

Iowa Voting Series, Paper 8: An Examination of Iowa “No Party” Voter Distribution in General Elections Since 1982

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Abstract

This is the eighth paper in a series examining aspects of voting in Iowa. In prior papers I examined various aspects of Iowa’s political party registration, turnout statistics, and voter distribution in midterm and presidential elections since 1982 in various combinations of party, sex, and age group. In this paper I take a closer look at the distribution of No Party votes in the 20 general elections from 1982 through 2020 and attempt to estimate their distribution between the candidates for particular contests. More specifically, I will examine the results of the 10 presidential (1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016) and 10 gubernatorial (1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2018) elections. After examining the data for those 20 contests I will turn to the 13 elections for United States Senator that occurred in Iowa during the period. The results show that the estimated distribution of No Party votes is more evenly divided in presidential elections, which is also when turnout for No Party voters is much higher. Of the 20 presidential and gubernatorial elections, two of the gubernatorial elections, 1998 and 2002, produced the largest estimated distributions for Democrats. Similarly, six of the eight elections in which the Republican candidate received the majority of the estimated No Party vote were gubernatorial elections. In six of the gubernatorial elections and four of those for president the party of the candidate who won actually turned out fewer party votes, but the distribution of No Party votes overcame the difference. Of the elections for US Senate seats, a combination of incumbency and weak opposition candidates seemed to be important factors for the No Party vote distribution.

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Updates

Unlike most academic papers I plan to update the data for this paper as elections occur. Data updates lead to changes in the text as well. Below is a list of the updates as they occurred.

- June 2014: Initial release
- May 2015: Update to include 2014 election data
- May 2017: Addition of 2016 election data; extension of data back to 1982 with significant changes to the text; several new figures for the added elections and format changes for some others; a few fixes after posting
- May 2019: Update to include 2018 election data and related text changes
- May 2021: Update to include 2020 election data and related text changes; renumbering of most figures

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In the prior papers in this series¹ I examined various aspects of Iowa’s political party registration, turnout statistics, and voter distribution in midterm and presidential elections since 1982 in various combinations of party, sex, and age group.² Very briefly, the data showed a fairly even balance in the party registration for Republicans and Democrats for most of the period. The number of No Party registrants started out between those for Democrats and Republicans, became the smallest for a short period, and then has been larger than the two major parties between 1994 and 2018.³ In terms of turnout, Democrats and Republicans generally had similar turnout percentages, but with Republicans usually a few percentage points higher. In the seventh paper I examined the voter distribution for the period and discovered that there were more Republican voters in Iowa in 12 of the 13 elections from 1994 on (all but 2008) and yet, Iowans voted for Democrats for president (2000 and 2012) and governor (1998, 2002, and 2006) in five of those elections. On the other hand, of the seven elections when there were more Democrats than Republicans who voted, Iowa elected a Republican governor three times (1982, 1986, and 1990) and voted for the Republican presidential nominee once (1984). This highlights the importance of No Party voters to the outcome of elections in Iowa.

In this paper I take a closer look at the distribution of No Party votes in the 20 general elections from 1982 through 2020 and attempt to estimate their distribution between the candidates for particular contests. More specifically, I will examine the results of the 10 presidential (1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020) and 10

¹ The most recent versions of all papers in the series are currently available at <http://www.profhagle.com/papers/iowa-voting-series>. (This and other links were valid as of the date this paper was posted.) Although I make references to prior papers in the series, I would like each to stand on its own. Thus, some explanatory material will be repeated from one paper to the next to provide background or context.

² When I referred to turnout in “presidential elections” or “midterm elections” in the prior papers it was a shorthand way of referring to turnout in that year in general, not for a particular contest. As will be explained below, in this paper I will be examining the data in relation to specific contests.

³ “No Party” is what Iowa calls its independents. It seems a little odd to refer to unaffiliated No Party voters as a party. In earlier versions of some papers in the series I referred to the party registration choices as “categories.” That proved somewhat cumbersome, so as I update this and later papers in the series I will use “party” to include No Party voters.

gubernatorial (1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018) elections. After examining the data for those 20 contests I will turn to the 13 elections for United States Senator that occurred in Iowa during the period.

Data

As with prior papers, data for this examination were gathered from the Election Results & Statistics page of the Iowa Secretary of State's website.⁴ This page provides links to election results for a variety of primary and general election contests in Iowa, including those for presidential and midterm elections. One should be aware that there is some variation in how the links to the results pages are labeled for the 20 elections. For example, for the 2000 presidential election the link is labeled "President/Vice President." For the next three presidential elections the results pages are labeled "Official Canvass by County." There is also some variation in how the results pages for the gubernatorial elections are labeled. The 2002 contest results page is labeled "Official Canvass by County," but for 2006 it is labeled "Official Canvass: Governor & Lieutenant Governor." For 2010 there is a heading labeled "Official Canvass by County" with links below pertaining to specific races. These differences are fairly minor and mostly to be expected under the circumstances. I mention the variations mainly to warn readers that they may have to poke around a bit should they wish to see the data on the Secretary of State's website for themselves.

In prior papers the examination of the data was straightforward. In this paper I am attempting to get some idea of how No Party voters distributed themselves between the candidates for the two major parties. As such, I will be doing more calculations on the posted data than in previous papers. In addition, there are some variations in how the data are presented on the Iowa Secretary of State's website. The combination of these two factors means that I need to be very clear about how I will handle the data and the assumptions I make in doing so.

The basic assumption I begin with is that the candidate for each major party will receive the votes of those registered to his or her party who turned out to vote, plus some portion of those registered as No Party who voted. It is well known, of course, that not everyone who is registered as a Democrat, for example, will vote for the candidate who is a Democrat. Similarly, not every registered Republican will vote for the Republican candidate. Reasons for such defections⁵ can include ideological grounds, perception that the party candidate is not qualified, lack of knowledge about the candidate, etc.

⁴ Election results and statistics from 2000 to the present can be found at <http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/results/index.html>. Results for earlier elections can be found at <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/results/archive.html>.

⁵ I do not intend "defections" in any pejorative sense here. As used in this paper it simply means when someone does not vote for the candidate of the party for which he or she is registered.

Regardless of the reasons, in most circumstances it should be reasonably safe to assume that the defections from either party will be about the same. Exit polls often show that about 5% of the voters for a particular party vote for another candidate, but roughly speaking, the defections should even out.

A second assumption concerns undervotes. Undervotes are instances where a voter has not selected a candidate in a particular race. It is common for voters to not make a selection in less publicized local races where they may not be familiar with any of the candidates, but it certainly occurs in even top-level races. Rather than just making a random selection, voters may choose to let other voters who may be more knowledgeable about the choices make the decision. It is also possible, of course, that a voter is well aware of the candidates in a race and does not like any of them. A third possible reason for an undervote occurs when a candidate is running unopposed. Many voters simply do not bother to cast a vote for an unopposed candidate. Of course, it is also possible that a voter just made a mistake and forgot to vote in a particular race. Regardless of the reason for undervotes, they do complicate the data analysis. This is also true for overvotes.⁶

All voters who cast a ballot are counted for purposes of turnout figures on the Statewide Statistical Reports regardless of how many races in which they actually cast a vote or have a vote counted. One could make a reasonable argument that undervotes are more likely to be cast by No Party voters as they are less likely to be informed, on average, about all the candidates. I previously indicated that some voters who are registered for either of the two major parties may defect for one reason or another, but rather than actually voting for the opposing party's candidate such a disaffected voter may simply decide to not vote. Unfortunately, from the data available it is not possible to determine the party breakdown of the undervotes. Thus, in the data calculations that follow I will assume, as I did with possible defections, that undervotes (and overvotes) of those who are registered for either of the two major parties are evenly distributed.

Let me repeat that the purpose of this paper is to get a general idea of the distribution of No Party voters. Understandably, the data do not specify how No Party voters cast their ballots, even in an aggregated form. Thus, the assumptions I need to make regarding both defections and undervotes mean that the calculations to follow will produce estimates of the party distributions rather than exact numerical information.

As in the prior papers, before proceeding I need to make an additional comment about the data for this paper. The information contained in the Statewide Statistical Reports is

⁶ Overvotes, as the name suggests, are instances when a voter has selected more than one candidate for a race in which only one selection is allowed. The reason is just a mistake on the part of the voter, but it still results in a non-vote for that race and creates the same difficulty in data analysis as an undervote. For the most part I will use the term "undervotes" as shorthand for both undervotes and overvotes unless the context suggests otherwise.

not entirely complete with respect to party identification. The reports contain divisions for Democrat, Republican, and No Party voters, but do not include an “Other” category as they do for the registration statistics.⁷ In addition, the 2002 Report did not contain a category for the Green Party, which was official for that election, but did for the Libertarian Party for the 2018 election. Although this was not a problem for the 1982 through 2006 elections, for 2008 and beyond it means that the grand total of registrants and voters in any particular age group cannot be achieved by simply adding the Democrats, Republicans, and No Party voters in that group. In the first paper in this series I simply added registrants in the Other category to No Party registrants. Although I have neither an exact count of such Other registrants on election day nor a direct indication of how many voted, the number can be determined in general terms as will be explained below.

Overview

Figure 1a provides an overview of the 10 gubernatorial elections being considered and Figure 1b provides an overview of the 10 presidential elections.⁸ The columns are paired based on the general elections. The “D” or “R” in the column label indicates whether the vote was for the Democrat or Republican in that particular race—presidential candidates in presidential election years or gubernatorial candidates in midterm years. The total height of the bars represents the number of votes that candidate received. Each column is divided based on the Party Vote and Additional votes that candidate received.

The Party Vote is from the turnout results for each particular election. The links in footnote 4 are to the Iowa Secretary of State’s general Election Results & Statistics pages for more recent or archived election results. On those pages are many links for each of the various elections. For each of the general elections there is a link to “Statewide Statistical Reports” which details several demographic aspects of turnout for that election. One of those aspects is the number of those who turned out for each party. Thus, the Party Vote is the number of voters of the indicated party who turned out for the election as indicated on the Statewide Statistical Reports.⁹

⁷ At various points since 2000 Iowa voters could choose to register as Green or Libertarian in addition to Democrat, Republican, or No Party. Reports on the Iowa Secretary of State’s website are not consistent in how Green or Libertarian registrants are handled. Sometimes they are indicated in an “Other” category, while other times they are included with No Party voters. As my focus in this paper is the additional votes candidates received beyond their party vote, and for the sake of simplicity, I will use the term “No Party” to refer to anyone not registered as a Democrat or Republican. See the first paper in the series for more details on voter registration in Iowa.

⁸ It is a bit inconvenient for readers, but to make the figures larger I will put them at the end of the paper rather than within the text.

⁹ The label for Party Vote is purple, indicating that it would be blue for Democrats or red for Republicans.

In calculating the Additional vote, I begin by finding the separate link on the Election Results page that provides a count of the votes for each candidate in a particular contest. The Additional value shown in green on the columns of Figure 1 is the number of total votes for that candidate (which is the total height of the column) less the number of that party who turned out (the blue or red portion). Again, keep in mind that some voters registered as Democrat or Republican likely did not vote for their party's candidate, but I am assuming such instances are evenly distributed between the two parties so that we can still get a sense of how many voters beyond those registered to a particular party were necessary to make up the candidate's total. As an additional caution, I will sometimes indicate numbers for party turnout or votes for a candidate because these numbers are based on posted data. On the other hand, because the calculations of the No Party vote distribution are only estimates I will only refer to them in terms of the estimated distribution percentages.

There is one additional aspect of Figure 1a that needs explaining. The top of the 1990-D column shows a patterned blue area rather than a green area. For this contest the Democrat who was running actually received fewer votes than the party members who turned out. I will discuss this more below when describing this particular contest.

Before proceeding to an examination of each election let me provide a specific example of the initial calculations. In the 2000 presidential contest the Statewide Statistical Reports indicate that 411,920 Democrats cast a ballot.¹⁰ Another link on the Election Results page indicates the total votes for the various presidential candidates.¹¹ On that page we learn that Gore received 638,517 votes. Thus, the number of "additional" votes Gore received beyond registered Democrats who cast a ballot was $638,517 - 411,920 = 226,597$. Similarly, in the 2000 election 456,664 registered Republicans cast a ballot. Given that Bush received 634,373 total votes the number of his additional votes beyond the number of Republican voters was 177,709. With allowances for the assumptions made regarding defections and undervotes, the additional votes for Gore and Bush necessarily come from those voters registered as No Party. The total votes cast in the 2000 presidential contest was 1,315,563. Subtracting the votes cast for Bush and Gore leaves 42,673 votes that went to other candidates. Adding the "Additional" votes for Bush and Gore along with those for other candidates provides an approximate total of No Party votes from which we can determine the estimated percentage of No Party votes each major party candidate received along with "Other." Converting the estimated No Party vote distribution into percentages indicates that Gore received 51% of the No Party vote, Bush received 40%, and 9% went to other candidates. (This is shown in Figure 2i, the pie chart for the 2000 election.) The pie charts for each election contest that follow will show this estimated distribution of No Party votes between the two major party candidates and Other.

¹⁰ <http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/2000StateWithLinnDemo.pdf>

¹¹ <http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/2000%20G%20PresVp.pdf>

One complication to these calculations occurs in the elections of 2006 and following. Reports for elections before 2006 (the Canvasses) did not have separate columns for undervotes or overvotes. Instead, the vote total listed on the Canvass report for the particular contest was, as you would expect, the total of the votes cast for all the parties plus write-in votes. Thus, for example, in the 2000 election in addition to the votes for Gore and Bush there were 42,673 votes for other candidates, which then reached the indicated 1,315,563 total. Beginning in 2006 the Canvass reports included columns for undervotes and overvotes and those figures were included in the reported total. For consistency with prior election data, I will subtract the undervotes and overvotes from the total reported on the Canvass for that contest before proceeding with the rest of the calculations as indicated in the example from the 2000 election above.

Figures 1a and 1 b provide a good sense of both the party turnout and the general distribution of the No Party votes between the two major party candidates. As I noted at the start of the paper, we can see that more Republican voters turned out for 13 of the 20 elections. We can also see by comparing the Additional votes for the candidates in each election that the Democrat received more than the Republican in 10 of the 20 elections. Republicans won all 10 of the contests in which their candidate had the larger number of No Party votes. Democrats won nine of the 10 contests in which their candidate had the larger number of No Party votes. The only time the candidate who received the larger number of No Party votes but still lost was in 2004 when the split in the No Party vote was the second closest and Bush beat Kerry even though Kerry received more No Party votes.

In 10 of the 20 contests the party that turned out more voters nevertheless lost because of the greater number of No Party voters who cast ballots for the other party. This occurred six times in the gubernatorial elections with Republican winning three times (1982, 1986, and 1990) and the Democrats winning three times (1998, 2002, and 2006). In the presidential elections there were four instances when the larger number of party votes still lost. Of these, Republicans won once (1984) and Democrats won three times (1996, 2000, and 2012).

With this general pattern in mind we can now turn to each of the 20 elections.

The 20 Elections

Although I split the gubernatorial and presidential elections between Figures 1a and 1b, I will discuss the elections in chronological order. In discussing the various elections I

will sometimes mention the voter registration or turnout percentage for that year, which is shown in Figures 2 and 3, respectively, of the second paper in the series.

Gubernatorial Election of 1982: Conlin versus Branstad

Figure 2a shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1982 gubernatorial election when Democrat Roxanne Conlin ran against Republican Terry Branstad.¹² Conlin was an attorney based in Des Moines who was active in the Iowa Democratic Party and had served as a United States Attorney during the administration of President Jimmy Carter. As a US Attorney she likely had some name recognition in Polk County, the state's most populous county and home to Des Moines, but much less beyond that. Even so, she won a three-way race for the Democratic nomination with about 48% of the vote. Branstad, on the other hand, had been Lieutenant Governor for four years and had much greater name recognition. He did not face a primary challenger. Although there were more registered Democrats than Republicans in 1982 (see Figure 2 of the second paper in the series) and more Democrats than Republicans actually voted (see Figure 1a), Branstad won the election. This was the first of six gubernatorial elections in which the winner's larger share of No Party votes overcame a smaller number of party votes. For this contest, Branstad received 63% of the No Party votes compared to Conlin's 34%. This contest was for an open seat, but Branstad was effectively running to continue the Republican administration of Republican Governor Robert Ray. As we will see in the contests to come, a majority of No Party voters favor the incumbent more often than not.

Presidential Election of 1984: Mondale versus Reagan

Figure 2b shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1984 presidential election. Like the 1982 gubernatorial election, there were more registered Democrats than Republicans in 1984 and more Democrats than Republicans voted (Figure 1b). Also like the 1982 election, far more No Party voters favored the incumbent Reagan which gave him the victory in Iowa. As shown in Figure 2b, an estimated 65% of No Party voters cast their ballots for Reagan compared to only 32% for Mondale.

