

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 2024 IOWA CAUCUSES

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KAMARCK: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to this Brookings webinar, “Key takeaways from the 2024 Iowa caucuses.” Let me just start by saying that the American race for presidential nomination is unique in our politics and in fact, in the politics around the world, because it's not one race, but is a sequence of races with each race building on or reacting to the one before it. The importance of sequence emerged in 1976, when Jimmy Carter surprised a field of much more well-known Democrats by winning in Iowa and gaining enough momentum to win in New Hampshire and the states that followed. They had always had their precinct caucuses early in Iowa, but the delegates they elected to the county conventions had never been required to state a presidential preference, and they'd never been required to hold the precinct caucuses on the same day. These two changes were required by the Democratic Party's reform movement, and they turned the Iowa caucuses, once a sleepy affair that no one covered into, and I quote here, “the functional equivalent of a primary.”

Soon after, the Republican Party, seeing all the attention these changes got the Democrats, made similar reforms. And so, for the past 47 years, Iowa has been the contest that essentially closed the field. And so, it was on Tuesday night when Governor Asa Hutchinson and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy dropped out of the race, leaving just three contenders. Ever since Iowa, um, got into the spotlight, candidates who thought they could bypass these early states have learned that to do so is to be guaranteed a seat on the sidelines. So sequence is here to stay. And for better or worse, these early states play an outsized role in the race for nomination. Which is why this afternoon we're asking, what does Iowa mean for New Hampshire? What does New Hampshire mean for South Carolina? And so on and so on for the next six months.

Uh, just a note for our listeners. You can send questions via X or formerly Twitter, um, at Brookings gov, hashtag Iowa takeaways or you can email events@brookings.edu and get our, um, questions in there.

To help us answer these questions, we've assembled four terrific political experts. Brianna Tucker is a deputy politics editor for The Washington Post, covering campaigns, Congress and daily breaking political reporting on social platforms. She previously served as deputy editor for the 202 newsletters. The, she joined -- and climate 202 -- she she joined the Post in 2021 and before that covered higher education, the 2018 midterms and Congress with a focus on minority congressional members. Whit Ayres is a leading political Washington consultant with over 30 years in polling and survey research for high profile political campaigns. He's the founder and president of North Star Opinion Research, a national opinion, opinion and public affairs research firm. He provides message development advice and insights to high level clients, including U.S. Senators Marco Rubio, Lamar Alexander, Lindsey Graham, Jim Inhofe and John Kennedy, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, current and former Tennessee governors Bill Lee and Bill Haslam, and former Senator Bob Corker. Mona Char- Charen who I think we will, will join us a little bit later is an American columnist, journalist and political commentator. She's written four books. Each one of them has a great title. One of them is called "Useful Idiots How Liberals Got It Wrong in the Cold War and Still Blame America." And if you, as if you couldn't tell. She often writes from the conservative perspective about foreign policy, terrorism, politics, poverty, etc. And last but not least, of course, is Brookings' own E.J. Dionne, who's a senior fellow here with me at Governance Studies. He's also a syndicated columnist for The Washington Post, a university professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture program at Georgetown University, and a nationally known and respected commentator on politics. It looks to me like he's written ten books and also great titles. His most recent is "One Nation After Trump: A Guide for the perplexed, the Disillusioned, the Desperate and the Not Yet Deported," which is again a great title with Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein.

Okay, so let's get to the basics. And I want to start with Brianna. Uh, Brianna, we are five days away from the New Hampshire primary. Can you describe for us or set this up by looking, telling us what the basic differences are between the electorate in Iowa and the electorate in New Hampshire?

TUCKER: Sure. Um, well, it's great to be here with such a great group of panelists. And I know we've probably cited or talked to most of you for our politics stories, um, and getting a better insight of what's happening on the ground. Um, Iowa and New Hampshire are really two, uh, pretty different electorates. Um, it's always noted and notable to say that these two, as very early nominating states, uh, are also predominantly white states compared to the rest of the, uh, calendar that comes after this. Um, particularly in South Carolina, uh, and Nevada as well. But with Iowa and a difference going into New Hampshire, you have Iowa, which is much more rural, uh, a lot more evangelical voters compared to New Hampshire, which is going to be, uh, a lot more urban, a lot more moderate. Um, I would also say that the biggest difference there, uh, that is different in this case, particularly, is New Hampshire just has the undeclared independent voters that make up, I think about 39%, um, of their current electorate. Um, and their process is very different than Iowa's. So with New Hampshire, they are able to, uh, vote any time during the day between 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. whereas Iowa, you have voters, uh, you show up at a specific place at a specific time, uh, at 7:00 in the evening. Um, and you also have, uh, a different process in New Hampshire where if you are undeclared, independent, um, you can vote for either Republican or Democrats, um, and will be registered with that party on the spot. So there's a huge, unpredictable, um, variable, I think when it comes to New Hampshire, that can't be foreseen because this is, uh, a group of voters that falls on the spectrum that could be, um, libertarian. It could fall, um, to Trump supporters, that could fall, uh, to or Trump supporters that were more so alienated or feel, uh, left behind with the GOP, um, to moderate voters who maybe, um, despise Trump and are looking for a Haley or DeSantis, um, type. But it really is more of a wildcard, I think, than Iowa going in and than we expected. As far as the polls were there, we knew Trump was going to sweep this state up. It was just by how much. Um, and New Hampshire is going to be definitely a different place specifically for Nikki Haley.

KAMARCK: Great. That's a great beginning and also makes, I think, everyone anxious to see what's going to happen next Tuesday. Um, let's see, E.J.. Um, what with what looks like DeSantis's withdrawal from New Hampshire. Um, Haley may now have a shot at going one-on-one against Trump. Do you think she can beat him there?

