

IOWA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, AND WHAT'S NEXT

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February 14, 2020

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN 2020 | ELECTION SERIES

The nearly yearlong Challenges and Opportunities in 2020 election series is a forum for academics, journalists, and others to comment on the issues at stake in the 2020 presidential election, and related topics front and center in American politics and society. The series promotes interdisciplinary conversations that explore undercurrents and themes affecting the upcoming election and the integrity of—and trust in—our democratic institutions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ROBERT Y. SHAPIRO

President, Academy of Political Science

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the panelists for participating in this event: David Redlawsk, Dante Scala, Walter Shapiro, and Christina Greer. They offered thought-provoking takes on the Democratic race so far and what to expect leading up to the convention.

I would also like to acknowledge the President of The American Assembly, Peter Bearman, and staff from The American Assembly and INCITE—Cadence Bambenek, Michael Falco, and Julius Wilson—for ensuring the panel's success and making the Challenges and Opportunities in 2020 election series possible. I thank Loren Morales Kando and Marianna Palumbo (summary report author) from the Academy of Political Science for their assistance in planning the panel.

The 2020 Iowa Caucuses

DAVID P. REDLAWSK

TO GAIN INSIGHT into Iowa voters' perspectives, David Redlawsk spent six months in Iowa leading up to caucus day. He saw 24 Democratic candidates, 33 cities, 101 events, and 133 speeches. During that time, Iowa voters were overwhelmingly unsure of whom to support.

IOWA VOTERS' CONCERNS

- Voters were having a tough time choosing between their top four or five candidates. Why?
- In Iowa, voters simultaneously sort of liked all of the candidates and sort of worried about all of them.
- Of the last eight polls in Iowa leading up to caucus day, four put Sanders ahead and four put Biden ahead.
- A survey of over 1,300 likely Iowa caucus voters demonstrated that each frontrunner had a characteristic that voters perceived as a challenge to their ability to win in November: Joe Biden's age, Pete Buttigieg's sexuality, Bernie Sanders's heart attack, and Elizabeth Warren's gender.
 - Biden supporters were concerned about his age, though somewhat less so than the overall sample.
 - Buttigieg supporters were as concerned about his sexuality as the overall sample. Younger voters were less concerned than older voters.
 - Sanders's voters were not particularly concerned about his heart attack, though the overall sample was.
 - Warren supporters, as well as female voters, were more likely than the overall sample to think her gender would be a challenge for November.

SURVEY OF IOWA COUNTY PARTY LEADERS

- Iowa Democratic Party county chairs are responsible for the caucuses in their respective counties. They understand what is happening on the ground and are engaged in the caucus process.
- County chairs did a bad job of anticipating statewide caucus results. However, they were much more accurate in anticipating Buttigieg's support in their own counties.

- They also accurately predicted which candidates would do better or worse than expected. Nearly half of the county chairs predicted Amy Klobuchar would exceed expectations, but not nearly as many expected the same for Buttigieg. Additionally, over 30 percent predicted Biden would do worse than expected.

IOWA CAUCUS SYSTEM

- A critical component of caucuses is the potential for second choices. Candidates are judged in each precinct independently. Candidates who receive at least 15 percent on the first vote are considered viable and get delegates to the state convention.
- If a candidate gets less than 15 percent in the first vote, they are considered non-viable. Their voters either leave the caucus site, combine with another non-viable group, or switch to another candidate.

2020 IOWA CAUCUS RESULTS

- In the first alignment, Sanders did as expected; Biden did much worse; Buttigieg, Warren, and Klobuchar all beat their expectations.
- In the final alignment, Sanders and Warren each bumped up slightly, and Buttigieg got a major bump.
- Warren was voters' top second-choice candidate, followed by Klobuchar, Buttigieg, and Biden. Sanders was nobody's second choice.

