



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

### The Youth Vote in the 2008 Iowa Caucus

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In the Iowa presidential caucuses conducted on January 3, 2008, young citizens made news by turning out in record numbers and supporting both winners—Senator Barack Obama (D) and Governor Mike Huckabee (R)—by the largest margins of any age group. They were widely considered key to the caucus results.

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, CIRCLE released estimates of the youth turnout in the Iowa caucuses. CIRCLE reported that 13 percent of eligible Iowans under the age of 30 had participated in the Iowa caucuses. The youth turnout rate rose to 13 percent in 2008 from 4 percent in 2004 and 3 percent in 2000. Young voters expanded as a proportion of all caucus-goers, *and* the total number of Iowans who caucused grew, producing the three-fold increase in youth participation.

This fact sheet contains additional analysis of youth caucus-goers in Iowa, based on the entrance polls conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.<sup>2</sup>

#### I. Turnout of under-25-year-olds and those between age 25 and 29



**Table 1 - Iowa Presidential Caucus Participation  
(combining both parties)<sup>3</sup>**

Caucus Year	Turnout Rate: Age 17-24	Turnout Rate: Age 25-29	Turnout Rate: Age 30 and Over	Overall Turnout Rate
<b>2008</b>	<b>15 percent</b>	<b>9 percent</b>	<b>17 percent</b>	<b>16 percent</b>
2004 <sup>4</sup>	5 percent	2 percent	8 percent	5 percent
2000 <sup>5</sup>	N/A	N/A	9 percent	8 percent

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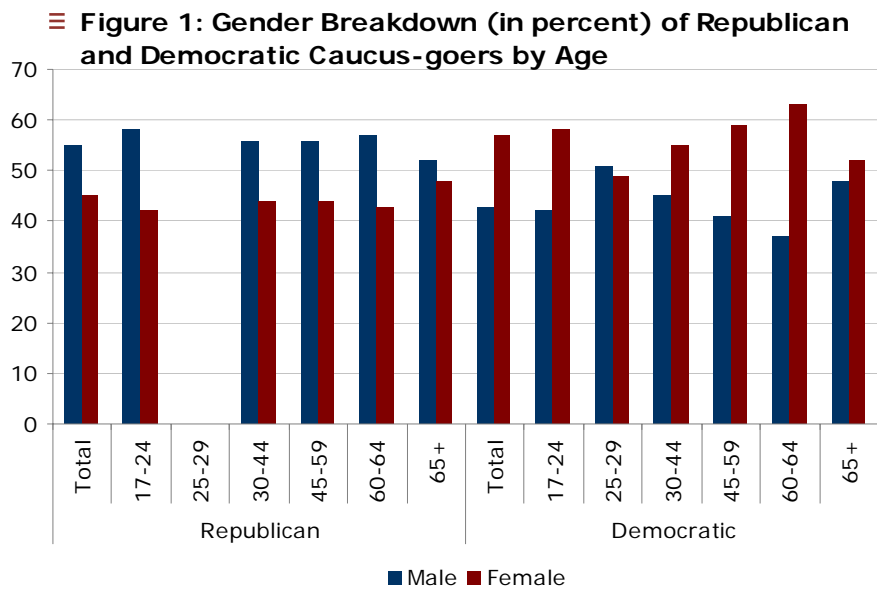
## II. The Democratic Caucus

### a. demographics

The under-25 Democratic caucus-goers were somewhat more racially and ethnically diverse than other age groups and than the state of Iowa as a whole. Ninety-two percent called themselves White; 4 percent called themselves Black; and 4 percent categorized as “other” in the entrance polls. In 2007, 17-24 year olds were 88 percent non-Hispanic White, 2 percent non-Hispanic black, and 10 percent identified as a race other than white or black. In that same year for all ages, 89 percent of Iowans identified as non-Hispanic White, 2 percent as non-Hispanic Black, and 9 percent as “other.”<sup>6</sup>

A majority of young Democratic caucus-goers were female, which was also true of the whole Democratic electorate. The opposite was true in the Republican caucus: the majority of young Republican caucus-goers were male. See Figure 1.