Gubernatorial Election of 1986: Junkins versus Branstad

Figure 2c shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1986 gubernatorial election between Democrat Lowell Junkins and incumbent Republican Governor Terry Branstad. Junkins had been in the state senate for nearly 14 years at the time he ran for governor. He easily won a four-way primary with about 53% of the vote. As a state senator, however, his name recognition was still well below that of a sitting governor. Even so, this was still a time when there were more registered Democrats than Republicans and more Democrats turned out to vote than Republicans.

¹² Again, the distributions shown in the pie charts are estimates given the assumptions I made in the calculations. I will often specifically indicate that they are estimates, but it may become tiresome to do so every time I refer to either the distributions or the percentages in them. Thus, please keep in mind that they are all estimated distributions and percentages.

Despite the greater number of Democrats who voted, the large majority of No Party voters favored Branstad and won the election for him. As shown in Figure 2c, 61% of No Party voters favored the incumbent Branstad compared to 39% who voted for Junkins.

Presidential Election of 1988: Dukakis versus Bush

Figure 2d shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1988 presidential election. At the time of the 1988 election Democrats had widened their lead over Republicans in voter registrations. Their turnout percentage for the 1988 election was also nearly as high as that of Republicans (see Figure 3 of the second paper in the series). As a result, more Democrats voted than Republicans. Unlike the prior three elections, however, the majority of No Party voters did not go with the perceived "incumbent" (i.e., George H.W. Bush seeking to extend the Republican administration to a third term). For this contest Michael Dukakis received 55% of the No Party vote while Bush received 42%. Although Bush was successful nationwide, he lost Iowa.

Gubernatorial Election of 1990: Avenson versus Branstad

There is no figure for the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1990 gubernatorial election between Democrat Donald Avenson and incumbent Republican Governor Terry Branstad. As noted above, this was an instance when a candidate actually received fewer votes than the members of the same party who voted. Avenson won the Democratic nomination in a five-way primary with slightly less than 40% of the vote. He had been a member of the Iowa House of Representatives since 1973. Members of the state House are likely to have even less name recognition than members of the state Senate. Democrats certainly would have liked to have defeated Branstad, who had now been in office nearly eight years, but Avenson was not the candidate to do it for them. As shown in Figure 1a, many more Democrats than Republicans voted, but many Democrats did not vote for Avenson. More specifically, although 408,264 Democrats voted in the 1990 election, Avenson only received 379,372 votes. Based on the way the estimates are calculated, that effectively meant that Branstad received nearly all the No Party votes (and probably some of the Democrats' votes as well). This was the third instance in the gubernatorial races when the candidate with the lower party voter turnout won because of a greater share of the No Party vote.

Presidential Election of 1992: Clinton versus Bush (versus Perot)

Figure 2e shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1992 presidential election. The 1992 election was unusual because of the presence of Ross Perot. As can be seen in Figure 2e, Perot received a majority of the No Party votes (as indicated by Other). Unlike prior elections when the Other category managed only a few percent of the No Party voters, in 1992 it was a majority. As noted above, No Party voters tend to have a preference for the incumbent, but the presence of Perot changed the overall picture. No Party voter turnout was above 80% for the only time during the entire period (again, see Figure 3 of the second paper) but George H.W. Bush only

received 23% of the No Party vote. Bill Clinton managed a bit more than Bush at 25%. Although Bush received 23% of the No Party vote, his total votes were still less than just the party vote for Clinton. In 1992, Democrats still had a very large lead in registrations and their turnout for this election was within a percentage point of Republicans.

Gubernatorial election of 1994: Campbell versus Branstad

Figure 2f shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1994 gubernatorial election between Democrat Bonnie Campbell and incumbent Republican Governor Terry Branstad. Unlike Branstad's prior opponents Campbell had much better state-wide name recognition. She had been a US Senate staffer in Washington, DC, and then a field coordinator for then-Senator John Culver (D-IA). She was the Chairwoman for the Iowa Democratic Party and was elected Iowa's Attorney General in 1990. Although Campbell was a strong candidate, 1994 was a Republican wave year. Voter registrations changed dramatically between 1992 and 1994. Registrations for Democrats decreased and those of Republicans increased such that Republicans held their first lead in the period. In addition, turnout for Democrats was well below what one would expect for them in a midterm year. The result was that the total votes Campbell received was below the party votes Branstad received. Branstad also received 68% of the No Party votes, compared to only 24% for Campbell.

Presidential Election of 1996: Clinton versus Dole (versus Perot)

Figure 2g shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1996 presidential election. The influence of Ross Perot on the 1996 presidential election was not as significant as it had been in 1992. Although Perot still received a large portion of the No Party votes (37%), Bill Clinton received a majority (58%). Most interesting is that Republican nominee Bob Dole only received 5% of the No Party vote, the least amount for any major party presidential candidate during the period. It is also worth noting that beginning in 1994 through 2000, there was a dramatic surge in No Party registrations, going from 470,428 in 1994 to 729,437 in 2000, while registrations for the two major parties hardly changed at all. Although nearly 50,000 more Republicans than Democrats voted in the 1996 election, the larger number of No Party voters and their strong preference for Clinton gave him an easy victory in Iowa.

Gubernatorial Election of 1998: Vilsack versus Lightfoot

Figure 2h shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1998 gubernatorial election between incumbent Democrat Tom Vilsack and Republican Jim Lightfoot. Lightfoot had been a US Representative for a dozen years, first for Iowa's Fifth Congressional District and then for the Third after redistricting following the 1990 Census. That combination would have given Lightfoot relatively good name recognition, but it was even higher because he also ran for the US Senate against Tom Harkin in 1996. Although he lost that race (see below), it certainly increased his name recognition across the state. Lightfoot led in most polls prior to the election, but some late stumbles by him and hard campaigning by Harkin for Vilsack resulted in Vilsack's

victory. For the fourth time in the gubernatorial races, the party that turned out the most voters for a candidate nevertheless lost. Over 50,000 more Republicans than Democrats voted in the 1998 election, but No Party voters went for Vilsack by 72% to only 23% for Lightfoot.

Presidential Election of 2000: Gore versus Bush

Figure 2i shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2000 presidential election. Although an open election, this was another instance when one of the candidates was essentially running as an incumbent to extend the current administration. In this case, Gore was effectively running to extend the Clinton administration. Although Republicans were more energized and turned out nearly 45,000 more voters than Democrats, No Party voters once again preferred the perceived incumbent and went for Gore over Bush by 51% to 40%. Bush lost Iowa by only 4,144 votes. This narrow loss frustrated many Republicans and some operatives believed that Republicans in the northwest part of the state did not turn out as well as expected. Although there were certainly many Republicans who did not vote, the larger percentage of No Party voters who voted for Gore was a more practical reason for Bush's loss.

Gubernatorial Election of 2002: Vilsack versus Gross

Figure 2j shows the estimated distribution of No Party votes in the 2002 gubernatorial election between incumbent Democrat Governor Tom Vilsack and Republican Doug Gross. Gross had been an advisor to Governor Terry Branstad and a private attorney and he was active in Republican party politics. His name recognition among voters was likely fairly low until the primary. There were three candidates vying for the Republican nomination and the race was very heated. Gross won the nomination with only 35.88% of the vote, less than a point above the 35% threshold necessary to win. Gross came out of the primary with diminished resources, was weakened politically, and never recovered. Although nearly 60,000 more Republicans than Democrats turned out to vote, Gross lost the election because only 17% of the No Party voters chose him and 72% of them preferred the incumbent Vilsack.

Presidential Election of 2004: Kerry versus Bush

Figure 2k shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2004 presidential election. Although the estimate still shows that more No Party voters cast their ballots for the Democrat, Kerry, the margin was very narrow and Bush clearly received a larger percentage than he had in the 2000 election. Interestingly, because the No Party vote was so evenly split, though still in favor of Kerry, the larger Republican vote determined the election. About 53,000 more Republicans voted in 2004 than in 2000, but more Democrats also voted in 2004 so the difference between the two parties was only 18,000 more Republicans than Democrats compared with the nearly 45,000 more Republicans in 2000. Understandably, Democrats were enthusiastic for the 2004 election and their voter registration numbers were nearly equal to those of Republicans.

Nevertheless, over the prior four years Republicans frequently reminded voters of the narrow loss in 2000 and worked hard to increase their base turnout. That effort along with the incumbency factor likely increased Bush's showing among No Party voters, even if though he still finished behind Kerry in that regard. It is also interesting to note that the 2004 election was the only one of the 20 presidential and gubernatorial elections in which the estimated majority of No Party voters did not side with the ultimate winner.

Gubernatorial Election of 2006: Culver versus Nussle

Figure 2l shows the estimated distribution of No Party votes in the 2006 gubernatorial election between Democrat Chet Culver and Republican Jim Nussle. Culver had won election as the Iowa Secretary of State in 2002. His father had also been a US Senator from Iowa, so his name recognition was good. Culver won what was effectively a three-way primary with just 39.1% of the vote. At the time of the 2006 election Nussle was a sitting US Representative from Iowa's First Congressional District. That would not ordinarily translate to state-wide name recognition, even in a small state like Iowa, but he was also the Chairman of the House Budget Committee and a frequent target of Democrats' scorn. Nussle initially had a primary opponent who might have been a tough challenger, but fairly early on they reached an agreement for the opponent, Bob Vander Plaats, to join Nussle's ticket as the Lieutenant Governor nominee. Although that avoided a messy primary fight for Nussle, the balance of factors influencing No Party votes was still largely in favor of Culver.

This was the closest of the 20 gubernatorial and presidential elections in terms of the party vote. More Republicans than Democrats turned out to vote, but fewer than 2,000 voters separated them. The small difference in the Party Vote likely reflects the more general fact that 2006 was a very good year for Democrats. The midterms held in the sixth year of a president's term are usually good for the other party, Democrats in this election. In addition, Democrats were able to tap into a growing weariness with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, although Culver received a clear majority of the No Party votes it was still a smaller percentage than Vilsack received in 2002. Moreover, Nussle increased his portion of the No Party vote (relative to the 2002 election) well beyond the portion that Culver lost by cutting deeply into the Other portion and picking up the bulk of the additional No Party voters who turned out. Nevertheless, the large majority of No Party voters favored Culver and he won the election decidedly. This was the sixth gubernatorial election when the candidate who had the greater number of party votes lost because of the distribution of the No Party votes.

Presidential Election of 2008: Obama versus McCain

Figure 2m shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2008 presidential election. The percentage of the No Party vote going to the Republican, John McCain, was effectively the same (when rounding to whole numbers) as Bush

received in 2000. Barack Obama, however, received a slightly larger portion than Gore did of the No party vote as the Other category was reduced.

As with the 2000 election this was a contest for an open seat, so there was no clear incumbency advantage. Given that McCain had often been a critic of Bush, he really was not running for an extension of the Bush administration. It was clear early on that 2008 would be another strong year for Democrats. As such, one might expect a larger portion of the No Party vote for Obama than is shown in Figure 2m. A large part of the reason we do not is related to the party vote (see Figure 1b) for this election. The 2008 election was the first presidential election since 1992 when more Democrats than Republicans turned out to vote. Although it is true that the Democrats' get out the vote efforts were very successful in 2008, they also had a much larger number of registered Democrats to start with. Both Democrats and Republicans set attendance records during the 2008 Iowa Caucuses, but there was clearly much more interest in the Democrats' race given the historic nature of a win by either Obama or Hillary Clinton (among other factors). Prior to about mid-2007 voter registration numbers for Democrats and Republicans had been about even and fairly stable for the prior two years. As the caucus races heated up in late-2007 there was a sharp increase in registrations for Democrats. At the same time there was a corresponding decrease in No Party registrations, presumably as many No Party registrants changed their party registration to participate in the Democratic caucuses. The No Party registration numbers gained back most of what had been lost for the caucuses by the time of the general election, but the numbers for Democrats and Republicans grew as well.¹³ The dramatic shift of so many voters from No Party to Democrat explains the surge in the Party Vote for Democrats in 2008. The shift in party registration also explains why the proportion of No Party votes was not larger for Obama in that many No Party voters who supported him had previously changed their voter registration to Democrat.

Gubernatorial Election of 2010: Culver versus Branstad

Figure 2n shows the estimated distribution of No Party votes in the 2010 gubernatorial election between incumbent Democrat Governor Chet Culver and Republican, former-Governor Terry Branstad. As mentioned earlier, incumbency is normally an advantage. If, however, the incumbent's performance is seen as poor then it can become a liability. Fair or not, many were critical of Culver's handling of the economic crisis as it affected Iowa. In addition, Culver "lost" the incumbency and experience advantage when compared to Branstad who was a prior four-term governor who had chosen to not run for reelection in 1998. An additional factor in the shift of No Party votes for this election was that 2010 was a wave election year for Republicans generally. That wave was apparent in Iowa as Republicans captured the governor's office as well as a majority in the State House and came within two seats of doing so in the State Senate. Culver's percentage of the No Party vote was cut in half compared to the 2006 election, though

¹³ See Figure 2 of the first paper in the series.

not all those No Party votes went to Branstad as the Other category was much larger in 2006. Although the estimated 52% of the No Party vote received by Branstad was the smallest of his several elections, it is understandable in that he had been out of office for 12 years and was facing a stronger opponent in the incumbent governor.

Presidential Election of 2012: Obama versus Romney

Figure 2o shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2012 presidential election. Compared to the estimate for 2008 it appears that Mitt Romney lost a few percent of the No Party vote and Barack Obama gained a few, but the explanation may not be quite that simple.

As noted above, Democrats saw a surge in voter registrations prior to the 2008 caucuses that was largely at the expense of No Party registrations (i.e., voters switched their registration from No Party to Democrat to participate in the Democratic caucuses). That was why I suggested the No Party portion of the vote for Obama was not larger than it appeared in Figure 2m. In the four years since 2008 voter registrations for Democrats shrank by about 68,000. Over the same period No Party registrations remained fairly stable and Republican registrations grew by about 38,000. In other words, it appears that some of the shifting that occurred in voter registrations for 2008 shifted back by 2012. These shifts in voter registrations along with a bit higher than usual turnout percentage over Democrats resulted in Republicans turning out about 21,000 more voters than Democrats. Nevertheless, the clear majority of No Party voters favored Obama. This was the fourth presidential election in which the losing candidate had more party votes.

Obama likely did not have much of an incumbency advantage among No Party voters in 2012. The economy was still seen as poor and much of the promise and excitement of the 2008 election had worn off by 2012. Nevertheless, the Obama campaign was well aware of these problems and worked very hard to overcome them. The result was that although Obama received about 6,000 fewer votes in 2012 than in 2008, and Romney received about 48,000 more votes than McCain, it was still enough for a clear win.

Gubernatorial Election of 2014: Hatch versus Branstad

Figure 2p shows the estimated distribution of No Party votes in the 2014 gubernatorial election between Democrat Jack Hatch and incumbent Republican Governor Terry Branstad. Hatch had served 10 years in the Iowa House and then another 10 in the Iowa Senate before running for governor. Hatch did not have much name recognition across the state. His only competition for the Democrats' nomination dropped out early so Hatch was not able to use a primary contest to increase his name recognition or hone his campaign skills prior to the general election.¹⁴ Despite being unopposed in the

¹⁴ It may sound odd to suggest that a candidate who had been elected to 20 years in the state legislature still needs to hone his campaign skills, but running a state-wide campaign is quite different from running in small state legislative districts.

primary he only received a bit more than 83% of the vote as nearly 16% of the Democrats who turned out did not bother to vote in his race. Some of these undervotes were likely due to the fact that Hatch was unopposed so the vote did not matter that much, but such a large percentage could also suggest a lack of enthusiasm for the candidate. As it turned out, Hatch did not prove to be a particularly strong candidate. In addition, the gubernatorial race was largely overshadowed by Iowa's US Senate race that year that drew national attention. (See below.) As it turned out, Hatch received 73,583 fewer votes overall than the Democrats' nominee in the Senate race. Based on the estimated distribution of No Party voters, they did not see Hatch as a viable alternative to Branstad.

Presidential Election of 2016: Clinton versus Trump

Figure 2q shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2016 presidential election. I suppose it is an understatement to say that the 2016 presidential race was unusual. The two major party candidates were very unpopular. Although Clinton was effectively running as an incumbent to extend the Obama administration, she had a difficult time in the Iowa Caucuses and only barely beat Bernie Sanders. Trump managed to finish second behind Ted Cruz in the Republican caucus contest, but he did not build the type of campaign organization traditionally seen in Iowa. Because of the weaknesses in the major party candidates there was more interest in several of the third party candidates. As a result, the Other category had its highest percentage except for the two elections with Perot (1992 and 1996). As it turned out, Clinton received more than 19,000 fewer party votes than Obama had in 2012 and Trump received nearly 30,000 more than Romney did. The enthusiasm for Trump was also apparent in the No Party vote. Despite the draw of several third party candidates, Trump still received 47% of the estimated No Party vote to Clinton's 30%.

