

VOTER PERCEPTIONS OF HOW '08 CANDIDATES WOULD HANDLE IRAQ WAR: REPUBLICANS WANT IN, DEMOCRATS WANT OUT

*Clinton Dominates Democratic Field,
Giuliani, Fred Thompson, McCain in Dead Heat for First Among Likely Primary Voters*

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Voter Perceptions of Presidential Candidates and the War

With the Iraq War continuing to dominate voter concerns, as seen by opposition to the War outranking all other key issues facing the U.S. at 27% (triple the second place issue, the Economy, at 9%), this month's Diageo/Hotline Poll probed voter perceptions on what actions regarding the War they felt the top presidential candidates, along with President Bush, may or may not take. Not surprisingly, President Bush was seen as being by far the most likely to maintain the status quo, with 50% saying he would not draw down US forces in Iraq. More generally, voters are much more likely to think that Democratic candidates rather than Republican candidates will bring the troops home, either beginning in the next three months or immediately (see Table 1). As expected, especially when compared to the Democratic front-runners, voters see Republicans as strongly supportive of leaving troops in Iraq to train Iraqis and target Al Qaeda leaders or making no cutbacks whatsoever in troop strength.

Out of all the candidates, Sen. John McCain is seen as being the biggest hawk, with 21% saying he would make no reduction in troop strength and 31% saying he would leave a substantial number of forces in Iraq. Sen. Hillary Clinton is seen as the most likely to back withdrawal, with 34% stating that she would support starting to bring the troops home in three months' time and 31% saying she would back an immediate withdrawal of US forces.

However, regardless of who wins the presidency in 2008, 49% of voters feel that the incoming president will back some kind of withdrawal, while only 36% believe that President Bush's successor will maintain a significant military presence in Iraq.

Table 1: How Presidential Candidates Would Handle the Iraq War
(n=801)

	Leave troops in Iraq to Train Iraqis and Target Al Qaeda	Start Withdrawing Troops in Next 3 months	Begin Immediate Withdrawal of Troops	Make no Cutbacks in Troops
DEMOCRATS				
Clinton	13%	34%	31%	5%
Edwards	18%	31%	21%	5%
Obama	13%	30%	28%	6%
REPUBLICANS				
Giuliani	25%	19%	9%	18%
McCain	31%	20%	5%	21%
Romney	25%	15%	4%	11%

Success in Iraq

The challenge America's military and political leaders face in defining victory in Iraq appears to plague the electorate as well. While there is little to no overriding consensus on what "success" in Iraq would look like, a plurality cite Iraqi forces taking over control of their country's security (30%). One-fifth of voters say they will view the War in Iraq as a success if a majority of U.S. troops are withdrawn (20%). Another 20% think the War will be a success if the Iraqi infrastructure such as the sectors responsible for electricity, oil, water, and sewage is fully restored.

Similarly, voters view a decrease in U.S. troop casualties (19%) and eliminating Al Qaeda strongholds in Iraq as key to American success (19%). To a slightly lesser extent, voters define success in Iraq as a significant lowering of civilian casualties (16%) and a reduction of federal spending on the War (14%).

2008 Primary Vote

Looking at the 2008 presidential vote, the Democrats are far better positioned than their Republican counterparts. In a generic ballot, the Democratic candidate wins by a whopping 24% (51% to 27%) over the Republican candidate. This is a five point increase for the Democrat since May (46% to 27%).

Among registered voters who typically vote in the Democratic primary, Hillary Clinton is nearly 10 percentage points ahead of her nearest competitor, Barack Obama, 39% to 30%. John Edwards is struggling in third place at only 11% but remains the only other Democratic candidate in double digits. Hillary Clinton is not only well ahead of the rest of the Democratic pack, but she also has the highest favorability rating of all the candidates, the highest our poll has ever seen for her (57%).

Among Republican primary voters, Rudy Giuliani, at 20%, is in a statistical tie with his two closest competitors, Fred Thompson and John McCain, who are at 19% and 17%, respectively. This is particularly striking given not only Fred Thompson's as-of-yet undeclared status, but that McCain's campaign has already been written off by so many. While it can be said that he is down, it appears McCain is definitely not out of the race.

As for the rest of the field, Mitt Romney occupies the fourth place spot, albeit at a distant 8%. Were it not for his consistently strong polling in the early primary states of Iowa and New Hampshire, it would be difficult to justify keeping him in the top tier of Republican candidates. However, he does remain the only other Republican candidate, besides Sam Brownback, whose numbers exceed the poll's margin of error.

Table 2: Which Presidential Candidate Will You Vote for in the 2008 Election?
(Primary Voters: n=393 Democrats; n=250 Republicans)

Democratic Primary	Total
Clinton	39%
Obama	30%
Edwards	11%
Kucinich	3%
Richardson	2%
Biden	2%

Republican Primary	Total
Giuliani	20%
F. Thompson	19%
McCain	17%
Romney	8%
Brownback	4%
Paul	2%
Huckabee	1%
Tancredo	1%
T. Thompson	1%
Hunter	*

To obtain complete poll results please see www.diageohotlinepoll.com.

To schedule an interview with Ed Rollins or Ed Reilly, contact Lauren Vincelli at (212) 850-5600 or Lauren.Vincelli@fd.com

Methodology: The Diageo/*Hotline* Poll was conducted by telephone from July 19 through July 22, 2007, among a random, nationally representative sample of 801 registered voters age 18 and older (margin of error +/- 3.5%).

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