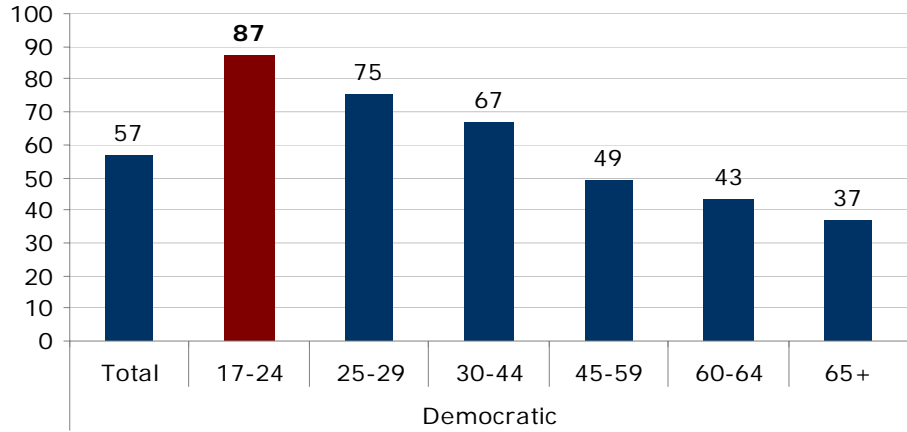
Of all age groups, the under-25s and the 25-29s were the least likely to come from union households. The under-25s were the most likely to live in neighborhoods described as “very upscale” (56 percent of them) or “upscale” (31 percent). In this respect, they were representative of the whole Democratic caucus population, of whom almost three quarters lived in upscale or very upscale zip codes. In contrast, young Republican caucus-goers were much *less* likely than young Democratic caucus-goers to live in “upscale” (25 percent) or “very upscale” (19 percent) zip codes (see page 4 for more information).<sup>7</sup>



### Young Voters More Likely to be First Time Caucus-Goers

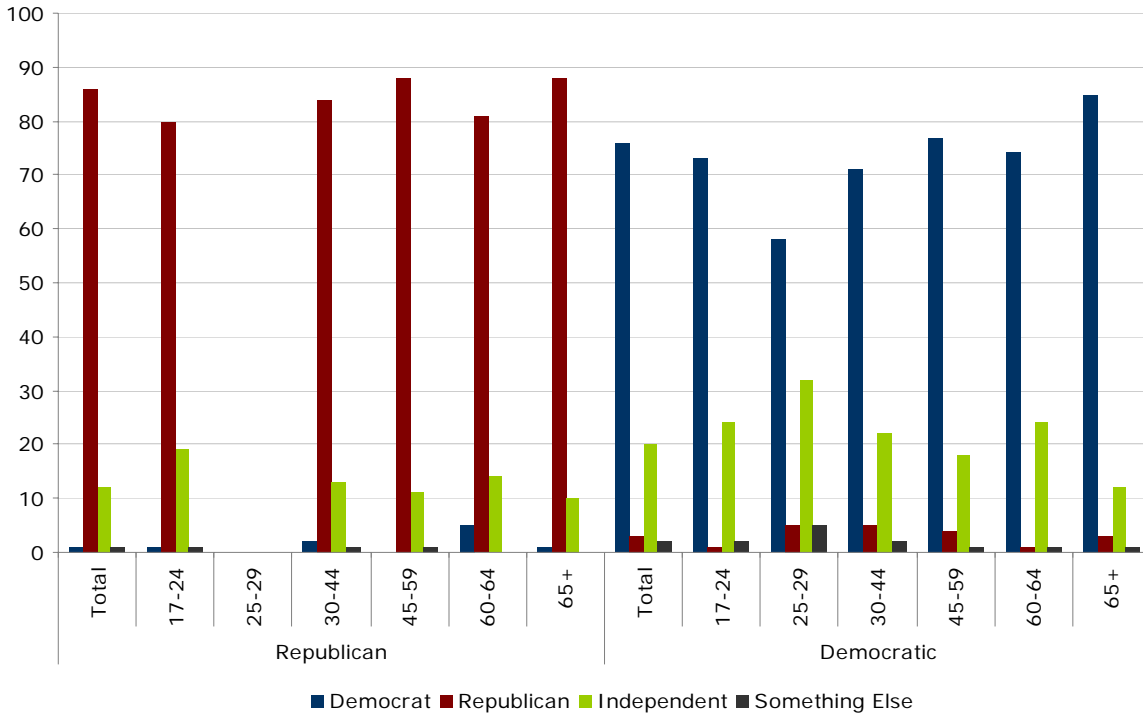
Over half of all caucus-goers reported that this was the first caucus they had ever attended. Young voters were most likely to be first-time caucus-goers. Eighty-seven percent of the under-25s said this was their first caucus. Seventy-five percent of those in 25-29 age range said it was their first caucus (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of First-time Democratic Caucus-Goers by Age



### More Young Independents Attend the Democratic Caucus

Figure 3: Political Party Identification (in percent) by Party Caucus and Age



Of all caucus goers, young people who identified as "Independent" were more likely to attend the Democratic caucuses than the Republican caucuses. This translated

into roughly 9,500 votes cast by young Independents (ages 17 to 24) in the Democratic caucuses and nearly 2,000 votes cast by young Independents in the Republican caucuses.<sup>8</sup> 24 percent of 17-to-24 year-olds Democratic caucus goers said that they usually think of themselves as "Independent" compared to 19 percent of 17-to-24 year-olds who attended the Republican caucuses.

