

## Where the Candidates Stand: The Public Learns as the Campaign Advances

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Public knowledge of the issues in the 2008 presidential election is increasing as the campaign proceeds, according to data released today by the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES).

Although more than half of the American public still cannot answer basic questions about the presidential candidates' records and their stands on issues, knowledge levels have increased over time, the NAES found.

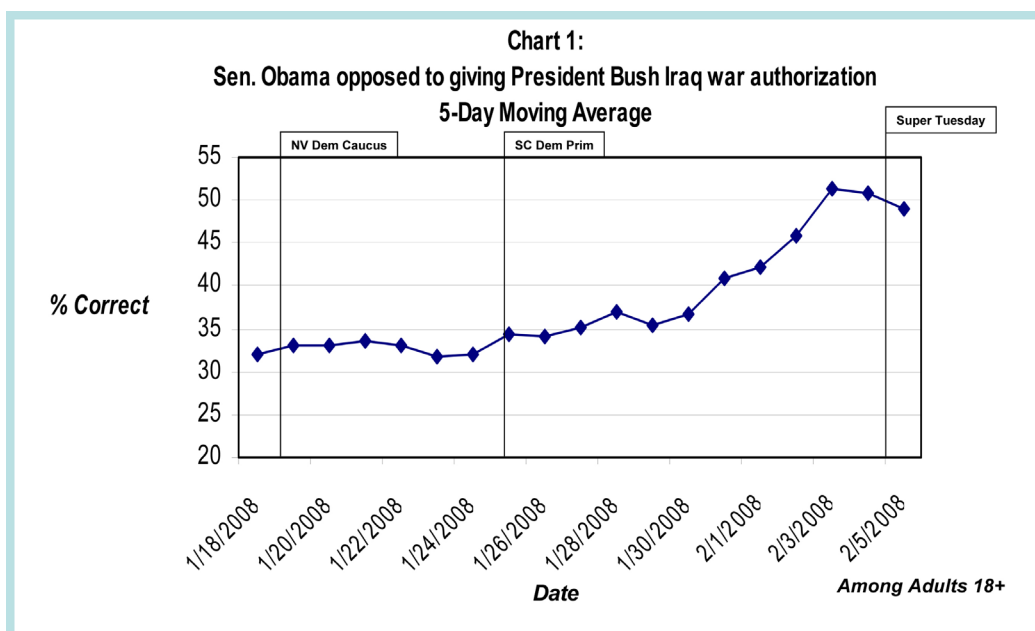
"Lost in the talk about the horse race and campaign tactics is the fact that there are important distinctions between candidates and across parties," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and co-director of the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES).

"The NAES suggests that the country has learned important information about these issue distinctions but still has a way to go," said Jamieson.

