

Evaluating the Impact of the 2024 Iowa Caucuses on Youth Perception of Politics

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ABSTRACT

As polarization in United States politics becomes more extensive, the youth vote can play a greater role in determining the outcome of the presidential election. The Iowa Caucuses are the first major political event in the election cycle, and at this event, Iowans can interact with politicians in person. Although both the youth vote and the Iowa Caucuses could dictate election results, minimal youth attend the Iowa Caucuses. In 2024, though, 21 high-schoolers attended the Iowa Caucuses to be student journalists as a part of the 2024 Presidential Iowa Caucus Workshop hosted by KidUnity, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Los Angeles. Observing how these high schoolers' perceptions of presidential candidates and politics changed after attending the Iowa Caucuses and meeting the presidential election candidates provides insights into how this event could serve as a valuable tool to increase political learning. These observations can also display which candidates appealed more to younger generations. Very little prior literature in this field of inquiry connects youth political involvement with the Iowa Caucuses. Therefore, this study aimed to bridge this gap through a mixed-method survey that assessed the perceptions high-school students had of presidential candidates and politics overall before and after attending the Iowa Caucuses. Results displayed that the student journalists had about politics and candidates grew after attending the Iowa Caucuses. Furthermore, the majority of respondents favored candidate Nikki Haley more and candidate Ron DeSantis less after attending the political event. Several subpopulations were also discerned; subpopulation data conveyed that female survey respondents favored female candidate Nikki Haley more than male respondents. Analyzing the effects the Iowa Caucuses had on youth journalists who interacted with candidates and voters in person demonstrates the effectiveness of this political event as a whole.

Introduction

As politics in the United States evolved, the Iowa Caucus became the first major event in the United States presidential election and nominating process. At this event, registered voters gather across Iowa in community venues and homes to express their preferences for presidential candidates and even meet these campaigners. At Republican caucuses specifically, participants vote to demonstrate support for a candidate. The outcome of the presidential election can be predicted by observing which candidates have the most preferences in Iowa. Thus, the Iowa Caucuses play a major role in shaping the early momentum and candidates' viability in the presidential race. Caucuses allow voters to enter "an ideal setting—a contest focused on candidates and their personalities, in a context having far-reaching political implications" (Kenny et al., 2020, p. 1). Citizens who attend the Caucuses can observe and interact with presidential candidates in person and better understand their policies.

Young voter turnout plays a significant role in who wins presidential elections. Despite this, recent elections demonstrate the lack of youth involvement in politics and going to the polls. In 2016, fewer than half of eligible voters in America under 29 voted in the presidential election (The New York Times, 2020, para. 1). This turnout from youth had a significant influence on the outcome of that presidential election, and the same impact may be seen in 2024. The youth vote can be a pivotal juncture; during the 2008 election, a crucial

explanation for Barack Obama winning the presidency was the participation of voters under the age of 30. 66% of voters under 30 voted for Obama in 2008, which made “the disparity between young voters and other age groups larger than in any presidential election since exit polling began in 1972” (Center, 2008, para. 1). If youth voters do not participate in voting or spreading awareness about the 2024 presidential election, election results could be modified immensely. The Iowa Caucuses provide an environment where voters can learn about candidates and their policies—this has the ability to influence young individuals and their votes.

The Iowa Republican Caucuses began on January 15, 2024. A group of 21 student journalists, including the researcher of this paper, traveled to the event as a part of the 2024 Iowa Presidential Caucuses Workshop hosted by KidUnity, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Studying how the Iowa Caucuses impacted 20 high schoolers' perceptions of the presidential election candidates will provide insight into how the Caucuses impact malleable minds overall as youth voting plays a critical role in the election process. Throughout this paper, the research will ask: What influence do the 2024 Iowa Caucuses have on youth's perception of presidential candidates and politics as a whole?

Literature Review

To vote in the Republican Iowa Caucuses, individuals have to turn 18 by the time of the presidential election in November. Therefore, there was a very small number of citizens at the 2024 Iowa Caucuses who were still in high school. The purpose of this study was to determine how student journalists' perceptions of politics and the 2024 presidential candidates were impacted after attending the Iowa Caucuses. Before examining how the student journalists' points of view were affected by the Iowa Caucuses, it is crucial to understand general political viewpoints.

Overall Perceptions of Politics and Government

The Pew Research Center conducted first-hand research in their report, *Highly Negative Views of American Politics in 2023*. This study was based on the results of two surveys conducted by members of the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel in July 2023. A common trend between the Center's research and the other studies about perceptions of politics is that most of the individuals surveyed to find data are over the age of 18. Although youth play a substantial role in shaping elections and promoting sentiment about political candidates, a gap found in this field of research is that very few studies focus on the perspectives of younger generations. After analyzing the Topline Questionnaire used in the Center's study from 2023, it was discerned that the questions asked in the Center's surveys would be beneficial if implemented into the surveys the researcher of this paper distributed because they could effectively lead to a conclusion as their topic of inquiry was similar to the one of this paper. The questions in the Center's survey asked how individuals viewed the United States political system, candidate qualities, and the influence of the common citizen in politics. The survey responses led to several findings; one finding that stood out included that “63% of Americans say they are dissatisfied with the candidates who have emerged so far” (Center, 2023).

