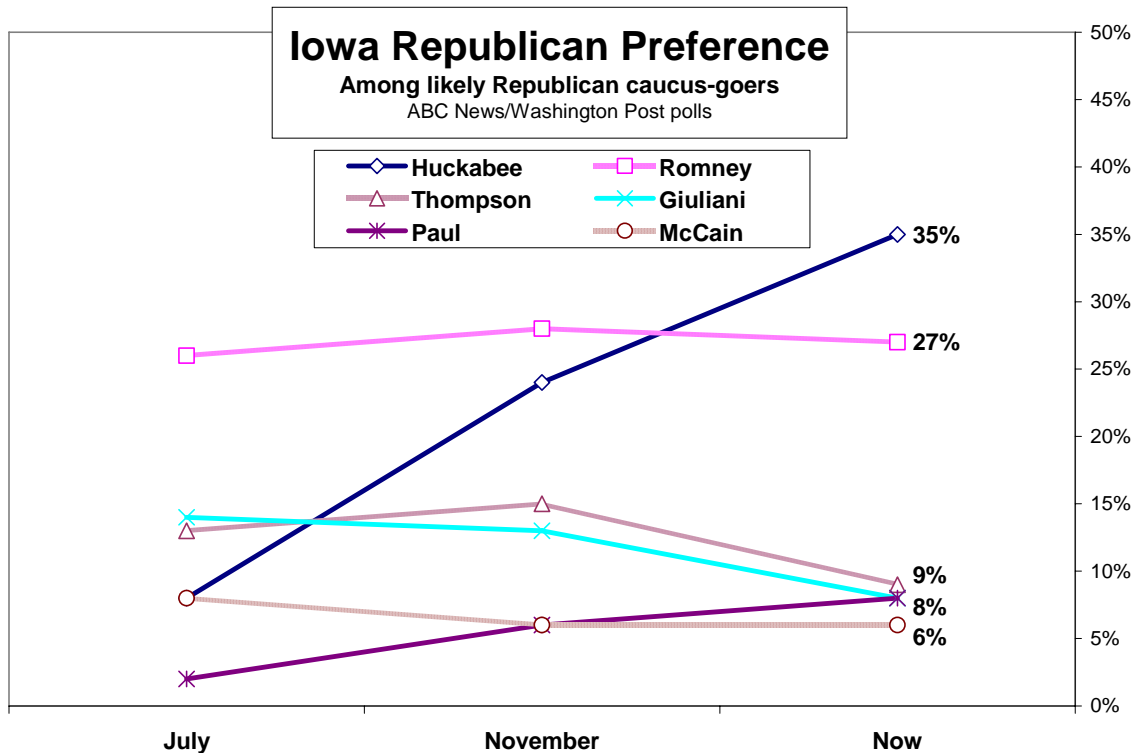


Religion Drives Iowa GOP Race, Lifting Huckabee into the Lead

Religion is driving the Republican presidential race in Iowa, with Mike Huckabee taking the lead on the strength of overwhelming support from evangelical voters – and Mitt Romney falling behind on the basis of concerns about his Mormon faith.

Huckabee, who jumped into contention in Iowa a month ago, has soared further among his key groups – weekly churchgoers, abortion opponents, conservatives, and above all, evangelical Protestants, who account for nearly four in 10 likely caucus-goers. They now favor Huckabee over Romney by a 3-1 margin, 57 percent to 19 percent.

Romney, for his part, holds a slight lead among the nearly eight in 10 Iowa Republicans who say his religion doesn't matter in their vote. But the remaining two in 10 say his Mormon religion makes them less likely to support him – and they overwhelmingly favor Huckabee, by a large enough margin to put him in front overall.

