

Biden sweeps three primaries amid coronavirus crisis

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18 March 2020

Former Vice President Joe Biden won primary contests in three major states Tuesday, giving him an increasingly wide lead in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination. Senator Bernie Sanders came closest in Arizona but was well behind in Illinois and fared particularly poorly in Florida.

Biden defeated Sanders by 60 percent to 23 percent in Florida, where billionaire Michael Bloomberg collected 12 percent, thanks to early voting during the period he was engaged in a massive advertising campaign. Biden swept every county in Florida, while Sanders' vote declined from 33 percent in 2016, when he lost the state to Hillary Clinton.

Biden led by 59 percent to 36 percent in Illinois, with Sanders winning only a single county, Champaign, site of the University of Illinois. Biden won two-thirds of the Democratic vote in both Chicago and its suburbs, but voter turnout plunged by 50 percent compared to 2016 because of the coronavirus crisis. More than 200 polling stations in Chicago had to be moved, either because they were located in nursing homes and other high-risk facilities, or because poll workers, many of them elderly, did not show up to staff them.

In Arizona, with vote-counting going into the night, Biden was leading by a margin of 43 percent to 30 percent, with 13 percent going to Bloomberg and 5 percent to former South Bend mayor Pete Buttigieg. Vote totals in the state were substantially above those in 2016, mainly because of extremely heavy early voting, with most ballots cast before the coronavirus crisis emerged, before Bloomberg and Buttigieg dropped out and endorsed Biden, and before Biden had become the heavy favorite for the nomination.

The three primaries will select 441 delegates to the Democratic national convention, and Biden will get the lion's share, extending his lead over Sanders to well

over 300 delegates. Network projections found that with Tuesday night's delegates, Biden now has more than half of the 1,991 required to win the nomination.

The primary vote was largely overshadowed by the coronavirus crisis, which slashed same-day voter turnout. In Ohio, the fourth state scheduled to vote March 17, Governor Michael DeWine postponed the same-day voting indefinitely, citing the dangers of coronavirus in the event of long lines at the polls or crowded precincts.

DeWine sought a court injunction Monday night to push the primary vote back to June 2, but Franklin County Judge Richard A. Frye denied it, declaring that the danger of the coronavirus to prospective voters had to be weighed against the democratic rights of the electorate.

DeWine then defied the judge's ruling and shut down the voting, declaring, "During this time when we face an unprecedented public health crisis, to conduct an election tomorrow would force poll workers and voters to place themselves at an unacceptable health risk of contracting coronavirus."

Both Sanders and Biden spoke to supporters on Tuesday night. Sanders made his remarks before the polls closed and made no reference to the voting. Instead he outlined proposals to address the coronavirus crisis, largely the same proposals he had made March 12 in a nationally televised speech. Signaling his dismissal as a contender for the nomination, the television networks did not broadcast Sanders' remarks.

March 17 may be the last primary for some time. The votes set for later in March and in early April, including Georgia, Louisiana, and Puerto Rico, have been postponed until late May or June. The state of Maryland, set to vote on April 28, has postponed its

primary until late June as well.

The demographic basis of Biden's easy victories over Sanders remained the same as in the two previous Tuesdays, when he won 10 out of 14 primaries on March 3 and 5 out of 6 on March 10. Biden won massive margins among African American voters, who made up 25 percent of the electorate in Florida and 22 percent in Illinois. He dominated among voters 45 and older, who comprised 70 percent of the electorate in Florida and 60 percent in Illinois.

Among those over 65 in Florida, who made up 34 percent of the vote, Biden led Sanders by 77 percent to 8 percent. Bloomberg actually led Sanders among those elderly Democrats, although he left the race nearly two weeks ago.

In each state, Biden had virtually unanimous support from prominent Democratic Party officials. In Illinois, for example, the entire state Democratic Party leadership had lined up behind him, including billionaire Governor J. B. Pritzker, who endorsed Biden the day before the primary, as well as Senator Richard Durbin, the No. 2 Democrat in the Senate, Senator Tammy Duckworth, and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

Sanders won majority support in every state among younger voters, those under 40 years old, with landslide levels above 70 percent among the youngest voters, aged 18 to 24. He also led Biden in Illinois and Arizona among Hispanic voters.



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