Contrasting to how the Pew Research Center distributed their own surveys, *The Perception of Politicians' Morality: Attacks and Defences* by Catellani and Bertolotti from the Catholic University of Milan looked at past research and surveys to determine how politicians' morality is perceived by voters. The surveys the authors reviewed were from the American National Election Studies (ANES) in the United States. These surveys asked participants if certain politicians had specific qualities, such as knowledge and leadership. Catellani and Bertolotti concluded “that the functions of politicians and their relationship with people further increase the importance attributed to morality” (Catellani, Bertolotti, 2015, pg. 18). Although this research reached a conclusion, young individuals were, again, not surveyed.

Political Perceptions of Younger Generations

Contrasting the aforementioned studies, Edgerly et al. (2018) sought to examine the political viewpoints of young individuals, specifically. During the 2016 presidential primary elections, the researchers explored the success of the media in teaching younger generations about politics in *Young Citizens, Social Media, and the Dynamics of Political Learning in the U.S. Presidential Primary Election*. Over three weeks, Edgerly et al. conducted daily surveys with a rolling cross-section design to view the developments in the impact of social media during the span of the presidential primary elections. 50 different individuals ages 18-35 gathered by Qualtrics, a research company, were given the survey each day (Edgerly et al., 2018, pg. 1047). With a final sample of 1,151 young adults, the researchers compared the connection between political learning and media exposure in survey participants' responses. The results of the research concluded that there is a definite correlation between the amount of media exposure on Facebook and key opportunities to learn about the primary candidates. It was found that "digital-only news" was a positive force when learning about politics, and respondents were able to answer more questions about topics that had been widely posted about. An implication of this study includes that politicians advertising their campaigns on Facebook could help their campaign's success. Overall, this study examines if learning about the presidential primary elections through social media is effective, which is similar to the study the researcher of this paper conducted because both focus on methods of learning about presidential candidates. Additionally, candidates at the Iowa Caucuses utilized methods similar to those of which Edgerly et al. (2018) studied. For instance, Vivek Ramaswamy focused heavily on the social media aspect of his campaign before dropping out of the race after the Caucuses.

Another point of view has been advanced by Professor Flanagan from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who wrote *Developmental Roots of Political Engagement*. This research asked what the antecedents of political engagement are in younger generations, and how childhood impacts political views. Contrasting to Edgerly et al.'s study from 2018, Flanagan's paper was a review of past studies. Flanagan drew from two empirical studies to reach a conclusion; one was a seven-nation comparative study of more than 5,000 12–18-year-olds political beliefs, and the other looked at the political views of 12–18-year-olds from several foreign and European-American backgrounds (Flanagan, 2003, pg. 4). This source concluded that the perspectives youth obtain during their developmental years impact their political engagement later in life. Socializing in community institutions and having large civic participation while young leads to a more politically informed life for individuals. A limitation of this study is that the source merely outlines research conducted by other individuals to identify a conclusion. Flanagan's study compares to this paper's research because most participants in both studies who completed the distributed surveys were politically involved and had a background in community engagement.

Iowa Caucus Research

Several hypotheses concerning the nature of the Iowa Caucuses have been advanced by many authors, including Kenny et al. (2021) in *Candidate Authenticity and the Iowa Caucus*. The researchers partnered with the Iowa Caucus Panel Survey to examine the concept of candidate "authenticity" during the 2020 Iowa Democratic Caucus. The results from this survey with 479 respondents were used to find correlations between whether "authenticity" played a role in how adults who attended the Iowa Caucuses perceived candidates. The researchers hypothesized that the more authentic a candidate portrayed themselves as at the Caucuses, the more support they would receive. A limitation of this study is that 84% of survey respondents were Democrats, thus leading to a possible bias in most responses (Kenny et al., 2021, p. 7). The research demonstrated that for candidates such as Biden and Buttigieg, authenticity played a significant role in vote intentions (Kenny et al., 2021, p. 3). It was illustrated that other candidates' authenticity, such as Warren, indirectly garnered support from female voters (Kenny et al., 2021, p. 3). This finding could be similar to the amount of support gathered for Nikki

Haley, the only female candidate at the 2024 Iowa Caucuses. Both directly and indirectly, authenticity played a crucial role in the 2020 presidential election and campaigns. This has informed the researcher of this paper's understanding of the scholarly conversation surrounding the Iowa Caucuses because it displays the feasibility of conducting survey research at the Iowa Caucuses. This study also resulted in further acknowledgment of the gap in this field of research, which includes the lack of data on youth opinion surfacing from the Iowa Caucuses.

Redlawsk and other authors from the University of Delaware also examined the amount of support for candidates and what motivated this support for those participating in the 2008 Iowa Caucuses. The researchers analyzed factors of education, income, gender, marital status, age, and religion to understand the influences on who Republicans and Democrats over the age of 18 supported. The researchers analyzed “two statewide random sample surveys collected through the Social Science Research Center at the University of Iowa” that were completed by 1,290 and 907 registered voters, respectively (Redlawsk et al., 2008, pg. 129). As Clinton led among registered Democrats and Romney led among registered Republicans from March of 2007 through August of 2007, according to the surveys, the researchers wanted to determine the leading causes behind this data. In both the 2008 and 2024 Iowa Caucuses, there was one leading female candidate: Clinton in 2008 and Haley in 2024. The gender of the voter had a major influence on the demographic of Clinton's supporters just as it did for Haley's supporters.

