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## **Endorsements Don't Sway the Public – With a Few Exceptions**

With a few notable exceptions, the endorsement of presidential primary candidates by notable groups and individuals carries little weight with the public, according to data released today by the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES).

In the survey, we asked people if they knew who certain people and organizations had endorsed for either the Republican or Democratic presidential nomination. We then identified the endorsed candidates and asked whether knowing that made them more or less likely to support the endorsed candidate or made any difference at all. Most people are unaware of endorsements of the presidential contenders and the reported impact of these endorsements is small, though there are some exceptions both in awareness and impact.

Although the endorsement of Sen. Barack Obama, Democrat of Illinois, by Sen. Edward Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, caught the public's attention, the vast majority of those asked said that Sen. Kennedy's January 28 endorsement will have no impact on how they vote. Fifty-nine percent of Democrats and independents were aware that Sen. Kennedy endorsed Sen. Obama. Once informed of the endorsement, 13 percent said they would be more likely to support Sen. Obama, and 9 percent said they would be less likely to support him (a net increase of 4 points). However, 75 percent of Democrats and independents said that his endorsement would make no difference at all in their level of support. Awareness in the survey was highest for Oprah Winfrey's pre-Iowa caucus endorsement for Sen. Barack Obama, with 73 percent of Democrats and independents saying they were aware of it (NAES did not ask the follow-up question assessing whether Ms. Winfrey's endorsement would make a difference).

Awareness of the conservative radio host and founder/director of Focus on the Family Action Dr. James Dobson's endorsement of former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee on February 7 is low with just 16 percent of Republicans and independents saying they knew of this endorsement. However, his endorsement still might have meant something to Gov. Huckabee's support among conservative Republicans and independents. When told of the endorsement, 24 percent of those Republicans and independents who self-identified as

“very conservative” say they would be more likely to support Gov. Huckabee, while just 2 percent say they would be less likely to do so (a net of 22 percent saying more likely). Among Republicans and independents who self-identified as “moderate,” as many said they would be less likely (6%) to support Gov. Huckabee after hearing the endorsement than would be more likely to support him (6%), so there is no net positive effect among this group. Still, the vast majority of Republicans and independents, regardless of ideology, said the endorsement would make no difference in their level of support for Gov. Huckabee.

The *New York Times*’ endorsement of Sen. John McCain, Republican of Arizona, for the Republican presidential nomination on January 25 had some effect on Republicans and independents who identify themselves as either “moderate,” “somewhat conservative,” or “very conservative.” The direction was negative for “very conservative” Republicans and independents as 14 percent said they would be less likely to support Sen. McCain after hearing the endorsement and 6 percent said they would be more likely to support him (a net negative of 8 percent less likely). The endorsement had little net impact on those Republicans and independents who call themselves “somewhat conservative,” with one percent more saying they would be more likely to support Sen. McCain after hearing the endorsement. The *Times*’ endorsement had more positive impact among self-identified “moderate” Republicans and independents with 7 percent saying the endorsement would make them more likely to support Sen. McCain and 3 percent saying they would be less likely to support him (a net positive of 4 percent). (The data for this question were collected prior to publication by the *Times* February 21 of an article about Sen. McCain’s ties to a lobbyist.)

On the Democratic side, the *Times*’ endorsement of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Democrat of New York, on January 25 also had a small effect on her support. A quarter of Democrats and independents knew of this endorsement. The survey shows a net increase of 6 points in the reported likelihood that they would support Sen. Clinton once Democrats and independents are made aware of it.

The survey also shows the potential impact of endorsements with another targeted group, Hispanics. About 16 percent of Democrats and independents surveyed were aware that the United Farm Workers endorsed Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Once informed of the endorsement, Hispanic voters were more than twice as likely as non-Hispanics to say they would support Sen. Clinton as a result. Twenty-five percent of Hispanics say they would be more likely to support her, while just 4 percent said they would be less likely to do so—a net of 21 percent saying they would be more likely to support Sen. Clinton after hearing the endorsement. The UFW endorsement also had a positive impact among non-Hispanics with 12 percent saying they would be more likely to support Sen. Clinton and 4 percent saying they would be less likely—a net of 8 percent more likely to support. Again, however, a majority of Democratic and independent Hispanics said the endorsement would make no difference in their level of support for Sen. Clinton.

“Endorsements can provide signals about candidates’ stands on issues, about their ideological dispositions and about the extent to which a candidate’s positions coincide

with those of an endorsing group,” said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and co-director of the National Annenberg Election Survey.

“But this effect can’t occur unless the voter knows that the endorsement has taken place. Overall, public knowledge of endorsements has been relatively low.”

“Endorsements may not have much of an effect because many people have already made up their minds,” said Ken Winneg, managing director of the National Annenberg Election Survey. “But in certain targeted cases, the effect, though small, may be just enough to provide a winning margin in a close race.”

