

Texas Primary Reveals Republican Unease Over McCain

The upcoming Texas Primary March 4th has revealed some conservative dissatisfaction with the likely nomination of Senator John McCain for president. This primary ranks as the most important since 1976, when Gerald Ford fought Ronald Reagan for Texas' delegates to the Republican Convention. Since the primary is later than many other states, the nominees of both major parties are usually known before the presidential contest rolls into Texas. Senator McCain leads the national GOP field by a large margin in the delegate count, with only former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee standing between him and the nomination. With the recent departure of Mitt Romney, both McCain and Huckabee draw increased support in Texas opinion polls, according to a report in the Houston Chronicle. On Feb. 8th the Arizona senator polled 43%, Mr. Huckabee 33%, and Ron Paul drew 9% of likely voters in Texas, Mr. Paul's home state. The 32 congressional districts each have 3 delegates at stake, for a total of 96, and 41 additional delegates going to the winner of the statewide vote, making it likely that each candidate will win some delegates. Mr. Huckabee recent victories in Kansas and Louisiana highlight considerable dissatisfaction among some social conservatives with Senator McCain. Many feel that McCain supported liberal and Democratic Party positions at the expense of conservative unity, while the Arizona senator feels that by supporting issues on a factual basis, he supports the country over partisan ideology and creates the opportunity for bipartisanship. Most of the institutional leadership of the Texas GOP now supports him, including former Rudy Guiliani supporter Governor Rick Perry, who recently called on Mr. Huckabee to withdraw from the race. Senator John Cornyn also recently endorsed McCain, though Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison has yet to endorse anyone. With a large base of conservative evangelical voters, Texas will challenge the secular Arizona senator. Even if Gov. Huckabee manages to win in Texas, John McCain's march to the nomination may be unstoppable. McCain may experience what happened to Gerald Ford in 1976, when social conservatives in the Texas Republican Party supported someone else in the primary and stayed home during the November general election. Another outcome is that unhappy conservatives may crossover March 4th and vote in the more interesting Democratic Party primary, since Texas voters can participate in either primary. Jimmy Carter won Texas in the 1976 presidential election, the last Democrat to do so. With McCain likely on the ballot in November, Democrats could carry Texas again.

About the Author

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