Also studying civilians over the age of 18 at the Iowa Caucuses, Assistant Professor Winfrey from the Greenlee School of Journalism and Mass Communication used data from surveys completed by 576 probable Democratic caucusgoers to study the relationship between candidates' support and gender at the 2020 Iowa Caucus. Recruited by Civiqs, an online polling company, caucus-goers completed a survey for this study. Winfrey concluded that “the best performing candidates were also more likely to be viewed as honest, compassionate, and strong leaders,” and that “women voters often rated [female candidates] higher than men did” (Winfrey, 2020, pg. 13). This conclusion can be useful when analyzing the support of female candidate Nikki Haley in the 2024 presidential election. Overall, Winfrey's research also demonstrated the feasibility of using surveys to find significant data at the Iowa Caucuses. Therefore, distributing surveys to determine the perceptions of individuals at the Iowa Caucuses is a feasible method to arrive at a conclusion.

Methods

Introduction

This study aimed to evaluate the changes that occurred in perceptions of presidential candidates and politics after attending the Iowa Caucuses. This research reviewed survey responses regarding political engagement, perceptions of the 2024 presidential candidates, perceptions of general politics, and self-growth throughout the process of being a student journalist at the Iowa Caucuses. This study aligns closely with the research of Kenny et al. (2021) in terms of distributing surveys at the Caucuses, and the survey questions were modeled after the Pew Research Center's survey from *Highly Negative Views of American Politics in 2023*.

Hypotheses

To guide the research after identifying the gaps in the field of inquiry, three hypotheses were utilized:

1. The student journalists would form different opinions about the candidates after attending the Iowa Caucuses.
2. The student journalists would learn more about the candidates through the process of going to the Iowa Caucuses.
3. Gender impacts the influence the Iowa Caucuses have on youth.

The first hypothesis was inspired by Kenny et al. (2021) which exemplified that interacting with political candidates led participants to observe the authenticity of those candidates, and thus, new perceptions of the candidates formed. This connects to the second hypothesis as interacting with the political candidates would also result in the student journalists knowing more about them and their policies at the Caucuses' conclusion. The third hypothesis aligns with Winfrey's (2021), Redlawsk's (2008), and Kenny et al.'s (2021) research because all of their studies found that a significant amount of the supporters of female candidates were also female.

To test these hypotheses, a pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental approach was used by collecting responses through a pre-test Google Form distributed before the Iowa Caucuses (Appendix B) and a post-test Google Form distributed after attending the Iowa Caucuses concluded (Appendix C); both forms had an Informed Consent section (Appendix A).

Population and Participants

This study had a selective sample as all the participants were from KidUnity's 2024 Iowa Presidential Caucuses Workshop. This workshop selected 21 students, including the researcher of this paper, to attend the Iowa Caucuses. Thus, through this process, 20 students were identified to participate in the study. The selection method for this study resulted in all members of the targeted population being equally likely to be chosen. This workshop allowed high schoolers from all over the world to fly to Iowa and be "shoulder to shoulder with Iowans, presidential candidates, political operatives and campaign staff, and members of the local and national media" (Civics in Action! - Iowa Caucus 2024 | Kidunity, n.d.). To attend this workshop, students filled out an application before October 2023 and were then selected by the program's administration. Most individuals selected to attend this workshop were from two schools: nine students were from Harvard-Westlake School and ten were from Marlborough School. These two schools are private institutions in Los Angeles. 30% of participants in this study were 18-year-olds, 55% were 17-year-olds, and 15% were 16-year-olds. In addition, 85% of participants were female, while 15% were male. This gender disproportionality could be a result of the fact that ten students were from Marlborough School, which is an "all-girls" school. 5% of students surveyed were from the American School in London, offering a global perspective to this study. The researcher of this paper was not enrolled in any of the schools that the respondents attended.

Implementation Process

The link to the pre-test Google Form containing the survey was emailed to the students in the 2024 Iowa Presidential Caucuses Workshop in January 2023, a week before the students traveled to Iowa. These students were predominantly interested in journalism or politics. This may have affected the participants' perceptions of the candidates because these students were exposed to discussions of politics and might have had more knowledge about this field before attending the Caucuses than others would have.

Survey Construction

The questions on the Google Form pre-test and post-tests were the same on both forms, except for two additional free response questions in the post-test form. There were identity-based questions to determine participants' age and school. This information was significant to obtain the data to determine if demographics played a role in survey responses. The survey questions also consisted of "check all that apply," Likert scale (1-5), and free-response questions. Six questions were modeled after Pew Research's study titled *Highly Negative Views of American Politics in 2023* because these questions were very effective in finding easily noticeable conclusions, simple enough for youth respondents to comprehend, and would provide the necessary data to identify differences and similarities between the pre-test and post-test answers. These questions in both the pre-test and post-

test forms hoped to exemplify student journalists' knowledge of candidates and politics, interest in candidates and politics, and perception of candidates and politics. The two additional free-response questions in the post-test form hoped to determine the connotations of the words youth used to describe their experience at the Iowa Caucuses. Table 1 below displays these questions.