2020 IOWA CAUCUS MISHAP

- A caucus is not a primary, and trying to make it one is what led to the mess. It is not a vote, but rather an expression of preferences. It has been turned into a vote by media and candidate demands.
- Over 95 percent of precincts did not need to canvass. Given the New Hampshire results, Iowa results look essentially correct.

The 2020 New Hampshire Primaries

DANTE SCALA

BERNIE SANDERS WON his second consecutive primary in New Hampshire on 11 February (after beating Hillary Clinton in 2016). However, he won with just barely over one-fourth of the vote—the smallest winning percentage in a New Hampshire Democratic primary since 1972.

THE EXPECTATIONS GAME PLAYED OUT

- After the Iowa caucuses, there was a small bump up in support for Sanders in New Hampshire. There was a big bounce for Buttigieg, who exceeded expectations in Iowa. Warren's support essentially remained flat.
- Klobuchar's support increased just slightly after Iowa. However, she performed exceedingly well in the pre-New Hampshire debate on 7 February. She stole Buttigieg's thunder and attracted new support in New Hampshire.
- Support for Biden, who disappointed more than any other candidate in Iowa, started to fall drastically.
- Scala believes that if Biden had proven himself in Iowa, a lot of moderate Democrats in New Hampshire would have voted for Biden. However, his electability took a big hit.

WHEN DID NEW HAMPSHIRE VOTERS DECIDE?

- According to exit polls, roughly 30 percent of New Hampshire Democratic voters made their decision in 2019. Approximately 18 percent chose their candidate in January and early February.
- About 50 percent of the electorate decided on a candidate either in the last few days before the primary or on New Hampshire primary day.
- Polls over the weekend (after the debate, but before primary day) showed Klobuchar rising. How high could she go? Roughly half of her voters decided in just the last few days.
- Nearly half of Sanders's New Hampshire voters were already with him by the start of 2020.
- Some Buttigieg voters decided early, though almost 40 percent decided in early February.
- Scala explained that momentum makes a candidate more visible nationally to voters who would be a natural audience—not to voters with no affinity for the candidate.

THE SANDERS COALITION

- Sanders's support among young voters (18–29) is double that of his statewide support. The same is true for his support among very liberal voters. They have “found their champion” in Sanders, which is Warren's dilemma.
- Sanders and Biden are both competing for the vote of white men with no college degree. More supported Sanders in New Hampshire.
- About 10 percent of the Democratic electorate in New Hampshire is made up of minority voters. Among them, Sanders was the leader—his outreach efforts paid off.

VOTER CHARACTERISTICS

- Buttigieg carried the southeastern region of New Hampshire—the outer suburban ring of the Boston metropolitan area. In these areas, Sanders finished third behind Klobuchar. Buttigieg also did well in the northern, rural areas where there are typically more Republicans.
- Klobuchar often spoke about her humble roots, though this did not translate to support from voters without college degrees. She did well among both white men and women with college degrees.

POST-NEW HAMPSHIRE PRIMARIES

- Biden, the frontrunner for most of 2019 took a big hit in Iowa and New Hampshire. Sanders became a frontrunner after Iowa and New Hampshire. Buttigieg had a mild spike. Michael Bloomberg began rising as Warren was fading. Klobuchar still needed to garner more support to catch up.
- Iowa and New Hampshire did their job—sort of. Usually two candidates emerge, but instead we had about four, which is unusually high.
- Biden poses several challenges for the Democrats: he is a weak frontrunner coming out of New Hampshire, and has prevented a younger, electable candidate from rising.

A Journalist's Perspective

WALTER SHAPIRO

THE OUTCOME of this Democratic nomination process is virtually unknowable at this point in time. Having covered 11 presidential campaign cycles, Walter Shapiro considers this the most baffling and unprecedented.

