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UNITED STATES 2020: THE DEMOCRATS BEGIN THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

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The U.S. democratic invisible primary ends June 26 and 27, closing the period during which candidates start raising money, creating their campaigns and seeking endorsements among the party's various groups and factions. This stage usually begins after candidates have announced their intention to run, but some occasionally choose to start building up their alliances and resources before announcing their candidacy. Though this has previously occurred away from the public eye, these primaries are becoming increasingly visible as the presidential race gains more importance in the media. Now, they are stepping more and more into the spotlight.

This takes us to June 26 and 27, when the first debate between candidates will take place. Since there are too many presidential candidates to fit in a TV studio, the networks organizing the debate (NBC, MSNB and Telemundo) decided to split the event across two days. Even with the schedule of 10 candidates debating each day, there still will not be room for all of them to participate. The Democratic National Committee had to establish new, two-fold criterion based on online fundraising and voting intention polls in order to determine which candidates would participate and which would not.

The 20+ candidates range from centrists to social democrats, with personal and political backgrounds as varied as their ideologies. The candidates include a former vice president, eight senators, four members of the House, three governors, two small-city mayors, a retired senator and two retired representatives, a former cabinet member, a businessman from the tech sector with no political experience and even a best-selling female author.

As if this wasn't chaotic enough, there is another factor to consider: this campaign will take place in the midst of the biggest conflict between the Executive and Legislative branches in at least eight decades. The House of Representatives is conducting half a dozen investigations into President Donald Trump's finances, conflicts of interest and his alleged obstruction of justice in the investigation of potential Russian interference. Since the House is controlled by the Democrats, democratic candidates will feel pressure to take a stance on issues such as presidential impeachment, even though that's the last issue any candidate wants to address at the beginning of their campaign.

Even with the overabundance of candidates and high political tension, the democratic campaign is thus far following a classic pattern: conflict between the centrist establishment and left-wing 'revolutionaries.' This also happened in 2000, with Al Gore ('establishment') vs. Bill Bradley (left-wing 'revolutionary); in 2004, with John Kerry ('establishment') vs. Howard Dean

('revolutionary); and again in 2016, with Hillary Clinton representing the moderates against self-proclaimed "Democratic Socialist" Bernie Sanders.

Thus far, the 2020 campaign seems to be defined by the fact that the 'establishment' has a clear candidate, whereas the 'revolutionaries' do not. This is partly due to the very success of that ideology, which has led more and more party leaders to embrace it.

The mirrored conflict between establishment/revolutionaries on one hand and the center/left on the other characterizes the main candidates' campaign. Trump's 2020 rival will arise from the resolution of that conflict.

"Trump's 2020 rival will arise from the resolution of that conflict"

The main candidates so far are:

1. JOE BIDEN

ESTABLISHMENT: 10 / REVOLUTION: 0

Right now, Biden is the candidate to beat. He shows 40 percent of voter intention in polls, has name recognition and has the support of major donors. He is also by far the strongest candidate among the white working class, usually members of trade unions, who swung from supporting Democrats to backing Trump in 2016, giving the current president his victory.

Those votes are the democratic establishment's obsession. With those 78,000 votes from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, Hillary Clinton would have been president. Despite having been at the front line of politics for four and a half decades, Biden's credibility among that group of voters is solid, making him (currently) the only one who can compete against Trump for that demographic. Biden's support is weakest among educated and leftist democratic voters, but even so, Trump's rejection among that group is so unanimous that if he succeeds in the primaries, that demographic will likely support him as a "tactical vote." His problem will be winning the primaries.

Biden is no novelty; but at least he did not 'capitalize' on his time away from politics, which proved to be a stumbling block in Hillary Clinton's campaign. At the policy level, his problem is not any lack of innovation—it is that he literally has no policy. For now, he is gaining traction without having publicly announced any concrete policies. His advantage is that he's a nice guy who everybody likes, and in the U.S., many people prefer to vote for a candidate they would have a beer with. Al Gore, John Kerry and Hillary Clinton lost because they were not capable of connecting with the electorate, not because of their policies.

However, sooner or later Biden will have to submit a government plan of action and introduce his team of advisors. Sharing his policy plans will be the next challenge to his candidacy. The former vice president cannot just keep promising Obama's third term.

2. BERNIE SANDERS

ESTABLISHMENT: 3 / REVOLUTION: 1

The Vermont senator has been the biggest victim of his own revolution. Through his rebellious 2016 campaign against Hillary Clinton, he was able to move the democratic needle so far to the left that his policies are now centrist by comparison. His proposals for universal healthcare and free college education have been absorbed by most of the other democratic candidates, leaving Bernie (as he is known by his followers) without the identifying features of his previous campaign. Bernie has lost his novelty, as someone who has been on the frontline of U.S. politics for the past three years. Many young people, who were his foundation of votes, have replaced him with Beto O'Rourke or Pete Buttigieg, or have withdrawn their support despite not having a new favorite candidate.