DIONNE: Well, my answer is yes, but. And I'm going to put the but in very large type. Uh, there is a road for her, but it's rocky, it's rutted, it's narrow, and it runs along the edge of a cliff. Uh, I think that she. If she has to win New Hampshire, I believe, to have any chance of going on, I don't think running Trump close in Hampshire will really cut it any more, especially after running third. Um, in, uh, Iowa, running third in Iowa probably deprived her of some of the burst of momentum that Iowa can give a candidate, as in, say, Gary Hart, whom we discussed before in 1984 against Walter Mondale. On the other hand, having, uh, DeSantis persist on the ballot, as Marc Thiessen, my Post, uh, columnist colleague wrote, uh, might help her a little bit because probably most of the DeSantis votes come out of Trump, uh, not her. Um, if she wins, um, in New Hampshire, there's a whole month between New Hampshire and South Carolina, and a whole lot can happen in a month.

Her problem and why I say that road is rutted and narrow and all that, is that Trump is way ahead in South Carolina, which is her home state. She was the governor there. It is a very conservative state. A lot of the party leadership, including the governor, Senator Lindsey Graham, um, have endorsed Trump. So it's not going to be easy for her to win her home state. Um, but if she does win New Hampshire, I think there's a burst of interest in her. Uh, and, uh, I think that at least gives her a shot to make competitive. Two smart pollsters, uh, I talked to last week, one of them Whit Ayres, uh, and the other Kristen Soltis Anderson, uh, in different ways, said essentially the same thing. There isn't an anti-Trump majority in the Republican Party, but there may be a "beyond Trump" majority if somebody can figure it, figure out how to mobilize it. Uh, I think the chances of that look a little more difficult today than they did, uh, before Iowa voted.

KAMARCK: Fantastic. And thank you Mona for joining us. I'm so pleased to see you here. Um, I'll go to Whit to give you a minute, and then I'll come to you, okay?

CHAREN: Sure.

KAMARCK: Whit, I was going to ask you, um, what about, what about Ron DeSantis? Okay. What happened to him?

AYRES: Oh, isn't that a good question? Because it was only a year ago, after his thumping reelection win in what used to be the swing state of Florida, Donald Trump's weakness or his candidate's weakness in the, uh, midterm elections that in some polls, including one of ours, Ron DeSantis, was actually ahead of Donald Trump. Uh, and now it looks like he's hanging on by his fingernails, if that. Uh, I think, Elaine, he had the wrong theory of the case to start off with. Uh, the Republican Party has three factions. There's a Never Trump faction, but it's only about 10% of the party. That's the faction Chris Christie was going after, which is why he topped out at about 10%, uh, and could get no higher. There's an Always Trump faction that is absolutely committed to Donald Trump. It's about 35 to 40% of the party. Uh, always Trump voters will walk over broken glass to vote for him. And criticizing Donald Trump among always Trump voters is like criticizing Jesus in a rural evangelical church. You know, you can take a shot at him, but it's not going to have any effect on Jesus's reputation. But it'll sure destroy the reputation of someone who takes a shot at him. A majority of the party, somewhere around 50%, are "Maybe Trump" voters. They voted for Trump twice. They would vote for him again against Joe Biden in a heartbeat. But they're at least interested in seeing what alternative is out there. And that's the group that Nikki Haley has gone after, which is why she refuses to say that Trump is unfit for office like the Never Trumpers want her to say, because if she does that, she thereby insults the millions of Republicans who supported Donald Trump twice.

KAMARCK: Right.

AYRES: But Ron DeSantis, I think, went after the Always Trump voters. You know, "we're going to start slittin' throats on day one." He's going to be combative. He's going to be forceful and in-your-face and take on the left-wing media. The problem is Always Trump voters are Always Trump for a reason. They're not going to settle for Trump lite when they can get the real thing. So I think he had a fundamental misreading of the case at the start. On top of that, his interpersonal skills in the sort of living room to living room campaigning that Iowa and New Hampshire really values, uh, just aren't that great. He doesn't have much support among his colleagues, congressmen and governors, the people who know him best. And he's had constant and unrelenting staff turn- turnover. You mentioned that we work for him as we did in his tight real a tight election in 2018. But it's interesting, Elaine, Ron DeSantis will have nothing to do with anyone associated with that very close victory that he won by about a half a point. Not the pollster, us, not either one of the media firms, not the campaign manager, not the fundraising consultant, and not the general, uh, the general consultant who's now running Donald Trump's campaign. So, he had never had a team around him that had been through a war before that was that he trusted and he didn't trust much of anybody. Uh, politics is a team sport. It's especially a team sport at this level. And so, I think he did not have the sort of smoothly functioning team that you need to play effectively. And finally, he had a whole series of rookie mistakes, from calling Ukraine a mere territorial dispute to suggesting that slavery might be a benefit in some way to enslave people. To my favorite, suggesting that RFK Jr, a vaccine skeptic, would be a great head of the Centers for Disease Control. So, combination of things. Uh, but I think the whole combination is what has led Ron DeSantis from, if not first place, close to first place to an also ran in the Republican primary.

KAMARCK: Great. Thank you so much. Mona, welcome. Happy to see --

CHAREN: Thank you so much, Elaine.

KAMARCK: Now, listen, for all of those Democrats and Republicans out there and some Republicans as, as Whit mentioned, who just hate the idea of Trump being on the ballot again, are there any silver linings in the in the Iowa caucuses or any silver linings anywhere that you can point to?