PROBLEMS WITH POLLING

- Despite media publishing national polls, there is no national primary. Conducting a national poll costs roughly the same as one state poll, and sounds much more impressive.
- Democrats choose 75 percent of the convention delegates by congressional district. Thus, even statewide polls cannot account for variance among congressional districts.
- The nation is in a polling vacuum until after Super Tuesday. There is not enough time to conduct quality polls between the Nevada debate and its caucuses, the South Carolina debate and its primaries, and the South Carolina primaries and Super Tuesday.
- In every district, a candidate needs to receive 15 percent of the vote to be allocated delegates. Biden polling well with black voters in the South led to the speculation that he could be the only viable candidate in majority-minority districts. With Biden exceedingly wounded from Iowa and New Hampshire, nobody can predict what will happen.

WHERE THE CANDIDATES STAND

- Biden holds the record for the longest gap between his first and latest presidential runs. However, he has always been a terrible presidential candidate. In 1987, he was so desperate for a message that he relied too heavily on consultants. In 2007—much like today—he rambled, went on weird tangents, and lacked a theme. These odd behaviors are not a function of age; they are who Joe Biden is.
- Warren has the most compelling stump speech, and really speaks to a woman's journey: two steps forward, one-and-a-half steps back. This is so different from the typical male political narrative. However, she has failed to convey this angle well in debates and commercials.

- Klobuchar is the little engine that could. It is unprecedented for a candidate to come fifth in Iowa and then surge in New Hampshire. Shapiro believes there is a significant constituency in the Democratic Party that wants a woman nominee after Hillary Clinton's failure in 2016.
- Buttigieg is another unprecedented figure. The mayor of a city with a population of 102,000 has managed to outlast New York City's current mayor, Newark's former mayor, and San Antonio's former mayor. Democratic voters may see it as more historic to nominate a gay man for president than another woman. Alternatively, voters may see him as someone who lets nothing get under his skin.
- Bloomberg's campaign spending is completely unprecedented. However, it is easy to poll well when you are the only one on TV. It will get harder for him going into Super Tuesday as headlines feature other candidates' successes in early states.
- Media outlets are considering Sanders to be the frontrunner despite only one state having reliably counted its votes—a state in which he significantly underperformed. There has been no hidden vote for Sanders. He cannot win the nomination with just 30 percent of the vote (his perceived ceiling). Voters seem to be strictly either with him or against him.

THOUGHTS GOING FORWARD

- Who is most likely to win the nomination? Buttigieg, Klobuchar, and Bloomberg are all top-tier candidates. This is something no one could have predicted a year ago.
- For all the talk of a contested convention: it may happen. That is a journalist's dream. However, Shapiro will not believe it until he is in Milwaukee.

The Importance of the Black Vote

CHRISTINA GREER

MINORITY VOTERS IN 2020 are still heading to the polls without the full protections of the Voting Rights Act (1965). When discussing turnout, it is important to remember that voter fraud and intimidation are real threats to black and other marginalized voters.

IOWA CAUCUSES SHOULD NOT BE FIRST

- In a recent op-ed for *The Washington Post*, Greer argued that Iowa should not be the first to hold an electoral contest—largely because of its homogeneity, but also because of its locale.
- Greer suggested that Georgia go first—there is a rising number of Latinx and Asian American and Pacific Islander voters, and the black share of the electorate has been growing significantly.
- The issue with caucus votes is that they are not private. The Framers wanted to make sure we had secret ballots so that voters were not influenced by external factors such as work supervisors or religious leaders.

CANDIDATE CLUSTERS FOLLOWING IOWA AND NEW HAMPSHIRE

- Greer grouped candidates based on ideology: (1) Biden, Buttigieg, Klobuchar, (2) Warren, Sanders, (3) Bloomberg.
- The rise of Buttigieg has been fascinating. With Buttigieg polling close to zero percent amongst black voters, the South Carolina primaries may slow his momentum.
- Black voters are loyal to Biden because of his loyalty to Barack Obama. However, Obama not yet endorsing Biden says something, especially to young black voters.
- Klobuchar is relatively unknown, but her record as a prosecutor began receiving scrutiny. With Biden seen as fading after Iowa and New Hampshire, she started doing well among moderates.
- Warren has a Hillary Clinton problem. Voters do not like Warren, but cannot explain why. Some men claim she is too radical, despite being a Harvard law professor with an interest in economics.