Gubernatorial Election of 2018: Hubbell versus Reynolds

Figure 2r shows the estimated distribution of No Party votes in the 2018 gubernatorial election between Democrat Fred Hubbell and Republican Kim Reynolds. Reynolds had been Branstad's Lieutenant Governor since he came out of political retirement and was reelected in 2010. In May 2017 he resigned to become the US Ambassador to China and Reynolds assumed the governor's office. That did not quite make her the incumbent, particularly in the eyes of Democrats. Her name recognition was good from having been Lieutenant Governor and campaigning with Branstad in two general elections, not to mention serving as governor for 18 months. Even so, she did not have a primary opponent so had less of an opportunity to campaign in her own right and sharpen her skills before the general election. Because Democrats effectively saw the race as an open seat there was more interest than usual for the nomination. The Democrats' nomination race got a lot of attention, but businessman Fred Hubbell won the nomination fairly easily. In looking at Figure 2r, it seems that No Party voters also did not particularly see Reynolds as the incumbent. The No Party distribution here was the closest of the 20 elections. Reynolds received about 2,000 more of the estimated No Party votes than

Hubbell. In addition, about 34,000 more Republicans than Democrats voted, which allowed her to win by a little over 36,000 votes.

Presidential Election of 2020: Biden versus Trump

Figure 2s shows the estimated distribution of No Party votes in the 2020 presidential election between Democrat Joe Biden and Republican incumbent President Donald Trump. This was another unusual election for a couple of reasons. First, and as noted in previous papers, because of the pandemic there was a push to get voters to cast absentee ballots for the June primary. Every voter in the state was mailed an absentee ballot request form. Whether they knew it or not, any No Party voter who requested a Democrat or Republican primary ballot automatically had his or her party registration changed to the party of the requested ballot. This resulted in a drop of more than 60,000 active No Party voters in a single month. Republicans gained a bit more than Democrats in the switch. By the time of the general election, the number of No Party voters had increased by about 20,000, but both Democrats and Republicans had gained even more. This was the first election since 1994 that No Party voters did not outnumber both Democrats and Republicans.

The 2020 election was also unusual because of the candidates. Having been vice president under Obama, Biden certainly had plenty of name recognition. Nevertheless, he ended up only finishing fourth in the Iowa Caucuses. What helped him somewhat was that the official results were delayed so there was not as much focus on his disappointing finish as there might have been.¹⁵ Despite winning the Democrats' nomination, there never seemed to be a strong pro-Biden feel to the Democrats' campaign. Rather, it was more anti-Trump. The opposing party will always be against the incumbent but it was far more intense regarding Trump. Even so, it appeared that Trump would likely win early in 2020 when the economy was in very good shape. When the pandemic hit and the economy floundered it gave Democrats additional ways to criticize Trump.

Polls seemed to suggest that the race was tight between Biden and Trump in Iowa (and also the US Senate race described below). It did not feel that way to me and it turned out the race was not that close. Republicans had a voter registration advantage and a higher turnout percentage so their party vote was 49,129 more than for Democrats. Compared to the 2016 election, there was a much smaller percentage of Other votes in the No Party distribution. That allowed Trump to increase his percentage of the estimated No Party voter to a majority, but Biden also received a higher percentage than Clinton did in 2016.

¹⁵ I discuss what happened at some length in my book, *Riding the Caucus Rollercoaster 2020* available on Amazon.com.

The Senate Elections

In addition to the presidential and gubernatorial elections during the period, Iowa had 13 elections for US Senate. Although these elections cannot be compared in the same way the others can, they are interesting nonetheless. Eleven of the 13 Senate elections involved the election or reelection campaign of one or the other of Iowa's two long-time Senators, Charles Grassley (R) and Tom Harkin (D). Harkin was initially elected in a presidential year (1984) then had two reelections in midterm years and two in presidential years. All Grassley's six races during the period were reelection campaigns, three in midterm years and three in presidential years. The twelfth election during the period was for an open seat when Harkin decided to retire rather than run for reelection in 2014. The thirteenth in 2020 was then a reelection of Joni Ernst, the 2014 winner.

Figure 3 presents an overview of the 13 Iowa elections for US Senate since 1984 as there was no Senate race in Iowa in 1982. As with the overview in Figures 1a and 1b, the "D" or "R" in the label indicates whether the vote was for the Democrat or Republican in that particular race and each column is divided based on the Party Vote and Additional votes that candidate received. The total height of the bars represents the number of votes that candidate received, but as in Figure 1a there is a catch here as the Democrat in the first five Grassley races actually received fewer votes than the number of Democrats who voted (as indicated by the hatched blue area). As in the discussion of the gubernatorial and presidential contests I will sometimes mention the voter registration or turnout percentage for that year, which can be found in Figures 2 and 3, respectively, of the second paper in the series.

1984: Harkin versus Jepsen

Figure 4a shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1984 Senate election between Democrat Tom Harkin and incumbent Republican Roger Jepsen. Jepsen had been a state senator and lieutenant governor prior to a surprise win over then-incumbent Senator Dick Clark. Harkin had served for 10 years as a US Representative before he ran against Jepsen. Democrats had a distinct voter registration advantage at this time and nearly 31,000 more Democrats than Republicans turned out in the election. The distribution of the No Party vote was fairly lopsided as 65% went to Harkin and only 32% to Jepsen.

Jepsen did not seem to have any incumbency advantage with the No Party voters. More interesting, however, is the difference in the way the No Party voters seemed to break in the US Senate race as opposed to the presidential race. Recall from Figure 2b that an estimated 65% of the No Party vote went to Reagan, but 65% of the No Party vote also went to Harkin. Although Harkin's win, or at least the size of it, was a surprise, apparent ticket-splitting by No Party voters should not be. Although we can reasonably expect upwards of 95% of voters registered as Democrat or Republican to

vote for their party's nominee, No Party voters have no such party loyalty to guide them.¹⁶

1986: Roehrick versus Grassley

There is no figure for the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1986 Senate election between Democrat John Roehrick and incumbent Republican Senator Chuck Grassley. This is the first of five reelection races for Grassley for which there is no figure because the Democrat in the race received fewer total votes than the number of Democrats who turned out to vote. In this race, Roehrick received slightly over 52,000 fewer votes than Democrats who turned out to vote. I have little information about Roehrick other than that he was an attorney based in Des Moines. He had taken opposition in the primary, so it did not give him much of an opportunity to increase his state-wide name recognition. The Democrats' nominee in the gubernatorial race (see Figure 4) received 39% of the No Party vote, but those voters were apparently far less impressed with Roehrick.

1990: Harkin versus Tauke

Figure 4b shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1990 Senate election between incumbent Democrat Senator Tom Harkin and Republican Tom Tauke. Prior to his run for the US Senate, Tauke had been a US Representative for a dozen years. He ran unopposed for the Republican nomination, which did not give him an opportunity to increase his state-wide name recognition. Nevertheless, he did better against Harkin than Jepsen did in 1984 in terms of the No Party percentage. It is no surprise that as the incumbent Harkin received a majority of the No Party vote (58%), but Tauke received a respectable 41%. Much like what occurred in the 1984 presidential election, Harkin managed a majority of the No Party votes at the same time that Republican incumbent Governor Branstad won the vast majority of the No Party vote.¹⁷

1992: Lloyd-Jones versus Grassley

There is no figure for the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1992 Senate election between Democrat Jean Lloyd-Jones and incumbent Senator Republican Chuck Grassley. Lloyd-Jones had served a dozen years in the Iowa legislature, first in the state house and then in the state senate. Her primary opponent put up a good fight, so it gave her more of an opportunity than some other candidates to increase her state-wide name recognition. Nevertheless, in running against the popular Grassley she received over 175,000 fewer votes than Democrats who turned out. In the presidential

¹⁶ In an earlier paper in the series I noted that not all No Party voters are in the ideological middle. Some are likely so far to the right that they do not want to join the Republicans, or so far to the left they do not want to join the Democrats. In addition, some people prefer to keep their party preferences secret so register as No Party. This can often occur among business or professional people, especially in an area where the opposite party dominates.

¹⁷ Recall from Figure 1a that 1990 was the one gubernatorial election in which a candidate failed to receive as many overall votes as members of that party who voted.

race that year Clinton managed to get more No Party votes than Bush, but that was also the year Perot received a majority of 52% (see Figure 6).

1996: Harkin versus Lightfoot

Figure 4c shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 1996 Senate election between incumbent Democrat Senator Tom Harkin and Republican Jim Lightfoot. Lightfoot was mentioned above as having run for governor in 1998. After serving a dozen years as a US Representative Lightfoot ran for a US Senate seat. Members of Congress do not usually have high name recognition state-wide. It often helps to have a primary to increase that name recognition and to give candidates a chance to hone their campaign skills with new audiences. Lightfoot had a primary opponent, but she did not provide much competition. Lightfoot also got into the race late and apparently did not raise enough money to adequately challenge Harkin. One advantage for Lightfoot was that nearly 48,000 more Republicans than Democrats turned out to vote. This was far from enough, however, as the No Party vote went decidedly for Harkin by 64% to 30%. This was the first of two reelections for Harkin when fewer Democrats than Republicans voted, but Harkin won on the basis of his distribution of the No Party vote. For Harkin, his share of the No Party vote was larger than the 58% Clinton received that year in the presidential race (see Figure 2g). Of course, the distribution of No Party votes in the presidential race was heavily influenced by the presence of Perot.

1998: Osterberg versus Grassley

There is no figure for the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 1998 Senate election between Democrat David Osterberg and incumbent Republican Senator Chuck Grassley. Osterberg was a former member of the state House. He ran unopposed in the primary. Given Iowa's preference for incumbents and the popularity of Grassley, it seemed to be difficult for Democrats to find a credible challenger. As occurred with Grassley's prior two opponents, we can see from Figure 3 that Osterberg received fewer votes than the number of Democrats who turned out to vote. In this instance, the deficit was over 54,000 votes.

2002: Harkin versus Ganske

Figure 4d shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2002 Senate election between incumbent Democrat Senator Tom Harkin and Republican Greg Ganske. Ganske was a physician and current member of the US House representing Iowa's Third Congressional District. When he first ran for Congress in 1994 he beat a long-time incumbent, so he was familiar with tough races. Ganske was seen as a somewhat moderate Republican and he had a primary challenge from a more conservative candidate. That gave Ganske a chance to increase his name recognition across the state. An advantage for Ganske was that 2002 was a year in which over 59,000 more Republicans than Democrats turned out to vote. Nevertheless, Harkin received 78% of the No Party vote to only 14% for Ganske.

It is not overly surprising that this distribution is quite similar to the one shown in Figure 2j for the gubernatorial election. Both Vilsack and Harkin were incumbents. Normally the party that does not hold the presidency does well in midterm election years. As noted previously, that expectation may have been mitigated to the extent 2002 was the first general election post-9/11. In any case, Iowa tends to like its incumbents and the 2002 elections were mixed in that four incumbent US Representatives were reelected (three Republicans and one Democrat) and one new Republican Representative was elected to the seat Ganske vacated. At the state level, of the six state offices (Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Auditor, Treasurer, Secretary of Agriculture), all but one of those elected or reelected was a Democrat.

2004: Small versus Grassley

There is no figure for the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party voters for the 2004 Senate election between Democrat Arthur Small and incumbent Republican Senator Chuck Grassley. Small had served a combined 14 years in the Iowa House and Senate, but had left office 17 years before running for the US Senate. Small was little known beyond some Democratic activists. He was unopposed in the primary and not well-funded, so he had little chance to increase his name recognition among Iowa's voters. Although 2004 did not seem that it would be a strong year for Republicans, no better known Democrats were eager to take on long-time incumbent Grassley. In part, this was likely because Grassley had often been hailed as the most popular politician in Iowa. The results of the 2004 Senate election in Figure 3 show Grassley's popularity.

Once again, Grassley's opponent received fewer votes than Democrats who turned out. According to the Iowa Secretary of State's data, 510,214 Republicans and 495,477 No Party voters cast a ballot. The large number of Additional votes for Grassley (527,961) also means, at a minimum, that Grassley received 32,484 votes beyond all the Republicans and No Party voters. Given that the November 2004 registration statistics show only 77 active Other registrants,¹⁸ the remaining votes must have come from Democrats. It is unlikely, of course that all the No Party voters cast their ballots for Grassley given undervotes and the 28,688 votes cast for candidates other than Grassley or Small. Nevertheless, the data indicate that 492,040 Democrats cast a ballot in the 2004 election, but Small only received 412,365 votes, which is why Figure 3 indicates that he received a negative 79,685 votes. In other words, Small received nearly 80 thousand fewer votes than the number of Democrats who voted.

2008: Harkin versus Reed

Figure 4e shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2008 Senate election between incumbent Democrat Senator Tom Harkin and Republican

¹⁸ The November 2004 voter registration statistics show all 77 were registered for the Green Party. See <http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2004/CoNov04.pdf>.

Christopher Reed. Reed was a relatively young businessman with no prior political experience. He won a three-way primary by a very narrow margin and just barely over the required 35% threshold to claim the nomination.

It was clear as early as the 2008 Iowa Caucuses in January that Democrats were going to have a very good year. This and the challenge of facing a strong incumbent seemed to cause any “A-list” Republican candidates to not enter the race for the Republican nomination. The result was three rather unknown, untested, and not particularly well-qualified candidates who competed in the primary. As the nominee, Reed lagged well behind Harkin in name recognition and funding, but still managed to get an estimated 16% of the No Party votes.

It is interesting to compare the distribution shown in Figure 4e with the one shown in Figure 2m for the 2008 presidential election. That the estimate for Obama is only 55% of the No Party votes and Harkin’s is 84% suggests that over a quarter of No Party voters may have split their votes, casting ballots for McCain in the presidential race and Harkin in the Senate race. Another point of comparison with the 2008 election is the number of undervotes. For the presidential race there were only 4,504 undervotes, which was low for a presidential year. In the Senate race, however, there were 31,500 undervotes, which was large even for a presidential year.

2010: Conlin versus Grassley

There is no figure for the estimated distribution of Iowa’s No Party voters for the 2010 Senate election between Democrat Roxanne Conlin and incumbent Republican Senator Chuck Grassley. Recall that Conlin had run against Terry Branstad for governor in 1982. Prior to that campaign she had been a lawyer, active in the Iowa Democratic Party, and a US Attorney during the Carter administration. After her defeat in 1982 she continued as an attorney and activist which gave her a fair amount of name recognition. Enough, at least, that she was able to easily defeat two far lesser-known candidates in the primary. Even if Democrats might have wanted a better nominee,¹⁹ Conlin was certainly a stronger candidate than Small was in 2004 or Osterberg was in 1998.

As noted previously, it was clear that 2010 was going to be a strong year for Republicans. In addition, although the Democrats’ nominee for the Senate seat might have expected some help from an incumbent Democrat running for reelection as governor, any advantage Chet Culver had along those lines seemed lost due to the economic situation in Iowa and that his opponent, Terry Branstad, was a former governor himself with far more experience.

¹⁹ Former Governor Tom Vilsack was serving as US Secretary of Agriculture at the time and many Democrats would have liked for him to have entered the race to challenge Grassley. Vilsack declined, as he did again for the 2014 race when Harkin chose to not run for reelection, and again in 2018 when he declined to run for governor.

In looking at the estimated distribution of No Party votes for the 2010 Senate race in Figure 3 we again see the same problem for Grassley's opponent: Conlin did not receive votes beyond the number of Democrats who cast a ballot. More specifically, 395,312 Democrats went to the polls in 2010, but Conlin only received 371,686 votes, resulting in a negative Additional vote of 23,626. Unlike in 2004, the number of votes for Grassley did not exceed the number of Republican and No Party voters, but it was close given that Grassley had 270,770 votes beyond the Party Vote and only 281,546 No Party voters cast a ballot. There were over 17,000 undervotes reported for this election and there were also about 26,000 votes for third party candidates. Thus, we cannot say for sure that any Democrats voted for Grassley in 2010, but many likely did.

2014: Braley versus Ernst

Figure 4f shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2014 Senate election between Democrat Bruce Braley and Republican Joni Ernst. When incumbent Senator Tom Harkin announced that he planned to retire, it provided the first open seat Senate election in Iowa in 40 years. Although Harkin's decision to not run for reelection was a surprise, sitting US Representative Bruce Braley quickly entered the race for the Democrats' nomination and cleared the field. Several high-level Republicans decided not to run for the seat which left the nomination race to a half dozen lesser-known candidates. Sitting state senator Joni Ernst eventually emerged from the pack and won the nomination going away. Although Ernst certainly improved her name recognition across the state to win the primary, Braley was still seen by political observers as the likely winner based on his Congressional and campaign experience.

There are certainly disadvantages to having a messy primary fight and the Republican gubernatorial primary of 2002 discussed above is a good example. On the other hand, the lack of a primary opponent sometimes does not give a candidate the opportunity to improve his or her campaign skills, increase name recognition, hone the campaign message, and so on. Polls prior to the Republican primary showed Braley with a double-digit lead over all of the Republican contenders. After the primary the Braley campaign stumbled early and never seemed to regain momentum. Among other problems, a video surfaced of Braley speaking before a group of Texas trial lawyers disparaging Grassley as "just a farmer from Iowa." Criticizing the state's most popular politician to an out of state group turned off a lot of voters, and they were frequently reminded of the insult given that Braley's opponents used the video in many ads throughout the campaign. Braley's lead in early polls collapsed and he eventually lost the election by eight points. Braley's campaign was picked by some media outlets as among the worst campaigns in the 2014 election cycle.²⁰ In a post-election analysis of the race Chris Cillizza, then of the *Washington Post*, picked Braley as the cycle's worst

²⁰ For example, *Politico* ran a story six weeks before the election picking Braley's campaign as among the worst of the cycle: <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/09/2014-worst-campaigns-111311.html>.

candidate.²¹ A key point was a lack of likeability on the part of Braley. For many voters, particularly those who may not follow politics as closely, such as No Party voters, likeability can be a key factor. This was no doubt a reason why a plurality of No Party voters favored Ernst as shown in Figure 4f.

