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USA

Trump Wins in Iowa; Money in American Politics

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Former president Donald Trump won the Iowa Republican primary in mid-January, the first primary in the country, with 51 percent of the vote, the rest split among his rivals Florida governor Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley the former governor of South Carolina. The candidates are now off to New Hampshire where Trump is also expected to win, though perhaps by a smaller margin in a state with many independent voters who are not registered to either the Republican or Democratic Party.

While Trump's victory is largely due to his charisma and the loyalty of his base, money plays an enormous role in American elections. Republican candidates spent \$124 million on the Iowa election, most of it on television advertising, and social media such as Facebook, and Google. Trump's organization, Make America Great Again Inc., broadcasted around 21,000 TV ads. But money was not decisive in Iowa. Haley, who spent the most, came in last.

Iowa has 2,083,979 registered Republican voters, but only 15% or 110,000 showed up for the caucuses, the form their primary takes, with meetings held in the state's 99 counties. The \$124 million spent represents \$1,112 per voter. Iowa's population is 87.9% white and the Republican party is 95% white. In this primary, Iowa elects only 40 out of 2,500 Republican convention delegates, under 2%, but because it comes first, it can set the tone for the entire primary election. Democrats no longer hold their first primary there because they believe it gives inordinate weight to a largely white and rural population that is not representative of the country.

The next Republican primary takes place on January 23 in New Hampshire which is 88.9% white. That primary will choose 22 delegates to the Republican convention, less than 1% of the total. The state Democrats will also hold an unofficial primary election on the same day, though the name of President Joe Biden the presumptive nominee will not be on the ballot.

In all of the primary and later general elections money will play a key role in determining the winner. The 2010 Supreme court case *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* overturned long-standing election regulations, allowing wealthy individuals, corporations, unions and others to spend unlimited amounts of money on elections.

This led to the creation of "super-PACS" (political action committees) that can accept unlimited contributions from corporations, unions, and other groups and spend it for or against candidates. It is estimated that 55% of corporate contributions go to Republicans, 45% go to Democrats. Republicans also receive funds from many conservative groups, such as the Evangelical Christians who contributed \$2.3 billion to the 2020 election, almost all to Republicans. Democrats also receive funds from labor unions, Black, Latino, women's, and LGBT organizations. Unions contributed \$1.8 billion, nearly all of it to Democrats in the 2020 election.

The Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 demanded that corporate money be removed from politics. Bernie Sanders took up that cry in 2016 when he ran for president. As Nina Turner, the co-chair of Sanders' campaign said, "The overflow of big money in politics drowns out the voices of everyday people. That is part of the conundrum in America: The more money you have the more speech you have. That leaves everyday people out of the equation."

The American left in the broad sense agrees that money allows the corporations to buy the government they want, so that it becomes in the words of Karl Marx, "the executive committee of the ruling class." The alternative is the building of a mass movement of working class and oppressed people who can use both their social and political power to create a more democratic socially progressive country.

21 January 2024

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