

Trump: Time to rally around me -- or expect voter riots

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WASHINGTON — After yet another round of convincing victories for Donald Trump, Republican leaders spent Wednesday wavering between grudging acceptance and deep denial about the businessman's likely ascent to the GOP presidential nomination. An emboldened Trump warned that if the party tried to block him, "You'd have riots."

With at least three more states in his win column, Trump is now the only candidate with a path to clinching the Republican nomination before the party's convention in July. But he still must do better in upcoming contests to get the necessary 1,237 delegates, leaving some opponents with a sliver of hope he can still be stopped.

"I still think it's a very realistic chance that nobody's going to have a majority of the delegates," said Henry Barbour, a senior Republican National Committee member who worked on Marco Rubio's delegate strategy until the Florida senator exited the race Tuesday.

Barbour said Trump "doesn't deserve to be president," but also said he could ultimately support the billionaire if he "can convince me that he's presidential material."



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks to supporters Tuesday at his primary election night event at his Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla.

Trump cautioned that his supporters would revolt if he falls just short in the delegate count and loses in a rules fight.

"If you just disenfranchise these people, I think you would have problems like you've never seen before," Trump said on CNN's "New Day."

Despite the deep concerns about Trump within the Republican Party, there was little tangible action Wednesday that indicated a way to stop the real estate mogul's march toward the general election.

There was no rush among party leaders or donors to coalesce around Ted Cruz, the only candidate in the race with even a long-shot chance of overtaking Trump in the delegate count. A small group of conservatives moved forward with plans to meet Thursday to discuss the prospect of rallying behind a third-party option, but no candidate had been identified to lead that effort.

The three best-financed efforts to stop Trump abruptly ceased advertising after Tuesday's

elections. The outside groups American Future Fund, Our Principles and Club for Growth have no Trump attack ads planned for Arizona—a crucial winner-take-all contest in six days—or in any states beyond.

Former House Speaker John Boehner floated his successor, Paul Ryan, as the nominee in the event of a convention fight.

But Ryan quickly took himself out of the mix, saying through a spokeswoman that he would "not accept a nomination and believes our nominee

should be someone who ran this year."

Meanwhile, Democratic front-runner Hillary Clinton set her sights on a November showdown with Trump. Her sweep of Tuesday's five primary contests was a harsh blow to rival Bernie Sanders, giving Clinton what her campaign manager described as an "insurmountable lead" in the delegate count.

"We are confident that for the first time in our nation's history, the Democratic Party will nominate a woman as their presidential nominee," Robby Mook wrote in a memo to supporters.

Clinton has at least 1,599 delegates to Sanders' 844. It takes 2,383 to win the Democratic nomination.

Trump urged Republicans to view the party's nominating contest with the same sense of clarity. During a round of calls to morning television shows, he said some of the same Republican senators who publicly criticize him have called him privately to say they want to "become involved" in his campaign eventually. He also picked up an endorsement Wednesday from Florida Gov. Rick Scott.

Trump also effectively killed the next GOP debate scheduled for Monday in Utah, saying "we've had enough debates." After Ohio Gov. John Kasich said he wouldn't debate

without Trump on stage, host Fox News scrapped the event.

Trump has won 47 percent of the Republican delegates awarded so far, according to the Associated Press delegate count. He needs to win 54 percent of the remaining delegates to clinch the nomination by the time the primary season ends on June 7.

Just a handful of states will vote between now and mid-April, a reprieve for opponents.

"We've got four weeks to identify what the most effective path is," said Tim Miller, a former Jeb Bush aide who now works for an anti-Trump super PAC.

Former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who is supporting Kasich, said there were "calls going back and forth between the Kasich-Rubio campaign" about the possibility of a joint ticket, though he said those conversations were preliminary.

Any scenarios that end with blocking Trump could leave the party in chaos. But some Republicans suggested that given the party's current state, the chaos couldn't get much worse.

"The divisions are already there," said John Jordan, a California-based donor who was leading a pro-Rubio super PAC. "There's already open warfare on TV. A couple thousand people in a food fight in Cleveland pales in comparison."