Table 1. Instruments

Survey Questions	Measurement Scale	Source
Which of the following candidates do you know of? Check all that apply.	Check all that apply: Biden, Trump, Williamson, Phillips, Haley, Ramaswamy, Hutchinson, Binkley, DeSantis, Christie, Kennedy, West, Stein	Self-defined
Who are your favorite candidates? Check all that apply.	Check all that apply: Biden, Trump, Williamson, Phillips, Haley, Ramaswamy, Hutchinson, Binkley, DeSantis, Christie, Kennedy, West, Stein	Self-defined
"What one word or phrase would you use to describe politics in the U.S. these days?"	Free-response	The Pew Research Center
"What one word or phrase would you use to describe the 2024 Presidential Election candidates?"	Free-response	The Pew Research Center
"In general, would you say the quality of candidates running for political office in the last several years has been..."	Likert Scale: Very Good, Somewhat Good, Somewhat Bad, Very Bad	The Pew Research Center
"How interested would you say you are in politics?"	Likert Scale: Extremely interested, Very interested, Somewhat interested, Not too interested, Not at all interested	The Pew Research Center
"I feel like I am knowledgeable about half of the 2024 election candidates' policies"	Likert Scale: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (5 being very knowledgeable, 1 being not knowledgeable)	Self-defined
"I am not satisfied with presidential candidates from either party."	Likert Scale: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (1 being satisfied, 5 being not satisfied)	The Pew Research Center

"I have learned a lot about the presidential candidates through the process of being a student journalist at the Iowa Caucuses."	Likert Scale: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (1 being have not learned, 5 being learned a lot)	The Pew Research Center
Post-Test Specific Questions		
What did you learn about the candidates during your time in Iowa? Explain.	Free-response	Self-defined
Did your perception of any candidates change after your time as a student journalist at the Iowa Caucus? Explain and use specific examples if possible.	Free-response	Self-defined

Data Analysis System

The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test surveys was later compiled through Google Forms's automatic transfer feature to a Google Sheet spreadsheet. This data was then put into sub-spreadsheets to narrow down conclusions, and then histogram construction was completed. To compare the pre-test and post-test responses, T-value and P-value tests were completed.

Findings and Analysis Likert Scale Response Analysis

Table 2. Likert Scale Responses

Questions - Pre & Post Test	T-values	P-values
"In general, would you say the quality of candidates running for political office in the last several years has been..."	0.697982	0.24682
"How interested would you say you are in politics?"	2.99018	0.00376*
"I feel like I am knowledgeable about half of the 2024 election candidates' policies."	2.703274	0.00704*
"I am not satisfied with presidential candidates from either party."	-1.37081	0.09321

"I have learned a lot about the presidential candidates through the process of being a student journalist at the Iowa Caucuses."	5.204963	0.00003*
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* = p-value is significant (less than 0.05)

Based on the Likert scale survey question responses in Table 2, many findings are discernable. Three P-values were statistically significant from the survey questions that had answers in a Likert scale form. The P-value to the question, "How interested would you say you are in politics?" was significant at 0.00376. This demonstrates that before attending the Caucuses, the survey respondents were not as interested in politics as they were after they had met candidates, voters, and experienced the Caucus environment overall. Thus, this P-value illustrates that the respondents gained interest in politics after attending the Caucuses. In July 2023, the Pew Research Center asked this same question ("How interested would you say you are in politics?") to determine what individuals in the United States thought of the quality of those running for office. The highest percentage of people in the Center's study (38%) responded that they were "Somewhat Interested" in politics, which differs from this paper's study as only 10% of pre-test respondents said they were "Somewhat Interested" in politics. Nevertheless, in the post-test, 0% of post-test respondents answered that they were "Somewhat Interested" in politics because respondents only answered that they were "Very Interested" or "Extremely Interested" in politics, demonstrating that more people were interested in politics after attending the Caucuses. Second, the P-value to the question "I feel like I am knowledgeable about half of the 2024 election candidates' policies," which was self-defined, was also significant at 0.00704. This exemplifies that the knowledge students had about the candidates' policies increased after attending the caucuses. Furthermore, the P-value for the question, "I have learned a lot about the presidential candidates through the process of being a student journalist at the Iowa Caucuses," which was self-defined, was significant at 0.00003. This demonstrates that respondents felt they learned more about the candidates after attending the in-person event. The P-value to the question, "In general, would you say the quality of candidates running for political office in the last several years has been..." was not significant, demonstrating that participants felt relatively the same about the quality of candidates in the United States before and after attending the Iowa Caucuses. The P-value for "I am not satisfied with presidential candidates from either party" was insignificant, as well, illustrating that participants felt relatively the same about their satisfaction with the presidential candidates from either party. Overall, the Likert scale responses from the pre-test and post-test forms exemplify some modifications formed in the perceptions about politics and presidential candidates after attending the Iowa Caucuses.

Short Answer Analysis

Table 3. Short Answer Responses

Questions - Pre & Post-Test	Words Used Most in Pre-Test Responses	Words Used Most in Post-Test Responses
"What one word or phrase would you use to describe politics in the U.S. these days?"	Chaotic (6) and Polarized (5)	Chaotic (3), Polarized (3), and Divided (3)
"What one word or phrase would you use to describe the 2024 Presidential Election candidates?"	Weak (2), Polarized (2), Old (2), Disappointing (2)	Different (2)

Regarding the words used in the free response questions in Table 3, “divided” was used more in the post-test question, “What one word or phrase would you use to describe politics in the U.S. these days?” This conveys that after attending the caucuses, the division in America was seen more clearly among the respondents. This aligns closely with the Pew Research Center’s study (which inspired this question) because the most answered words when asking the same question in their study were “divided, division, divisive, [and] dividing” (Center, 2023, pg. 11). This demonstrates the strong presence of division in politics felt among citizens in the United States, whether it is felt by youth or adults. In addition, the connotations of the self-defined question, “What one word or phrase would you use to describe the 2024 Presidential Election candidates?” were less negative in the post-test answers. This conveys the implication that attending in-person political events could lead to a more positive outlook on politics.