Further separating him from base, Bernie, known as a bastion for the working class, has become a millionaire thanks to his book 'Our Revolution.' When he was asked about it, his answer was similar to Hillary's or even Trump's: "If someone thinks I will apologize for writing a best-seller, I won't." He still remains the second most popular candidate, though he has under 20 percent of the intended vote.

3. ELIZABETH WARREN

ESTABLISHMENT: 3 / REVOLUTION: 7

The Massachusetts senator is facing a political trap as complicated as Bernie's. It is very likely her political program will end up prevailing and that the eventual winner of the primaries will have to adopt many of her ideas on tech company regulation, financial system reform to defend consumer rights and gender equality. It's also very likely that she will not be the candidate who puts these plans into action. Warren's personality makes her attractive to highly educated left and center-left voters, but she lacks appeal among the working class. Even with these challenges, she is still third in the competition, polling between 5 and 10 percent.

4. KAMALA HARRIS

ESTABLISHMENT: 5 / REVOLUTION: 8

Harris is similar to Warren in many ways, but there are two differences in her favor: she is half-Indian and half-African American, and she is a compelling public speaker. The former will help her win the primaries, while the latter is a key feature in politics where voters consider each candidate's personal identity. The senator also has geography on her side; she is from California, which means access to the massive financial resources of activists, tech companies and Hollywood. The primaries' calendar also favors her, with California and other major states voting soon. In theory, she could be in a position to beat her rivals.

The problem is that Harris' campaign hasn't fully taken off. She has not gained significant endorsements and is behind Warren in the polls. Even among African Americans, she's far behind Biden in popularity. This may be due to the fact that she's not yet very well-known on the national stage, or that she hasn't yet had a chance to display her excellent debate skills.

5. PETE BUTTIGIEG

ESTABLISHMENT: 5 / REVOLUTION: 10

The mayor of South Bend, a small city with only 100,000 inhabitants, should never have become more than an anecdote. Even though Buttigieg has popularity levels similar to Warren and Harris, his political trajectory has thus far followed the well-known path in the U.S. primaries of skyrocketing, then crashing. This happened to Howard Dean in 2004; Republican Mike Huckabee in 2008; and Rick Santorum, Herman Cain and Newt Gingrich in 2012. Of course, that was supposed to be Trump's story in 2016, but he ended up in the White House.

So, it's possible—though unlikely—that Buttigieg will resist burning out. In his favor, he has great rhetoric, he's gay and he has an air of purity—he's free from the contamination of Washington. Other points of interest are his status as an Afghanistan war veteran and his youth—at age 37, he is just two years above the legal age to run. Young, urban people love him, and many don't seem to realize that under his groundbreaking aesthetics and modern-day "cool guy" demeanor, Buttigieg has a moderate ideology that establishment Democrats view favorably. Even with these positives, he seems too inexperienced to win the nomination.

6. BETO O'ROURKE

ESTABLISHMENT: 5 / REVOLUTION: 9

O'Rourke's supporters see him as the new Obama, while his detractors see him as a triumph of image over substance—a claim also leveled against the former president. O'Rourke has three main assets: he is handsome, he made a viral video of a road trip from Texas to Washington with a republican congressman and he was close to stealing the senate seat from former republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz. Although this may not seem impressive, his narrow loss against Cruz was considered a victory by many, as it meant a Democrat almost won a senate seat in Texas, which has been a republican stronghold for 25 years.

This near-victory proved that O'Rourke is skilled at campaigning in a large and influential state. It's not clear whether this qualifies him for a presidential election, however. So far, his strategy is following in Buttigieg and Biden's footsteps, with him playing the "nice guy" card. However, this strategy seems to be proving more effective for O'Rourke's opponents; the South Bend mayor, despite having started from a much weaker foundation, has been consolidating his popularity as time goes on. Meanwhile, the former VP has not experienced the typical loss of voting intention that takes places after the initial surge in the polls when a well-known candidate announces they are entering the race. O'Rourke, on the contrary, has recently seen his numbers go down in the polls, even dropping beneath the 5 percent floor at the beginning of this month.

7. CORY BOOKER

ESTABLISHMENT: 7 / REVOLUTION: 3

This New Jersey senator is a combination of Harris, Biden and Buttigieg. He belongs to a racial minority, with his African American heritage, and he was the mayor of Newark, a city many Americans link to crime and poverty. Despite this, his policies are very moderate, and he has previously cooperated with Facebook—the company parts of the Democratic Party consider synonymous with Russian interference in the 2016 election. His campaign is not gaining traction. In 2016, Booker was considered Obama's natural successor. Now, he is on the verge of becoming the great disappointment in the primaries. His popularity is falling, coming dangerously close to the 1% voting intention where Senators Amy Klobuchar and Kirsten Gillibrand are trapped.

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