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MAY POLLING SHOWS INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE MICHAEL BRIDGFORD DRAWING 10.4% IN IOWA'S 1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT WITH NAME ID AT 19% LESS THAN 40 DAYS FROM LAUNCH

District polling reveals broad voter openness to independent representation as race tightens

BETTENDORF, Iowa — July 20, 2026 — A district-level survey of 940 registered voters in Iowa's 1st Congressional District, conducted in May 2026 by Independent Center Voice, found independent congressional candidate Michael Bridgford drawing 10.4% support on the general election ballot test — a figure made more striking by the fact that 19% of respondents had already heard of him, just 40 days after he launched his campaign.

At that point, the campaign was focused solely on signature petitions for ballot access. That an independent candidate hit double digits, without any party or institutional infrastructure, and with name recognition of just 19%, is a result few political analysts would have projected.

The broader survey findings show the opening Bridgford is running into. Sixty-six percent of district voters said they're open to supporting an independent who is willing to work with both parties. Nearly 78% said a candidate's positions matter as much as or more than party affiliation. Among self-identified independents — more than 35% of the district's registered voters — openness to an independent candidate climbed to nearly 75%.

On the ballot test itself, the Democratic candidate led at 32%, the Republican followed at 28%, and 28% remained undecided — a striking concentration of persuadable voters in a district where nearly two-thirds say they're open to an independent.

That was May. Two months later, the campaign looks nothing like it did then.

Since the survey was fielded, Bridgford has knocked on doors and met thousands of voters face-to-face across the district, building the kind of direct, retail relationships that don't show up in a name-ID number until weeks later. At the same time, his social media presence has taken off: a single campaign video has topped 385,000 views, total campaign views across platforms are approaching one million, and his follower base doubled in a single week. The 19% name-ID gap documented in May is closing fast — and closing from two directions at once, in person and online.

"It's the real conversations at the doors and in public that tell me exactly what Iowa needs. My job is to listen, then go represent the people of the district, not party bosses or special interests," said Bridgford.

Iowa's 1st Congressional District carries real national weight heading into November. Rated a toss-up by the Cook Political Report, the race pits a well-funded, establishment backed Republican incumbent and Democratic challenger against an independent who, by the numbers available in May, was already outperforming expectations before two more months of campaigning. If that survey was the baseline, the real question now is how much ground has shifted since — and the campaign's answer is: a lot.

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Survey conducted May 2026 by Independent Center Voice. Sample size: 940 registered voters, Iowa's 1st Congressional District. Results are unweighted and should be treated as directional. Full topline available at

<https://independentcentervoice.com/insights/in-iowas-first-district-neither-party-has-a-lock>.