Democratic voters embrace stability over leftward turn

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WASHINGTON — Bernie Sanders has clearly tapped a vein of economic populism, but the latest presidential primary exit polls — along with previous primary and caucus results — suggest a Democratic Party electorate unwilling to embrace the kind of leftward shift the Vermont senator proposes.

That, perhaps, as much as Hillary Clinton's continued lopsided advantage with non-white voters, underscores Sanders' steep challenge as he tries to cut into the former secretary of state's ever-expanding delegate lead.

Clinton won four states Tuesday — with Missouri still too close to call — and ran up comfortable margins in Ohio, North Carolina and Florida. The outcome gives her a wider delegate lead than then-Sen. Barack Obama enjoyed over Clinton at this point in the pair's extended 2008 primary battle.

Exit polls conducted for the Associated Press and television networks in all five states that held primaries Tuesday found Democratic electorates inclined to maintain the governing approach of the Obama administration.

At least half of all voters surveyed preferred a continuation of Obama's policies, while no more than a third wanted policies that are more liberal. And at least 7 in 10 voters in each state thought Clinton has realistic policy approaches, while Sanders registered lower on that assessment across the board.

The proportion saying Sanders has realistic policies was highest in the two states where he came closest to Clinton — Illinois and Missouri — where about two-thirds of Democratic voters said Sanders has realistic policies. In North Carolina, only about half of Democratic voters said Sanders' policies are realistic, and in Florida it was less than half.

That gap suggests Clinton may have found a winning argument in challenging the feasibility of Sanders proposals for things like universal health insurance and



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks during an election night event Tuesday at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Fla.

tuition-free colleges and universities.

But Tuesday's results from states like Ohio and even Missouri — states with electoral and demographic profiles more similar to Michigan — suggests Sanders could have trouble sustaining the momentum, even as he maintains considerable support at the ballot box and in fundraising.

In both states, Sanders commanded his usual advantage among younger

voters, but Clinton still managed to win a slim majority among white voters in Ohio (53-47) while limiting Sanders' advantage among whites in Missouri (54-45).

Clinton led handily among self-identified Democrats in each state voting Tuesday, while Sanders led among independents, who make up a much smaller proportion of the Democratic primary electorate.

Those numbers help

explain Sanders' trouble capitalizing even where the electorates are sympathetic to his arguments on trade, a major factor in his Michigan win. In neighboring Ohio, where a majority said international trade costs jobs, Clinton won by double digits. In Illinois and Missouri, the two closest margins Tuesday for Democrats, Sanders performed better than Clinton among voters who said that international

trade mostly takes U.S. jobs rather than creates them. But Democrats were still split on whether trade takes or creates jobs, limiting Sanders' benefit.

Sanders' struggle to capitalize on voter angst does not translate to the dynamics among Republicans, where front-runner Donald Trump continued to take advantage of voters who express general anger. The billionaire businessman rode the success to three victories, with Missouri still too close to call and Ohio siding with its home-state governor, John Kasich.

In Florida, where Trump trounced home-state Sen. Marco Rubio, about 59 percent of angry voters supported the billionaire, while just 16 percent supported Rubio.

In Ohio, Trump had a smaller, 51 percent to 29 percent margin over Kasich among that group. In Ohio, Kasich was supported by over half of voters who were just "dissatisfied," but in Florida even that group gave Trump a slight advantage, 41 percent to 32 percent over Rubio.

Trump was the overwhelming favorite in each state among voters looking for an outsider. But Kasich won three-quarters of Ohio voters preferring the next president have political experience, while only just over half of those voters supported Rubio in Florida. Nearly a quarter of Florida GOP primary voters said they most value a candidate who "tells it like it is."

For all their advantages, there are warning signs for both Clinton and Trump on distrust within their own parties. Majorities of Democrats each state said Clinton is honest, but in every case they were even more likely to say Sanders is honest.

Among Ohio Republicans, meanwhile, 54 percent said they believe Trump is not honest, while 44 percent of Florida Republicans made the same assessment. Forty-five percent of Ohio Republicans said they would consider a third party option in a Clinton-Trump matchup in November, while just 3 in 10 Florida Republicans said the same.



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