Aside from the disappointment many Democrats felt from losing a seat that most thought they should have won, there are two reasons Ernst's win was of particular interest. First, as the returns were counted on election night it appeared that this race was the one that tipped control of the US Senate to the Republicans. Second, prior to Ernst's victory, Iowa and Mississippi were the only two states that had not elected a woman to Congress or as governor.²²

2016: Judge versus Grassley

Figure 4g shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2016 Senate election between Democrat Patty Judge and incumbent Republican Senator Chuck Grassley. Judge had won two terms as Iowa's Secretary of Agriculture and had been the lieutenant governor in the Culver administration (2007-2011). That gave her much greater name recognition than any of Grassley's previous reelection opponents. She joined the primary race a bit late, but only one of her three opponents gave her much competition.

Although that one opponent, Robert Hogg, was a sitting state senator and a much more energetic candidate, Iowa Democrats seemed to prefer Judge for her better name recognition and past experience. Given the way the presidential race was shaping up early on, it seemed that 2016 might be the Democrats' best chance to defeat Grassley and they wanted someone with a more proven record to represent them. On the other hand, some Iowa environmentalists were not happy with Judge and she was not able to make an argument for generational change the way the younger Hogg might have.

Given Judge's qualifications, many suggested that 2016 would be the toughest race of Grassley's career.²³ Grassley was never one to take his opponents lightly, and it did not seem that Judge would be that formidable of a candidate, but it was unclear how the unusual presidential race would affect the Senate campaign. As it turned out, Judge was his most formidable reelection opponent in that she was his only opponent who managed to get more votes than the number of Democrats who turned out to vote. As shown in Figure 4g, she received an estimated 10% of the No Party vote, compared to

²¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2014/11/11/the-worst-candidate-of-the-2014-election/>.

²² Iowa expanded on this in 2018 by electing a woman Republican governor (see Figure 2r) and two women Democrats who beat incumbents in US House races for IA01 and IA03. In 2020, three of the four US Representatives elected from Iowa were women.

²³ As one example, http://qctimes.com/news/state-and-regional/iowa/as-always-grassley-plans-for-toughest-race-of-his-career/article_f8779119-eadb-584b-9fe2-90393d64386d.html.

76% for Grassley. The estimate of 14% for Other was largely due to the larger than usual number of votes for the Libertarian Party and Independent Party Iowa candidates.

2020: Greenfield versus Ernst

Figure 4h shows the estimated distribution of Iowa's No Party votes for the 2020 Senate election between Democrat Theresa Greenfield and incumbent Republican Joni Ernst. I have noted before that Iowa likes its incumbents. Nevertheless, other things being equal an incumbent will be most vulnerable in his or her first reelection campaign. That is probably a bit less so for Senators who have had six years to establish name recognition, etc., but given the circumstances of the 2020 election environment Democrats were hopeful they could defeat Ernst. Five Democrats ran for their party's nomination. One was an also-ran. Three others were more visible, including a former US Navy admiral, but Theresa Greenfield seemed to be the front-runner and favorite for most of the race. She was a business woman in the real estate industry. She had initially run for a US House seat in Iowa in 2018, but had to withdraw when it was discovered that her campaign manager had falsified some signatures used to qualify for the ballot. That did not seem to hurt her particularly for the 2020 nomination race and she won the nomination with 46.68% of the vote.

For the general election some analysts rated the race a toss-up and it got a fair amount of national attention. As I noted above, however, it did not seem like a close race to me and it turned out that it was not. Like in the presidential race, there were nearly 50,000 more Republicans that voted. The No Party distribution broke decidedly for Ernst as Figure 4h indicates she received 51% of their votes.

Concluding Comments

For the 20 presidential and gubernatorial general elections examined here No Party votes seemed to be distributed more evenly in presidential election years than in gubernatorial years. The largest estimated portions of the No Party vote for Democrats came in 1998 and 2002 (both with Vilsack as the gubernatorial candidate). Based on these results I would be tempted to suggest that those No Party voters who do not turn out in the gubernatorial elections might be more apt to vote for the Republican candidate, but of the seven elections in which the Republican candidate received a majority of the No Party vote, five of them were gubernatorial election years (all with Branstad as the candidate).

In the US Senate races, Harkin and Grassley proved to be very durable candidates. In the 1980s and 1990s they won elections and No Party vote majorities in both gubernatorial and presidential elections when the candidate from the opposing party won. Grassley, for example, won in 1992 and 1998 when Democrats Clinton and Vilsack also won. Harkin won in 1984 and 1990 when Republicans Reagan and

Branstad also won. In the 2000s, to some extent Harkin and Grassley were fortunate in the timing of their reelection efforts. Most candidates are helped by a strong candidate at the top of their party's ticket. In that regard, Grassley had an incumbent president running for reelection in 2004. There was no incumbent during Harkin's reelection in 2008 but it was certainly a year that was going to be a strong one for Democrats. In the midterm elections, one might argue whether a gubernatorial or a Senate race is considered the top race, but it certainly would not hurt to have a strong gubernatorial candidate also on the ticket. Along these lines, Harkin did better than incumbent Governor Vilsack in terms of his estimated share of the No Party vote in 2002, but they likely helped each other to some extent. In 2010, Democrat Culver was the incumbent governor, but, as noted previously, he basically lost any incumbency advantage given Branstad's prior experience and Iowa's economic situation at the time. Like Harkin in the 2002 race, in 2010 Grassley received a higher estimated portion of the No Party vote than the gubernatorial candidate.

Regarding the 2014 Senate race, had Harkin run for reelection he likely would have won. Moreover, his being on the ticket to balance incumbent Governor Branstad might have helped the Democrats' nominee in one of the two open US House seats. With no incumbent in the Senate race the interesting question was the extent to which other factors would come into play. Aside from the specific campaign factors noted above, that Branstad was a strong incumbent and 2014 was a good year for Republicans undoubtedly played a role in Ernst's win.

In the initial release of this paper, about four months prior to the 2014 election, I noted that it did not seem as if 2014 would be a wave year for Republicans. I also noted that wave year or not, as the midterm election in the sixth year of a president's term it should be a good year for the out party, meaning the Republicans. That certainly proved to be the case for both the gubernatorial and US Senate races in Iowa. Republicans also won two open US House seats (one a hold, one a pick-up). On the other hand, Democrats held the state senate and two state-wide offices with incumbents running.

In a previous version of the this paper, written about 17 months before the 2016 elections, I thought that the presidential election might look more like 2000 than 2008. I thought that might mean the No Party voters might break in favor of the Democrat, but not overwhelmingly so. Despite the twists and turns in the presidential campaign, this seemed to be a reasonable assumption right up until the election. It was not until then that most started to see that Trump had tapped into the concerns of many voters, and in particular many of those who were less concerned about political parties, in a way that Clinton had not. Although there was much to dislike about both Clinton and Trump, and many No Party voters opted for an alternative, Trump still captured substantially more of the No Party vote than Clinton. I also noted in the previous paper that Grassley's reelection run might depend on what happened in the presidential race. As

it turned out, Grassley received an estimated 76% of the No Party vote. That was actually down from his prior five reelection campaigns, but still far more than Trump received.

The 2018 election turned out about as I expected when I discussed it at the end of the previous version of this paper. Reynolds won the Republican nomination for governor and the Democrats fielded a stronger than usual nominee. That race had the closest distribution for the estimated No Party vote of the 20 elections (see Figure 2r). As is often the case, however, the results were mixed in that in the state-wide races incumbents of both parties won, but one Republican incumbent lost (Auditor of State). In addition, Democrats beat two incumbent US House members (IA01 and IA03), but Republicans maintained control of both chambers in the state legislature.

The 2020 election was interesting in that there were initially 23 Democrats who joined the race for their party's nomination. Despite the intense anti-Trump sentiment among Democrats it seemed as of early-2020 that he might be easily reelected. Once the pandemic hit and the economy was hurt it seemed that Trump was vulnerable. This seemed to give Biden a chance to win in Iowa even though he only finished fourth in the Iowa Caucuses. Polls and election prognosticators suggested that the presidential and Senate races in Iowa would be very close. Being here in Iowa I did not get that same feeling. There did not seem to be much in the way of a pro-Biden feeling among Democrats rather than anti-Trump. That difference might still drive turnout for the base, but does not necessarily motivate No Party voters and the estimates suggest both Trump and Ernst won a majority of No Party voters. In addition, Republicans flipped two Congressional seats, one open and one held by a first-term incumbent.

Looking ahead to 2022, the big question will be how Iowa's four Congressional districts are redrawn. One seat will likely still be a safe Republican seat, but the other three are competitive now and will likely remain so.

Figure 1a: Overview of Estimated Party and No Party Votes in Iowa Gubernatorial General Elections Since 1982

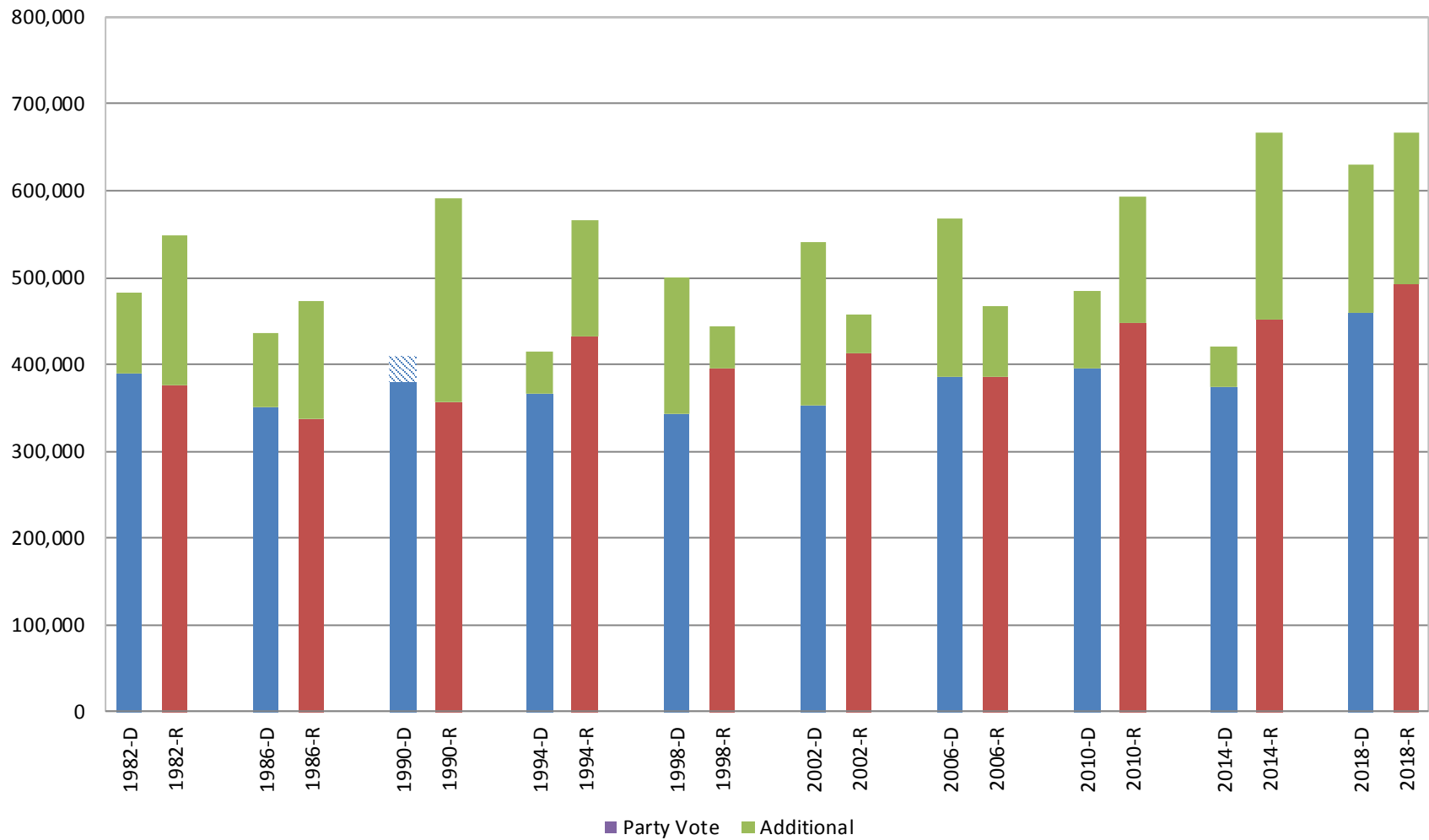


Figure 1b: Overview of Estimated Party and No Party Votes in Iowa Presidential General Elections Since 1984

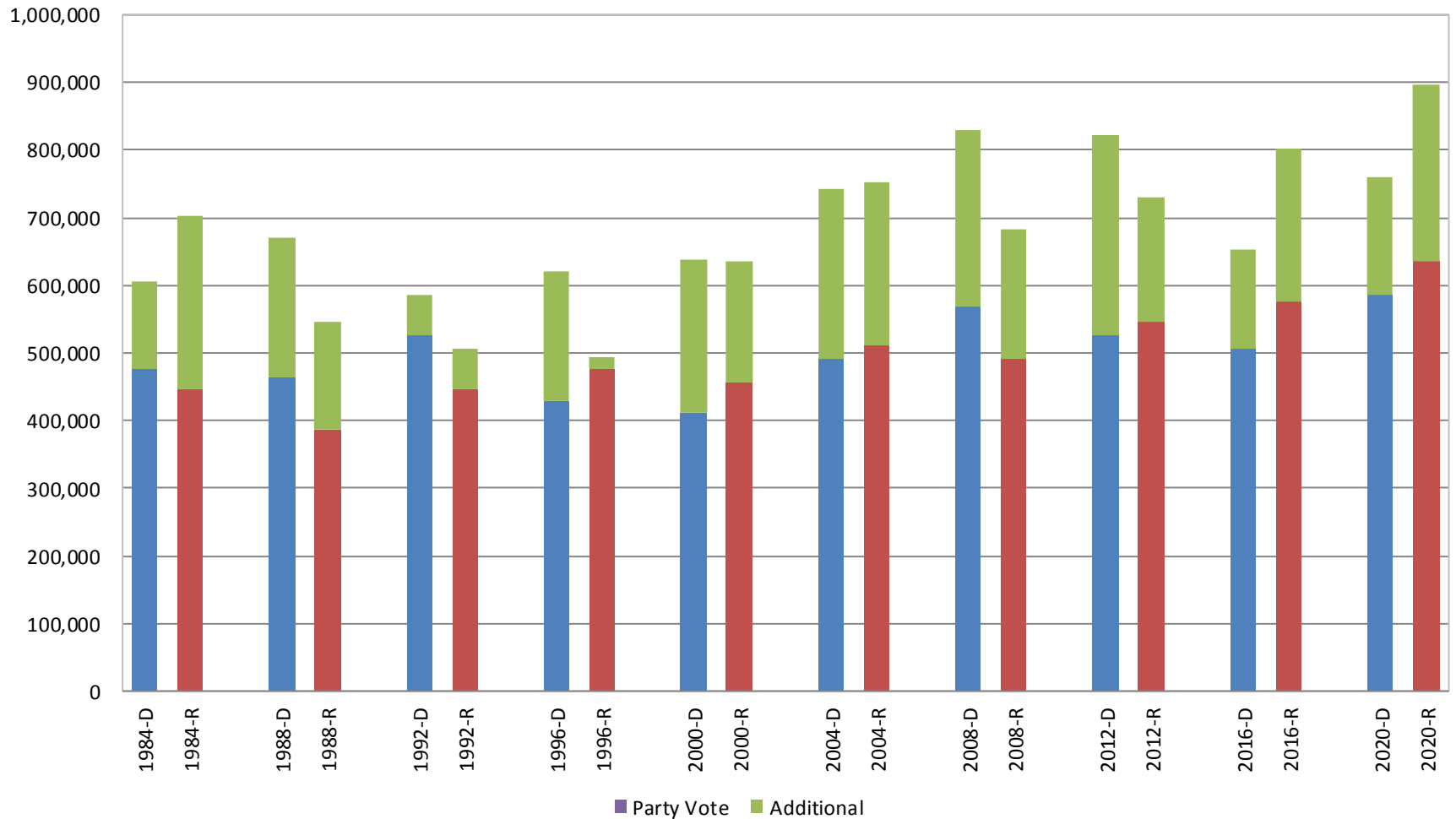


Figure 2a: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1982 Gubernatorial Election

