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THOUSANDS OF SMALL BATTLES: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION NETWORKS ON VOTE CHOICE IN CAUCUSES

by

Jonathan Andrew Jackson

A DISSEPTION

Presented to the Faculty of The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Political Science

Under the Supervision of Professor Elizabeth Theiss-Morse

Lincoln, Nebraska

July, 2018
THOUSANDS OF SMALL BATTLES: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION NETWORKS ON VOTE CHOICE IN CAUCUSES

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University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisor: Elizabeth Theiss-Morse

How do the people with whom we talk about politics influence our voting behavior? In this dissertation, I seek to answer that question within the particular context of voters in a single Iowa county in the 2016 Republican presidential caucus. In doing so, I seek to refine generalizations about the influence of political discussion networks on voting behavior, mainly developed to explain behavior in general elections, to nomination contests, a comparatively underdeveloped area of inquiry. This study also contributes to a greater understanding of the behavior of Iowa caucus attendees, an understudied area despite Iowa’s importance (along with New Hampshire) in our sequential presidential nominating system. Through a series of panel interviews supported by observations, I make several findings affirming theories on social influences on voting behavior within the context of nomination contests. The first is that individuals are reasonably accurate when predicting which candidate a political discussion partner supports despite the multi-candidate nature of the nomination contest and not having party ID as a frame of reference. Second, although there is some evidence for campaign effects in the form of contacts from campaigns or supporters of candidates, political discussion networks have a stronger influence on vote choice in nomination contests than do campaign effects. I note a tendency towards increased homophily on candidate preference over the course of a campaign. A unique finding of this study that homophily within a group may trigger strategic voting behavior, in the form of supporting the main
rival of the leading candidate within a political discussion network, as well as bandwagoning. Finally, an emergent study of local political elites finds variation between local elected officials, party leaders, and party activists in terms of ideology and the size of political discussion networks. Those findings suggest that local party leaders may play a more important role than local elected officials in diffusing political information in their communities during nomination contests. I conclude with recommendations for further research.
Dedication

In memory of Joseph H. Jackson, a good brother and friend. You left us much too soon.

In memory of Allan L. McCutcheon, who enthusiastically helped me begin this journey, despite my decision not to conduct the research in his native Page County.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the result a great deal of time, effort, and angst on my part. However it is also the result of the work, support, and advice of many others. That is certainly true of my committee members. John Hibbing’s guidance and advice at several stages of my time at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has informed this dissertation, other research on which I am working, and my teaching. My studies with Dona-Gene Barton provided me with much of the broad political science theory behind this dissertation. As the graduate chair of the Political Science Department over the later part of my time at UNL, she has also been very supportive of my work and that of the other graduate students here. Many of the data gathering methods I used in the making of this dissertation were developed under that direction of Alice Kang in the summer of 2014. Without her assistance, this would be a much poorer piece of work. Ron Lee graciously agreed to join my committee as the outside member. His probing questions as he came on board helped me better focus my analysis.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. As my committee chair, she has endured the fits and starts of my writing “process” with professionalism and good humor, and has provided invaluable guidance and advice throughout my graduate career. Beth expertly combines academic rigor with niceness in a way that has at times convinced me both that I must do better and that I can do better. Those characteristics served me well and have also been instrumental in her continued rise in UNL’s academic and administrative ranks despite her best efforts to avoid it.
There are many faculty, staff, and fellow graduate students who have also had a
hand in providing feedback and support that helped make this dissertation possible. I
would like to particularly thank Katelyn Abraham, Michael Combs, Ernest Dupree III,
Matthew Eberhart, Balazs Feher-Gaura, Sarah Gittleman, Frank Gonzalez, John Gruhl,
Ingrid Haas, Kyle Hull, Jeonghyeon Kim, John Peterson, Stephen Schneider, Kevin
Smith, Sergio Wals, and Clarisse Warren. Julia Reilly and Cary Wolbers had a direct
hand in this research by agreeing to attend and video two of the caucus meetings in
Fremont County and I am grateful for their help. Ross Miller was the Graduate Chair
when I started at UNL and was greatly helpful in making it possible for me to be able to
begin my studies here. Helen Sexton was the first person I meet when I came to UNL and
has been enormously helpful throughout my time here. David Csontos has also been very
helpful during my time here and is one of the nicest curmudgeons (or, perhaps, one of the
most curmudgeonly nice guys) I have ever met.

I received useful feedback and training related to this dissertation at the 2015
Iowa Conference on Presidential Politics, the 2016 ICPSR Summer Program Introduction
to Network Analysis and Advanced Network Analysis Workshops, the 2017 Annual
Political Networks Conference and Workshops, and the 2018 North Carolina Political
Science Association Conference. While attempting to list every individual who provided
helpful feedback at those meetings is impossible, I would like to point out the help of
John Skvoretz, from the University of South Florida, for his insights on network analysis.

This dissertation would have been impossible without the acceptance and support
of many people in Fremont County, Iowa. The members of Fremont County Republican
Party Central Committee were universally supportive and helpful. Special thanks goes to Freddie Krewson, the Republican County Chair. Research like this is difficult, if not impossible, without the help of a gatekeeper and Freddie was as helpful a gatekeeper as any social scientist could have hoped to work with. His support and introductions paved the way for much of the early part of my research. The staff at the Fremont County Auditor’s office were always professional and helpful, especially in providing me with information I needed to construct my participant recruitment list. The public libraries in the towns of Sidney, Tabor, Hamburg, and Randolph served as my local offices, were I would enter data, plan data collection, and temporarily escape the midsummer heat. I am thankful for the staffs of those libraries for their helpfulness. Of course, this research would not be possible without the cooperation of the research participants. Research ethics and institutional review board rules prevent me from thanking them by name, but I am grateful.

I would also like to thank my family for their love and support. My mother, Mary N. Jackson, taught me how to plow through difficulties and simultaneously be supportive of loved ones. My children, Adelia, Austin, and Christine, have had to endure way too many nights of daddy being away at conferences or being grumpy from wrestling with data or writings, but have been good sports and sources of joy. Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Im Jeong-sun, who has heard so much about the ends and outs of this dissertation that she is as ready as I am to get it done. This dissertation is as much a result of your patience and sacrifice as it is my own, and I will always be grateful. Open bar, dude!
Grant Funding

A substantial portion of this dissertation was made possible by funding from the Political Science Department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Institute for Humane Studies. My field work in the summer of 2015 was made possible through a UNL McPhee Fellowship and Institute for Humane Studies PhD scholarship. Further work was made possible through a Thomas W. Smith Fellowship and a Michael and Andrea Leven Family Foundation Fellowship, both provided through IHS.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On a typically cold February evening in Farragut, Iowa, voters from two precincts packed into the library of the (since closed) Nishnabotna High School to participate in the first vote for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination. Some had to take time to change their voter registration to Republican at a table in the hall outside the library before entering. Down the hall from the library, the sounds of the basketball game the Nishnabotna High School Blue Devils were hosting could be heard; not everything in Iowa stopped for the presidential caucus. Early in the caucus meeting, several individuals rose to speak on behalf of their preferred candidates. Those speeches and the side conversations that took place just before and during the caucus meeting were the last chances that friends and neighbors had to influence each other’s vote before ballots were cast, a process that began months earlier with the first conversations about the then-emerging field of Republican candidates.

In the broadest sense, this study is about what causes people to vote the way they do, although that question is expressed by examining a particular event (the 2016 Iowa caucus) in a particular place (Fremont County, Iowa). By what processes do we evaluate political information? More specifically, how do social influences, as acted out through our political discussion networks, influence voting behavior? I use Ikeda and Boase’s definition of political discussion network as “discussants (whom) respondents listed as being those with whom they discuss political matters” (2010, p 12). This narrowing of terms is meant to provide a more readily operationalized measure of that subset of social networks that include discussion of politics while recognizing that most talk in political
discussion networks is not directly political and that they are “constrained by other social influences” (Hibbing et al., 2011, p 603).

The major parties’ nomination processes provided the American public with a pair of historically unpopular nominees in 2016.\(^1\) Despite the importance of nomination contests in limiting the candidates voters have to choose from in general elections, most work on political discussion networks in the United States, such as Huckfeldt and Sprague’s canonical studies of voters in the 1984 presidential election, focus on general elections, when known party affiliation of discussion partners acts as a strong cue about voting intentions. But what happens in nomination contests, when party affiliation offers no clue about which candidate a family member, friend, or neighbor supports? This study will also help address that question.

The General Relevance of this Study

The difficulties involved in figuring out how members of the public go about forming their opinions has caused political scientists to caution that the will of the people is “incredibly hard to put your finger on” (Noel, 2010, p. 4). Individuals seek to vote correctly (that is, in accordance with their preferred policy outcomes) with the minimal amount of effort in seeking out information on which to base that decision (Downs, 1957). To that end, voters seek out sources they believe to be reliable to act as shortcuts in gathering and analyzing information. Those shortcuts can be based on trusted media sources, groups one belongs to or identifies with, or people whose opinion one trusts (Lupia, 1994; Mondak, 1995; Popkin, 1991). Researchers have also found that

individuals rely on those around them to form identities of themselves and help determine how “one of us” would interpret political information in which people immersed in common social contexts “suggest to each other and reinforce certain ways of interpreting current events” (Walsh 2004, p. 22).

This research is a case study observing voters in rural Iowa. However, it is not just about Iowa voters or rural voters, but is an “intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). This case is bound in space (Fremont County, Iowa) and time (several months before and during the 2016 Iowa presidential caucus). Although a single case study does not usually form the basis for generating new generalizations, it can be a useful tool for refining generalizations and forming “naturalistic generalizations” that can be applied to other cases (Stake, 1995), in this instance the influence of social networks on candidate support. An advantage of this method is its use of a wide variety of information to provide an in-depth picture of the case.

The Intrinsic Importance of Iowa

In addition to the general applicability of this study, there is also an intrinsic value in understanding the decision-making process of voters in the first contest to determine who will win arguably the most important elected position in the world. Iowa, along with New Hampshire, is an early make-or-break competition in the nominating process, giving it an outsized importance in the presidential nominating process. Because “Small events in Iowa can have big effects on the rest of the presidential campaign” (Bartels, 1989, p. 122), campaigns pour a great deal of resources into influencing voters in the Iowa caucuses. However, rather than act as kingmaker, Iowa’s primary roll has more often
been to reduce the size of the field and influence what happens in New Hampshire eight
days later (Mayer, 1996; Adkins and Dowdle, 2001), meaning that more candidates of
more ideological stripes are actively campaigning in the months leading up to the
caucuses than at any other time in the presidential nominating process.

Some scholars have downplayed the importance of Iowa, the first presidential
caucus state (and the first presidential primary state, New Hampshire), noting that the
winner of the so-called “invisible primary” was the most likely winner of the presidential
nomination. Between 1980 and 2008, all but two of the candidates who raised the most
money in the months before the Iowa caucus went on to win their party’s nomination
(Aldrich 2009). However, Iowa and New Hampshire influence the nomination contests
long before the first votes are cast. Poll numbers in the early nominating states have a
stronger influence on national media coverage and national polling numbers than the later
have on the former, justifying candidates’ early and intense focus on those early voting
states (Christenson and Smidt, 2012). The importance of Iowa in the nomination process
may even have become enhanced over the past decade due to what Hull (2008) calls “E-
mentum”, the ability of campaigns to more quickly capitalize on Iowa success through
Internet voter contact and fund raising, a finding demonstrated by the ability of the
Obama campaign to build quickly on its success in Iowa in 2008 (Redlawsk et al., 2011).

Although there is a rich supply of literature on the impact of Iowa on the
presidential nominating process and the impact of campaigns on the Iowa vote, it is
relatively weak on the specific processes by which individual caucus-goers decide for
whom to support and what influences those processes. In one of the most recent and
scientifically rigorous books on the Iowa caucuses, Redlawsk, Tolbert, and Donovan note
that “few scientific studies of caucus attendees exist in the literature” (Redlawsk et al., 2011, p. 124). This case study aims to help fill that void in the literature by using available data, observations, and interviews in a single Iowa county to explore how political discussion networks influence vote choice among presidential caucus voters. However, and as previously noted, this is not just a study of rural voters or Iowa voters and will develop findings applicable to other contexts.

**Dissertation Outline**

In the remainder of this dissertation, I present the methodology and findings of nine months of fieldwork and follow up surveys that produced a unique dataset and supporting observations. In Chapter 2, I begin by detailing the theoretical and practical considerations that eventually led to my decision to focus the study on Republican likely caucus voters in Fremont County, Iowa. I also provide a description of Fremont County to provide a context for the findings in order to help determine how relevant this case study may be to other cases. I then detail the methods employed to gather the data analyzed in the later chapters of this dissertation. Those methods were developed in a pilot study in Nemaha County, Nebraska, in the summer of 2014 and further refined over the next several months. Most of the information used in this dissertation is based on a series of interviews conducted from the summer of 2015 through several weeks after the Iowa presidential caucus of 2015. I close the chapters with a description of observational data collection.

In Chapter 3, “Dyadic Network Analysis and the Correctness of Perceptions of Discussion Partner Views”, I briefly review three levels of network analysis: egocentric, dyadic, and complete, and note the limitations of each level of analysis. I then review
relevant literature related to information exchange and perceptions of homophily in political discussion networks. The resulting expectations are that people will be able to accurately predict the candidate preferences of their discussion partners and that accuracy will increase over time as the caucus date nears. I also expect that, when people inaccurately predict the candidate preferences of their discussion partners, they will tend to falsely believe that their discussion partners support the same candidates that they do. I test those expectations using dyadic network analysis drawn from my dataset.

In Chapter 4, “Campaign Effects and Ideological Vote Share”, I review two of the “usual suspects” thought to influence voting in nomination contests. I review the relevant literature related to campaign effects that yield two expectations that can be tested with my dataset. The first is that people who receive person-to-person contacts from a candidate’s campaign (rather than, say, hear ads for that candidate on the radio) are more likely to support that candidate than those who do not. The second is that people who personally meet a candidate or hear a candidate speak in person are more likely to support a candidate than those who do not. I test those expectations using panel data from each of the five rounds of interviews conducted with study participants. I also have two expectations based on the literature on ideology and voting. First, I expect that people are more likely to vote for candidates that they perceive to be closer to themselves ideologically. Second, as people receive information on the candidates during the course of the campaign, variation in their perceptions of candidate ideology will become narrower. Those expectations are tested using measures of self-perceived ideology taken in the summer of 2015 and measures of perceived candidate ideology taken that summer and again in January of 2016.
In Chapter 5, “Political Discussion Networks and Vote Choice”, I use egocentric network analysis to investigate the possible impact of individuals’ political discussion networks on their candidate support and how political discussion networks may moderate campaign effects. I start with a review of the literature on the influence of social identity and political discussion on political behavior. My initial expectations are that there is homophily within political discussion networks on candidate support and that the level of homophily increases over the course of a political campaign. I also expect that having supporters of a candidate within someone’s political discussion network will increase the chance that messages from that candidate’s campaign will be effective in influencing that person to support that candidate.

In Chapter 6, “Social Contexts and the Political Activism of Local Political Elites”, I present emergent findings on three sets of local political activists: local elected officials, active members of the county party’s central committee, and political activists who participate in party activities during election periods, but who are otherwise inactive. I investigate the relative sizes of political discussion networks of those three types of elites and how they change in size over the course of the presidential campaign. I also investigate the relative levels of political conservatism of the three types of elites. This chapter includes qualitative analysis of the expressed belief in the efficacy of political talk, the relative importance of ideological conservatism and political moderation, and the willingness to engage in strategic voting.

In the aptly named final chapter, “Conclusion”, I review the main findings of chapters three through six. I then discuss the major implications of this study, go over its
strengths and limitations of this study, and point out possible avenues for further research.
CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDY SELECTION AND METHODS

This chapter is a review of the methods employed to collect the data analyzed in the rest of this dissertation. This research is based on a case study of voters in rural Iowa. It is a single case: Republican caucus voters in Fremont County, Iowa. It primarily involved the collection of original data through participant interviews at five points in time before and after the 2016 Iowa presidential caucus. It also involved observation of participants and political events.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the case study approach and its application to this research. I then go over the theoretical and practical considerations that resulted in Fremont County being selected as the research site for this study. Next, I explain reasons for limiting the study to members of one political party, the challenges involved in creating a sample frame of likely 2016 caucus voters, and how those challenges were overcome. It is important in case study research to understand the context of the case to help determine how similar it may be with other cases, so I briefly explain the history, geography, and politics of Fremont County.

Most of the chapter details the procedures used to gather the data analyzed in the rest of this dissertation, especially the interview procedures that constitute the bulk of the data in this study. I start with a brief explanation of a pilot study in Nemaha County, Nebraska in 2014 during which I practiced and refine the interview techniques I employed in Fremont County. I then detail how potential participants were recruited for the study. There were five rounds of interviews: an initial in-person interview lasting an average of about twenty-six minutes in the summer of 2015, three follow up phone
interviews lasting about ten minutes each, and a final post-caucus phone interview lasting about five minutes. I review the procedures and content of those interviews. I close the chapter with an overview of observation data collection of Fremont County Republican Party central committee meetings, local political events and caucus of four of Fremont County’s five precincts, including a brief note on the difficulty of maintaining confidentiality of participants when encountering multiple participants at public events.

The Case Study Approach

This research is a case study of Republican caucus voters in a rural western Iowa county. A case study is an “exploration of a ‘bounded system”, the bounds being time and space (Creswell 2007). The particular space in this study is a single county in southwestern Iowa and the particular time is from June 2, 2015 to the Iowa presidential caucus on February 1, 2016. Notwithstanding Van Evera’s (1997) arguments about the potential for case studies to provide strong causal arguments, a single case study does not usually form the basis for generating new generalizations, although it can be a useful tool for refining generalizations and forming “naturalistic generalizations” that can be applied to other cases (Stake, 1995), in this instance the influence of political discussion networks on candidate support. So, at a minimum, the findings from this study can be used to test theories and can also be used to develop theories to be tested in other contexts, something greatly aided by the intense observation of the subject afforded by case study research (Flyvbjerg 2006).

A single case study may miss an important variable if it is not present in a measurable way within the case. For example, although rural America is widely and, for the most part, accurately regarded as conservative, there is diversity within rural areas
due to regional and demographic variation. Scala et al. (2015) also found that variation in the foundation of the local economy is also correlated with political party support, with farm-based rural counties generally supporting Republicans and “new rural” counties with economies based on leisure and service leaning towards Democrats. Researchers using a single case study in one type of county could potentially overstate the case for the generalizability of their results, for example, by conducting their study in a county with an emerging tourism economy and concluding that rural people are trending Democratic.

However, a variable of interest can be measured within a single case study. In fact, a single case study can provide strong causal arguments through “congruence procedures”, comparing the independent and dependent variables across observations within a case (Van Evera, 1997). For example, using the example from Scala et al. above, a case study in a “new rural” county can test hypotheses about why those counties are trending Democratic by collecting data on individual voters within the country. Such data could include how long they have lived in the county and their occupation, to test how much, if any, of the observed phenomenon is due to in-migration and how much is due to participation in service-based, rather than agricultural-related, work. Similarly, this case study includes individual-level measurements of things such as campaign effects by asking participants directly if they had received contacts from humans (as opposed to mail and robo-calls) connected to a presidential campaign and if they have personally met the candidate. This allows for more precision than more general measurements, such as candidate visits to the area (although those are also measured for comparison purposes).
Selecting the case

Although the generalizability of single case studies is the subject of much debate, the “strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalizability of a case study” (Flyvbjerg 2006, p226). Practical considerations, such as accessibility, must also be taken into account in case selection. After assessing theoretical and practical considerations I explain below I chose, Fremont County, Iowa as the location for this study.

Iowa is an ideal site because it would provide an extreme case for testing the impact of political discussion networks on two phenomena. The first is ideological vote share, the portion of the vote each candidate would receive if every voter voted for the candidate they believed to be closest to them ideologically. As the first electoral contest in the nation, Iowa has more candidates than any other presidential contest, with candidates dropping out if they face disappointing results there. This relative plethora of candidates makes Iowa an ideal testing ground for hypotheses regarding ideological vote share because it presents voters with a choice numerous candidates of various perceived ideologies, and also explains why some candidates choose to skip Iowa if they face too many similarly ideologically positioned candidates or if they are too distant from most caucus voters ideologically (Hull 2005), as New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Ohio Governor John Kasich largely did in 2016.

Iowa is also an ideal location to study is campaign effects. Iowa, along with New Hampshire and South Carolina, is visited by more presidential candidates than any other state. That intensity of effort by the presidential campaigns means that, as with ideological vote share, Iowa presents an extreme case for the study of campaign effects.
Once Iowa was selected, the particular location of the case study had to be selected. The selection process was based on three factors; accessibility, likelihood for a large portion of political discussion networks to be located within the county, and the target population being small enough that a single researcher could realistically recruit and interview a large portion of the population. A final factor was the cooperation of potential gatekeepers in helping to gain access to participants. Each of these factors will be considered in the next few paragraphs.

To effectively conduct the research, I needed to regularly visit the counties selected from June of 2015 to February of 2016. For that reason, the accessibility criterion was that the county seat had to be within a four hour round-trip drive of Lincoln, Nebraska. Drive times between Lincoln and the county seats were measured using the “How Far Can I Travel” app at freemaptools.com. Eight counties in southwestern Iowa met this criterion: Harrison, Shelby, Pottawattamie, Mills, Montgomery, Fremont, Page, and Taylor.

The second consideration was that political discussion networks within the county must be as self-contained as possible. In other words, as many members of the county as possible should work, shop and worship within the community as that would aid in mapping political discussion networks. This served two purposes. First, by working in a more isolated location, I hoped to be able to interview a higher proportion of members of participants’ political discussion networks. Second, by having a higher proportion of political discussion networks within a county, I sought to gain “strong controls” of omitted variables based on the “uniform character of the background conditions” being studied (Van Evera, 1997, p. 52)
The Omaha/Council Bluffs area is the most likely draw for people living in southwestern Iowa, so the self-contained criterion was that the county seat must be at least an hour-and-a-half round trip from Council Bluffs. Areas closer to the Omaha/Council Bluffs area would have a higher proportion of their population work and attend places of worship in the metro area, meaning that I would have less opportunity to interview other members of their political discussion networks. That is not to say that I was looking for a perfectly isolated community. Rather, I sought an area where a higher proportion of people lived, worked, and worshiped in the same area in order to increase the likelihood of interviewing other members of participants’ political discussion networks. This choice allowed me to conduct the dyadic network analysis presented in Chapter 3 in addition to egocentric network analysis presented in Chapter 5. An advantage of dyadic network analysis is that the findings are at least somewhat less dependent on the perception of network membership by individual participants (Borgatti et al. 2013, also see Van Duijn & Vermunt, 2006). In an extreme example of that, one participant participated in every round of the study but refuse to divulge the names of any political discussion partners. I was still able to draw a partial network for that participant based on that participant being listed in the political discussion networks of other participants. Drive times between Council Bluffs and the county seats were measured using the “How Far Can I Travel” app at freemaptools.com. That eliminated five counties, leaving Fremont, Page and Taylor. During the first round of interviews, I discovered that more of my participants in Fremont County than expected worked, worshiped, or sought medical treatment in Nebraska City, which is just across the
Missouri River. Despite that, there was enough self-containment to perform dyadic analysis political discussion networks in Fremont County.

The third consideration was that the pool of likely caucus goers had to be sufficiently small that a major portion of them could be interviewed before the caucuses scheduled for January of 2016. The basis for this measurability consideration was Republican Party caucus attendance in 2012 because that was the most recent competitive party caucus. The measurability criterion was that attendance in the Republican caucus in 2012 was 250 or less in that county. Republican caucus attendance was taken from a report by the Des Moines Register from that year. Of the three counties, only Page had more than 250 Republican caucus attendees in 2012, so it was eliminated from consideration.

Based on those criteria, Fremont Country was selected as the primary research location with Taylor Country as the back-up location should I encounter difficulties gaining access in Fremont County.

A final consideration was an assessment of how cooperative key individuals, such as local party officials, would be with a multi-month study in their community. Republican Party Chair Freddie Krewson proved to be generously cooperative and became a “gatekeeper” providing “entrance to the research site” (Creswell 2007 p 60) by introducing me to other members of the Fremont County Republican Party Executive Committee. Most of those executive committee members, in turn, also proved to be enormously helpful. They and Krewson provided introductions or let me drop their names when introducing myself at the courthouse or to other key figures in the county. Democratic Party chair Brian Kingsolver was also generous in offering information,
although I decided to limit my research to Republicans for reasons detailed in the next section.

Selecting the Participants

Once Fremont County was selected as the research area, the next step was selecting the population within Fremont County to be studied. In this section I will discuss the reasons for limiting my study to Republican likely caucus voters across the county and go over the process of creating a sample frame of those voters.

I had initially planned on studying both Democrats and Republicans across the entire county, but was advised by my committee members that the scale of my proposal was overly ambitious. This left me with two options; limiting my study to a geographical subset of Fremont County or limiting my study to members of one party.

Limiting the research to a geographic subset of Fremont County most likely would have meant limiting it to two or three of the county’s five precincts. The most likely choices would have been the Sidney and Green precincts. That selection would have included about half of the population of the county, including the towns of Sidney (the county seat in the middle of the county) and Tabor, the two largest towns in the county. It would have also been geographically compact, with most participants located within a thirty-minute drive of Sidney. Interviewing participants from both parties may have also given more data on cross-party discussion networks.

However, there were limitations to that approach. First, many politically relevant meetings, such as party central committee meetings or meetings of or with county officials, take place with people from across Fremont County. Limiting the research to just two or three precincts would have excluded some potentially important actors from
the study. For example, two of the more prominent members of the central committee live in Farragut precinct on the eastern edge of the county. It is also likely that, despite the geographic compactness gained by limiting the research to two precincts, studying participants from both parties in Green and Sidney precincts would have yielded fewer political discussion network connections than researching members of one party in all five precincts given the tendency towards homophily in social networks (McPherson, et al., 2001, although see Eveland & Kleinman, 2013). For those reasons, I chose to limit the research to members of a single party from across the county.

I elected to limit my study to Republicans for a couple of reasons. First, it appeared that the Republican Party was better organized in the county with regularly-held central committee meetings that I could attend. As it turned out, my sitting in on the central committee meeting in June of 2015 paved the way for several interviews with party activists. The county Democratic Party did not have such regular meetings. As I continued to do my research, I heard from people in the county that the Democratic Party in Fremont County had a change of leadership and that the party had to have the caucus for the entire party held at a single location (Sidney Elementary School) because of organizational difficulties that they were having.

