

# THE HILL

## **A.B. Stoddard: Rand Paul, kingmaker**

By A.B. Stoddard - 03/12/14

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul's landslide win in the CPAC straw poll was predictably dismissed as insignificant and nearly rigged by the overwhelming majority of young voters who now dominate the Conservative Political Action Conference. True, they swoon for Paul's outrage over the government takeover of their smartphones and aren't representative of the voters who will ultimately decide the outcome of the GOP primary process two years from now. But underestimating Paul's reach, determination and role in reshaping the GOP would be folly for Republicans and Democrats alike.

Paul currently crushes all Republican 2016 hopefuls in three critical categories: new ideas, fire in the belly and a clear strategy. His foray into African-American communities to press for the restoration of voting rights for criminals, his outreach to young voters on privacy issues, his bridge-building with Jewish voters on aid to Israel, his engagement with social conservatives and his refusal to draw hard lines on immigration and gay marriage are all designed to build a far broader coalition than not only that of his father, former Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), but of the other potential candidates as well. And while GOP primary voters aren't likely ready to choose a candidate who makes Hillary Clinton look like a hawk, Paul's hesitance on defense matters reflects a stark trend away from internationalism, not only among young voters but Americans in both parties and of all ages.

As they both swarm the spotlight, Paul is often lumped with Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) as a Tea Party purist who, with his libertarian principles, is too far out of the mainstream to become a credible presidential contender. But unlike Cruz, Paul isn't rejecting any Republican, or even Democratic, votes, acknowledging as he did at CPAC that "the party has got to grow bigger, or we're not going to win again."

Paul has inserted himself in a neutral zone between two warring GOP factions. He is tight with his state's senior senator, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who has declared war on the outside insurgent groups backed by the Tea Party and originally backed Paul's primary opponent, as well as other establishment players like Karl Rove. As John Samples of the Cato Institute told *The New York Times* of Rand Paul, "unlike his father, he's not interested in educating. He's interested in winning."

Of all Republican presidential hopefuls Paul is already the most organized, due in part to his father's campaign apparatus from three failed bids. Like his dad, he will seek to influence the outcome, and his political future, by amassing a load of delegates. But Ron Paul forged such a

warm alliance with GOP nominee Mitt Romney in 2012 that a Romney staffer joked he was their “deputy campaign manager” — as the more conservative candidates combined outpaced Romney in each 2012 primary election, he had Ron Paul to thank for splitting enough of the vote that none of the other contenders could eclipse him. It’s not clear Rand Paul would do the same.

Paul has worked assiduously to move beyond the comparison to his father with his own, updated version of Paulism. Though he may get tripped up along the way by some of the anarchist and racist voices within the libertarian movement, the Paul of 2014 appears ready to reject any troublesome association that gets in his way.

At this point Paul has outsmarted and outperformed both competitors and critics. If that trend continues, the Republican Party won’t be the same again.

*Stoddard is an associate editor of The Hill.*