CHAREN: Well, sorry for the dog barking in the background. Um, I, uh, you know, um, when you look for silver linings in today's Republican Party, um, some people might think that you need psychiatric care, uh, because it's pretty grim. Uh, and, uh, and I'm not going to deny that, uh, the party having been transformed into a wholly owned, you know, Trump subsidiary, is, uh, is a grim thing for our republic. Um, but yes, I do think there are some silver linings from the results in Iowa. Let's look for, first of all, at who goes to a caucus. Okay. Caucus-goers represent 15% in a good year, a little over 15% in a big turnout year of the eligible Republican voters in the state of Iowa. Um, so these are the most hardcore, committed, uh, Republicans who, uh, are gonna be, uh, showing up. And Iowa is a very conservative state. It has trended more and more Republican, uh, over the last, uh, you know, about ten years, um, much more than other, uh, states around it. Uh, it is very rural, it is very evangelical, all that. Okay. So that sets the table to say that even among these Republicans who are very conservative, 25% of them in a pre, uh, caucus poll for the Des Moines Register, which turned out to be incredibly spot on in terms of the final numbers, said that they would not vote for Trump if he is the nominee of the Republican Party. 25%. That is astounding. I mean, bear in mind Trump is running basically as the incumbent. Okay. He should be getting, if this were a normal kind of political leader, the incumbent president gets, you know, no competition and gets 90% of the of the vote. And so, um, he got a little over 51%. So there is, you know, half almost half of the voters wanted someone else. And 25% say that in the general election they'll vote for someone else. Furthermore, 11% of those voters, 11% of the total, said they'll vote for Biden. Now, bear in mind, hardcore Republican caucus-goers, um, Biden, who has been so demonized in, you know, on Republican media and, uh, and social media and so forth. Um, you know, and yet there are people in the Republican Party who look at Trump and say, nope, under no circumstances, yes, I will even vote for the Democrat rather than see him in office again. And, uh, look, it is that many, and we don't know how many of those will actually make good on that pledge. Uh, you know, we have a long campaign ahead of us. Some people do come home. As the campaign approach, you know, as the actual voting approaches. Um, but this presidential election, like all of our presidential elections of recent of the recent past, will be decided by five swing states and by very narrow margins in those swing states. And so a swing of just a few Republicans who refuse to vote for Trump could be highly, highly significant to the ultimate outcome. There is no hope, I think, of preventing Trump from being the Republican nominee, and that is a tragedy, but there is hope of preventing him from winning the general election.

KAMARCK: That is great. That is obviously music to the soul of many people who are Democrats or who don't want Trump. And that's that's a great analysis. Let me throw out a question to everybody. And that is, is there anything you can imagine that will move the needle in this race, or are we going to continue to see something like we saw in Iowa, Trump winning with 50% or more, Haley and maybe DeSantis, if he stays in the race, kind of lagging behind? Um, will it will it be this way all the way through until everyone but Trump says, you know, goodbye, I'm not doing this anymore? Um, or is there something, something that could change it, either external to the race or, um, inside the Republican Party? Brianna, do you have any thoughts on that?

TUCKER: Uh, I mean, I have a couple thoughts. Um, I think one from, like, our reporting as well. And this has been and I think Whit could also speak to this, but there is this thought about Trump's legal proceedings as far as being the person who can just outlast him. Um, whether that be, um, you know, some kind of something that would bar and we've seen that this is actually galvanized his base. Um, there is with within his most ardent supporters, um, this awareness of his indictments, this awareness of, um, the criminal proceedings against him in these cases. But they have not deterred support. Um, and so, uh, or actually, it has it has earned him more support, um, for this portrayal of a victim of our justice system. Um, but I also think outside of just that longevity that they're holding on to. Um, I'm a little surprised about the lack of endorsements as well. Um, while there is this, uh, clamoring from the anti Trump kind of, uh, forces for some consensus around a candidate. Um, I do think that there are previous candidates who have dropped out. Um, who might have some more sway. Someone like Mike Pence, someone like Tim Scott, um, that could weigh into this race. Um, and we've seen even after Christie, uh, and going into Iowa and maybe even Vivek, I think that would actually push more supporters to Trump. Um, but I do think

that at this point, it feels like, um, in our reporting shows that Trump still has, uh, quite a march to the nomination through New Hampshire, through South Carolina, even though that is Haley's home state, uh, Trump is still, fer like, winning fervently there. Um, and the one question I have and what kind of addresses was DeSantis as well, and his candidacy. Um, and, uh, even though both were DeSantis was 21% Iowa and Haley was 19. Um, it's a little still interchangeable as far as who got to lead with Iowa and just claim that, you know, they get the momentum for this next contest. Uh, but after New Hampshire, what that looks like between Haley and DeSantis, um, is really a big question, because it's a lot of time between now and February 24th. Um, and, uh, like E.J. said, a lot can happen.

AYRES: Elaine.

KAMARCK: Yeah. Go ahead, Whit.

AYRES: 70% of Americans do not want a Biden-Trump rematch. That's an extraordinary number.

KAMARCK: Yeah.

