

## Clinton leads in Iowa but Edwards gains

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By John Whitesides, Political Correspondent

DES MOINES, Iowa (Reuters) - Democrat Hillary Clinton holds a slim lead in Iowa over Barack Obama and a rising John Edwards, who are tied for second place three days before the state opens the presidential nominating race, according to a Reuters/C-SPAN/Zogby poll released on Monday.

In the tight Republican contest in Iowa, Mike Huckabee narrowly leads Mitt Romney, who slipped by one point to trail 29 percent to 27 percent. John McCain gained two points but remained a distant third at 13 percent.

About 6 percent of likely caucus-goers in each party remain undecided of their choice in Thursday's contest, the first big test in the state-by-state battle to choose Republican and Democratic candidates in November's presidential election.

"It's about as close as you can get at the top in both races," pollster John Zogby said. "But it's still very uncertain."

The poll of 899 likely Democratic caucus-goers and 902 likely Republican caucus-goers was taken Thursday through Saturday and has a margin of error of 3.3 percentage points for each party.

Most of the top candidates in both parties have been crisscrossing Iowa for days in a late hunt for support that could give them an edge and momentum for later contests.

The poll showed Clinton, a New York senator and former first lady, leading Edwards and Illinois Sen. Obama by four points, 30 percent to 26 percent. Edwards, a former North Carolina senator, gained two points overnight to pull even with Obama.

Delaware Sen. Joseph Biden and New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson were at 5 percent. Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd and Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich were at 1 percent.

### GOOD DAY FOR EDWARDS

"Edwards had a good day by virtue especially of increasing support among independent voters," Zogby said. Edwards led narrowly among independents over Clinton and Obama.

The poll found Clinton's supporters remained the most dedicated with 73 percent saying their support was "very" strong, compared to 66 percent for Edwards and 63 percent for Obama.

Under Iowa's arcane caucus rules, candidates must receive support from 15 percent of the participants in each precinct to be viable. If not, their supporters can switch to other candidates.

Edwards was the most popular second choice with 28 percent, while Obama had 25 percent and Clinton 14 percent.

In the Republican race, Huckabee held on to his slim two-point lead despite an Iowa ad campaign from Romney attacking Huckabee's record as governor of Arkansas.

McCain solidified his hold on third with his two-point gain to 13 percent. Three Republicans battled for fourth, with former Tennessee Sen. Fred Thompson at 8 percent and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Texas Rep. Ron Paul at 7 percent.

A third-place finish for McCain, an Arizona senator who has largely bypassed Iowa to concentrate on the next contest in New Hampshire, would give him a small measure of momentum going into that state's January 8 primary.

Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, has been running hard in both Iowa and New Hampshire. His top rivals in each state have concentrated on just one -- Huckabee in Iowa and McCain in New Hampshire.

"The only real movement for Republicans was with McCain," Zogby said. "If he continues to climb it could hurt Romney because he is pulling support from independents, moderates and others who are essential to Romney's support."

The rolling tracking poll will continue each day through the Iowa caucus on Thursday. In a rolling poll, the most recent day's results are added while the oldest day's results are dropped in order to track changing momentum.

(Editing by Bill Trott)

(For more about the U.S. political campaign, visit Reuters "Tales from the Trail: 2008" online at [blogs.reuters.com/trail08/](http://blogs.reuters.com/trail08/))

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