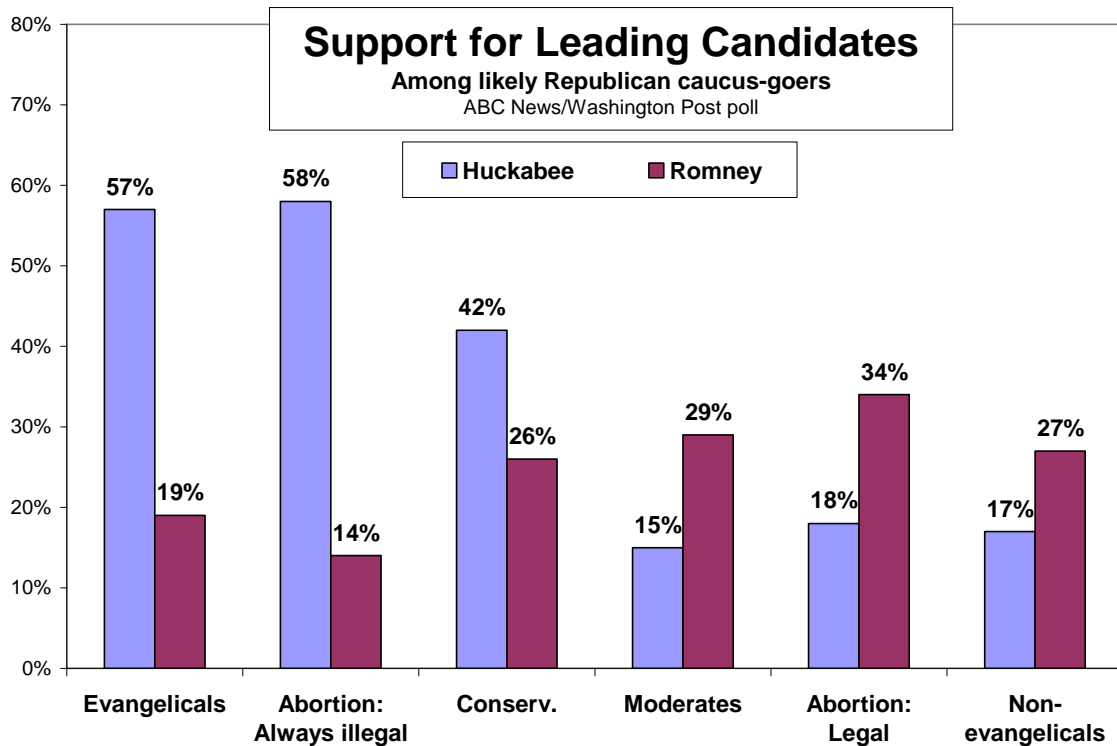


The contest between these two has sucked the oxygen out of the rest of the GOP field in Iowa, with Rudy Giuliani and Fred Thompson both down to single-digit support in this

ABC News/Washington Post poll, alongside John McCain (who already was there) and the lesser-known Ron Paul. Current third place is truly anyone’s guess.

Huckabee, governor of Arkansas and a Baptist minister, has experienced a remarkable surge in Iowa, from 8 percent support in July to 24 percent last month and 35 percent now. Romney, the longtime Iowa front-runner, has been flat across this period; he has 27 percent support among likely caucus-goers.

It’s the not-Romney vote that’s coalesced behind Huckabee. Beyond evangelicals (but including many of them) he now leads among weekly churchgoers by a 2-1 margin, 51-23 percent; his support in this group rose by 17 points in the last month. He leads by 4-1 among the strongest abortion opponents, with a 22-point gain in support. And among conservatives overall – a group that accounts for seven in 10 likely caucus-goers in Iowa – Huckabee now leads Romney by 16 points. Last month they were essentially even.



In another striking result, Huckabee’s latest gains, in the past month, have come almost exclusively among women – and women are among the groups more likely to express objections to Romney’s Mormon faith. The Huckabee-Romney race currently is a dead heat among men – but Huckabee leads by 18 points among women.