Additionally, although the Republican field was wide open, I made the (mistaken, as it turned out) assumption that Hillary Clinton would easily win in Iowa. Because my dependent variable was vote choice in the 2016 presidential caucus, I believed it was better to research the party that would exhibit more variation on that variable.
An unanticipated advantage of researching Republicans is that it allowed me to interview more local elected officials, most of whom are Republicans. That allowed me to gather data that I used in chapter six of this dissertation.

Having decided to limit my study to Republicans, I needed to create a sample frame that would reflect my population (attendees of the 2016 Republican caucuses) as closely as possible. Because that population did not yet exist, I would have to select participants on other criteria. There is variation in participation from caucus to caucus because voters will come out for different candidates. However, because voting patterns are most often habitual (Gerber, Green, & Shachar 2003; Dinas 2012), it was reasonable to assume that most of the participants of the 2016 caucus could be found among the 244 people who voted in the 2012 caucus in the county. If getting a frame that matched the population was not possible, using the list of 2012 caucus voters would be reasonably close.

However, getting that list proved to be impossible. Unlike with primaries or general elections, Iowa caucus voter lists are not maintained by government officials because they are conducted by the parties. To further complicate matters, county party chair Freddie Krewson informed me that they had not kept a copy of that list after sending it to the state party. A member of the Fremont County Republican Central Committee got me in touch with an Iowa Republican Party’s Regional Political Director for the third congressional district. The official informed me that the state party does not give their caucus lists away. When I expressed an interest in buying the list for Fremont County, the official informed me that the party only makes the list available for purchase by candidate committees.
I conducted a handful of interviews in early June, 2015 through snowball sampling while I worked to develop a larger list. The snowball sample consisted of names of members of the Fremont County Republican Party executive committee, who were 2012 caucus attendees by definition (because those offices are filled at caucuses), so all participants contacted through snowball sampling were on the contact list that I later developed. I discovered in late June that, although there were no public records of all caucus attendees, lists of those elected as delegates and alternates to the Republican Party county convention and those elected as caucus officials or local party officials were filed with the office of the Fremont County Auditor. I used those lists as the basis of my sample. The staff at the auditor’s office proved to be accommodating and efficient; they located the records and allowed me to enter the vault where the records are kept to see them. The records were on the third or fourth layer of carbon copies and were too faded to copy with a copying machine, so I hand-copied the names and locations of 102 people from those lists and later matched them with a voter list I purchased from the auditor’s office. I added an additional 35 unique names from the 2014 caucus record, reasoning that those who attend midterm caucuses are also like to attend presidential caucuses.

The list of 137 names from 2012 and 2014 still left me 107 names short of the 244 people who attended the 2012 caucus. I supplemented the list by adding the names of Republicans who voted both in a (December 30, 2014) special election for state senate and a (February 10, 2015) special election for U.S. congress. A final supplemental list included those on my initial snowball sample and those who were listed in participants’ political discussion networks and who voted in at least one of the previously mentioned special elections. Combining all those lists yielded a working list of approximately 230
names. Purging those who had moved, died, or never participated in caucuses (that final measure acquired after initial contact with those on the list) yielded a final list of 199 likely 2016 Republican caucus voters.

**Fremont County, Iowa**

Some background on Fremont County may be useful in providing context for this research. In addition to providing a better feel for the local environment, including background on the community in which the study took place can help provide an understanding of potential contextual effects, broadly defined by Huckfeldt and Sprague as “any effect on individual behavior that arise due to social interaction within an environment” (1995, p. 10). Although obviously not a variable, a deeper knowledge of the context of this case study can be helpful given the “context-dependent” (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 221) nature of case study research. This section provides a very brief overview of the history, geography, demographics, and politics of Fremont County and may be useful for readers of this study in determining its applicability to other research.

Fremont County was founded in 1847. Its location along a major north-south transit route has shaped its history and economy. Due to its location next to the Missouri River and on the border with Missouri, the county (especially the town of Tabor) became a hub on the Underground Railroad as well as a staging ground from which John Brown and other “free soilers” launched attacks into Missouri and Kansas.

It is located in the far southwestern corner of Iowa. It borders Page County to the East, Montgomery County to the northeast, Mills County to the North, Nebraska and the Missouri River to the West and Missouri to the South. The western quarter of Fremont County rests in the Missouri River flood plain. It is agriculturally rich but is the most
sparsely populated part of the county. In addition to agricultural bounty, the flood plain also provides flat land on which a railway and Interstate Highway 29 were built. Rising above the flood plain to the east are a tall set of bluffs. They are the Loess Hills, a rare geographic formation of glacial deposits formed during the last ice age. Waubonsie State Park is located on a particularly large set of such hills in central Fremont County. The remaining two-thirds of the county consists of the rolling hills characteristic of western Iowa.

The three largest towns in the county are on a roughly north-south axis running through the middle of the county. Tabor is on the northern border with Mills County; part of the town is within Mills and the Fremont-Mills school district crosses the county line as well. The county seat and largest town in Fremont County, Sidney, is in the middle of the county. Hamburg, a few miles north of the border with Missouri at the southern end of the county, is located where the Nishnabotna River has cut a gap in the Loess Hills. The towns of Riverton, Farragut, Imogene, and Randolph are located in the eastern half of the county while Thurman is in the west at the edge of the Missouri River flood plain. The unincorporated communities of Bartlett and Percival are located further west on the flood plain.

Fremont County is divided into five precincts, each centered on one of the five largest towns in the county. Those towns also provide the restaurants, taverns, and drug stores that provide centers of coffee drinking, socialization and discussion. The most prominent of those coffee klatsch locations is Penn Drug in the county seat of Sidney. Located directly across from the courthouse, it has traditionally been the site of most
presidential candidate visits to the county, including three of the four visits to the county in the 2016 election (the fourth visit being to the high school near Sidney).

The US Census Bureau estimated that Fremont County had a population of 7,441 in 2010, of which 95.6% was non-Hispanic white. Hispanics were 2.4% of the population and all other ethnic or racial group were less than one percent of the population. The median household income was $49,245, slightly higher than the national mean of $46,326. That income was relatively evenly spread with only 9.1% of the county’s population below the national poverty line, compared to 14.5% nationwide. Education levels are somewhat below the national average with 18.6% of the population over twenty-five years old having a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 29.8% for the nation as a whole. Like much of the rural Midwest, Fremont County has seen decades of decline population. The highest reported population of Fremont County was 18,546 in the 1900 census, but it has declined to an estimated 6,906 (according to the Census Bureau) by 2015. That decline, due to increasing urbanization and greater efficiency in the agricultural industry, is similar to that of other rural counties in western Iowa.

There are 1,958 Republicans among the county’s 4,826 registered voters. The last two Republican presidential caucuses have been close affairs, reflecting an even division of conservative and more moderate voters in the county. In 2008 Mike Huckabee carried the county with 55 votes to Mitt Romney’s 53 out of a total of 191 votes cast. It was Romney’s turn to win a close contest in the county in 2012 when he received 59 votes out of 224, compared to Rick Santorum’s 58. The county tends to vote Republican, although a review of election records revealed a few local Democratic victories in local elections in the first decade of the 21st Century.
Data Gathering Procedures

In this section, I will detail the data gathering procedures used in this study, starting with a pilot study conducted in Nebraska in 2014 during which I developed many of the techniques used in Fremont County. I will then review how potential participants were initially contacted and recruited. The bulk of this section will deal with procedures for the five rounds of interviews conducted with participants. It will close with a discussion of observational research used to help better understand the context of the information gathered in those interviews.

In the summer of 2014 I conducted a study under the direction of Dr. Alice Kang. The goals of that study were to develop the skills and techniques that I would use during my later research, and to craft strategies for conducting research in Iowa. The study included a set of interviews with several local political elites in Nemaha County, Nebraska. Nemaha County was chosen because of its similarities to the counties in Iowa that were on the list of potential study sites, being small, rural and relatively far from larger cities. Its county seat, Auburn, is about 45 minutes southwest of Sidney, the county seat of Fremont County. Conducting those interviews was invaluable in preparing me for the interviews I would later conduct in Fremont County. They helped me better prepare my interview instruments, conduct interviews, and code and analyze interviews. To give two practical examples, I abandoned the use of lapel mics (interviewees tended to become overly formal after clipping the mics on themselves, as if the act of putting them on put them in “interview mode”) and invested in a foot pedal (which allowed me to rewind recordings with my foot, allowing me to keep my fingers on the keyboard) to speed the transcription of interviews.
To discover the impact of political discussion networks on the vote choice of Iowa caucus goers, I engaged participants in a series of interviews. The interviews consisted of an initial in-depth interview (with an average interview time of roughly 26 minutes) in the summer of 2015 followed by three follow up interviews of 5-10 minutes. A final, brief, post-caucus interview was conducted to collect the dependent variable. There were also some observations made of social settings and of politically relevant events such as county party meetings, campaign events, and social events. Such in-depth research can provide local context and meanings to improve understanding of data gathered (Fenno, 1986; Schatz, 2009).

The initial phase of interviews began in early June with interviews of local Republican Party leaders and others reached through snowball sampling. Interviews with those on the contact list I developed were conducted from early July through mid-August.

The first contact most potential participants received from me was in the form of a prenotification letter (see Appendix A). The individuals were addressed by name in the opening salutation. This practice has been found to increase response rates (Dillman et al. 2014). To further personalize the letter, I introduced myself as a “doctoral student from the Political Science department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln” and hand-wrote mailing addresses in blue ink on the envelopes. The rest of the first and second paragraphs explained the study and emphasized how important the respondent’s participation was to its success. Stressing the importance of participation and giving respondents an opportunity to share their views on a matter in which they have expertise (in this case, their own political views and their critiques of presidential candidates) has
been found to make surveys more salient (Groves et al., 2000), which helps increase the response rate.

The final two paragraphs provided my contact information and mentioned that I would be contacting them in person or by phone within two weeks. It also mentioned a two-dollar token of appreciation that I enclosed with the letter. Such small tokens have been found to increase response rates and two-dollar tokens are more cost effective than larger incentives in that they provide “more bang for the buck” in terms of increase in response rate per dollar spent (Singer & Ye, 2013).

The envelope featured a University of Nebraska-Lincoln logo and the letter was printed on University of Nebraska letterhead. University sponsorship has been found to help increase response rates (King et al. 2001, Dillman et al. 2014). University sponsorship can be especially effective when the research area is relatively close to the university (Ladik et al. 2007). Although Fremont County is in Iowa, it is much closer to Lincoln, Nebraska, than it is to either Iowa City (home of the University of Iowa) or Ames (home of Iowa State University). Fremont County is also in the Omaha, Nebraska, media market; most research respondents get their news from Omaha-based sources. A zip code-based study of college football team support by the New York Time’s “The Upshot” blog revealed that the Nebraska Huskers are the most popular team in Fremont County (Giratikanon, 2014), a finding supported by the number of Husker flags and signs on area buildings and vehicles.

Letters were mailed roughly once every 5-6 days from the first week of July through the first week of August. The first batch went to those in the sample frame who lived in the Sidney precinct, the second set of mailings to those in the Washington-
Hamburg precinct, the third to the Riverton precinct, the fourth to Farragut precinct, and the fifth to Green precinct and the western portion of Sidney precinct. Letter mailings were staggered so follow up contacts could be made within ten days of delivery.

Most of the voter information obtained from the Fremont County Auditor’s office included phone numbers. Although I had always planned to do some participant recruiting in-person, I also planned to recruit participants via phone as well. That plan was abandoned after initial recruitment via phone proved to be disappointing, with only two of ten people contacted agreeing to be interviewed (with one person being especially emphatic in his refusal). Although in-person recruiting can be more expensive (not an issue for me because I was doing all my own recruiting) and is much more time consuming, it tends to produce a higher response rate than phone recruiting (Dutwin et al. 2014).

To make recruitment as efficient as possible, I made “walk lists” for each day in the field. Each walk list included the names and addresses of people to be contacted that day and a map, created with Google Maps, of the most efficient route to take to reach those addresses. For potential participants who lived in a town, I walked from house to house. For those in rural areas, the walk list was actually a “drive list.” The list for each geographic area was divided into “day” and “evening” components based on potential participant age, with those 65 and older on the day list and those under 65 on the evening list, although I varied the times at which I visited each home if my initial attempts of contacting them were not successful. I made five attempts to contact potential participants before marking them as not contacted.
During the recruitment process, I continued to emphasize my affiliation with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and wore knit shirts with the UNL “N” on them every day I was in the field, as I did whenever I attend Republican Party central committee meetings and other events.

In addition to a higher response rate than phone recruiting, another advantage of using in-person recruiting is that it allowed for on-the-spot interviewing. Most of the people who participated in the study completed their first interview during my recruitment visit at their homes.

In addition to being able to gather longitudinal data, starting the research eight months before the caucus may have improved the response rate. Several participants noted in the months immediately preceding the caucus that they had stopped opening mail from unknown sources and would not have picked up the phone had they not already had my phone number on their contacts list.

It is difficult to gage the difference between study participants and nonparticipants because a full list of caucus voters is not available. A couple of limited comparisons are available from voter file information. They are similar in mean age: 62.5 years at the time of the caucus for participants and 60.8 years old for non-participants. There was some geographic variation between participants and nonparticipants on the contact list; Farragut precinct had 22 participants and 12 nonparticipants, Green precinct had 21 participants and 33 nonparticipants, Hamburg/Washington precinct had 17 participants and 15 nonparticipants, Riverton precinct had 7 participants and 19 non participants, and Sidney precinct had 32 participants and 19 nonparticipants. Geographically, participants were more representative of 2016 Republican caucus voters than were nonparticipants,
with participants having an average variation from caucus voters of 3.3 percentage points and nonparticipants having an average variation from caucus voters of 6.7 percentage points (see Table 2.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Precinct</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Nonparticipants</th>
<th>Caucus Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farragut</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg/Washington</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverton</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Proportion of study participants, nonparticipants and caucus voters by precinct

The final vote choice of the 80 participants who answered the question on for whom they voted for on caucus night is generally close to the caucus results. The top five finishers are in the same order and most have a similar percentage of the vote. The exception is Senator Ted Cruz; 30.4% of caucus participants reported voting for Cruz while only 20.5% of all caucus voters in Fremont County voted for him (see Table 2.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Actual Fremont County Votes (426 total)</th>
<th>Study Participant Votes (80 total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td>182 (42.7%)</td>
<td>32 (40.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td>87 (20.4%)</td>
<td>25 (31.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Rubio</td>
<td>77 (18.1%)</td>
<td>12 (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Carson</td>
<td>40 (9.4%)</td>
<td>6 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rand Paul</td>
<td>11 (2.6%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeb Bush</td>
<td>10 (2.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Kasich</td>
<td>6 (1.4%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Christie</td>
<td>5 (1.2%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Santorum</td>
<td>5 (1.2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>2 (0.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carley Fiorina</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Comparison of countywide and participant caucus votes.
*There was one countywide write-in vote for a candidate not on the ballot.

The initial interviews were conducted in-person between early June and early August, 2015. Ninety-eight people participated in those interviews. Most were conducted
in the participants’ homes although some were conducted in their places of business, in restaurants or in the Sidney public library. The first question was open-ended and primarily designed to get participants talking: “Could you tell me about yourself and why you became politically active?” Having an innocuous and easily answered question at the beginning of an interview has been found to increase the likelihood that the interview will be completed (Dillman 2014). Other open-ended questions in the interview instrument consisted of open ended questions on participants’ views of candidate electability and viability, litmus test issues, and organizations to which the participant belonged. They were also asked which presidential candidate they supported and why.

To measure political discussion networks, participants were asked “who have you talked about politics with over the past month?” making it clear that I was asking for names. For each person named, participants were then asked how they knew that person, how well they knew that person (acquaintance, close, or very close) and whom that person supported for president. Those follow-up questions were asked after the list of political discussion partners was completed in order to reduce the possibility of satisficing in the form of giving fewer names of political discussion partners in order to reduce the number of follow up questions the participant has to answer (Krosnick, 1999).

To measure ideology, both self-reported and the assessed ideology of the presidential candidates, I used a standard seven-point Likert scale with response options of “very conservative,” “conservative,” “slightly conservative,” “moderate,” “slightly liberal,” “liberal,” and “very liberal.” This question were used to measure ideological crowding. One problem that arose is that Donald Trump was not included in the first
several interviews of the first round. His name was added and included in most of the first round of interviews and in a latter round of interviews.

In addition, a battery of modified Wilson-Patterson questions using a 0-100 point scale were used to gain an objective measure of participant views. The scale is similar to the “feeling thermometers” used in the American National Election Studies surveys (ANES). Such scales have been shown to be reliable and allow respondents to express the strength of their feelings or a neutral position (Everett, 2013) and can provide a reliable and valid measure of ideology (Henningham, 1996) as a comparison to self-reported ideology as well as provide information about which issues voters feeling most strongly about. One variation in my scale from the ANES version is I only label the end points (where 0 represents very negative and 100 represents very positive) while that ANES version labels nine points (100 = very warm or favorable feeling; 85 = good, warm, or favorable feeling; 70 = fairly warm or favorable feeling; 60 = a bit more warm or favorable than cold feeling; 50 = no feeling at all; 40 = a bit more cold or unfavorable feeling; 30 = fairly cold or unfavorable feeling; 15 = quite cold or unfavorable feeling; 0 = very cold or unfavorable feeling). When presented with a choice including nine labeled points, over 95% of respondents tend to choose one of the labeled points, effectively making it a nine-point scale (Alwin, 1997). I did inform participants that 50 represents a neutral point.

To directly measure campaign effects, participants were asked if they had been contacted by presidential campaigns (other than junk mail or robo calls) and if they had personally met any of the candidates or been to a campaign event.
Many participants chose to elaborate on the closed-ended questions, providing greater context for their answers. Ninety-seven interviews were completed, most of which were recorded. In addition to other information, participants were asked for their phone numbers and permission to be called for follow-up interviews. Ninety-six of 97 participants agreed.

Three rounds of follow-up interviews were conducted between the initial interviews and the presidential caucus on February 1, 2016. Participants were contacted by phone with their permission. All three of the follow-up interviews took about ten minutes each.

The follow-up interviews were designed to measure changes in candidate support and political discussion networks. Questions on presidential candidate preference and political discussion partners were repeated in each round. If the participant supported a different candidate than in the previous round, I asked why there had been a change in preference. Additionally, participants were asked each round if they had been contacted by a presidential campaign (other than junk mail or robo calls) or had personally seen or met a presidential candidate since the last interview (expressed in terms of time such as “in the past six weeks”).

For questions on political discussion partners, I used a dependent data collection method. In dependent data collection of political discussion partners, I mentioned the names of the people listed in prior rounds and asking participants if they had talked to those people over the past month or two (depending on how long it had been since the last interview). Such dependent data collection methods tend to increase the validity of the data collected in comparison to independent data collection in panel studies,
especially on “noisy” variables (Hill, 1994) as I expected the political discussion partner question to be. In addition, I saw using dependent data collection questions as a way of addressing concerns over satisficing if the participant remembered from the previous survey that there would be follow up questions for each person on their list. Once the list of prior political discussion partners had been exhausted, I asked participants about new discussion partners, being careful to ask “who else have you talked politics with” rather than “is there anyone else you talked politics with” to establish an expectation that there would be additional names. As in the initial round of interviews, follow up question about discussion partners were only asked after the list of discussion partners had been exhausted. Each round of interviews also included questions that were only asked that round to provide more data on the participants. Those unique questions are detailed below.

The second round (first follow up round) of interviews was conducted in September and October of 2015. The standard repeated questions were asked: candidate preference, political discussion partners, contacts from presidential campaigns, and seeing presidential candidates. Additionally several unique questions were asked in this round. The first, meant as a warm-up question, was “Are you happy with the current field of Republican presidential candidates or is there someone else you would like to see enter the race?” If they said they would like someone else to enter the race, they were asked to name that person. They were asked if they had seen any of the presidential debates. If they answered “yes”, they were asked which candidate they believed had performed the best in them. Finally, they were asked about their education level.
One issue that arose during the second round was due to flooding in the spring of 2015. That flooding led to a late harvest, which made it difficult to reach some participants as they were doing extra work that fall. Seventy-three interviews were completed and some of those who were missed in this round answered the unique questions from this round in subsequent rounds.

The third round was mostly conducted in November and December of 2015, although a handful of interviews were conducted in the first week of January. The standard repeated questions were asked: candidate preference, political discussion partners, contacts from presidential campaigns, and seeing presidential candidates. The warm-up question for this round was “Do you think it is good to have plenty of time to evaluate the presidential candidates, or do you think presidential election campaigns should be shorter?” Additionally, I asked questions regarding electability (can the candidate win in the fall) and viability (can the candidate win the Republican nomination). For each candidate, they were asked "Regardless of whom you support, do you believe [candidate name] has a strong chance to win the Republican presidential nomination, somewhat of a chance, or no chance?” and “If [candidate name] were the Republican presidential nominee, would he (she) be more likely to win or lose in the general election in November?” They were also asked if they considered a candidate’s standing in Iowa or national polls when considering for whom to vote. Seventy interviews were completed in this round and some of those who were missed in this round answered the unique questions from this round in subsequent rounds.

The fourth round of interviews was conducted from mid-January through the morning of February 1 (the day of the caucus). The standard repeated questions were
asked: candidate preference, political discussion partners, contacts from presidential campaigns, and seeing presidential candidates. The warm-up question for this round was “Do you think Iowa should change to a primary system for the presidential nominating contest?” I also revisited a question from the initial round of interviews on participants’ assessment of candidate ideology on a seven-point Likert scale (from very liberal to very conservative). This was done for two reasons. The first was to see if the participants’ view of any candidate’s ideology had changed over the course of the campaign. The second was to get a base measure for their view of Donald Trump’s ideology, for a handful of participants who were interviewed before Trump announced his candidacy.

Seventy-three interviews were completed in this round and some of those who were missed in this round answered all the questions from this round in the post-caucus interview. If a participant missed a round of interviews, the unique questions from that round were added to the interview questions for the next round. For example, if a participant missed the second round, during which participants were asked about their news consumption habits, I asked the participant those questions during the third round interview. Repeated questions from a missed interview were treated as missing data.

A final round of interviews was conducted in the weeks immediately following the caucus and the only questions asked were for whom the participant voted and who the participant talked with about politics during the last few days before the caucus or at the caucus site. For the purpose of measuring political discussion networks over the seven months before the presidential caucus, the results of the four rounds and the post-caucus round were combined. Eighty interviews were completed in this round. Those eighty
people were the only participants from whom the primary dependent variable (vote choice in the presidential caucus) were collected.

Although observing participants in natural settings can help provide local context for other data (Walsh, 2009), it was not a priority for this project. There are regular coffee klatches throughout Fremont County, such as at Stoner Drugs in Hamburg and Tabor, the Farragut Tavern in Farragut, and Penn Drug in Sidney. Penn Drug hosts two such informal gatherings, one in the morning that is mostly female and another in the afternoon that is mostly male. Although observing those gatherings could provide in-depth information on social identity and political discussion, it was outside the scope of this investigation to cover them with enough depth for the whole county.

However, there were three types of events that I was able to observe that helped me better understand what Walsh (2004) saw as the way people use discussion to make sense of politics. The most in-depth observations made were of the monthly Fremont County Republican Party central committee meetings. I was also able to observe political events in and near Fremont County. Finally, I was able to observe (in person or through video with the assistance of colleagues) three of the four Republican caucus meetings held in Fremont County.

The Freemont County Republican Party central committee held monthly organizational meetings during the study period. The meetings took place in Freedom Corner, a two-story brick building in Farragut that once hosted city hall on the first floor and a masonic lodge on the second floor. One of the current owners of the building was a member of the central committee. Meetings usually took place on Wednesday evenings until the encroaching evening darkness and poor weather of winter caused a move to
Saturday mornings. All the meetings opened with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. They usually began with a formal agenda, although they often veered into side conversations.

Central committee meetings were often an opportunity for presidential campaign staffers to speak to party activists in an attempt to recruit local supporters. A representative for Rick Perry (who later joined the Trump campaign after Perry dropped out) came to the central committee meeting in June. The July meeting had a representative from the Jeb Bush campaign. In August, representatives from the Carly Fiorina and Lindsey Graham campaigns visited. Representative from the Marco Rubio campaign came in September, along with new representatives from the Bush and Fiorina campaigns. Most of those representatives were young people from out of state who were field workers for the campaign. The exception was the Perry/Trump representative, who was a middle-aged male from southwestern Iowa.

Perhaps the most momentous central committee meeting was on January ninth, 2016, the last meeting before the caucus. Although the bulk of the meeting was devoted to planning the caucus meetings, this was the only meeting at which central committee members spoke directly about their presidential candidate preferences. Party chair Freddie Krewson announced that he was supporting Trump despite some reservations about him. Krewson believed that Trump would appeal to Democrats, who would switch parties to vote for him in the caucus. Treasurer Tammy Johnson responded that she was impressed with Senator Ted Cruz when he visited Penn Drug in Sidney in October. Several other members noted their approval of Cruz as well. Carly Fiorina and Marco Rubio were also mentioned positively but nobody said that they would vote for them.
Being a small county in the southwestern corner of Iowa, Fremont County was not visited by many candidates. Those candidates who did visit the county were those who had committed to going the “full Grassley”, visiting all of Iowa’s 99 counties. This phrase is named after Iowa Republican Senator Chuck Grassley, who has regularly visited every county in Iowa during his six terms in the US Senate. Four candidates visited Fremont County during the course of the campaign, all in 2015. Former Pennsylvania Senator and 2012 caucus winner Rick Santorum spoke at Penn Drug in Sidney in March. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, who dropped out of the race before the caucus, did a meet and greet (just working a room without a prepared speech) at Penn Drug in August. Texas Senator Ted Cruz did a meet and greet at Penn Drug in October. Also in October, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, the 2008 caucus winner, visited Sidney High School. Each of these events involved the candidate meeting a few dozen people (perhaps just one dozen in the case of Santorum).

