

POLS115
Fall 2007
Essay #2

In How Voters Decide, Richard Lau and David Redlawsk examine the ways in which voters process information in order to make decisions about for whom to vote in US presidential elections. In their conclusion, they note: 'human beings have a great capacity for making sense of complicated information environments. At the same time, there is no question that information environments can be structured in ways that increase the chance that voters will sort through the noise and excitement to find the right choice.' (p. 264).

I want you to write an essay that examines the argument made by Lau and Redlawsk in the context of the Iowa caucuses. What kind of information environment is found in the Iowa caucuses? And what kinds of decision-strategy or strategies (the four models presented by the authors) is that environment likely to encourage given the target audience (those like to participate in the caucuses). And how likely is that to lead to caucus-goers making a "correct vote" (as defined by Lau and Redlawsk). Finally, is the campaign for whom you are working – if your internship is not with a campaign, pick one of the campaigns to use as an example – communicating with voters in ways that are likely to clarify or obscure the choices they make, and what does this imply for the model described by Lau and Redlawsk?

This essay is due in class on October 3. Late essays will be penalized one letter grade for each class day they are late.

Please put your name on a separate cover sheet and no place else.

Your essay will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

- 1) Understanding of the information-processing model described in the book:
_____ 10 points.
- 2) Discussion of the Iowa caucuses as an information environment, including the provision of evidence to support that discussion: _____ 10 points.
- 3) Discussion of likely response of voters to the information environment of the caucuses: _____ 20 points.
- 4) Discussion of how campaigns can enhance or obscure the information environment: _____ 20 points.
- 5) Coherence of the essay, including, but not limited to, the connection between your evaluation of the Iowa caucus environment, campaign efforts and the ability of voters to make informed decisions at the caucuses: _____ 20 points.

6) Quality of writing (spelling, grammar, clarity, punctuation, proper citation of sources, etc.): _____ 20 points.