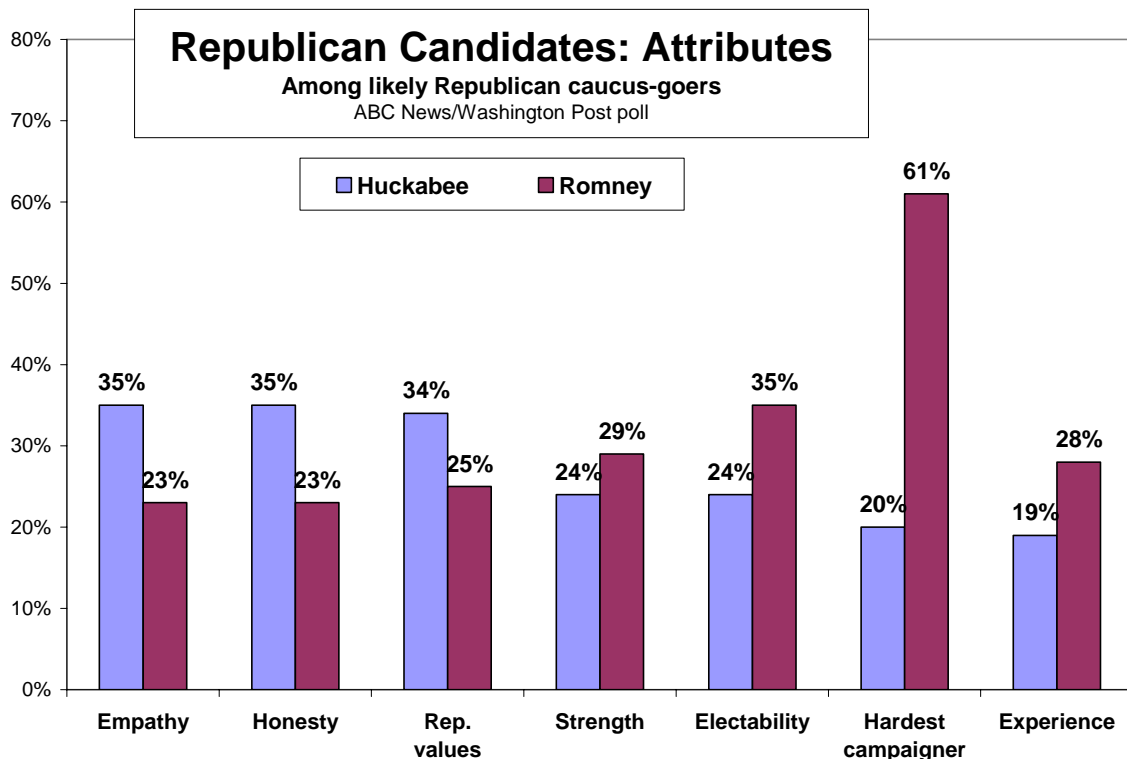
DECIDED? – Huckabee has firmer backing overall – 60 percent of his supporters say they’ve definitely made up their minds, compared with 49 percent of Romney’s – and he’s been wearing well since exploding onto the radar last month. By more than 2-1 (37

percent vs. 15 percent) Iowa Republicans say the more they hear about Huckabee, the more they like him.

The race certainly is not over. Neither Huckabee nor Romney has majority high-level enthusiasm behind his candidacy. Among all likely caucus-goers, 42 percent say they may yet change their minds, and just over two in 10 say there’s a good chance of it – more than enough to keep the eventual outcome, now two weeks off, uncertain.

Trailing Huckabee must be a bitter pill for Romney, given the fact that the vast majority of likely caucus-goers – 61 percent – continue to say it’s Romney who’s campaigned hardest in their state. (He’s racked up more than 160 campaign events in Iowa this year, vs. just over 100 by Huckabee.) And indeed Romney retains the advantage in some groups – notably seniors, moderates, non-evangelical Protestants, those who favor legal abortion and, as noted, those who say his religion makes no difference in their choice.

ATTRIBUTES – Beyond the role of religion, Huckabee’s advantage seems to relate more to his personal attributes than to specific issues. Of six individual issues tested in this poll, he leads in trust to handle just one, “social issues such as abortion and gay civil unions.” Of seven personal attributes, he leads on three: empathy, best representing his party’s “core values” and honesty and trustworthiness.