I was only able to attend one of those events, the Walker meet and greet in October (the Santorum event was before I began my field work and conference commitments prevented me from attending the other two events), although I was able to speak with people who attended the Cruz and Huckabee events. Although there was some self-selection of attendees at these events (i.e., Cruz fans coming to the Cruz event), some of those who met the candidates were regular Penn Drug customers or people who came to see the candidate out of curiosity.

I encountered one potential problem with maintaining the confidentiality of participant participation at the Walker event, and at a town hall meeting with Senator Chuck Grassley in the fall of 2015 at the Tabor community center. At both events, I met...
participants and was socially obliged to greet and speak with them. Inevitably, I would see and speak with other participants. Because many of those participants also knew each other, we would eventually form a group of 3 to 5 people talking about the presidential campaign and other topics. Although I was careful not to talk about my research at those events, it could be surmised by some participants who other participants were based on their knowing me.

With the help of colleagues Julia Riley and Cary Wolbers, I was able to video and observe three caucuses covering four of Fremont County’s five precincts. Observing the caucuses gave a better understanding of the casual nature of the proceedings where attendees know most of the other participants at least in passing. Although there was a formal structure to the proceedings, with a three-minute limit on speakers for candidates, rules and order were generally not strictly enforced. The caucus in Sidney had to be moved from the public library to a nearby church because of an over-capacity crowd.

In addition to providing a better understanding of how caucuses work in practice, they provided a final data point for campaign effects: speakers at the caucus. Cruz and Trump were the only candidates who had people speak for them at each of the three meetings (four caucuses) covered. The Sidney caucus also had speakers for Ben Carson, John Kasich, and Marco Rubio. There were speakers for Carson, Kasich and Rand Paul in the Green precinct caucus in Tabor. In the meeting in Farragut where the Farragut and Riverton caucuses were held, there were speakers for Cruz, Trump, Paul, Rubio, and Jeb Bush. The caucus in Hamburg was not covered and it was not possible to determine which candidates had speakers there.
**Conclusion**

This chapter provides an overview of case selection criteria used to select Fremont County, Iowa for the study, background on Fremont County, and a detailed description of the methods used to gather data for this study. The purpose of this information is to provide context for the data and analysis presented in later chapters of this dissertation in order to help place the findings of this study within the broader literature. An understanding of that context will also aid in making comparisons with other case studies and in understanding the applications and limits of this research.
CHAPTER 3: DYADIC NETWORK ANALYSIS AND THE CORRECTNESS OF PERCEPTIONS OF DISCUSSION PARTNER VIEWS

The perceived candidate preference of political discussion partners’ is sufficient for understanding the effects of political discussion networks on voting behavior. However, an understanding of the accuracy of the predictions of discussion partners’ candidate preferences can help differentiate social influence based on the actual opinions of political discussion partners versus those based on participants’ perception of the opinions of those partners. In this chapter, I will assess how accurate individuals are in identifying which candidates those in their political discussion networks support, how that accuracy changes over time, and whether participants falsely predict that their discussion partners support the same candidate as they do.

I will start with a broad explanation of network analysis, reviewing dyadic, egocentric, and complete networks. The first will be the form of analysis used in this chapter while the latter two will be used in chapter four. I will then review prior findings related to the exchange of information and the perceptions of agreement in political discussion networks, leading to several hypotheses regarding how accurate people are in predicting which candidates those in their political discussion networks support and how frequently people falsely believe partners are in agreement with them. Finally, I will test those hypotheses using dyadic analysis of the political discussion networks in the Fremont County data set and draw conclusions from that analysis.

Levels of Network Analysis

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a full treatment of social network theory, a brief preview of concepts and terms is needed as a reference for readers
of this chapter. This is especially true because there are several commonly used alternatives for many of the terms used in this chapter. Unless otherwise noted, I will use terms suggested and defined in the second edition of Knoke and Yang’s *Social Network Analysis* (2008) as they apply to this research.

The simplest level of network analysis is the *egocentric network*, which consists of a single participant or actor (ego) and all other actors (alters) with whom the participant has discussed politics. Each reported political discussion partnership is a *tie* (line) with each pair of actors connected through a tie being a *dyad*. In this study, egocentric analysis includes the nature of the relationship between the participant and each of the alters (e.g. spouse, coworker) and measures of how each participant perceives the strength of the relationships with each of their alters and which candidate each alter supports. Without follow-up interviews with alters, there is no way of confirming if ego reports of alter views are accurate. Egocentric analysis will be the focus of chapter four.

The next level of analysis is the dyad or *dyadic network*. It consists of pairs of actors in which at least one of the actors reports a relationship, in this case a report of having discussed politics. As noted by Knoke and Yang (2008), conversing is “*nondirected*” (p. 7), meaning that a dyadic political discussion tie is considered to exist in this study if one participant reports having had a political discussion with another participant, even if that other participant does not note a tie. It is through the study of these dyads that I can measure the accuracy of perceived candidate support among political discussion partners as I have reports of both the ego’s perceived candidate preference of their alters and the actual candidate preferences of those alters. A common claim against dyadic analysis is that it cannot be assumed that the replies made by the two
members of a dyad are independent (Kenny, 1996). However, concerns over the non-independence of dyadic measurements have not precluded the use of dyadic analysis in political science research (for example, see Huckfeldt, 2007 and Pietryka et al., 2017) and dyadic analysis often performs better than other forms of network analysis (Mizruchi and Marquis, 2006).

There were 90 reported dyads between participants in the first round, 77 reported dyads in the second round, 54 reported dyads in the third round, and 98 reported dyads in the fourth round. The final, post-caucus round, which includes the fourth round of interviews covering most of the final month before the caucus and a report of political discussions during the last few days before the caucus, included a total of 121 reported dyads. The increased number of dyads in the post-caucus round is reflective of both an increase in the size of political discussion networks as the presidential caucus approached and the higher response rate in the post-caucus round of interviews. Of those 121 dyads in the final round, 81 included an ego predicting the caucus vote of an alter. The forty missing cases are primarily from egos who did not venture a prediction of the vote choice of alters. The high number of missing cases is likely due, at least in part, to participants not being given a follow-up prompt asking them to make their best guess about alters’ vote choice if they initially stated that they did not know.

The final level of analysis is the *complete network* (or whole network), a measure of the relations between all actors in a network to “explain an entire network’s structural relations” (Knoke and Yang 2008, p 14). Because analysis at the complete network level requires the participation of a large proportion of the network, it will not be used in this study.
Knowing the Political Preferences of Discussion Partners

When people discuss politics, it is unlikely that they are sharing a great deal of political knowledge. Individuals are unlikely to know who their representatives are, understand the positions of candidates on various issues or locate candidates on an ideological spectrum (Campbell et al. 1960, Converse 1964). Instead, they are likely “talking about politics in the context of constructing a social and political identity” (Sinclair 2012 p. 2). That is, they are placing themselves politically within a larger social framework. This does not necessarily mean conformity, although it could be for the sake of maintaining social norms or simply to maintain social peace. Political discussion networks that are homogeneous in demographic and socioeconomic terms and also tend to be homogeneous politically in most social circumstances (Knoke, 1990; however see Mutz and Mondak, 2006 on cross-cutting political discussion networks at work).

If political discussion partners disagree on candidate preference, there are several ways that such disagreement can remain undiscovered (MacKuen, 1990). First, preferences can go unreported, with partners not sharing their preference, or partners may misrepresent their preferences. People may also misperceive the preferences of their discussion partners. Another way to avoid potential disagreement on candidate preference is to keep conversations on safer topics. That was the case in all the Fremont County Republican Party executive committee meetings I observed (with the exception of the last meeting before the presidential caucuses), during which remarkably little discussion on the Republican presidential candidates took place outside of visiting campaign representatives making pitches for their own candidates. Instead, committee members
generally stuck to technical matters, like organizing events and the caucus, and why Republicans needed to win in 2016.

When individuals do discover a difference between their candidate preference and the preferences of others with whom they interact socially, those individuals are “presented with the compelling possibility that [they have] made a wrong calculation with respect to politics” (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995, p. 49), a discovery made possible through social interaction. Although such a discovery does not necessarily mean that individuals will change their mind on their preferred candidate, it does foster a reassessment based on the new information. It is through this awareness of political disagreement that changes in political opinion are made possible (Huckfeldt et al., 2005; McPhee et al., 1963). The salience of that information will vary by the source and context by which that knowledge was gained. Although discovering disagreement with someone who is perceived to be an “other” may reinforce the previously held view, disagreement with someone seen as socially or ideologically similar is likely to at least temporarily weaken support for their preferred candidate because it is through interaction with people with similar self-identification, political or otherwise, that individuals form a social “us” with which individuals identify (Walsh, 2004).

People pay attention to and value the opinions of those around them (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Mutz and Mondak, 1997) and, even though most political information is exchanged in the context of informal personal discussion rather than explicit political debate (Conover et al., 2002; Huckfeldt et al., 2004), that information can influence people’s political perceptions. Although the question of the influence of political discussion networks’ influence on voting behavior will be addressed in the next
chapter, a reasonable precursor to the question of the influence of the political opinions of others is the awareness of the political opinions of others. The question of whether egos’ perceptions of the political views of their alters are based on the alters’ actual views or on projections of the egos’ own opinions onto those alters has a direct bearing on the validity of the question of social influences on voting. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) found that individuals tended to be accurate when predicting which candidates their political discussion partners supported, although that was during a general election, when the party ID of discussion partners could give some clue on candidate support. Despite the lack of party ID as a clue in nomination contests, I expect that egos will be able to correctly predict the candidate preferences of their alters. Given that political discussion was ongoing during the research period, providing more opportunities to exchange information in a matter noted above, and that political communication is associated with increased levels of information (Huckfeldt, 2001), I also expect that the accuracy of those predictions will increase over time. This leads to two hypotheses:

\[ H_1: \text{A person is more likely to correctly predict the candidate preference of political discussion partners than would be expected by chance.} \]

\[ H_2: \text{A person is more likely to successfully predict the candidate preference of political discussion partners when the prediction is made close to an election than when it is made well before an election.} \]

**Perceptions of Homophily in Intra-party Political Discussion Networks**

The tendency for “birds of a feather to flock together”, that is, for people to connect based on shared beliefs and moral views as well as similarity in demographic, cultural, behavioral, and psychological characteristics, has long been noted. Both Aristotle and Plato noted that friendship ties are more likely to form when people share
similarities (McPherson et al., 2001), in other words, people connect at a higher rate with those who are similar than with those who are different. Connections are also more stable when there is a sufficient level of homogeneity with a group (Baccara and Yariv, 2013).

As with other aspects of research on social influences on political behavior, most research on homophily has used measurements based on party preference. That is natural because research findings have long indicated that party (Democratic-Republican) and broad ideological (liberal-conservative) identities form early and are remarkably stable, causing some scholars to argue that they function more like ethnic or tribal identities than like simple collections of opinions on issues (Campbell et al., 1960). In their canonical text on voting behavior in the 1948 presidential election, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) focused on the general election, as did Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) in their study of the 1984 presidential election. Studies on topics ranging from political tolerance (Mutz, 2002a) to mate selection (Alford et al., 2011) have further supported the strength of homophily in party ID and broad ideology.

But is there further sorting within political subspecies? Within the context of a presidential nomination contest, will Republicans sort themselves based on candidate support within their party? Baccara and Yariv (2013) found that the most stable groups are those in which there is relatively more “similarity among extremists than among moderate individuals” (p. 69). Although factionalism within a party can be strong enough to lead to a conflict that results in a splintering of party members (Boucek, 2009), I observed no sign of factionalism among Republicans in Fremont County that approached that level. The countervailing force of identity reinforcement is stronger when there is the presence of an “other” to remind group members of their relative similarities (Walsh,
2004). The concurrent Democratic nomination contest in Iowa was a constant reminder to Republicans that, whatever the differences were between candidates like Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, those differences were relatively inconsequential when compared to the differences between them and a Democratic candidate like Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders.

Despite that relative ideological unanimity, there may still be at least some pressure for intra-party political discussion partners to gloss over political differences, giving egos at least some misperception of the candidate preferences of their alters. Egos may also selectively misinterpret signals from their alters, further muddying the waters (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). So, although I expect egos to be able to correctly predict the candidate preferences of their alters, per hypotheses H$_1$ and H$_2$, I also expect that when egos do err in their predictions, those errors will not be random but in favor of the egos’ own candidate preferences:

$H_3$: When someone incorrectly predicts the candidate preference of political discussion partners, that person is more likely to predict that the partner prefers the same candidate as the predictor than would be expected by chance.

**Dyadic Analysis of the Results from the Fremont County Study**

Questions regarding political discussion partners were asked in each of the five rounds of interviews in the study. As is standard in network research, this study generated the lists of participants’ political discussion partners through a name generator question. In each round a participant was asked “Who have you talked about politics with over the past two months?” (The time frame of the question varied in the follow up interviews depending on the amount of time that had passed since the previous interview.) In the first round, 79 participants reported 418 ties. In the second round 67 participants reported
319 ties. In the third round 64 participants reported 322 ties. The fourth and fifth rounds were combined into a single “final round” for some analysis because the fifth round only covered the last few days before the caucus and the fourth and fifth rounds collectively were shorter (about 1 month) than any of the other rounds (which covered 2-3 months each). Counting those rounds separately would have made it appear that political discussion suddenly dropped just before the caucus. In the final round 79 participants reported 458 ties.

Part of the variation in reported ties is due to the larger number of participants in the first and final interview rounds; all 80 participants completed the interviews for those rounds while 67 of those 80 participants completed the second round interview and 64 of those 80 completed the third round interview. The number of participants reporting ties are fewer than the total number of participants in each round because some participants reported not discussing politics with anyone in some rounds. One participant diligently participated in each round of the study but just as diligently refused to divulge the names of any alters. That participant was kept in the study because several other participants listed that participant as an alter, contributing to dyadic analysis.

**The Accuracy of Prediction of Discussion Partners’ Vote Choice**

When we guess the candidate preferences of our discussion partners, how accurate are we? To see if there is evidence to support the hypothesis that people are more likely to correctly predict the candidate preference of political discussion partners than would be expected by chance, I examine the correlation between egos’ predicted vote choice of their alters and those alters’ actual vote choice. Of the 120 dyads in this study in which the alter stated a caucus vote choice in the post-caucus interview, there are
81 ego predictions of the alter’s vote choice. Of those 81 predictions, 60 (74.1%) were accurate.

A Pearson Chi-Square test would not be valid for a data set that included all the Republican presidential candidates because the expected vote count for most of the sixteen candidates included in the survey is below the generally acceptable level of five. However, a valid Chi-Square test can be run by recalculating the variables into three values with all the candidates other than Ted Cruz and Donald Trump coded as “other”.

A chi-square test of independence was performed on the modified data set with the caucus vote variable transformed to a measure of “Cruz”, “Trump”, and “other” to examine the relationship between egos’ reports of alters’ vote choice and the alters’ actual vote choice. Egos correctly predicted alters’ votes for Cruz, Trump or another candidate at a greater rate than would be expected by chance. The expected count of correct predictions of a vote for Cruz was 9.7 while the actual count of successful predictions of a vote for Cruz was 22. The expected count of correct predictions of a vote for Trump was 16.4 while the actual count of successful predictions of a vote for Trump was 29. The expected count of correct predictions of a vote for another candidate was 3.4 while the actual count of correct predictions of a vote for another candidate was 10. A count of predictions of candidate support within the “other” category also indicated that predictions tended to be reasonably accurate with ten predictions within that category being accurate compared to six that were inaccurate. The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2 (4, N = 81) = 58.709$, $p < .01$. A Cramer’s V measure of .602 indicates that the effect size of the relationship is large (Cohen, 1988), supporting the hypothesis
(H1) that participants were more likely to correctly predict the candidate preference of their political discussion partners than would be expected by chance.

Is the accuracy of egos’ predictions of alters’ candidate preference related to the relationships between egos and alters? A variable measuring vote choice prediction accuracy was formed by subtracting the value of the alter’s caucus vote choice in the post-caucus interview from the ego’s prediction of the alter’s vote choice and then recoding each zero (meaning that the prediction was correct) to one and all other values to zero. Chi-square tests of independence were performed using that variable and several measures of the relationship between the egos and alters in each dyad.

Belief that a political discussion partner was politically knowledgeable was not related to accurately predicting which candidate that discussion partner supported, $X^2 (1, N = 81) = .000, p = .985$. Similarly, closeness of relationship was not related to accurately predicting which candidate that discussion partner supported. The relationship between accuracy of ego predictions of alter candidate support and ego reports of the closeness of the relationship with those alters was not significant. In fact, it was a perfect non relationship, $X^2 (1, N = 81) = .000, p = 1.000$.

Spouses tended to be more accurate than non-spouses when predicting discussion partners’ candidate support. The relationship between accuracy of ego prediction of alter candidate support and reported spousal or non-spousal relationship between the ego and alter was significant at the more lenient .10 level, $X^2 (1, N = 81) = 3.344, p = .067$. Interestingly, there was variation between the sexes on that question, with males being more accurate when predicting spouses’ candidate support than when predicting non-spouses’ candidate support but with females having no statistically significant difference
when predicting spouses’ candidate support than when predicting non-spouses’ candidate support. Among male participants, the relationship between accuracy of ego prediction of alter candidate support and reported relationship between the ego and alter (spouse or non-spouse) was significant, $X^2 (1, N = 41) = 4.377, p = .036$. Among female participants, the relationship between accuracy of ego prediction of alter candidate support and reported relationship between the ego and alter (spouse or non-spouse) was not significant, $X^2 (1, N = 40) = .476, p = .490$. The difference between males and females in the variation of prediction accuracy of spouses and non-spouses is due to males being more accurate in predicting the candidate support of their spouses rather than females being more accurate in predicting the candidate support of non-spouses. Among all dyads, there was not a significant difference between the sexes in predicting candidate support of political discussion partners, $X^2 (1, N = 81) = .683, p = .409$.

**Increasing Prediction Accuracy Preference over Time**

Do predictions of alters’ candidate support improve as we get closer to an election? The rate of successful ego prediction of alter candidate preference over time was measured in each of the four pre-caucus panel interviews. A variable measuring vote choice prediction accuracy was formed in each round by subtracting the value of the alter’s candidate preference in the post-caucus interview from the ego’s prediction of the alters’ candidate preference (including “I don’t know”) and then recoding each zero to one (meaning that the prediction was correct) and all other values to zero. The mean accuracy of ego predictions in each of the rounds was compared with the mean accuracy of the subsequent round using paired samples t-tests. Because the pairings varied from round to round, in part due to changes in political discussion network composition and in
part due to interviews not being completed with some participants in the second and third rounds, the mean accuracy of ego predictions of alters’ candidate support varies based on the round to which it is being compared. For example, if ego A made candidate preference predictions for alters B, C, and D in round one, C, D, and F in round two, and D, F, and E in round three, the A-C and A-D pairings would be included when comparing rounds 1 and 2 while the A-D and A-F pairings would be included when comparing rounds 2 and 3.

As seen in figure 3.1, the mean rate of ego predictions of alter candidate preference increased between each of the rounds of panel interviews with a mean success rate of 0.20 (N=83) in the first round, 0.26 (N=82) in the second round, 0.41 (N=64) in the third round and 0.59 (N=97) in the fourth round.

![Figure 3.1: Mean successful prediction rate of alters’ candidate preference in each of the four pre-caucus panel interviews.](image-url)
A paired-samples t-test indicated that predictions were not significantly more accurate in the second round ($M = 0.25, SD = .438$) than in the first round ($M = 0.20, SD = .401$), $t(70) = 1.070$, $p = .288$, $d = 0.12$. However, predictions were significantly more accurate in the third round ($M = 0.42, SD = .497$) than in the second round ($M = 0.17, SD = .379$), $t(52) = 4.111$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.57$. Predictions were also significantly more accurate in the fourth round ($M = 0.56, SD = .501$) than in the third round ($M = 0.41, SD = .496$), $t(60) = 2.255$, $p = .028$, $d = 0.30$. Naturally, predictions were significantly more accurate in the fourth round ($M = 0.59, SD = .495$) than in the first round ($M = 0.19, SD = .396$), $t(72) = 5.944$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.89$. Those findings support the hypothesis (3.2) that participants will more accurately predict the candidate preferences of their political discussion partners closer to caucus day than they will earlier before the caucus.

Egos were willing to guess alters’ candidate preference in 22 of 83 dyads in the first round, 30 of 82 dyads in the second round, 34 of 64 dyads in the third round, and 68 of 97 dyads in the fourth round. Despite that increase in the number of predictions egos were willing to make regarding the candidate preference of their alters, the accuracy of remained consistent at 68% in round one, 70% in round two, 76% in round three, and 74% in round four. That increase in successfully predicting the candidate preference of larger share of political discussion partners over time suggests that information regarding presidential preferences is being exchanged between participants as the caucus nears.

Increased information flow of presidential preferences as the caucus neared was typified by the last meeting of the Fremont County Republican Party Central Committee before the February 1 caucus. During each of the previous meetings I had attended (starting in June of 2015) presidential candidates were only mentioned when campaign
representatives came to make pitches to committee members. The meetings themselves dealt with party events, such as fund raisers and planning for caucus logistics. That changed at the January 9 meeting when county chair Freddie Krewson opened the floor to discussion of candidates and laid out several reasons why he was supporting Donald Trump. That kicked off twenty minutes of discussion among the nine members in attendance about their views of the various candidates, although a few members did not express their candidate preference. Although that meeting may have been an extreme example, as the presidential caucus looms larger, it is logical for it to become the natural topic of discussion in political discussion networks.

It is worth sounding a couple notes of caution when considering the accuracy or inaccuracy of ego predictions of alter candidate support. Many participants expressed varying levels of indecision when asked about candidate preference during their interviews. It is possible that there were some cases of alters providing evidence that they supported one candidate when speaking with egos and stating that they supported a different candidate when speaking with me a few days later. It is also possible in some cases that the act of participating in a study in which participants were asked about the candidate preference of those with whom they discussed politics stimulated inquiries between participants on that question. That concern is tempered somewhat by the time frame between question rounds (4-10 weeks, except between the 4th round and the post-caucus interview), giving participants time to forget what was talked about a month or two previously and for their alters to change their candidate preference in the next round of interviews (an average of 24 of the 80 participants changed their candidate preference between interview rounds.)
Is Candidate Preference Homophily at Least Partially Imagined?

When I investigate homophily of candidate support in egocentric networks in the next chapter, we will not have the means of knowing how much of that homophily is based on real agreement between egos and alters and how much is based on egos projecting their own candidate preferences onto alters.

The number of egos who incorrectly predicted alters’ candidate preferences was low in each of the pre-caucus rounds of interviews. There were seven inaccurate predictions in the first round, nine in the second round, eight in the third round and eighteen in the fourth round. Although there were only a slightly larger number of inaccurate predictions of alter candidate vote choice in the post-caucus interviews than in the fourth round of pre-caucus interviews (21 compared to 18), the post-caucus interviews did not have a “don’t know” option for alters’ vote choice, meaning that all 21 cases were comparisons of egos’ predictions of alters’ vote and those alters’ actual (rather than projected) vote. In 13 of those 21 cases, the egos incorrectly predicted that their alters agreed with them on candidate vote choice.

Due to the low number of cases being tested, I sought to conduct a Chi square test on a 2x2 table. The candidate preference variables were condensed to “Trump” and “other” because twelve of the 21 egos being tested reported having voted for Trump. Although a great deal of information is lost in such a conversion, it does allow for statistical testing. The expected count in two of the four cells were still below the minimum acceptable value of five for a Chi square test to be used, necessitating the use of Fisher’s exact test.
As expected in Hypothesis H₃, the actual count was higher than the expected count for those cells in which the alters’ predicted vote choice matched the egos’ reported vote choice. The actual count for predicted alter votes for Trump by Trump voters was seven compared to an expected count of 4.6. The actual count for predicted alter votes for other candidates by those who voted for other candidates was eight compared to an expected count of 5.6. The relationship between egos voting for Trump or another candidate and their prediction of alters voting the same way was significant at the .1 level, (95% CI, p = .067).

Figure 3.2: Proportion of participants’ alters for whom participants accurately predicted candidate preference, inaccurately predicted preference and believed the alters supported the same candidate as the participant, inaccurately predicted preference and believed the alters supported a different candidate than did the participant, and did not predict candidate preference.
Figure 3.2 incorporates the findings of this chapter (and adds a time element to hypotheses H₁ and H₃). The first finding is that, when participants are willing to predict which candidates their discussion partners support, they tend to be accurate even without the aid of party ID to guide them. Second, as the election campaign progresses, participants become willing to predict the candidate preference of more of their political discussion partners without losing accuracy. Third, that when participants are inaccurate in their predictions of which candidates their political discussion partners support, there is a nontrivial tendency for participants to erroneously believe that their discussion partners support the same candidate that they do.

Discussion

If you ask people whom they believe their friends and family will vote for in a nomination contest that will take place several months in the future, it is probable that few people would be willing to make a guess for most of the people they know and they would likely be wildly inaccurate in those predictions that they would be willing to make. Despite the early attention paid to Iowa in the presidential nomination contest, the same applies to the participants in the Fremont County study. When asked in the summer of 2015, participants were only able to successfully predict whom their discussion partners would vote for in the February 1, 2016, caucus about a fifth of the time.

However, consistent with prior findings on the exchange of information in political discussion, participants’ successful predictions of discussion partners’ candidate preferences increased in each subsequent round of interviews as the caucus approached and the predictions that were made were more likely to be accurate than would be expected by chance. Somewhat surprisingly, the accuracy of participant predictions of
discussion partners’ candidate preferences was not affected by several measures of the relationship, with neither participant perception of their partners’ political knowledge (as would be expected if individuals seek to get information from those they see as expert information providers per Downs (1957)) nor the reported strength of the relationship between the participants and their partners having an impact on prediction accuracy. The only partial exception to that trend was with marriage; men were more accurate when predicting their wives’ candidate preference than when predicting others’ candidate preference, but women were no more accurate in predicting whom their husbands supported than in predicting whom others supported. However, although participants were generally accurate when predicting candidate support of their discussion partners, when they were wrong there was a tendency towards incorrectly believing that their discussion partners supported the same candidates that they did.

