

Iowa Campaigns Pivot to Getting Out Vote

Final Poll in Iowa Affirms Trump Lead, Haley Second

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Des Moines, Iowa (Dan McCue)

DES MOINES, Iowa — The final poll before Iowans head to their respective caucus sites on Monday shows former President Donald Trump continues to hold a commanding lead over the field of challengers, with former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley second.

The NBC News/Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa GOP Caucus poll released Saturday night was conducted between Jan. 7 and Jan. 12 and its results are based on telephone interviews with 705 registered voters.

For Trump, the poll appears to confirm that he won't be the victim of a surprise upset.

Though he's made the fewest visits to the state of any of the Republican hopefuls this election cycle, 48% of likely GOP caucusgoers picked Trump as their first choice for president.

The result tops George W. Bush's record in 2000 of 43% for the highest support level in any final pre-GOP caucus Des Moines Register poll.

His lead of 28 points also breaks Bush's record of 23 percentage points.

If there's any ripple in the numbers for Trump, it's that he's seen them undergo a slight dip from the 51% who said the same in December.

Haley's numbers confirm that she's continuing to experience a surge.

She's now in second place, garnering the support of 20% of likely caucusgoers, an increase of 4 percentage points since December and her best showing in the poll this election cycle.

But in the words of Steve Kornacki, national political correspondent for NBC News and MSNBC, the numbers contain some "cautionary notes" for the candidate.

Namely, a majority of her supporters said they only felt mildly enthusiastic about her candidacy — something that could spell trouble if, as expected, it is a historically cold caucus night.

"The deep data on [Haley] suggest she looks stronger in the poll than she could on caucus night," pollster J. Ann Selzer told the Des Moines Register.

Seltzer, who conducted the poll, said while Haley has clearly surpassed Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis in stated voter support, “most of the rest of the data here is not good news.”

According to a detailed breakdown of the poll published by the Des Moines Register on Sunday, Trump has the greatest share of enthusiastic supporters, with 49% saying they felt that way, and another 39% describing themselves as very enthusiastic.

And just 11% said they are only mildly enthusiastic in their support of the former president.

By comparison, the majority of the 49% who said they plan to caucus for Haley said they were only mildly enthusiastic in their support, a bad number that has actually climbed 10 points since December, while 12% (up from 2%) described themselves as not that enthusiastic about her.

According to the poll, just 9% say they are extremely enthusiastic to caucus for her, while another 30% say they are very enthusiastic.

DeSantis has slipped in the latest poll, coming in with the support of 16% of likely caucus participants, but he has a silver lining in the numbers — the percentage of those who say they are extremely enthusiastic to caucus for him is on a sharp upswing, reaching 23% last week and being in the mid-teens only a month ago.

Those interested in the Des Moines Register’s complete breakdown of the poll can find it [here](#).

Now The Ground Game Is All

While the numbers made headlines locally, the fact of the matter is the campaigns had already sharply turned from wooing every

last possible person to getting as many as possible to brave the cold to cast their vote for them.

“The thing you have to realize if you’re a candidate is that there’s just not that much more you can do in these waning hours,” said Will Rogers, the former GOP chairman for Polk County, Iowa, which encompasses Des Moines.

“I mean, there have already been over 3 million door knocks in the state of Iowa from people working on behalf of these candidates. I myself have had my door knocked on seven times this cycle — the latest coming this past Friday,” he said.

“In fact, I just read a story in the Daily Mail, out of London, about a single volunteer who knocked on 22,000 doors all by himself,” Rogers continued. “That’s just one person, and the top candidates have had hundreds of these volunteers essentially going full tilt since last summer. And that’s because here in Iowa, it’s all about voter contact.

“I mean, I can remember visiting a candidate’s office one day while they were training door knockers,” Rogers said. “They literally put them through a sales training program, and, you know, if you take somebody who has the energy and enthusiasm and the interest, and put them through a professional program, you can turn them into a really serious part of your campaign.

“I’m impressed with it. I really am,” he added.

Another thing that distinguishes presidential politics in Iowa from politics almost anywhere else is that the get-out-the-vote effort is decidedly grassroots.

“First of all, you have to understand that there are 1657 voting precincts statewide, and basically, what each of the campaigns does is put at least one person, if not more, into each one of those

precincts and puts them in charge of all the planning that needs to be done.

“And these are all local people who are strong supporters of the candidate and are committed to them,” he said.

“Now, DeSantis, from what I hear, is a perfect example of this; he’s got those people in place in all 1657 of those precincts, and what they are going to do is ask as many people as they can to turn out for the caucus, and then they’re going to speak on DeSantis’s behalf to ensure he makes the best showing possible.”

While parties provide voters with rides to the polls in a normal part of the electoral process in other parts of the country, here too, Iowa is just a little bit different.

“I don’t honestly know what the campaigns are doing in this regard, but I do know that people will offer their neighbors rides — even in cases where their neighbor might be supporting another candidate,” Rogers said.

Nicole Schlinger, founder of CampaignHQ, an organization that provides strategic consulting and other services to Republican candidates, said to understand the caucuses, it’s beneficial to see it as a bifurcated process.

“The campaigns organize the bus tours and rallies and the extensive voter contact programs that are going to identify turnout, but ultimately, it’s the precinct captain and as many helpers and volunteers as they’re able to recruit who play the key role in the success or failure of caucus night,” she said.

“They are going to be the ones looking at the list of all registered Republicans prior to people gathering and the caucuses getting

underway, asking, ‘What is their plan to get to the caucus and what is their plan to vote,’” Schlinger said.

