

Political Insider Admits: Media Controlling GOP Primary

The presidential nominating process has become a reality television show: Political Survivor. It's no longer controlled by political parties or primary voters. It's controlled by the media.

The essential features of the process are debates and polls. And money? Not really. Look at former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. He raised more than \$100 million, enough to scare off most competitors in the old days. Now he's struggling to remain viable.

Two contestants, Texas Governor Rick Perry and Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, were voted off the island before a single primary took place. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie were banished to the Isle of No Return to dwell among the low a contest controlled by the media, personality beats policy. Candidates with colorful and attention-grabbing personalities have the advantage. Even candidates with abrasive personalities, like Donald Trump. And goofy personalities, like Ben Carson.

The process also rewards candidates with well-honed debating skills like Florida Senator Marco Rubio and Texas Senator Ted Cruz. Even though debating skill may not be an essential quality of a great president. Things like a solid record of achievement, practical ideas and endorsements by one's peers get discounted in today's media-driven process. Bush's new slogan – "Jeb Can Fix It" – does not seem to be catapulting him into the lead.

Governors used to do well in presidential contests because voters valued executive experience: Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush. This year, however,

governors and former governors – Bush, Christie, Huckabee, Ohio Governor John Kasich, former New York Governor George Pataki – are languishing. Their policymaking experience often includes deals and compromises. Even governors with strong records don't necessarily do well in debates.

The media claim to be an impartial arbiter in the process – but that's become a joke. To survive in a digital world, the press has become more sensational and opinionated. When they stage presidential debates, the networks have a different objective than the candidates. The candidates want to win supporters. The networks want to make the CNBC debate last month, we saw what happens when the process gets out of control. The moderators tried to expose personal weaknesses and bait the candidates into attacking each other. Anything for ratings and tweets.

But the candidates outsmarted them. They made the media the issue. That's how Carson wiggled out of the charge that he has misrepresented his past. Asked in the most recent debate whether he was having a problem with press scrutiny of his background, Carson replied, "What I do have a problem with is being lied about and then putting that out there as truth."

The media claim that voters really do have a voice in the process. National poll standings determine which candidates are invited to participate in the debates and how they are ranked on stage. It's an incredible abuse of poll data.

For example, the false precision used to rank the contenders is ridiculous. Drawing a line between Huckabee (not invited to the prime-time debate because his national polls averaged 2.4 percent), and Kasich (invited because he averaged 3.0 percent) is statistically isn't any national campaign, yet. Voters know little about the candidates, except for celebrities like Trump and Carson. All they can judge on is fleeting personal impressions from the debates.

How did we come to this?

It started in the 1970s, when reformers took control of nominations away from party bosses and turned it over to primary voters. But how are primary voters supposed to get the information they need to make a knowledgeable decision? Most voters today don't pay much attention to the advice of party leaders. But they do follow the media. So the media took control of the process. And used it for their own ends – sensationalizing the process to generate ratings and page clicks. And profits.

Voters in Iowa and New Hampshire are furious. They claim they have the right to winnow the candidates and separate the starters from the nonstarters. What gives them that right? The fact that they are small states. Candidates don't have to spend a lot of money to compete in Iowa and New Hampshire. But they do have to spend a lot of time there, meeting voters face to face. The voters of Iowa and New Hampshire say they have the experience and skill to know what makes for a good president. They claim they give thoughtful deliberation to their . But look at Christie. He has attended more than 40 events in New Hampshire over the past three months. But he's running eighth in the New Hampshire polls. Maybe the voters there just don't like him. But look who's leading in New Hampshire: the national media favorites, Trump and Carson.

Insiders expect the final survivors to be Rubio and Cruz, mostly because of their debating skills. Both are first-term senators. Neither has much of a record of achievement. An ad being aired by Cruz supporters asks, "What's Rubio ever done? Anything? Other than his Gang of Eight amnesty bill, can anyone think of anything Marco Rubio's ever done?" The Bush campaign is telling donors that Rubio would be "a GOP Obama."

A lot of people nourish the hope that the frivolous and distracting spectacle will soon end. The press will darken the debate stage and focus attention on the voters who will

actually be making the decision. As one New Hampshire voter told the New York Times, “When the tent comes down and the circus leaves town, maybe we’ll elect a president.” {eoa}

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