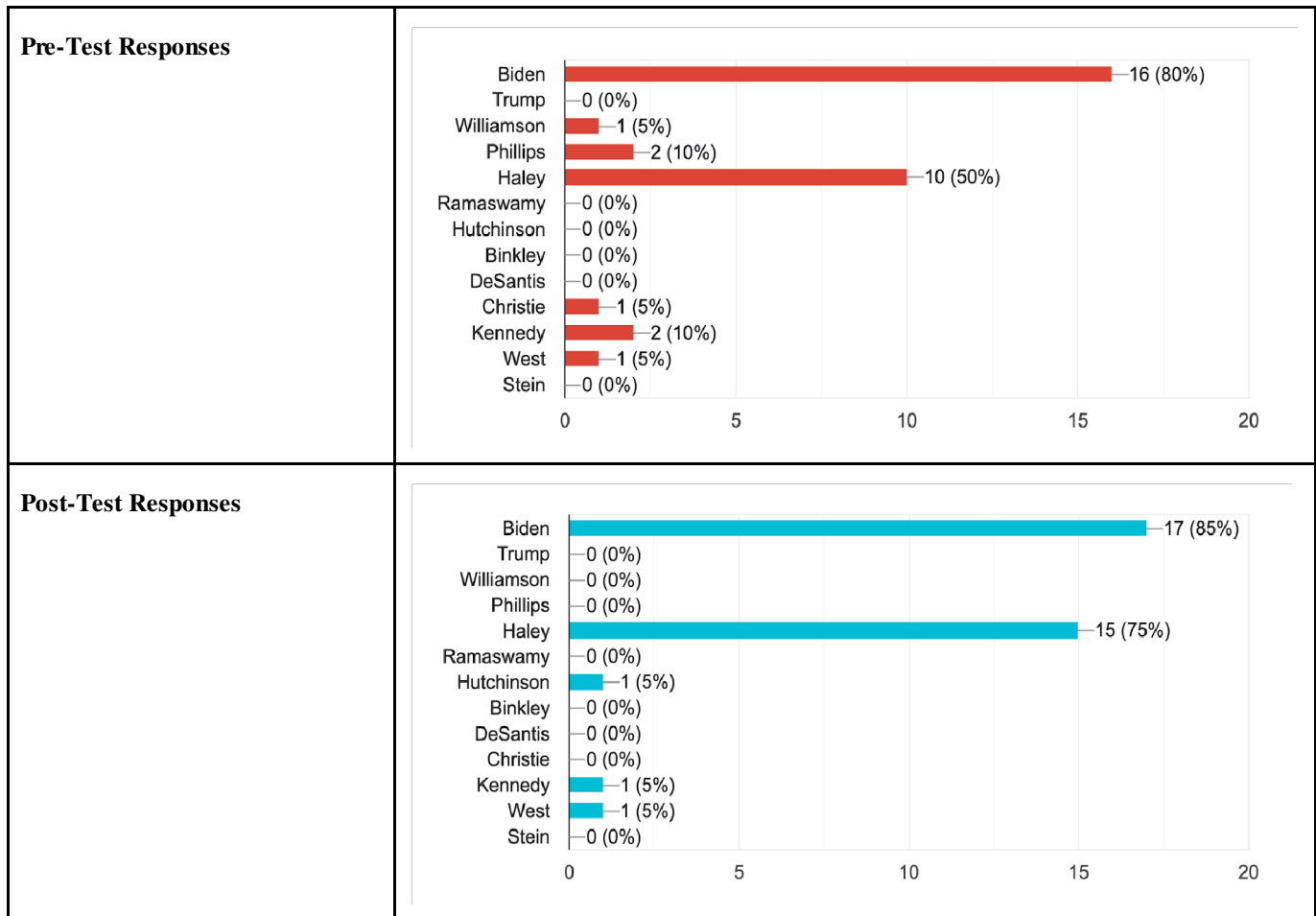
“Check All That Apply” Question Analysis

Table 4. Knowledge of Candidates Among Respondents

Question:	Which of the following candidates do you know of? Check all that apply.																																										
Pre-Test Responses	<table><thead><tr><th>Candidate</th><th>Count</th><th>Percentage</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Biden</td><td>20</td><td>100%</td></tr><tr><td>Trump</td><td>20</td><td>100%</td></tr><tr><td>Williamson</td><td>10</td><td>50%</td></tr><tr><td>Phillips</td><td>7</td><td>35%</td></tr><tr><td>Haley</td><td>20</td><td>100%</td></tr><tr><td>Ramaswamy</td><td>20</td><td>100%</td></tr><tr><td>Hutchinson</td><td>11</td><td>55%</td></tr><tr><td>Binkley</td><td>4</td><td>20%</td></tr><tr><td>DeSantis</td><td>20</td><td>100%</td></tr><tr><td>Christie</td><td>20</td><td>100%</td></tr><tr><td>Kennedy</td><td>19</td><td>95%</td></tr><tr><td>West</td><td>9</td><td>45%</td></tr><tr><td>Stein</td><td>4</td><td>20%</td></tr></tbody></table>	Candidate	Count	Percentage	Biden	20	100%	Trump	20	100%	Williamson	10	50%	Phillips	7	35%	Haley	20	100%	Ramaswamy	20	100%	Hutchinson	11	55%	Binkley	4	20%	DeSantis	20	100%	Christie	20	100%	Kennedy	19	95%	West	9	45%	Stein	4	20%
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Table 5. Favorite Candidates Among Respondents