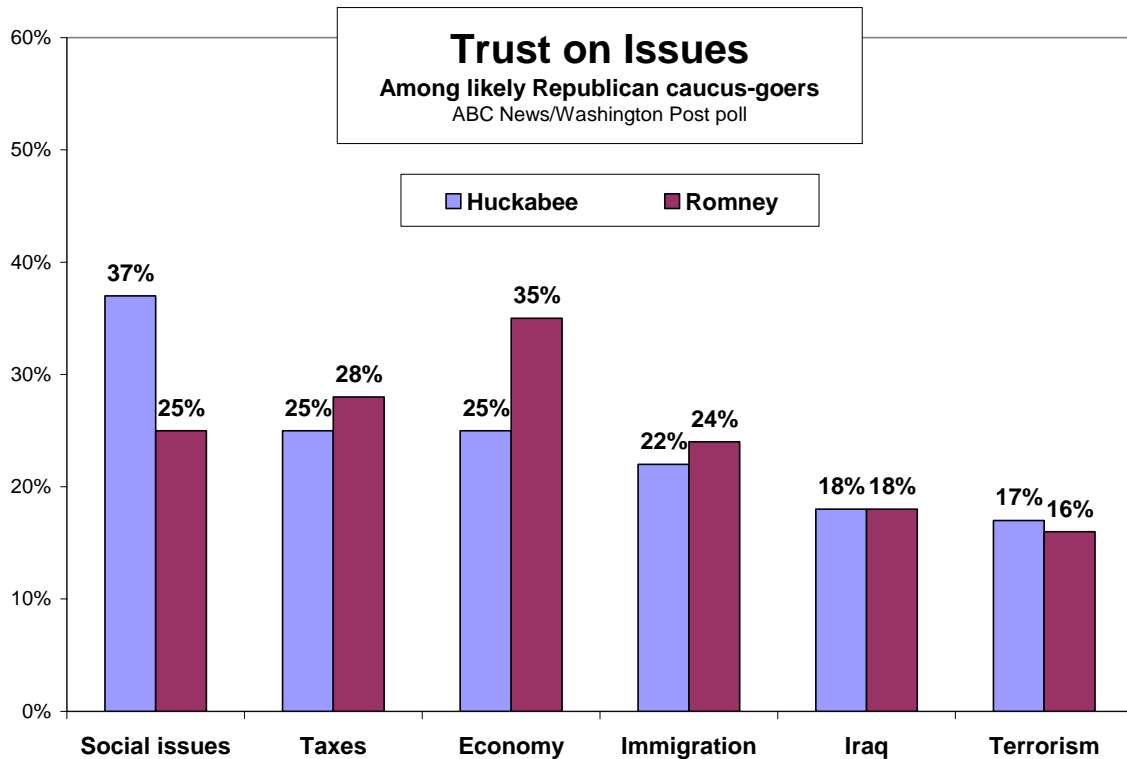


Huckabee has gained on these and others, with 7- to 12-point advances. Giuliani has suffered the most, losing 13 points on electability, 11 points as the “strongest leader” and a scant 5 points on having the best experience.

Romney leads Huckabee by a close 5 points as the strongest leader, by 9 points on experience – and by 11 points as having the best chance to win in November. Those attributes likely will figure in Romney’s closing arguments.

ISSUES – Huckabee, as noted, leads in trust to handle social issues such as abortion and gay civil unions. He and Romney are essentially even in trust to handle the Iraq war, taxes, immigration and terrorism (with a slight lead for Giuliani on terrorism and for McCain on Iraq). In trust to handle the economy, Romney holds a 10-point advantage.

Nonetheless, Huckabee has gained on the issues. Generally, where he now runs evenly with Romney he’d trailed just a month ago by anywhere from 5 to 14 points. The biggest gain for Huckabee is in trust to handle immigration, now leading as the most important issue cited by Iowa Republicans.



The issues list cited by likely Republican caucus-goers in Iowa is a varied (or perhaps fragmented) one, with nine issues receiving double-digit mentions as one of the two top concerns. Last month immigration and the war in Iraq ranked evenly as top concerns; now immigration has gained and the war’s slid back as a concern, as have health care and the broader U.S. campaign against terrorism.

Comparison with top issues among Democratic likely caucus-goers shows the very broad differences between these groups. Democrats have just four top issues – the Iraq war, health care, the economy and education. Several issues on the Republicans’ list (e.g.,

immigration, terrorism, abortion, taxes, morals and values) barely register on the Democrats’; likewise the Democrats’ top issues get far fewer mentions by Republicans.

	Two top issues among likely caucus-goers		
	Republicans		For comparison:
	Now	11/18	Democrats Now
Immigration	30%	24%	6%
Iraq	19	24	48
Terrorism	17	21	3
Abortion	15	15	<1
Economy	14	16	24
Taxes	14	13	2
Morals/values	11	10	2
Health care	10	16	46
Ethics/honesty	10	5	5
Education	5	2	16

RELIGION – The role of religion in the Iowa race – also reflected in the last ABC/Post national poll – is worth a further look. On Romney’s religion, 36 percent of evangelicals say they’re less likely to vote for him because of his Mormonism – far more than the number of non-evangelical Protestants (7 percent) who say so.

