

# Sanders Searches for Super Tuesday Targets

In Virginia and across the map, he hopes to compensate for Hillary Clinton's demographic advantages.



 National Journal

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🕒 Feb. 24, 2016, 8 p.m.

**N**ORFOLK, Va.—While thousands waited in the damp chill to hear Bernie Sanders's message in person earlier this week, a more critical target for his campaign walked right past Scope Arena in the form of Eon George-Jefferson.

The Virginia Beach acupuncturist is African-American, a registered voter, and a strong supporter of President Obama. And although a business appointment left her no time for political rallies that morning, she wants to hear what Sanders has to say before making up her mind.

"Thus far, I'm still open," she said.

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Her choice Tuesday, and the choice of millions of minority voters like

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her in a dozen states, will decide the future of the senator's improbable presidential run. Because after all the high-energy rallies and the tens of millions collected in \$3 and \$10 and \$25 increments, that night's results will either elevate Sanders as a legitimate threat to win the Democratic presidential nomination or leave him just far enough behind Hillary Clinton to make victory all but impossible.

While the first four contests are about perceptions and momentum, Tuesday will mark the single biggest day on the Democratic primary calendar. A candidate needs 2,383 delegates to win the nomination, and 865 will be awarded on March 1. Only two other primary dates come close: March 15, when five states, including Florida, Illinois, and Ohio, award 691 delegates, and June 7, when heavyweight California and five other states award 694.

And of the 11 states voting Tuesday (Democrats in American Samoa also vote that day, as do Democrats who live abroad), five are in the South, with large percentages of African-American and Latino voters—groups that Sanders has had trouble connecting with. While Sanders will almost certainly win big in his home state and do well in Massachusetts and Minnesota, those three states combined have 184 delegates, compared with 476 from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas.

Which leaves Virginia as a reasonably large and racially diverse state (and the only one of the March 1 states likely to be in play during the November general election) where Sanders might do well—possibly following the playbook used by then-Sen. Obama when he beat Clinton nearly 2-to-1 in the 2008 primary. But even here, Sanders starts with the deck stacked against him: Both U.S. senators have endorsed Clinton, while Gov. Terry McAuliffe is a longtime friend of and fundraiser for both Clinton and her husband, former President Bill Clinton.

Geoffrey Skelley of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics said Sanders could nevertheless do well in the Northern Virginia counties, home to many urban liberals, who have been among Sanders's strongest supporters in previous contests. "I'm also interested to see how Bernie Sanders does in those rural, Appalachian areas," Skelley said. "I expect Sanders will end up winning college towns. I guarantee you Sanders will win Charlottesville."

Those rural counties along and to the west of Interstate 81 were the only places that Clinton did well in 2008, winning many of them by 2-to-1 margins.

"We skew older, and we skew whiter," said Botetourt County Democratic chairwoman Gretchen Notermann. "I'm thinking that those demograph-

ics are probably going to go for Secretary Clinton.”

A half-dozen Democrats that gathered at her Fincastle home recently agreed that Clinton would likely do well again—but pointed out that even overwhelming support in such sparsely populated areas won’t matter much one way or the other. “Trees don’t vote, as they say. And we have a lot of trees around here,” said retiree Gib Ehalt.

As for Virginia’s youth vote, if Sanders is hoping for massive turnouts among the state’s college students, he may be disappointed. At a popular student hangout just off the University of Virginia’s grounds in Charlottesville, exactly one flyer even mentioned an election—the student government election that wraps up this week. Neither Sanders nor Clinton appears to have a major presence on campus.

Fourth-year psychology major Lindsay Mottola said she wishes students were more engaged. “People are so busy all the time,” she said as she worked on her laptop. She added that she plans to vote, although she hasn’t fully settled on a candidate yet. “I think I’m leaning toward Bernie.”

Of course, even if Sanders does get a big turnout from young voters and wins over more-liberal voters in Northern Virginia, to win the state he would still need to narrow the gap with minority voters, especially among African-Americans who make up 19 percent of the state’s population and at least 30 percent of the Democratic primary electorate.

With just days to go, that could prove too steep a hill, particularly with the recent endorsements that Clinton has won from the Congressional Black Caucus and Rep. James Clyburn of South Carolina.

“I think it’s a big deal,” said Karla Grase, cochair of the Hampton Democratic Committee. “That definitely does matter to African-Americans that Hillary Clinton has the support that she has.”

All Sanders can likely do at this point is hope that enough black voters are like 28-year-old James Boyd, who took time off from his job with a Portsmouth aerial imaging company to attend Sanders’s Norfolk rally. Not that he has anything against Clinton, he said; he just likes what Sanders is saying about income inequality. “I think we need new, innovative ideas.”

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