“They literally go through the list for their precinct, going through each name, one by one,” she continued. “And while they do so, they’re saying things like, ‘Hey, this person might need someone to go pick them up,’ or ‘This person lives way out on gravel and we need to send someone out with a four-wheel-drive pickup to get them to their caucus site.’”

Schlinger laughed as she recalled the 2008 Iowa caucus, a contest that had volunteers calling around to schools and hospitals to line up wheelchairs to enable people who were “a little uncertain” or “a little shaky” to participate.

“It’s just the kind of thing you do,” she said. “In addition to the more mundane things, like figuring out how people are going to get from the parking lot to the school auditorium.”

“That’s why organization matters. That’s why human-to-human and person-to-person contact really, really can be determinative,” she said.

Speaking with reporters at the Iowa Caucus Media Center in Des Moines, former Iowa GOP Executive Director Gentry Collins said the reason caucuses have worked so well for the Republican party, nudging the state from purple to reliably red, is their grassroots focus.

“There’s no top-down here,” he said. “If you want to come to Iowa and go to all 99 counties and organize all 1657 precincts, you have got as much of an opportunity to make your case to Iowa voters as anybody.

“And you’ve got every bit as much of an opportunity to succeed here, whether or not you are a big name or have a big checkbook

or not,” he continued.

“The importance of Iowa is that our caucusgoers are going to give every candidate a chance,” Collins said. “That means we are going to take the front-running candidates and we are going to kick the tires and put them through their paces. We’re going to sharpen them and make them better candidates, and we’re going to help them hone their message.

“But that being said, we’re also going to give lesser-known candidates and lesser-known voices a chance as well,” he said.

Former County Chair Talks Haley Appeal

As for the former county chair himself, Roger said he’s committed to caucusing for Haley.

Though the release of the poll was still several hours away as he spoke, Roger did talk about Haley’s surge and why he believes she appeals to Iowans.

“I think there are a number of factors that have been helping her here,” he said.

“The first is that she’s a woman competing in a field of men. So as a woman, she stands out of the crowd,” he said.

Along with that, Rogers said, Haley has been espousing a nuanced message that has separated her from some of the other candidates in the race.

“I think that’s helped her to kind of rise as well,” he said.

“I mean, DeSantis has put on a great ground game and his organization has done a fabulous job here — I can’t stress enough what a really great job they’ve done.

“But at the same time, a candidate has to move people ... you have to have a message that moves people ... and you know, whether it’s Vivek Ramaswamy or DeSantis, their message has basically been the same as Trump’s in a lot of ways,” he said.

“Now, there are subtle differences that might move a smaller portion of people, but those distinctions don’t tend to resonate,” Rogers continued.

“So what you have happening is people saying, ‘If I want a Donald Trump, I’ll just go ahead and vote for the actual Donald Trump.’”

As for the question of Haley’s “surge,” Rogers said the momentum for her campaign began to build in the fall, as the candidate herself began to lean into Iowa and see it as a landscape where she could compete.

“I think initially, when she first entered the race, she wasn’t necessarily the most aggressive in terms of appearances or campaigning. Her campaign didn’t have her putting in 500 different appearances across the state, but the ones she did have were very well-planned and well-executed events that impressed the people who came out to see her.”

Rogers played a hand in organizing one of those events, at a manufacturing plant in Indianola, Iowa.

“It had a few things going against it,” he said. “It was on a Saturday, and it also happened to be Rosh Hashana. And yet, other than an earlier appearance by DeSantis, it drew the biggest crowd she’d had — something like 75 to 80 people.”

“So I think her having a series of really good, solid appearances helped her. And certainly, the debates helped her. I mean, I don’t know what her name recognition was in Iowa on Aug. 1, but I can

guarantee you that right now, in terms of Iowa caucusgoers, it's 100%. People know who she is and they know what she's about."

Rogers then stepped back and explained how he defines a "great, well-executed" campaign event.

"Well, first of all, it begins with the candidate themselves," he said. "Haley has got personality. She's got charm. She's got a level of energy that's good.

"Then there's execution," he continued. "She stays on message and doesn't go off and talk about five different things in the midst of a story. Not that digressions can't be effective, but they only work for a few candidates and we've already got two of them in the race — President Joe Biden and Trump."

"The other thing Haley has done well in Iowa is she's done a good job of getting people to come out to her events. I mean, I know, we're Iowans. We like to see people five times before we make a decision. That's kind of a running joke, but we do.

"And she's been compelling enough to be of interest to a lot of people. I mean, toward the end of this campaign, people were showing up in droves, happily having to wait in line to get it."

With that Rogers caught himself.

"I don't want that to sound like Haley made people wait in line for her to show up. Her events start when the tickets say they start, which is another thing that has distinguished her.

"I mean, it's not like she's had five surrogates go out and try to hold the crowd's attention, pumping it up and then stretching by playing loud music.

"She's been good about being very punctual and respecting people's time, because, you know, there's nothing that says they

have to be there. And once she is at an event, she's shown that she's got a nice personal touch about her," he said.

"She works the rope line and shakes hands, she looks people in the eye when she talks to them, and unfailingly takes pictures with them."

At this point, Rogers said he'd find it really hard to believe that there's any big pool of likely caucusers who haven't made up their minds.

"I mean, if someone really likes and supports Trump after the last seven or eight years, by golly, nothing's ever going to change their mind.

"Now, you might be able to pick off a particularly soft supporter of one of the other candidates, but at this point, the effort would far outweigh the gain.

"I mean, supporters of someone like Ramaswamy, who is trailing Trump, Haley and DeSantis are pretty solid.

"With the caucus here, there just isn't anywhere else to turn to dramatically affect the outcome," Rogers said.

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