Other pro-Huckabee groups – weekly churchgoers, abortion opponents and conservatives overall – also are more apt than their counterparts to say they’re less likely to support a Mormon. So, as noted, are women – 27 percent less likely, compared with 15 percent of men. National data among Republican and Republican-leaning men and women are almost identical. One reason: Women are about 10 points more likely to be evangelicals.

Looking at the Iowa numbers another way, 41 percent of Huckabee’s supporters say they’re less likely to support Romney because he’s a Mormon. A regression equation finds that being an evangelical is the single most dominant predictor of his support.

As in any low-turnout event, who actually shows up on caucus day will be an important element in the outcome. In this survey, 11 percent of Iowans were identified as likely Republican caucus-goers; actual turnout in past years has been about 5 percent. A further challenge for Romney is that evangelicals can be a motivated, high-turnout group.

Concerns about a Mormon candidate are reflected in national data as well; in an ABC/Post poll last week, 21 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said they were less likely to support a Mormon candidate – down from 30 percent last summer, but essentially matching the current number in Iowa. Again, evangelicals were most apt to say so, and Huckabee’s national support among evangelicals has surged, from 13 percent in November to a field-leading 29 percent last week.

Such dynamics are less a factor in New Hampshire, in part because there are far fewer evangelicals there. Evangelical Protestants account for 37 percent of likely caucus-goers

in Iowa, and an identical 37 percent of likely Republican primary voters nationally, but just 15 percent in New Hampshire, where Romney has continued to lead.

TONE – Finally, there’s a positive note in Iowans’ reactions to the campaign. Sixty-six percent of likely Republican caucus-goers say the race has been mostly positive in tone; an additional 29 percent say it’s been a mix of positive and negative – leaving just 3 percent who say it’s been mostly a negative campaign. On this, at least, Iowa Democrats feel about the same.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Dec. 13-17, 2007, among a random sample of 501 adults likely to vote in the Iowa Republican caucuses. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abncnews.com/pollingunit>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Vote registration.

2. How closely are you following the 2008 presidential campaign: very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not closely at all?

	---- Closely -----			---- Not closely -----			No
	NET	Very	Smwt.	NET	Not too	At all	opinion
12/17/07	95	51	44	5	4	1	0
11/18/07	93	48	44	7	6	1	0
7/31/07	88	35	53	12	10	2	0

3. Likelihood of attending caucus.

4. Choice of caucus.

5-14. Previously released.

15. If the Republican caucus were being held today, and the candidates were: (Rudy Giuliani, John McCain, Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Duncan Hunter, Tom Tancredo, Ron Paul, and Fred Thompson), who would you support?

NET LEANED VOTE:

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	8	13	14
John McCain	6	6	8
Mitt Romney	27	28	26
Mike Huckabee	35	24	8

Duncan Hunter	1	1	1
Tom Tancredo	2	2	5
Ron Paul	8	6	2
Fred Thompson	9	15	13
Other (vol.)	0	0	1
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	4
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	5
None of these (vol.)	1	1	4
No opinion	4	4	7

16. (IF NAMED CANDIDATE) Will you definitely support (NAME) as your first choice, or is there a chance you could change your mind and support someone else as your first choice? (IF CHANCE CHANGE MIND) Is there a good chance you'll change your mind, or would you say it's pretty unlikely?

	Definitely support	-Chance change mind - NET	Unlikely	Good	No opinion
12/17/07	54	42	21	22	4
11/18/07	36	59	26	34	5
Romney supporters					
12/17/07	49	47	28	19	5
11/18/07	29	70	28	42	2
Huckabee supporters					
12/17/07	60	36	19	16	4
11/18/07	48	45	19	26	7

17. (IF NAMED CANDIDATE) How enthusiastic are you about supporting (NAMED CANDIDATE) - very enthusiastic, fairly enthusiastic, not too enthusiastic, or not enthusiastic at all?

