



Cruz Tops Trump, Loras College Poll Finds

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DUBUQUE, Iowa— With seven weeks to go before the 2016 Iowa Caucuses, Texas Senator Ted Cruz has emerged as the leader of the crowded Republican field. Real estate mogul Donald Trump finds himself in second, with retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson and Florida Senator Marco Rubio the only other candidates with double-digit support as a first choice. Jeb Bush rounds out the top five and is the only other candidate whose support reaches outside the poll's margin of error, in the latest poll conducted December 7-10.

It has been a good several weeks in Iowa for the junior senator from Texas. Firebrand conservative Iowa Congressman Steve King and noted Iowa evangelical leader Bob Vander Plaats endorsed Cruz recently.

“Rep. King and Mr. Vander Plaats are all well-known and influential voices within the social conservative and evangelical base here in Iowa. And, it is this base which can deliver a victory or defeat on caucus night,” commented Associate Professor of Politics and Director of the Loras College Poll, Christopher Budzisz, Ph.D. Senator Cruz also received the endorsement several months ago of Iowa-based radio talk-show host Steve Deace, another prominent conservative opinion leader within the state.

Besides Cruz's launch to the top, the other stories from the latest Loras College Poll are Trump's resiliency and the decline in support for Carson. Despite expectations by pundits throughout the summer and fall, support for Trump has not diminished in Iowa.

“While Mr. Trump finds himself behind Senator Cruz in our current poll, it is worth noting that Trump's support has remained consistently strong relative to the field, and he is the only other candidate above 20 percent support. Mr. Trump's support has proven quite resilient and much more stable than many other candidates',” Budzisz remarked.

Carson, the leader on the last Loras Poll in late October, has seen his support slide significantly.

“It has been a rough several weeks for Dr. Carson, and this is reflected in our current polling. As foreign policy emerged as a more prominent part of the campaign, so did the questions about Dr.

Carson’s foreign policy preparedness. Coupled with a successful challenge for the evangelical and social conservative base by Senator Cruz, it is no surprise to see Dr. Carson’s support diminish. However, his favorability rating among Republican voters remains very strong, so I don’t think there is much evidence to suggest that voters no longer like or respect Dr. Carson, just that they intend to vote for someone else,” Budzisz remarked.

Candidate Preference

Candidate	Candidate Support (as first choice)	Candidate Support (as first or second choice)
Ted Cruz	29.7 percent	52.3 percent
Donald Trump	23.4 percent	32.6 percent
Ben Carson	10.8 percent	24.0 percent
Marco Rubio	10.6 percent	29.8 percent
Jeb Bush	6.2 percent	9.6 percent
Carly Fiorina	3.4 percent	7.8 percent
Rand Paul	2.4 percent	4.4 percent
Mike Huckabee	1.8 percent	4.4 percent
John Kasich	1.0 percent	2.0 percent
Rick Santorum	1.0 percent	1.8 percent
Chris Christie	0.4 percent	3.4 percent
Lindsey Graham	0.0 percent	0.2 percent
Undecided	9.0 percent	

Cruz extends his advantage over the field when considering first choice or second choice support.

“From the first choice-second choice data, it is clear that Senator Cruz is well-regarded by many likely voters. Support for Marco Rubio triples if one considers his appeal as a second choice for voters. Cruz and Rubio are broadly appealing to many within the Republican caucus electorate, with Cruz receiving support of 22.6 percent of respondents as their second choice and Rubio garnering 19.2 percent as a second choice. Ben Carson is the only other candidate garnering double-digit support as a second choice, with 13.2 percent. Donald Trump is the second choice of only 9.2 percent of those polled,” Budzisz concluded.

Differences from Last Loras College Poll

There has been some notable movement in the top five candidates since the previous Loras College Poll released on October 26. Cruz has experienced a roughly five-fold increase in his support levels as a first choice, whereas support for Carson has notably declined. Support for Trump has proven resilient across polling since summer.

