

After New Hampshire: A Marathon, Not A Sprint

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Der US-Wahlkampf bleibt spannend: Weder im demokratischen noch im republikanischen Lager gibt es bisher einen klaren Favoriten unter den Anwärtern auf das Präsidentenamt. Die Amerikaner müssen sich auf ein Kopf-an-Kopf-Rennen zwischen Barack Obama und Hillary Clinton einstellen, das den Superwahltag am 5. Februar wohl überdauern wird. Die republikanische Wählerschaft lässt sich von keinem ihrer Kandidaten so richtig begeistern: Zu viele Wähler haben ernsthafte Einwände gegen eine McCain-, Romney- oder Giuliani-Administration. Mike Huckabee, Gewinner des Iowa caucus und Liebling der religiösen Rechten, hat derweil bei einem Wahlsieg der Republikaner gute Aussichten auf das Vizepräsidentenamt. Doch die Unfähigkeit der Republikaner, sich rasch auf einen gemeinsamen Kandidaten zu einigen, hat ihre Chancen auf einen Sieg im November drastisch verringert.

After New Hampshire, it's easy to see that the early primaries will not lead to the coronation of a favored candidate from either party; as my grandmother would put it, the situation remains as clear as mud. But the dynamics underlying this fascinating moment in time are entirely different for the Democrats and Republicans. And unless the GOP quickly coalesces around a consensus candidate, it really will not matter all that much who eventually wins the Republican marathon for the nomination. For either Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton will easily beat them.

1984 Redux

It is certainly true that Iowa and New Hampshire have upended the conventional wisdom that Hillary Clinton would coast to the Democratic nomination. Then, as now, her advantages are formidable. She has the money, best organization, and the endorsement of the

Democratic Party establishment. In her husband, she has the most gifted political strategist in the country; also, by miles, he remains the most popular Democrat among party regulars. Yet it has been far from a cakewalk, for Barack Obama, in the tradition of Robert Kennedy, George McGovern, and Gary Hart, has something intangible but of vital importance ... the ability to catch fire through the process, to visibly grow as the campaign rolls on, and to genuinely excite vast swathes of people through eloquence and passion, to participate in the electoral process as they have never done before. Senator Clinton, in a not so subtle slam at Obama, said loftily that you campaign in poetry, but you govern in prose. Unfortunately for her, she is campaigning in prose as well. The poetry, and the enthusiasm, is all with Obama.

This resembles nothing so much as the 1984 Democratic Primary Race, where the colorless but solid Walter Mondale, the choice of the Democratic es-



tablishment, saw off the fast charging, cerebral yet charismatic, Gary Hart. As in that race, after eking out a surprise victory in New Hampshire, Hillary still has the greatest chance of winning the nomination. The remnants of the old FDR Democratic coalition—older women, union members, the less wealthy—turned out to save her campaign. Obama, as held true in Iowa, won the majority of younger voters, the better educated, the well-off. If these underlying New Hampshire demographics hold true, Hillary certainly must have the advantage.

But, as the 2008 presidential race has shown, conventional wisdom can often be turned on its ear. For one thing, the last major demographic pillar of the Democratic base, Black voters, have shifted decisively to Obama as it has become clear he is the first African-American in history to have a legitimate shot at the presidency. This alone is likely to carry the Illinois Senator to victory in the upcoming South Carolina primary, with its large Black community. But we are settling down into a state of trench warfare: While South Carolina is likely to go with Obama, Florida is likely to go with Hillary. On February 5th, Super-duper Tuesday, twenty-plus states will all vote, in what amounts to a national primary. Obama will win his home state of Illinois, and has a good chance to carry nearby Ohio. Clinton will take her base of New York, New Jersey, and the greatest prize of all, California. She will end February 5th ahead in the race, but not by much. Given that all Democratic delegates to the convention are chosen proportionally—that is, if Obama receives 45 percent of the vote in California in losing, he is still awarded 45 percent of the state's delegates—the race, contrary to what everyone thought, will likely go on beyond February 5th.

The Messed Up Republicans

As confusing as it is, the Democratic race for President is clarity itself, compared with the bloodbath going on amongst Republicans. Here, for once, current con-

ventional wisdom is on the money; it is easy to make a case that none of the candidates can win the nomination, but we must be proved wrong once. Far from winnowing the field, four candidates still have a real chance at victory.

Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, the darling of the religious right, has won the Iowa caucus. His strengths are a genuine sunny disposition, a folksy eloquence, and the die-hard support of the Christian Evangelicals, who comprise one-third of the Republican base, and are pivotal to any efforts at party unity following this fractious race. But given his inability to get support beyond this base, and a lack of money and organization, Huckabee looks like the odds-on favorite for the Vice-Presidential nomination.

Victory in New Hampshire again saved John McCain. The old war-horse, who would be the oldest President ever inaugurated for a first term if he were elected, still excites moderates and independents in a way no other Republican can match. In addition, the Arizona Senator is an undisputed expert on national security matters, and may be the last grown-up standing in a particularly weak field. But McCain's greatest quality, his fearless disregard for going against the grain, is also his greatest weakness. His views on Iraq are to the right of George Bush, while the country, sensibly, long ago decided Iraq is an unmitigated disaster. Even more damaging, the Senator's sensible immigration stand, allowing illegal immigrants to begin the long road to citizenship following paying fines, has been decisively repudiated by a party moving ever-rightwards on this issue. Out of touch with both general and party public opinion, McCain would prove a respected, but wounded, nominee.

Mitt Romney saved his chance with a come-from-behind victory in Michigan, where his father was a popular former governor. Given his immense personal fortune, Romney is best positioned to run on Super-duper Tuesday, where money is vital to compete across

the spectrum for delegates (most but not all primaries for the GOP are allocated by proportion). Also, in Michigan, after being rightly accused of flip-flopping on a score of issues, Romney seems to have at last found his authentic voice, that of a respected and competent business manager, if one somewhat wanting in compassion and charisma. As the struggling American economy becomes more of an issue, Romney has a real advantage. However, there is little doubt that Romney has failed to connect with most voters, finishing second in both Iowa and New Hampshire. He has no record on foreign affairs, having served as a governor and a successful businessman. The war on terrorism and Iraq remain two of the top four issues for Republican voters (the others being immigration and the economy); his threadbare record here and lack of genuine enthusiasm for his candidacy make him a weaker candidate than expected. Mike Huckabee put it well; Romney does not remind people of the friend who got laid off, but rather the boss who hands out the unemployment slips.

Rudy Giuliani, with his unorthodox Florida strategy, also still has a chance. Fearing that the early contests, such as Iowa, were too polarizing for him to do well, given his socially libertarian positions of abortion and gay rights, and gun control, the former Mayor of New York instead decided to place his eggs in one basket, Florida, home of legions of retirees from his home city. He needed, and has gotten help from the others, in that splitting the early contests has left the party without an early-anointed successor. Florida is a rare primary that is winner-take-all; the winner receives all, and not a portion of the delegates to the nominating convention. Giuliani has spent almost all his time and money campaigning in the balmy south, while his rivals have been trudging through snow-filled Iowa and New Hampshire. A win would give him the most delegates heading into Super-duper Tuesday, momentum, and the name recognition that comes from being one of the authentic heroes on September 11th. In truth he is the only candidate who could still quickly

win the nomination. But it grows increasingly unlikely. Rather than the extra time and money spent in Florida helping him, Giuliani's once formidable lead there has shrunk to nothing; polls put him now slightly behind McCain and slightly ahead of Huckabee. Without a win, Giuliani is finished, along with any chance for a quick Republican coronation.

The Real Problem

But for all the delightful ambiguities that they have thrown up, perhaps Iowa and New Hampshire have actually played their traditional role of clarifying America's politics; 100,000 more people voted for Democrats than Republicans in Iowa, and 50,000 more in New Hampshire. Given that these states are neither strongly Democratic nor Republican, these are earth-shattering numbers. They are the price paid for Iraq, the scarily weak economy, and a general sense that America is off track. When President Bush came to office, party identification was evenly divided. Now 50 percent of the country say they are Democrats, compared to 35 percent who identify themselves as Republicans. This will be the historical legacy of George W. Bush. Without uniting quickly behind a consensus candidate, the primary season has made the chances of a Republican victory in November decrease from slim to miniscule.



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