	--- Enthusiastic ---			---- Not enthusiastic ----			No opinion
	NET	Very	Fairly	NET	Not too	Not at all	
12/17/07	94	45	49	5	4	1	1
11/18/07	91	34	57	8	8	1	1
Romney supporters							
12/17/07	94	43	51	6	5	1	1
11/18/07	94	28	65	6	6	0	0
Huckabee supporters							
12/17/07	97	48	49	3	3	*	0
11/18/07	94	50	44	4	4	0	2

18. What is the single most important issue in your choice for the Republican candidate for president? (IF MENTIONED MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE) Is there one other issue that's nearly as important?

Top two important issues combined

	12/17/07	11/18/07
Iraq/War in Iraq	19	24
Terrorism/National security	17	21
Economy/Jobs	14	16
Education	5	2
Environment	1	*
Health care	10	16
Ethics/Honesty/Corruption in government	10	5

Immigration/Illegal immigration	30	24
Abortion	15	15
Morals/Family values	11	10
Federal budget deficit	6	4
Housing/Mortgages	*	*
Social Security	2	4
Foreign policy	1	3
Iran/Situation in Iran	*	*
Taxes	14	13
Energy/Ethanol	1	2
Farming/Agriculture issues	1	0
None/Nothing	*	0
Other	18	15
No opinion	5	5

19. Regardless of who you may support, which of the Republican candidates do you think (ITEM)?

12/17/07 - Summary Table

	Giuliani	McCain	Romney	Huckabee	Thompson	Other/None/ No opinion
a. is the strongest leader	20	12	29	24	6	10
b. best understands the problems of people like you	5	6	23	35	8	23
c. is the most honest and trustworthy	3	7	23	35	10	22
d. has the best experience to be president	16	18	28	19	6	14
e. has campaigned the hardest in Iowa	3	1	61	20	1	13
f. has the best chance of getting elected president in November 2008	19	4	35	24	4	14
g. best reflects the core values of the Republican Party	5	8	25	34	11	18

Trend where available:

a. is the strongest leader

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	20	31	26
John McCain	12	6	11
Mitt Romney	29	30	23
Newt Gingrich	NA	NA	5
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	2
Mike Huckabee	24	12	4
Duncan Hunter	*	*	*
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	4
Tom Tancredo	1	1	2
Ron Paul	3	3	*
Fred Thompson	6	9	9
All of them	1	*	*
None of them	0	2	1
No opinion	5	6	12

b. best understands the problems of people like you

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	5	8	13
John McCain	6	5	7
Mitt Romney	23	21	21
Newt Gingrich	NA	NA	3
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	5
Mike Huckabee	35	25	10
Duncan Hunter	1	1	1
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	7
Tom Tancredo	2	5	4
Ron Paul	9	8	2
Fred Thompson	8	11	9
All of them	2	3	1
None of them	5	6	5
No opinion	5	7	12

c. is the most honest and trustworthy

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	3	4	7
John McCain	7	8	10
Mitt Romney	23	25	21
Newt Gingrich	NA	NA	3
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	5
Mike Huckabee	35	26	10
Duncan Hunter	*	1	1
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	7
Tom Tancredo	2	4	3
Ron Paul	8	6	2
Fred Thompson	10	13	11
All of them	2	3	1
None of them	4	5	5
No opinion	5	8	13

d. has the best experience to be president

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	16	21	22
John McCain	18	13	18
Mitt Romney	28	31	21
Newt Gingrich	NA	NA	8
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	4
Mike Huckabee	19	12	4
Duncan Hunter	1	*	*
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	3
Tom Tancredo	1	1	*
Ron Paul	3	3	1
Fred Thompson	6	9	5
All of them	1	1	*
None of them	3	2	2
No opinion	5	7	12

e. has campaigned the hardest in Iowa

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	3	4	6
John McCain	1	5	7
Mitt Romney	61	63	49
Newt Gingrich	NA	NA	1
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	5

Mike Huckabee	20	8	1
Duncan Hunter	*	0	0
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	4
Tom Tancredo	0	1	4
Ron Paul	2	2	*
Fred Thompson	1	3	*
All of them	2	2	2
None of them	1	3	5
No opinion	8	11	16

f. has the best chance of getting elected president in November 2008

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07
Rudy Giuliani	19	32	31
John McCain	4	3	5
Mitt Romney	35	30	26
Newt Gingrich	NA	NA	3
Tommy Thompson	NA	NA	3
Mike Huckabee	24	12	1
Duncan Hunter	*	0	0
Sam Brownback	NA	NA	2
Tom Tancredo	0	*	1
Ron Paul	2	2	1
Fred Thompson	4	8	11
All of them	*	*	0
None of them	1	4	3
No opinion	11	9	14

g. No trend.

