

New Mexico Caucus Voter Survey Executive Summary
July 20, 2004

On February 3, 2004, New Mexico Democrats held a Presidential Caucus. In reality, however, there was no caucusing among the Democratic rank-and-file in New Mexico this caucus was instead a state party run primary allowing for mail in votes and quick in and out voting. Regardless, this process placed New Mexico and a few other states (including South Carolina, Arizona, Missouri, Delaware, Oklahoma, and North Dakota) third in a string of Democratic nomination activities beginning with the Iowa Caucus on January 24 and the New Hampshire Primary on January 27. Historically, New Mexico had played at best a marginal role in selecting the party nominee because in most years New Mexico's presidential primary was held in June, often after the party nominee had already been selected by other voters in other states. Because Governor Bill Richardson wanted New Mexico to play a central role in the 2004 Democratic selection process he supported legislation that would allow the political parties to hold a presidential caucus, which the Democratic Party of New Mexico (DPNM) then chose to do. This change brought candidate and press attention to New Mexico as it had never seen before. Candidates spent money on TV advertising, held rallies, created grass roots organizations and the first Democratic presidential debate was held in Albuquerque on September 4, 2003.

Because of New Mexico's key position in the nomination process, researchers at the University of New Mexico wanted to learn about the decision making process used by these important voters and formulated a survey designed to do so. The DPNM kindly provided a sample of caucus voters. Nearly 4500 voters were then sent letters explaining their importance to the study and providing them with a URL (vote.unm.edu) at which they could take the survey. Voters also could request a mail survey and self addressed stamped envelope to return the survey by contacting us. And, a sub-sample of almost 250 respondents was sent mail surveys with the initial letter. All in all, about one-fifth (21%) of our respondents chose the mail survey over the internet survey. The total response rate was 23.4%.

Because we know the actual caucus results and had a variety of data from the party about respondents in our sample we were able to confirm its validity. For example, we found that the caucus outcome matched rather well the actual caucus results (see Table 1).¹

Table 1. Comparison of Actual and Sample Results of Caucus Outcome

Candidate	Actual Statewide Results	Survey Results
John Kerry	42.6	39.8
Wesley Clark	20.4	20.5
Howard Dean	16.4	16.2
John Edwards	11.2	13.0
Dennis Kucinich	5.5	6.8
Joe Lieberman	2.5	2.2

This executive summary focuses on three key questions. In Part 1, we examine how DPNM caucus voters feel about President George W. Bush. In Part 2, we examine how DPNM caucus voters learned about the candidates and their activities for the party nomination

¹ We also found that gender, age and city distributions of our respondents reflected well the underlying sample characteristics.

contenders. Lastly, in Part 3, we examine what factors were involved in voter decision making for the caucus. This summary only examines a small portion of the questions asked in the survey. Specific question wording and aggregated results or frequency information for each question has been placed as a link off our web site (vote.unm.edu).

Part I. NMDP Caucus Voters' Evaluations of President George W. Bush

We asked a number of questions to assess Democratic caucus voters' evaluations of George W. Bush. Given that we have a sample of Democratic Party activists it is not surprising to find that opinions of President Bush are not very favorable. This is clear in Tables 2 and 3, which show the percentage of respondents' evaluations of President Bush on a variety of presidential dimensions. In Table 2, which focuses on retrospective judgments of the President, we find that with the exception of his handling of the war on terror, over three-fifths of caucus voters strongly disapprove of the job he is doing as President, his handling of the economy and the war in Iraq. Even on the war on terror issue, where the President receives his highest marks, about one-half (48%) of caucus voters strongly disapprove and over one-quarter (28%) disapprove of his efforts.

