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## New York, once a kingmaker, returns to political relevance

*The Empire State was a lynchpin in presidential elections for eight decades, then hit a 40-year dry spell. Now it is back with Bernie, Hillary and The Donald*

By JOSHUA SPIVAK

As the Empire State gets ready for its moment in the primary spotlight, New Yorkers have a lot to be happy about on the presidential level. Not only is their primary relevant and important for the first time in a generation, but three of the leading candidates have deep New York ties. After more than half a century in the political wilderness, New York looks like it is finally ready to be back in the spotlight.

The Republican front-runner, Queens-born Donald Trump, is uniquely indented with his home state. Trump's entire career, as a real estate mogul, reality TV star and "tell-it-like-it-is" candidate, is based on his New York connections and New York personality. On the Democratic side, both candidates have strong New York roots. Bernie Sanders is Vermont's senior senator, but he was born and bred in Brooklyn. And Hillary Clinton may have been born in Illinois and lived in Arkansas and the White House, but her political ascent started in the Empire State, where she was twice elected New York's junior senator.

This is really a long-awaited return to form for the state. Back in the days when it was the largest Electoral College prize, New York was the lynchpin of presidential elections. Its leaders served as critical kingmakers on both sides of the aisles. The result was that New Yorkers were well represented on the presidential tickets.

From 1868, with Horatio Seymour, through Thomas Dewey's famously failed run in 1948, New Yorkers were on the ballot as either a presidential or vice presidential pick in all but two elections (1908 and 1924). New Yorkers were sometimes the only choice — in 1904 and 1944, the Democrats and Republicans both put up New Yorkers as their presidential candidates.

New York's days as a presidential incubator came to an abrupt end once Dewey did not in fact defeat Truman. Since 1948, New York has not had a single presidential nominee. It has seen three vice presidential candidates make the ticket, but all three lost, two of them in the biggest blowouts in history. The state did manage to get one of its own appointed vice president, but Nelson Rockefeller then had the ignominious distinction of being dropped from the ballot when it was election time.

New York's fall seemed to track closely with its drop in population, from first to fourth. The two states that have elected more than one president since 1948 are now the top two in terms of population: California and Texas.

But now, New York is back. It's even seeing surprising success on the congressional level, as Charles Schumer is to become the first-ever party leader in the Senate to come from New York.

What explains New York's back to glory campaign? For one, the state is used to producing and handling outsize, TV-ready personalities — such as Trump and even Clinton, who ranks among the most famous people globally. New York City was always a staging ground for movies and TV shows, though it has moved from the setting of “Death Wish” and “The Warriors” to the 1990s successes of “Seinfeld” and “Friends.”

New York became in the popular imagination a prime location for fun and enjoyable living. Even us natural-born hayseeds in Brooklyn have seen the borough transformed into a hot spot, and Bernie Sanders' accent and behavior are no longer seen as an ethnic or urban oddity. Instead, Brooklyn might as well be any cool city.

The road back to political relevance has been as bumpy and unpleasant as a trip on the Cross-Bronx Expressway. But on April 19, New Yorkers can finally celebrate a rare high point in their political travels. The Empire State will be back on top.

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