

Social Media Crowns Cruz Debate Winner, but Trump Scores on Sentiment

U.S. presidential candidate Ted Cruz drew the most attention on social media during Wednesday's Republican debate, mostly for accusing the CNBC moderators of a liberal bias.

Thomson Reuters' social media sentiment analysis showed the volume of tweets mentioning the U.S. senator from Texas was the highest among the candidates at 14,090, while celebrity real estate developer Donald Trump, a party front-runner, followed with 12,045.

Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, who was leading the latest national poll on the Republican 2016 primary race heading into the debate, was a distant third with 9,366 mentions during the night.

But in terms of sentiment, based on the ratio of positive versus negative tweets, Trump scored 15.2 on average, followed by Rand Paul, a U.S. senator from Kentucky, with an average score of , according to Thomson Reuters data.

Carson was third with an average score of 3.7, and Cruz followed with a reading of 3.3.

Scores of other candidates were negative. Former Hewlett-Packard Co Chief Executive Officer Carly Fiorina suffered the most with a negative 17.5 average. That marks a significant decline from the second Republican debate in September, when she was considered the "winner" on social media.

Marco Rubio, a U.S. senator from Florida, scored a negative 8.2 average, and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was at a negative 7.5. Other candidates – Former Florida Governor Jed

Bush, Ohio Governor John Kasich and former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee – scored between negative 4 and negative 5.

Cruz's criticism of the debate moderators and their "biased" line of questioning was the most trending moment on social media during the third Republican debate, which was considered a critical test for many candidates reaching the make-or-break point of their campaigns.

Rubio also got a moment of glory on social media when he handily eclipsed Bush, his one-time mentor.

In terms of gaining new followers on Twitter, Carson led the race with more than 15,000 by the end of the night, according to Engagement Labs, a social media technology and data analytics firm.

Trump had nearly 7,700 new followers, and Rubio got slightly more than 7,000. Cruz drew roughly 4,200 new followers by the end of the debate. {eoa}

(Additional reporting by Melissa Fares; Data compiled by Connie Yee, Thomson Reuters R&D; Editing by Lisa Von Ahn)

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