AYRES: The vast majority of Americans being appalled that these are the two choices that they may be facing in the fall. I think that creates a little bit of instability, although it certainly looks stable on the surface. I mostly agree with E.J. I do think, though, that if Nikki Haley can run a close second in New Hampshire, maybe not win, but come within single digits, for example. Uh, that that may keep her in the race until South Carolina. And then it's all the whole ballgame is in South Carolina. Uh, it's kind of a 3 to 1 strategy. Third in Iowa, second in New Hampshire. And then she's going to have to win South Carolina. Uh, but there are so many things that could happen that we just can't anticipate right now. I just I can't help but feel that the outcome of this election is going to be determined by events that haven't happened yet. The Iowa entrance poll showed that 32% of the Iowa caucus voters said that a guilty verdict on a felony for Donald Trump would render him unfit for office. Now, that doesn't mean that they won't eventually vote for him, because the question didn't say, Will you vote for him against Joe Biden? But they did say they thought it would render them unfit for office. The the difference would be that most Republicans see Joe Biden as a failing octogenarian with signs of senility. And so if that's the only alternative, maybe they might vote for Donald Trump, even though they think he's unfit for office. But that creates an enormous element of uncertainty about this thing. You know, as as Mona said, you've got to get over 90% of the votes in your own party to be competitive in a closely balanced, polarized electorate. If you drop that down to 80 or 70, you've got big problems.

KAMARCK: Let me just add to this before we go to E.J., because you might -- And that means that all of these various third party candidates might be a place where some people land who hate both the candidates. Uh, E.J.?

DIONNE: You know, first of all, I do want to take a sharp issue with, uh, Whit, uh, I do not, Joe Biden is certainly an octogenarian. I don't think he shows any signs of senility. And I think that word is not only unfair, but loaded. And so I --

AYRES: I was saying the perception of Republicans, E.J.

DIONNE: Oh, okay. Well, that that they would then probably think that of me too. Uh, the, um, I I just said I do want to uh, and in terms of Haley, I just want to say I'm not sure she'll drop out after New Hampshire. I just don't think without the momentum of a victory, it's it's really going to get, uh, very far. I do still think she needs a victory to have the momentum. But I do want to underscore one thing that, uh, Whit said which is, I think that entrance poll, poll of people as they went into the caucus showing this really large chunk of Republicans saying they would not consider Trump fit for office, was a very big deal. 29% of them, uh, said they don't buy this that Trump big lie. Now, people who are Democrats say, how can all these Republicans believe him?

But when you have caucus goers, these are, uh, the most committed Republicans you can imagine for the most part. Some independents went in there to vote for Haley. But, uh, that is extraordinary. Um, and I also think that the Iowa, uh, underscored a real problem Trump has that in some ways, the splits within the Republican Party mirrored the splits in the country. If you look at the education, uh, level question of people who went in, um, people who did not graduate from college, 61 pers. Uh, 67% of them, uh, voted for Trump. But among college grads, uh, Trump got only 37%. Um, that's a real weakness. This is a group that a generation ago was a Republican group. You've had a hemorrhaging of college grads from the Republican Party, and now you even have within the Iowa caucuses, um, you know, this a very low, uh, percentage, uh, for Trump. Um, and the last thing that suggests this is, uh, not 100% baked for him is that turnout in Iowa. Now, granted, there you go. 100,000 voters down about, I don't know, a hundred and --

KAMARCK: 30,000, it was down about 30,000

DIONNE: Yeah. Down from about what? Down about 55,000. Now, granted, uh, it was terrible weather, but as, uh, which said, you know, Trump, uh, the core Trump support will walk over broken glass, but at least some of them were not willing to drive over snowy and icy, uh, roads. And so I think that turnout says that this giant Trump machine out there and he ran he also ran probably the best organized campaign in Iowa. Uh, of all of them, um, uh, that suggests that this is not a sort of electoral gorilla out there. It's formidable. He's the favorite. Um, but, yeah, you might have imagined, even in the bad weather, a larger turnout than that if Trump were as strong as everybody is saying he is.

CHAREN: Uh,

AYRES: Elaine, could I say a word about

CHAREN: Elaine could I? Oh, sorry.

KAMARCK: Let's go to Mona and then we'll come back around. Yeah. Go ahead Mona.

CHAREN: Um, just a a brief point.

KAMARCK: Because this was originally your question.

CHAREN: Um, so so you asked whether we're going to just see a repeat of Iowa, you know, for the next several contests. And, um, I think the answer to that is no, um, partly because New Hampshire is its own thing. New Hampshire has a history of saying, you know, the hell with the hell with Iowa. Um, or as uh, Haley put it, and got dragged for it a little bit. You know, that that, uh, New Hampshire would correct what Iowa did. Um, and, uh, but. Um, so the New Hampshire poll is a semi-closed, semi-open. I don't know how you. It's a bit odd. You you can't vote in the New Hampshire primary if you're a registered Democrat. But if you are an independent, you can sign up, be a Republican that day and vote. So it's, uh, kinda open and, uh, if you you're willing to go to a little bit of effort. Plus, New Hampshire voters are very different from Iowa voters, very different history and traditions, and they're more independent and more libertarian leaning, etc. So, um, even though Trump is ahead in the 538 average, um, there are some polls that show them neck and neck. Trump and Haley. Um, it's not out of the question. She could even win in New Hampshire.

AYRES: Yeah.

CHAREN: There's, then that raises, though, the question of what happens after that. Um, so Nevada is already completely wired for Trump. They have, you know, they've they've screwed around with that. It's a crazy situation where they now have a primary and caucuses two days apart. Um, and you'll only get delegates from the, from the caucuses, which is, uh, and the head of the Republican Party is, I think, correct me if I'm wrong, has been indicted for being a false Trump

elector in 2020 and has, um, sort of rigged the thing to make sure that Trump wins. Okay, so Nevada's not important, but, um, but South Carolina is the next one. And if she can't win her own state, um, I don't see that, I mean, it seems like that the train just goes right into the into the gully there. Um. She is 30 points behind, and I'd have to say, what is going to happen between New Hampshire and South Carolina to persuade Republicans in South Carolina that they have new knowledge about either Haley or Trump? It's hard to see.

KAMARCK: Hard to say.