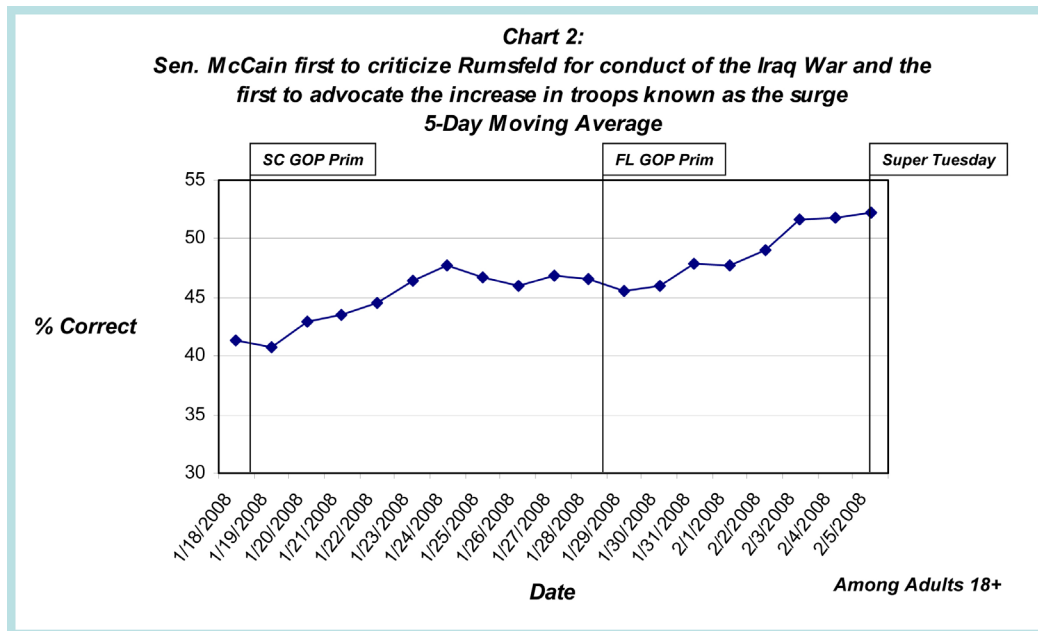
The candidates have had ample opportunities to air their positions. More than 30 debates and other forums have already taken place. Two more Democratic debates are on tap in coming days. Tomorrow, the candidates will meet in Austin, Texas, at an event co-sponsored by CNN, Univision Communications, Inc. and the Texas Democratic Party. On Feb. 26, they will meet again at a debate co-sponsored by NBC and Cleveland State University in Cleveland.

Counting both Democratic and Republican, more than 70 primaries and caucuses have been held. Over 30 million votes have been cast, and more than \$100 million has been spent on political advertising.

On specific issues, voter awareness is climbing. For example, the charts below show a steady increase in the knowledge that Sen. Barack Obama, Democrat of Illinois, was against the Iraq War from the beginning. In the first week the question was in the survey (January 14), 32 percent correctly named Sen. Obama. The number correctly naming Sen. Obama increased to about 50 percent in the five days leading up to Super Tuesday (see Chart 1).



Similarly, knowledge that Sen. John McCain, Republican of Arizona, was the first to criticize former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and call for a surge in U.S. troops in Iraq increased steadily over time. In the first few days after the question was placed on the survey (January 18), 41 percent correctly named Sen. McCain as once opposing President Bush’s tax cuts. In the days leading up to Super Tuesday, that number increased to 52 percent (see Chart 2). During that time Sen. McCain ascended to front-runner status.



Over the course of the survey, respondents were asked a variety of questions about specific issues and candidate positions. (For the list of questions, see below.) On Democratic candidates’ positions, the most well-known is that Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York is proposing health mandates. Nearly six in 10 say they know this. Just about four in 10 are aware that Sen. Obama was against the Iraq war from the start. Chart 1 shows how that knowledge has increased over time. Fewer know about the Democratic candidates’ various proposals to roll back President Bush’s tax cuts for certain Americans (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Knowledge of Democratic Candidates’ Stances: National Sample\***

|   | <b>Total</b>     |
|---|------------------|
| Obama was against the Iraq war authorization from the start<br>(1/14/08 - 2/5/08)                                     | 38%<br>(N=5,485) |
| Democratic candidates would eliminate the Bush tax cuts for people above a certain income level<br>(1/14/08 - 2/5/08) | 25%<br>(N=5,485) |
| Clinton in favor of health care mandates<br>(1/14/08-1/25/08, 1/30/08-2/5/08)   | 58%<br>(N=4,242) |
| Obama has done more toward ethical reform<br>(1/22/08 - 2/5/08)   | 23%<br>(N=3,649) |

\*Sample sizes vary because questions were placed on the survey at different times

On Republican candidate stances, most know that Sen. McCain supported the surge early on and was the first to criticize Rumsfeld on the war (see Chart 2). A nearly equal proportion (43 percent) correctly names Sen. McCain as the supporter of an immigration bill that calls for closing the border followed by creating a path for citizenship to those who have not

broken any criminal laws. About three in 10 were able to name former Gov. Mike Huckabee as the Republican candidate who favors abolishing the IRS and supporting both a constitutional amendment prohibiting same sex marriage and one that outlaws abortion.