### **b. Choices and opinions**

Senator Barack Obama won the Democratic caucus and drew his strongest support from young citizens. He performed exactly as well among the 17-24s and the 25-29s, drawing 57 percent support from each group.

The 25-29s who participated in the Democratic caucus were more Independent than any other age group (32 percent of them were Independents, compared to 20 percent of all Democratic caucus-goers). The under-25s, however, were less likely to call themselves Independents (24 percent).

Younger Democratic caucus-goers basically had the same issue priorities as other age groups. For all ages, the economy was the top choice for 35 percent; the war in Iraq, for 35 percent, and health care, for 27 percent. For those under age 25, the war was the top choice for 34 percent; the economy, for 33 percent; and health care, for 32 percent. Nevertheless, the under-25s were considerably more liberal than other age groups: 54 percent of all caucus-goers said they were "liberal," compared to 77 percent of the under-25s. They were also most interested in "change" (64 percent of the under-25s cited the ability to bring about change, vs. 52 percent of all Democratic caucus-goers. The over-65s were twice as interested in "experience" as the under-25s (27 percent vs 13 percent).

## **III. The Republican Caucus**

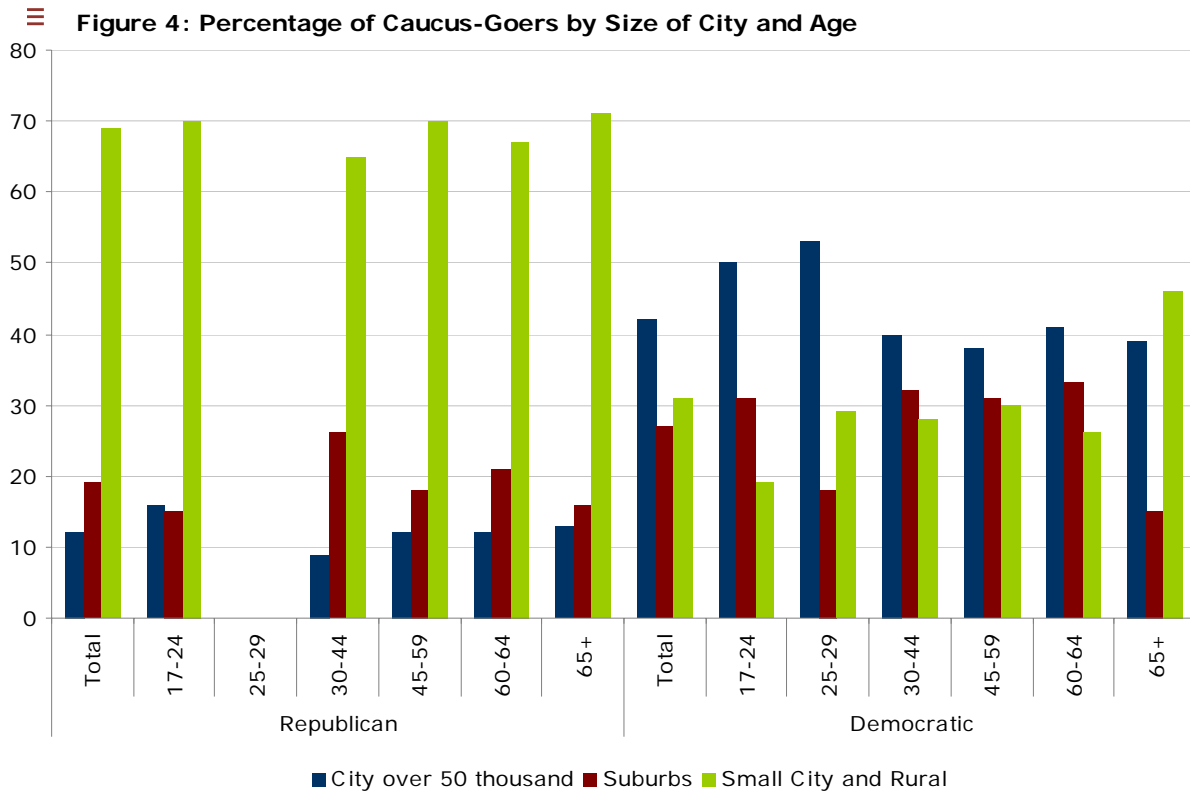
### **a. Demographics**

Sixty percent of the under-25s were "born again or evangelical Christians," precisely the same proportion as in the whole GOP caucus population. Nineteen percent were Independents, compared to 12 percent of Republican caucus-goers and 23 percent of all caucus-goers.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, Republican caucus-goers were much *less* likely than Democratic caucus-goers to live in "upscale" or "very upscale" zip codes, and much more likely to live in "downscale" or "very downscale" zip codes. By this measure, Republican caucus-goers under the age of 25 were better off than older Republican caucus-goers. Forty-four percent of the under-25s lived in upscale or very upscale districts. They were nevertheless less affluent than their counterparts in the Democratic caucus, of which 87 percent of the under-25s came from upscale or very upscale zip codes.