Table 2. Percentage Approving and Disapproving of President Bush on Handling his Job as President, the Economy, the War in Iraq and the War of Terror

	Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Approve	Strongly Approve
Job as President	61.2	24.7	10.4	3.6
Handling of the Economy	68.0	22.1	8.2	1.6
The War in Iraq	67.9	20.1	8.9	3.2
The War on Terror	48.4	28.0	18.3	5.4

Likewise President Bush does not receive good marks on his ability to solve the nation's economic problems, to secure good relations with others, or to fight terrorism as shown in Table 3. As before, his highest marks are in his ability to fight terrorism, but even here only about one in seven (14%) see him as above average or outstanding. He also is seen as someone who "doesn't care about people like me" and his overall evaluation is very low. On overall evaluation only about 7% of respondents are willing to rate him above average or outstanding and about 10% rate him as average.

Table 3. Evaluations of President Bush in Percentages

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
Ability to solve Nation's Economic Problems	68.2	17.2	10.1	3.3	1.2
Ability to Secure Good relations with other nations	71.9	12.8	11.2	3.2	1.0
Ability to Fight Terrorism	46.3	19.2	20.4	10.3	3.8
Really Cares about People Like Me	72.8	12.9	9.2	3.5	1.6
Overall Evaluation	72.0	11.4	9.8	4.8	1.9

That being said, it is interesting to note that about 10% of our sample voted for George W. Bush in 2000 and their evaluations of Bush are significantly different from their Democratic counterparts that voted for Gore. This is shown in Table 4, which compares the mean score of Bush and Gore voters in 2000 on the above presidential dimensions.² A higher average score indicates stronger evaluations of the President. The difference between these two groups of voters is quite large across all the dimensions we examine with Bush voters always feeling much more favorable toward Bush than Gore voters. The largest difference is on overall evaluation where Bush voters evaluate Bush on average about 2 points higher than Gore voters.

Table 4. Average Evaluations between Bush and Gore Voters

	Bush Voters' Score	Gore Voters' Score	Difference
Job as President	2.98	1.40	1.58***
Handling of the Economy	2.66	1.29	1.37***
The War in Iraq	2.76	1.33	1.43***
The War on Terror	3.03	1.67	1.36***
Ability to solve Nation's Economic Problems	3.15	1.34	1.81***
Ability to Secure Good relations with other nations	2.90	1.33	1.57***
Ability to Fight Terrorism	3.68	1.89	1.80***
Really Cares about People Like Me	3.07	1.30	1.78***
Overall Evaluation	3.35	1.32	2.03***

*** $p < .001$

² Table 2 values were coded in the following way: 1 is strongly disapprove, 2 is disapprove, 3 is approve and 4 is strongly approve. Table 3 values were coded in the following way: 1 is poor, 2 is below average, 3 is average, 4 is above average and 5 is outstanding.

Part II. NMDP Caucus Voters Engagement in the Process

Our data indicate that caucus voters are very engaged in this year’s presidential election. Nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) of caucus voters indicated they were “very interested” in the presidential campaign this year. Such high levels of engagement may be due to the increased interest of candidates in New Mexico because of its key position as an early state in the nominating process. Moreover, because of New Mexico’s early position in the nomination contest it was expected that candidates, their campaigns and their supporters would engage in activities to help New Mexico caucus voters learn about the candidates in order to make a good choice. We were able to gauge this activity by asking a set of questions designed to tell us how voters learned about the candidates. Voters could indicate they learned about the candidates by meeting him personally, attending a meeting, being contacted by his campaign, receiving mail from him, receiving email from him, hearing his advertisements on TV or radio, obtaining information through the internet or through family and friends. We counted the number of “learning” events that each respondent participated in for each candidate. These results are presented in Table 5 first as a percentage for the number of learning events each respondent engaged in and second as a mean or the average learning events for each candidate. Interestingly, with the exception of Al Sharpton, who was not on the New Mexico ballot, the percentages clearly show that well over a majority of voters learned in a variety of ways about each candidate. Respondents learned the most about Senator Kerry with 92% of caucus voters participating in one or more learning events. Governor Dean was a close second with 89% of caucus voters participating in one or more learning events. General Clark and Senator Edwards many voters also learned about with 84% and 82% of caucus voters respectively engaging in at least one learning event.

