

US presidential campaign: Sanders opens up lead in Iowa, New Hampshire polls

By Patrick Martin
15 September 2015

A series of polls released Sunday and Monday show plunging support among Democratic Party voters for the presumed frontrunner, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, while Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has taken double-digit leads in the first two states that will cast ballots, Iowa and New Hampshire.

According to an Internet poll run by CBS and YouGov, Sanders has a lead of 22 percentage points in New Hampshire, 52 to 30 percent, and a 10-point lead in Iowa, 43 to 33 percent. Sanders has been leading in New Hampshire polling for the past month, but was trailing in polls of likely Iowa caucus voters until late last week.

Clinton continues to lead in South Carolina, the state that votes third in the nomination campaign, by 46 percent to 23 percent. She also leads in national polls, by figures ranging from 37 to 30 percent (CNN) to 42 to 24 percent in a Washington Post/ABC poll (with 21 percent for Vice President Joe Biden, who is not a declared candidate).

While clinging to a lead in national polls of likely Democratic voters, Clinton has fallen below 50 percent for the first time, dropping 21 points since July in the Washington Post/ABC poll. These polls suggest that Sanders' support may increase substantially, since 39 percent of those polled said they didn't know enough about him to have an opinion.

The same polls show Republican primary voters continuing to back billionaire Donald Trump (33 percent) and retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson (20 percent), with none of the former elected officials seeking the nomination gaining more than 8 percent, the level of support registered by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. The biggest drop in support was suffered by Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, who fell from 13 percent to only 2 percent.

Clinton's steady decline in the polls is only partially the result of the media battering over her use of a private email server while she was secretary of state. In the latest surveys, 49 percent of likely voters did not consider the email server a legitimate issue, compared to 44 percent who did.

Of far greater significance is the shift to the left among young people and working people, which has found expression in large turnouts at the rallies staged by the Sanders campaign, first in college towns like Madison, Wisconsin, later in major cities like Denver, Seattle and Los Angeles.

More than 9,000 attended a Sanders rally held at Greensboro Coliseum in North Carolina Sunday night, held as part of a three-day campaign swing through the Carolinas and Virginia. Sanders also spoke at the historically black Benedict College in South Carolina and at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, the college founded by the late ultra-right fundamentalist Jerry Falwell.

At each of these venues, Sanders gave the same basic speech, focusing on economic inequality and denouncing the political influence of the "billionaire class." He also hailed the election of Jeremy Corbyn as the leader of the British Labour Party, declaring, "We need leadership in every country in the world which tells the billionaire class that they cannot have it all. We need economies that work for working families, not just the people on top."

In his remarks at Liberty University, Sanders couched his condemnation of inequality and corporate greed in Biblical terms, with numerous quotations from the Old Testament and references to the example set by Pope Francis.

Sanders is the first candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination to address a convocation at

Liberty University. The thrice-weekly compulsory student assemblies have been a regular campaign stop for Republicans, and Senator Ted Cruz chose to launch his presidential bid at one.

As he has since declaring his candidacy in the spring, Sanders has offered more rhetorical opposition to Wall Street greed than actual policy differences with either the Obama administration or Hillary Clinton. He calls for government spending on infrastructure to create new jobs—a position espoused by many Republicans as well as Democrats—but not for a program of public works to create jobs directly rather than through the promotion of capitalist businesses.

The most noticeable change introduced in the past month is the addition of an appeal to racial identity politics in an effort to accommodate groups like Black Lives Matter, which staged protests at his recent rallies on the Pacific Coast. In Greensboro, for example, he saluted the election and reelection of Barack Obama as historic victories against racism, and condemned police violence in exclusively racial terms, as though young black men were the only victims of police killings.

“I do not want to see local police departments that look like invading armies,” Sanders said in Greensboro. “A good police department is one that is part of the community, not one that looks like an oppressing force.”

In reality, while young black men are disproportionately targeted for police violence, the police attack working class victims of all races, and the largest number of those killed by police are white.

Sanders has continued to downplay the issues of war and militarism and avoided any criticism of the Obama administration’s drone warfare and interventions in the Middle East during an appearance Sunday on the NBC interview program “Meet the Press.”

In response to a question about the refugee crisis and the civil war in Syria, he claimed to be “very concerned about a lot of the war talk that I am hearing from my Republican colleagues, who apparently have forgotten the cost of war and the errors made in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

The current refugee crisis, however, is a byproduct of the wars of the Obama administration, particularly its regime-change war in Libya and its fomenting of civil war in Syria, which has sent half of the population of that country into flight.

Sanders said that Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other US allies in the Middle East would “have to get their hands dirty and are going to have to get on the ground” to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, while he opposed the use of US ground troops. But it is precisely the use of these countries as conduits for funneling weapons and Islamist fighters into Syria, organized and encouraged by the Obama administration, that has destroyed Syria as a functioning society and displaced millions of refugees.

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