These findings help in our understanding of three things as we examine egocentric data in chapter four. First, whatever influence participants’ political discussion network has on them on caucus day is based upon a reasonably accurate assessment of the real opinions of their discussion partners’ actual preferences. Second, their assessment of the candidate preferences of those in their political discussion networks becomes more complete as caucus day approaches. Third, when they are inaccurate in their assessment of their discussion partners’ candidate preferences, there is a slight tendency to systematically err in favor of their own preferences. Although this third finding does inject a note of caution, the overall findings mean that reported information on the preferences of those in their political discussion network during nomination campaigns (when party ID offers no clue on candidate preference) is based on the real opinions of
their discussion partners and are a reasonably reliable measure when conducting egocentric measures of political discussion networks during nomination campaigns, especially later in the campaign.
CHAPTER 4: CAMPAIGN EFFECTS AND IDEOLOGY

Because of Iowa’s importance, presidential campaigns spend a great deal of resources contacting likely Iowa caucus-goers. In the 2008 caucus, the vast majority of caucus-goers reported having been contacted by one or more of the presidential campaigns through phone banks, robo calls, mail, or some combination of those (Redlawsk et al., 2011). Caucuses tend to have lower turnout than primaries, which gives greater power to those who do bother to sit through the long caucus process and rewards campaigns that invest in strong grassroots organizations to find and reach those voters (Mayer, 1996). As its boosters claim, Iowa rewards practitioners of retail politics over those who rely primarily on media ads: “Iowa appears to be the one place where old-style, in-person, social capital-driven politics is still practiced and rewarded at the presidential level” (Hull, 2008, p. 98).

The previous chapter dealt with questions of how well participants understood the candidate preferences of those with whom they discussed politics. The next chapter will deal with measures of how the political discussion networks in which participants are embedded influences vote choice and moderates campaign effects and ideological crowding. The primary foci of this chapter are direct measures of campaign effects and ideological vote share. This chapter will also address participant perceptions of candidate ideology. This chapter begins with a review of literature on campaign effects and ideological crowding, leading to two hypotheses related to each of those concepts. The results section will open with a comparison of participant voting in the presidential caucus with the actual county-wide caucus vote and an examination of how participants’
presidential candidate preference shifted during the several months before the caucus. It will then examine two measures of campaign effects, the first being person-to-person contacts from presidential campaigns and the second being either meeting or seeing candidates personally. The next section will deal with two questions of ideology. The first is the relationship between ideological vote share, the proportion of votes a candidate would receive if every participant voted for the candidate that they perceived to be the closest to themselves ideologically, and the actual vote share candidate received from study participants at the presidential caucus. The second is a test of how participant perceptions of candidate ideology changes over the course of a campaign. The chapter will close with a discussion of the implications of the findings. Some of the findings of this chapter will be revisited in chapter five, which will include measures of how political discussion networks may moderate campaign effects.

Because many voters do not have the time or knowledge base to gain the information they need to make correct voting decisions, they seek sources of information they believe share a similar orientation regarding the preferred state of society. Choosing sources that match a citizen’s preferences is a process of trial and error by which citizens eventually find information sources which, “provide them with versions of events that closely approximate the version they would formulate themselves were they expert on-the-spot witnesses” (Downs, 1957, p. 213). Campaigns themselves can provide information to help individuals vote correctly when higher levels of campaign intensity provide them with more information (Bergbower, 2014). When people do not have the information they need to make political evaluations, they use information shortcuts that
are easily obtained to help them make choices on the basis of “gut rationality” (Popkin, 1991), keeping a running tally of such shortcuts to update their assessment of candidates.

Lodge and Taber take that a step further, saying that “affect tallies” influence every part of the evaluation process, including how we recall memories (Lodge and Taber, 2013, pp.58-59). In fact, those with greater political sophistication are more likely to disregard information that contradicts their previously held views than are relative political neophytes. Those high in political sophistication are more resistant to communications from incumbents while voters of midrange awareness “pay enough attention to be exposed to the blandishments of the incumbent but lack the resources to resist” (Zaller, 1992, p. 19) and those low in political sophistication are not exposed to enough information to give them cause to modify their opinions.

There are numerous short cuts that people can draw on as a substitute or supplement for their own information analysis, a very partial list including party identification (Downs, 1957), interest group support (Lupia, 1994), and media content (Mondak, 1995; although see Hull, 2008). Voters also use information from electoral campaigns to help them in making voting decisions (Lodge et al, 1995; Hansen & Pedersen, 2014).

**The influence of campaign effects and ideology on vote choice**

The conventional wisdom in political science is that, although campaigns can marginally influence elections, most votes are determined by “fundamentals” like party identification and the state of the economy (Noel, 2010). However, in the context of a party nomination contest, neither party identification nor a retrospective vote based on the state of the economy is salient. This potentially leaves more of an opening for
campaigns to have an impact on vote choice in nominating contests. Most Iowa caucus-goers, even first-time caucus-goers, reported having been contacted directly by at least one campaign, either by live phone call, recorded phone message, mail, email, or in person (Redlawsk et al., 2011). Hull (2008) found that a combination of candidate visits to Iowa and direct contacts by campaigns is the “tactic that rules the caucus” (p. 98). Although Hull did not find an independent effect for direct contacts by campaigns, the findings of this study may provide an answer to when direct contact is effective and when it is not:

\[ H_1 \quad \text{Partisans who report being directly contacted by a candidate’s campaign are more likely to vote for that candidate than partisans who do not report being directly contacted by a candidate’s campaign.} \]

\[ H_2 \quad \text{Partisans who report meeting a candidate or attending a candidate’s campaign event are more likely to vote for that candidate than partisans who do not report meeting a candidate or attending a candidate’s campaign event.} \]

Constituencies within parties tend to pull candidates towards relatively extreme and narrow ideological positions despite the expected moderating effects of the general election (Gershtenson, 2007). In ideological terms, that means that successful candidates in nomination contests will tend to be bound by the relatively narrow ideological confines of their parties’ base voters. However, in a crowded field of candidates, many are likely to be seen as ideologically similar to their competitors. In simple terms, ideological crowding is the idea that the presence of several candidates of a similar ideological stripe will lead to “splitting the vote of specific faction of primary voters” (sic) (Norrander and Stephens, 2012, p. 5). Assuming that voters will most often choose candidates who are the closest to themselves ideologically, candidates who are perceived to be similar ideologically will tend to divide voters of similar ideology between them.
Ideological proximity is the distance between a voter’s ideological self-identification and his or her perceived ideology of a candidate. There has been long-standing disagreement over the utility of using ideological proximity. Miller et al. (1976) found that the perceived closeness of a candidate’s issue positions with voter’s own position predicted vote choice. However, in a response to Miller et al., RePass (1976) found in an analysis of longitudinal data that voters in the 1972 general election projected closer ideological proximity to their preferred candidate rather than pick a preferred candidate based on ideological proximity. Further complicating matters, although voters are successful in identifying policy differences between candidates with starkly differing positions, they are (perhaps understandably, considerably less successful in differentiating candidates with more nuanced positions from each other. For example, although voters in the 1968 presidential election correctly considered George Wallace to be a hard-liner on Vietnam and Eugene McCarthy to be opposed to the war effort, they could not identify the comparatively small distance between the positions of Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey (Page and Brody, 1972).

Hull (2008) expresses ideological proximity as $IP_A = |I_A - I_R|$ with $I_R$ being the voter’s ideological self-identification and $I_A$ being the voter’s perceived ideology of candidate A. For example if participant R self-identified as slightly conservative (scored as 5 on a standard Likert scale of ideology), perceived candidate A as very conservative (a score of 7) and candidate B as conservative (a score of 6), candidate A would have an ideological proximity of two with the participant although candidate B would have an ideological proximity of one. In the two-candidate example above, candidate B would be awarded the ideological vote of participant R. Ideological vote share in this study is the
number of participants who had the smallest ideological proximity score with the candidate, with ties being equally proportioned to candidates with the smallest score. For example, if three candidates each have an IP of 0 for a participant, they would each be awarded a third of a vote. Ideological vote share can be expressed as $IVS_A = (\sum (SIP_A / CSI_P)) / V$ with SIP being each voter with the smallest ideological placement score for candidate A, CSI_P being the total number of candidates with the smallest ideological placement score for that voter and V being the total number of voters surveyed. Ideological crowding is simply the proportion of votes not captured by a candidate’s ideological vote share, that is, the proportion of the votes that are ideologically closer to other candidates. This can be used to measure how hemmed in a candidate is in a crowded primary. Ideological crowding is significantly and negatively correlated with a candidate’s share of the actual vote in the caucus (Hull, 2008), inversely, candidates with a higher ideological vote share should have a larger portion of the actual caucus vote:

$$H_3 \quad \text{Candidates with higher ideological vote share scores are more likely to get a higher share of the vote than are candidates with lower ideological vote share scores.}$$

How does the perception of candidate ideology change over the course of the campaign? Electoral campaigns are “information-rich events” educating voters on, among other things, the candidates’ “policy and ideological bearings” (Iyengar and Simon, 2000, p. 156). Those educating effects of campaigns increase during the last few weeks of an election (Arceneaux, 2006). If campaigns are educating voters over the course of a campaign, then it is reasonable to expect that those voters should begin to draw more similar conclusions about the ideology of candidates:
There will be less variance in voter perception of candidate ideology later in the campaign period than early in the campaign period.

Results from the Fremont County Study

The dependent variable used to test Hypotheses 1 and 2 in this chapter is participants’ vote choice in the 2016 caucus, asked within a couple of weeks of that vote. Candidate support in the four pre-caucus rounds of interviews were also measured, along with other variables mentioned later in this chapter. The leading candidates among study participants during the first round (summer of 2015) were Ben Carson and Scott Walker; Donald Trump had the third highest level of support and may have been higher, but was not included in the survey until he had officially announced his candidacy on June 16. Walker had dropped out by the time of the second interview round (September-October) while Carson was still the leading candidate, joined by Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and Trump. Trump and Cruz broke away as the leading candidates in the third (December-early January) and fourth (late January) rounds followed by Rubio, a pattern that held through the caucus. A fuller listing of candidate preferences in each round can be seen in Table 4.1.

The high number of missing values in round three is somewhat worrisome. The timing of those interviews, mostly in late December and early January, made completing contacts more difficult. Making an educated guess about who the missing participants supported in that round is not possible because only one of the 17 not interviewed in round three supported the same candidate in rounds two and four.

Participants’ candidate support varied greatly over the course of the study. Of the eighty participants who completed the study, only three (one Cruz supporter, one Trump supporter, and one Carson supporter) supported the same candidate in each of the rounds.
in which they participated. Among the 12 participants who supported Scott Walker in round one, four voted for Trump in the caucus, four voted for Rubio, three voted for Cruz, and one voted for Carson. Among the 14 participants who were undecided in the first round, seven voted for Trump, three voted for Cruz, two voted for Rubio, one voted for Chris Christie and one voted for John Kasich. Of the 17 participants who supported Ben Carson in round one, seven voted for Trump, five voted for Cruz, four voted for Carson (although only one stuck with Carson in every round of the study), and one voted for Christie.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Round 1</th>
<th>Round 2</th>
<th>Round 3</th>
<th>Round 4</th>
<th>Caucus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>Vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td>9 (11.3%)</td>
<td>11 (13.8%)</td>
<td>18 (22.5%)</td>
<td>24 (30.0%)</td>
<td>32 (40.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td>3 (3.8%)</td>
<td>11 (13.8%)</td>
<td>18 (22.5%)</td>
<td>20 (25.0%)</td>
<td>25 (31.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Rubio</td>
<td>5 (6.3%)</td>
<td>13 (16.3%)</td>
<td>7 (8.8%)</td>
<td>11 (13.8%)</td>
<td>12 (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Carson</td>
<td>17 (21.3%)</td>
<td>16 (20%)</td>
<td>3 (3.8%)</td>
<td>5 (6.3%)</td>
<td>6 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Kasich</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Christie</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rand Paul</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeb Bush</td>
<td>4 (5.0%)</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carley Fiorina</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>3 (3.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>4 (5.0%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>3 (3.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Santorum</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>3 (3.8%)</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby Jindal</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Perry</td>
<td>4 (5.0%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Walker</td>
<td>12 (15.0%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>14 (17.5%)</td>
<td>7 (8.8%)</td>
<td>11 (13.8%)</td>
<td>5 (6.3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12 (15.0%)</td>
<td>17 (21.3%)</td>
<td>7 (8.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1:** Candidate support during each of the four pre-caucus interview rounds and reported vote at the caucus. Only candidates who received support from at least one participant at some point during the study are included. Candidates who had dropped out are indicated with a dash. The numbers of the two leading candidates in each round are bold.

In rounds two through four, participants who supported a different candidate in the previous round where asked an open-ended question about why they changed. The
answers of those who could articulate a reason for changing their candidate support were coded. The results from each round are recorded in Table 4.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for change</th>
<th>Rounds 1-2</th>
<th>Rounds 2-3</th>
<th>Rounds 3-4</th>
<th>Rounds 4-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior choice had dropped out</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with prior choice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior choice cannot win</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred new choice over prior choice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2: Reasons participants gave for changing candidate support between rounds.*

Negative evaluations of prior supported candidates (either dissatisfaction with them as candidates or belief that they cannot win) greatly exceeded positive evaluations of new choices in every round. Across all rounds, the “victims” of having prior supporters switch because of dissatisfaction with them were Carson (7 participants gave this as the primary reason to stop supporting him), Trump (5), Rubio (3), Cruz (2), Santorum (2), Kasich (2), Paul (1), and Bush (1). The reasons participants gave for their dissatisfaction varied widely from believing that the candidate was too mild to win (a common reason given for changing from Carson), to dissatisfaction on particular issues (immigration for Rubio, opposition to government support of ethanol for Cruz), to reacting against statements by the candidate (Trump). The candidates that suffered the most from the belief that they could not win were Huckabee (6), Carson (5), Bush (3), and Santorum (2), with Paul, Jindal, Fiorina, and Kasich each losing one vote because a participant believed that they could not win the nomination. Among participants who expressed a positive preference for a different candidate over their previous choice, the beneficiaries were Trump (5), Cruz (2), Paul (1), and Rubio (1).
In addition to shifting support between candidates, there was also a trend towards greater consolidation of support for a few leading candidates. In both of the first two rounds, 36.3% of surveyed participants supported the top two candidates. In the third and fourth rounds, roughly 45% of participants supported two leading candidates. In the post-caucus interview, 71.3% of participants reported voting for either Donald Trump or Ted Cruz. The next sections will deal with several accounts of why voters supported the candidates they did.

Participants noted a wide range of reasons for voting the way they did on caucus night. Only one participant admitted to being influenced by someone they met at the caucus and another said that they were impressed with the candidate upon meeting him. Some of the more common answers were variations on candidate experience or qualities, electability, ideology or issue agreement, or a desire for change. The distribution of those reasons among voters for the top four candidates (with the rest collapsed into an “other” category) is shown in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Candidate qualities</th>
<th>Electability</th>
<th>Ideology, issues</th>
<th>“Change”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Rubio</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Carson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.3: Distributions of reasons participants gave for voting for the top four candidate on caucus night*

As can be seen in the table, the reasons participants gave for their votes were not evenly distributed among the four leading candidates. Participants who supported Ted
Cruz were most likely to cite ideology as the reason for their vote while supporters of Marco Rubio were most likely to cite a belief that he was the most electable candidate. Supporters of Ben Carson and Donald Trump like the personal qualities of those candidates (with terms such as “leadership”, “business experience”, and “honesty” often being mentioned). Trump was additionally helped by the view that he was an agent of change. How did participants get the information on which those assessments were based? Perhaps it came from the campaigns themselves. The impact of campaign efforts to reach voters is addressed in the next section.

**The Impact of Campaign Effects**

Assessing campaign effects on any election can be difficult. That is particularly so for the presidential caucus in Iowa. Campaigns become nearly ubiquitous on both paid and earned media in the months before the caucus. In addition, Republican presidential campaigns (unlike political scientist graduate students, I discovered to my chagrin) were allowed to purchase lists of previous caucus voters from the Iowa Republican Party. People on those lists were inundated with contacts in the form of mailers, emails and automated (robo) calls. Robo calls are especially popular with less-well-financed campaigns because they are cheaper and easier to implement than live calls from volunteers or paid telemarketers (Miller, 2009).

The multitude of contacts was magnified by the number of candidates in the running. During the early phase of this study in the summer of 2015, there were 16 major candidates running for the Republican nomination. By the date of the caucus, there were still eleven major candidates in the running. Most of those campaigns, their supporting super PACs, and other supporting organizations were working the likely voter lists hard
during the last few months of the campaign. For many likely voters, it would have been easier to list the campaigns that didn’t contact them than those that did.

To deal with that problem, I limit my independent variables measuring campaign effects to two items, both of which required a commitment to a “ground game” in Iowa. The first is person-to-person contacts by people on behalf of the candidate, either in-person or by phone. That contact could have been from either the candidate’s campaign, a supporting super PAC, or a local activist; study participants were not asked to differentiate the nature of the contacts beyond the candidate they were supporting because participants might not be able to differentiate sources other than which candidate they were calling. It is also possible that participants would not have been able to successfully differentiate the sources of the contact if asked to do so. The second is meeting a candidate or attending a campaign event.

Short of personally meeting a candidate or attending a candidate event, campaigns can add a human touch to their voter contact efforts by having staffers or volunteers speak with likely voters. Such grassroots efforts are a tried-and-true campaign technique that has been proven to be effective in a variety of political settings (Andre and Depauw, 2016). The first hypothesis of this chapter is an assessment of the impact of such grassroots campaigning on the vote choice of study participants. To measure direct contacts by campaigns, participants were asked about such contacts in each of the four pre-caucus rounds of interviews. The questions were along the lines of “Have any presidential campaigns contacted you in the past (4-8 weeks), not including junk mail, spam email, or robo calls?” In the first round of interviews, I asked about the previous two months. In subsequent rounds, the time period varied depending on the amount of
time between the previous and current interviews. If the participant said “yes”, I followed up by asking which campaigns had contacted them. Although asking about contacts from each campaign in each round (e.g. “Did someone from the Ted Cruz campaign speak with you in the past eight weeks”) might have increased the number of reported contacts, I elected not to do so because running through each campaign would have lengthened the time of each interview considerably and increased the likelihood of participant fatigue, lower quality data for questions later in the survey, and participants dropping out of the study (Ben-Nun, 2008).

One coding issue that emerged was that, although participants could recall being contacted by campaigns, they often could not remember which campaigns had contacted them. Going through the list of candidates with them usually did not help jar their memories. In such cases, I coded based on the adjective participants use to describe how many campaigns contacted them. For example, if a participant said that they were contacted by “some” or “a few” campaigns, but could not identify any of them, I coded it as no contacts from any campaigns. If a participant said that they had been contacted by “a lot” or “all” of the campaigns, I coded as contacts from all campaigns. Although not ideal, it is probably more accurate than coding as no contact from any campaign whenever a participant could not remember which campaign contacted them. The disadvantage of this choice is that it may slightly overstate the number of contacts from resource-poor campaigns and slightly understate the number of contacts from campaigns that committed their resources towards person-to-person contacts.

I summed the reported contacts from each of the eleven campaigns that were on the ballot at the caucuses. The possible number of total contacts was from zero to four,
based on the number of rounds in which participants recall being contacted at least once by the campaign. I then calculated the mean number of contacts per participant. Those totals are reported with each candidate’s vote share among participants in Table 4.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Mean Number of Campaign Contact Periods Across Four Rounds</th>
<th>Participant Caucus Vote Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>32 (40.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>25 (31.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Rubio</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>12 (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Carson</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>6 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Kasich</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Christie</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rand Paul</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>1 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeb Bush</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carley Fiorina</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Santorum</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Mean number of periods in which participants received campaign direct contacts on behalf of candidates and candidate vote share among participants.

Those means in Table 4.4 appear low, which no campaign having been able to contact every participant at least once. There are a couple of possible reasons for that. First, Fremont is a small county in a corner of the state, so campaigns may have given likely caucus voters less attention. Also, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, participants may have underreported attempts by campaigns to make person-to-person contact with them. That is especially true because many participants told me that they had stopped accepting calls from unfamiliar phone numbers in response to the numerous robo calls they were receiving during the last several weeks of the campaign (something that also made my job harder because many participants had not saved my number on their phones).
A linear regression was calculated to test if the mean number of contacts per participant by campaigns predicted candidate vote share among the eight candidates. A significant relationship was found, $F(1,9) = 4.601, p = .061$, with an adjusted $R^2$ of .265. Looking at data with individual participants as the unit of analysis, a multinomial logistic regression was performed to model the relationship between the total number of contacts from campaigns and candidate support. Due to the low number of participant votes for most candidates, the dependent variable (caucus vote) was collapsed into three categories: Trump (32 votes), Cruz (25), and other (23). A multinomial logistic regression was run to find the impact of contacts from the Cruz and Trump campaigns on participant vote choice in the presidential caucus. The addition of person-to-person contacts from the Trump and Cruz campaigns to a model that contained only the intercept did not significantly improve the fit between model and data, $X^2 (df = 4) = 5.922$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .080$, $p = .205$.

Binary logistic regressions were also used with the dependent variable collapsed into “Trump” and “not Trump” for the first test and “Cruz” and “not Cruz” for the second test. The addition of person-to-person contacts from the Trump campaign to a model that contained only the intercept significantly improved the fit between model and data, $X^2 (df = 1) = 3.211$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .053$, $p = .073$. However, person-to-person contacts from the Cruz campaign to a model that contained only the intercept did not significantly improve the fit between model and data, $X^2 (df = 1) = 1.178$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .021$, $p = .278$. Although the Cruz campaign made more person-to-person contacts with participants than the Trump campaign did, those contacts were less effective. Of the 20 participants who reported being contacted by the Trump campaign at least once before
the caucus, 12 voted for Trump. However, only 11 of the 31 participants who were contacted by the Cruz campaign at least once before the caucus voted for Cruz. In that regard the Cruz campaign was like a sower casting seeds widely only to have most of them fall on rocky soil.

If the results of data on hearing from supporters of a candidate are mixed, then what about hearing from the candidates themselves? The idea that personal contacts from candidates can influence voters is a truism in political campaigns, as is the idea that the retail politics of candidates meeting prospective voters in living rooms and at coffee klatches is especially effective in gaining votes in the Iowa presidential caucus (Hull, 2008).

Sitting in the southwestern corner of Iowa, Fremont County is not on the beaten path for presidential candidates. It was only visited by candidates committed to doing the “full Grassley” of campaigning in all or nearly all of Iowa’s 99 counties in an attempt to have the candidate meet as many voters as possible. Only three candidates who were on the February caucus ballot made it to Fremont County: Senator Ted Cruz, Governor Mike Huckabee, and Senator Rick Santorum. Governor Scott Walker, who dropped out well before the 2016 caucus, also campaigned in Fremont County. Santorum, who came within 1 vote of winning Fremont County in 2012, visited Penn Drug in Sidney in March of 2015. Scott had a meet-and-greet at Penn Drug in July, but dropped out of the race a few weeks later. It was Cruz’s turn to meet voters at Penn Drug in October. Huckabee, who won in Fremont County in 2008, shook things up a bit by having a town hall event at Sidney High School in late November. In addition, Santorum visited the Depot Deli in
Shenandoah, just across the county line in Page County, for lunch on the same day in March he spoke to the coffee klatch in Sidney.

Unsurprisingly, more participants reported personally seeing or meeting Cruz, Huckabee, or Santorum than any other candidates. Seventeen participants reported meeting Santorum or going to a Santorum event at least once before or during the 2016 presidential race compared to fifteen for Cruz and nine for Huckabee. Between zero and five participants reported such contacts with all other candidates.

The evidence suggests that there is no relationship between personally seeing candidates and voting for those candidates. Although Cruz came in second place in the countywide vote and among participants, both Huckabee and Santorum did poorly on caucus night in Fremont County and no participants reported voting for either of them. Statistical analysis bears out that observation. In each of the four pre-caucus interviews, participants were asked, “have you personally seen, met, or been to an event of any presidential candidates in the past (4-10 weeks)?” If the participant said “yes”, I then followed up by asking which candidates they met or events they attended. In a linear regression, the mean number of periods in which participants met a candidate or attended a candidate event did not predict voting for that candidate, F(1,9) = 0.748, p = .410, with an adjusted R² of -.026.

Examining participant-centered data told a similar story. In a binary logistic model of voting “Cruz” or “not Cruz”, adding reported attendance at a Cruz campaign event or meeting Cruz to a model that contained only the intercept did not significantly improve the fit between model and data, X² (df = 1) = 2.494, Nagelkerke R² = .043, p < .114. Likewise, in a model of voting “Trump” or “not Trump”, adding reported
attendance at a Trump campaign event or meeting Trump to a model that contained only
the intercept did not significantly improve the fit between model and data, \( X^2 (df = 1) = 1.398 \), Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .023 \), p < .237. Those nonsignificant results came from different
causes. For Trump, the problem was too few contacts; only five participants reported
meeting Trump or going to a Trump event at least once, with four of those voting for
Trump. The closest Trump came to Fremont County was a rally in Council Bluffs, a little
over an hour to the north. For Cruz, the problem was converting the meeting of the
candidate into votes; of the 15 participants who reported meeting Cruz or attending a
Cruz event, only seven voted for him.

**Ideology, Issues, and the Caucus Vote**

Do issues and ideology make a difference in candidate support? If elections,
including nomination contests, are battles of ideas, then voter ideology and perceptions of
candidate ideology should be reflected in the voting on caucus day.

Most prior caucuses seemed to fit the expectation of relatively moderate front-
runners challenged by seemingly more ideologically extreme challengers. For example,
in 2012 relative moderate Mitt Romney and conservative Rick Santorum finished in a
virtual tie in Iowa. In 2008, conservative Mike Huckabee won Iowa with Romney
coming in second (moderate front runner John McCain did not actively compete in Iowa).

In the summer of 2015, it appeared that the 2016 caucus would be similar with
Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio competing to be the moderate front-runner and a host of
candidates, led by Ben Carson and Ted Cruz, competing to be the main challenger on the
right. The entry of Donald Trump appeared to disrupt that typical pattern. In this section,
I will examine the relationship between ideological vote share (and, by extension, ideological crowding) and actual vote share.