**Table 2: Knowledge of Republican Candidates' Stances: National Sample\***

|   | <b>Total</b>     |
|---|------------------|
| McCain opposed some Bush tax cuts<br>(1/14/08 - 1/28/08, 1/30/08 - 2/5/08)  | 29%<br>(N=4,940) |
| McCain first to criticize Rumsfeld and advocate surge<br>(1/14/08 - 2/5/08)   | 47%<br>(N=5,485) |
| Knowledge of specifics of McCain's Immigration Plan<br>(1/30/08 - 2/5/08)   | 43%<br>(N=1,676) |
| Huckabee favors abolishing IRS<br>(1/31/08 - 2/5/08)  | 30%<br>(N=1,430) |
| Huckabee supports both a constitutional amendment prohibiting same sex marriages and a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion<br>(1/22/08 - 1/30/08) | 32%<br>(N=1,978) |

\*Sample sizes vary because questions were placed on the survey at different times

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

**Methodology and survey questions:**

Data for this analysis comes from the NAES telephone survey. The field period ran from January 14 through February 5, 2008. The total number of respondents interviewed during this period was 5,485. This analysis measured candidate knowledge. The data were weighted to match the census.

The sample sizes vary for each question reported because some questions were asked at different times.

**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, examines a wide range of political attitudes about candidates, issues and the traits Americans want in a president. It places 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.

**Question Wording—Knowledge Questions (Each knowledge question was asked among all respondents)**

Which Democratic candidate running for president was opposed to giving President Bush authorization to wage war in Iraq: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards (until Jan. 30), or Barack Obama? (correct- Obama)  
(Added to the survey, January 14)

Which Democratic candidate running for president is proposing a health care reform plan that mandates that everyone have health insurance: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards (until Jan. 30), or Barack Obama? (correct- Clinton)  
(Added to the survey, January 14; suspended January 25; reinserted in the survey January 30)

Which Democratic candidate running for president would eliminate the Bush tax cuts for people above a certain income level: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards (until Jan. 30), Sen. Barack Obama, all of them, or none of them? (correct- all of them)  
(Added to the survey, January 14)

Which Democratic candidate running for president did the most in the United States Senate to pass ethics reform: Hillary Clinton, John Edwards (until Jan. 30), or Barack Obama? (correct- Obama)  
(Added to the survey, January 22)

Which Republican candidate running for president opposed some of the Bush tax cuts: Rudy Giuliani (until Jan. 30), Mike Huckabee, John McCain, or Mitt Romney? (correct- McCain)  
(Added to the survey, January 14; deleted January 28; reinserted January 30)

Which Republican candidate running for president was the first to criticize former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld for conduct of the Iraq War and the first to advocate the increase in troops known as the surge: Rudy Giuliani (until Jan. 30), Mike Huckabee, John McCain, or Mitt Romney? (correct- McCain)  
(Added to survey, January 14)

Which Republican candidate running for president has an immigration plan that would, as a first step, secure the nation's borders, then, once that is done, allow people who entered the country illegally to have the opportunity to become citizens under certain conditions, but deport those who have committed crimes while in the United States: Mike Huckabee, John McCain, or Mitt Romney? (correct- McCain)  
(Added to survey, January 30)

Which Republican candidate or candidates running for president supports abolishing the Internal Revenue Service: Mike Huckabee, John McCain, or Mitt Romney? (correct- Huckabee)  
(Added to survey, January 31)

Which Republican candidate running for president supports both a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriages and a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion: Rudy Giuliani, Mike Huckabee, John McCain, or Mitt Romney? (correct- Huckabee)  
(Added to survey, January 22; deleted, January 30)

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