

# GOP Can Stop Trump, But Only by Thwarting its Voters

After his smashing victory in New York, Donald Trump will finish the primaries well ahead of Ted Cruz and in hailing range of the 1,237 delegates needed for the nomination.



AP Photo/Julie Jacobson



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**W**ith Donald Trump's blowout win in New York and five more Trump-friendly states just a week away, Republicans intent on blocking their front-runner from the presidential nomination will have no choice but to become downright undemocratic—with a lowercase "D."

A *National Journal* review of the remaining states suggests that even if Trump does poorly in Indiana and loses winner-take-all contests in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Montana, he will likely still end the primary

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season with close to 1,150 delegates. That total will be at least 300 deleg-

ates more than Sen. Ted Cruz will have, and will represent several million more primary voters.

Trump made a point of mentioning both of those leads in his victory speech on Tuesday night, while continuing to rail against a system that permits delegates to be awarded in local and state conventions, rather than statewide elections. “Nobody should take delegates and claim victory unless they get those delegates with voters and voting,” he said. “The people aren’t going to stand for it.”

So while Cruz and those committed to defeating Trump continue to argue that his finishing even a single delegate shy of the 1,237 threshold needed to secure the nomination means the party can rightfully give it to anyone it wants on the second ballot, other Republicans concede that approach carries political hazards.

Ron Kaufman, a Republican National Committee member from Massachusetts, said that if Trump gets close to that mark, enough of the 100-150 “unbound” delegates at the convention will probably line up with Trump to make the question moot. Delegates not required by the rules to vote for a particular candidate come from a number of territories and states—with 54 coming from Pennsylvania, which votes next week.

“If he gets into the 1,100 range, my guess is he finds a way to get the other 100,” Kaufman said.

That Republicans are even having this debate this far into the primary season, and with a candidate so far ahead, illustrates again Trump’s unprecedented effect on the party. While a plurality of its voting base sees Trump as the champion of the neglected working class, many GOP leaders see him as an incompetent egoist who will not only lose the general election, but also cause the Republicans to lose control of the Senate and significantly diminish their majority in the House.

“Donald Trump is bad for my party and bad for the country,” one local New York state GOP official said privately. He allowed that giving the nomination to someone who comes in second or third in the voting, or someone who didn’t even run at all, would cause the party problems. But letting Trump be the nominee, he believed, would be even worse. “It’s something the party’s going to have to work through.”

For his part, Trump is working to make that a burden too heavy for the party even to contemplate. Though weeks ago he primarily attacked his rivals for the nomination, he has now instead turned his fire on the Re-

publican National Committee itself, calling the system “rigged” and warning of dire consequences should he finish first in the delegates yet

not be given the nomination.

A former staffer is organizing a protest march on the convention in Cleveland in July, even as new top campaign aides focus on trying to find delegates actually loyal to Trump to serve as delegates in those states he has won—a strategy Cruz made a priority six months ago.

Shawn Steel, an RNC member from California, said the on-the-ground work is a good step forward for Trump—one he could have taken at any time since he entered the race. “I think he could have had this wrapped up 30 days ago,” Steel said.

As to Trump’s suggestion that his voters will abandon the party should he be denied the nomination, Steel said they could be brought back with a simple counterargument: “And that’s Obama’s third term. And that’s a real visceral concern,” he said. “That’s why I think the threat of the walkout is greatly exaggerated.”

If Trump does in fact finish about 100 delegates shy of the 1,237 mark, Steel said, the path to clinching the nomination is fairly straightforward.

“Is he going to end his war with the party? Is he going to improve his campaign operations? Is he going to act more presidential?” Steel asked. “I think it’s up to him. This is one area where he has the chance to be successful or snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.”

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