Candidate	Candidate Support as First Choice (Oct. 19-22 poll)	Candidate Support as First Choice (Dec. 7-10 poll)	Change
Ben Carson	30.6 percent	10.8 percent	-19.8
Donald Trump	18.6 percent	23.4 percent	+4.8
Marco Rubio	10.0 percent	10.6 percent	+0.6
Jeb Bush	6.8 percent	6.2 percent	-0.6
Ted Cruz	6.2 percent	29.7 percent	+23.5
UNDECIDED	12.8 percent	9.0 percent	-3.8

Voter Expectations

In addition to the standard question of which candidate they personally intend to vote for, likely caucus voters were asked who they *expected would win the caucus* and who they *expected would eventually win the nomination*. The top five responses were:

Expected Caucus Winner		Expected Eventual Nominee	
Donald Trump	31.3 percent	Donald Trump	28.9 percent
Ted Cruz	23.8 percent	Ted Cruz	20.6 percent
Ben Carson	5.8 percent	Marco Rubio	11.0 percent
Marco Rubio	5.0 percent	Jeb Bush	5.0 percent
Jeb Bush	4.4 percent	Ben Carson	4.4 percent
UNDECIDED	27.7 percent	UNDECIDED	29.3 percent

Trump leads the expectations amongst the candidates as 31.3 percent of those polled said they expected him to win the caucus and 28.9 percent of those polled expect him to be the eventual nominee.

“Given the large number of undecideds on this question, Republican voters are seeing this race as anything but decided,” Budzisz remarked.

Net Favorability

The Loras Poll also asked likely voters whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the various candidates. The results below indicate the net favorability of the candidates (percentage favorable opinion minus percentage unfavorable opinion). As such, positive numbers indicate a net favorable view, whereas negative numbers indicate a net unfavorable opinion.

Candidate	Net Favorability
Ted Cruz	+67.4 percent
Ben Carson	+61.0 percent
Marco Rubio	+60.5 percent
Carly Fiorina	+38.1 percent
Mike Huckabee	+36.8 percent
Rick Santorum	+21.8 percent
Donald Trump	+18.2 percent
Chris Christie	+10.2 percent
Jeb Bush	+4.6 percent
Rand Paul	-6.4 percent
John Kasich	-15.7 percent
Lindsey Graham	-44.8 percent

“Senator Cruz’s favorability ratings have really surged—more than doubling where he was in our last poll. Likewise, Senator Rubio’s numbers have increased. Dr. Carson’s have fallen back a bit, while Donald Trump’s net favorability score remains pretty consistent,” Budzisz commented.

Likely caucus participants were also asked whether or not there was a candidate they absolutely would not vote for. As with previous polling, Donald Trump remains the most divisive choice for likely Republican voters, with 30.1 percent indicating they would absolutely not vote for the real estate mogul.

A Closer Look at the Electorate

Given the nature of caucus participation, it is important to note two core parts of the Republican electorate--evangelical Christians and ideological conservatives. In the past two Republican caucuses, evangelical or born-again Christians comprised roughly 60 percent of the caucus electorate.

“Participation rates for the Iowa precinct caucuses are actually very low compared to a general election, but there are some groups who consistently participate. While the vast majority of Iowans will not turn out and vote on February 1, certain core groups on both sides of the political aisle will participate in their party’s caucus,” Budzisz remarked.

Of those likely voters identifying as evangelical or born-again Christians (52.7 percent of the likely Republican caucus voters polled in this survey), this key voting bloc is currently primarily

supporting three candidates. Cruz leads, receiving support from 36.5 percent of such voters, with Trump receiving 20.5 percent, and Carson with 13.3 percent. 64.9 percent of Cruz first-choice supporters are evangelical/born-again Christians. The number is 64.8 percent of Carson, and 46.2 percent of first-choice supporters of Trump are in this key demographic.

Turning to the ideological attachment of voters, Cruz dominates among voters who consider themselves “very conservative,” receiving support as a first-choice candidate of 44.8 percent of these voters. Trump and Carson are a very distant second and third among this key group of voters (19.3 percent and 10.3 percent respectively). Cruz and Trump top the field with voters who consider themselves “conservative” at 27.7 percent and 26.8 percent. Voters in these two ideological groups comprised 76.2 percent of the Republican sample (29.1 percent very conservative, 47.1 percent conservative).