- Sanders appears as the frontrunner with 23 percent of the vote. That means 77 percent of Democratic voters are not with him.

BLOOMBERG'S UNPRECEDENTED RUN

- Bloomberg purchased attention in ways never seen before. As the former mayor of New York City, he has been galvanizing mayors from across the nation and learning about their constituents. He customizes messages to voters based on the media market they are in.
- Many of Bloomberg's endorsements are from black mayors in red states. For black voters—especially single-issue voters who just want to remove Donald Trump—Bloomberg seems like the best candidate by the power of suggestion.
- Anyone with several billion dollars to spend could make it happen. However, can money beat time? Time is the one equalizing factor for all candidates.

BLACK VOTERS IN 2020

- Black women are the keepers of the Democratic Party at this moment.
- Black voters are intrinsically strategic. They tend to stay in protectionist mode (Biden, Buttigieg, Klobuchar) as opposed to advancement mode (Sanders, Warren). They may choose to vote for their second or even third choice in anticipation of how white voters in their state might swing.
- Black voters are not single-issue voters. Many black voters will not be anti-Bloomberg just because of stop-and-frisk.
- Black men are susceptible to the Republican Party in ways black women are not. Trump appeals especially to military and aspirational black men.

Question and Answer Takeaways

ATTENDEES HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to ask the panelists questions following the panel discussion.

WILL IOWA LOSE ITS PLACE AS FIRST IN THE NATION?

- Iowa has been the first nominating contest since 1972. Redlawsk explained that Iowa, as first in the nation, matters because of the way media covers it. Pundits set expectations pre-Iowa based on polling and money raised. Pundits interpret the caucus results based on expectations, and media coverage shifts accordingly. Later voters take their cues from the Iowa results and media coverage.
- The Democratic National Committee has established rules that carve out dates for the first four states. Further, Iowa state law requires that it must be the first in the nation.
- There are a finite number of small states that are not influenced by neighboring big-city media markets, are not too expensive to campaign in, and are not too large to hinder travel.
- If a Democrat wins this fall, 2024 will presumably be uncontested. However, if Trump wins reelection, all bets are off for the entire structure.
- Redlawsk proposed running all of the first four states on the same day.
- Shapiro noted that some state has to go first, but that caucuses should be banned. He suggested New Hampshire first (it was the single closest toss up state in 2016), a southern state second, Iowa third as a primary, and then a western state fourth.

WOMEN CANDIDATES

- Because she peaked late, Klobuchar has not had time to go through serious vetting. Can she survive being taken to task, especially regarding her record as a prosecutor?
- Straight white men do not like Warren, though not for any particular reason (much like Clinton in 2016).

BROKERED CONVENTION?

- It is possible for the Democratic nominee to be none of the current candidates. After the first ballot, anything can happen. However, it is hard to imagine Sanders and his supporters giving way to anyone who got less support than he did.

HAS SANDERS HIT HIS CEILING?

- Redlawsk noted that Sanders has seemingly lost support since 2016.
- Scala did not think he has hit his ceiling yet. If he keeps winning, it could be possible for Democratic voters to bandwagon.
- Shapiro pointed out that Sanders is nobody's second choice. Additionally, as Greer highlighted, many of his 2016 voters were not Sanders supporters—they were anti-Hillary.
- Post-New Hampshire, Sanders beats all other Democratic candidates in head-to-head polling.
 - Shapiro finds these polls fairly meaningless, as most voters only start to pay attention about a week before their own state primary/caucus day.
 - Greer countered this, stating that her own research shows that among black voters, Bloomberg beats all other Democratic candidates.