

# [***Opinion: Trump's Iowa win shows the Republican nomination is no contest***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B40-P3M1-JBSS-S01D-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former President [*Donald Trump's easy win*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/iowa-caucuses-01-15-24/index.html) in Iowa on Monday confirms that there really is no race for the Republican nomination this year. With a deep freeze discouraging turnout, the caucuses provided a hard test of voter enthusiasm. Trump's rivals failed it.

A measure of the former president's insurmountable strength within the party is that he not only beat Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy, he also overcame all of the institutional powers backing them - some of the most formidable interests in the GOP.

The well-funded libertarian-leaning donor network assembled by billionaire [*Charles Koch*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/28/politics/koch-network-nikki-haley/index.html) put its money and muscle behind Haley. Evangelical leader [*Bob Vander Plaats*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/21/politics/bob-vander-plaats-endorsement-desantis/index.html) and Iowa's Republican governor, [*Kim Reynolds,*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/06/politics/kim-reynolds-ron-desantis-endorsement/index.html) put their considerable influence to work for DeSantis. The forces arrayed against Trump are significant not only for their funding and their grassroots networks, but for the ideological commitments they represent. Voters faced a philosophical choice, not just a pick of personalities.

They were also called upon to deliver a verdict of their own on the criminal cases against Trump. The former president argues that these prosecutions are [*political*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/11/politics/donald-trump-civil-fraud-trial-takeaways/index.html), and Iowa Republicans showed that they agree. The 2024 election is shaping up to be a referendum on ***politics*** in the legal system as well as on Trump and President Joe Biden. If Trump's primary opponents (with the exception of former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who dropped out of the race last week) have preferred to talk about almost anything else, Trump has never been shy about discussing his legal travails on the campaign circuit. Voters, starting with Iowa's Republicans, are now having their say.

Iowa is a solid red state that gives a good sense of where the Republican Party as a whole stands today. If it's more red than the nation at large, it's the just right hue to predict what's coming in most other Republican contests. There are cycles when Iowa is an outlier, but all evidence says this isn't one of them.

It's hard to think of any place where DeSantis could do better than Iowa. This was a state that Sen. [*Ted Cruz*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/02/01/politics/iowa-caucuses-2016-highlights/index.html) won in 2016, though even then he finished only [*3 points*](https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/primaries/states/ia/Rep) ahead of Trump. The DeSantis campaign and its outside allies [*spent $35 million in the state between January 1, 2023, and January 12 of this year*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/15/politics/advertising-spending-iowa-republicans/index.html). Trump's side, by contrast, spent just $18.3 million. Even with an almost 2:1 spending advantage over Trump, DeSantis couldn't mount an effective challenge - not even with the backing of Reynolds and Vander Plaats.

A sign of just how little dissension there is in the Republican Party about Trump's nomination could be seen ahead of the caucuses, as everyone from North Dakota Gov. (and former 2024 presidential hopeful) [*Doug Burgum*](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4408377-burgum-endorses-trump-for-president/) to Sens. [*Mike Lee*](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4406439-sen-mike-lee-wholeheartedly-endorses-trump/) and [*Marco Rubio*](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4408498-rubio-support-trump-2024-snub-desantis/) stepped up to endorse Trump. DeSantis had a year to make his case for the nomination to the party's elected leaders nationwide, as well as to Iowa voters. They heard his offer and turned him down. His moment, for this cycle, is over.

Haley's campaign and deep-pocketed backers spent even more in Iowa than DeSantis's team did: [*$37 million as of Friday*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/15/politics/advertising-spending-iowa-republicans/index.html). But if [*polling*](https://cnnpolitics.com/2024/01/13/politics/trump-holds-wide-lead-over-gop-field-ahead-of-iowa-caucuses-poll-finds/index.html) before the caucuses is any indication, Haley's donor dollars are largely buying support from non-Republicans: A [*Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom poll*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/13/politics/trump-holds-wide-lead-over-gop-field-ahead-of-iowa-caucuses-poll-finds/index.html) found that Independents and Democrats make up half of her [*support*](https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/iowa-poll/caucus/2024/01/13/iowa-poll-nikki-haley-leads-ron-desantis-ahead-of-republican-caucus-night-big-lead-for-donald-trump/72216523007/).

Haley's hopes for a strong showing in the [*New Hampshire primary*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/09/politics/cnn-new-hampshire-poll/index.html) on January 23 rest on the possibility of significant crossover voting from those outside the GOP. But while that strategy, if successful, might keep her campaign afloat until her home state of [*South Carolina*](https://www.politico.com/2024-election/results/south-carolina/) votes on February 24, it's not a viable path to the Republican nomination. Iowa has tested Haley's support among Republicans and found it wanting.

DeSantis and Haley were well-financed and politically experienced opponents: No one can say that Trump's victory over his rivals doesn't count because the anti-Trump vote was split or the candidate field was weak. DeSantis and Haley were not weak opponents - but as Iowa shows, even strong rivals can't touch Trump.

Opinion by Daniel McCarthy

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