

Republican Debate

- Amber Born

By the time you're reading this, the New Hampshire primary has happened. Maybe someone else will have dropped out of the presidential race (Carson, Christie, and/or Fiorina will be the first to go, I think). But I'm writing this on Sunday, February 7, 2016. There was a Republican debate last night on ABC. The debate was crucial for the Republicans because it happened two days before the New Hampshire primary, which is the first primary in the 2016 election season. Debates aren't important for every candidate; Donald Trump didn't even show up at the last one and he's still the Republican frontrunner in New Hampshire. But for others, like John Kasich, a debate can present an important opportunity to remind the viewers who you are. The day before the debate, a Quinnipiac poll put Trump at 31%, Cruz at 22%, Rubio at 19%, Carson at 6%, and everybody else so low that they weren't worth mentioning. Two days later, in the aftermath of the debate, CBS News put Trump at 30%, with Kasich, Rubio, Bush, and Cruz virtually tied for second. It is interesting to note that Carly Fiorina wasn't even invited to this debate and she polled 5% to Ben Carson's 4%. I think Carson lost support because when the candidates were being introduced at the beginning of the debate, his name was called and he was supposed to go onstage, but he just stood in the wings as the other candidates went by. He says now that it was because he didn't hear his cue, but it might have been because he knew it would be the last interesting thing to happen in his campaign.

There are lots of fairly obvious reasons not to like Trump and Cruz, partially because the Republican party itself doesn't like either one of them and partially because Trump says lots of terrible things and everybody who knows Cruz says lots of terrible things about him. But Rubio's problems are not so apparent, so his fellow debaters (mostly Christie) alerted the viewers of Rubio's issues. Christie pointed out that Rubio is a first-term senator, much like Obama (and Cruz, but that wasn't mentioned), that Rubio misses lots of votes in the Senate because he's busy campaigning, and that Rubio uses a "memorized 25 second speech" over and over again. Rubio responded to the allegations of repetitions by repeating himself three times.

Long story short, Christie and Carson were the statistical losers of this debate. Onstage, Christie verbally beat Rubio to a pulp at every opportunity, but didn't manage to impact either of their standings in the polls. I think the real winner of the debate was John Kasich. At the beginning of the debate, the moderators literally forgot to bring him out. Chris Christie had to ask "Can I introduce Kasich?" before moderator David Muir remembered that there were supposed to be seven candidates. And now Kasich is polling in second place. That's the kind of underdog story that Americans love, even though underdogs aren't typically governors worth millions of dollars.