

One Last Look at Tuesday's 3 Biggest Prizes

Tuesday, presidential nominating contests will take place in 12 states in what is being billed as "Super Tuesday I" and the "SEC Primary."

Not only will nearly one-quarter of the states go to the polls, but 632 delegates—nearly half of what is needed to win the GOP presidential nomination—will be at stake. But more than 40 percent of those delegates will be distributed by just three states: Alabama, Tennessee and Texas.

Because of the way these states allocate their delegates, it is possible that front-runner Donald Trump could cement his position, or a challenger—either U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) or Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.)—could turn the race for the Republican nomination into a two-candidate affair.

More than half of the voters in the GOP primaries Tuesday will be evangelicals. The percentage is even higher in the three biggest states, meaning committed Christians have not only the opportunity, but the responsibility, to affect the 2016 presidential campaign going forward.

Here's an in-depth look at the three biggest Super Tuesday I states and how evangelicals may play a role in their outcomes, based on the most recent polling data.

Alabama

The Cotton State sends 50 delegates to the Republican National Convention. It's an open primary with a delegate allocation process that is a little different than what casual observers have watched so far in the 2016 campaign.

That process is called "winner-take-most," which injects some

really interesting mathematic gymnastics into the delegate counts. It works like this:

- If one candidate receives a majority of the votes, or only one candidate receives at least 20 percent, he will get all of the delegates.
- If no candidate receives a majority, but more than one candidate gets 20 percent of the vote, the delegates are awarded proportionally to all candidates receiving at least 20 percent.
- If no candidate receives 20 percent of the vote, the delegates are awarded proportionally.

There are seven congressional districts in Alabama, each one receiving three delegates. The state also gets 29 at-large delegates. In the Cotton State, the district and at-large delegates—minus the state party chair, national committeeman and national committeewoman—are directly elected on the primary ballot.

At the top of the ballot, voters will select their presidential candidate of choice. Down ballot, voters must then select the delegates of their choice, but must make those selections based upon the presidential candidate they have already selected.

Each of the state's 67 counties has its own ballot.

The ballot identifies the presidential candidate each delegate-candidate has committed to vote for at the national convention. In some cases, the candidates have more than the required number of delegates on the ballot.

A new poll released Monday morning by Monmouth University shows Trump leading Rubio by 23 points, 42-19, with Cruz trailing at 16 percent. If that holds out, Trump would win all of the at-large delegates, giving him another state majority.

Three-fourths of the voters said they were strongly decided on their presidential picks, with nearly half saying they're either completely decided, or have already taken part in early voting. Traditionally, evangelical voters make up about 75 percent of Republican primary voters in Alabama.

Tennessee

The Volunteer State brings a 58-delegate haul, making it the second-biggest prize of Super Tuesday I. Its open primary is also a winner-take-most contest that works this way:

- All of the delegates are awarded to the candidate who receives two-thirds of the votes, or if only one candidate receives more than 20 percent.
- At the district level, if more than one candidate receives 20 percent of the votes, the candidate with the most votes gets two delegates, and the runner-up gets one delegate.
- At the statewide level, if two or more receive at least 20 percent, the delegates are awarded proportionally to only those candidates who received 20 percent of the vote or more, based on the total votes for only those candidates.
- At the district level, if no candidate crosses the 20-percent threshold, each of the top three receives one delegate in that district.
- At the statewide level, if no candidate breaks the 20-percent threshold statewide, all delegates are distributed proportionally among all the candidates.

There are 27 district delegates and 31 at-large statewide delegates. But it doesn't end there. In Tennessee, like Alabama, most of the delegates are direct-elected. Half of the at-large delegates are selected by the Tennessee Republican Party's state executive committee.

Tennessee has "early voting," meaning voters could vote

absentee-in-person in the primary. A record-shattering number of voters—385,653, an increase of more than 17 percent over 2008—took part in early voting between Feb. 10 and 23 this year.

Based on past electoral history, between 20 and 25 percent of primary voters take part in early voting in Tennessee. If that holds, 2016 total turnout will also shatter the previous record of approximately 1,177,000 voters.

Over the weekend, Marist College released a poll of likely Tennessee voters conducted on behalf of *NBC News* and the *Wall Street Journal*. It was the first poll conducted in more than three months in the Volunteer State.

It found Trump had an 18-point lead, 40-22, over Cruz with Rubio trailing at 19 percent. It also found he had the highest “intensity of support” with 74 percent of those who picked him saying they strongly support his candidacy, compared to 62 and 49 percent, respectively, for Cruz and Rubio.

The data also indicated that nearly three-fourths of likely GOP voters self-identify as evangelical Christians. Trump’s support among white evangelicals was 39 percent, compared to 24 percent for Cruz and 20 percent for Rubio. It found about two-thirds of evangelicals were already deeply committed to their candidate of choice.

Texas

The Lone Star State is, by far, the biggest prize on Super Tuesday I, offering 155 delegates. Like Tennessee, its open primary is also a winner-take-most format, but with different criteria.

There are 36 congressional districts, meaning there are 108 district delegates (three each). The remaining 47 delegates are at-large based on statewide returns. Here’s how it works:

- If one candidate receives a majority of the votes, he will get all of the delegates.
- At the district level, if no candidate receives a majority, but at least one candidate gets 20 percent of the vote, the district winners each get two delegates and the runner-up gets one.
- At the statewide level, if no candidate receives a majority, but at least one candidate gets 20 percent of the vote, the delegates are awarded proportionally among the top two candidates.
- At the district level, if no candidate receives 20 percent of the vote, the top three candidates each receive one delegate.
- At the statewide level, if no candidate receives 20 percent of the vote, the delegates are awarded proportionally.

Texas also has early voting, but the Secretary of State's Office only announced turnout for the 15 largest counties (the state has 254 counties). A little more than 1,107,000 early votes were cast in those counties, which is slightly lower than the record set in 2008.

The Lone Star State has nearly 9.2 million registered voters.

YouGov released a new poll over the weekend on behalf of *CBS News*, which showed Cruz with a 42-31 lead over Trump with Rubio trailing at 19 percent. If those numbers held, Cruz would receive 27 at-large delegates to Trump's 20.

About 59 percent of likely Republican voters surveyed self-identified as "born-again or evangelical Christian." Among them, Cruz was the first-choice candidate of 43 percent, while Trump won 31 percent support, and Rubio got 18 percent.

Of the evangelical voters who have selected a candidate, 80 percent said they were unlikely to change their votes.

However, the poll also found “matters of faith and religion” were most important to less than half of voters. Among evangelicals, only 56 percent said the faith of the candidate they vote for had to align with their own.

They were more concerned about—in rank order—Obamacare, the Second Amendment, immigration, the handling of ISIS and economic issues.

Interestingly, a plurality of evangelicals saw Trump as the candidate with the most optimistic message, as well as the candidate who has the best chance to win in November. Meanwhile, Cruz was seen at the most conservative and the candidate with the best kind of experience.