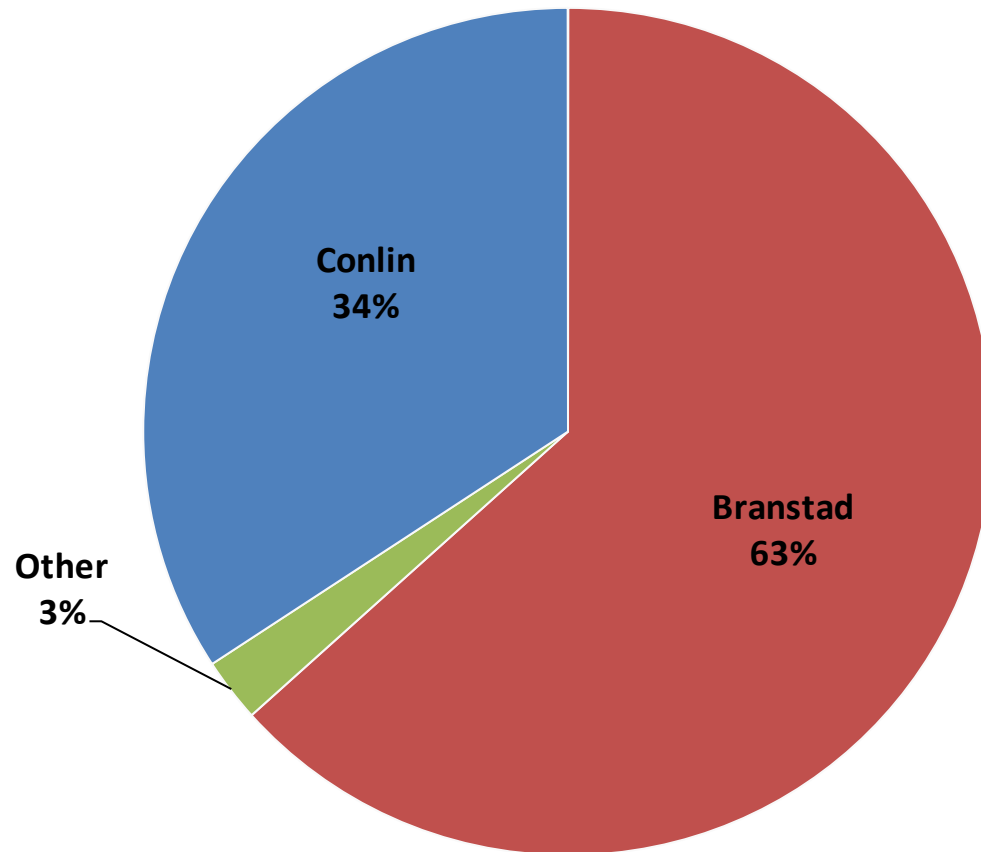


Figure 2b: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1984 Presidential Election

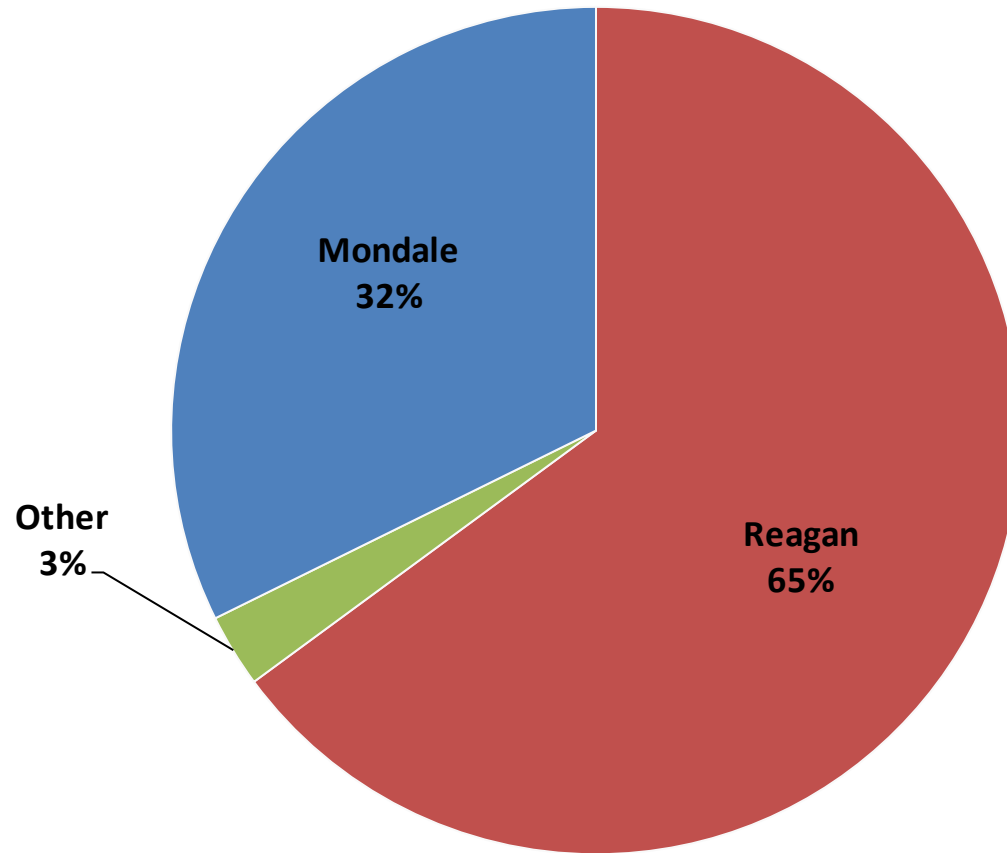


Figure 2c: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1986 Gubernatorial Election

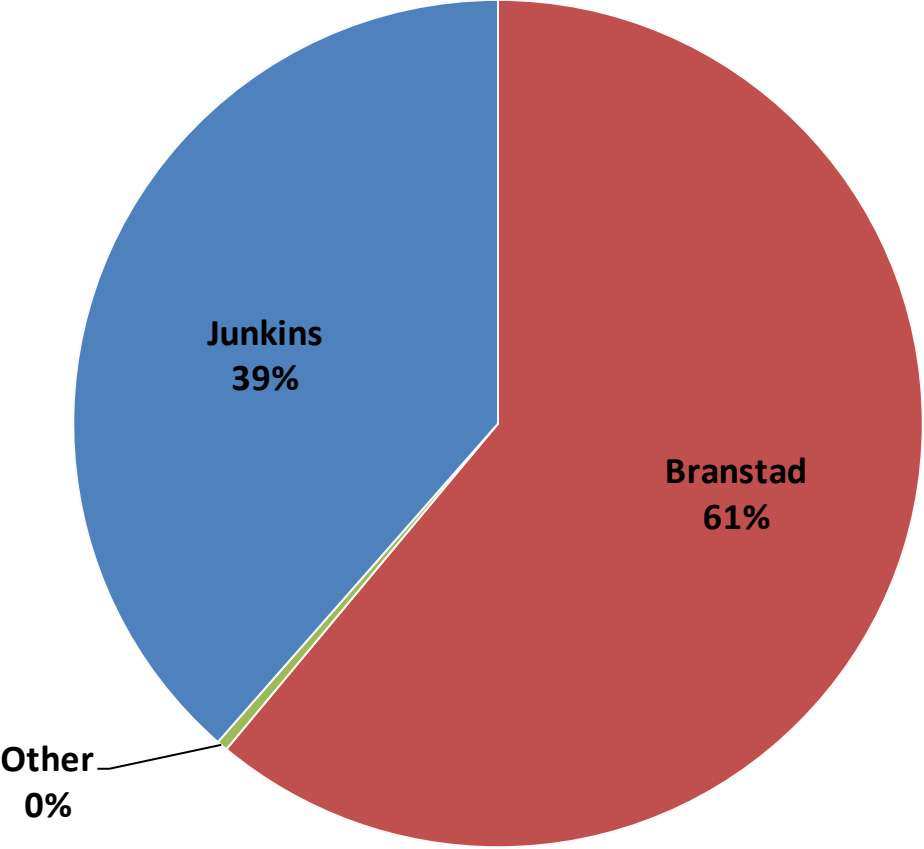


Figure 2d: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1988 Presidential Election

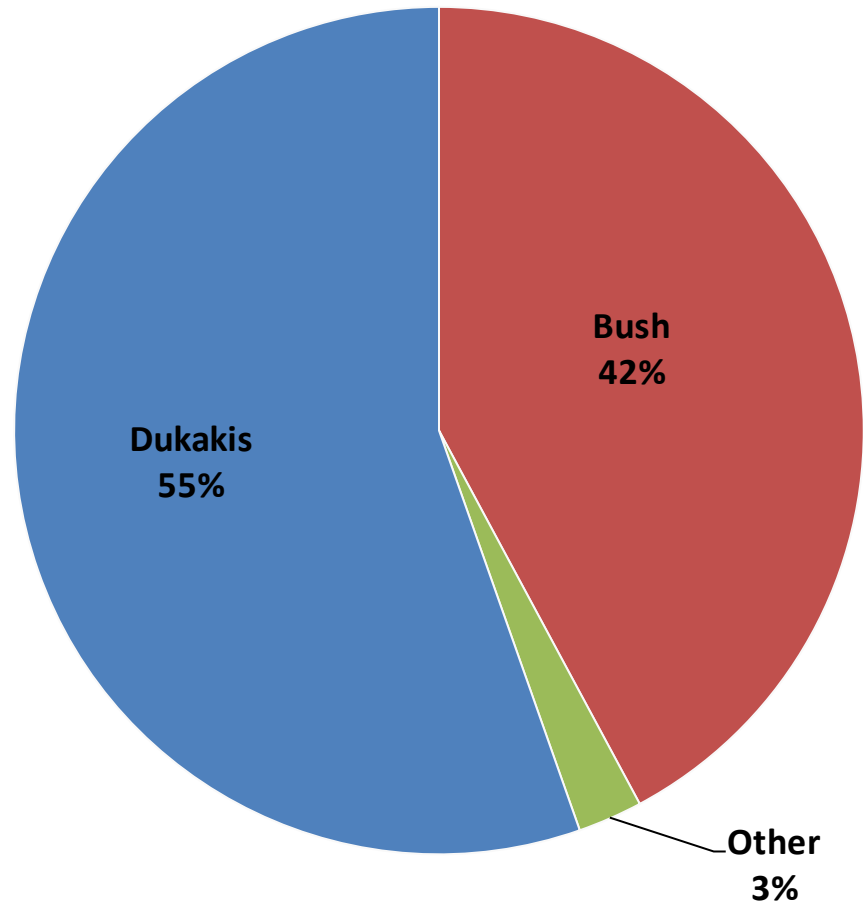


Figure 2e: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1992 Presidential Election

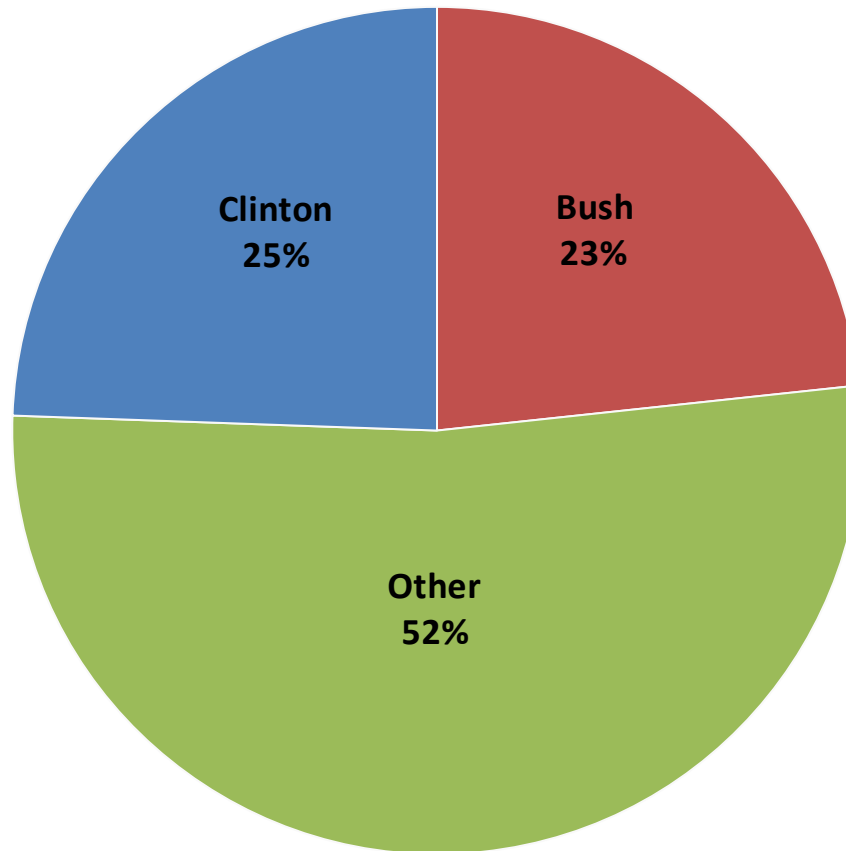


Figure 2f: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1994 Gubernatorial Election

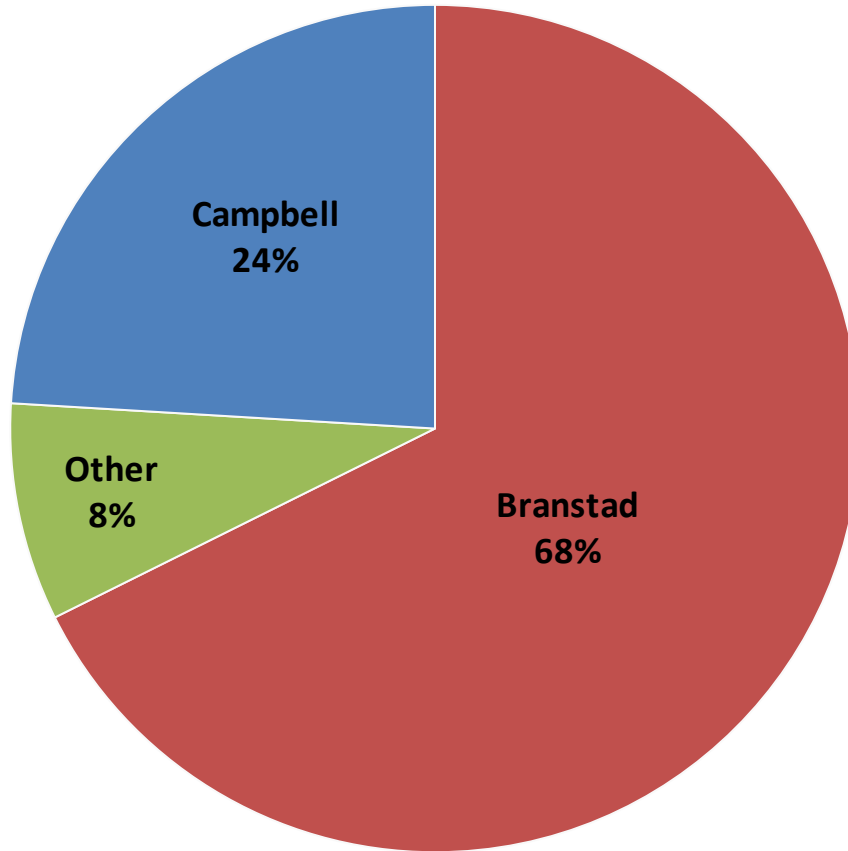


Figure 2g: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1996 Presidential Election

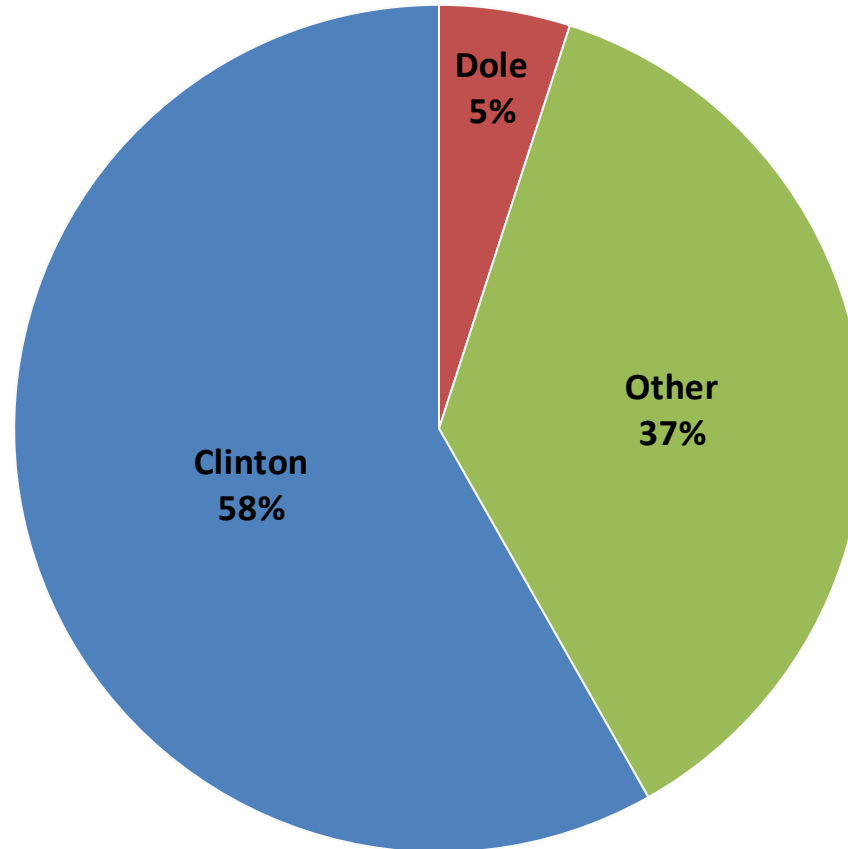


Figure 2h: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1998 Gubernatorial Election

