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March 12, 2009: Why Should Iowa Remain the First Presidential Primary?

APSA Press Release



For Immediate Release
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Why Should Iowa Remain the First Presidential Primary? Because it is More Representative Than You Might Think.

Washington, DC—A new study finds that Iowa reflects the diversity of America more than most other U.S. states and is well-placed to deserve its status as the first presidential nomination primary. In particular, Iowa was found to be particularly typical of the U.S. in economic and social terms.

The research was presented in an article by political scientists Michael Lewis-Beck (University of Iowa) and Peverill Squire (University of Missouri) entitled "Iowa: The Most Representative State?" appearing in the January issue of *PS: Political Science & Politics*, a journal of the American Political Science Association. The article is available online at <http://www.apsanet.org/media/PDFs/PSJan09LewisBeckSquire.pdf>.

The authors set out to answer the question of whether or not Iowa is truly as unrepresentative of the U.S. as is widely assumed, especially the idea that its "heavily rural, northern European-descended population make it far from demographically representative of contemporary America." They note initially that in terms of size, location, and accession to the Union (1846), Iowa is about at the midpoint for all states—but that investigating the characteristics of the inhabitants of the state is the necessary crucial step. To do so, they examine "an extensive battery of state-level socioeconomic and political measures...[and] uncover their underlying patterns."

Their measures include 51 different indicators of social, cultural, economic, political, and policy activities in each of the 50 states that are further weighted and compiled into 3 main factors: Economics, Diversity, and Social Problems. The results for each state on each indicator and factor were then scored and ranked. Their findings show that the overwhelming majority (39) of Iowa's indicators was typical of the broader U.S. population, or within one standard deviation of the average. The findings show that not only is "Iowa a reasonably representative state," but that Iowa's standing of 12th overall outperforms New Hampshire—its longstanding national rival for the first-in-the-nation primary.

Diversity was a drag on Iowa's overall ranking, where "in a nutshell, the population of Iowa is too old and white to represent the nation" but the authors observe that "this is not the only factor that counts....Nor is it arguably the most important....in terms of distinguishing one state from another, the economics dimension is about three times as important as the [social] problems dimension, and almost twice as important as the diversity dimension."

Elaborating on that point, the authors underscore their finding that Iowa is the most representative state in the Union on economic conditions. They conclude by noting that "all things considered, there seems to be no cause to take away Iowa's first-in-the-nation presidential selection status. If one state must hold this position then it is hard to make a better pick."

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