The first step towards measuring ideological vote share is noting the ideological proximity of each candidate for each voter. That is found by subtracting each participant’s ideological self-placement on a 1-7 Likert scale (with 7 being the most conservative) from the participant’s ideological placement for each candidate, expressed as $IPA = |I_A - I_R|$ with $I_R$ being the voter’s ideological self-identification and $I_A$ being the voter’s perceived ideology of candidate A. When two or more candidates have the smallest score, that participant’s vote is divided equally between them. Considering the relatively small number of participants in this study, ideological vote share is expressed as number of votes rather than percentage as is done in other studies. Ideological vote share for a candidate (A) can be expressed as $IVSA = \Sigma(SIP_A/TSIP)$ with SIP being each voter for whom candidate A is at least tied for the smallest ideological placement score, and TSIP being the total number of candidates with the smallest ideological placement score for that voter. Ideological crowding, the proportion of votes not captured by a candidate’s ideological vote share can be expressed as $1 - (IVSA/V)$ with V being the total number of participants in the study.

During the first round of interviews, conducted in the summer of 2015, participants were asked to rate themselves on ideology using a standard Likert scale ranging from “extremely liberal” (1) to “extremely conservative” (7). Twenty-six participants rated themselves as “very conservative”. The most common self-rating was “conservative” by 35 participants. Twelve participants rated themselves as “slightly conservative” while five rated themselves as “moderate”. Few participants were willing
to identify themselves as liberal with only one rating of “slightly liberal” and one of “liberal” among the 80 participants. The mean self-rating of the participants was 5.96, making the group about as conservative as one would expect from a pool of Republican caucus voters in Iowa.

The range of the means of ideological ratings participants gave the candidates was narrow, between 4.48 and 6.18. The most conservative candidates, according to participants, were Rick Santorum with a mean rating of 6.18 on the Likert scale, followed by Ben Carson at 6.03, Mike Huckabee at 5.9, and Ted Cruz at 5.82. Chris Christie was rated the most moderate of the candidates at 4.48, followed by Jeb Bush at 4.63, Donald Trump at 4.7, and John Kasich at 4.88. Only 49 participants were willing and able to place Kasich on the scale, indicating that he was not successful in letting caucus voters know about him. Those placed in the relative ideological middle included Rand Paul at 5.54, Carly Fiorina at 5.42, and Marco Rubio at 5.27.

Calculating ideological vote share based on individual ratings of candidates produced a vote share of 11.5 for Cruz, 9.18 for Huckabee, 8.41 for Carson, 8.28 for Rubio, 7.62 for Santorum, 6.91 for Paul, 6.64 for Trump, 6.37 for Fiorina, 5.11 for Christie, 4.71 for Bush and 3.07 for Kasich. So, if participants voted solely on which candidate they believed was the closest to them ideologically, Cruz would have won among the study participants while Trump would have finished seventh rather than first. As can be seen on Table 4.5, there is little relationship between ideological vote share and the actual vote on caucus night.

A linear regression did not reveal a relationship between candidates’ ideological vote share and their actual vote share among participants, \( R^2 = .08, F(1,9) = 1.848, \)
Nor was there a relationship between ideological self-placement of participants and vote choice, F(6, 73) = 1.391, p = .230. Among the candidates with the highest vote share among participants, Trump had by far the largest gap between his mean ideological placement and the ideological self-placement of his voters with a gap of 1.24 points on the Likert scale, compared to a gap of 0.4 for Rubio and 0.26 for Cruz.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Ideological Vote Share</th>
<th>Actual Vote Share</th>
<th>Mean ideological placement of candidates (4th round)</th>
<th>Mean ideological self-placement of candidate’s voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cruz</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>6.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckabee</td>
<td>9.18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson</td>
<td>8.41</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubio</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santorum</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trump</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>5.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiorina</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasich</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Candidate ideological vote share and actual caucus vote among research participants.

Looking at the voting patterns of participants based on their self-reported ideology, as seen in Table 4.5, also indicated a lack of ideologically-based voting. Ted Cruz won the votes of both the participants who reported themselves to be left-of-center. Otherwise, no candidate dominated in any ideological category, although Trump won a plurality of votes among moderates, those who are slightly conservative and conservatives. Cruz won among very conservative participants.

Participants were also asked to rate how much they agreed with statements on 14 issues on a scale of 0 to 100. About half of the results were reverse-coded so that 100 was
the most conservative position for all items. A mean conservatism score for all 14 items was calculated for each participant. As with ideological self-placement, there was not a statistically significant relationship between the conservatism scale and caucus vote; a multinomial logistic regression did not reveal a relationship between the aggregated conservatism score and vote choice, $X^2(6,N=80) = 3.238$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .04$, $p = .778$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very liberal / liberal</th>
<th>Slightly liberal</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Slightly conservative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very conservative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rand Paul</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marco Rubio</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Carson</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Christie</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Kasich</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.6: Distribution of participant caucus votes by self-reported ideology. The top vote-getter among each ideological category is in bold.*

Several aggregations of subsets of the conservatism scores were also tested. Two of the subsets were not significantly related to vote choice: economic and fiscal conservatism (based on support for cutting government regulations, cutting the federal budget, and limited government, and opposition to raising taxes and increasing welfare spending), $X^2(6,N=80) = 5.95$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .076$, $p = .429$; social conservatism (based on opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, a pathway to citizenship for those who entered the country illegally, gun control, and support for school prayer), $X^2(6,N=80) = 9.299$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .116$, $p = .157$. One item, “support for ‘Biblical truth’”, was not include in any of the subcategories because many participants seemed to struggle with answering it. Including it in the social conservatism scale did not affect that scale’s relationship with participant vote choice.
One conservatism scale, foreign policy and defense conservatism (based on support for increase military spending and drone strikes against suspected terrorists overseas, and opposition to increased foreign aid), was found to be significantly related to vote choice, \( X^2(6,N=80) = 14.027, \) Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .171, \) \( p = .029 \). However, the statistical program used to run that analysis warned that there was a problem with the Hessian matrix for that particular multinomial logistic regression, indicating that some of the categories should be merged. Collapsing vote choice into three categories of “Cruz”, “Trump”, and “other” and rerunning the multivariate logistic regression produced similar results, \( X^2(2,N=80) = 5.355, \) Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .073, \) \( p = .069 \). Although an examination of the parameter estimates did not reveal a significant difference between Cruz and the other Republicans, there was a significant and positive difference between Trump and the other Republicans \( (p = .048) \).

A binary logistic regressions, with vote choice collapsed into “Trump and “other” confirmed that there was one difference between Trump supporters and supporters of the rest of the Republican field. The addition of defense and foreign policy conservatism to a model that contained only the intercept significantly improved the fit between model and data, \( X^2 (df = 1) = 5.252, \) Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .086, \) \( B = .045, \) \( p < .022 \). Although the effect was not especially large, it suggests that Trump’s success among participants was due to an appeal to nationalism in the form of military strength and foreign policy toughness. Adding a scale based on an immigration question to the foreign and defense policy conservatism scale did not improve the performance of the model, although it was still significant, \( X^2 (df = 1) = 2.87, \) Nagelkerke \( R^2 = .048, \) \( p < .09 \). The findings suggest that
Trump’s main appeal was to nationalism rather than ideological conservatism, and is worth further study.

There were three individual issues that had significant relationships with vote choice (p < .10) between Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and other candidates. Cruz voters were more supportive of the idea of “Biblical truth” than were Trump voters or voters for other candidates. Both Cruz voters and Trump voters were more supportive of drone strikes against terrorism suspects than were those who voted for other candidates. Finally, Cruz voters were less likely to oppose “aid to the world’s needy” than were Trump voters or those who voted for other candidates.

The participant ratings of Donald Trump’s ideology deserve more attention at this point. Trump won on caucus night, both in Fremont County as a whole and among the study participants, followed by Ted Cruz (who won statewide). However, Trump’s rating varied much more than that of any other candidate; the variance in ideology in the fourth round ranged from .849 to 1.886 for the other ten candidates but was 2.547 for Trump. Almost unique among the candidates, Trump had a trimodal distribution on his ideology rating with 21 participants rating him as “conservative”, 18 rating him as “moderate”, and 7 rating him as “liberal”. That distribution can be at least partially explained by observing the difference between Trump voters and non-Trump voters in an independent-samples T-test. In a one-way ANOVA, Trump’s ideology rating was significantly more conservative among Trump voters (M=5.2, SD=1.186) than among non-Trump voters (M=4.35, SD=1.758), t(71)=2.308, p=.024. When Trump first entered the race, many participants did not know what to think of him, as exemplified by a statement from one
participant in the summer of 2015. When asked to place Trump ideologically, the participant laughed and said:

*I don’t know if he is conservative, wishes he was conservative, plays at being conservative, or is trying to fool everybody. I would put him down as very conservative but I don’t trust the son-of-a-bitch. I like what he says but I don’t trust him to do what he says.*

Six months later, that participant voted for Trump.

In a sense, Trump, who had no political background and who had supported Democrats in the past, was a graft on the body politic of Republicans. Those who accepted that graft saw him as conservative while those who rejected it saw him as moderate if not liberal. This suggests that Donald Trump was an ideological Rorschach test in whom voters saw what they wanted to see, and who’s presence in the race may have disrupted the role played by ideology that has been found in other studies. This finding also lends support to RePass’ (1976) contention that candidate preference predicts ideological assessments of candidates rather than the other way around.

Are those perceptions of candidate ideology based on facts or fancy? If participant ratings of candidate ideology are factually-based, then it is reasonable to expect that there will be less randomness in those ratings over time as participants are exposed to more information about the candidates through the course of a campaign.

Participants were asked to rate candidate ideology in the first round of interviews conducted in the summer of 2015, and again in the fourth round of interviews conducted in late January, just a few days before the caucus. The mean ideological rating for each candidate in both rounds is reported in Table 4.7, along with the variance for each round. Change in the variance of candidate ideology ratings was in the expected direction of
decreasing over time for eight of the eleven candidates. However, the direction of change was not random; the three candidates for whom the variance of their ideology ratings increased were the three leading candidates. Those candidates also had the most variance in their fourth round ideology ratings. Following Nordstokke and Zumbo (2010), nonparametric Levene’s tests were conducted to find if the difference in variance between the first and fourth round candidate ideology ratings was statistically significant. Only the difference in variance between the ratings for Jeb Bush (p=.038) and Ted Cruz (P=.093) were found to be significant at the .10 level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Round 1 Mean Ideology</th>
<th>Round 1 Variance</th>
<th>Round 4 Mean Ideology</th>
<th>Round 4 Variance</th>
<th>Change in Variance over Time (R₄ – R₁)</th>
<th>Significance level of nonparametric Levene’s test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trump</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>2.124</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>2.547</td>
<td>+0.423</td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruz</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>.797</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.886</td>
<td>+1.089</td>
<td>.093*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubio</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>1.409</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.864</td>
<td>+0.455</td>
<td>.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>1.016</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>1.850</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.174</td>
<td>-0.676</td>
<td>.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.766</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.125</td>
<td>-0.641</td>
<td>.038*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasich</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>1.117</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
<td>.311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.865</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.167</td>
<td>-0.698</td>
<td>.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santorum</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>1.412</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>-0.510</td>
<td>.559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huckabee</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.883</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>1.376</td>
<td>-0.507</td>
<td>.824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiorina</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.645</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1.329</td>
<td>-0.316</td>
<td>.546</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Comparison of mean ideology ratings and the variance of those ratings for Republican caucus candidates in the first and fourth interview rounds. * = significant at the 0.1 level.

Ted Cruz had by far the largest increase in variance from round one to round four. A comparison of the variance in ideology ratings for Cruz between Cruz voters and Cruz nonvoters was conducted to see if there was a difference in the change of variation for Cruz’s ideology rating between the groups. Somewhat surprisingly, Cruz voters displayed
a larger increase in the variance of their ideology rating of Cruz than did Cruz nonvoters. Cruz nonvoters went from a mean ideology rating of Cruz of 5.91 with a variance of 0.925 in the first round to a mean ideology rating of 5.78 with a variance of 1.573 in the fourth round. Cruz voters reported a mean ideology rating of 6.56 for Cruz with a variance of 0.379 in the first round to a mean ideology rating of 5.88 with a variance of 2.610 in the fourth round. If anything Cruz voters were collectively less sure of his ideology than were those who did not vote for him.

The findings of this section indicated that participant assessments of similarities with candidate ideology, whether based on a self-assessment of ideology or based on issue-based measures, had little impact on voting. In addition, there is evidence that campaigns did not help participants narrow the gap in how they rated the three leading candidates (Trump, Cruz, and Rubio) ideologically, fitting with Redlawsk’s (2004) finding that increased exposure to information may contribute to greater ambivalence when evaluating candidates. I certainly noticed more negative comments directed at Trump, Cruz and Rubio than at other candidates during my observations in Freemont County, and front runners are traditionally subject to more negative attacks. That negative information directed at front runners may have been the source of the increased ambivalence observed regarding their ideological ratings. That likely limited the role of ideological voting among participants.

Discussion

There was no evidence to support the idea of an “ideological vote”, with candidate’s ideological vote share looking nothing like their actual vote share among study participants. There was also no relationship between conservatism based on
participant self-placement on a battery of questions on 14 issues and caucus vote. Examining subscales of the conservatism battery revealed that Trump supporters were more conservative on a battery of foreign policy issues (supporter of a strong military, opposition to foreign aid, and support of drone strikes against suspected terrorists), although there was no significant difference on social or fiscal issues, suggesting that part of Trump’s support was due to nationalism. Interestingly, there was little variation on the question of allowing those in the country illegally to have a pathway to citizenship among supporters of the various candidates, despite the emphasis that Trump placed on immigration during the campaign.

There is limited evidence that participants could even come to a rough consensus on candidate ideology. There was some convergence on the ideological placement of most of the eleven candidates on the caucus ballot over the six-month course of the study (although only one such convergence, that of Jeb Bush, was statistically significant). Participants were further apart in their ideological ratings of the three leading candidates (Trump, Cruz, and Rubio) near the end of the campaign period than at the beginning, although the difference for only one of the three (Cruz) was statistically significant. Although it is outside of the scope of this study, it is possible that the leading candidates were the ones most subjected to negative messages, which in turn increased ambivalence about the ideology of those candidates.

The analysis of the impact of campaign effects on vote choice produced mixed results. Although there was some evidence supporting the hypothesis that person-to-person contacts from campaigns increase the vote share of that campaign’s candidate, there was no evidence to indicate that meeting a candidate or attending a campaign event
moved votes, although Cruz, with his visit to Sidney several months before the caucus, came close.

Although the case for campaign effects having an impact on caucus voting is weak, and the case for ideological vote share having an impact on caucus voting is nonexistent, evidence for the former is strong enough to believe that it could be an important factor under the right conditions. One such condition, candidate preference of those with whom participants discuss politics, will be examined in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL DISCUSSION NETWORKS AND VOTE CHOICE

In the previous chapter, I found some evidence of the influence of campaign effects on vote choice and no evidence supporting the influence of perceptions of candidate ideology on vote choice. As discovered in the dyadic analyses presented in chapter three, individuals become better informed about the candidate preferences of their political discussion partners over time. This allows for greater confidence in the egocentric data presented in this chapter, which I will use to investigate the impact of participants’ political discussion networks on their candidate support and any possible moderation effects that political discussion networks have on campaign effects.

I begin the chapter with a review of the literature on social identity and political discussion, and how political discussion networks influence vote choice. This review will lead to four hypotheses regarding the impact of political discussion networks on vote choice, homophily over the course of a campaign, and political discussion networks moderating campaign effects. Finally, I will test those hypotheses, draw conclusions based on those tests, and present some emergent findings.

Social Identity, Political Discussion, and Voting

Social identities, the attachments that people make with groups within their environment, provide citizens with a perspective at the intersection of their identities, values, and interests (Walsh, 2004). Unlike Campbell et al. (1960) and those who built upon their work, who saw groups functioning as proxies for self-interest, Walsh finds that group identity influences decisions about which information is relevant and how it is perceived. Identity plays the important role of mediating values and interest: “Identities
function as links between one’s social location and one’s view of the world” (Walsh, 2004, p. 31) with identities at least in part formed through social interactions.

**Social Cues and Voting**

The impact of cues received during the course of an election campaign are muted or reinforced by the social interactions in which those cues or information are exchanged. Voters receive messages from campaigns and political elites through the media but “until these messages have been checked with others and validated, their full effects are not felt” (Popkin, 1995, p. 20). Similarly, campaigns enjoy little success in getting people to change their minds. Although elites may activate “issues frames” through the media (or campaigns), the frames themselves are formed by citizens based on their self-identities, which in turn are formed through values, interests and interactions within groups with which those citizens identify (Walsh, 2004).

Family and friends are a major influence on vote choice (Berelson et al., 1954). The citizens most likely to change their minds on vote-choice are those who face “cross-pressure” from those in their immediate social circles (Berelson et al., 1954; Sinclair, 2012). In fact, although citizens assess candidates based on past performance (Fiorina, 1981; Conover, 1986), they often choose to disregard much of the information about candidates that is available to them, instead substituting the observations of others they know (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998)

Citizens often circumvent elite framing of issues by interpreting the news through the lens of their social identities and their perception of what “people like us” feel about the information presented by elite sources such as the media or election campaigns.
(Walsh, 2004). For example rural voters may be less likely to support government aid for the poor because they see government as a tool for urban interests and welfare programs and as undercutting traditional rural values of hard work and thrift (Walsh, 2012).

Citizens’ social identities are formed through interaction in their own social networks (Walsh, 2004). When their social identity is salient “their sense of self shifts from the personal to the collective”, which can influence individual behavior (Theiss-Morse, 2009, p. 8). There are two factors to consider when looking at the political influence of social networks on their members: selection and influence (Bello & Rolfe, 2014). Selection is the choosing of partners with whom to have political discussions. That selection may be indirect (who we chose to socialize with) and direct (who we choose to talk politics with). Workplace networks often have the highest levels of political heterogeneity of any social networks (Mutz, 2002b). However, there is some evidence for direct selection in choosing not to talk politics with some people in one’s social network (Bello & Rolfe, 2014), especially if there is known political disagreement within the network (Cowan and Baldassarri, 2018). Also, networks that are homogeneous in demographic and socioeconomic terms, which many voluntary networks are, also tend to be homogeneous politically (Knoke, 1990), a finding that extends even to our choice of marriage partners (Alford et al., 2011).

Influence is the changing of someone’s mind as the result of “new information, social pressure, imitation of peers or some other psychological mechanism associated with making conditional choices” (Bello & Rolfe, 2014, p. 136). Social networks can exert a strong influence on vote choice and those with politically diverse discussion
networks are more likely to change their vote choice than those with more homogeneous networks (Berelson et al., 1954; Bello & Rolfe, 2014).

Having relative political experts (those with more information than other network members) within a social network enhances political participation among network members, perhaps because it provides group members with ready access to information to help them vote correctly (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998). However, having divergent views among experts in a group can depress participation by making members ambivalent about election results (McClurg, 2006). Experts within social networks not only have the power to persuade others through social communication, but also tend to more often retain their own opinions over time (Huckfeldt et al., 2014).

There may be a more subtle interaction between influence and selection with socialization taking place through interactions with those who are like-minded reinforcing the perspective of the in-group among its members. Although social identity is more about self-identification (in terms of region, class, race, or gender) rather than group membership, that identification is lived out through interactions with groups of people with similar self-identification forming a social “us” (Walsh, 2004). Groups that send unambiguous messages to their members in the form of relative homogeneity of views aid those members in connecting political preference to vote choice, even in the absence of overt political expressions (Sokhey and McClurg, 2012). In terms of candidate support, increasing support for a candidate within a social network becomes a self-reinforcing process; the more people within a group who support a candidate, the more
likely others in the group will support that candidate (Bello & Rolfe, 2014; Huckfeldt et al., 2014).

So, social networks provide members with a means of blunting the impact of elite communications, such as media messages or election campaign contacts. Would that buffering effect of social networks hold up in an environment of intense campaign communications? Given the importance of retail politics for the presidential caucuses in Iowa, a fuller understanding of how social networks influence vote choice would make an important contribution to our understanding of how individual caucus-goers decide which candidate to support.

Rather than one large war for a whole state or even county, it may be more accurate to see statewide elections (including presidential primaries and caucuses) as a concurrent series of thousands of small battles that take place in every community and social network throughout the state. The vote count in an election is the result of those thousands of battles, with one candidate usually dominating within each of those contests. A close election outcome is not the result of an even division within social networks across the polity, but rather the result of a relatively even split in the number of (often lopsided) victories in social networks across the polity. Successful campaigns are those that can successfully carry more of those groups as a result of their campaign efforts.

**Political Discussion Networks and Vote Choice**

This chapter focuses on the subset of social networks in which political discussion takes place. As noted in Chapter 1, I use Ikeda and Boase’s definition of political discussion network as “discussants (whom) respondents listed as being those with whom they discuss political matters” (2010, p 12).
While campaigns are attempting to influence voters from outside the bounds of political discussion networks, members are also (intentionally or not) influencing those within their political discussion networks. The tendency for people to be like those with whom they associate is long-noted (McPherson et al., 2001). There is a tendency towards greater homophily within discussion networks in general elections (Bello and Rolfe, 2014) but will that also be true in nomination contests or will the multi-candidate nature of nomination contests allow for greater diversity of candidate support within networks? The expectation is that the tendency towards homophily will still apply. As individuals within a network come to support certain candidates, they will influence others in that network, creating a convergence within the network towards a candidate. Once a candidate reaches a threshold of support (not firmly established within the literature) within a political discussion network, there will be a tendency towards greater conformity in candidate support among members within that network. That tendency towards conformity will increase over time as the caucus nears as the result of cross-pressures (Berelson et al., 1954) created from ongoing discussions within the network.

**H1** Partisans are more likely to express support for a candidate that has the support of a significant portion of the members of their political discussion network than they are to express support for a candidate who does not have the support of a significant portion of the members of their political discussion network.

**H2** During a nomination contest, there will be greater agreement on candidate support within a political discussion network later in the campaign than earlier in the campaign.

Hypothesis two will be measured by the proportion of the participants’ political discussion network with which the participant agrees regarding presidential candidate support.
The presence of supporters of candidates within one’s political discussion network will also moderate the impact of candidate visits and direct campaign contacts (by phone, mail, email or in-person by campaign staff or volunteers) on vote choice through the role that discussion partners play in helping individuals interpret information they receive from elite sources (Walsh, 2004), such as campaigns.

\[ H_3 \] Partisans who report being directly contacted by a candidate’s campaign are not more likely to vote for that candidate than partisans who do not report being directly contacted by a candidate’s campaign if a plurality of the people in that partisan’s political discussion network support a different candidate.

**Results from the Fremont County Study**

As in the previous chapter, the dependent variable used to test most of the hypotheses in this chapter is participants’ vote choice in the 2016 caucus. Candidate support in the four pre-caucus rounds of interviews were also measured, along with other variables mentioned later in this chapter. After a brief overview of the political discussion networks of study participants, the direct relationship between political discussion networks and vote choice is investigated, followed by an examination of possible interactions between campaign effects and political discussion network influences.

The mean political discussion network size for 79 of the 80 participants for the entirety of the study (that is, the network size based on the number of unique discussion partners across all five rounds of interviews) was 8.25. The size of those networks varied across participants from a low of one to a high of 21, with a standard deviation of 3.86. One participant said that he discussed politics with several people but steadfastly refused to provide their names or any other information about them. That participant was initially kept in the study in the hope that he could be later persuaded to reveal the names of his
discussion partners. Although he never divulged those names, he was later kept in the study because he was listed in the political discussion networks of other participants, making his information useful in the dyadic analysis in chapter 3.

As seen in Figure 5.1, mean political discussion network size varied across each of the rounds of the study. The mean self-reported political discussion network size in the first round, when participants noted with whom they discussed politics in the previous two months, was 5.32. It dipped down to 4.78 in round two, which covered two to three months between the first and second round interviews. Mean political discussion network size recovered somewhat in round three, which covered about two months, to 5.13. Unique partners in political discussion networks in the fourth round, which covered most of the month of January, and the fifth round, which covered a few days (and in some cases a few hours) between the time of fourth interview and the caucus vote, were combined into a single measure covering the last three to four weeks before the caucus. The mean network size for those rounds was 6.25.

A one-way within subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare mean political discussion network size between rounds. There was a significant effect across all rounds, Wilks’ Lambda = .609, F (3,53) = 11.346, p < .001. Three paired samples t-tests were used to make post hoc comparisons between rounds. A first paired samples t-test indicated that there was a significant difference in the decline in political discussion network size between the first round (M=5.31, SD=2.664) and the second round (M=4.78, SD=2.52); t(66)=2.061, p = .043. There was not a significant difference in the means for the second round (M=4.68, SD=2.54) and third round (M=4.93, SD=2.83); t(55)=-0.898, p = .373. There was a significant difference in the increased means from
the third round (M=5.13, SD=3.01) to the final rounds (M=6.44, SD=3.28); t(63)=-4.482, p < .001. The means for the second and third rounds were different in different paired t-tests because missing cases in those rounds meant that some participants who were included in one comparison for those rounds were not included in the other.

![Figure 5.1: Change in mean political discussion network size over the course of the study (from the summer of 2015 to February 1, 2016).](image)

The increase in the size of political discussion networks near the caucus date makes intuitive sense; with the presidential caucus nearing, it is expected that people would discuss politics more. The decline from the first round to the second round is a little more puzzling. Based on my discussions with participants and observations of Fremont County, one possible explanation is that summer is the peak time for socializing with community picnics, pancake breakfasts and other events drawing members of the community together. Once the county fair and Sydney Rodeo in August are finished,
community events decline somewhat and decline further as the cold of late fall sets in. An additional factor is that roughly a fifth of the participants in the study work directly or indirectly in agriculture and the fall harvest season left them too busy to have enough time for the significant social interactions that are a prerequisite for political talk. In an extreme example of that, one participant specifically requested during an interview in August not to be called for an interview in the month of October because he was going to be too busy with the harvest to be bothered with a 10-minute phone interview.

**Political Discussion Networks and Vote Choice**

The previous chapter covered questions regarding the impact of campaign effects and ideological vote share on voting in the 2016 Iowa Republican presidential caucus by participants. There was limited evidence supporting the former and none supporting the later. What about the influence of political network discussion partners on vote choice?

Seventy-two participants predicted a candidate preference for at least one discussion partner in the final, post-caucus interview. For each of those participants, the stated candidate preference for each discussion partner (or alter) was recorded. Due to the low number of participants and alters backing most of the candidates in the caucus, analysis was limited to voters supporting Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and an “other” category for all other candidates. The number of alters supporting each of those was divided by the total number of alters for whom a presidential candidate preference was stated by the participant (the “known political discussion network”) to form ratios of alters supporting Trump, Cruz, or other candidates. For example, if a participant guessed the candidate preference of five alters, three of whom supported Trump, one of whom support Cruz, and one of whom supported Marco Rubio, the ratio of the known political
discussion network supporting Trump would be .6 compared to .2 for Cruz and .2 for “other”. Alters supporting Democrats were excluded from the calculation.