DIONNE: Could I could I footnote one thing Mona said?

KAMARCK: OK, go ahead.

DIONNE: Just briefly

KAMARCK: Then we 'll go back around

DIONNE: There there is not a Democratic primary that counts for delegates because of the new Democratic rules. But there is actually a Democratic primary. And the other interesting test that I'm going to be really, uh, I'm going to be very curious about is whether there's a campaign that is being waged independent of the Biden campaign, technically, to get Democrats in New Hampshire to write-in Joe Biden. Um, in that race, I think he will win that primary. That doesn't count. Um, and I think it'll be interesting to see, does he get close to a majority -- write-ins are hard to win? Um, he's going to win it. Does he get close to 50%? Does he get over 50%? What is the Democratic turnout in a primary that doesn't count? Uh, do for Biden. And I think everybody will watch it. And lots of people will draw broad conclusions from that, whether they are justified or not.

KAMARCK: Whit, you wanted to get in on this, too. And and then we'll go to Brianna.

AYRES: The New Hampshire polling is all over the place.

KAMARCK: Yeah.

AYRES: One reason, and that is the proportion of the undeclared voters that can vote in the Republican primary, as Mona said. It is very difficult to anticipate what proportion they will make of the final turnout. Uh, they can make as high as 40 or 45% of the total turnout can come from undeclared. That's how John McCain pulled his huge upset in 2000. John McCain came in with 5% in Iowa; George W. Bush won it with 41. And then John McCain turns around and stomps George W. Bush by 19 points. It was 49 to 30 in the New Hampshire primary in 2000. So the reason that he did so well is that he ran really well against the undeclared voters. So if you're looking at different polls in New Hampshire and wondering how in the world they could be so different, I guarantee you the difference is going to be determined by the proportion of undeclareds that the pollster lets into the sample.

KAMARCK: Brianna, I want to get you in on this one. What can happen?

TUCKER: Between now and in February 24th? I know we jumped around a little bit.

KAMARCK: Yeah, we jumped around a little bit. Yes.

TUCKER: Oh, man. Um, I think, uh uh, remind me the, Sorry, I was following, like, Whit's point here. Remind me the initial question here.

KAMARCK: Oh, don't worry. If you can follow up on Whit's point if you wanted to.

TUCKER: Yeah. Um, well, I was I was thinking one about what E.J. had said about turnout as well in Iowa. Um, uh, just coming back from there. And even so, a lot of the people that we spoke with, I mean, they are, again, the most committed caucus goers, some of the most devoted people who show up at this particular time, um, in this particular life threatening storm, as it was called, um, to vote. And I think especially in Iowa, I mean, the count was down based on Edison research since 2012, um, and 2016. So over almost, almost two decades. Um, of that, I think considerably saying it is still magnificent, I think, to say that that many people came out, I think it was 110,000. Uh, and to only be down 5000 from 2012 or 2008, um, or 2016 is is not a lot. Um, that's acutu

DIONNE: I think it was about 50,000, Brianna.

CHAREN: Yeah, uh, there were 187,000 in, uh, in 2016.

TUCKER: Okay. Okay. Thank you.

DIONNE: So, yeah, I I agree. If it had been that small, it wouldn't have been a big deal. I thought it and and still the weather, you are 100% right, the weather was awful, but it was pretty big decline.

KAMARCK: She was there.

CHAREN: She was there, she knows.

TUCKER: Even so, I mean, all all of our reporters and the people that they spoke to, um, whether they were Trump or Haley supporters, um, were all just extremely like, you know, they said they would army crawl to get here. Like, this is their system. They do this every year, every four years, um, and so I think for turnout, I mean, purposes, it was a little unusual, but, uh, I still think we'll see at least some of the same on par for New Hampshire, um, barring any weather. But, yes.

KAMARCK: Um, let me um, the, the our audience is very into this conversation and so let me and they've they've asked some actually really pertinent questions to keep this going. So let me, let me ask the first one. Um, and the first one is simply an expectations question. I mean, everybody who's been in presidential politics knows expectations matter. Um, that's why Bill Clinton could lose the New Hampshire primary in 1992 and still be the comeback kid and have a burst of momentum. So let's set some expectations here. Our our, um, listener says, what will the finish? What finish will Haley need to have to change the media narrative? Now why don't we just pick let's just go around, pick a number, and I'll start, uh, I'll say 40 between 40 and 50%. And I think she gets momentum. Whit?

AYRES: Well, E.J. and I have already discussed part of that question. I think if she comes within single digits against King Kong, that that gets momentum going into South Carolina, if she wins, it's even more momentum going into South Carolina. But of course, you don't have the same structure of the electorate in South Carolina that you do in New Hampshire.

KAMARCK: Brianna.

TUCKER: I mean, I would agree if she's within striking distance of, uh, Trump, it can just prove that he is not impenetrable, that his support, uh, can go to her there. I think it will give her, uh, enough of a boost especially it's DeSantis will effectively surrender there. He's in the single digits polling in New Hampshire. This is not he's not spending, uh, a lot of time in New Hampshire. This he's he's shifting his focus. He knows this is not his contest to win. Um, but I do think, Haley, this is her best shot. Uh, and actually, we wrote a story on this, um, a week ago by Maeve Reston. But this is really her best shot. And some of the anti-Trump, uh, movements shot to prove that they can, uh, stop or at least slow Trump down here. Um, and I think one of the biggest unknowns is it's

just there's it's just not certain that there would be consolidation behind Haley, furthermore, after in New Hampshire, uh, if she would win more support.

KAMARCK: Mona? Let's go Mona and then we'll come to E.J.. What's what's the what's the magic number here?

