

# US elections: Republican crisis deepens over prospect of contested convention

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Billionaire Donald Trump, the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, blasted the Republican National Committee and RNC Chairman Reince Priebus during campaign appearances in New York and Pennsylvania this week.

Trump called the process for selecting delegates to the July 18-21 Republican National Convention a “scam” and a “dirty tricks” operation. In an interview Tuesday with the *Hill*, Trump said, “It’s a disgrace for the party. And Reince Priebus should be ashamed of himself. He should be ashamed of himself because he knows what’s going on.”

The outburst was in response to a series of setbacks for the Trump campaign at the hands of his main rival, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, at state and congressional district conventions of the party in a half a dozen states, most of them held last weekend.

The most notable was the Colorado state convention on April 9, where Cruz won all 34 delegates and both Trump and the third remaining candidate, Ohio Governor John Kasich, won none. Colorado is one of six states or territories that has neither a primary nor a caucus, but chooses national convention delegates at a state convention.

The Cruz campaign, which has much closer ties to local Republican organizations, has been able to win additional delegates in several states where Trump won the primary vote, including Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia and Louisiana. In some cases, these delegates are still pledged to vote for Trump on the first ballot, but can switch their votes to Cruz on subsequent ballots if Trump fails to obtain the 1,237 delegates needed to gain a majority and secure the nomination.

The *Washington Post* reported Wednesday, based on its canvassing of delegates selected at the congressional district and state level, that between 130 and 170 delegates were poised to switch from Trump to Cruz on a

second ballot, making it essential for Trump to win a first-ballot victory.

Spokesmen for the Trump campaign outdid even the candidate himself in incendiary language and hints of violence if the Republican convention fails to nominate him. Speaking on the NBC program “Meet the Press” Sunday, Trump’s newly hired convention manager, Paul Manafort, accused the Cruz campaign of “Gestapo tactics” in pushing through its delegate choices at local and state conventions.

A longtime Trump associate and Republican operative, Roger Stone, went further, threatening to post the room numbers of any convention delegates who were pledged to Trump but sought to support Cruz, Kasich or another nominee. Social media was filled with statements from Trump supporters threatening violence against such delegates.

Trump continues to lead the contest for the Republican nomination and could still prevail on the first ballot, according to numerous media tallies, depending on the outcome of the remaining primary contests. The current estimate is 755 delegates pledged to Trump, with 545 for Cruz and only 143 for Kasich. Another 172 delegates remain pledged to Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who has suspended his campaign, and there are about 200 delegates unpledged to any candidate.

Trump would need to win just over 60 percent of the 854 delegates who remain to be selected in 16 primaries on three main dates: New York on April 19; five East Coast states on April 26; and the last five states, including California and New Jersey, on June 7.

Opinion polls in the six states voting April 19 and April 26 show Trump well ahead, but not by enough to assure the proportion of delegates he needs for the nomination. Kasich, who has not won a single delegate since he won his home state of Ohio on March 15, is running second in the polls in most of these states, with Cruz a poor third.

Kasich is the last remaining hope of the Republican Party establishment, which sees both Trump and Cruz as erratic and extremist candidates likely to be defeated in the general election. His dismal delegate total, barely 10 percent of the total needed for nomination, is an accurate reflection of the isolation and unpopularity of the Republican leadership, even within its own party.

A further sign of the disarray among congressional Republicans came with Tuesday's declaration by House Speaker Paul Ryan that he would not under any circumstances become a candidate for the presidency, even in the event of a contested or deadlocked convention.

Ryan called an afternoon news conference at the Republican National Committee headquarters, where he declared, "Let me be clear. I do not want, nor will I accept, the nomination for our party." In the event that no candidate wins a first-ballot majority, he said, delegates should limit their alternatives to other candidates who ran in the primaries and caucuses.

While the wrangling over delegate selection and possible convention outcomes has dominated media coverage of the Republican contest, the two leading candidates continue to move further and further to the right.

Cruz has based his campaign on appealing to Christian fundamentalists and other extreme-right voters, and has consistently criticized the Trump campaign from the right, seeking to outdo the billionaire demagogue in attacking immigrants and targeting American Muslims for repressive policing.

Trump has in turn escalated his own ultra-right rhetoric, raising again the demand that the US government reinstate waterboarding as a method of interrogation against captured members of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

That the Republican nomination campaign has boiled down to a contest between a fascistic demagogue calling for torture and an advocate of theocracy and militarism only demonstrates how far to the right the official US two-party system has moved.



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