The means, however, indicate that Governor Dean appeared to reach the most voters with the most learning events with an average learning score of 2.35. Dean is followed closely by Senator Kerry who had an average learning score of 2.28 on our 8 point scale. General Clark was next with a learning score of 1.90 and John Edwards was fourth with a learning score of 1.64. A closer look at the individual components of our index indicates that most voters learned about the candidates through TV and radio ads, but this is very closely followed by the personal contact methods of direct campaign contact and through friends and family members.

Table 5. Percentage and Average Breakdown of the Number of Ways New Mexico Caucus Voters Learned About Each Nomination Contender

No. of Learning Events	Wesley Clark	Howard Dean	John Edwards	Richard Gephardt	John Kerry	Dennis Kucinich	Joe Lieberman	Al Sharpton
0	15.7	10.7	18.4	40.8	8.0	40.7	41.9	58.3
1	31.1	25.8	36.3	38.5	26.4	34.8	39.7	33.4
2	24.1	20.9	23.0	11.3	27.5	13.1	12.7	6.7
3	14.9	20.4	14.0	5.5	18.8	6.3	4.0	1.3
4	8.0	11.9	4.5	2.7	10.2	2.2	1.1	.1
5 or more	6.2	10.3	3.8	1.2	9.1	2.9	0.7	.1
Average Learning	1.90	2.35	1.64	.95	2.28	1.06	.85	.52

We also asked voters about their engagement and activity in the process. Voters indicated whether they were active for a candidate in the following 8 possible ways: attended a public rally, fund-raising efforts, convincing others to support a candidate, canvassing, wrote a letter of support, advertised a candidate's name with a yard sign, bumper sticker, or button, contributed less than \$100 to a candidate's campaign, and contributed more than \$100 to a candidate's campaign. As before, we created an index of voter activity for each respondent. The aggregated responses are presented in Table 6. In general, activity performed on behalf of candidates was lower than learning activity. Caucus voters were most active for Senator Kerry with almost 30% of them engaging in at least 1 activity as shown by the percentages. General Clark and Governor Dean were nearly tied with slightly more than 15% of caucus voters engaging in some sort of campaign activity. Senator Edwards was next with about 10% of caucus voters doing something for him. Likewise the mean indicates that voters did the most overall activity for Senator Kerry with an average of nearly one-half activity for each respondent. Governor Dean was second with an average of .35 activities and General Clark with a close third with an average of over one-quarter activities.

Table 6. Mean and Percentage Breakdown of Overall Activities for the Party Candidates

No. of Learning Events	Wesley Clark	Howard Dean	John Edwards	Richard Gephardt	John Kerry	Dennis Kucinich	Joe Lieberman	Al Sharpton
0	83.6	83.8	89.6	96.6	71.9	92.1	97.5	99.3
1	11.4	9.2	7.7	2.7	18.7	4.4	2.2	0.5
2 or more	5.0	7.0	2.7	0.7	9.4	3.5	0.3	0.2
Average Learning	.27	.35	.16	.05	.46	.17	.03	.01

Part III. Decision-Making

Recall that prior to the New Mexico caucus event there were two nominating events. The first of these was the Iowa Caucus, held on January 24, and the second of these was the New Hampshire primary, held on January 27. In the Iowa caucus there was a surprise victory for Senator John Kerry who received 38% of the caucus vote. Senator John Edwards came in second there with 32% of the vote. This victory pushed Representative Gephardt out of the race and gave Kerry momentum going into the next round of primaries. In New Hampshire Kerry received another win with 39% of the vote. Dean, however, came in second and Clark came in third. This left Kerry in the strongest position going into the nominating events of 7 states, including New Mexico, scheduled for February 3, 2004.

The momentum Senator Kerry gained in those two prior contests clearly influenced New Mexico caucus voters. We asked voters, "How early did you make up your mind?" They could respond, "Before any nomination contest, shortly after the Iowa and/or New Hampshire contests in late January or within 3 days of the New Mexico caucus. Notice in Table 7 how voters who waited until after Iowa and New Hampshire clearly broke for Kerry. While only a little over one-quarter of voters had chosen Kerry before Iowa and New Hampshire about one-half of voters deciding after Iowa (54%) and within three days of the New Mexico Democratic Caucus

(44%) chose Kerry over the other nomination contenders. Among early deciders Kerry was in a close contest with General Clark and Governor Dean, but after Iowa and New Hampshire he was the clear winner.