Question:	Who are your favorite candidates? Check all that apply.
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The percentages of knowledge about candidates increased, as demonstrated in the post-test answers in Table 4, proving that students felt they learned more about the candidates after the Caucuses. Most noticeably, in Table 5, five more people said Haley was their favorite candidate in the post-test responses compared to the pre-test responses. This could be an implication of the positive interactions the students had with this candidate; Haley talked and took pictures with several of the respondents, which might have impacted the responses. This aligns closely with the literature of Kenny et al. (2021), who partnered with the Iowa Caucus Panel Survey to examine the concept of “candidate authenticity” during the 2020 Iowa Democratic Caucus. The research demonstrated that for candidates such as Biden and Buttigieg in 2020, authenticity played a significant role in the support they received. It was illustrated that other candidates’ authenticity, such as Warren, indirectly garnered support from female voters. Relating this to the 2024 Iowa Caucus, if students felt that Haley was authentic when interacting with her, this could result in a greater number of student journalists feeling that she was their favorite candidate in the post-test survey.

Haley’s role in the Iowa Caucuses relates to Warren’s role in the 2020 Iowa Caucus researched by Kenny et al. (2021) as they were both female figures at the event who gained popularity with their authenticity.

Free-Response Thematic Analysis

Table 6. Definition of Themes

Question: Did your perception of any candidates change after your time as a student journalist at the Iowa Caucus? Explain and use specific examples if possible.	
Theme	Definition
Positive Perception of Nikki Haley	Respondents found Nikki Haley more favorable after attending the caucuses
Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis	Respondents found Ron DeSantis less favorable after attending the caucuses
Positive Perception of Voters and Supporters	Respondents saw voters in a new, positive way
Negative Perception of Vivek Ramaswamy	Respondents found Vivek Ramaswamy less favorable after attending the caucuses
Positive Perception of Vivek Ramaswamy	Respondents found Vivek Ramaswamy more favorable after attending the caucuses
Negative Perception of Donald Trump	Respondents found Donald Trump more favorable after attending the caucuses

Table 7. Summary of Responses

Survey #	Respondent Key Takeaways from Caucuses	Corresponding Themes
1	- Now “despises Ron DeSantis now than ever” - Nikki Haley supported her points very well - Enjoyed Nikki Haley’s logic	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis, Positive Perception of Nikki Haley
2	- “Terrified of Ron DeSantis”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
3	- Perception of Nikki Haley is “drastically different” - Felt Nikki Haley had a middle ground between the parties	Positive Perception of Nikki Haley
4	- Nikki Haley was “impressive”	Positive Perception of Nikki Haley

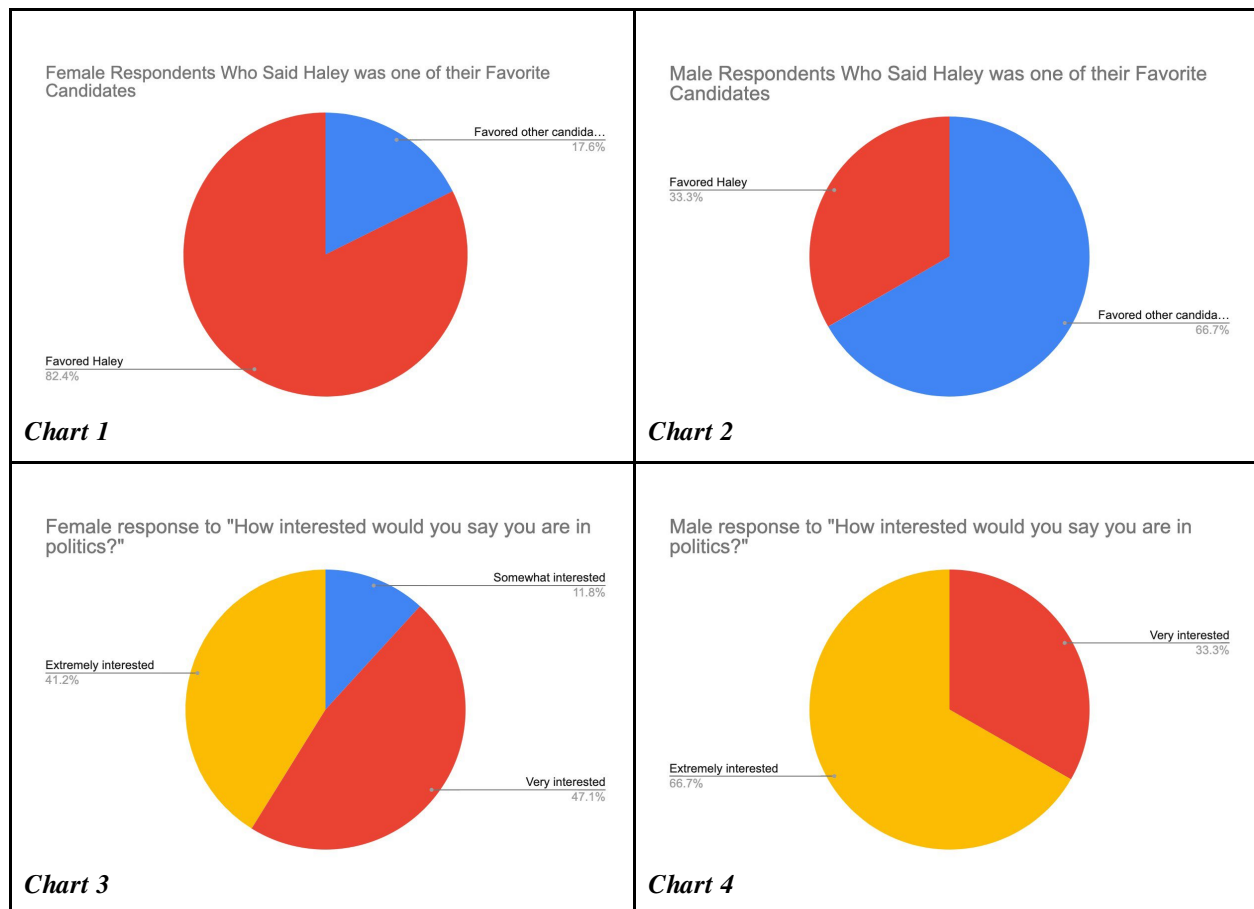
5	- “DeSantis was discriminatory and extremely rude” - “Lost respect” for DeSantis	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
6	- “Definitely more scared of DeSantis and his perception of conservatism”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
7	- DeSantis has an “authoritarian nature”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
8	- “Now more scared of DeSantis”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
9	- “Now more scared of Ron DeSantis”	
10	- “Seeing how rude and negative Ron DeSantis was at his rally made [the survey respondent] utterly terrified to imagine him as president”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
11	- Trump’s team made the survey respondent “dislike him even more” - Trump’s supporters were surprisingly moderate and	Positive Perception of Voters and Supporters, Negative Perception of Donald Trump, Positive Perception of Vivek Ramaswamy,
	- level-headed - Haley’s supporters “really prioritized her care for women” - Ramaswamy was “not as crazy as [the survey respondent] thought” - Ramaswamy’s policies made the survey respondent “hate him more”	Negative Perception of Vivek Ramaswamy
12	- Saw “Nikki Haley in a different light which was good”	Positive Perception of Nikki Haley
13	- “Perception of Nikki Haley changed the most” - Nikki Haley “ is more center leaning about certain policies...making me support her more than I used to”	Positive Perception of Nikki Haley
14	- Survey respondent “hates Nikki Haley even more”	Negative Perception of Nikki Haley
15	- “More pro Nikki Haley” - “VERY anti-DeSantis”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis, Positive Perception of Nikki Haley
16	- “More afraid of DeSantis”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis
17	- “Grew to fear DeSantis” - “Learned more about Vivek’s policies and it made [the survey respondent] hate him more” - “Learned more about Nikki Haley,” making the survey respondent “like her more as a candidate”	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis, Positive Perception of Nikki Haley, Negative Perception of Vivek Ramaswamy
18	- “DeSantis is even more scarier” than the survey respondent thought - Respondent admires Haley	Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis, Positive Perception of Nikki Haley

