

Cruz wins Iowa Republican caucuses; Clinton and Sanders in near-tie

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By the early hours of Tuesday, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held a narrow lead in the Iowa Democratic caucuses over Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, with only a small fraction of precincts still to report. As of this writing, Clinton had 49.9 percent compared to 49.6 percent for Sanders.

In the Republican caucuses, Texas Senator Ted Cruz was declared the winner in a three-way contest with billionaire Donald Trump and Florida Senator Marco Rubio, with nine other Republican candidates trailing badly. Cruz had 28 percent of the vote, Trump had 24 percent and Rubio had 23 percent, a result that was at odds with recent polls showing Trump in the lead.

There was a heavy turnout compared to previous years in both the Democratic and Republican caucuses. Republican turnout was 185,000, up 54 percent from the previous record. There were no overall figures for the Democratic turnout because of the peculiar structure of that party's caucuses, which reported only the number of delegates elected to the state convention for each candidate, not actual vote totals.

Press reports suggested that Sanders fell short of the surge of new voters that propelled Barack Obama to victory in the 2008 Iowa caucuses, when a record 239,000 people turned out. First-time voters were a majority in 2008, but made up 40 percent of those participating this year.

There was a significant turnout of young people, particularly in precincts around the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, Northern Iowa University, and in other college towns. These backed Sanders overwhelmingly; his margin over Clinton among voters 30 and under, according to exit polls, was a remarkable 86 percent to 11 percent. By comparison, in 2008, Obama won 57 percent of under-30 voters, when he defeated Clinton and Senator John Edwards.

Sanders won low-income voters, those with household incomes under \$30,000 a year, by 16 points, and those in the \$30,000-\$50,000 bracket by 3 points. Clinton won voters in households with a union member by 9 points and black and Latino voters by 18 points. She won handily in households with incomes over \$100,000 a year. Her biggest margin came among the elderly, winning 70 percent of those 65 and older.

Other exit poll numbers point to the shift to the left expressed in the popular support for the Sanders campaign. Some 70 percent of Democratic caucus-goers described themselves as “very liberal,” and 90 percent said that health care, income inequality and the economy were the main issues. Only six percent cited terrorism as the main issue.

The Iowa caucuses account for only a tiny fraction of the delegates to the Democratic and Republican conventions—44 out of 4,763 for the Democrats, 30 out of 2,472 for the Republicans. But as the first statewide contest, and amplified by saturation media coverage, the results have major significance for the course of the presidential race.

In the Democratic contest, Clinton escaped a devastating defeat by the narrowest of margins, reflected in her comments at a late-night rally that she was “breathing a sigh of relief” over the Iowa results. Sanders is heavily favored in the New Hampshire primary February 9, and two consecutive defeats would certainly have called into question Clinton's status as the supposedly inevitable nominee.

In her quasi-victory statement, Clinton clearly sought to appeal to Sanders' supporters, declaring herself “a progressive” and supporter of universal health care and claiming to stand in “a long line of reformers” in American politics. She emphasized the need for party unity.

Sanders said the caucus results had “sent a message to the political establishment, the economic establishment and, yes, to the media establishment.” He repeated his denunciations of “a rigged economy” with “nearly all new income and wealth going to the top one percent.”

In the Republican caucuses, ultraconservative and Christian fundamentalist voters, particularly in the more rural western half of the state, were the main backers of the Cruz campaign, while Rubio led in the state’s two largest cities, Des Moines and Davenport, and Trump led in Dubuque, Sioux City and many smaller industrial towns.

For the Trump campaign, the defeat in Iowa was something of a debacle, since he had been leading in the polls for the past several weeks. The billionaire demagogue made only the briefest of concession speeches and then hurried onto his private jet to leave the state.

Rubio hailed as a victory his close third-place finish, which made him the best placed of the candidates with significant backing in the Republican Party establishment.

For the nine Republican candidates who finished in single digits, the Iowa result is likely the beginning of a winnowing process. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, who won the caucuses in 2008, received only 2 percent of the vote this time and announced that he was suspending his campaign. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, once the frontrunner thanks to his name and huge campaign war chest, won less than 3 percent. His campaign spent \$15 million in Iowa—an average of \$3,000 for each of the 5,000 votes Bush received.



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