79.7% preferring one of the three reforms presented to no reform, with respondents evenly distributed across the three. A majority of Republicans (50.6%) preferred to keep their caucuses in their current format. The rest were also split evenly across the three options presented. While there was slight variation by respondent gender, younger voters expressed a greater preference for reform: 21% of those 18-24 wanted to keep things as they are compared to 33.9% among those 35-54, 40.1% of those 55-69, and 46.1% of those 70 and over. Support did not vary much with respondents' stated chances of attending the caucuses in 2020, except among Republicans. 54.6% of Republicans who reported they were very likely to caucus wanted to keep participation in person only, compared to 40% among those somewhat likely and 41.7% of those not very likely.

If the Iowa Republican or Democratic parties were to open up caucus access, it could lead to conflict with New Hampshire, which bills itself as the first-in-the-nation primary. When reminded that opening up the caucuses might jeopardize Iowa's first-in-the-nation status, respondents were split on whether Iowa voting first was important: 31.6% of respondents indicated it was very important, 32.1% that it was somewhat important, and 32.4% that it was not important. Republicans and Democrats had similar patterns of responses. And while a similar percentage of Independents also said it was important to go first (32%), they were more likely to say that staying first was not important (37.1%) compared to 28.6% for Democrats and 30.1% for Republicans.

Responses again varied little by gender, but support for staying first was higher among those aged 35-54 (32.4%) and 55-69 (37.3%) relative to those 18-34 (26.1%) and 70 and over (29.4%). Those most likely to caucus expressed the strongest preference for staying first: 39.6% said it was very important while 20.3% indicated it was not important compared to 32.4% overall who said it was important and 32.3% saying it was not at all important. This split was especially pronounced among likely Republican caucus-goers, with 53.5% saying it was very important for Iowa to stay first compared to 31.9% among all Republicans. 34.8% of very likely Democratic caucus-goers responded it was very important to stay first, similar to the 33.4% with that response among all Democrats.

The University of Iowa Department of Political Science has conducted the Hawkeye Poll since 2007. A series of national and state public opinion polls, this experience serves as an important learning opportunity for students. This year, over 250 undergraduate students from 12 classes had the opportunity to directly participate in the research production process and to acquire valuable career-

related knowledge about survey research and public polling in general. Learn more about the course at <https://now.uiowa.edu/2019/11/taking-iowas-pulse-hawkeye-poll>.

Respondent Identification: A random sample of registered voters was acquired with 40% household landline numbers and 60% mobile phone numbers. Sample included 50% registered Democrats, 25% registered Republicans, and 25% registered with No Party, drawn equally from each of Iowa's four Congressional districts. All respondents who stated they were over age 18 and willing to participate in the survey were included.

Weighting: Reported results are weighted by age, sex, education, party registration, and congressional district.

About the Hawkeye Poll

1288 registered voters in Iowa were surveyed by telephone from Oct. 28 – Nov. 10, 2019 with a margin of error +/-2.8%.

The poll was conducted by the Hawkeye Poll Cooperative, comprised of University of Iowa faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in the political science and sociology departments. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project, which uses the facilities of the Iowa Social Science Research Center directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science and faculty advisor for the poll. The Department of Political Science, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the University of Iowa Public Policy Center fund the poll.

CONTACT:

Frederick Boehmke, Hawkeye Poll, 319-335-2342 (office), 716-866-9277 (cell), frederick-boehmke@uiowa.edu

Jielu Yao, Hawkeye Poll, 319-335-3381 (office), jielu-yao@uiowa.edu