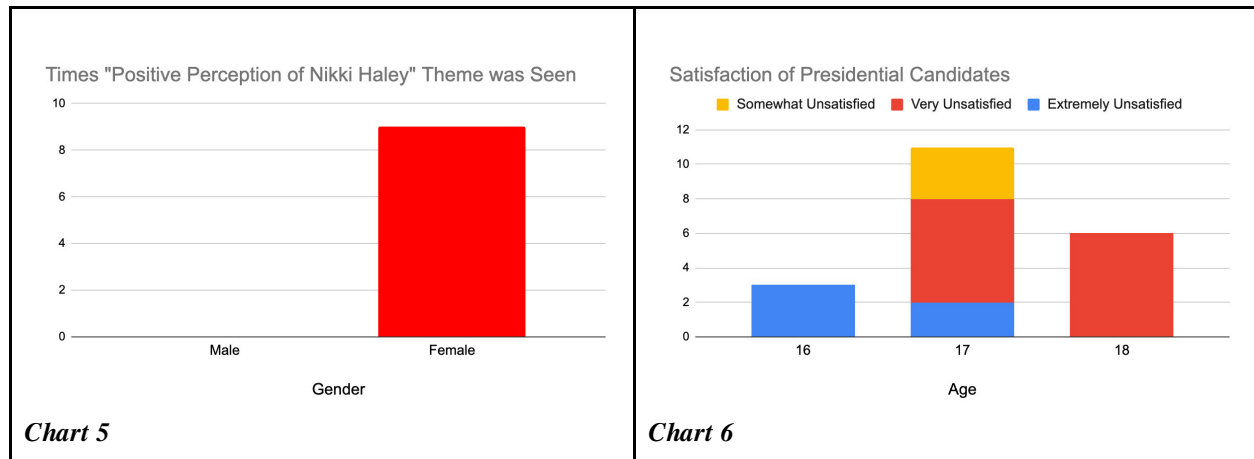
19	- Used a response from the past question to answer this one - Respondent's "perspectives on candidates themselves didn't change much" but the "perspective of their supporters" did change	Positive Perception of Voters and Supporters
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Regarding Table 7, 19 individuals answered the survey question "Did your perception of any candidates change after your time as a student journalist at the Iowa Caucus? Explain and use specific examples if possible." In these responses, the two most common themes (defined in Table 6) in the free-response survey questions in the post-test responses were "Negative Perception of Ron DeSantis" and "Positive Perception of Nikki Haley." Thus, the majority of respondents gained a negative perspective on Ron DeSantis and a positive perspective on Nikki Haley after attending the Iowa Caucuses. A possible explanation for this could be that DeSantis yelled at a student in the Iowa Presidential Caucus Workshop at his rally. This could be a factor in why many other students in the Workshop did not have a positive perception of DeSantis. These findings display the various changes in youth's perceptions after taking part in the Iowa Caucuses. Within these findings, several subpopulations are discerned.

