

# The Street



## Rubio Voted 'Most Electable' in Iowa, But Is It Enough to Get Elected?

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For a third-place finisher in the Iowa caucus, Marco Rubio is doing a heck of a victory lap. Why? Because, in Iowa, Rubio was voted "Most Electable."

The Florida senator's surge appears in part to be a reaction to rising concerns among Republicans that Donald Trump or Ted Cruz will emerge as the party's presidential nominee, which some fear would essentially guarantee a victory for Democrats come November. Compared to the former's wild unpredictability and the latter's widespread unpopularity, Rubio feels to many to be a safer, smarter bet.

"[Broader appeal] is important when you're trying to win in states like Ohio and Virginia and Florida and Colorado," said Mississippi-based Republican strategist Henry Barbour.

There are other Republican candidates in the election that have a broader, more moderate appeal, but Rubio bested them all in Iowa.

Bush has failed to take off, despite the millions of dollars pumped into his campaign, Christie mirrors Trump's personality but lacks his populist appeal, and Kasich can appear a bit wonkish, explained Doug Bandow, senior fellow at the Cato Institute and former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan. "Each of them has something about them, where I think Rubio comes in looking a little more glamorous, talking in religious terms, probably outshines those others."

Unfortunately for those working with this basic thesis, the ghosts of elections past suggest electability does not always translate to victory.

What The Wall Street Journal called Arizona Senator John McCain's "electability edge" didn't win him the White House in 2008, nor did former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney's perceived electability garner him a victory in 2012.

Eight years ago, Hillary Clinton's argument that she was a more sensible candidate for Democrats than then-Senator Barack Obama didn't turn out as she had hoped. Currently, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, a former independent and self-proclaimed Democratic socialist, is giving her a run for her money despite big questions about his electability.

"Rubio's a desperation selection for people who don't want either Trump or Cruz," said Bandow. "He may very well be more electable, that's possible. Looking for somebody just because they are electable doesn't seem to work out very well."

Still, the race for to win the "not the wrong choice" contest is still young. The New Hampshire primaries will represent an opportunity for Rubio to solidify his place in the race or for others to reset the conversation.

"New Hampshire represents a second chance for a lot of people," said Barbour. "You've got Jeb and Kasich and Rand [Paul] and Carly [Fiorina] and Christie, who all realize they've got to deliver the goods in New Hampshire."

If Rubio turns in strong showings in New Hampshire and into South Carolina, and other establishment-friendly candidates fail to launch, he is likely to be the GOP's electability bet.

"My view is that after South Carolina, this thing needs to be down to Trump, Cruz and somebody," said Barbour.

### **What About Trump?**

"Trump's showing hurts him more than he would hurt anyone else, because part of his candidacy is premised on him being a winner," said Randy Barnett, a law professor at Georgetown University Law Center and advisor to Rand Paul's campaign..

After leading the polls for months, Trump was fed his first piece of loser pie in Iowa Monday evening, coming in second in the caucus with 25% of the vote to Cruz's 28%. It's fair to assume he's choked it down, even as he works to spin his second-place finish in Iowa into success.

"My experience in Iowa was a great one," he wrote on Twitter Tuesday. "I started out with all of the experts saying I couldn't do well there and ended up in 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Nice."

Barbour acknowledged Iowa was always going to be a tough place for him to win, even though he appeared to be surging in the polls in recent weeks. "It seems like his lack of ground game and Cruz and Rubio's better ground effort made the difference," he said.

Had he won in Iowa, as he is likely to do in New Hampshire, many pundits believed he would have a clear path to the Republican nomination. Now that his positioning doesn't appear to be as solid as presumed, the GOP is in for a harder-fought contest.

"This is more likely to be a real campaign," said Bandow.

So what's next for Trump?

"Nobody but Donald Trump knows what Donald Trump is going to do next," said Barnett. "My guess is he will show up for the next debate."