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**Socialist Bernie on the rise**

Democratic voters in the small state of Iowa are set to vote for their party’s nominee for the November Presidential election today on Monday, February 3.

At stake are only 41 delegates out of a total 4979, which is less than one percent, but the amount of time, resources and energies that the contesting candidates spend in this state is greater than any other primary.

Iowa gets huge national attention mainly because for many candidates it is a make or break primary. There is a lot of history involved in the primary of this state. Two prominent candidates who won the Iowa primary ultimately won the presidential nomination – Jimmy Carter (from Georgia) and Barack Hussain Obama (Chicago).

Polls in the state primary show that Bernie is ahead of his rivals, including former vice-president Joe Biden. No other candidate had held bigger rallies as Bernie’s campaign has done; and his grassroots movement and number of volunteers is greater than his rivals. There would be little surprise if he emerges as the winner today.

Hillary Clinton lost both bids for presidency, and for Bernie, this is his second coming with experience in the field. In the 2016 Democratic primaries, Bernie Sanders won 23 states gaining 46 percent of the total votes (with 1865 delegates) against a very strong Hillary Clinton. It was Hillary’s second attempt for presidency, and Bernie’s first one.

Like in Pakistani politics, electability is a big consideration among Democratic voters and traditional thinkers; they want to pick a candidate who can defeat Donald Trump, and one who does not scare moderates and independent voters. A September 2019 Gallup poll found that 31 percent of Americans identified as Democrat, 29 percent as Republican and 38 percent as Independent. Neither party’s candidates can win without the independent vote.

To assume that a left-leaning progressive Democrat will not get support from independents is not justified given past experience. For example, before Barack Obama no one in the country really believed an African-American would be elected president, but Obama broke that myth. The Iowa state that Trump won in 2016, Obama had won before, so winning Iowa increases the likelihood of winning the presidency.

In the national polls for the Democratic nomination, Joe Biden still holds sway over Bernie, with 32 percent against Bernie’s 22 percent. So polls at the first primary state Iowa and the national level show that the Democratic field is not an open contest, but has emerged as a contest between Biden and Bernie. It should not surprise anyone that until the Democratic convention in July, the target of criticism for the Democratic establishment will not be Donald Trump but Bernie Sanders.

If one reviews the past one week’s analysis of the Iowa primary, mainstream media does not seem relieved at Bernie’s rise, rather they call it ‘panic among the Democrats’. Hillary Clinton went one step further, saying of Bernie: “No one likes him”; within days she had to walk away from her comments. Twitter feeds were flooded with pro-Bernie tweets.

There is a mountain of evidence now that the Democratic National Committee (DNC) rigged the primaries against Bernie. It is now on record that Hillary’s campaign was funded from DNC accounts; Bernie did not get DNC funds. It was his grace that he did not blame the DNC and Hillary because he knew what was at stake – the future of American democracy.

Having been a senator since 2007, Bernie understands well American power politics; but he does not play foul, he does not build his case and candidacy on the weakness of his rival, the way recently his progressive rival Elizabeth Warren did during a debate in Iowa. The only time Bernie resorted to criticism publicly against Elizabeth Warren was when an anchor asked him to withdraw his nomination as there are now young candidates furthering his progressive agenda (Senator Warren was in reference). Bernie’s reply was: “but she is a capitalist, I am a democratic socialist; she is not against capitalism, I am”.

In his campaign discourse, Bernie does not use the traditional socialist language of criticism while emphasizing why the country needs the change. His only reference from the past has been that of the 1930s New Deal, with deep roots in the redistribution of wealth and resources in the American context.

There are several grounds on which one can assess Bernie’s rise and viability as a Democratic candidate for the November 2020 US presidential election, the first one being his campaign’s focus on the fundamental questions of inequality, poverty, healthcare, tax evasion by big corporate companies. Another issue that affects every worker in the country that goes out to work every day is wages. No other candidate raises these issues and offers a solution the way Bernie does – a living wage and gainful livelihood, without initiating trade wars, blaming other scapegoats (immigrants), the way Trump did and continues to do.

Bernie does not blame Russia, China and or any other foreign power for American inequality, his (socialist) critique is of the system and the nexus of state/government and capitalism which is not working for everyone.

There is a solid hope this time that Bernie is coming with his political revolution because Democratic voters are swayed by a leader who inspires them with his character and message; Bernie has both. Its true that national polls view Joe Biden as an electable but isn’t it also true that even Democrats see him as an uninspiring leader who carries the baggage of his son’s unethical behaviour when he draw a huge salary from a Ukranian company when Joe was vice president. Trump could easily demolish him in debates, if he is to be the candidate.

Bernie has raised more funds than any other Democratic candidate. Over 700,000 people have contributed $35 million to his campaign in the last quarter, a consecutive lead in fund raising that keeps building his movement on the slogan of ‘Not me, Us’. Bernie’s ‘us not me’ narrative has built a coalition of minorities, trade unions (a 200,000 strong American Postal Union has endorsed him) women groups and his core support base – the American youth.

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