

# Let's Dissect the Iowa Caucuses

For about three-fourths of Iowa Republicans, Monday night's first-in-the-nation caucus was at least a little bit disappointing. But there's a lot more to the story than just simply who won and the 11 others who didn't.

So, let's take a look at what worked, what didn't, who's in, who's out and what it all means as the Republican nominating process advances toward Cleveland.

## Retail Politics

Going door-to-door is still the most effective way to win over voters. Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio proved that with their very strong showings. Whoever wins the GOP nomination had better remember that when Iowa, a swing state in the last four election cycles, becomes important again in the late summer and early fall.

## Get Out the Vote

Except for the much-ballyhooed Trump grass-roots effort—which failed to show up in many key precincts across the state—and Rand Paul's efforts to woo the “younger voters,” most of the traditional GOV efforts worked. The end result: nearly 185,000 voters, which is about 51 percent more than the previous record of 122,000 set in 2008.

The top two campaigns, in terms of grass-roots organization, were Cruz Crew and Team Rand. Cruz relied on door-knocking and retail politicking in all 99 counties, and his precinct captains averaged 32.7 voters apiece, compared to 8.4 for Rand's precinct captains. Phone banking was even less effective for the Paul camp, netting a less than 1 percent success rate.

## **Ted Cruz**

As the winner, he clearly reinforced the notion that traditional campaigning in Iowa works. Six months ago, several of his people were telling me they hoped for a top-four finish. That was when there was an expectation that Jeb Bush and Ben Carson would finish much better than they did.

But he's yet to win over the rest of the country. New Hampshire will be difficult for him to win, by any stretch of the imagination, but South Carolina is a must-win if he wants to continue his momentum into Super Tuesday and beyond.

## **Donald Trump**

As the runner-up, this could've been the beginning of the end for the national front-runner. A meltdown, a la Howard Dean in 2008, would've been a deal breaker. Instead, he offered a rare magnanimous speech that sounded hardly like the words of someone who isn't used to coming in second place.

Expect him to spend a lot more time on the ground in New Hampshire over the next week. He can ill afford another poor showing in the Granite State. He held off Rubio in Iowa, but the Florida senator was perhaps the biggest winner Monday night, because he has the most momentum in the establishment lane.

Clearly, the "Shock & Awe" style of campaigning doesn't work in Iowa, where voters have spent decades being able to have face-to-face conversations with their candidates. New Hampshire voters are used to the same kind of attention; it's a smaller state and easier to cover in a week's time—it will be interesting to see if his campaign changes gears.

## **Marco Rubio**

Running a close third to the media-described "top two" provides an enormous amount of momentum going into New

Hampshire, which votes in just seven days. Rubio was, at one time, running in second in the Granite State, but has seen John Kasich move into contention there.

Kasich had a predictably poor outing in Iowa, having spent almost no time at all in the Hawkeye State. He doesn't have the momentum-boosting headline of a "close third" in Iowa to share with New Hampshire Republicans, who tend to skew a little more left of center.

Rubio's strong finish in Iowa also reinforced the time-tested retail campaign strategy in Iowa. Many of the barely visited counties went his way on Monday night because he took the time to visit them. Had he spent more time on the ground in Iowa earlier in the campaign, he might very well have won the Hawkeye State.

### **The GOP Establishment**

The epitaph is yet to be chiseled in stone for the GOP establishment, but in Iowa, it's all but dead. The anti-establishment candidates accounted for nearly two-thirds of the vote Monday night, and by virtue of a firm victory for Cruz, the kingmaker status for Gov. Terry Branstad is effectively crippled.

It will be interesting to see in the days ahead if the establishment wing of the party decides to get behind Trump or Rubio, another candidate, or if it splinters in several different directions. We are seeing, at least at this early stage, the same problems that have plagued committed Christians and grass-roots conservatives in the past few election cycles.

### **Huckabee and Santorum**

The old conventional wisdom—that being a previous winner of the Iowa Republican Caucus matters to voters—was thrown out the window early on by the polls. But traditionally, polls

have been very poor indicators of the strength of Christian and/or conservative candidates.

Still, Huckabee and Santorum, despite doing “all the right things” in terms of retail politics, landed pretty much where the polls said they would. The only plausible explanation, as cold as it might sound, is that conservative and Christian voters, by and large, rejected their respective messages.

Huckabee has already announced he’s done, and not too ironically, Trump has a campaign event scheduled for Wednesday in Little Rock, Arkansas, so I think we all know what’s happening there. According to sources close to Santorum’s campaign, he’s pretty much done, too, but may not announce a suspension for a few days.

It’s very difficult to envision a scenario where either of them is able to resurrect his political career as a candidate. Both could be useful as officials in a Republican administration next January, or both could move on to broadcast media. Huckabee was a highly successful host on FOX News Channel before launching his campaign, and Santorum has filled in a couple of times for my good friend, nationally syndicated talk radio host Steve Deace.

## **Pollsters**

The polls leading up to Caucus Night all had Trump in the lead, solidly. Only one had Rubio anywhere close to Trump. Monday’s results clearly demonstrated the traditional methods of polling are no longer effective. The question now is whether or not there is an effective way to capture that information.

Gallup decided at the onset of the 2016 presidential race to get out of the polling business when it came to elections. Instead, it’s focusing solely on issue-oriented polls. Are we seeing the end of the political pollster, or can they regain their relevance in the 21st century?

## Democrats

The Democrat Party has come to a fork in the road, and it will be interesting to see which direction the majority within the organization will take. Even more interesting will be whether or not the minority in the party will follow along for the ride, or if they're going to insist upon a new direction.

And if the big tent folds, how will that impact future elections and, more importantly, the Republican Party?

The results Monday night demonstrate the Democrats haven't yet decided if they want a liberal-progressive-statist of the Saul Alinsky mold (Clinton) or the liberal-socialist-statist of the Karl Marx mold (Sanders). Being incapable of distancing itself from either radical leftwing world view, however (the demise of "traditional" Democrat candidates Jim Webb and Martin O'Malley), suggests the DNC has big problems looming on the horizon.