

California Primary highlights political crisis in Democratic Party

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The California primary on June 7 is the last major vote before the conventions for Democrats and Republicans in July. The Republican campaign is effectively decided by the withdrawal of every candidate but Donald Trump. However, the latest polls put the Democratic contenders Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders tied for the state. If Clinton, the Democratic frontrunner, fails to win the state it would intensify the crisis of her campaign, which has also been hit by the deepening scandal over her use of a private email server while Secretary of State.

At stake next week are the 475 delegates from California, 126 from New Jersey and 113 combined from New Mexico, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota. The very last primary contest will be in Washington, DC on June 14. Sanders is expected to win the smaller four states, while Clinton is favored to take New Jersey. A poll by Public Policy Priorities last week showed the California race in a dead heat, with Clinton's lead over Sanders within the margin of error.

Because these states assign delegates proportionally, neither candidate can gain enough delegates to significantly shift the current standings. Clinton leads Sanders in pledged delegates (those elected at state primaries) 1,769 to 1,499, but she leads 541 to 43 in party appointed super-delegates who are free to change their vote through the convention.

If Sanders wins California he will pull somewhat closer to Clinton in pledged delegates, but more importantly it will have demonstrated Clinton's deep unpopularity. If she becomes the Democratic candidate she will be the second most unpopular candidate for either party since those statistics have been measured. A full 55 percent of Americans view her unfavorably. The only candidate less popular is Donald Trump.

If Clinton only wins New Jersey on June 7, she will

have lost 16 of the last 23 states to Sanders, the worst showing of any victorious candidate, presuming that she become the nominee.

Clinton has been backed by several leading California Democrats, particularly senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, while Governor Jerry Brown has remained neutral.

Feinstein has effectively called on Sanders to drop out of the race, saying, "He ought to be able to read the signposts as well as anybody else, and if he did that, he would know that it's all but over." She said the nation would be "better off" if he "were to consider putting his campaign in the very real perspective that it's in."

For her part, Boxer played a central role in the provocation around the Nevada caucus, where state Democrats called in Sheriff's deputies to shut down the state Democratic convention to preserve a Clinton victory. Boxer claimed that Sanders supporters reacted violently: "It was a scary situation. It was frightening. I was on the stage. People were six feet away from me. If I didn't have a lot of security, I don't know what would have happened."

Initial claims of chairs being thrown, arrests and violent action by Sanders' supporters were later proven false. Sanders has since defended Boxer, praising her role on the Senate environmental committee.

California is dominated by the Democratic Party, which controls nearly every state office. A failure by the preferred candidate of the party apparatus would be a major blow, particularly given the deep unpopularity of Clinton nationally.

The role of the Sanders campaign is to convince workers and youth that they should place their hopes in the same Democratic Party that has overseen the massive social cuts and an immense growth in inequality under Obama. "I think that Democrats do

well when the voter turnout is high,” said Sanders in an interview at the beginning of the month on NPR’s *Morning Edition*. “Republicans lose when the voter turnout is high. So I’m going to do everything I can to stimulate political discourse in this country—get young people, working people involved in the political process.”

In recent days he has emphasized his commitment to backing Clinton if she is nominated.

Voters in the California Democratic Party primaries have to be registered as Democrats. Between mid-March and mid-May, according to California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, there was an increase of 220,000 voters who registered as Democrats, bringing the state total up to 7.7 million. In comparison, there were only 70,000 additional registrations for the Republican Party, for a total of 4.8 million.

Sanders has been recognized for his service by some of the same Democratic officials who want him to drop out of the race.

“Bernie’s entry in the race I think was very helpful, because he was able to communicate to the young people who were longing to hear their grievances addressed,” Sen. Boxer said in an interview with SiriusXM’s Julie Mason. “He connected with a whole group of voters who don’t ordinarily vote.”

While supporting his efforts to bring in voters for the party establishment, leading Democrats are concerned with his plan to fight the nomination through to the convention. They are afraid that the social layers he mobilizes with the slogan of “political revolution” against the “billionaire class,” are not going to follow his lead in endorsing a Clinton candidacy.

The support for Sanders in California is a reflection of the same social crisis that has been motivating his supporters throughout the country. The cost of living has skyrocketed in the state, while wages have declined since the 2008 crash. Median home prices in the state are over double the national average, and rental prices are 50 percent higher. A third of California families struggle every month to meet basic needs, according to a report by United Ways of California. The Democratic administration of Governor Brown has slashed pensions, cut education funding and forced through concessions contracts on public employees.

Under these conditions, leading Democrats are worried that a contested convention will get out of

hand. In the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the Democratic mayor unleashed police to violently disperse antiwar protesters and the party is concerned that Sanders will not be able to line his supporters up behind the nominee and they will need to publicly do that again.

“It worries me a great deal,” Feinstein told CNN’s Manu Raju about Sanders plan to contest the convention. “You know, I don’t want to go back to the ‘68 convention, because I worry about what it does to the electorate as a whole—and [Sanders] should, too.”



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