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Dems in 3-way tie; Huckabee leads GOP

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DES MOINES -- A new Iowa caucus poll from Lee Enterprises newspapers shows the Democratic race is a virtual three-way tie, with John Edwards rising to tie Barack Obama for the lead and Hillary Clinton rising to just one point behind.

On the Republican side, Mike Huckabee remains in the lead with a 7-point edge over Mitt Romney.

The poll, conducted with 500 likely caucus goers from each party on Dec. 26 and 27, showed Edwards and Obama tied with 29 percent to lead Democrats, followed by Clinton with 28 percent. Bill Richardson was fourth with 7 percent. Joe Biden was fifth with 3 percent. Chris Dodd and Dennis Kucinich both had 1 percent and 2 percent were undecided.

For Republicans, Huckabee leads with 34 percent, followed by Romney with 27 percent. Fred Thompson is a distant third with 11 percent, followed by a three-way tie for fourth between Rudy Giuliani, John McCain and Ron Paul, with 8 points each. Duncan Hunter had 1 percent and 3 percent were undecided.

The poll, which has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.5 percent, was commissioned by Lee Enterprises and conducted by Maryland-based Research 2000.

There is plenty of room for shifts in the final days before the Jan. 3 caucuses, with 19 percent of Democrats and 31 percent of Republicans saying they are likely or very likely to change their minds.

Edwards, a former U.S. senator from North Carolina, has gained 5 points from the Lee Enterprises poll two weeks ago, while Clinton, a U.S. senator from New York, has gained 4 points. Obama, a U.S. senator from Illinois has seen his support drop 4 points. Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, has lost 2 points. The support for Biden, Dodd and Kucinich was unchanged.

The bottom line for Democrats is an already-close race is now closer.

The Republican race is more stable at the top, with Huckabee, the former Arkansas governor, gaining 3 points since the poll two weeks ago, and Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, gaining 5 points. Fred Thompson, the former U.S. senator from Tennessee, gained 2 points. McCain and Paul each gained 1 point, while Giuliani lost 1 point.

Since the previous poll, U.S. Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado has dropped out of the Republican race. He had 2 percent support before.

Notably, Huckabee's numbers have risen despite weeks of relentless attacks from Romney and other opponents. However Romney has narrowed the gap from the previous poll from 9 points to 7 points.

The shifts in the Republican race appear to be driven by movement of undecided voters to one of the top two candidates, with undecided voters dropping from 12 percent to 3 percent between the two polls.

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Print Page