Young people who attended the Republican caucuses were much more likely to come from small cities or rural areas than young people who attended the Democratic caucuses. Seventy percent of 17-to-24 year-olds who attended the

Republican caucuses were from a small city or rural area compared to just 19 percent of 17-to-24 year-olds who attended the Democratic caucuses.



## b. Choices and opinions

Republican caucus-goers under the age of 25 had different issue priorities from other age groups.



**Table 2 - Top Issue Among Republican Caucus-Goers**

	Under the Age of 25	All Ages
The economy	<b>33 percent</b>	26 percent
Illegal immigration	28 percent	33 percent
The war in Iraq	26 percent	17 percent
Terrorism	10 percent	21 percent

The youngest Republicans were considerably less likely to describe themselves as “enthusiastic” about the Bush Administration: 11 percent of under-25s versus 20 percent of all Republican Caucus goers. They were less likely to describe themselves as very conservative than other Republican caucus-goers (30 percent v. 45 percent), and more were self-described “moderates.” They were less enthusiastic about their choice in the Iowa Caucus. Just over half (54 percent strongly supported their candidate, compared to 64 percent of all Republican Caucus-goers).

## APPENDIX

Table A shows the recent trends in Iowa caucus participation for under-30s.



**Table A - Iowa Presidential Caucus Participation  
17-to-29-Year-Old Citizens**

Caucus Year	Youth Turnout Rate	Turnout Rate of Age 30 and Over	Overall Turnout Rate	Number of Youth Who Caucused	Youth as Share of Caucus-goers
<b>2008</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>64,080</b>	<b>19%</b>
2004	4%	8%	5%	20,740	17%
2000	3%	9%	8%	14,940	9%

Table B shows the trends separately for the Democratic and Republican caucuses.



**Table B - Iowa Presidential Caucus Participation  
By Party  
17-to-29-Year-Old Citizens**

Political Party	Caucus Year	Number of Caucus-goers	Share of Caucus-goers
Democratic	<b>2008</b>	<b>46,640</b>	<b>22%</b>
	2004	20,740	17%
Republican	<b>2008</b>	<b>10,235</b>	<b>11%</b>
	2004 <sup>10</sup>	N/A	N/A

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Senior Research Associate, Director, and Research Associate, respectively. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all data presented in this fact sheet come from the 2008 IA National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.

<sup>3</sup> The share of caucus goers is obtained from the IA National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International (2008 & 2004) and IA entrance polls conducted by Voter News Services (2000). The numbers of votes cast are obtained from the Associated Press at 2 am on January 4. Estimated voter turnout is obtained by taking the estimated number of votes cast and dividing it by the estimated population of 17-to-29-year-old citizens and citizens over the age of 30 from the Current Population Survey.

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<sup>4</sup> 2004 statistics only include the Democratic Caucus. There was no Republican Caucus in 2004, because President George W. Bush was an incumbent and the GOP nomination.

<sup>5</sup> We are unable to calculate the voter turnout rate for the younger age groups in 2005, because Day-after vote counts by party were not available from The New York Times. The vote counts by party are needed to calculate the overall 17-24 and 25-29 share in 2000, numbers that are required to estimate the voter turnout rate.

<sup>6</sup> CIRCLE's analysis of the 2007 Current Population Survey, March (Demographic) Supplement. "Other" category includes all races/ethnicities other than non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black.

<sup>7</sup> The entrance polls also provide information on family income supplied by the respondents, but this information is often not a good measure of socio-economic status [SES] for young people. For example, some college students have low current incomes but have high SES. The affluence of zip codes is also an imperfect measure of SES but we consider it more meaningful.

<sup>8</sup> Votes cast are estimated by multiplying the number of votes cast by 17-24 year-olds by the proportion of voters who identified as Independent from the 2008 IA Republican and Democratic National Election Pool Surveys conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.

<sup>9</sup> To estimate the percentage of Independents in both party caucuses, we first estimate the number of Independents in each party's caucus. Next, we add the estimated number of Independents from both caucuses and divide that sum by the total number of caucus-goers from both parties.

<sup>10</sup> See Note 4.