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## COLUMNIST

# Christie's Carpet Bombing Campaign Hasn't Moved The Needle – Yet

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In the six weeks since he announced his intention to seek the Republican presidential nomination, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie – true to his promise – has mercilessly and harshly pounded front runner former president Donald Trump.

In interview after interview – seemingly on a daily basis – Christie has used the kind of language normally associated with Trumpian rants to shred his former friend.

The impact of Christie's carpet bombing campaign? None.

In the Real Clear Politics polling average, Christie began his campaign at 2.5 percent support. In the latest survey, he's still there. Trump is at 53 percent.

In New Hampshire where Christie has spent a great deal of time in the valid belief that it is a far more accurate indicator of candidate strength than the Iowa caucuses, Christie polls at four percent, tied with former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott. Trump is at 44 percent.

Christie's needle of favorability has not risen and Trump's has not fallen.

It is unlikely Christie will change his strategy and presumably is looking forward to stepping it up when the first Republican National Committee sanctioned candidates' debate takes place on Aug. 23 in Milwaukee — if, that is, he meets the criteria to participate and if Trump follows through on his threat to boycott the event.

Christie stands to lose a great deal if he fails to make the debate cut, while Trump, confident that his lead in the polling is so overwhelming that the nomination belongs to him, has nothing to lose by refusing to attract an audience for competitors who will spend the evening attacking him.

A debate without Trump and the anticipated verbal fireworks from Christie will be a meaningless exercise held before a rapidly shrinking audience.

A back and forth exchange between Haley and, say, former vice president Mike Pence over the intricacies of Medicaid funding will not make for compelling television. The clicking sound of remote control channel-changing will be heard all over America.

The pressure to leave the race will intensify on those — including Christie — who fall short of the debate eligibility as the Republican establishment attempts to cull the field and avoid the 2016 experience when Trump secured the nomination after his competition splintered the vote.

The immediate and significant impact of an absence from the debate stage will be felt in fund raising efforts. Money will dry up for the non-participants, endangering organization and advertising strategies and offering diminished hope for a turn around.

There is a growing restiveness within the party establishment over the continued failure of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis — currently running second to Trump — to gain ground and remaining as much as 30 to 40 points behind the ex-president. Christie continues to share single digit support along with the other 10 candidates.

Not surprisingly, speculation and attention have turned elsewhere, principally on Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican in a Democratic state who was elected in 2021 by largely steering clear of any involvement with Trump. He's been coy about his intention while — in the manner of most in a similar situation — not unequivocally dismissing the idea of a candidacy.

A debate participant or not with stubbornly low polling numbers, Christie will likely remain in the running and stick to his all out assault on Trump.

He has no presence in Iowa and seems to be willing to gamble all on the New Hampshire primary six months off, believing that a strong finish there and a poor showing by Trump will reintroduce competitiveness to the contest.

It was, though, in New Hampshire where Christie finished sixth, dropped from the race and endorsed Trump in 2016.

Aside from a few Trump-style snide comments, the former president has studiously ignored Christie treating him as a non-threat whose attacks have failed to resonate among Republican voters — a view seemingly supported by their failure to generate any significant movement in poll numbers.

If Christie has become discouraged over the failure to loosen Trump's vise-like grip on Republican voters, he hasn't shown it.

If supporters remain steadfast in the face of two indictments, being held liable in a civil suit involving a sexual assault allegation, and under investigation for election interference and fomenting the Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U. S. Capitol, it's unlikely they'll be swayed by Christie's description of their idol as an ego-driven, narcissistic, loser, coward, traits applied to Trump regularly for years.

If the dismal polling results continue for Christie and demonstrate his attack strategy has not moved voters, his candidate colleagues will continue to shy away from direct confrontations with Trump and strive to undercut him by arguing he's unable to defeat President Biden.

Christie may have begun his candidacy by becoming a thorn in Trump's side or — more perilous — a dagger at his throat.

In the snows of New Hampshire, the verdict may be that he was merely a splinter in Trump's thumb.

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