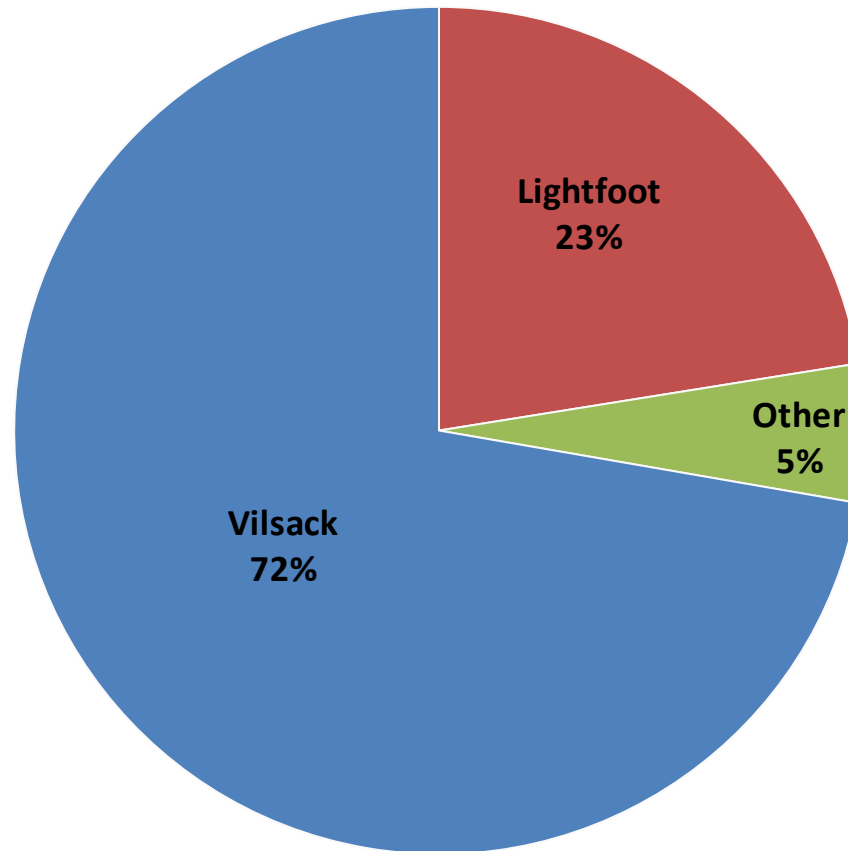


Figure 2i: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2000 Presidential Election

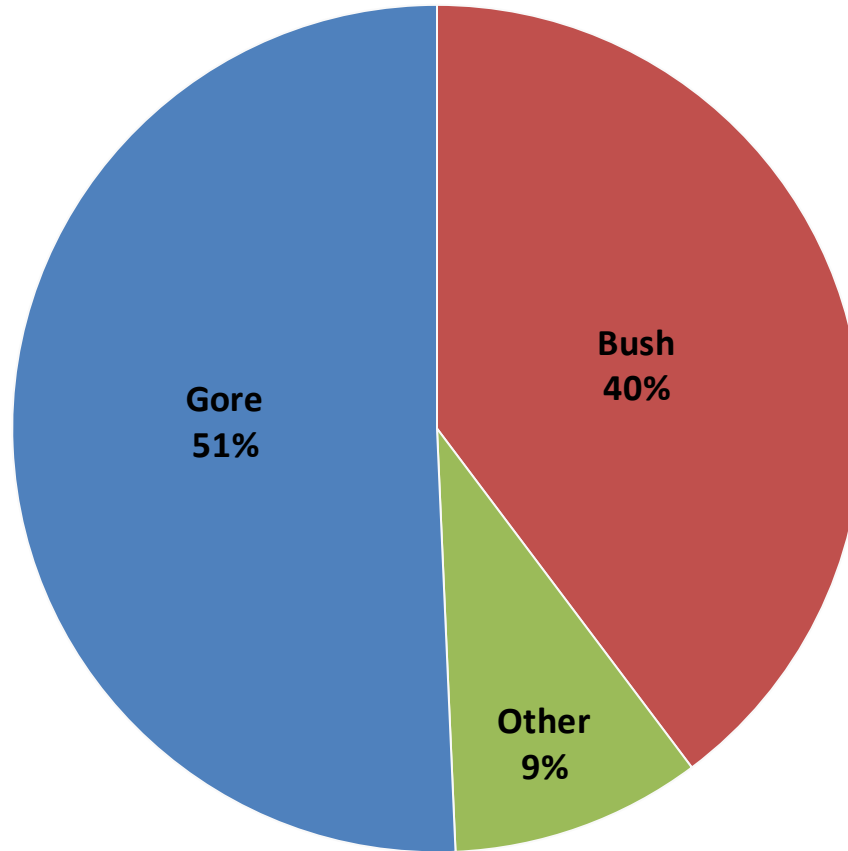


Figure 2j: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2002 Gubernatorial Election

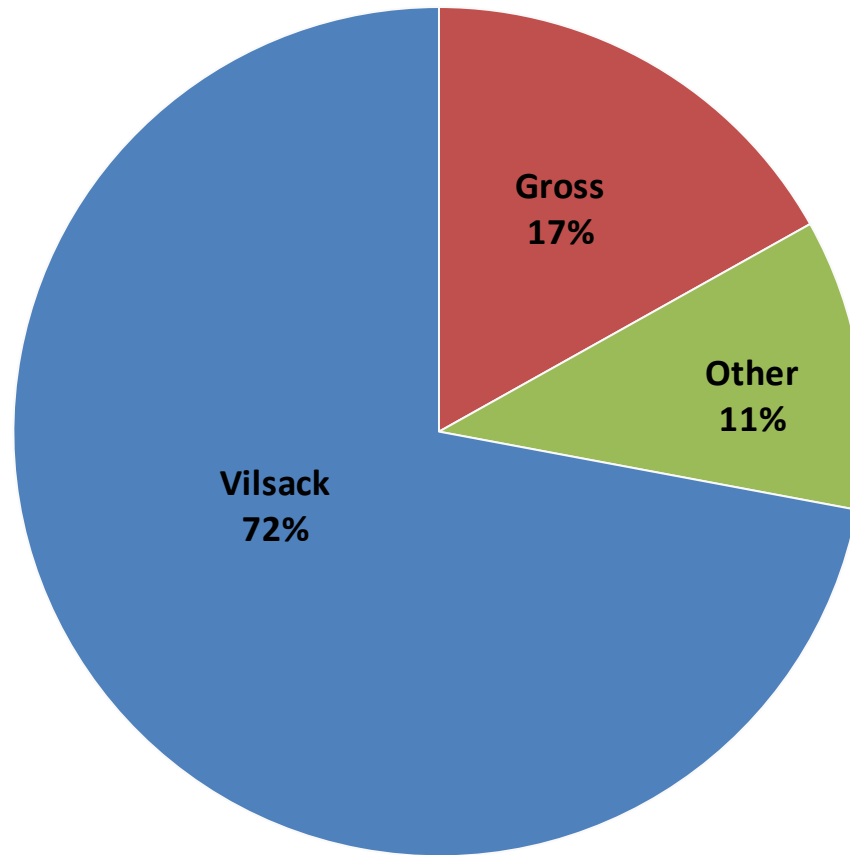


Figure 2k: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2004 Presidential Election

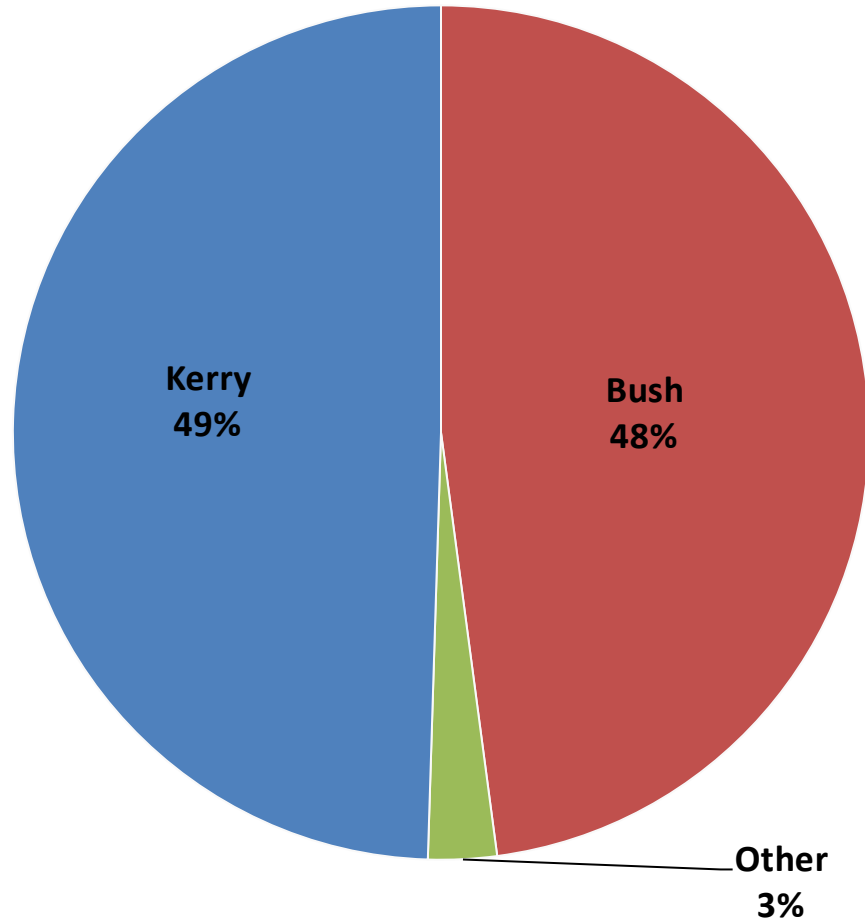


Figure 2I: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2006 Gubernatorial Election

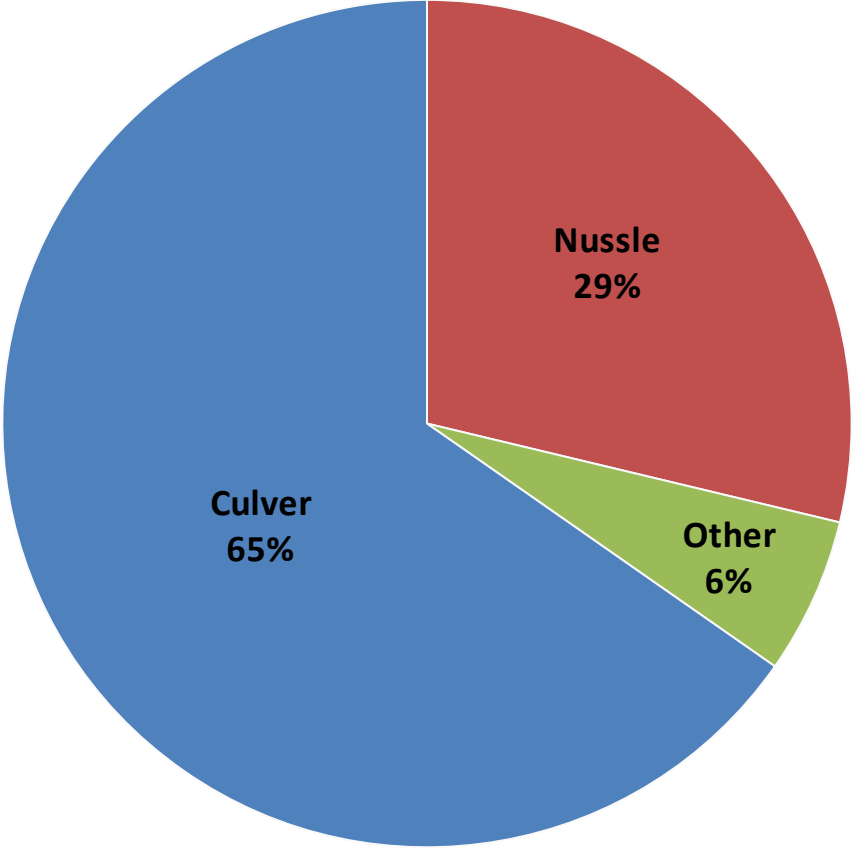


Figure 2m: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2008 Presidential Election

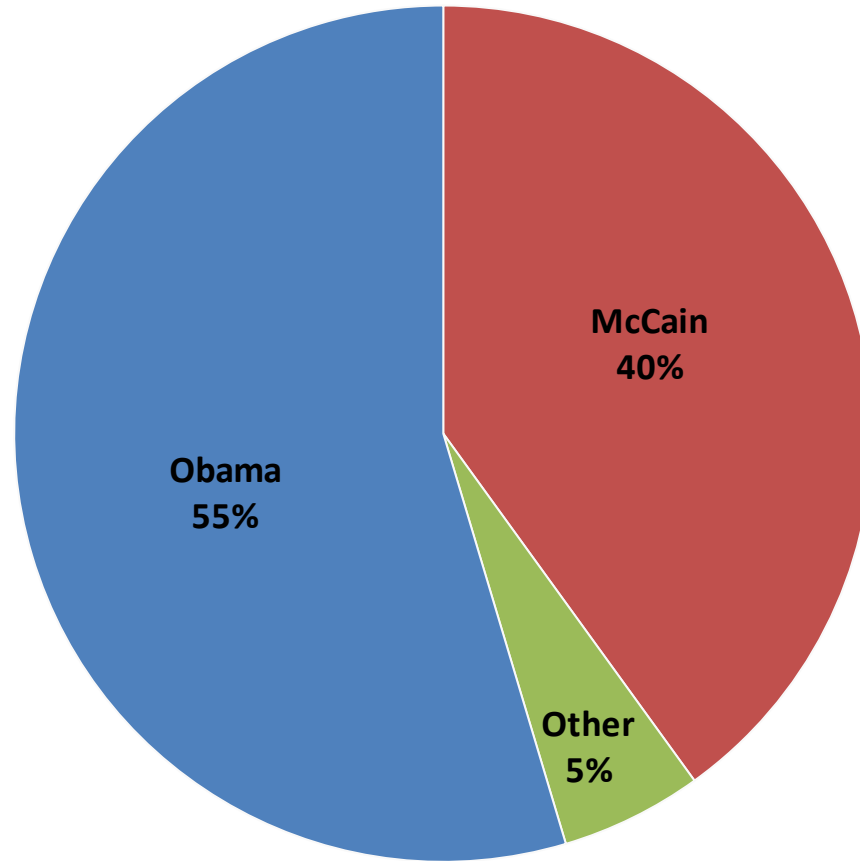


Figure 2n: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2010 Gubernatorial Election

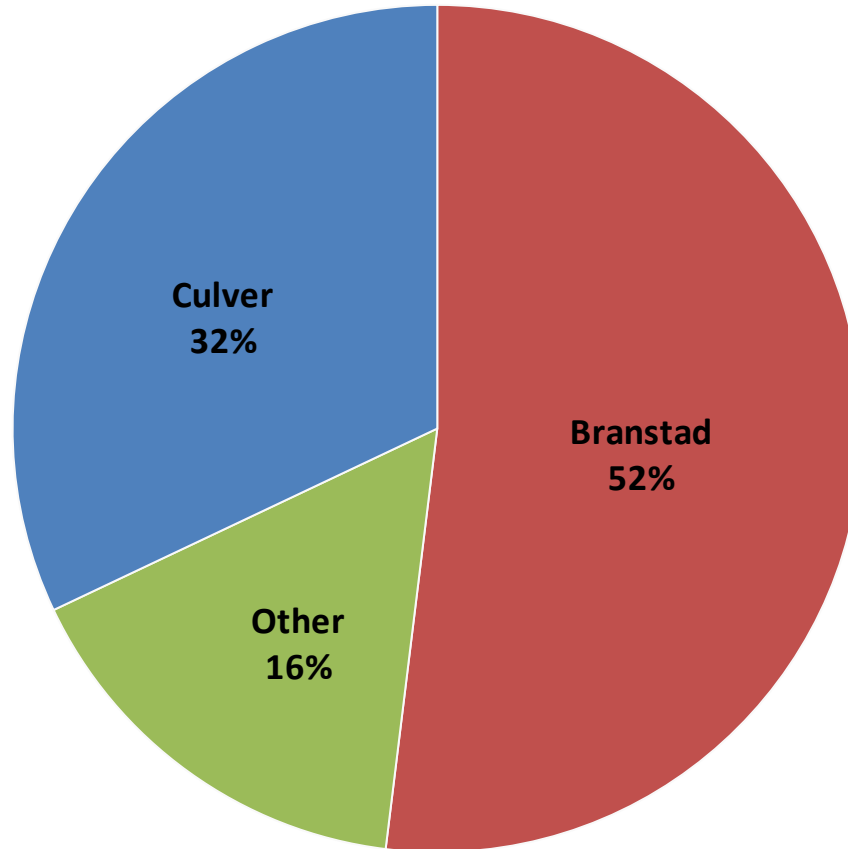


Figure 2o: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2012 Presidential Election