To test the first hypotheses, dummy variables were calculated for 1/3 of known political discussion network supporting Cruz, 1/2 of known political discussion network supporting Cruz, 1/3 of known political discussion network support Trump and 1/2 of known political discussion network supporting Trump. Of the 72 participants who reported the presidential candidate preference of at least one member of their known political discussion network in the post-caucus interviews, 42 reported that at least a third of their known political discussion network supported Trump and 34 reported that at least half supported Trump. Twenty-seven participants reported that at least a third of their known political discussion network supported Cruz and 16 reported that at least half did so. Clearly, those are not mutually exclusive categories. For example, two participants reported that half of their known political discussion network supported Trump and the other half supported Cruz. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of those participants voted for Trump and the other voted for Cruz. At the other extreme, four participants reported that no one in their known political discussion network supported either Trump or Cruz. Again perhaps unsurprisingly, none of those four participants voted for either candidate. Of the nine participants for whom at least a third of their network supported Trump and at least a third supported Cruz, 4 voted for Trump, 4 voted for Cruz, and 1 voted for Rubio.

Of the 42 participants who reported that at least a third of their known political discussion network supported Trump, 26 (61.9%) voted for Trump, 11 voted for Cruz, and 5 voted for another candidate. Of the 27 who reported that at least a third supported Cruz, 13 (48.1%) voted for Cruz, 8 voted for Trump, and 6 voted for another candidate.
Of the 34 who reported that at least half supported Trump, 23 (67.6%) voted for Trump, 8 voted for Cruz and 3 voted for another candidate. Of the 16 who reported that at least half supported Cruz, 9 (56.3%) voted for Cruz while 4 voted for Trump and 3 voted for another candidate. See Figure 5.2.

![Figure 5.2](image)

**Figure 5.2:** The percentage of participants voting for Trump, Cruz or another candidate when at least 1/3 of known political discussion network supports Trump, at least 1/2 supports Trump, at least 1/3 supports Cruz and at least 1/2 supports Cruz.

A chi-square test of independence was performed on the data set with the caucus vote variable transformed to a measure of “Cruz”, “Trump”, and “other” to comparing the proportion of a political discussion network supporting a candidate and participants’ vote choice. A significant effect was found when at least half of a participant’s known political discussion network supported Trump ($X^2 (2) =20.278$, p<.001). Twenty-three of the twenty-seven participants who reported that at least half of their known political discussion network supported Trump voted for Trump, compared to an expected count of 14.2. A Cramer’s V measure of .531 indicates that the effect size of the relationship is
large (Cohen, 1988). A significant effect was also found when at least a third of a participant’s known political discussion network supported Trump ($X^2 (2) = 20.513$, $p < .001$). Twenty-six of the forty-two participants who reported that at least a third of their known political discussion network supported Trump voted for Trump, compared to an expected count of 17.5. A Cramer’s V measure of .531 indicates that the effect size of the relationship is also large.

Similar results were found for the proportion of Cruz supporters in a participant’s known political discussion network. A significant effect was found when at least half of a participant’s known political discussion network supported Cruz ($X^2 (2) = 7.310$, $p = .026$). Nine of the sixteen participants who reported that at least half of their known political discussion network supported Cruz voted for Cruz themselves, compared to an expected count of 4.7. A Cramer’s V measure of .319 indicates a moderate effect size. (Because two cells had an expected value of 4.7 [less than the recommended minimum value of 5], a Fisher’s exact test was also performed, producing similar results with $p = .012$. The Chi square results are reported here for the sake of consistency.) A significant effect was also found when at least a third of a participant’s known political discussion network supported Cruz ($X^2 (2) = 7.553$, $p = .023$). Thirteen participants who reported that at least a third of their known political discussion network supported Cruz voted for Cruz, compared to an expected count of 7.9. A Cramer’s V measure of .531 indicates that the effect size of the relationship is also moderate.

Looking at the two candidates with a large enough number of supporters to test, there is evidence supporting hypotheses H1. Having half, or even a third, of the people for whom participants believe they know which candidate they support is associated with
greater levels of support for that candidate by participants than would be expected by chance.

A look at participants’ caucus vote collapsed into “Trump”, “Cruz” and “other” also revealed how political discussion networks may have framed participant vote choice. A multinomial logistic regression with vote for “other” as the excluded category found that the portion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Trump was positively and significantly associated with participants voting for Trump rather than for one of candidates in the “other” category (Marco Rubio, Ben Carson, etc.). Similarly the portion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Cruz was positively and significantly associated with participants voting for Cruz. That is in keeping with the findings from earlier in this chapter and hardly surprising. What was surprising was that the portion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Trump was also positively and significantly associated with participants voting for Cruz and the portion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Cruz was positively and significantly associated with participants voting for Trump. The addition of proportion of political discussion networks supporting Trump or Cruz to a model that contained only the intercept significantly improved the fit between model and data, $X^2 (df = 4) = 40.888$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .489$, p < .001.

Switching the excluded category of participant vote choice supported that finding. With voting for Cruz as the excluded category, the portion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Trump was positively associated with participants voting for Trump and the proportion of political discussion networks that supported Cruz was negatively associated with participants voting for Trump. However, neither result
was statistically significant. On the other hand, both the portion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Trump and proportion of participants’ political discussion networks that supported Cruz were negatively and significantly associated with voting for one of the “other” candidates as opposed to voting for Cruz. The results were similar with voting for Trump as the excluded category. The findings are summarized in Table 5.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>“Other” excluded</th>
<th>Trump excluded</th>
<th>Cruz excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant voting for “other”</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.761 (1.157)*</td>
<td>3.344 (1.077)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of network supporting Trump</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-6.757 (1.665)*</td>
<td>-4.939 (1.608)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of network supporting Cruz</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-5.009 (1.814)*</td>
<td>-5.559 (1.721)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant voting for Trump</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-3.761 (1.157)*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.417 (1.260)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of network supporting Trump</td>
<td>6.757 (1.665)*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.818 (1.485)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of network supporting Cruz</td>
<td>5.009 (1.814)*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.551 (1.605)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant voting for Cruz</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-3.344 (1.077)*</td>
<td>0.417 (1.260)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of network supporting Trump</td>
<td>4.939 (1.608)*</td>
<td>-1.818 (1.485)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportion of network supporting Cruz</td>
<td>5.559 (1.721)*</td>
<td>0.551 (1.605)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model summary: $X^2 (df = 4) = 40.888$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .489$, $p < .001$

*Table 5.1: Summary of multinomial logistic regressions. Standard errors are in parentheses. *Significant at the .05 level. None of the other results were significant at the .10 level.*

These results appear perplexing; why would knowing that many of the people with whom you talk about politics support Donald Trump be associated with voting for Ted Cruz and vice versa? The most likely explanation is that having a large portion of a participant’s political discussion network supporting either of those two candidates
triggered strategic voting. During the final weeks before the February 1 caucus, it was widely known that Trump and Cruz were the leading candidates\textsuperscript{2}. If, for example, most of the people with whom a participant discussed politics supported Donald Trump, that would naturally provide the participant with a reason to also support Trump. If, however, the participant was opposed to Trump and had evidence of his popular support in the form of personally knowing Trump supporters, then the participant would vote for the person most likely to defeat Trump. In that situation a vote for a third candidate would not serve the purpose of stopping Trump. The same logic would apply if many of a participant’s political discussion partners supported Ted Cruz. On the other hand, if a participant’s political discussion network provided countervailing evidence in the form of discussion partners supporting neither Trump nor Cruz, they would be under less pressure to strategically vote for whichever of those two candidates the participant opposed less.

So, depending on the nature of their political discussion networks, participants either found themselves in a world with a Trump-Cruz dichotomy where a vote for one could be seen as a vote against the other, or a world in which such strategic voting was not necessary.

**Increased Candidate Support Homophily over Time**

Having found that having supporters of a particular candidate within a participant’s political discussion networks just before the caucus is positively associated with the participant voting for that candidate in the caucus, I next address change in agreement within political discussion networks over time. To test the hypothesis that

\textsuperscript{2} For example the final DM Register/Bloomberg poll of likely caucus voters, released a few days before the caucus, had Trump in front with 28\% followed by Cruz with 23\%. 
there will be greater agreement on candidate support within a political discussion network later in the campaign than earlier in the campaign, the level of agreement between members of participants’ political discussion networks on presidential nomination preference was measured in each of the four rounds of interviews conducted over the eight months prior to the February 1, 2016 caucus. For this test, political discussion partners who were Democrats or who were ineligible to vote (for example, underage children or noncitizens) were excluded from the analysis. Discussion partners for whom the participant did not know which candidate they supported were included. While that inclusion increased the number of cases included in the analysis by including those participants who did not know the preferences of any discussion partners, it lowered mean agreement scores. Due to missing data in the second and third rounds, direct comparisons were only possible for 48 participants.

As seen in Figure 5.3, mean agreement within political discussion groups was low in the first two rounds with a mean of 15.27% in round 1 (conducted in the summer of 2015) and 12.17% in round 2 (October). Mean within-political discussion network agreement increased to 20.96% in round 3 (December 2015-early January 2015) and increased again in round 4 (late January) to 35.40%. The within political discussion network agreement in the post-caucus interviews (36.08%) was virtually identical with those of round four, indicating that there was not a last-minute convergence just before voting.

\[\text{\^{3}}\text{ There was no difference in candidate vote (divided into votes for Trump, Cruz, or other) between those who had Democrats in their political discussion networks and those who did not.}\]
Figure 5.3: Mean within-political discussion networks agreement on presidential nomination preference, including discussion partners for whom participants did not know who they supported

The data was not normally distributed in the first three rounds, necessitating the use of a Friedman test to compare the difference in mean agreement on presidential nomination preference within political discussion networks between rounds. There was a significant difference for increase of mean agreement across rounds ($X^2 (4) = 54.302$, $p<.001$), supporting hypothesis H3. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests indicated that there was no significant change in mean within network agreement between the first and second rounds ($Z = -0.639$, $p=.523$). However there were significant increases in agreement between rounds two and three ($Z = -2.663$, $P=.008$) and between rounds three and four ($Z = -3.614$, $p<.001$). There was not a significant change in the last few days covered by the time between rounds four and five ($Z = -0.421$, $p=.674$).

Although there was not a significant increase in agreement on candidate support between participants and their political discussion partners between rounds four and five, having a larger share of a participant’s political discussion network in agreement was
associated with maintaining support for that candidate. Of the 72 participants who provided information on their political discussion networks in round four, 61 voted for the candidate they supported in round four while 11 voted for a different candidate. There was a significant difference in mean agreement between participants and members of their political discussion networks between those who voted for a different candidate than the one they supported in round four (M=.0818, SD=.145) and those who voted for the same candidate (M=.3552, SD=.264); t(70)=3.33, p=.001. Knowing that many people around them support that same candidate appeared to reinforce participants’ conviction to continue supporting that candidate.

**Political Discussion Networks and Campaign Effects**

So far, this study has found limited support for a relationship between campaign effects on vote choice and moderate-to-strong evidence of a relationship between the support of members of a political discussion network and participant support of the same candidate. This section will investigate the possibility of an interaction between campaign effects and political discussion network effects. That expectation is based on the role political discussion partners play in helping interpret information from outside sources such as campaigns.

As was done for earlier tests, the participants were divided into groups of those who voted for Ted Cruz and those who did not for one set of binary analysis and divided into groups of those who voted for Donald Trump and those who did not for another set of binary analysis. A binary logistic analysis was conducted to predict voting for Ted Cruz among the study participants using the number of contacts from the Cruz campaign, the presence or absence of a plurality of participants’ political discussion networks
supporting Cruz, and an interaction of those two variables. A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, indicating that the model reliably distinguished between participants who voted for Cruz and those who voted for other candidates, $X^2 (3) = 11.738$, $p = .008$, Nagelkerke’s $R^2 = .192$. The correct prediction rate of the model was 75.0% compared to a prediction rate of 68.8% for the constant-only model. Having a plurality of political discussion partners support Cruz made a significant contribution to the prediction ($p = .008$) with having a plurality of political discussion partners supporting Cruz making participants 7.3 times more likely to vote for Cruz when contacts from the Cruz campaign are held constant. However, neither contacts from the Cruz campaign ($p = .220$) nor the interaction of those variables ($p = .965$) was significant.

Examining voting patterns for Donald Trump among study participants told a similar story. A binary logistic analysis predicting voting for Trump used the number of contacts from the Trump campaign, the presence or absence of a plurality of participants’ political discussion networks supporting Trump and an interaction of those two variables. A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, indicating that the model reliably distinguished between participants who voted for Trump and those who voted for other candidates, $X^2 (3) = 30.906$, $p < .001$, Nagelkerke’s $R^2 = .433$. The correct prediction rate of the model was 80.0% compared to a prediction rate of 60.0% for the constant-only model. Neither total contacts form the Trump campaign nor the interaction between contacts from the Trump campaign and having a plurality of political discussion partners supporting Trump where significant predictors. Having a plurality of political discussion partners support Trump made a significant
contribution to prediction (p < .001) with having a plurality of political discussion partners supporting Trump making participants 13.4 times more likely to vote for Trump when contacts from the Trump campaign are held constant.

Discussion

A nomination contest is a much more wide-open affair than a general election, with partisan identification (usually the strongest predictor of vote choice) not being a consideration. This leaves voters with a need to find other means of evaluating candidates. In chapter four, there was evidence supporting the contention that campaign effects, in the form of person-to-person contacts from campaign representatives, influenced vote choice. However, seeing candidates in person and having ideological similarity with candidates did not affect vote choice.

In this chapter it was discovered that the strongest predictor of vote choice found in this study was having people with whom participants discuss politics supporting a particular candidate. Having as little as a third of those in a participant’s political discussion network supporting a particular candidate was associated with the participant voting for that candidate. Of course, participants were also members of their own political discussion networks, leaving open the possibility that they were influencing those in their networks as much as they were being influenced by them. However, the evidence did indicate that disagreeing with a large portion of their discussion networks did weaken their resolve to vote for that candidate and that knowing that many people they discussed politics with supported the same candidate reinforced participants’ prior stated conviction to vote for that candidate. Whether through conversion or
reinforcement, there was an increase in homophily in candidate support, with within-group agreement on candidates more than doubling during the course of the study.

Although there was some evidence of campaign effects in chapter four, they generally did not make a significant contribution to vote choice when combined in a model with political discussion network support, either in a main-effects only model or with an interaction of those variables. Including campaign contacts to a model with political discussion network support, and with participants as the unit of analysis, did not improve the model. There was some evidence to support that the mean number of periods that participants reported being contacted by campaigns had an effect independent of the mean proportion of political discussion network support for that candidate, but the effect was absent in a model that included an interaction of the two variables. The evidence suggests that, although campaigns can influence voters, those voters will listen to their friends and family first.

An interesting additional finding is that the size of participants’ political discussion networks did not expand in a linear fashion as the presidential caucus approached. Rather, there was a dip in network size from the summer to the fall of 2015. Network size only partially recovered in the last months of 2015 and did not increase significantly until the last several weeks before the presidential caucus of February 1, 2016. As least part of the reason for the observed dip was a slowdown in the number of local social events from the summer to the fall. This fits with Walsh’s (2004) observation that political discussion is nested within broader social interactions; if you have fewer opportunities to talk with people, you have fewer opportunities to talk politics with people.
An additional interesting, and unexpected, finding was that having a portion of participants’ political discussion networks supporting Donald Trump was associated with a greater likelihood to vote for Trump and a greater likelihood to vote for Ted Cruz, as opposed to voting for one of the other candidates. The reverse was also true: having a portion of participants’ political discussion networks supporting Cruz was associated with a greater likelihood to vote for both Cruz and Trump. The most likely explanation is that having evidence of support for either of those leading candidates provided both a reason to vote for one of them and a reason to cast a strategic vote for the other.

These findings indicate that those with whom we discuss politics can have a strong influence on how we view candidates and, ultimately, which candidates get our votes. However, the relationship between the influence of political discussion and vote choice is more complex than a simple matter of voting with the group.
CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND THE POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF LOCAL POLITICAL ELITES

Participant: “I believe in the political system.”

Interviewer: “What do you mean by that: that you believe in the political system?”

Participant: “Well, you’ve got to participate. Otherwise you have no influence on whatever the decisions are made. I am active politically... I’ve also been very active in many community organizations.”

How do those who are the most politically active in their communities express that activism? How are the ways they express that activism related to their political ideology and the number of people with whom they discuss politics? Are there meaningful differences between local elected officials and party activists on ideology and belief in the efficacy of political talk? The purpose of this chapter is to try to answer those questions and gain some insight into how the social contexts of local political elites shape local politics.

Social Contexts

The people we encounter on a regular basis are a major influence on vote choice. The citizens most likely to change their minds on vote choice are those who face “cross-pressure” from those in their immediate social circles (Berelson et al., 1954; Sinclair, 2012). Although citizens assess candidates based on past performance (Fiorina, 1981; Conover et al., 1986), they often choose to disregard much of the information about candidates that is available to them, instead substituting the observations of others they know (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998).

Social contexts are groups where social interaction can, but not necessarily must, occur. They have social and political properties that have the potential to influence those
within them (McClurg, 2010). Groups which send unambiguous messages to their members in the form of relative homogeneity of views aid those members in connecting political preference to vote choice, even in the absence of overt political expressions (Sokhey and McClurg, 2012).

The central questions for this chapter concern the relationship of the social contexts of local political elites with the extent of their political discussion networks and their expressed ideology. For this study, I will use McClurg’s definition of social contexts as “specific and identifiable social spaces from which citizens can receive politically-relevant information” (2010, p 9). It is important to note that a social context does not imply direct, or even indirect, communication between all its members. Members of the same civic organization share a social context; they may only be vaguely aware of each other, if at all, but share that social space. Although each of the three categories of local political elites are defined by their positions in government or the Republican Party, it is not just their positions that are related to their behavior and ideology. Occupying different positions puts individuals in regular contact with different people, potentially putting differing constraints on political talk. So it is the social contexts of those positions, rather than the positions themselves, that are of interest.

The “specific and identifiable social space” from which local political elites can receive politically-relevant information is most easily identifiable for the core central committee members: the monthly committee meetings and personal conversations between committee members related to committee work. However, based on observations of every central committee meeting between June 2015 and the February 2016 caucus, I found that relatively little direct political discussion takes place at those meetings other
than when representatives of presidential campaigns make their pitches to committee members (as happened in most of those meetings). Much more time was spent on administrative matters such as organizing meeting sites and temporary leaders for the caucus and preparing for a fund raising event later in the spring. The one exception came at the January meeting in which several members of the central committee identified their preferred candidate, with most expressing a preference for either Senator Ted Cruz (the eventual Iowa Caucus winner) or Donald Trump (the eventual winner in Fremont County and eventual Republican Party nominee). However, those meetings do provide a venue for side conversations on politics and supply members with a ready pool of potential conversation partners with an obvious interest in Republican Party politics.

For public officials, their most obvious context is related to their prominence as elected officials and the need to at least occasionally talk politics in relations to their own electoral campaigns. Although that social space does exist it is restrained, given the small size of Fremont County, by a reluctance of officials to talk politics while conducting their official duties and the fact that many of their electoral campaigns have been uncontested.

The peripheral committee members may appear to lack any social context whatsoever related to local politics. However, they were asked to be committee members because of their status as political leaders in the community in general, and often their leadership during past Republican caucuses in particular. What sets them apart from the core members is that they generally did not attend any central committee meetings, or attended just one meeting during the seven months of observed meetings, even though they were officially members. That most of them were eventually asked to serve as caucus leaders again in 2016 and accepted is evidence of a contextual relationship
between the core leadership of the party and those peripheral central committee members, with core members trusting peripheral members to reliably conduct party business at the caucuses despite their lack of participation in regular party business.

The Political Discussion Networks of Local Political Activists

People are more likely to engage in political talk with those with whom they agree (Wyatt et al., 2000), so the comfort level that local political activists will have with talking about politics varies with the real or perceived level of agreement with the people they meet on a common basis. For elected officials, the likelihood that they will meet those with whom they disagree on politics during the course of doing the jobs for which they were elected is higher than that of party activists. Even in an area as heavily Republican as Fremont County, public officials will encounter and be asked to serve the needs of people with politically divergent views, increasing the chance of encountering disagreement if politics are discussed. Disagreement in political discussion networks, and the resulting “cross pressures” that individuals face, has long been found to be associated with political indecision and demobilization (Berelson et al., 1954; Mutz, 2002b; however see McClurg, 2006). That possibility will likely decrease the importance that elected officials place on, and their willingness to engage in, political talk. That expectation leads to the first two hypotheses:

\[
H_1 \quad \text{Core central committee members are more likely to engage in political talk with more people than elected officials.}
\]

\[
H_2 \quad \text{Peripheral central committee members are more likely to engage in political talk with more people than elected officials.}
\]

The idea that elected officials would avoid talking about politics with people seems nonsensical, and would be in the context of their own election campaigns.
However, the study period was about midway between local elections, meaning that the political talk in which they would most likely engage would be on topics other than their own elections.

People who engage in local institutional political activities tend to have a higher degree of political efficacy than those who do not (McLeod et al., 1999). That higher degree of efficacy may express itself, among other ways, as a greater willingness to engage in political talk. Additionally, the number of people with whom someone talks about politics is dependent on having a "supply of appropriate discussants in the surrounding social environment" (Bennett and Bennett, 1986, p. 434). Although I directly observed little in the way of direct talk about issues and politicians at meetings of the Fremont County Republican Party central committee, active participants in those meetings had ready access to similarly-minded potential discussants. Considering the greater engagement that core members have with the party institution (in fact, they are the local party institution) and the potential for core members to have a greater supply of potential discussants, I expect that they would engage in political talk with more people:

\[ H_3 \quad \text{Core central committee members are more likely to engage in political talk with more people than peripheral central committee members.} \]

**The Ideology of Local Political Activists**

The political culture of a community is mediated by groups within that community (Putnam, 1966). The basic political conservatism that one would expect to find among rural Republicans in the Midwest will be expressed differently by members of different Republican groups. There is also the issue of relative mobilization among activists within the party. The party organization mobilizes for elections and, in turn, mobilizes political activists, tying those activists with the broader community (Huckfeldt
and Sprague, 1992). The social influences among local political activists have as strong an influence on local politics as the formal governing structure and understanding the “locus of power” in local politics requires “not only an exploration of the formal, institutional, front regions of local governance, but also of the informal, amorphous, and restricted back regions of individual interaction” (Woods, 1998, p. 2116). So the nature of the social influences within different local political institutions will differ with the kinds of individuals within those institutions.

Being exposed to politically heterogeneous views tends to moderate political views and preferences (Sinclair, 2012). Based on that finding there are several expectations regarding the relative ideological extremism of local political elites, First, elected Republican officials (elected officials), who regularly deal with local people of all political persuasions and with state government officials, will likely be more moderate than party activists. In fact, Broockman et al. (2017) found that local party officials tend to prefer ideologically extreme candidates for public office and often do not see any trade-off between ideological loyalty and electability because they tend to be ideologically extreme themselves.

Second, among party activists, those who are active in the Fremont County Republican Party central committee and regularly meet with other Republicans on party business (core central committee members), and thus are exposed to individuals with a wider range of ideology, will likely be more moderate than party activists who are not regular participants in party business between elections (peripheral central committee members). That fits with the findings of Broockman et al. (2017), who surmised that, despite party leaders’ embrace of relatively extreme candidates “it may well be the case
that the formal leaders of local parties are less enthusiastic about extremists than other local party activists” (p. 30).

Those expectations yield two hypotheses:

\[ H_4 \] Core central committee members are more likely to express stronger conservatism than elected officials.

\[ H_5 \] Peripheral central committee members are more likely to express stronger conservatism than core central committee members.

By implication from those two hypotheses, peripheral central committee members will express stronger conservatism than will elected officials.

These hypotheses do not speak to causation: Does exposure to more heterogeneous views lead to moderation or is it more likely that relative moderates will seek positions that expose them to heterogeneous views?

**Methods Unique to This Chapter**

The research presented in this chapter is the result of an emergent research design embedded in the larger case study of likely caucus voters in Fremont County detailed in Chapter Two. Such embedded designs are an effective way to address secondary questions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

For the purpose of this research, “local political elites” are the equivalent of Dahl’s “political stratum”, which he characterized as “a small stratum of individuals… much more highly involved in political thought, discussion, and action than the rest of the population” (Dahl, 1961, p. 90). Twenty local political elites, defined as either local elected officials or official members of the Fremont County Republican Party central committee, were interviewed over the summer of 2015. Those twenty can be further divided into three groups: eight core Republican central committee members (members
who attended at least three of the monthly central committee meetings between June and September of 2015), six peripheral central committee members (those who are committee members by virtue of being elected caucus officials, but who did not attend central committee meetings), and six elected officials. The participants in this research represent all of the core central committee members, a majority of the peripheral central committee members and a majority of the county-wide elected officials plus one district school-board member and one town council member. Although there are undoubtedly others in Fremont County who would qualify as being highly involved in local political thought, discussion, and action than the rest of the population, the people included in this analysis constitute those who were recruited or have sought to serve in either local party or government leadership (even if only temporarily in the case of central committee peripheral members). Understanding these local elites has intrinsic value for the larger case study and can inform research on the motivations of local political elites and their potential impact on the political process.

Eighteen of the twenty initial interviews with local political elites were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The other two interviews were not recorded at the request of the participants, but extensive notes were taken of the interviews and answers to open-ended questions assigned codes. The coded answers were then analyzed and grouped by category and further analyzed to develop the themes that helped explain the numeric findings of this chapter.

The quantitative findings of the research primarily came from several closed-ended questions asked during the interviews, including self-reported ideology, issue positions and political discussion network size. Although the small size of this subset of
participants does not lend itself to statistical analysis, the data are triangulated from the themes developed from the transcripts and my notes from the interviews. Triangulation helps establish greater validity of findings by providing corroborating information (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). A further check on validity is derived from the several months spent with members of the community in their homes and local businesses, having discussions over meals and after church services, and attending local political events. This time in the field helped develop a better understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009). All participants are represented by codes designating their social context in this study: CC1-8 for core central committee members, CP1-6 for peripheral central committee members, and EO1-6 for elected officials.