Table 7. Crosstabulation of Vote Choice by Timing of Vote Decision

	Before Any Contest	After IA and/or NH	Within 3 days of NM
Clark	23.5	19.3	17.4
Dean	26.6	6.8	10.8
Edwards	10.8	12.1	16.5
Gephardt	1.7	2.3	.9
Kerry	26.6	53.8	44.4
Kucinich	8.6	4.2	6.9
Lieberman	2.2	1.5	3.0

The apparent wins in Iowa and New Hampshire and subsequent nominating contests clearly led New Mexican caucus voters to believe that Senator Kerry was the most electable Democratic candidate and the candidate most likely to beat President Bush. We asked voters to give their best estimate of the chances of each Democratic contender winning the presidential election and the President's chances of winning the election. Voters could rank each contender as: certain to lose (coded 1), probably will lose, more likely to lose than win, a toss up, more likely to win than lose, probably will win and certain to win (coded 7). By averaging the scores for each candidate we can compare their electability chances as perceived by New Mexico Democratic caucus voters. Higher scores indicate a higher chance of winning the election. Table 8 shows that Senator Kerry was the most likely candidate, indeed the only candidate likely, to defeat President Bush in the November election.

Table 8. Average Electability Scores for Nomination Contenders and President Bush in the November General Election by Party and Ranking

Candidate	Mean Electability Score
Bush	4.06
Kerry	5.02
Edwards	3.25
Clark	3.15
Gephardt	2.90
Dean	2.85
Lieberman	2.10
Kucinich	1.93
Sharpton	1.38

While we found no gender differences in voter choice, we did find that self-identified Hispanics and self-identified whites voted somewhat differently. For each group of voters the most likely choice was Senator Kerry, but this was much greater for Hispanic voters than for white voters. These results appear in Table 9, which shows the percentage of white and Hispanic voters for each candidate.

Table 9. Support for Democratic Contenders by Anglos and Hispanics.

Candidate	White Voters	Hispanic Voters
Clark	20.2	23.5
Dean	16.3	14.0
Edwards	13.8	8.9
Gephardt	1.6	1.7
Kerry	36.9	50.3
Kucinich	8.2	1.7
Lieberman	2.9	0.0

Interestingly we also asked voters to rank their preferences for their party's nomination from the following contenders: Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Kucinich, Lieberman and Sharpton. The rankings proved interesting considering the actual results of the caucus as shown in Table 1. While we found that Kerry was in the aggregate ranked the highest, the second place finisher Clark was not ranked second, instead voters ranked Senator Edwards, who came in a distant fourth, as their second preference for the party nomination. Table 10 shows these results. This suggests that the choice of Edwards as the vice presidential pick was perhaps a good one as he clearly is the most popular Democrat, next to Kerry, among those who ran for the nomination.

Table 10. Mean Ranking of Candidate Preference for Party Nomination from Highest Ranking (1) to Lowest (8)

Candidate	Mean Electability Score
Kerry	2.27
Edwards	2.91
Clark	3.71
Dean	4.09
Gephardt	5.02
Kucinich	5.50
Lieberman	5.75
Sharpton	7.14

Conclusion

In conclusion our results demonstrate that Democratic activist voters' attitudes toward President Bush are fairly extreme. We also find that voters were very informed about the candidates in this election and were very engaged. Many voters actively campaigned for one of the party contenders. Finally, it is also clear that the winner of the nomination converted his momentum from the earliest campaigns into greater electability ratings increasing his attractiveness to Democratic voters.

If you have any questions or comments about this summary or about this project please contact Professor Lonna Atkeson at (505) 471-5548 or e-mail her at: atkeson@unm.edu.