

# Republicans and Democrats Have Changed Roles, Election Analyst Says

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University of Arkansas political scientist Andrew Dowdle has studied the pre-primary period for the past eight presidential elections, and from what he has seen so far, the 2008 election appears to be turning the usual process on its head.

"Republicans are acting like Democrats, and Democrats like Republicans," Dowdle said. In addition, changes in the timing of primaries and caucuses will affect campaigning and "may make the dynamics of the presidential nomination process proceed in a different manner" than in the past eight elections.

In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Dowdle and colleagues Randall E. Adkins of the University of Nebraska, Omaha, and Wayne P. Steger of DePaul University focus on presidential elections from 1976 to 2004, examining the factors in the pre-primary period that have affected support for candidates.

Little is known about the factors that shape public support for candidates in the time leading up to the primaries. From previous studies, the researchers knew that at this point in the pre-primary year, Republicans tended to rally around the frontrunner, as identified by the party leadership. As a result, the media focused relatively more attention on the candidate. Rank-and-file party members had "a pretty strong indication as to which candidate they should back," the researchers wrote, and opinion polls remained stable.

In contrast, Democratic Party elites tended to divide their support among candidates, producing a relatively open and competitive nomination process. The result was "a weak, diffused signal sent to party activists, contributors, the media, and ultimately the party electorate," according to the researchers.

For 2008, though, Dowdle noted, the Democrats

have frontrunners, while the Republicans do not. This difference is due in large part to the current political environment.

"The natural frontrunners in the Republican Party are so closely associated with the administration that they are deciding not to run," Dowdle said. "For example, it's not to Jeb Bush's advantage to run this time."

While new factors may emerge in the 2008 pre-primary period, Dowdle suggested that one key finding from the study of past elections should hold true: "Generally, it is campaign-related and not candidate-related factors that are the significant indicators in the presidential nominations of both parties."

"What candidates are doing themselves is probably less important than what others are doing on their behalf, such as support from media and influential endorsements," Dowdle said.

Although the winners of both parties' 2008 presidential nominations may spend \$100 million in the nomination stage alone, Dowdle said that the level of spending at this early point in the campaign has minimal impact - except for fundraising.

"At this point, it is worthwhile to spend money to raise money," he said. "It used to be that candidates dropped out when they weren't getting primary and caucus votes. Now they drop out when they aren't getting money."

While it is vital to have large sums of money on hand as campaigning proceeds, Dowdle noted, "Money is necessary but not sufficient to win. Howard Dean and Phil Graham both had well-funded campaigns, but they were not able to get support in the primaries and caucuses."

In contrast to most previous election seasons, Dowdle noted, multiple Democrats have been able

to raise large sums of money. Hillary Clinton had raised about \$62 million by mid-August, and what is typically the heavy fundraising period is only beginning. John Edwards has been a successful fundraiser and could have \$50 million by the end of the year.

On the Republican side, Dowdle pointed to Fred Thompson, who has garnered interest during the past few months and is rumored to be planning an early September announcement of candidacy. While Thompson avoided being the target of political attacks and negative coverage, Dowdle noted that sitting it out has made it difficult for Thompson to raise funds. Dowdle suggested that Thompson has taken the risk of falling behind when the next fundraising report is released and not being able to catch up.

Dowdle is an assistant professor of political science in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences. He presented the paper "The Viability Primary: Modeling Candidate Support Before the Primaries" at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Source: University of Arkansas

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