My background aided in gaining access and trust among some of the early participants in the snowball sampling phase of the research. Specifically, I let it be known among those I met in the community that I was also a Republican and had worked as the Iowa coordinator for a minor presidential candidate (Alan Keyes) in 1996. The generally warm reception I received in the community and the common ground for political discussion I shared with most participants created the potential for bias in favor of the research participants. To paraphrase P. J O’Rourke (1993), even a person with the soul of a political scientist has to like something sometime, and I like Fremont County, Iowa.

**Evidence from Fremont County**

The findings presented here are only based on the egocentric political discussion networks of the 20 local political elites studied for this report; the number of partners in local elites’ political discussion networks were limited to those reported by the elite
participants. Complete network data in the form of connections reported with elites by other participants were not included.

**Political Discussion and Views on the Efficacy of Political Talk**

One core theme that emerged from this part of the research is that central committee core members expressed a greater enjoyment of, and greater belief in the efficacy of, political discussion than did elected officials, with central committee peripheral members not expressing much opinion on the matter. As part of my research, I collected data on the members of participants’ political discussion networks.

As seen in Table 6.1, the findings did not support all of the hypotheses on political discussion network size. Analysis of the size of local political elites’ political discussion networks during the first round of interviews in the summer of 2015 found that central committee core members had the largest average size of political discussion networks (5.625), supporting hypotheses H1 and H3. However, elected officials had a larger average size of political discussion networks (4.5) than did central committee peripheral members (3.833), disconfirming hypothesis H2. It would appear that the central committee peripheral members expressed little opinion on political discussion in the summer of 2015 (see below) because they did relatively little of it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Committee Core Members</td>
<td>5.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Committee Peripheral Members</td>
<td>3.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Officials</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6.1: Mean political discussion network size for local political elites in the summer of 2015*
There are also longitudinal data available from several rounds of panel interviews. Not all participants were interviewed in every round (except for the first and fifth rounds). Changes in average political discussion network size were not linear for any of the three groups. While the campaigns were ramping up their efforts in Iowa during the fall of 2015, flooding in the spring caused a late harvest. As a result, several participants (who work in agriculture) saw the time they had available for social activities severely cut, which provided them fewer opportunities to discuss politics. It also reduced the number of available political discussion partners available for those participants who do not work directly in agriculture. For that reason, a comparison of the first and final interview rounds is the most feasible.

As would be expected, political discussion networks grew for all three groups of political elites (see Figure 6.1). The political discussion networks of core central committee members grew from 5.625 to 7.25. Those of elected officials grew from 4.5 to 5.5. At the same time, the political discussion networks of peripheral central committee members grew to the point where it was slightly larger than the average for elected officials, growing from 3.833 to 5.666. The parity in the size of political discussion networks between elected officials and peripheral central committee members is mainly due to the smaller growth in the networks of elected officials, suggesting that the resistance many of them expressed towards talking about politics may have moderated the generally tendency towards larger political discussion network sizes as the caucus approached. For comparison, the size of political discussion networks for all participants was 5.32 in the first round 6.25 and in the final rounds.
Figure 6.1: Change in political discussion network size of local political elites over time.

Despite having achieved their position through electoral politics, most elected officials did not express enthusiasm for talking politics in the community beyond their own campaigns. Part of the constraint on their political discussion is based on their attempts to keep politics out of their official duties. When ask about discussing politics, EO1, noting that she worked at the county courthouse, said, “working where I work, it would not be wise [to discuss politics]”. Other elected officials also expressed reluctance to talk politics among their fellow Republicans or become more active in local politics despite having achieved their positions through elections:

EO2: *There seems to be a consensus around here, so there is not really a need [to discuss politics among Republicans].*

EO4: *I guess politics, to me, is more looking at the laws, how laws are constructed, who makes the laws and things such as that, than it is the social side of it. That is the part that I really enjoy, the legal side of it.*
EO5:  *I don’t vote for the party; that’s why I’m not involved in local county politics, because they are a bunch of raving maniacs sometimes, on both sides, the political activists… I don’t get involved in county politics, so I’m not on the Republican central committee for the county or anything like that.*

EO6:  *Running for office made me more careful, more tactful in what I said (about politics).*

EO3 was an exception to the general view expressed by elected officials; for that participant, running for public office preceded becoming politically active: “I got more active after I was elected, or ran.” However, that participant had one of the smallest reported political discussion networks among all local elite participants, so that reported increase in activity was apparently from a very low baseline.

However, elected officials do not avoid politics beyond their own campaigns entirely. I observed several elected officials attending events like a Scott Walker meet-and-greet at Penn Drug in Sidney and a town hall meeting with Senator Chuck Grassley in Tabor over the summer of 2015.

Although only one of the elected officials who spoke directly about political discussion expressed enthusiasm for it, all of the core committee members who directly talked about political discussion did so. They expressed a belief in the efficacy of “word-of-mouth” (CC2) and the importance of political candidates to “shake a few hands and talk to folks” (CC1). Most core and peripheral committee members are retired and those who are not run their own, non-retail, businesses, which minimalizes constraints on political discussion in their daily lives. For CC6, running her own business has created an opportunity to have more, rather than less, political discussion:
CC6: There are an awful lot of folks who like to talk about politics (when they visit the participant’s business).... And people (that the participant knows in other states) know that we are involved because we are in Iowa and because we have been associated with the party so much. I mean, we put signs on our cars (laughs). That invites conversation.

Several core central committee members and elected officials expressed enjoyment of politics. For elected officials, that enjoyment was limited by the previously noted constraint of their public offices and a wish to avoid unnecessarily alienating potential supporters. EO1 was “always interested in politics” and found that “political campaigns are just the most interesting thing I’ve ever done”. EO4 has become “very active in the political field; it’s enjoyable”. CC5 likes to “get involved” and enjoys “listening to politics” while CC2 found that “once I had that experience of being involved [in politics], I loved it”.

That enjoyment of politics translated into greater involvement in the Republican Party for some central committee core members. CC6 found that the opportunity to meet candidates from all over the nation through Republican Party events “just makes it more interesting”. CC2’s interest in politics drove her activism within the party:

CC2: I made a decision that I wanted to stay and be somewhat involved, and my party choice is the Republican Party, involved in the activities just so I could stay somewhat informed. Not just totally about the activity part, but I do enjoy that part, too.

For CC6, candidates, no matter how good their ideas are, need the support and structure to succeed and “I think either of the parties provide that”. One of the common discussions I encountered in central committee meetings was how they could support Republican candidates in the 2016 elections. They sought to raise the party’s profile and
support candidates through participation in community events, organizing a county-wide fundraiser, and recruiting candidates to run for office.

The interviews did not include specific questions about enjoyment of politics or belief in the efficacy of political talk; those participants who did mention those topics did so in the context of other questions. None of the peripheral central committee members volunteered views on either topic.

**Conservative Ideology and Strategic Voting.**

The other core theme of this chapter is that peripheral central committee members expressed strong across-the-board conservatism while elected officials expressed more moderation and core central committee members fell between the other two groups. As part of my research, I asked participants for their self-rated ideology on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 for very liberal to 7 for very conservative.

I also asked participants to rate their views on 14 political issues on a scale from 0 to 100 with 100 representing the most conservative position on about half of the questions and 0 representing the most conservative position on the other half. The latter set of answers were reverse coded so that 100 represented the most conservative position on all questions. An issue-conservatism scale was formed by calculating the mean scores for each participant across all 14 issues. The issues asked about ranged widely, from fiscal issues (e.g. taxes and federal spending) to hot-button issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and immigration. A social conservatism scale was created using a subset of social issues (abortion, same-sex marriage, a path to citizenship for illegal immigration, gun control, and school prayer).
Table 6.2: Measures of political conservatism of local political elites. Self-placement is on a 1-7 scale, with 7 being extremely conservative. Issues scores on a 0-100 scale with 100 being the most conservative position. The numbers expressed are averages among several issues.

The findings are presented in Table 6.2. The mean self-rated ideology score for elected officials was 5.67, well on the conservative side but considerably more moderate than the other local elites. The mean self-rated ideology of peripheral central committee members (6.5) was only slightly more conservative than the mean self-rated ideology of the core central committee members (6.43). The differing levels of conservatism among local elites was clearer. Central committee peripheral members had a conservatism score of 80.05 compared to a score of 75.69 for central committee core members. Elected officials were again the most moderate with a mean conservatism score of 64.48. The difference in conservatism scores is more pronounced when only considering social issues. The social issue conservatism scores were 84.00 for central committee peripheral members, 75.81 for central committee core members, and 59.86 for elected officials. Although the size of the differences between the three groups of local political elites on conservatism varied depending on how ideology was measured, all were in the same direction and supported both hypotheses H₄ and H₅.

Although all the elites interviewed were on the conservative side of the political spectrum, and self-rated themselves as such, there were differing degrees to which they
embraced it in their interviews, with peripheral central committee members expressing the strongest enthusiasm for conservatism, elected officials more likely to express moderation, and core central committee members falling in between.

Most members of all three groups identified strongly with conservatism. For CC7, conservatism “is the makeup of me as a person” while CP1 describes himself as a “right wing fanatic.” EO1 sees it as “my lifestyle”, adding “I agree with what they (conservatives) agree with… and with liberals not at all”. That element of opposition to liberalism as part of one’s conservative identity was evident in the views expressed by other local elites, saying that they are “pretty much the opposite of liberal” (CC4) and that they “fit more on the conservative scale” (EO4). In perhaps the most entertaining interview conducted during this research, CC3 strongly expressed that oppositional disposition when asked why he considered himself a conservative:

CC3:  *Because I disagree with everything. I disagree with everything the government does. Everything! Everything since Theodore Roosevelt.*

However, there were also expressions in support of moderation among elected officials and core central committee members. For EO2, social conservatism is a distraction from more important issues: “it is an easy thing to get on the radio and say ‘I’m against abortion and gay marriage’ but at the end of the day what does that do for the country”? While CC6 expressed some common cause with libertarians’ ideas on freedom, she believed that “they take it to the point where that it wouldn’t be controlled in a government like ours”. Some participants who did not consider themselves on the extreme right did so, not because of their issue positions, but because they believed in
finding common ground or governing from the middle, both for themselves and candidates for the presidency:

EO5:  *I want a presidential candidate I’m convince will govern from the middle: a moderate candidate who is willing to compromise with Congress on whatever Congress has decreed.*

EO6:  *I’m not on the far right. I think you get into some... For instance, with different leadership positions you have to consider both sides; there are points to both sides of an issue. I’m a moderate. There’s always two sides to a story and both sides have merit.*

CC5:  *They need to be able to listen. I mean, not only have their views (but how they) come across with their views. I would like to have a candidate that would listen to everybody. Say if somebody is getting out of hand, just stop them a little bit; calm them down a little bit... They have to deal with so many individuals. It is not just me. It is not just your views. It’s everybody’s views. They have got to be able to hash out everybody’s views to do what is right for everybody in the United States.*

It is not clear if the preference for moderation on the part of elected officials and, to a somewhat lesser degree, core central committee members, is based on selection (with relative moderates gravitating towards community or party leadership) or if the demands of their positions influence them towards more moderation.

A similar pattern emerges when looking at individual issues. Members of all three groups expressed broad support for conservative positions on fiscal, economic, and foreign policy issues, but elected officials generally took a more moderate stance on social issues. There was near unanimity on expressed support for increasing defense spending, reforming welfare programs, shrinking the size of the federal government, and gun rights. On abortion and immigration, the elected officials generally expressed less conservative positions than either the core central committee members or the peripheral committee members. As would be expected, there was some disconfirming evidence as
well, such as EO1 considering a pledge to secure the border to be a litmus test for presidential candidates and CC6 stating that gay marriage and abortion are “social issues and not the government’s business”.

Those differences on issues are reflected at least somewhat in the first answer they gave to the question “are there any issues that a candidate must agree with you on before you would vote for him or her?” Of the five elected officials who said that they had such a litmus test, two answered that candidates must agree with them on social issues, but not in the way that one would expect. One of them said that candidates must be in favor of same-sex marriage or at least not be in favor of any federal action prohibiting it (this was soon after the Supreme Court legalized same sex marriage throughout the United States with the Obergefell v. Hodges decision). Another elected official said that the closest thing to a litmus test was that he would not vote for someone who “mixes religion and politics”. Other issues mentioned were immigration (“securing the borders”), maintaining a strong defense, and fiscal conservatism.

The core central committee members expressed a more traditional set of litmus test issues, including getting more confrontational with Iran, opposing Common Core, getting rid of Obamacare, enforcing immigration laws, and opposition to abortion. Only two of the central committee peripheral members said that they had a litmus test issue and for both is was opposition to legal abortion.

There was also some variation on views towards strategic voting. Each participant was asked “How important is it that a candidate has a strong chance to win the general election in November?” The views expressed toward electability (the perceived ability of a candidate to win in the general election) when deciding which candidate to support
were about evenly divided between those who thought it was important and those who thought it was not. However, there was a divide among local elites on electability, with most central committee core members placing greater emphasis on electability, most central committee peripheral members discounting it, and elected officials being evenly divided.

Most central committee core members were emphatic on the importance of electability (the perceived ability of a candidate to eventually win the in the general election) to the point of supporting a candidate based on that rather than the person’s preferred candidate:

CC1: *I’m going to be very candid with you, Andy. It is critically important that that person have the potential to win in the general election. So that brings you back to, is there going to have to be a consensus? I think there is going to have to be. (In the) primaries, it is going to have to be someone who leans to the right. But isn’t that politics? I wish is wasn’t that way. I wish the person could run in the general election the same as he ran in the primary.*

CC6: *That’s really important. It’s like they’re all nice and they’re all conservative. Which one can win?*

Other central committee peripheral members expressed similar views, although there was some disconfirming evidence, with one central committee peripheral member emphasizing electability and one core member discounting its importance. However that core central committee member’s discounting of the importance of electability seems to be based on his belief that any Republican nominee could win against the likely Democratic standard bearer:

CC3: *Anybody could beat Hillary; I could beat Hillary!*
On the other hand, although there was disagreement on electability, most elites said that they do not consider viability (the perceived ability of a candidate to eventually win the Republican nomination) important when choosing which candidate to support in the presidential caucus. The views of many participants on viability are similar to those expressed by one of the elected officials:

EO3:  I'd (vote for) the best person. Even if they don’t stand a chance, if I believe they are the best person, I’m still going to support that person.

Discussion

Candidates running for office seek the endorsements and active support of local political elites. In the context of nomination contests, successful campaigns do not seize the party machinery for their service. Rather, by securing the support of local political elites, they take advantage of the social interactions that account for the “persistence of distinctive partisan community traditions” (Putnam 1966).

However, local political elites vary in their ideological fervor and their means of disseminating information through their personal political discussion networks. The findings of this research suggest that core members of party central committees occupy a middle position among local elites ideologically and possess the greatest means among local elites of sharing their views. The findings further suggest that it is the social dynamics among local elites (including party leaders), rather than the party organization itself, that drives retail politics in local communities.

The usual caveat about generalizing from a single case applies here but these findings have generated several testable theories about local political elites. Future research should be conducted in larger and more diverse communities to see how having
multiple centers of party activism changes participant views towards political
communication within parties. This study does not systematically address causality in the
relationship between social contexts of local political elites and their views on ideology
and political talk. For example, does relative moderation and a belief in the efficacy of
political talk cause central committee members to become more active in the workings of
the party, or do core central committee members develop a greater appreciation for
moderation and political talk based on their experience in the party organization?
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The research conducted in this dissertation sought to test theories regarding the impact of political discussion networks, campaign effects, and political ideology on vote choice. The central thesis of this study is that the process of deciding for whom to vote is, if not completely a social act, one that is heavily influenced by those with whom we socialize on a regular basis. Broadly, this study sought to illuminate the process by which social interaction in the form of political discussion influenced vote choice. More narrowly, the goal of this work is to fill a gap in the literature on the Iowa presidential caucus, an understudied but important part of presidential elections.

At the beginning of the research process, my main focus was on finding how political discussion moderated campaign effects and ideological vote share. Although both of the latter concepts are well-supported in the literature, in this study support for campaign effects was relatively weak and support for ideological vote share (and its inverse, ideological crowding) was nonexistent. However, as will be seen in the next section, there were several interesting findings on the impact of contacts from candidate campaigns on voting, voter perceptions of candidate ideology, and the differing ideology and size of political discussion networks of local political elites. In addition, the findings regarding the influence of political discussion on voting behavior were robust, providing empirical support for theories of social influences on voting, especially in the context of nomination contests.

Overview of Research Methods and Results

Because the empirical foundation of this dissertation is based on a unique dataset created through a case study, an explanation of the process and methods used is required
and, in Chapter 2, I detailed the case selection criteria and other considerations that led to my choosing as my case Republicans in Fremont County, Iowa, who were likely presidential caucus voters. Those criteria included accessibility throughout the eight-month study period, sufficient distance from large population centers so that most participants would work and socialize within the county, and a small enough number of likely voters that a sufficiently large proportion of them could be regularly interviewed by a single researcher. The study was limited to Republicans because it was likely that there would be greater variation on the primary dependent variable (caucus vote choice). For various reasons a list of prior Republican caucus voters was not available, but a contact list of 199 likely Republican caucus voters was cobbled together from various lists available from the Fremont County Auditor’s office and some limited snowball sampling. The first half of the chapter closed with a description of Fremont County in order to provide a context for the data gathered during the field work and panel interviews.

Chapter 2 also included a detailed description of the process employed to gather the data used in this study, beginning with a de facto pilot study in Nemaha County, Nebraska, in the summer of 2014 that helped develop skills strategies later used in the study. After some attrition over the course of the study, the final number of participants was 80 for a participation rate of 40%. Participants were asked many of the usual questions regarding ideology, issues, and candidate support. They were also asked in each round of interviews about with whom they discussed politics. The data from those interviews was supported by observations of Fremont County Republican central committee meetings, a candidate visit to Sidney, some other local events, and (with the
help of two colleagues) three of the four Republican caucus meetings that took place in the county.

One advantage of the methods used in this case study was that it allowed for the dyadic network analysis presented in Chapter 3 to be based on data collected from discussion partners recruited independently; much of the dyadic analysis that has been used in electoral studies, such as Huckfeldt and Sprague’s (1995) canonical work on social communications and voting behavior, has been based on snowball sampling with the initial respondent. That independent data collection allowed the study of non-mutual dyads (increasing the number of pairs available for analysis) while negating the need to do follow-up interviews with non-participants named as discussion partners by the participants. An important feature of dyadic analysis is that it allows for the verification of participant predictions of which candidates their discussion partners supported. The analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrated that when participants were willing to predict the candidate preferences of their discussion partners, they were more accurate than would be predicted by chance (despite there being no help provided by party ID). As the date of the presidential caucus approached and the nomination contest became more salient, participants ventured predictions for more of their discussion partners without a drop in accuracy. Although there was a tendency for participants who made incorrect predictions to mistakenly believe that their discussion partners supported the same candidate as they did, the general finding is that participants were reasonably accurate in predicting which candidates their discussion partners supported. The findings on the accuracy of predictions of discussion partner candidate support provide greater confidence about the
influence of political discussion partners on participant vote choice when examining egocentric data in later chapters.

I analyzed the impact of campaign effects and ideological vote share in Chapter 4. The findings regarding campaign effects were modest. There was some evidence that being contacted by a candidate’s campaign was related to voting for that candidate, but the findings were not strong. In addition, there was no relationship between either meeting a candidate personally or attending a candidate’s event and voting for that candidate. If the findings regarding campaign effects were weak, the findings regarding ideology were nonexistent. Ideological vote share (the proportion of the vote a candidate would get if every participant had voted for the candidate that they placed closest to themselves ideologically) was not significantly related to the actual vote share on caucus night. There was also no relationship between participant conservatism scores, based on a battery of 14 questions on political views, and caucus vote. In addition, there was no relationship between either social conservatism or economic conservatism (based on subsets of the ideology questions) and vote choice. However, Trump supporters were found to be more conservative than the supporters of other candidates on a subset of foreign and defense policy conservatism, suggesting that Trump’s appeal may have been to nationalism rather than ideological conservatism.

There were two other interesting findings regarding ideology. The first concerns participants’ perceptions of Donald Trump’s ideology. Unique among all candidates, Trump had a bimodal distribution on his ideology rating on a seven-point scale, with peaks at “conservative” and “moderate”. Relatedly, Trump had by far the greatest variance in ideological ratings from participants. A source for that wide variance was that
Trump supporters were significantly more likely to place Trump to the right politically than were those who did not support Trump. A look at changes in the variance of participant ratings of candidate ideology from the summer of 2015 to January of 2016 revealed another interesting finding. Variance in the ideological ratings of most candidates decreased over the course of the presidential campaign (although only Jeb Bush’s decrease was statistically significant). That was in line with the expectation that information about candidates over the course of the campaign would generate a greater consensus about where candidates stood ideologically. However, the variance in participant perceptions of the ideology of the three leading candidates (Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio) actually increased, although only Cruz’s increase was statically significant. It is likely that negative information directed at the leading candidates from the campaigns and supporters of each other and the other candidates in the field made voters less sure of where those candidates stood.

In Chapter 5, I found that knowing people who support a particular candidate was a much stronger predictor of voting for that candidate than being contacted by a candidate’s campaign. In a model combining the campaign effects found in Chapter 4 with political discussion network support, campaign effects diminished as a significant factor in vote choice. In addition, when adding an interaction term of campaign effects and political discussion network support to the model, neither campaign effects nor the interaction term were significant.

Perhaps as a natural result of the strength of interpersonal discussion regarding candidate support, there was increased consensus on which candidate to support within discussion networks; within-discussion-group homophily on candidate support more than
doubled over the course of the study. In addition, individuals who agreed with most of their political discussion network regarding candidate support were more likely to maintain support for that candidate on caucus night than were those who disagreed with most of their political discussion network, suggesting that homophily plays a role both in increasing support for a candidate and in maintaining support for that candidate. There is also evidence that candidate support within political discussion networks plays a role in the likelihood of engaging in strategic voting. While the proportion of participants’ political discussion networks supporting Donald Trump was significantly related to voting for Trump, it was also significantly related to voting for Ted Cruz (with voting for other candidates the excluded category). The reverse was also true. This suggests that, for example, when a participant found that most of the Republicans she knew supported Trump and she could not bring herself to support him, she would settle on the leading non-Trump candidate. However, if the bulk of her political discussion network supported a different candidate or divided its support among several candidates, there was less of a reason to see a need to vote for Cruz as the only real alternative to Trump. These findings indicate that, although homophily on candidate support strongly influences voting for that candidate, its impact is more complex than a matter of simply voting with one’s group.

In Chapter 6, I present emergent findings regarding local political elites derived from data from the Fremont County study. Core party central committee members were more likely to engage in political talk, and express greater enthusiasm for political talk, than were either peripheral central committee members or local elected officials. Peripheral central committee members had the smallest political discussion networks in the summer of 2015. Although the size of the political discussion networks of all three
groups increased as the caucus neared, the size of elected officials networks increased relatively slowly while those of peripheral central committee members grew the fastest. This reflected both the relative reluctance of elected officials to discuss politics outside the context of their own elections (none were running that year) and the fact that peripheral central committee members tended only to be politically active during election periods. In addition, core central committee members occupied an ideological middle position between the relative moderation of elected officials and the relative conservatism of peripheral central committee members. Together, those findings indicate that core central committee members, by virtue of their central ideological placement and greater means of disseminating political information, are likely the most influential of local political elites.

Discussion

The evidence from this study suggests two related features of social influences on voting behavior in nomination contests: the influence of social influences on voting behavior in nomination contests and the influence of information from political discussion networks on strategic voting. These findings provide insight on voting behavior in nomination contests in general and on the voting behavior of Iowa presidential caucus voters in particular, providing important information on the contests that shape the choice voters have in general elections.

From the findings, it appears that the impact of social influences, in the form of political discussion networks, on voting behavior in nomination contests is strong. Much of the previous work on social influences on voting behavior (e.g. Berelson et al., 1954; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Levine, 2005; Sinclair, 2012) has been on general
elections, when the known party affiliation of political discussion partners can act as a cue about how fellow party members are voting. Despite the absence of that powerful heuristic, this study presents evidence that the tendency towards vote choice homophily found in general elections can also be found in nomination contests. Relatedly, voters who found themselves in disagreement with much of their political discussion networks during the last few days of the race were more likely to vote for a different candidate on caucus night than the candidate they had planned on voting for than were those who agreed with a large portion of their political discussion network.

Although there is a strong tendency towards homophily within political discussion networks, the full picture of social influences on voting behavior is more complex. When a large portion of a voter’s political discussion network supports one of the two leading candidates in a nomination contest (e.g., Ted Cruz), the voter is more likely to support that candidate than one of the candidates further back in the pack. However, there is also a significantly greater likelihood that the voter will vote for the main opponent of the network’s preferred candidate (e.g. Donald Trump) rather than one of the candidates further back in the pack. How do we explain this latter phenomenon? The most likely explanation is that, when confronted with first-hand evidence that many people are supporting a candidate that a voter cannot support, that voter will strategically support the candidate most likely to defeat the network preferred candidate. Trump and Cruz were the two leading candidates during the last two months of the campaign, according to most public polling; upon discovering, for example, that Cruz was dominant within their own political discussion network, participants tended to see the choice as voting for Cruz or voting for the candidate most likely to beat Cruz, in this case Donald Trump. In contrast,
when a large portion of a voter’s political discussion network divided its support among many candidates or supported one of the candidates not leading in the polls, there was both less social pressure to support one of the leading candidates and less of a perceived need to vote strategically against a disliked leading candidate.

Information from political discussion networks is important in this assessment because individuals tend to use conversations with those whom they know to verify information from the media. People are likely to reject information from the media “if a perspective conveyed by the mass media clashes with the group members’ perspective” (Walsh, 2004, p. 53). In other words, if the media tells you that Trump and Cruz are the leading candidates, but most of the Republicans with whom you talk about politics plan to vote for Ben Carson, you are likely to discount the information you get from the media when deciding for which candidate to vote. This is not to suggest that information from the media is not important. Rather, it suggests that there is an interplay between information from the media and information from personal discussions.