CHAREN: Uh, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad tidings, but there's no magic number, in my opinion. Um, she could win New Hampshire and still have no place to go in this Republican Party. Um, I do not think she can win her home state. And I don't think that she can generate enthusiasm. One of the things that was noted in that Iowa poll was that even among voters who were choosing Haley, uh, their enthusiasm for her was incredibly low. Um, she is, um, she is perceived, I'm sorry to say, because I would the world would be so much better off if the Republican Party would turn to someone like Haley. But, um, look, here is the ABC News Ipsos poll out today. 80% of Republicans and Republican aligned adults view Trump as the candidate with the best chance of getting elected in November. 1 in 10 say Haley has the best chance. Um, also, she is perceived as the old rhino establishment Republican. That is no longer what Republican voters get excited about. They want the fight. They want the populism. They want the pugilism. And she does not bring it as much as she's sort of made these disgusting efforts in that direction by saying, this has never been a racist country, ever, which is just, you know, okay. Um, or by saying she's going to kick people with their high heels, you know, it's that's not going to do it. So I just don't think she has her finger on the pulse of where Republicans are and what they're after.

TUCKER: I want to add --

KAMARCK: OK

DIONNE: Just a real quick answer --

KAMARCK: Then I'll come back to [Inaudible]

DIONNE: -- one more vote. One more vote than Donald Trump. And then I think it opens it up. I agree with Mona that this is, she's got a hard road. And when I first looked at the entrance poll, I said, gee, she kind of looks like either a Rockefeller Republican or a George H.W. Bush, uh, Republican. But that was a long time ago in both, uh, in both cases. But I think if she beat Trump by any margin, that creates a whole different story and everybody is gonna to it's gonna be a big deal that Donald Trump loses, uh, somewhere. One other quick point. I think there are competing media narratives out there are obviously the dominant one is Trump has this sewn up, etc., etc.. Um, but I think there were second day stories out of Iowa that did raise some of the problems that this result presents, uh, Trump with. And again, I think if Haley, um, you know, beats, uh, Trump by any margin, those will be the dominant stories out of New Hampshire.

KAMARCK: Okay. Good. You wanted to add something, Brianna.

TUCKER: I wish I was going to add on Mona's comment too, as well. Um, the one thing with Haley, and she's had to walk back a couple comments in the last couple of months from just, you know, uh, you know, not admitting, you know, slavery as the cause and root of the Civil War to America has never been a racist country. Um, and I wouldn't quite call these gaps. Uh, some of these are facts. Um, and in history books. But I feel that that is also something that just opens her up to more attack in the next coming weeks. And so and she's got, you know, there's no debate. She's doing the town hall tonight. Um, she's really going to have to, to be disciplined and also like, tighten that up and just it it will make her much more susceptible. And we know that because the Trump campaign has become harder. Ah, the ads have been coming harder at her. Um, so I think that's just something to be mindful of as well.

KAMARCK: Good.

CHAREN: Brianna, I think her big mistake was that was apologizing for what she said about, uh, the Civil War. Within the context - not not from the point of view of normal people - within the context of the GOP right now. Okay. If she had said, yeah, I said the Civil War wasn't about slavery, and I'm doubling down on it. The liberal media's coming after me, and it's just ridiculous. And I'm going to stick with my gut. Then she would have gotten some popularity among voters.

KAMARCK: Okay. Now, we've we've mentioned here, we've all mentioned how close how this could this whole presidential race could come down to five states and to a matter of thousands of votes. We've got a variety of, uh, third parties out there. I'll go around for a minute and tell me. And this this is a question from one of our viewers viewers. What do you think the role of third-party candidates will be? Why don't we start with you, Whit?

AYRES: It all depends upon which candidates they are and who they draw, who they draw support from.

KAMARCK: How about the ones, the ones we -- Robert Kennedy?

AYRES: You know, I mean, Robert Kennedy is more popular among Republicans than Democrats, kind of like Liz Cheney is more popular among Democrats than Republicans. So it's very difficult to know exactly where they'll pull from. Uh, but they they can have an effect on the outcome, depending upon how just how frustrated Americans are at the Trump Biden rematch. Uh, it's also possible that you could have a number of people who could a number of Republicans who could go to the polls and skip the presidential race and vote in down ballot races. That's what happened in Georgia. That's why Jack Kemp and Brad Raffensperger were able to win so easily.

CHAREN: Brian Kemp.

AYRES: Is that a lot of people, a lot of Republicans, just sort of skip the top of the ticket, uh, and vote down ballot. So, um, it really depends on which candidate you're talking about and who they're going to draw from.

KAMARCK: Brianna.

TUCKER: I agree on on which candidates. Uh, Kennedy is much more attractive to Republicans. Manchin is also attractive to Republicans. And so it's it's, easy to say a third party in our in our system is just an instant spoiler, um, but I think it just doesn't always break down like that.

KAMARCK: E.J.

DIONNE: Um, yeah. I think Robert Kennedy is complicated, but for the moment he's drawing from Republicans. But I think, uh, Cornell West draws either from Biden or I think just as likely makes an argument that depresses the Black vote, but which would hurt Biden. Um, I think the Greens take votes away from Biden. And if there's a No Labels candidate, um, it's highly likely that that candidate takes away from Biden. The polling I've seen tends to show that the net effect of multiple candidates is to hurt Biden more than, uh, Trump. And I think that's going to I don't see how that changes between now and November.

KAMARCK: Mona?