Subpopulation Findings

Table 8. Histograms of Subpopulation Findings from Post-Test





Regarding Table 8, the histograms focused on two main subpopulations: gender and age. Charts 1 and 2 exemplify how more female respondents than male respondents felt Haley was one of their favorite candidates; 82.4% of female respondents favored Haley, but only 33.3% of male respondents favored Haley. Another gender comparison is made in Charts 3 and 4, which compares female and male interest in politics after attending the Iowa Caucuses. While 66.7% of male respondents said they were “Extremely interested” in politics after attending the Iowa Caucuses, only 41.2% of female respondents stated they were “Extremely interested” in politics. Thus, there was a greater interest in politics among the males in this population rather than the females after attending this political event. The last gender comparison made regards the thematic analysis; it was identified that in the post-test specific free-response questions, nine females gained a “Positive Perception of Nikki Haley” at the Caucuses, but no males demonstrated this theme in their responses. Therefore, Haley was more popular among the female respondents, which Chart 5 conveys. This is similar to how Warren was more popular among female respondents during the 2020 Iowa Democratic Caucuses, as demonstrated by Kenny et al. (2021). Finally, Chart 6 illustrates the trends in satisfaction of presidential candidates among the subpopulations of ages. All the 16-year-olds were “Extremely Unsatisfied” with the candidates, while all the 18-year-olds were “Very Unsatisfied” with the candidates. Although the 17-year-olds had mixed satisfaction with the presidential candidates, this histogram demonstrates that satisfaction with candidates increased as age increased.

Subpopulations

These conclusions do not equally apply to all members of the study’s population. The researcher of this paper hypothesized that gender would affect the perceptions students gained from the Iowa Caucuses. Table 8 demonstrates that females, specifically, would favor candidate Nikki Haley more than the males in the program. A limitation of this conclusion is that there were only three males in this study because only three males were enrolled in the Iowa Presidential Caucus Workshop.

Implications of Research Question and Community of Practice

Overall, the data displays that the study’s population grew to be more knowledgeable about politics and the Iowa Caucuses after attending the event. In addition, the perceptions of the presidential election candidates and politics as a whole were modified by attending the caucuses. This is demonstrated by the significant P-values in Table 2, the change in connotations of the words most used in free-response questions in Table 3, the increase in knowledge among respondents about politicians in Table 4, Nikki Haley demonstratively becoming a more favorable candidate in Table 5, and the popular themes amongst survey responses in Table 7. These findings

specifically support my first and second hypotheses by demonstrating that after going to the Iowa Caucuses, individuals became more knowledgeable about politics, and their opinions were modified. This research could help this field of practice by acknowledging the advantages of students seeing inside works of politics and government, as well as recognizing effective ways for candidates to interact with voters in person. Future research could also acquire a greater gender balance, study primary elections or even political rallies, and study students who were not already interested in politics.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the question addressed throughout this paper asks: What influence do the 2024 Iowa Caucuses have on youth's perception of presidential candidates and politics overall? This study further reinforces the existing literature in this field by discussing political involvement and its impacts on human perceptions of politics, while filling the gap in this topic of inquiry; there was a lack of research on youth involvement in politics and its connection to the Iowa Caucuses before this paper. Prior literature about the Iowa Caucuses, such as *Candidate Authenticity and the Iowa Caucus* by Kenny et al. (2021), emphasizes the importance of candidates being authentic at the Iowa Caucuses. This importance of authenticity was also seen in Winfrey's work from 2021, which indicates that female voters resonated more with female candidates because they felt that those candidates were more authentic to them. Looking at the three hypotheses that guided this research, it is exemplified that students' point of view was modified due to the Iowa Caucuses. Pertaining to Hypothesis 1, the students did form different opinions about the candidates after attending the Iowa Caucuses because some candidates were seen as more authentic and positive than others as shown in Tables 7 and 8. This relates to Hypothesis 2 as interacting with the candidates led to more knowledge gained about the candidates, which is illustrated in Tables 2, 4, and 5. Referring to Hypothesis 3, gender did impact the influence of the Iowa Caucuses on youth perceptions of candidates as female respondents favored Haley more than male respondents did, exemplified in Table 8.

Although many substantive findings were brought to the surface from this study, several limitations are still present. The sample size for this study was 20 individuals—even though this was the only number of respondents available to the researcher as there was a slim amount of high school students present at the Caucuses, it would be advantageous for future research to gather more participants. The sample size also did not have an equal ratio of males to females, which could have impacted the results. This study did not take race, ethnicity, or political party into account, which also could have revealed the reasoning for some students' responses. In addition, the selective sample already had extensive knowledge and interest in politics, which is also a limitation because their answers would have differed if they were not as familiar with this field before attending the Iowa Caucuses.

As a result of the findings from this study, it is clear that the Iowa Caucuses impact individuals who attend them. Attending in-person political events can allow for greater learning about political campaigns, candidates, and politics as a whole. Future researchers can use this study to conduct similar research at other events in the presidential election, such as the primaries. Communities might react to this research by encouraging young voters and students to go to political events to learn more about how the government functions. Advocating for a better future includes advising youth to be informed on politics—the Iowa Caucuses can serve as an effective aid for this. It is imperative to recognize the Iowa Caucuses as a learning tool if the United States wants to pave the way for a more informed citizenry and democracy. Observing how youth are impacted by this event provides insights into not just the evolving political landscape as the 2024 election approaches but also the emerging dynamics of politics that could shape an improved world.

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