While the data in this study showed that candidate support within political discussion networks had a much stronger relationship with vote choice than did campaign effects, I would not advise campaigns to discontinue their efforts. As noted in Chapter 5, it may be most accurate to see an election (both general elections and nomination contests) as a concurrent series of thousands of small battles that take place in every community and social network throughout the district or state. The vote count in an election is the result of those thousands of battles, with one candidate usually dominating within each of those contests. This study found that efforts from campaigns had a small but real effect on vote choice. Reaching a few members of a political discussion network,
or even one member, can introduce information that will affect political conversations within that network. While there is certainly no guarantee that the efforts of a campaign in winning those thousands of battles will be successful, leaving the field uncontested is a sure path to failure.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The use of a case study method to answer questions regarding the influence of political talk on vote choice allowed for a single researcher to collect extensive longitudinal data from a single unit (Republican caucus voters in Fremont County, Iowa) to help understand a larger set of units (voters generally, and voters in nomination contests in particular). The data from this case study helped in the study of the questions in this dissertation, providing greater understanding of the sometimes complex ways that social influences affect voting behavior. Those findings support some theories of voting behavior (e.g. the effect of political discussion on behavior, the tendency towards homophily within political discussion networks) while challenging others (e.g. ideological vote share and ideological crowding). The case study method employed in this research also provided the flexibility to allow for emergent findings initially based on fieldwork observations and interviews.

However, as case studies in political science tend to occupy a middle ground between the thick description of ethnographies and the statistical power of large-n studies, they can suffer the limitations of being methodologically lukewarm compared to those other methods. Such was sometimes the case with this study. Although the data gathered from the interviews and observations in this study were useful in providing data for conducting statistical analysis, the small sample size imposed some limits on analysis.
For example, in several statistical tests, the dependent variable (participant vote choice) had to be collapsed into three categories of “Trump”, “Cruz”, and “other”. A larger sample could have produced fuller or more nuanced analysis by analyzing more categories. A survey of several hundred likely voters could have answered some of the questions dealt with in this study with a lot less time and effort and at only a little more cost.

Likewise, this study could have benefited in places from the detailed description provided by ethnographies. That is most apparent in the study of local political elites presented in Chapter 6. The initial in-person interviews were relatively long (lasting, on average, a little over 30 minutes each) and contain enough open-ended questions to allow the qualitative analysis of transcripts, and were backed up by verification through observations and numeric data. However, the four rounds of panel interviews tended to be shorter (5-10 minutes) and limited to closed-ended questions. In addition, I was still taking classes during part of the research period, which limited the time available for field work in the fall of 2015. More descriptive data would have helped investigate causality regarding the phenomena investigated in this study. For example, more detailed interviews with fewer participants could have helped pen down exactly when participants began supporting particular candidates, helping better understand the direction of causality within political discussion networks.

**Future Research**

When considering the limitations of this study, the temptation is to seek to address them in future studies by calling for more detailed descriptions, more time in the field, and more statistical power. There are few problems in political science research that
cannot be solved with a five-year paid sabbatical, a crack staff of a dozen well-trained research assistants, and a couple MacArthur Foundation “genius” grants. Short of that, there are several specific areas for future research suggested by the findings of this study.

The lack of evidence for ideological vote share (or ideological crowding) was unexpected, given the findings of Hull (2008). The plethora of major Republican candidates may have been a factor in minimizing the role of ideology. For example, there were three candidates whom participants collectively rated to the right of six on a seven-point Likert ideology scale in the summer of 2015 (Ted Cruz, Ben Carson, and Rick Santorum). The only statistically significant difference between the candidates on ideology was that supporters of Donald Trump were more conservative than supporters of the rest of the Republican field on defense and foreign policy issues. Further research could address the extent to which large fields of candidates in nomination contests “crowd out” ideological crowding and how campaigns seek to differentiate their candidates when the field is crowded. In addition, more work should be done on the role of information contributing to increased collective confusion on the perceived ideology of candidates.

Further work on the possible interaction of campaign effects and political discussion network influences on voting behavior is needed. The relative weakness of the findings on campaign effects prevented them from making a statistically significant contribution in an interaction model with political discussion networks. It is possible that the null finding was a result of weaknesses of this particular study and that larger studies may find a significant interaction.
The complexity of the relationship between candidate support in political discussion networks and voting behavior should be investigated in more depth, especially within the context of nomination contests. Although the finding that knowing many people who support a particular candidate increased the likelihood of voting for that candidate is not novel, the finding that it also increased the likelihood of voting for that candidate’s principal opponent (as opposed to less competitive opponents) is interesting and warrants further study.

The findings on local political elites bear further study as well. Future research should be conducted in larger and more diverse communities to see how having multiple centers of party activism changes participant views towards political communication within parties. This study does not systematically address causality in the relationship between social contexts of local political elites and their views on ideology and political talk. For example, does relative moderation and a belief in the efficacy of political talk cause central committee members to become more active in the workings of the party, or do core central committee members develop a greater appreciation for moderation and political talk based on their experience in the party organization? As noted in the second chapter of this dissertation, case studies can be a useful tool for refining generalizations and forming “naturalistic generalizations” that can be applied to other studies (Stake, 1995).

This study helps address an understudied yet important part of the American political system. The findings (and some of the non-findings) of this study provide a useful starting point for further inquiries. It refines generalizations developed in the study of general elections to nomination contests. Among those findings are individuals can
predict the candidate preferences of those with whom they discuss politics with reasonable accuracy in nomination contests, despite not having discussion partner party ID as a guide. Political discussion networks are more strongly related to vote choice than are communications from campaigns, supporting prior findings on the role that people with whom we discuss politics play in validating information from outside sources. Those findings strengthen those theories by demonstrating that they are not limited to general elections and expand our understanding of social influences in nomination contests. While the finding of increased homophily on candidate preference over time is not new, the related finding that homophily is potentially related to strategic voting against the leading candidate within a political discussion network is novel, generating hypotheses about the relationship between network composition and strategic voting that can be tested in other contexts. Finally, I have found variation in the terms of ideology and political discussion among local political elites. Those findings, especially regarding the ideological centrality of party central committee members and their greater belief in the efficacy of political talk, suggest that it is party leaders rather than local elected officials whom candidates should primarily court as part of their campaign ground game.

The events of 2016 underscore the importance of nomination contests in general and the Iowa presidential caucus in particular; Donald Trump could not have been in a position to defeat Hilary Clinton had he not first won the Republican nomination and Trump’s strong showing in Iowa was the first tangible demonstration of his viability. The findings of this dissertation are noted within the context of the Iowa presidential caucus, an event that plays an oversized role in making or (more often) breaking presidential aspirations, and provide one of the few scientific studies of caucus attendees.
REFERENCES


Gerring, J. (2004). What is a case study and what is it good for?. *American Political Science Review,* 98(02), 341-354.


APPENDIX A

Recruitment letter (on University of Nebraska letterhead) sent to all prospective participants

Dear John Doe,

My name is Andy Jackson. I am a doctoral student from the Political Science department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study about voting in presidential nomination contests. You are eligible to be in this study because you have been identified as a likely participant in the 2016 Iowa presidential caucuses based on your participation in prior caucuses or your recent voting history. I obtained your contact information from records kept by office of the Fremont County Auditor.

If you decide to participate in this study, I will interview you in person about your political beliefs, your assessment of official or likely presidential candidates, and the nature of discussions you have about politics. Everything you say in the interview will be strictly confidential. This project is being funded in part by grants from the Institute for Humane Studies and the Political Science department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

As a token of appreciation, I have included a $2 bill in this mailing. Of course, your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time.

In the coming couple of weeks, I will contact you by phone or in person to ask if you will participate in this study. If you have any questions, please contact me at jonathan.jackson@huskers.unl.edu or you may call me at 919-757-5905.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jonathan A. “Andy” Jackson

517 Oldfather Hall
Department of Political Science
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588-0328
APPENDIX B

The next several pages contain samples of the interview protocols for the initial in-person interviews conducted in the summer of 2015, and the four panel interviews conducted by phone from September of 2015 to February of 2016. The sample protocols for the panel interviews include examples of fields that were filled in for each of the interviews based on responses from previous rounds (in bold and italics); there was a partial custom-made protocol for each participant in the panel interviews. The page count of some of the protocols are different than what is seen in this appendix due to differences in formatting.
In-Person Interview Protocol

Project: The impact of social networks on the vote choice of Iowa caucus goers

Date: __________________________

Time: __________________________

Location: __________________________

Interviewer: Jonathan Andrew Jackson

Participant ID number: __________

Informed consent signed? ____

Notes to interviewee:

- Thank the interviewee for his or her time.
- Let interviewee know that the “talk” will take about an hour and will be composed of seven major questions with associated follow-ups and exploration.
- Ask permission to record interview.
- Assure interviewee that the contents of the interview will remain confidential and that they will only be identified as an “Iowa Democratic/Republican political activist”. Also that they will only be identified by a random five-digit code in the data.
- Tell the interviewee that the results of the interview will be part of research to be presented in conference and be included as part of a dissertation and perhaps a journal article.
- During interview, record participant phone number if had not already and ask the best days and times to call for follow up interviews.
In-Person Interview Questions with Potential Probes and Follow-ups

1. Could you tell me about yourself and why you became politically active?  
   [Probe: How long have you been politically active? Have you ever volunteered for a presidential candidate (if so, for whom and when)?]

   a. How would you rate yourself ideologically? Do you consider yourself to be… (read through list)
      ___ Very liberal
      ___ Liberal
      ___ Slightly liberal
      ___ Middle-of-the-road
      ___ Slightly conservative
      ___ Conservative
      ___ Very conservative

   b. Why did you rate yourself the way you did?
2. What things do you consider when deciding who to vote for in a presidential caucus?

   a. How important is it that a candidate has a strong chance to win the party nomination?

   b. How important is it that a candidate has a strong chance to win the general election in November?

   c. Are there any issues that a candidate must agree with you on before you would vote for him or her? (If so, which one(s)?)

3. How would you rate (name of candidate in random order) ideologically? Do you consider that candidate to be... (read through list for first candidate)
   ___ Very liberal
   ___ Liberal
   ___ Slightly liberal
   ___ Middle-of-the-road; moderate
   ___ Slightly conservative
   ___ Conservative
   ___ Very conservative

   a. How about (next candidate on the list until all candidates are rated)?
   [Place answers in list on next page]
Answers for Question 3: How would you rate (name of candidate in random order) ideologically? Do you consider that candidate to be…?

(Start at a random point on the list.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very liberal</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Slightly liberal</th>
<th>Middle-of-the-road; moderate</th>
<th>Slightly conservative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very conservative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
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<td>Rand Paul</td>
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<td>Marco Rubio</td>
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<td>Ben Carson</td>
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<td>Carly Fiorina</td>
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<td>Jeb Bush</td>
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<td>Scott Walker</td>
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<td>Chris Christie</td>
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<td>Rick Perry</td>
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<td>Lindsey Graham</td>
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<td>Bobby Jindal</td>
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<td>John Kasich</td>
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<td>Donald Trump</td>
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<td>other - volunteered</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Who do you plan to vote for in the caucus? [Do not push for leaners. It participant says he or she will not vote, probe for the reason not voting?]

________________________

i. Why?

ii. Are you definitely going to vote for that candidate or do you think you could change your mind? Who would be your second choice?

5. Now I am going to ask you about some particular topics. I will ask how positive or negative do you feel about each issue on the scale of 0 to 100, where 0 represents very negative and 100 represents very positive. How do you feel about…? (each topic in random order – continue to ask until all issues have been asked).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>0 to 100 scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion rights (reverse code)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Government regulation of business (reverse code)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gay marriage (reverse code)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military spending</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cut the federal budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gun rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>A path to citizenship for illegal immigrants (reverse code)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biblical truth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase taxes (reverse code)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase welfare spending (reverse code)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drone strikes against terrorism suspects</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign aid to the world’s needy (reverse code)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School prayer</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6. What are some local organizations or groups that you belong to?

[For each group mentioned: What kinds of things do you talk about with people in that group? How often does politics come up in formal or informal discussions within that group?]

a. What state or national organizations do you belong to?

b. Do you attend church regularly?
   i. [If yes] Which church? ____________
7. Who have you talked about politics with over the past month?
   (Try to get up to 10 names. If participant declines to give names, ask for initials. This data is needed to match with questions in follow up contacts later. Continue to probe for more names until participant runs out of names.)

   **Probes for individuals**
   a. How do you know ______________? *multiple connects are fine*
   b. Do you consider ______________ to be an acquaintance, close, or very close?
   c. Who is ______________ supporting for president?

   **General probe**
   d. Of the people you mentioned, which ones do you think are the most knowledgeable about politics? *(Note answers, including “myself”).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>a. How known?</th>
<th>b. How well known?</th>
<th>c. Supporting for president</th>
<th>d. Among most knowledgeable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
8. Have any presidential campaigns contacted you? *(If yes, ask which campaigns and the nature of the contacts.)*

9. Have you personally seen or meet any presidential candidates? *(If yes, ask which candidates and context in which they saw the candidate (Where? When?, etc.))*

10. What else do you think I should know?

Closing notes:

- Thank participant again for his or her time.
- For the snowball sample (phase 1 only):
  - Ask for name and contact information of other people “you think I should talk with”.
  - Ask for permission to use participant’s name when contacting prospective new participant.
- Ask the participant about any places in the county where people gather regularly.
- Remind participant that you will contact him or her “a couple of times” by phone between now and the caucus scheduled for January of 2016 for brief (10 minute) follow ups. If participant requests that you not contact him or her, check the blank below and do not contact the participant for follow ups.
  
  ___The participant requested not to be contacted again.
Second Round Interview Protocol

Project: The impact of social networks on the vote choice of Iowa caucus goers

Date: ______________________

Time: ______________________

Interviewer: Jonathan Andrew Jackson

Participant ID number: 16042

Date of first interview: Aug 2

Notes to interviewer:

- Only those who had previously signed informed consent forms and given permission to be called will be called.
- Thank the interviewee for his or her time.
- Let interviewee know that the “talk” will take about ten minutes and will be composed of questions meant to follow up on prior interviews.
- Remind interviewee that the contents of the interview will remain confidential.
- Remind the interviewee that the results of the interview will be part of research to be presented in conference and be included as part of a dissertation and perhaps journal article.

1. Are you happy with the current field of Republican presidential candidates or is there someone else you would like to see enter the race? [If they say “someone else” ask for who they would like to see enter the race.]
   ___ Happy with the current
   ___ Would like someone else: (Who?) ____________________________

2. Have you seen any of the Republican presidential debates or portions of the debates?
   a. If no…. go on to question 3
   b. If yes…. “Who do you have believe has done the best in the debates so far?

3. At the moment, who do you plan to vote for in the caucus? [Do not push for leaners.]
   ____________________________ [First Round Answer: Jane Doe]
   i. What do you like most about ______?
   ii. Are there other candidates you are considering? If so, who?
   iii. [Ask only if answer changed from first round.] You had previously said that you supported Jane Doe. Why do you no longer support that candidate?
4. Who have you talked about politics with over the past two months? (Try to get up to 10 names. If participant declines to give names, ask for initials and answer the follow up questions. Continue to probe for more names until participant runs out of names.) Probes for each individual mentioned (some information will already be provided if the person was mentioned in the first interview). If the participant does not mention someone mentioned in the first round of interviews, do not mention that person.
   e. How do you know _______________? (multiple connects are fine)
   f. Do you consider _______________ to be an acquaintance, close, or very close?
   g. Who is _______________ supporting for president?
   General probe
   h. Of the people you mentioned, which ones do you think are the most knowledgeable about politics? You can name more than one person.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom Jones</td>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace Jones</td>
<td>Sister</td>
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<td>Coworker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>C</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. How do you get most of your information about the presidential candidates? You can name more than one source. [Open ended question.]
   _____ 1. TV
(Which stations or shows?) ________________________________

_____ 2. Radio
    (Which stations or shows?) ________________________________

_____ 3. Newspapers
    (Which newspaper?) ________________________________

_____ 4. The Internet
    (Which sources?) ________________________________

_____ 5. People you know
    (Who?) ________________________________

_____ 6. Something else
    (What?) ________________________________

6. Which of the following best describes the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
   ___ 1. No formal education
   ___ 2. 8th grade or less
   ___ 3. Some high school
   ___ 4. High school graduate or equivalent such as GED
   ___ 5. Some college
   ___ 6. Associate or Bachelor’s degree
   ___ 7. Graduate or professional degree

7. Have any presidential campaigns contacted you, not including junk mail, spam email, or robo calls? (If yes, ask which campaigns and the nature of the contacts.)

8. Have you personally seen or meet any presidential candidates? (If yes, ask which candidates and context in which they saw the candidate (Where? When?, etc.)
Third Round Interview Protocol (To be conducted in early December of 2015)

Project: The impact of social networks on the vote choice of Iowa caucus goers

Date: ______________________________
Time: ______________________________
Interviewer: Jonathan Andrew Jackson
Participant ID number: ______________________________
Date of first interview: Aug 2
Date of second interview: Oct 26

Notes to interviewer:

- Only those who had previously signed informed consent forms and given permission to be called will be called.
- Thank the interviewee for their time and let them know that the “talk” will take about ten minutes and will be composed of questions meant to follow up on prior interviews.
- Remind interviewee that the contents of the interview will remain confidential and that the results of the interview will be part of research to be presented in conference and be included as part of a dissertation and perhaps journal article.

9. Do you think it is good to have plenty of time to evaluate the presidential candidates, or do you think presidential election campaigns should be shorter?
   ___ Plenty of time    ___ Be shorter

10. Have any presidential campaigns contacted you in past (4-8 weeks), not including junk mail, spam email, or robo calls? (If yes, ask which campaigns and the nature of the contacts.)

11. Have you personally seen, meet, or been to an event of any presidential candidates in the past (4-8 weeks)? (If yes, ask which candidates and context in which they saw the candidate (Where? When?, etc.)

12. At the moment, who do you plan to vote for in the caucus? [Do not push for leaners.]
   ______________________________ [1st round answer: / 2nd round answer: ]
   b. What do you like most about _______?
   c. Are there other candidates you are considering? If so, who?
   d. [Ask only if answer changed from previous rounds.] You had previously said that you supported Jane Doe. Why do you no longer support that candidate?
13. The last two times we talked, you mentioned some people whom you have discussed politics with. I am going to read that list to you. For each of those people, please let me know if you have discussed political matters with them in the past two months. (Go through list, checking the third “mentioned” box if the respondent says yes.

Thanks. Who else have you discussed politics with over the past two months? Continue to probe for more names until participant runs out of names.) Some information will already be provided if the person was mentioned in the first interview.

Follow ups for newly mentioned political discussion partners:

i. How do you know _______________? (multiple connects are fine)

j. Do you consider _______________ to be an acquaintance, close, or very close?

Follow up for all political discussion partners:

k. Do you generally agree or disagree when talking politics with ________?

Follow up for all political partners in the 3rd round

l. Who is _______________ supporting for president?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>a. How known?</th>
<th>b. How well known</th>
<th>Mentioned (check if yes)</th>
<th>c. Agree or disagree (check)</th>
<th>d. Supporting for president</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom Jones</td>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace Jones</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gene Simmons</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Katten</td>
<td>Coworker</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy Grace</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned Krewson</td>
<td>Friend, Penn Drug Coffee</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. "Regardless of whom you support, you to believe [candidate name] has a strong chance to win the Republican presidential nomination, somewhat of a chance, or no chance?" (Repeat for each candidate.)

15. If [candidate name] were the Republican presidential nominee, would he (she) be more likely to win or lose in the general election in November? (Repeat for each candidate.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chance to win Republican nomination (Viability)</th>
<th>Likeliness to win general election (electability)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Chance</td>
<td>Somewhat of a chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rand Paul</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco Rubio</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben Carson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carly Fiorina</td>
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<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
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<td>Rick Santorum</td>
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<td>George Pataki</td>
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<td>Jeb Bush</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Christie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsey Graham</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Kasich</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

16. When considering whom to support in the presidential caucus, do you consider a candidate’s standing in national public opinion polls?
   ____ Yes   ____ No   ____ Some (vol.)

17. When considering whom to support in the presidential caucus, do you consider a candidate’s standing in Iowa public opinion polls?
   ____ Yes   ____ No   ____ Some (vol.)
Third Round Interview Protocol (To be conducted in late January of 2016)
Project: The impact of social networks on the vote choice of Iowa caucus goers

Date: ________________________________
Time: ________________________________
Interviewer: Jonathan Andrew Jackson
Participant ID number: ________________________________

Notes to interviewer:
- Only those who had previously signed informed consent forms and given permission to be called will be called.
- Thank the interviewee for their time and let them know that the “talk” will take about ten minutes and will be composed of questions meant to follow up on prior interviews.
- Remind interviewee that the contents of the interview will remain confidential and that the results of the interview will be part of research to be presented in conference and be included as part of a dissertation and perhaps journal article.

1. Do you think Iowa should change to a primary system for the presidential nominating contest?
   ___ Yes  ___ No

2. Have any presidential campaigns contacted you in past (4-8 weeks), not including junk mail, spam email, or robo calls? (If yes, ask which campaigns and the nature of the contacts.)

3. Have you personally seen, meet, or been to an event of any presidential candidates in the past (4-8 weeks)? (If yes, ask which candidates and context in which they saw the candidate (Where? When?, etc.)

4. At the moment, who do you plan to vote for in the caucus? [Do not push for leaners.]
   ________________________________ [1st round: Walker / 2nd round Carson: 3rd round: Carson]
e. What do you like most about _______?

f. Are there other candidates you are considering? If so, who?

g. [Ask only if answer changed from previous rounds.] You had previously said that you supported Jane Doe. Why do you no longer support that candidate?
5. The last three times we talked, you mentioned some people whom you have discussed politics with. I am going to read that list to you. For each of those people, please let me know if you have discussed political matters with them in the past two months. (Go through list, checking the third “mentioned” box if the respondent says yes.)

Thanks. Who else have you discussed politics with over the past two months? Continue to probe for more names until participant runs out of names.) Some information will already be provided if the person was mentioned in the first interview.

Follow ups for newly mentioned political discussion partners:
m. How do you know _______________? (multiple connects are fine)
n. Do you consider _______________ to be an acquaintance, close, or very close?

Follow up for all political discussion partners:
o. Do you generally agree or disagree when talking politics with ________?

Follow up for all Republican political partners from all rounds:
p. Who is _______________ supporting for president?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mentioned (check if yes)</th>
<th>a. How known?</th>
<th>b. How well known</th>
<th>c. Agree or disagree (check)</th>
<th>d. Supporting for president</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom Jones</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace Jones</td>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Sister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ned Krewson</td>
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<td>Friend, Penn Drug Coffee</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
6. Answers for Question 3: How would you rate (name of candidate in random order) ideologically? Do you consider that candidate to be liberal, moderate, or conservative?
   a. [If answer = liberal] Is he/she very liberal, liberal, or slightly liberal
   b. [If answer = conservative] Is he/she slightly conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Very liberal</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Slightly liberal</th>
<th>Middle-of-the-road; moderate</th>
<th>Slightly conservative</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Very conservative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ted Cruz</td>
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<td>Rick Santorum</td>
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<td>Jeb Bush</td>
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<td>Chris Christie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsey Graham</td>
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<td>John Kasich</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donald Trump</td>
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7. Do you plan to talk with anybody to anyone about your preferred candidate between now and the caucus?
   ___ Yes ___ No

   a. [IF YES] Who do you plan on talking with about your preferred candidates?
**Post Caucus Interview Protocol** (To be conducted in early February of 2016)

Project: The impact of social networks on the vote choice of Iowa caucus goers

Date: ________________________________

Time: ________________________________

Interviewer: Jonathan Andrew Jackson

Participant ID number:

Date of 1st interview: 7-11  2nd: 10-26  3rd: 12-11  4th: 1-25

Notes to interviewer:

- Only those who had previously signed informed consent forms and given permission to be called will be called.
- Thank the interviewee for their time and let them know that the “talk” will take about five minutes and will be composed of questions meant to follow up on prior interviews. Note that this will be the last interview.

Remind interviewee that the contents of the interview will remain confidential and that the results of the interview will be part of research to be presented in conference and be included as part of a dissertation and perhaps journal article.

1. Which candidate did you vote for at the February 1st caucus?

   [1st round: Walker / 2nd round Carson: 3rd round: Carson / 4th round: Trump]

   a. What one thing was the most important in making you decide to vote for _____?

   b. [Ask only if answer changed from previous round.] You had previously said that you supported Jane Doe. Why did you change your support?

2. When did you finally decide for whom to vote in the presidential election?

   [READ]

   a. _____ At the caucus
   b. _____ The day of the caucus (but before attending the caucus)
   c. _____ The Sunday before the caucus
   d. _____ The week before the caucus
   e. _____ Sometime earlier in January
   f. _____ Sometime in December
   g. _____ Before December
3. Who are the last five people you discussed politics with before voting in the caucus?  
*Continue to probe for more names until participant runs out of names.*) Some information will already be provided if the person was mentioned in the first interview.

*Follow ups for newly mentioned political discussion partners:*
q. How do you know _______________? (multiple connects are fine)
r. Do you consider _______________ to be an acquaintance, close, or very close?

*Follow up for all Republican political partners from all rounds*
s. Whom do you believe _______________ supported for president in the caucus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>a. How known?</th>
<th>b. How well known</th>
<th>Mentioned (check if yes)</th>
<th>c. Supported for president</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom Jones</td>
<td>Brother-in-law (Dem)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Jones</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>VC</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX C

The plot below consists of the political discussion networks of all 80 participants who completed the study for the seven-month period of the study and their political discussion partners.

Of the 401 nodes in the plot, ten are core members of the Fremont County Republican Party Central Committee (red), who were elected to the central committee and attended at least two of the six committee meetings that took place during the seven-
month research period. Another seven are peripheral members of the central committee (pink), who were elected to the committee but do not regularly attend meetings. Eight nodes are public officials, either Republicans elected to county-wide office, or Republicans who serve in paid appointed positions at the pleasure of the county board of supervisors (blue). Node size is based on betweenness centrality (the number of times a node lies on the shortest path between other nodes), which shows which individuals function as a bridge between individuals and groups. For example the largest node in this plot spoke about politics with both members of the party central committee (red nodes) and members of a local church that included several caucus attendees (yellow nodes at the bottom of the plot).

Since the participation rate of likely caucus voters in this study was well below the 80% rule-of-thumb for whole network analysis, such analysis was not conducted in this dissertation.