




On the Fence: A Voter's Guide To the 2008 Election

BY MARK HALPERIN

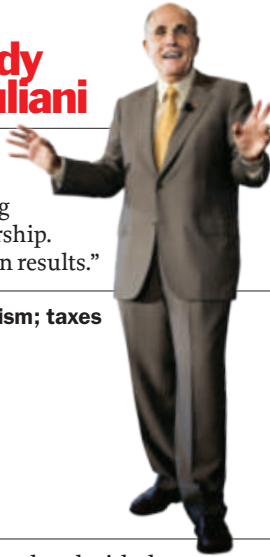
WE KNOW. BASEBALL playoffs have only just begun. You've barely thought about Thanksgiving, yet it's time to start figuring out whom to support for President. The recent announcement that Iowa voters plan to caucus while college-football bowl games are still being played in the first week of January just increases the odds that party nominees may be selected before most of the country has even tuned in. That's a problem, with the stakes so high in a country unsettled by war and so many untested—and still unfamiliar—candidates. A recent *TIME* poll shows Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton leading their respective competitors nationally, but the race is still wide open. Bill Clinton has described campaigning for President as a job interview, with an application process consisting of unrelenting media scrutiny and a grueling coast-to-coast gauntlet of events and debates. Here we present the top-tier finalists for the job.

Halperin's newest book, The Undecided Voter's Guide to the Next President, will be out Oct. 16

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DANIEL BARRY—BLOOMBERG; ROB KIM—LANDOV; EVAN AGOSTINI—GETTY; BROOKS KRAFT—CORBIS FOR TIME; LISA HORNAK—REUTERS; JOHN RAOUX—AP; PATRICK ANDRADE—ATLAS; ISTOCK; AP; GEORGE FREI—GETTY; ISTOCK (3); HEINZ RUCKENANN—UPI/LANDOV; LAKE COUNTY MUSEUM—CORBIS

	Hillary Clinton	Barack Obama	John Edwards
Slogan	"The strength and experience to bring real change."	None	"The campaign to change America."
Signature Issues	Experience; health care; and did we mention experience?	"Turning the page" on the old ways of Washington; U.S. foreign policy; and the Clinton-Bush years	Health care; poverty
What They Have	Strong support from women; a sense of inevitability; the best political brand name in the Democratic Party; former President as spouse and campaign adviser; discipline	Charisma; energy and youthful enthusiasm; an appeal and outsider-reformer credentials that match the hunger for change among Democratic voters and Americans in general	Strong support base in Iowa; populism with a smile ; fearlessness about challenging Clinton
What They Need	A win in Iowa 	To get his understated message through the hurly-burly carnival atmosphere of a presidential campaign and to convince voters that he is ready to become Commander in Chief just over a year from now	To have Iowa's Democrats make him the comeback kid in the caucuses; more labor-union endorsements
Liabilities	With voters looking for change, a continuation of the Bush-Clinton-Bush-Clinton dynastic cycle is a tough sell; tens of millions of Americans are dead set against her	Inexperience; the difficulty of contrasting himself with Clinton without seeming too negative and strident	Overshadowed by Clinton and Obama in fund raising, celebrity and inevitability; haircuts and hedge-fund ties bringing up questions about his commitment to the middle class
Look For	How she responds when directly attacked; organization and endorsements in Iowa, that all-important first state, where she's still in a three-way tie with Edwards and Obama	Al Gore's endorsement? 	A possible first trip to Iraq ; whether he pulls out all the stops to go after Clinton (and whether Obama ends up benefiting from his efforts)
What You Don't Know About Them	Likes: Power-walking, crossword puzzles and the music of Aretha Franklin Biggest junk-food weakness: Chocolate ice cream Most memorable childhood activity: "On Christmas mornings, my father and the other fathers in the neighborhood would load us all into the car and take us ice-skating on the Des Plaines River, near where I grew up."	Biggest junk-food weakness: French fries Most memorable childhood activity: Bodsurfing Favorite vacation place: Hawaii	 Biggest junk-food weakness: Cheeseburgers Most memorable childhood activity: "Playing football with my father." Favorite vacation place: North Carolina beaches

Rudy Giuliani



Mitt Romney



Fred Thompson



John McCain



“Strong leadership. Proven results.”

“True strength for America’s future.”

“Security. Unity. Prosperity.”

“Courageous service. Experienced leadership. Bold solutions.”

Terrorism; taxes

Spending restraint; skilled management; opposition to gay marriage

Limiting the role of the Federal Government; entitlement reform

Commitment to military involvement in Iraq; fiscal discipline; battling global warming

A strong bond with the American people from 9/11; the perception that he can **beat Hillary Clinton;** current strength in big states like Florida, New York and California

Polling leads and strong organizations in Iowa, New Hampshire and Michigan; **the most relentless work ethic** of all the candidates; a telegenic wife and five campaigning sons

Celebrity; an easy connection with voters on the stump; strong national poll numbers (despite tepid press reviews of his campaign performance); status as the only Southern conservative in the top tier

An **inspiring personal history;** experience on the presidential campaign trail; loyal supporters in New Hampshire; flickers of his old straight-talking self

A large Republican field (to divide up the social conservative vote); an inconclusive and inconsequential result in Iowa; a strong showing in New Hampshire

Movement upward in national, South Carolina and Florida polls; **personal connection with the American people**



A breakout debate performance; strong enough placements in the early contests to demonstrate that he’s a contender and to head into **South Carolina** as a clear finalist

For Republican voters to ignore his stand on immigration and for independent voters to overlook his stand on the Iraq war; a win in the New Hampshire primary

Socially liberal positions of which many voters are still unaware; a checkered personal past; 9/11-related controversies

His **Mormon faith** and his reputation for flip-flopping on many key issues

Perceptions that he is **lazy and unprepared;** a weeks-old campaign that is still scrambling to put the basic elements of advisers and organization in place

His age; the collapse of his base of support and national momentum; a press corps that is over its honeymoon with him; an absence of new ideas

Whether he keeps his famous vituperative, **snappish streak** in check when the inevitable attacks come his way

Tens of millions of **his own money** he could pour into his campaign; whether and how he contrasts his record with that of chief rival Giuliani to get the New Yorker one on one

Folksy television commercials featuring Thompson gazing straight into the camera and addressing voters directly

Whether he can get enough of his mojo back to come out of **New Hampshire** on a roll to the nomination

Factoid: Started an opera club in high school

Biggest junk-food weakness: Pie

Most memorable childhood activity: “Playing baseball and going to baseball games.”

Most memorable childhood activity: “As a child and young person, I got to spend a good portion of my summer on Lake Huron . . . where my family and I had barbecues and went swimming and boating.”

Favorite place to vacation: “Any place close to a golf course.”

Favorite place to vacation: Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire



Past jobs: Church-pew-factory worker, package deliveryman, shoe clerk and high-priced Washington lobbyist

Quote with his high school yearbook photo: “The lazier a man is, the more he plans to do tomorrow.”

Biggest junk-food weakness: Sugared doughnuts

Most memorable childhood activity: Going to camp in San Diego

Favorite place to vacation: Sedona, Ariz.

