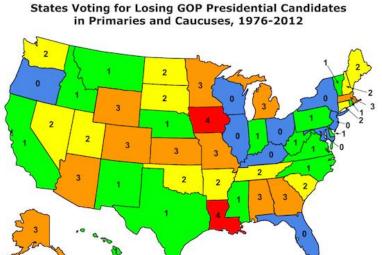
"Why Primaries Are Better Than Caucuses " Washington Post, April 20, 2015 By Philip Bump http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/04/20/why-primaries-are-better-than-caucuses/

lowa is very proud of its status as the first state to weigh in on presidential races every four years with its caucuses -perhaps equally as proud as New Hampshire is to be the "first in the nation" presidential primary. But New Hampshire should be more proud. That's because primaries do a much better job of picking the eventual winner than do caucuses. A post at the Smart Politics blog detailing the success of the various states in picking the eventual nominee got us thinking. It included the map below, which shows how many times since 1976 each state has picked a candidate in the Republican nomination process that went on to lose.



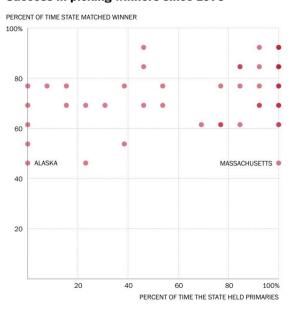
Compiled by Smart Politics, www.smartpoliticsblog.ord

(Yes, yes, we are aware of a certain Mr. Obama.) New

Hampshire has had its misses, too, but notably fewer.

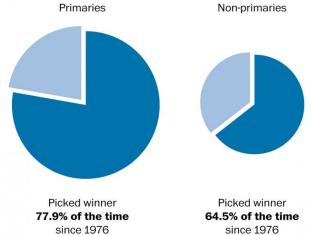
No state always picked the eventual winner. Several came close, usually getting tripped up in tightly contested nomination battles -- for example, New Jersey and Texas picking Clinton in 2008, or Wisconsin and Oregon picking Gary Hart in 1984. Virginia was the only state that with frequent caucuses which picked 12 of 13 winners. (Smart Politics has its one miss in the 1976 race, when it backed Ronald Reagan over non-elected incumbent Gerald Ford; we don't include that race

Success in picking winners since 1976



Iowa sticks out like a sore thumb. Which made us curious about how each system did overall. We used data on the type of election from Frontloading HQ and results from Wikipedia to calculate picks in races in which there was no incumbent. Of the 650 total contests since 1976, more than 440 were primaries. The results of the primaries matched the eventual winner 77.9 percent of the time. The results of the caucuses: only 64.5 percent.

Of course, lowa, given its petulant insistence on going first, usually has a wider field of candidates from which to choose. But it's not like Mike Huckabee in 2008 or Rick Santorum in 2012 used that momentum to dash along to the presidency.



because of the incumbent. Our numbers reflect Virginia's one miss as Jesse Jackson in 1984.)

There wasn't a strong correlation between how often a state held primaries and how often it picked the winner, but there was a trend. The graph below shows the frequency of primaries (versus conventions and caucuses) against how many successful picks the state made.

Notice that even primary states can do badly. Massachusetts insists on picking candidates who won't go on to win, for some reason. So. We've argued before that Iowa shouldn't be the first state to vote. We amend that statement to say, "unless it actually holds a real primary." We can be patient, though, anticipating the change that will emerge once people realize that caucuses are not the best way to predict a president.