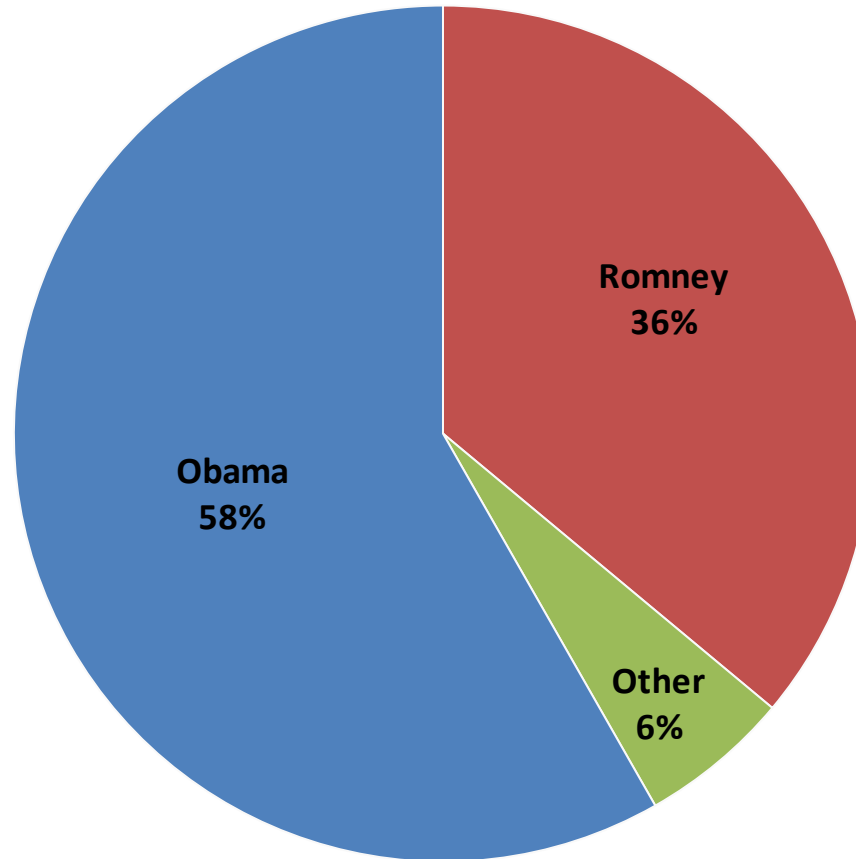


Figure 2p: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2014 Gubernatorial Election

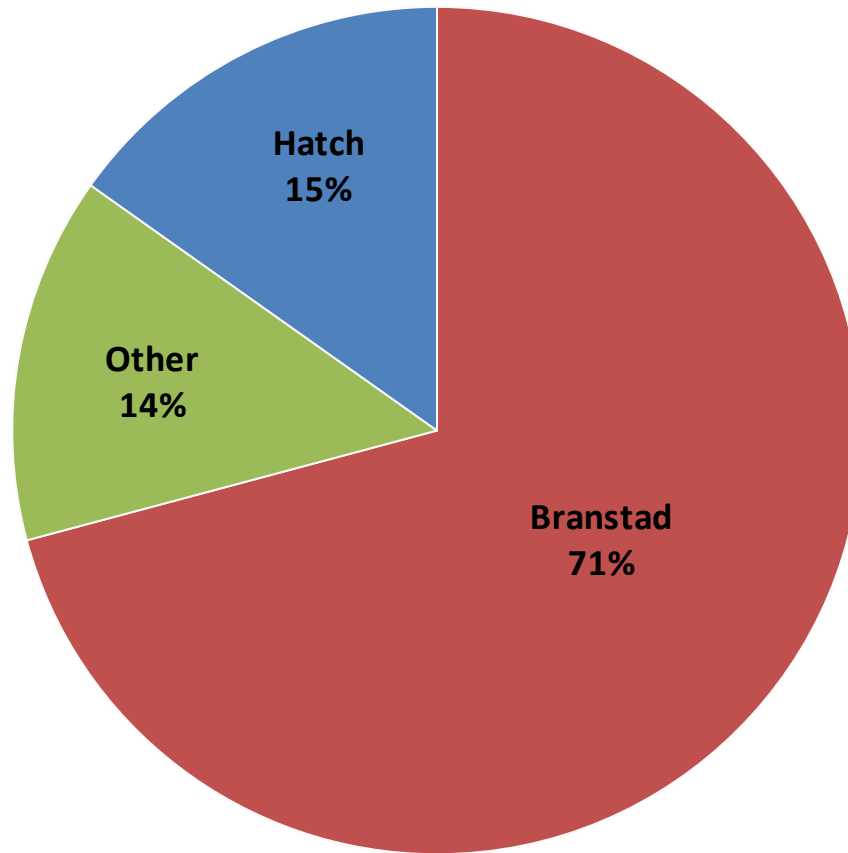


Figure 2q: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2016 Presidential Election

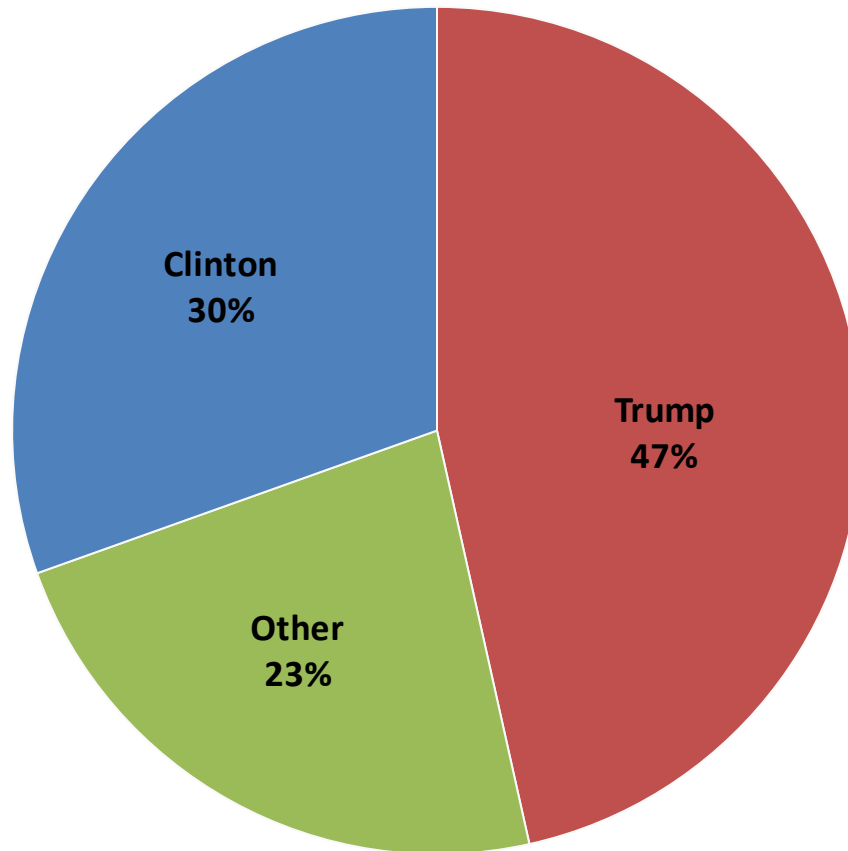


Figure 2r: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2018 Gubernatorial Election

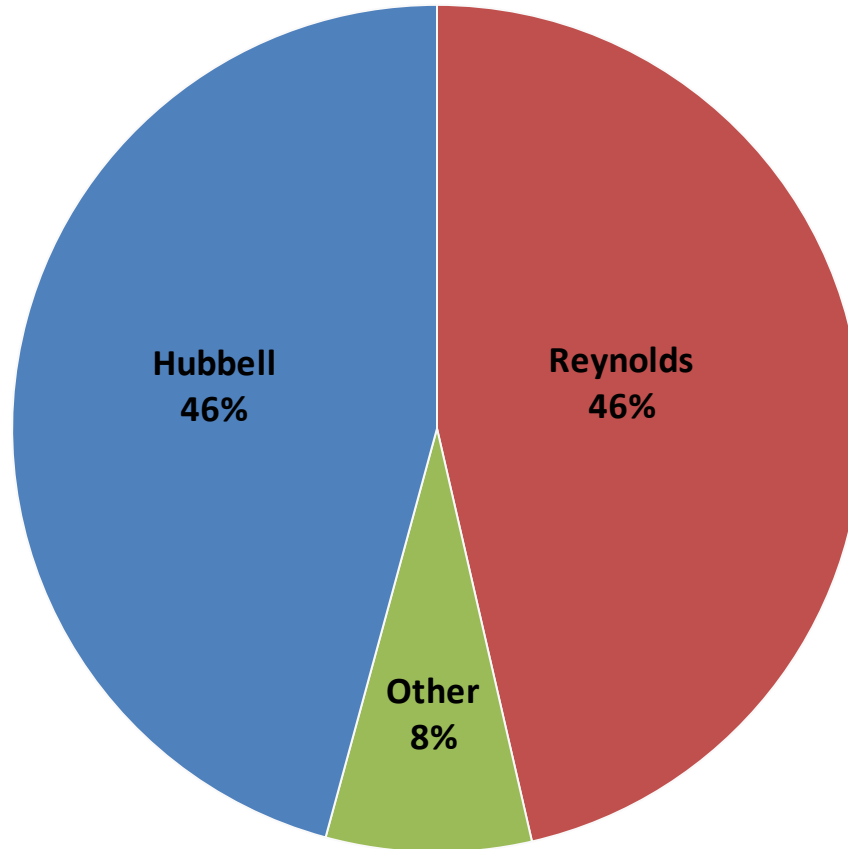


Figure 2s: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2020 Presidential Election

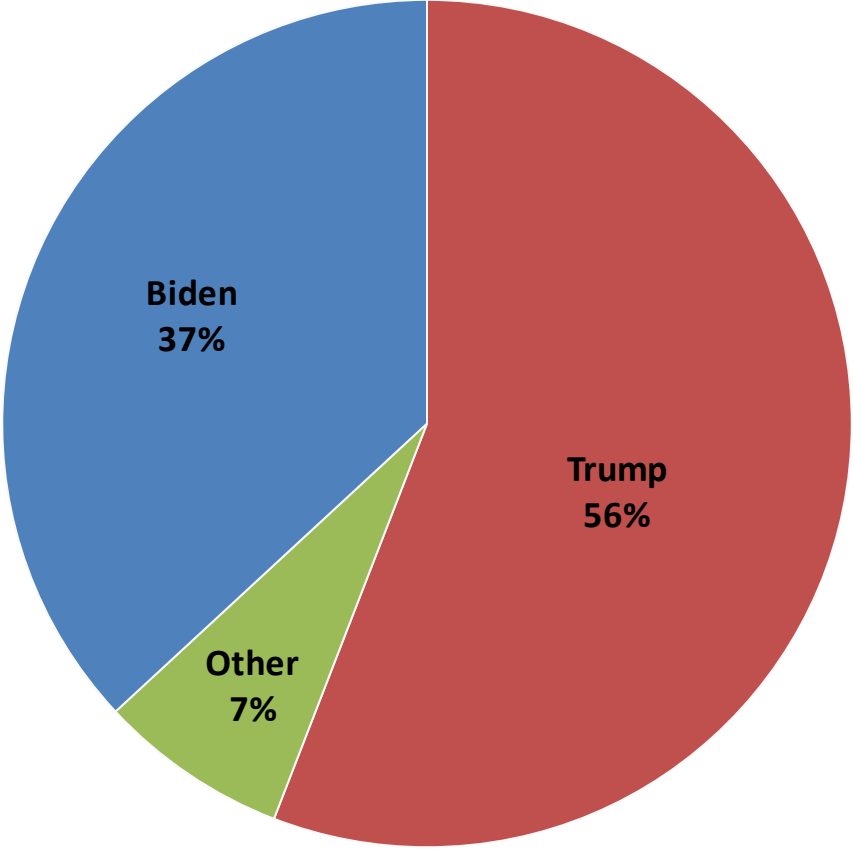


Figure 3: Overview of Estimated Party and No Party Votes in Iowa US Senate Elections Since 1984

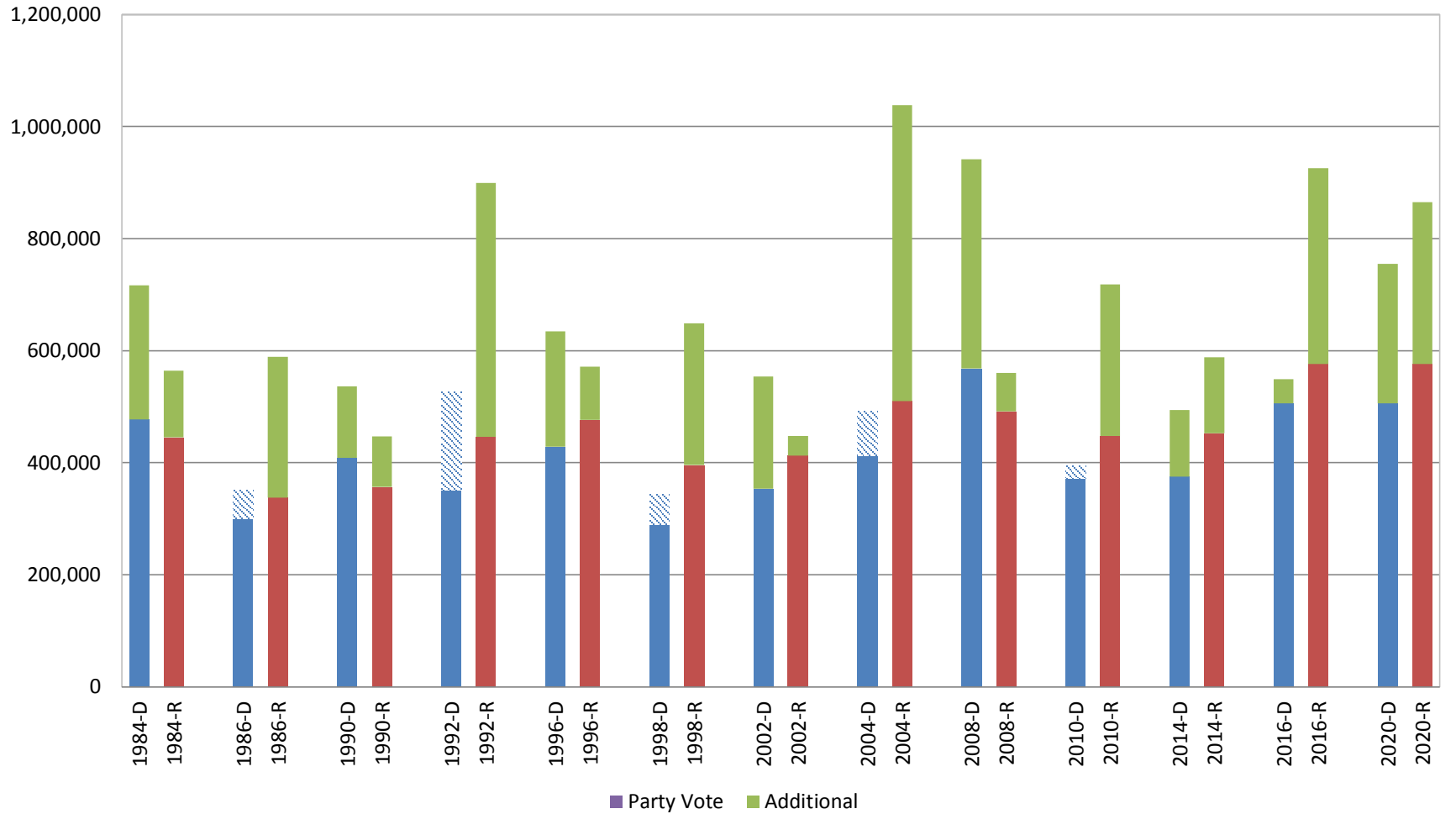


Figure 4a: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1984 US Senate Election