CHAREN: Yeah, I I agree with E.J.. I think the, uh, I think the No Labels candidacy, um, has the potential to be a true spoiler. Um, if they run somebody, uh, you know, like, uh, Larry Hogan, um, because there are, as I was saying earlier, there is a slice of the Republican electorate that will not vote for Trump, but and they should have to make the choice between Trump and Biden. But if you give them a Larry Hogan where they can park their vote and say, well, at least I didn't have to vote for a Democrat, you know, I can feel good about myself voting for Larry Hogan,

uh, who has no chance of actually being president. Uh, then you have split the anti-Trump coalition that is so necessary, and then you have prevented Biden from winning, and you've elected Trump. True spoiler.

KAMARCK: That's right. Um, another question that's come from the audience, which is pretty interesting. If Trump is on the ballot in November and loses, what do you think the possibility of a repeat of the January 6th, um, will be?

AYRES: I think it's very low, Elaine, in large part because Trump will not have control of the federal machinery. He will not be able to call up, you know, an attorney general and say, you need to declare this was fraudulent. You also have a lot of January 6th people who went to jail. Uh, people have noticed that as well. So I think the chances of another January 6th, in the event of a Trump loss is, is a lot, lot lower than it ever was in 2020.

KAMARCK: And that's so interesting because, you know, I always go back to the after January 6th, remember they were going to come to Washington on March 4th, the traditional Inauguration Day and have some big demonstrations or something. And if for those of us who live in Washington, the entire city was like, you know, gates were everywhere, streets were blocked off, etc., and nobody came, nobody came. And I think that's because some of them were getting subpoenas at that point and said, we're not going to do that. E.J.?

DIONNE: I wish I were as confident as you that nothing like that will happen. I think if it is a close election, Trump will contest it, uh, and, uh, I think you could revisit something like that. A lot may matter as to which party controls the House of Representatives, because the new House takes over three days before the count is supposed to take place. If Mike Johnson is the speaker, Mike Johnson was a champion of the idea that essentially the Congress could void the result, uh, of the, uh, of the election. What happens if Mike Johnson is the speaker after the 2024 elections? Uh, I think it could be very messy.

KAMARCK: Mona.

CHAREN: Yeah. Um, it is, um, so there are so many unknowns. First of all, how many people? It's one thing to say after, uh, a 2020 election, you know, and Trump claims it was rigged and everybody gets, you know, drawn into this lie. I wonder whether it loses some of its potency the second time around where people just say, there he goes again, you know, claiming to have been cheated. Uh, I don't want to predict that because I don't know, but, um, there's that factor. Um, also, um, it's one thing to say we're going to march to the Capitol and make sure that Donald Trump doesn't have to leave the white House where he's currently residing, and we're going to march on the Capitol to put him back in. It's just a little different, uh, quite different. And, um, but finally, I do think, though, that, um, that. Our our divisions and our troubles are going to be far from over, even if Trump is defeated, uh, because, uh, we are going to spend the next ten months, um, in a sustained attack on our judicial system, uh, where a big tens of millions of Americans are going to be convinced that our justice system is completely corrupt and rigged. Uh, further undermining trust in our institutions, which is already an ongoing issue. Um, and, uh, I expect things to get, um, you know, I, I expect the, the, uh, erosion of civility and, and, uh, comity that that has characterized the entire Trump era to continue.

DIONNE: Mona's line, Mona reminds me of that great John McCain line that things always get darker before they go completely black.

KAMARCK: Brianna, let's get your two cents in.

TUCKER: And I was I was just going to add on E.J.'s point as well, Mike Johnson isn't the only one in the House that I think about as well. Uh, Elise Stefanik also has committed to - she did not commit to certifying the 2024 election. So I think paying attention to the House is one part of it. Um, again, yes, it's a little bit different when you have an incumbent president that's in the White

House as well as, uh, has control of 1 or 2 of the chambers versus, um, all all of Biden and his, uh, Cabinet and as well as the Senate. And it's and, uh, it's just not quite the same. So I don't think we can predict that that would happen. Um, but I think it's a totally, um, different set up and, uh, apparatus for that to be the foundation.

KAMARCK: And also, I suspect that the Capitol Police and National Guards and everybody who was kind of surprised last time around and thought this was going to be a normal political demonstration, I think they're going to be really, really ready, which makes this all more difficult. All right. Let me as we as we run into the final, um, stage here. Um, let's suppose that Nikki Haley comes within in single digits, which I think all of you have, um, said would need she need that to get the boost in to South Carolina. Let's say that she doesn't win there, but maybe it's close, right? Maybe they're proud enough that it's close. Um, what happens on Super Tuesday? Okay. Now, usually, traditionally, one of the reasons that field clears out before Super Tuesday is people simply run out of money. We don't know how much she's raised in this last quarter, but one news story said she raised \$24 million in December alone. So she might actually have the money to keep going. Does she keep going? Should she keep going? Start with E.J.

DIONNE: Uh, well, I think money -- uh, I was just trying to pull up on my phone the list of the Super Tuesday states. I think money is not going to be a problem for her. If you've got the Koch network behind you and they stay behind you, uh, they can raise a heck of a lot of money whether directly to her campaign or to her super PAC. So I think money. If Haley has a shot, uh, she's going to find money. I think her problem will be to find states she could win. Um, I thought the way, in some ways the worst news I saw for Haley is how far Trump is running ahead in California, um, which is not a state you would think of as an actual Trump, uh, state. He got, uh, shellacked there in the general election. Um, and so you wonder what, you know, if she can't do it there, uh, she could probably win Massachusetts, which is on that list, but --

KAMARCK: Rhode Island.

DIONNE: -- a Republican

KAMARCK: Rhode Island.

