



[The Impending Iowa Republican Presidential Caucuses May Provide the First Indicator Regarding Voter Preferences](#)

Following months of intense campaigning, Republican presidential candidates are slated to face off in next week's Iowa caucuses. As has been the case since the 1970s, Iowa will hold the first presidential nominating contest in the nation, with what has long been the event to signal the official start of the presidential primary season. Iowa Republican voters will indicate their picks for the party's presidential nominee, with the results determining how many of the state's 40 convention delegates each Republican presidential candidate will receive. The Republican field vying for the party's nomination is comprised of five main candidates: former President Donald Trump, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, and former Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson. The race in Iowa does not appear to be as open as it usually is in competitive cycles, with one candidate in particular – former President Donald Trump – holding a notable lead over his rivals in the polls. Recent Iowa polling shows Trump with a lead of about 30 percentage points in the state. Many election analysts are therefore anticipating that Trump will likely win, but are especially interested in observing the results of the upcoming Iowa caucuses to see if a clear top challenger to Trump emerges from the remaining pack of GOP candidates. Trump remains popular among much of the Republican electorate despite numerous scandals and legal woes. In fact, the two states of Colorado and Maine have attempted to disqualify Trump from appearing on their Republican primary ballots, in historic decisions that are currently on hold while the legal process plays out in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Unlike primary elections that are held in most other states across the country in which voters cast their individual ballots at polling locations, the Iowa caucus process consists of a series of local meetings held throughout the state whereby participants discuss and vote on the candidates to indicate their preference for a presidential nominee to represent the political party on the November general election ballot. While the more often seen primaries provide those who partake with more flexibility in being able to cast their ballots on Election Day itself or via absentee and early voting, the Iowa caucuses are held in the evening and normally require voters to attend during that time in order to participate. Presidential candidates who do not perform as well as hoped in the Iowa caucuses certainly have ample opportunities in other states to make up ground in the race for their party's nomination. Back in 2020 for example, President Joe Biden finished 4th and despite his underperformance in Iowa, went on to win the Democratic nomination and ultimately the presidency. As such, the Iowa caucuses are by no means a "be-all and end-all" for who will ultimately win their party's nomination, but due to its first-in-the-nation status in the presidential campaign timeline, the results can sometimes provide a boost to the campaigns of certain candidates, deal a devastating blow to force extreme underperformers out of the race, and send a signal to voters in other states regarding those who might be in strong positions heading into future primary contests.

Biden's eventual triumph in the 2020 U.S. presidential election is far from the only example of results in the Iowa caucuses not aligning with the ultimate outcome of the race. In 2008, Republican candidate Mike Huckabee won the Iowa caucuses with 34% of the total vote, significantly ahead of later party nominee John McCain who finished in 4th with only 13%. Additionally, in both 2012 and 2016, the GOP winners in Iowa – Rick Santorum and Ted Cruz respectively – did not earn their political party's presidential nomination in those years. Election experts have highlighted that one of the major reasons why the results in Iowa often times do not shed light on the future

course of the presidential race is that what resonates with much of the electorate there is not necessarily the case in other states across the country. As one analyst put it, “those who win in Iowa often don't become president because Iowa caucuses just don't reflect the diverse policy preferences and demographic composition of the United States as a whole.” Winning in Iowa is one thing, but it pales in comparison to doing so in more eclectic battleground states like Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

As the presidential election season kicks off, the Republican caucuses in Iowa will undoubtedly be the contest which garners attention and focus to see which candidate takes the first step towards the political party's nomination to run against expected Democratic nominee, incumbent President Joe Biden. The Democratic party's caucuses on the other hand will merely be made up of long-shot challengers seeking to grab the nomination away from Biden. However, as has historically been the case, the Iowa caucuses of the sitting president's political party is anticipated to result in a landslide victory for Biden. Incumbent presidents rarely face serious challenges from within their political party during their re-election campaigns, and no incumbent president has ever lost a nomination challenge in modern U.S. history. This presidential election cycle in 2024, the Iowa Democratic Party has expressed that it will, for the first time, conduct presidential candidate preferences via mail. Thus, Iowa Democrats will indicate their choice through a mail-in voting process between mid-January and early March, the official results of which should be known by the latter.