This survey was conducted between December 17 and February 18. (See Appendix for tables, methodology and question wording.)

## Appendix

**Table 1: Knowledge of Dr. James Dobson and Focus on the Family Action’s Endorsement of Gov. Mike Huckabee and Impact Republicans v. Independents**

	Republicans	Independents
% Correctly Identified Huckabee	19	16
% More Likely to Support Huckabee	15	8
% Less Likely to Support Huckabee	2	7
NET (Diff bet More Likely and Less Likely)	+13	+1
% Makes No Difference	78	81
% Don’t Know Impact	4	4
	(N=832)	(N=799)

**Table 2: Knowledge of Dr. James Dobson and Focus on the Family Action’s Endorsement of Gov. Mike Huckabee and Impact Among Conservatives and Moderates**

	Conservative (NET)*	Very Conservative	Somewhat Conservative	Moderate
% Correctly Identified Huckabee	21	29**	16	15
% More Likely to Support Huckabee	17	24**	14	6
% Less Likely to Support Huckabee	3	2	3	6
NET (Diff bet More Likely and Less Likely)	+14	+22	+11	0
% Makes no Difference	75	69**	78	84
% Don’t Know	5	4	5	3
	(N=903)	(N=333)	(N=572)	(N=570)

\*Combines self-identified categories of “very conservative” and “somewhat conservative”

\*\*p<.05

**Table 3: Knowledge of *New York Times*' Endorsement of Sen. John McCain and Impact Among Republicans and Independents**

	Republicans	Independents
% Correctly Identified McCain	24	22
% More Likely to Support McCain	8	6
% Less Likely to Support McCain	7	4
NET (Diff bet More Likely and Less Likely)	+1	+2
% Makes No Difference	82	87
% Don't Know Impact	2	3
	(N=1,812)	(N=1,761)

**Table 4: Knowledge of *New York Times*' Endorsement of Sen. John McCain and Impact Among Conservatives and Moderates**

	Conservative (NET)*	Very Conservative	Somewhat Conservative	Moderate
% Correctly Identified McCain	25	31	22	21
% More Likely to Support McCain	7	6	7	7
% Less Likely to Support McCain	9	14**	6	3
NET (Diff bet More Likely and Less Likely)	-2	-8	+1	+4
% Makes No Difference	81	77	83	87
% Don't Know Impact	3	3	3	2
	(N=1,982)	(N=716)	(N=1,266)	(N=1,262)

\*Combines self-identified categories of "very conservative" and "somewhat conservative"

\*\*p<.05

**Table 5: Knowledge of United Farm Workers' Endorsement and Impact  
Hispanics vs. Non-Hispanics**

	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic
% Correctly Identified Clinton	15	16
% More Likely to Support Clinton	25*	12
% Less Likely to Support Clinton	4	4
NET (Diff bet More Likely and Less Likely)	+11	+8
% Makes No Difference	54*	82
% Don't Know Impact	17*	1
	(N=125)	(N=1,320)

\*p<.05

**Table 6: Knowledge and Impact of Endorsements\***

Endorser **(Endorsed Candidate)	% Correctly Identified	% More Likely to support	% Less Likely to support	NET (Diff bet More Likely and Less Likely)	% No Difference in support	N
<b>Democrat</b>						
New York Times (Clinton)	25	11	5	+6	81	(2,108)
United Farm Workers (Clinton)	16	14	4	+10	78	(1,478)
MoveOn.org (Obama)	14	8	5	+3	82	(1,478)
Sen. Edward Kennedy (Obama)	59	13	9	+4	75	(1,787)
Oprah Winfrey (Obama)	73	NA*	NA*	NA*	NA*	(2,375)
<b>Republican</b>						
New York Times (McCain)	22	7	6	+1	83	(4,071)
Dr. James Dobson/Focus on the Family Action (Huckabee)	16	11	5	+6	78	(1,858)
National Right to Life (F. Thompson)	3	10	8	+2	74	(1,670)

\*NA—This endorsement question was not followed up with a support impact question.

\*\*Endorsement questions asked among partisans and independents

**Question wording:**

*Do you happen to know who [ENDORSER] endorsed for the Democratic/Republican nomination for president?*

*[ENDORSER] endorsed [CANDIDATE]. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support [CANDIDATE], less likely to support [CANDIDATE], or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support [CANDIDATE]?*

The analysis for this release was conducted by Ken Winneg, managing director of the National Annenberg Election Survey.

**About the survey: The National Annenberg Election Survey** is the largest academic election survey being conducted in the 2008 campaign. It ultimately will include between 45,000 and 50,000 rolling cross-section telephone interviews (one interview per respondent) and almost 100,000 web interviews (including up to five interviews with the same person) as the campaign evolves. The first web wave began in October 2007; the final interviews will be completed following the general election, November 4, 2008.

The data reported here are drawn from the rolling cross-sectional phone survey.