DIONNE: Yeah. Uh, you know, Republican primary winners of Massachusetts are really the favorites in the whole party. Uh, going way back to John Anderson, I think. I can't remember if he won or came in second. But anyway, um, and there are a lot of southern states in that group that are very strong, uh, Trump states. So, um, but look, I, I agree with the premise she could win in New Hampshire and then come reasonably close in South Carolina she'd be cutting a 30 point Trump lead. Uh, so she'd have something going into that. But it is not the best collection of states for her to be running into.

KAMARCK: Yeah. In fact, I did, I, she did, I should have told you all this. I, I did count this. And six out of the 13 states that day are southern states where you would expect the Trump electorate to look a lot of the Republican electorate to look a lot more like Iowa than like New Hampshire. Whit, and then, uh, Brianna.

AYRES: Elaine, the Trump forces have constructed the primary process to benefit Trump.

KAMARCK: Mhm.

AYRES: That's what's happened in California. Rather than doing some kind of proportional allocation of delegates, it's now winner take all. It's not an accident that it's winner take all. That was done by the Trump forces. So unless Nikki can beat Trump in South Carolina, if you can't beat him in your home state, it's hard to see where you're going to beat him.

KAMARCK: Brianna.

TUCKER: I would add, uh to beating him in your home state, it seems like the Trump campaign's effort is really to to end this race early, to wrap it up as quickly as possible, um, particularly with an embarrassing, you know, loss for Haley in her state. Um, and it also seems that we're starting to see this, like unification behind Trump for some Republicans, whether it's not just Vivek endorsing, um, it or Rubio throwing his endorsement behind, um, but it, the strategy behind the Trump campaign to get everyone behind him quickly and make this decisive and make this fast. Um, and really just, just show a, a brutal kind of strength over the rest of the, the race.

DIONNE: Could I underscore what Brianna just said really briefly? Cruz. Um, you know, Donald Trump attacked his father, Donald Trump attacked his wife. Uh, Ted Cruz said, you don't go after my wife or my children. And now he has fallen into line. Marco Rubio couldn't have been more insulted by Donald Trump as that campaign, uh, went forward. It really tells you something about what's happening inside that party. Uh, those two in particular really brought home, uh, what Brianna said.

KAMARCK: Mona, you get the last word on this one. Super Tuesday.

CHAREN: Uh, Super Tuesday will be the high water mark for Donald Trump. He will seem to bestride the world like a colossus. Um, the Republicans will line up to endorse him. Uh, he will be at his most powerful and seemingly invincible. And then things will begin to unravel thereafter. Because then everybody who has been saying, well, we'll wait to see if it's a two-man race before we focus, you know, are going to be focused. And the trials will begin, and the, Trump as a defendant will become the biggest, uh, story of the campaign. It isn't about issues. It's going to be about Trump being convicted or not convicted, and all of the facts that will come out in the trials. Um, and so Super Tuesday, his very best day, after that starts to drift down.

KAMARCK: Does that argue for Nikki Haley quote suspending her campaign or keep running, even if she's picking up? See, a lot of these some of these Republican states are winner take all, and you get the whole batch of delegates. A lot of them are winner take more where a candidate, if you got a three-delegate district, which they all are, a candidate has to get 50% to get all of them. But if he falls below 50% or 60% in some places, then somebody else can pick up a delegate here, a delegate there. This is kind of like what Ted Cruz did, um, in 2016.

CHAREN: So the promise of --

KAMARCK: Does it make sense for her to stay around?

CHAREN: --the premise of your question, though, is, if I understand it correctly, that there would be a reason for her to hang around in case he gets convicted or, you know, he dies or something, and then she's the last person standing and therefore the party turns to her. Um, frankly, even if he were convicted, I do not think the party would deny him its nomination. I just I think it's that much a cemented cult. And so, um, so I don't really, I mean, it's up to her whether she wants to, uh, take, you know, to, to stay in or out, but I don't think it will have any effect on the outcome. I just don't.

KAMARCK: All right, any last words? Because we've got, uh, we've got one minute left. And any last thoughts or comments? Speak now.

CHAREN: Um, I would like to just put in a plug for a piece that my colleague Sarah Longwell posted today in the New York Times and in The Bulwark dot com about, uh, the former Trump officials who need to start speaking up and explaining, Cabinet members, uh, who should come, who are who have said they cannot support him in 2024 and that they need to come out and say it loudly and, uh, often.

AYRES: It's an excellent piece

DIONNE: And quick point. I think that as Trump reenters the public consciousness, a lot of people don't follow politics closely, and while people watching this have noticed Trump a lot, he hasn't really been in the public consciousness for a lot of people who turn on the politics later. I think that we're gonna know something about what happens in November by whether Trump's vote starts to deteriorate as he becomes more prominent or the opposite. I don't think it's the opposite. I think it begins for some of the reasons, Mona said, it begins to deteriorate. But I think the next month, three months are going to be very much more revealing of the outcome than the last three months have been.

AYRES: Elaine, I'm very worried about what it says about our political system if it coughs up two people opposed by 70% of the registered voters in the country. I'm really worried. So I'm now down to praying for divine intervention. That's my last bet.

KAMARCK: Brianna?

TUCKER: Last word I would say, uh, another plug. It's please to tune in to our New Hampshire coverage. Uh, we will cover everything, every nook and cranny of all these campaigns. And so we are excited to be on the ground and report from there.

DIONNE: God bless you, Brianna. I'm doing a live chat and opinions with a bunch of really cool people. Uh, so yeah, tune us in. Thank you.

KAMARCK: Well, listen, Whit, Brianna, E.J., Mona, thank you so much for joining us. And for our audience, thank you for send- paying such close attention and sending in such good questions. Bye bye.