

What Exactly Are the Paths to the GOP Nomination?

Wednesday afternoon, in announcing his decision to not participate in Thursday's GOP presidential debate in his home city of Detroit, Dr. Ben Carson cited his lack of a "pathway to the nomination."

Republican National Committee rules require a candidate must have delegate majorities from eight states, as well as a majority of the total number of delegates. With even front-runner Donald Trump still needing about 900 delegates, and more than 1,700 delegates still available across about two-thirds of the states, it would seem anything's still possible.

At this juncture, in a four-man race, the best any one candidate can hope for is about 60 percent of the remaining delegates. That is because several states allocate delegates in a winner-take-all fashion.

March 15 is the magic date when RNC rules allow states to offer all of their delegates to the candidate who wins a plurality of the popular vote. That day, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio all have winner-take-all nominating events, as do the North Mariana Islands (don't count toward a state delegate majority).

That night, 295 delegates will be awarded in a winner-take-all fashion. After that, there will be 12 more winner-take-all contests, including California with its 172 delegates.

So, with that in mind, here's what each of the remaining GOP candidates must do to lock up the nomination before the campaign trail ends in Cleveland.

John Kasich—to secure the nomination, he would need to win 69 percent of the remaining delegates available, including

delegate majorities in eight states. He gave Trump a run for his money Tuesday in Vermont, arguably the most liberal state in the country. He's polling in the low single digits everywhere else. With the other front-runners still in the race, it is mathematically all but impossible for the Ohio governor to pull it off.

Marco Rubio—to secure the nomination, he would need to win 64 percent of the remaining delegates available, as well as delegate majorities in eight states. He's trailing in all of the winner-take-all states, making it practically impossible to see him pull that off in a four-man race. If there isn't a clear-cut nominee, however, he does have the establishment connections to make himself the new leader of the pack in Cleveland.

Ted Cruz—to secure the nomination, he would need to win 58 percent of the remaining delegates available, as well as delegate majorities in eight states (he didn't win a majority in Alaska, Oklahoma, or Texas on Tuesday). It's very difficult, given the current electoral environment, but not as impossible as it would be for others, given he's pulling into contention for a few of the winner-take-all states coming up.

Donald Trump—there's a reason why many are considering him the presumptive nominee. He already has delegate majorities in four states (South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee), and has so far won 40 percent of the delegates awarded. He needs to win majorities in four more states (he leads in the polls in a number of winner-take-all states) and about half of the remaining delegates.