20. Regardless of who you may support, who do you trust most to handle (ITEM)?

12/17/07 - Summary Table

	Giuliani	McCain	Romney	Huckabee	Thompson	Other/None/ No opinion
a. The economy	9	7	35	25	7	17
b. The U.S. campaign against terrorism	26	19	16	17	8	14
c. Immigration issues	9	7	24	22	10	28
d. The situation in Iraq	16	23	18	18	7	18
e. Social issues, such as abortion and gay civil unions	5	5	25	37	10	18
f. Taxes	8	7	28	25	10	22

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	12/17/07	11/18/07
Rudy Giuliani	9	15
John McCain	7	5
Mitt Romney	35	36
Mike Huckabee	25	16
Duncan Hunter	1	1
Tom Tancredo	1	1
Ron Paul	6	5
Fred Thompson	7	11
All of them	*	*
None of them	3	2

No opinion 7 8

b. The U.S. campaign against terrorism

	12/17/07	11/18/07
Rudy Giuliani	26	33
John McCain	19	15
Mitt Romney	16	15
Mike Huckabee	17	10
Duncan Hunter	1	1
Tom Tancredo	2	4
Ron Paul	4	5
Fred Thompson	8	11
All of them	1	1
None of them	1	2
No opinion	5	4

c. Immigration issues

	12/17/07	11/18/07
Rudy Giuliani	9	9
John McCain	7	9
Mitt Romney	24	27
Mike Huckabee	22	13
Duncan Hunter	1	1
Tom Tancredo	11	13
Ron Paul	7	6
Fred Thompson	10	11
All of them	1	1
None of them	2	3
No opinion	7	8

d. The situation in Iraq

	12/17/07	11/18/07	7/31/07*
Rudy Giuliani	16	19	17
John McCain	23	20	21
Mitt Romney	18	19	15
Mike Huckabee	18	12	3
Duncan Hunter	1	1	1
Tom Tancredo	2	3	1
Ron Paul	6	5	1
Fred Thompson	7	11	8
All of them	1	1	1
None of them	3	3	7
No opinion	6	6	16

* "Regardless of who you may support, which of the Republican candidates do you think is best able to handle the situation in Iraq?"

e. Social issues, such as abortion and gay civil unions

	12/17/07	11/18/07
Rudy Giuliani	5	11
John McCain	5	4
Mitt Romney	25	25
Mike Huckabee	37	28
Duncan Hunter	1	1
Tom Tancredo	1	2
Ron Paul	6	6
Fred Thompson	10	16
All of them	*	*
None of them	2	2
No opinion	8	6

f. No trend.

21. Regardless of who you may support, would you say the more you hear about Mike Huckabee the (more you like him), the more you hear about him the (less you like him), or has your opinion about him not changed lately one way or the other?

	More you like him	Less you like him	Opinion has not changed	No opinion
12/17/07	37	15	45	2

22. Does the fact that Mitt Romney is a Mormon make you (more) likely to vote for him, (less) likely to vote for him, or doesn't it make a difference in your vote?

	More likely	Less likely	Wouldn't matter	No opinion
12/17/07	2	20	78	*
Compare to: New Hampshire, likely Republican voters				
12/3/07	3	9	88	*
Compare to: National, leaned Republicans				
12/9/07	6	21	72	1

23. Have you attended any previous Iowa caucuses, or will this be your first caucus?

	Have attended	First caucus	No opinion
12/17/07	59	41	*
11/18/07	66	34	*
7/31/07	76	24	0

24. Previously released.

25. Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases or illegal in all cases?

	NET	Legal All cases	Legal Most cases	NET	Illegal Most cases	Illegal All cases	No opinion
12/17/07	23	7	16	74	49	25	3
11/18/07	23	6	17	75	51	24	1

26. Previously released.

27. How would you describe the tone of the Republican caucus campaign so far? Would you say it has been mostly positive, about equally positive and negative, or mostly negative in tone?

	Mostly positive	Equally positive and negative	Mostly negative	No opinion
12/17/07	66	29	3	2

END