Climate Change, Refugees, and Terrorism

The newest Loras College Poll asked likely voters to respond to questions on climate change, refugees, and terrorism. Respondents were asked their approval/disapproval of a U.S. commitment to a reduction in its greenhouse gas emissions as currently being pursued in Paris. Respondents were also asked their approval/disapproval of the possible use of ground troops in Syria to fight ISIS, as well as current plans for the U.S. to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees. In all three cases, a noteworthy partisan divide exists. Results of these issue questions are as follows:

U.S. commitment to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions

	Republican Subsample	Democratic Subsample	Total Sample
Total Approve	30.8 percent	88.2 percent	59.6 percent
Total Disapprove	55.8 percent	5.6 percent	30.6 percent
Unsure	13.2 percent	6.2 percent	9.7 percent

Use of U.S. ground troops to fight ISIS in Syria

	Republican Subsample	Democratic Subsample	Total Sample
Total Approve	65.4 percent	27.8 percent	46.5 percent
Total Disapprove	22.4 percent	58.3 percent	40.4 percent
Unsure	12.0 percent	13.6 percent	12.8 percent

Plan to accept 10,000 refugees from the conflict in Syria

	Republican Subsample	Democratic Subsample	Total Sample
Total Approve	13.8 percent	67.5 percent	40.7 percent
Total Disapprove	78.2 percent	20.8 percent	51.0 percent

Unsure	7.8 percent	8.6 percent	8.2 percent
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Other noteworthy results from the poll of Republican caucus electorate include:

- Likely voters were asked which candidate they trust the most to address the threat of terrorism. 30.7 percent indicated they trust Trump the most to address terrorism. The only other candidate in double-digits was Cruz (26.1 percent).
- Likely voters were also asked which candidate is best prepared to handle foreign policy. As with the terrorism question, Cruz and Trump topped the list of responses. 25.1 percent find Cruz most prepared, and 20.8 percent responded that Trump was most prepared.
- Republican disapproval of President Obama continues unabated. In the current Loras Poll, 90.8 percent of the likely Republican caucus voters indicated they somewhat or definitely disapprove of President Obama’s job performance (up from 86.4 percent in the October Loras Poll).
- Likely Republican voters in Iowa remain very negative on the direction of the country as well. In the current poll, 93.6 percent indicated that they believe the country is heading in the wrong direction (92.2 percent in the October Loras Poll).

For toplines and crosstabs related to today’s release, see: <http://loras.edu/poll>

Note on Methodology: The Loras College Poll surveyed 1,000 likely 2016 caucus voters (499 likely Republican voters, 501 likely Democratic voters). The survey was conducted December 7-10, 2015. Both subsamples of party caucus participants include no-party registrants who passed likely voter screen (see below). Margin of error for full sample results is +/- 3.1%, while for the party subsamples the margin of error is +/- 4.4%. All results calculated at a 95% confidence interval.

- Survey conducted with a random sample of registered voters (phone numbers drawn from official Iowa Secretary of State voter files of those who voted in either the 2012 or 2014 general election or who had registered since December 1, 2014).
- Likely caucus voter was defined as those indicating they were “definitely or very likely” to vote in the 2016 Iowa Caucus. Those indicating they were “somewhat likely” were subjected to further screen question regarding their general interest in politics. Only those indicating they were “very interested” in politics were then accepted within the sample as a likely caucus voter.
- The statewide sample was balanced for gender and age to approximate past caucus entrance polling, and divided evenly across Iowa’s four congressional districts.
- Survey included both landlines and cell phones (with an approximate 70-30 split).
- The survey was conducted using live operator interviews through a contracted professional call center.
- Script development and methodology used for the survey received input from Republican campaign consultant Brian Dumas and Democratic campaign consultant Dave Heller.

The Loras College Poll is conducted several times each year. Loras College faculty and student researchers work as part of the survey research team to develop poll questions, analyze and interpret data, and assist with sharing the final results with local, regional and national media.

Capitalizing on its location in the politically vital and vibrant state of Iowa, the Iowa Presidential Caucuses serve as a cornerstone of the Loras College Poll, with additional surveys focused on current events, social issues, economic issues, politics and more.

The Loras College Poll website is: <http://loras.edu/poll>

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