

# [***And the Winner of the Iowa Caucuses Will Be... Who Cares? | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B3T-XDP1-DY68-10KW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Is anyone paying attention to Monday's Iowa caucus? The feverish pitch of horse race polling, speculation and jockeying that usually precedes an Iowa caucus is mostly missing this year.

**Body**

Is anyone paying attention to Monday's Iowa caucus? The feverish pitch of horse race polling, speculation and jockeying that usually precedes an Iowa caucus is mostly missing this year. For the mainstream media, former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) has this thing wrapped up and all that remains is for Republican voters to officially nominate the guy for a third time. Democrats are morosely resigned to their octogenarian president's re-election bid, and months of elite hand-wringing hasn't convinced him to step aside.

But even the candidates don't seem to be feeling those ethanol-fueled jitters. The overwhelming favorite to be the Republican nominee for president has barely spent [*any time*](https://www.axios.com/2024/01/08/gop-candidates-strategies-iowa-trump-haley-desantis) in Iowa, in part, of course, because he's quite busy dealing with his[*91 felony indictments*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/trump-charges-jan-6-classified-documents/). It's hard to blame him for not investing too much—Trump himself lost Iowa in 2016 to [*Ted Cruz*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ted-cruz?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and won the nomination anyway, just like Democrats [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and [*Hillary Clinton*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hillary-clinton?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) did [*in 2020*](https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/presidential/caucus/2020/02/05/joe-biden-calls-4th-place-iowa-caucus-finish-gut-punch/4669943002/) and [*2016,*](https://www.politico.com/story/2016/02/hillary-clinton-iowa-performance-218607) and like [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*Mitt Romney*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mitt-romney?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*in 2012*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/19/mitt-romney-iowa-win-recount#:~:text=The%20Republican%20presidential%20frontrunner%20Mitt,votes%2C%20a%20majority%20of%2034.) and [*John McCain*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/john-mccain?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*in 2008*](https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSWAT008623/).

Throughout this century, winning Iowa has actually been a pretty poor predictor of winning a major party nomination for president, and it's gotten worse as the century has marched balefully on. That is primarily because caucuses attract a different crowd that is not necessarily representative of the general electorate. Whatever you might think of debating your neighbors for several hours about the most appropriate presidential nominee for your party, it is not a practice that is particularly inclusive or designed for people who don't pay close attention to ***politics***. That's why Iowans in three straight contested Republican primaries (2008, 2012 and 2016) picked a candidate who is further to the religious right than the GOP electorate as a whole (not an easy task by the way!), and why for each of those Iowa winners, their Hawkeye State triumph was the high point of their campaigns.

For years, Democrats have grown increasingly uncomfortable with the prominent role that small, rural, white Iowa has played in their nomination process. That unease culminated in the 2020 [*election night fiasco*](https://apnews.com/article/fc6777e93b8c50b2fd20e0d31fcc43b3) that made it difficult to declare a winner and led party elites to strip the state of its first-in-the-nation status, at least for this cycle. But there has never really been much debate inside the GOP about it. For Republicans, Iowa is very much on brand for the party, perhaps more now than ever before. In an organization increasingly driven by non-college-educated, rural and exurban whites, Iowa checks all the boxes—39th in college degrees per capita, fourth highest percentage of white residents and [*13th most rural.*](https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/most-rural-states) It's biggest metropolitan area (Des Moines) [*ranks 82nd*](https://www.iweblists.com/us/population/MetropolitanStatisticalAreaPop.html) in the United States in population. Whatever Iowa Republicans want is therefore probably pretty close to the center of Republican opinion on the matter.

Maybe this is the year that Iowa breaks its losing streak, especially since Trump appears likely to win the state decisively and is poised to do the same in most states to come. But if Trump believes that a sweeping win in Iowa is the key to the rest of the race, he sure isn't acting like it. Biotech entrepreneur and world's most irritating man [*Vivek Ramaswamy*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/vivek-ramaswamy?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) has held nearly 10 times more events there than Trump has, and even people who are plausible contenders like former South Carolina Gov. [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/nikki-haley?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and Florida Gov. [*Ron DeSantis*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ron-desantis?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) haven't staked the place out, smelling of flop sweat and desperation quite like Rudy Giuiliani [*did*](https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/world/americas/27iht-giuliani.4.9533180.html) with Florida in 2008.

Trump's victory in Iowa, at least according to polls, is likely to be less decisive than his campaign hoped or than the current media narrative would have you believe. He's averaging just 52.2 percent of the vote there in recent surveys, [*according to*](https://www.realclearpolling.com/polls/president/republican-primary/2024/iowa-caucus) Real Clear ***Politics***, which isn't great for someone who has convinced most of the Republican electorate that the last election was stolen from him and that he's for all intents and purposes an incumbent.

Trump's support also might be a little soft—as Matt Towery of polling firm Insider Advantage [*noted*](https://insideradvantage.com/insideradvantage-iowa-gop-caucus-survey-trump-49-desantis-and-haley-tied-with-17-each-trump-leads-evangelical-vote/) about their late December poll showing Trump at 49 percent in Iowa, "36 percent of respondents say they are open to changing their support before the day of the caucuses." If you throw in undecideds and the Ramaswamy and freshly-dropped-out [*Chris Christie*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/chris-christie?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) voters who might see the futility of their candidates' bids in the harsh lights of the precinct halls, it is possible that Trump wins narrowly or (much less likely but not impossible) not at all.

Probably the worst thing that could happen for Iowa's place in the American presidential nomination process would be for Trump to win the state relatively narrowly, with Haley getting 25 percent or 30 percent and the narrative momentum that always accompanies a surprise showing in Iowa. If Trump then gets dusted in New Hampshire and ultimately loses the nomination to Haley or DeSantis, that would make the state 0 for its last 5 in picking the winner in contested nomination battles. Players with batting averages of .000 generally get sent to the minors pretty quickly, and Iowa is as ripe for a demotion as ever for both parties.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2335290/icy-reception.jpg)

**Graphic**

Icy Reception

JIM WATSON/AFP via Getty Images

Snow covers a placard for Republican presidential candidate Florida Governor Ron DeSantis in Davenport, Iowa, on Jan. 11.

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