

At the GOP convention in Ohio, Kasich will welcome—and woo—delegates

In his long-shot bid to win the Republican nomination, the Ohio governor will need to make the most of his home-court advantage.



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🕒 April 4, 2016, 8:01 p.m.

Sure, Republican insiders who try to engineer a John Kasich nomination this summer might incite riots outside the Cleveland convention hall, but look on the bright side: At least they'll have picked the one person who can call in the Ohio National Guard.

And therein lies the peculiar, dual role for the Ohio governor, who will be hosting the gathering of 50,000 Republicans to his state while quite possibly still trying to cajole the subset of 2,500 convention delegates into ignoring his dismal performance in the GOP primaries and nominating him anyway.

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“Ohio is a swing state we know we need to win in November. We’re

headed for a contested convention. We've got our governor in the mix. We've got everything you could ask for," said Matt Borges, chairman of the Ohio Republican Party, who is among those hoping the national party turns to Kasich if front-runner Donald Trump fails to win the 1,237 delegates needed to secure the nomination by the end of primary season. "Our message is pretty simple: Pick the guy who can win in November."

Ordinarily a home-state governor's responsibilities at a convention are fairly straightforward and largely ceremonial—welcoming the delegates to what in recent decades has become a televised pep rally for the nominee. Tim Pawlenty, governor of Minnesota during his party's 2008 convention in St. Paul, had a somewhat larger role because he also cochaired the "host committee," the bipartisan group that must raise tens of millions of dollars to pay for the event.

Pawlenty, though, was not a candidate simultaneously seeking the nomination himself. "In John's case, it's fundamentally different," Pawlenty said, wondering if Kasich could have shouldered more convention responsibilities even if he'd wanted to, given his campaign schedule. "He's been out of the state for most of the past year."

Nevertheless, Ohio voters continue to like their governor, as do voters nationally. Overcoming a reputation from his years in Congress as prickly and difficult, Kasich is the only remaining GOP candidate seen favorably by the national electorate, and the only one polls suggest might be likely to beat Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton.

Ohio Republicans gave Kasich a solid victory in that state's primary last month—which stands out as his sole victory all primary season. Borges said that win by itself has enormous import, given that Republicans will need Ohio if they hope to win back the White House in November. What's more, Borges said, if the convention heads into multiple ballots, Kasich will suddenly find himself in a good position.

"I think it does give him a home-court advantage," he said, noting for example that Kasich would have the ability to arrange private meeting rooms in the immediate vicinity of the convention hall for the various state delegations to plan strategy. "It allows us to be a little bit more organized, and we'll take every advantage we can get."

Just how big an advantage that would provide remains open for debate.

"I don't think the nomination's going to be based on meeting rooms," said Pawlenty. But he allowed that Kasich could have an edge in terms of rounding up supporters quickly to lobby delegates, "if you need a surge

force of volunteers, or a surge force of communicators, or a surge force of arm-twisters—although I guess I better be careful of saying 'arm-

twisters' in the era of Trump—metaphorical arm-twisters.”

In the end, though, Kasich’s local popularity won’t mean much when it comes to the actual delegates. “The decision-makers inside that convention hall are mostly not from Ohio,” Pawlenty said.

Ken Blackwell, a former Ohio secretary of state and an unsuccessful candidate for governor, said that not only are most of the delegates *not* from Ohio, but they are also considerably more conservative than Kasich, making his path even more unlikely.

“There’s no way he can step over Trump and Ted Cruz, even if the party is in his house,” Blackwell said, adding that while he can understand how the Texas senator can make a defensible argument for the nomination if he manages to close the gap with Trump, he cannot see how the party can give it to someone else.

“It is a much easier moral case and political case you can make if there is just a little daylight between Trump and Cruz, and if Trump is at least 100 away from 1,237,” Blackwell said. “But you would have to have the imagination of Walt Disney to give it to someone who hasn’t been in the hunt or who has come in a distant third.”

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