

Presidential Prognostication: A Tale of Two Polls

In the final six weeks before the first-in-the-nation Iowa Caucus, there will be a feast of presidential preference polls to track. In the past week, nearly a dozen new polls have been released, and in reviewing them, one thing is clear.

The mainstream media's reporting on poll results—and, more importantly, their analysis of them—appears to have an influence over future polls released by—you guessed it—the mainstream media.

Take, for instance, earlier this year, when Dr. Ben Carson suddenly emerged as a front-runner in Iowa. The media reported on the one poll's results as if they were a matter of fact, and slowly, over the next couple of weeks, the other polls “caught up.”

The polls are showing a similar trend with U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas). He emerged a couple weeks ago as a front-runner in Iowa—as reported by the same polling outfit that put Carson out front—and slowly, the other polls are catching up.

Except, where Carson eventually faded, it appears unlikely Cruz will do the same. To make that assessment, you have to look beyond the polls themselves and analyze the organizational strength of each campaign. In the case of Cruz, his campaign far surpasses almost all the others in terms of organization and grassroots support.

The real “X factor” in the current Republican presidential field, however, remains Donald Trump. Earlier this week, The Morning Consult, which analyzes those who are conducting the polls, discovered a potential anomaly in the current polls that suggests Trump's support might be underestimated by current methodology.

As everyone continues to ponder this new piece of the puzzle, have a look at the 30-day polling averages in each of the early voting states and nationally.

IOWA

The first-in-the-nation caucus state has become a dead heat between Cruz and Trump. Just two weeks ago, Trump still held a nearly 5-point lead. This week, Cruz holds a 2-point lead that is likely to grow in the coming days:

1. Ted Cruz
2. Donald Trump
3. Marco Rubio
4. Ben Carson
5. Jeb Bush
6. Rand Paul
7. Carly Fiorina
8. Chris Christie
9. Mike Huckabee
10. John Kasich
11. Rick Santorum
12. George Pataki

Carson is “cratering,” that is, his polling average is dropping off steeply. In the last two weeks, his polling average has lost nearly 6 points. His current two-week polling average is another 3 points lower. By mid-January, Jeb Bush may be back in fourth place in Iowa, if he isn’t surpassed by Chris Christie, who recently ramped up his efforts in the Hawkeye State.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

In the Granite State, Trump maintains an enormous lead over the rest of the field, and it's continuing to grow, despite the fact Cruz is gaining support. If Cruz and Rubio combined their support in New Hampshire, right now, Trump would still be leading by more than 5 points:

1. Donald Trump
2. Marco Rubio
3. Ted Cruz
4. Chris Christie
5. John Kasich
6. Jeb Bush
7. Ben Carson
8. Carly Fiorina
9. Rand Paul
10. Mike Huckabee
11. Rick Santorum
12. George Pataki

Christie has surged in New Hampshire, moving to within a half-point of Cruz and less than 2 points behind Rubio. Carson, however, is headed in the opposite direction, and has dropped to the bottom half of the field.

In the first primary state, the rest of the field is more spread out than in Iowa, a sign of the unsettled state that exists in the "establishment lane." Recent polls suggest Cruz has locked up the "conservative lane," while Trump has secured a plurality of support from all of the lanes, which gives him

enough support to maintain his large lead.

SOUTH CAROLINA

In South Carolina, social conservatives and evangelical Christians make up the bulk of the Republican primary voters. It also happens to be the state where Trump appears to have the most support. In many ways, the 30-day averages in the Palmetto State mirror the national averages for the top four candidates:

1. Donald Trump
2. Ted Cruz
3. Marco Rubio
4. Ben Carson
5. Jeb Bush
- 6-t. Rand Paul
- 6-t. Chris Christie
8. Carly Fiorina
9. Mike Huckabee
10. John Kasich
11. Rick Santorum
12. George Pataki

Cruz has more than doubled his support in just three weeks' time in South Carolina. Carson's support, meanwhile, has been halved. Rand Paul and Christie are both surging, although neither of them are in any position to threaten any of the top four. Mike Huckabee and John Kasich have both dropped off significantly.

COMBINED AVERAGE

Taking the combined averages of the first three early voting states, it's clearly a two-man race at the top, followed by three or four who can contend for delegates in states that give proportional allotment, followed by six candidates that, statistically, aren't likely to still be in the race by Super Tuesday:

1. Donald Trump
2. Ted Cruz
3. Marco Rubio
4. Ben Carson
5. Jeb Bush
6. Chris Christie
7. John Kasich
8. Carly Fiorina
9. Rand Paul
10. Mike Huckabee
11. Rick Santorum
12. George Pataki

NATIONAL

There remains very little difference between the combined average of the early voting states and the 30-day national polling averages. The two averages for nine of the candidates are within 2 points of each other. Carson's are within 3, Cruz' are within 4, and Trump's are within 5:

1. Donald Trump

2. Ted Cruz
3. Marco Rubio
4. Ben Carson
5. Jeb Bush
6. Chris Christie
7. Carly Fiorina
8. Rand Paul
9. John Kasich
10. Mike Huckabee
11. Rick Santorum
12. George Pataki