

January 30, 2020

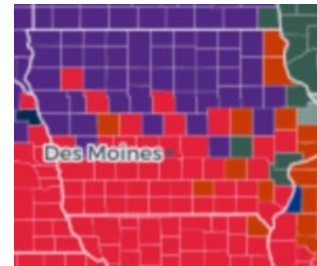
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Super Bowl Sunday and Iowa Caucus Monday

Events held on back-to-back dates for only the third time in history

The last time the Super Bowl was held the evening before the Iowa Caucuses, the Pittsburgh Steelers defeated the Los Angeles Rams 31-19 in Super Bowl XIV (1980) to become the first NFL team to win four Super Bowls. That Steelers squad consisted of 10 hall-of-fame players, a hall-of-fame coach, and a hall-of-fame owner. As the names Swann, Bradshaw, Harris, and Noll take Steelers' fans back to the glory days, so might, for some, the prominent names in the 1980 election cycle: George H.W. Bush narrowly defeated Ronald Reagan in the Iowa Caucuses, but Reagan would ultimately earn the nomination, select Bush as his running mate, and handily defeat incumbent President Jimmy Carter.

It's difficult to make the argument that Super Bowl XIV impacted the 1980 Iowa Caucuses, and it still seems like a stretch 40 years later. There are some interesting factors at play, however, between the 2020 Iowa Caucuses and this year's Super Bowl LIV, pitting the Kansas City Chiefs against the San Francisco 49ers. For one, Iowa's proximity to Kansas City. With Kansas City situated around 130 miles from Iowa's southern border, many Iowans naturally root for the Chiefs. In fact, in 2018, online ticket retailer SeatGeek produced an [NFL Fandom U.S. map](#) analyzing the behavior of NFL ticket shoppers. Check out the image above – the red represents Chiefs fans (and the purple represents fans of the Minnesota Vikings). It's a pretty safe bet many Iowans have a vested interest in this year's Super Bowl and will be tuned in Sunday night.



Even absent a heightened "local" interest in the game, the Super Bowl is typically the most watched television broadcast in the U.S. each year by far and the timing of the big game relative to Iowa's nominating contest could impact 11th hour campaign efforts. Well before the Chiefs/49ers matchup was set, Chair of West Des Moines Democrats, Victor Dutchuk, warned the campaigns to tread carefully in case they annoyed fans gripped to their TVs during the Super Bowl. "Typically the night before the caucus, including the day of the caucus, there is a massive increase in phone-banking and door-knocking," Dutchuk told the Washington Examiner. "The Super Bowl the night before should, in my opinion, limit their ability to do that because you don't want antagonize any caucusgoers." We've been there- settled in to enjoy dinner, a favorite show, or a sporting event, and the phone rings or there's a knock on the door from a political party or candidate. Annoying. Well, what if your favorite team is in the Super Bowl for the first time in 50 years and they're about to score a momentum-changing touchdown? Sounds like Dutchuk provided sound advice.

It's also worth noting that President Trump and Democratic candidate Michael Bloomberg both recently revealed they're each paying upward of \$10 million for 60-second ads to air during the Super Bowl. It remains to be seen what impact, if any, those ads will have on the Iowa Caucuses considering both are focused on a more national appeal. Trump is without a serious challenger in Iowa, but is targeting the state to show strength and boost Republican Caucus turnout, while Bloomberg's strategy has been to skip Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina (total of 155 delegates at stake among the first four states) and instead focus on the 14 states and 1,357 delegates at stake on Super Tuesday, March 3.

And finally, one thing holds true of all elections (and in this case, caucuses): voter turnout always plays a major role. The weather is frequently discussed as a turnout factor for elections, but one could also argue that the outcome of the Super Bowl *could* impact Chiefs' fans moods on Monday, which *could* also play a role in voter turnout. Football notwithstanding, the Iowa Democratic Party has been bracing for a possible record-breaking turnout for more than a year, driven by angst over President Trump and a large field of Democratic candidates, each with their own ground operation in the state. But even more interesting is that each Democratic candidate believes high-turnout will help them individually – and they aren't wrong.

To understand how that's possible, consider the uniqueness of the Iowa Democratic Caucuses, and if you aren't familiar, here's a short primer (and be prepared to have your mind blown...no, really). While the Iowa caucuses, like all primary contests, are about earning the most pledged delegates that vote during the Democratic National Convention this July in Milwaukee, the process isn't what most would consider a "normal" election. It's a public event requiring Iowans to be physically present in one of the state's 1,678 precincts (think community centers, high school gymnasiums, libraries, etc.), in which people literally congregate in different parts of the room with people supporting the same candidate (note, six "virtual" caucuses are being added this year, so technically not every caucus will be held in person). And if a candidate fails to gain support of 15% of attendees in that room, the candidate is removed from the running (in that precinct) and supporters have an opportunity to realign themselves with a different candidate or convince other caucusgoers to join in support of their candidate before a final vote is taken. Ultimately, Iowa's pledged national delegates are allocated to candidates proportionally based on these results using a mathematical formula. Clear as the mud being slung around the Hawkeye State this week, right? [Here's an article from CBS that explains things further.](#)

Okay, eyes back on the prize (the one in Iowa, not the Lombardi Trophy). As of Tuesday morning, the Democratic contest in Iowa appears to be a four-way race between Sen. Bernie Sanders (22.7%), former Vice President Joe Biden (22.1%), former South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg (16.1%), and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (13.6%), based on an average of state polls according to [FiveThirtyEight.com](#).

As the national polls seem to be trending toward Biden and Sanders, Iowa presents an opportunity for Biden to solidify his frontrunner status and for Sanders to seize early momentum and perhaps proclaim himself the frontrunner, especially considering his popularity in the next state to vote, New Hampshire. Buttigieg and Warren have solid opportunities to win delegates as well, and latch on to any amount of momentum that would create. The results will ultimately be a test of their field operations, which have been well-regarded by Democratic activists in the state. And then there are the curious cases of Senator Amy Klobuchar and Andrew Yang, both polling in single digits statewide, but with their own passionate supporters. The dialogue surrounding those candidates appears to be less about whether they can win delegates on Monday, but more about courting their supporters if they don't achieve the 15% threshold on the first tally. Remember, supporters of all candidates will be working the caucus rooms to build alliances and garner more support. The importance of having an organized campaign and passionate, knowledgeable supporters in all corners of the state cannot be overstated.

At the end of the day, the prize in Iowa is a somewhat paltry 41 pledged delegates (out of the 1,990 delegates needed to win the nomination on the first ballot), and since it's not winner take all, the number of delegates awarded to the "winner" will be further divided. But the value of winning, and even the value of coming away with delegates, could help set the tone for the rest of the Democratic presidential primary. As former NFL wide receiver Terrell Owens famously said, "Get your popcorn ready."