National Annenberg Election Surveys also were conducted in 2000 and 2004.

The 2008 survey, as with past NAES polls, will examine a wide range of political attitudes about candidates, issues and the traits Americans want in a president. It will also place a particular emphasis on the effects of media exposure through campaign commercials and news from radio, television, newspapers and the internet. Additionally, the survey measures the effects of other kinds of political communication, from conversations at home and on the job to various efforts by campaigns to influence potential voters.

**Methodology and Survey Question Wording**

Data for this analysis comes from the NAES telephone survey. The field period ran from December 17, 2007 through February 18, 2008. The total number of respondents interviewed during this period was 13,817.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education.

The sample sizes vary for each question reported because some questions were asked at different times. Below each question are the dates the questions ran, the sample size for the question and the margin of error.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

**ASKED AMONG DEMOCRATS AND INDEPENDENTS**

Do you happen to know who **Oprah Winfrey** endorsed for the Democratic nomination for president? (Correct: Obama)

*(12/17/07-1/6/08, N=2,375, margin of error=+/-2.01)*

\*Follow-up not asked

**PAIRS OF QUESTIONS WERE ROTATED**

Do you happen to know who **The New York Times** endorsed for the Democratic nomination for president? (Correct: CLINTON)

*(1/25/08-2/5/08, N=2,108, margin of error=+/-2.13)*

**The New York Times** endorsed Hillary Clinton. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support Clinton, less likely to support Clinton, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support Hillary Clinton?

*(1/25/08-2/5/08, N=2,108, margin of error=+/-2.13)*

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Do you happen to know who **Senator Edward Kennedy** endorsed for the Democratic nomination for president? (Correct: OBAMA)

*(1/28/08-2/6/08, N=1,787, margin of error=+/-2.32)*

**Senator Edward Kennedy** endorsed Barack Obama. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support Obama, less likely to support Obama, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support Barack Obama?

*(1/28/08-2/6/08, N=1,787, margin of error=+/-2.32)*

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Do you happen to know who the **United Farm Workers** endorsed for the Democratic nomination for president? (Correct: CLINTON)

*(2/4/08-2/11/08, N=1,478, margin of error=+/-2.55)*

The **United Farm Workers** endorsed Hillary Clinton. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support Clinton, less likely to support Clinton, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support Hillary Clinton?

*(2/4/08-2/11/08, N=1,478, margin of error=+/-2.55)*

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Do you happen to know who **MoveOn.org** endorsed for the Democratic nomination for president? (Correct: OBAMA)

*(2/4/08-2/11/08, N=1,478, margin of error=+/-2.55)*

**MoveOn.org** endorsed Barack Obama. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support Obama, less likely to support Obama, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support Barack Obama?

*(2/4/08-2/11/08, N=1,478, margin of error=+/-2.55)*



**ASKED AMONG REPUBLICANS AND INDEPENDENTS**

Do you happen to know which one candidate **the major papers in Iowa, New Hampshire and Massachusetts** endorsed for the Republican nomination for president? [IF NECESSARY, READ—That is the *Des Moines Register* in Iowa, *The Manchester Union Leader* in New Hampshire, and *The Boston Globe* in Massachusetts, which neighbors New Hampshire] (Correct: McCain)  
(12/17/07-1/6/08, N=2,311, margin of error=+/-2.04)  
\*Follow-up not asked

Do you happen to know who **Joe Lieberman** endorsed for the Republican nomination for president? (Correct: McCain)  
(12/17/07-1/6/08, N=2,311, margin of error=+/-2.04)  
\*Follow-up not asked

**PAIRS OF QUESTIONS WERE ROTATED**

Do you happen to know who **National Right to Life** endorsed for the Republican nomination for president? (Correct: F. Thompson)  
(1/11/08-1/21/08, N=1,670, margin of error=+/-2.40)

**National Right to Life** endorsed Fred Thompson. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support Fred Thompson, less likely to support Fred Thompson, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support Fred Thompson?  
(1/11/08-1/21/08, N=1,670, margin of error=+/-2.40)

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Do you happen to know who **The New York Times** endorsed for the Republican nomination for president? (Correct: McCain)  
(1/25/08-2/18/08, N=4,071, margin of error=+/-1.54)

**The New York Times** endorsed John McCain. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support McCain, less likely to support McCain, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support John McCain?  
(1/25/08-2/18/08, N=4,071, margin of error=+/-1.54)

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Do you happen to know who **Dr. James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family**, endorsed for the Republican nomination for president? (Correct: Huckabee)  
(2/8/08-2/18/08, N=1,858, margin of error=+/-2.27)

**Dr. James Dobson** endorsed Mike Huckabee. Does this endorsement make you more likely to support Huckabee, less likely to support Huckabee, or does it make no difference in your likelihood to support Mike Huckabee?  
(2/8/08-2/18/08, N=1,858, margin of error=+/-2.27)