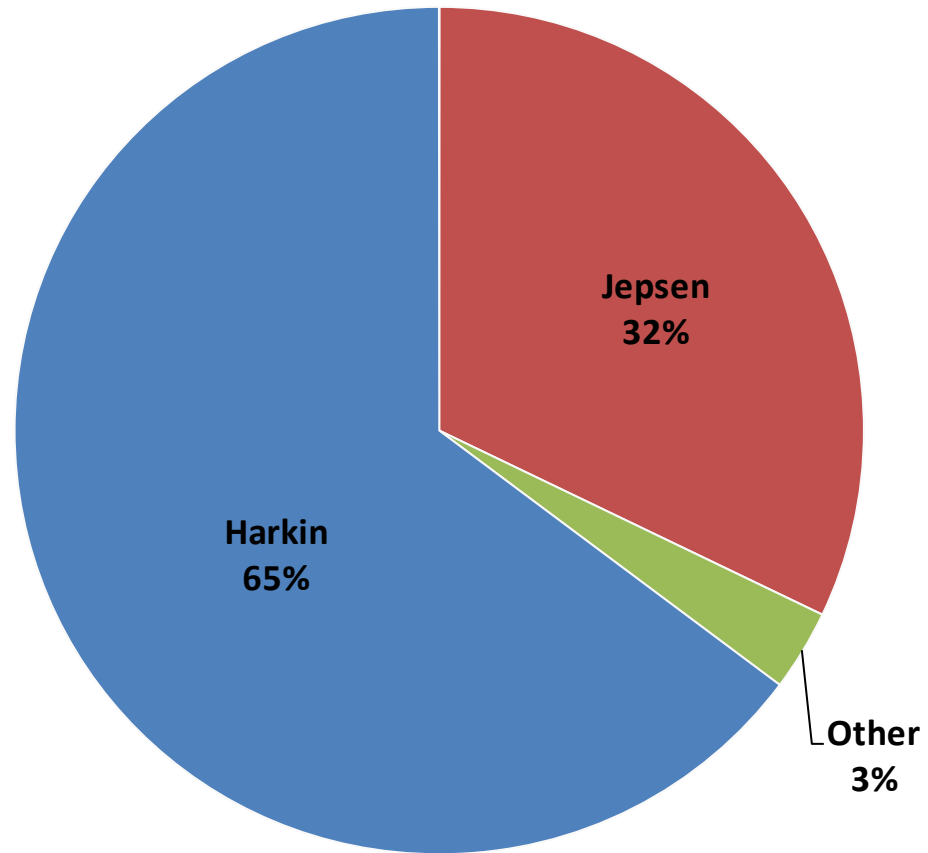


Figure 4b: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1990 US Senate Election

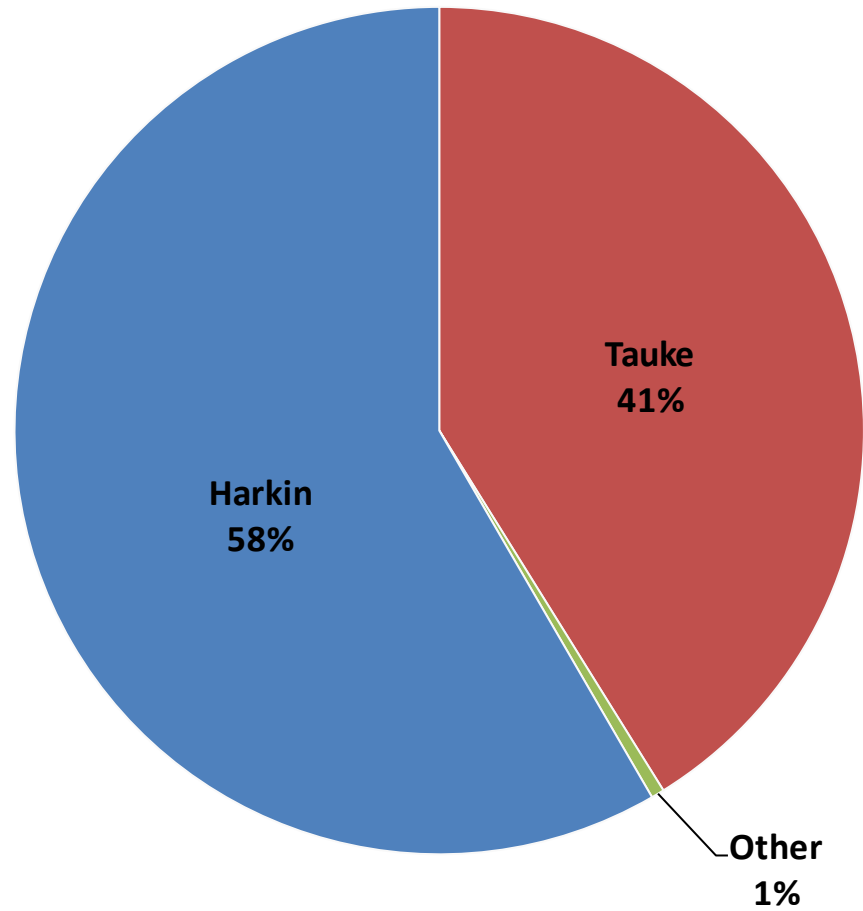


Figure 4c: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 1996 US Senate Election

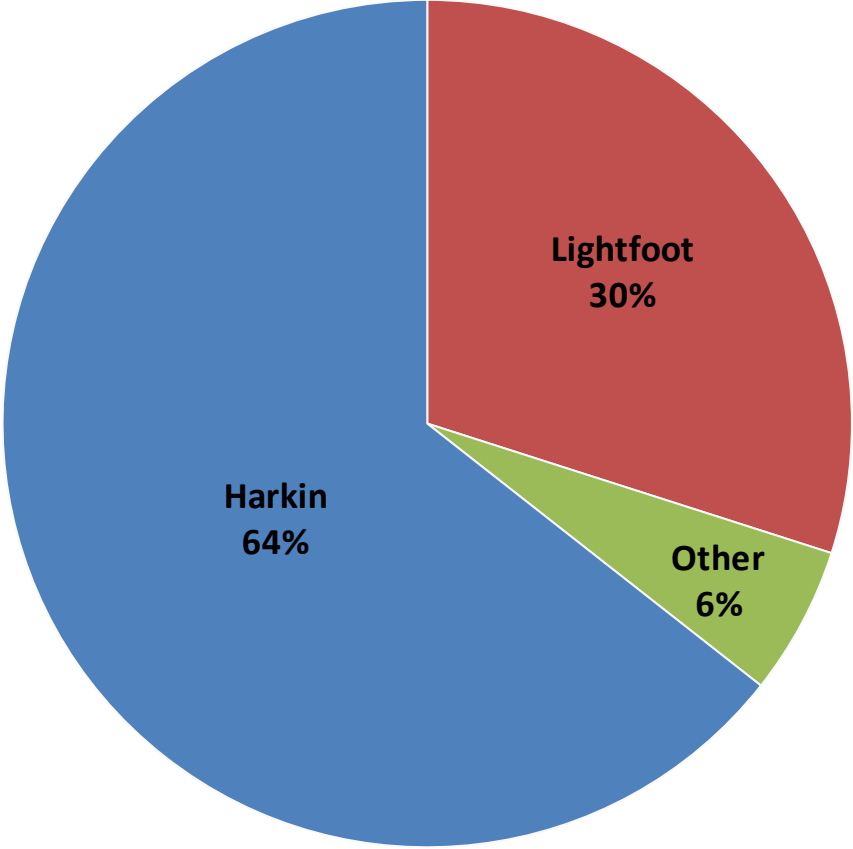


Figure 4d: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2002 US Senate Election

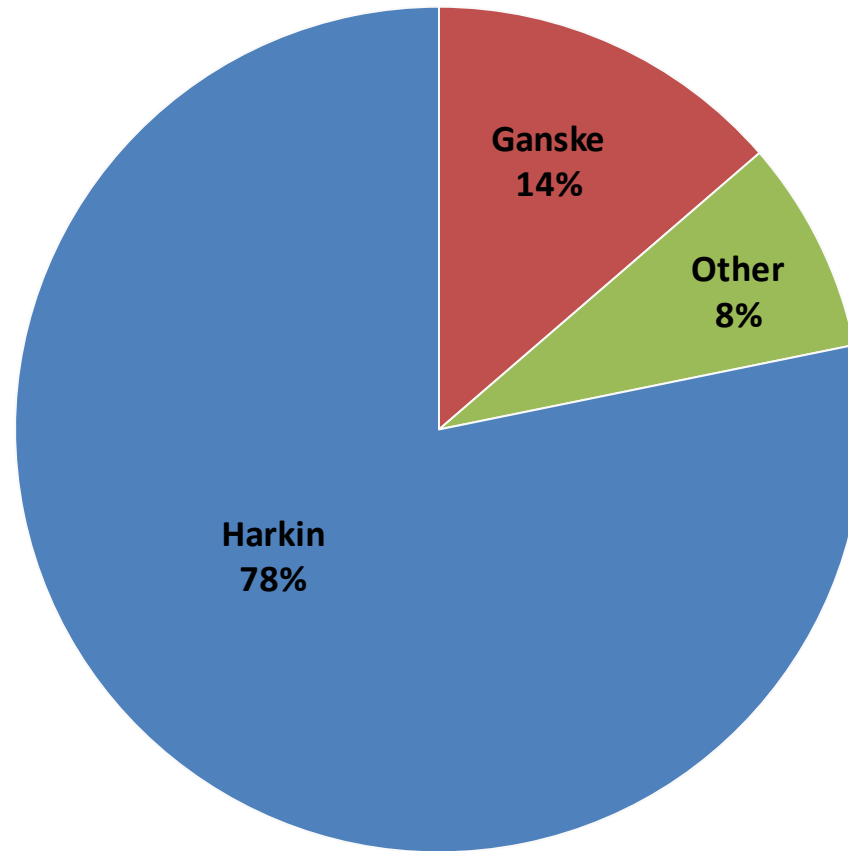


Figure 4e: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2008 US Senate Election

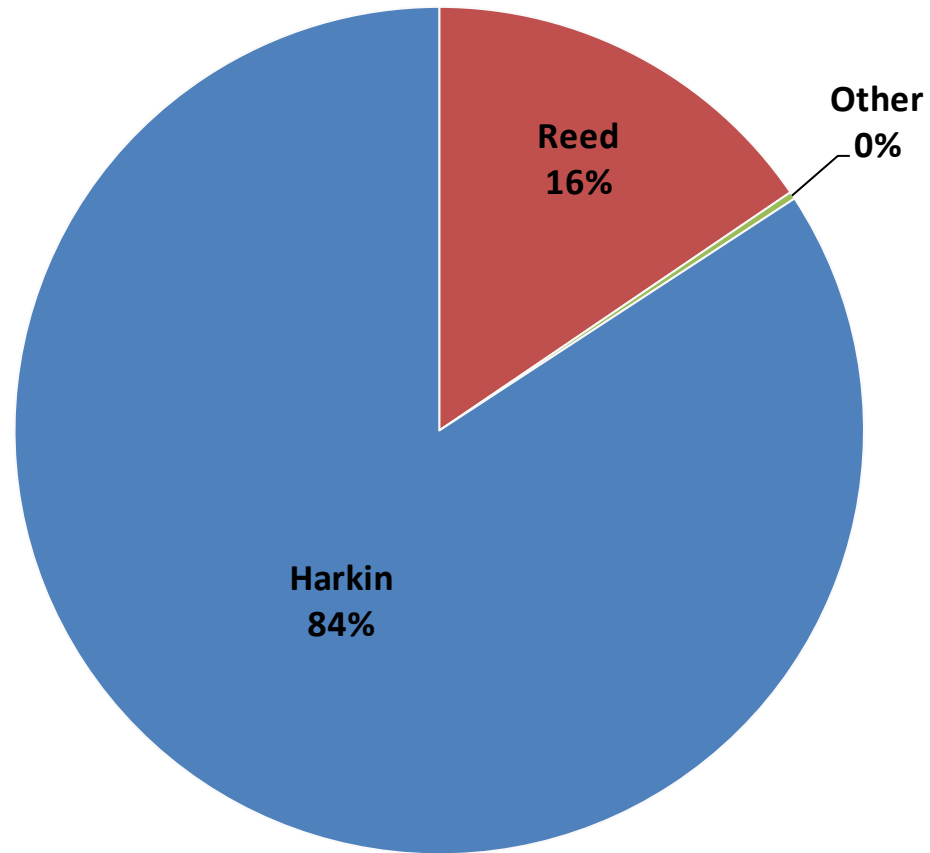


Figure 4f: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2014 US Senate Election

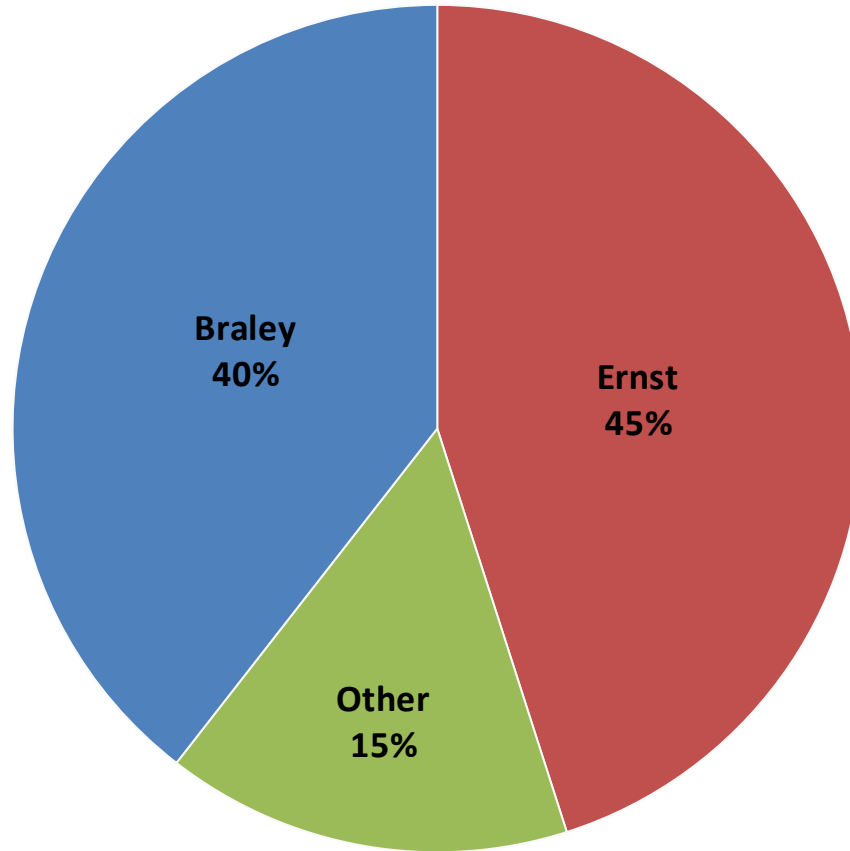


Figure 4g: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2016 US Senate Election

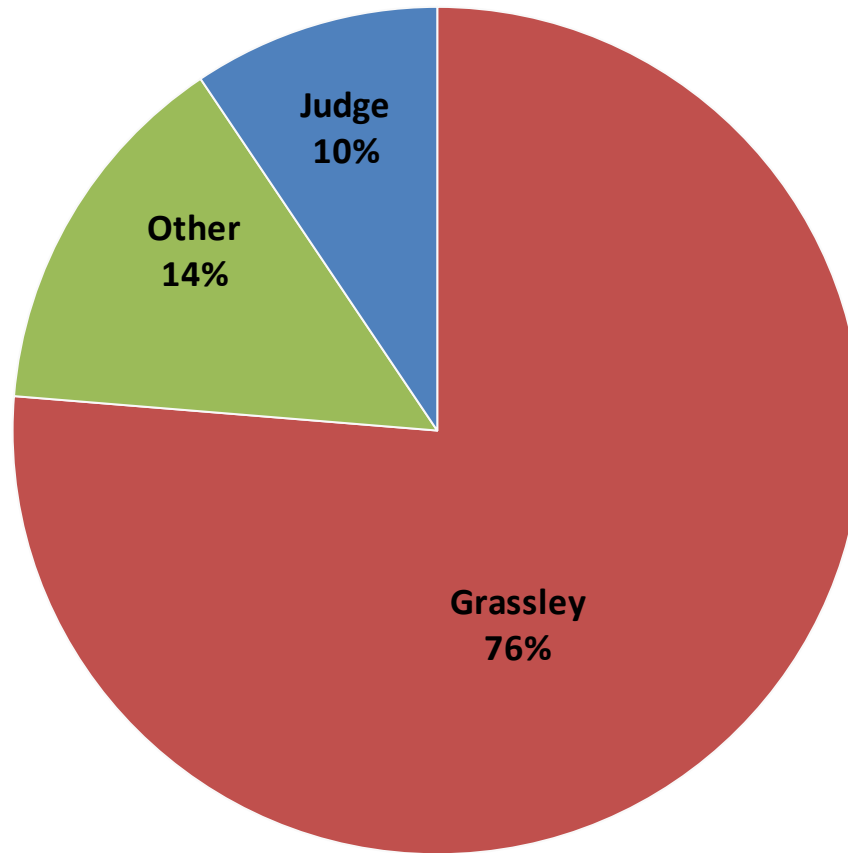


Figure 4h: Estimated Distribution of Iowa No Party Votes in the 2020 US Senate Election

