

What Will the Caucus Turnout Be?

It's been three weeks since the latest polls were released either nationally or in early voting states, but narrowing the focus of our polling averages, while not changing any candidates standing, has sharpened the results.

Donald Trump remains the leader in every polling average except Iowa, where Ted Cruz now holds a lead, which is still within the margin of error for the combined average there. In New Hampshire, Trump leads by 13 points, while in South Carolina, it's 11 points.

With less than four weeks before the first-in-the-nation Iowa Republican Caucus, we'll take a look at turnout projections.

Iowa

In the Hawkeye State, Ted Cruz' lead is boosted by one poll that has him at 40 percent. Essentially, until a new poll comes out, the first contest in the nominating process is a dead heat on paper:

1. Ted Cruz
2. Donald Trump
3. Marco Rubio
4. Ben Carson
- 5-t. Jeb Bush
- 5-t. Mike Huckabee
7. Carly Fiorina
- 8-t. Rand Paul

8-t. Chris Christie

8-t. John Kasich

11. Rick Santorum

Could we see a repeat of 2012, where a low-polling candidate (this time, Mike Huckabee) suddenly emerges at the 11th hour? Based on ground-level observations, it seems unlikely, but there are a lot of variables that go into a Caucus win. Still, Mike Huckabee is now in the upper half of the field.

Marco Rubio is beginning to drop off and Ben Carson's "slide" continues to gain momentum (older polls that are no longer part of the average were helping stay above 10 percent). It will be important to see how their numbers change in the next round of polls.

Caucus Turnout

The record for Iowa Republican Caucus turnout is around 125,000. Most "experts" say that based on increases in GOP voter registrations and the impact of "outsider" campaigns—such as Trump and Carson—turnout could be as high as 135,000 on Feb. 1.

Three major factors play into how that estimate may change as we get closer to Caucus Night:

- the weather
- the ability of the outsiders to turn supporters who haven't voted in the past into caucus attendees
- the "X factor"—is there an issue that will come up between now and then that will completely change the dynamics of the race?

So, based only on what we know now, and assuming weather will be reasonably good—for February in Iowa—let's stick with the

experts' number and project the turnout, based on polling and ground-level observations:

1. Donald Trump 43,500
2. Ted Cruz 42,000
3. Marco Rubio 11,000
4. Rick Santorum 8,000
5. Mike Huckabee 7,000
6. Rand Paul 6,500
7. Ben Carson 5,000
8. Jeb Bush 4,500
9. Chris Christie 3,500
10. Carly Fiorina 2,500
11. John Kasich 1,500

New Hampshire

In the Granite State, it's still Trump, then everyone else, almost literally. Although there is a 13-point lead between Trump and second-place Marco Rubio, the gap between Rubio and seventh-place Ben Carson is just 8 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-t. Mike Huckabee
- 10-t. Rick Santorum

Of the 11 candidates, only four lost fractions of a point on their averages: Trump, Carson, Huckabee and Rick Santorum. Everyone else saw increases ranging up to a couple of points. This has had the net impact of tightening the middle of the field.

South Carolina

In South Carolina, both Trump and Cruz saw their averages increase, while Carson's continues to fall:

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-t. Mike Huckabee
- 9-t. John Kasich
11. Rick Santorum

For the most part, candidates at the bottom of the field saw their averages increase, which is indicative of fewer undecided voters. No new polls have come out since Lindsey Graham and George Pataki dropped out, but their impact on the race going forward is likely to be negligible.

Combined Average

Very little has changed in the combined averages for the first three early voting states:

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

National

With no new polls, the national polling average for the Republican candidates merely reflects a more immediate view from a smaller sample size. As a result, Cruz has moved up some, Carson has moved down some, and everyone else has remained fairly steady:

1. Donald Trump

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