

# [***Haley's exit from the GOP race pushes off — again — the day Americans could elect a woman president***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGR-B8D1-DYMD-61WG-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

WASHINGTON — A woman ascends toward the heights of American ***politics***, with the nation's top elected office — the presidency — looming far out of reach. A man at the bottom predicts, unhelpfully: “You'll never make it, sister!”

Asked the Chicago Daily Tribune, in a 1922 editorial cartoon published two years after women won the right to vote: "How high will she go?”

More than a century later, that question remains stubbornly unanswered. [*Nikki Haley's suspension*](https://apnews.com/article/nikki-haley-republican-trump-super-tuesday-losses-95ab56b68a8eefbbf04ef90f2f00ef29) Wednesday of her campaign for the GOP presidential nomination makes her the latest in a long line of women with presidential hopes to crash against the monolith of a man — in this case, Republican Donald Trump — in a nation founded on the concepts of equality and opportunity for all.

Without endorsing Trump, Haley withdrew from the contest with a shoutout to the women and girls who supported her, and by quoting a woman who did make it to the top in a democracy — Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first female prime minister.

“'Never just follow the crowd," Haley said, suggesting she'll become a private citizen, for now. “Always make up your own mind.”

**A PRECEDENT CONTINUES, WHETHER PEOPLE LIKE IT OR NOT**

Polls show most Americans do not necessarily oppose electing a woman president, hypothetically. And this year, Haley notched some history: She's the first woman to win a Republican presidential primary, [*in the District of Columbia*](https://apnews.com/article/nikki-haley-republicans-donald-trump-dc-primary-7b5eec7a5398379b0f1c9ed9f50b6ce3); she also [*won in Vermont.*](https://apnews.com/video/united-states-government-vermont-nikki-haley-national-national-9ded69ca2dc34a98ae51965e0bee9ff6) Supporters and analysts say she may have developed a playbook for confronting the former president who dominates the Republican Party — and for running in the post-Trump era.

But once again, there's no woman at the top of either party's ticket. And the prospect of electing a woman president for the first time seems another four years off — again.

Haley's exit from the presidential contest sets up a [*rematch few people want*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-trump-2024-campaign-democrats-republicans-440088966619e68dbf89f745788bb372) between two white [*men of advanced age*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-state-of-union-mental-capacity-trump-reelection-66d8784586d21f30885d8153f949510c) — Democratic President Joe Biden, 81, and his predecessor, Republican Donald Trump, 77.

“The fact that voters in both parties have thrown their support to two elderly white men indicates that they believe that old white guys are still the most electable in a presidential race," said Karrin Vasby Anderson, a professor at Colorado State University who studies gender and political culture.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem declined to run for the GOP nomination last year, saying no Republican could beat Trump. “Why run if you can't win?” she said on Fox News' “Fox and Friends.”

And despite significant hand-wringing among Democrats over Biden, [*none mounted a serious challenge*](https://apnews.com/article/marianne-williamson-campaign-election-2024-76505d653c2f06f703bd5755c6cb9908).

It's not just the presidential contest. California, a Democratic stronghold and the nation's most populous state, won't have a woman in the Senate for the first time in more than three decades. Republican former baseball star [*Steve Garvey and Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff face off*](https://apnews.com/article/california-senate-schiff-garvey-runoff-feinstein-november-5d3ce432a26bba5a6436acd57c9e0b74) in November for the seat long held by the late Dianne Feinstein. She [*died last year.*](https://apnews.com/article/dianne-feinstein-dead-c831f3228ac44faa9653234570bb8ce9)

This all comes 104 years after women gained the right to vote, in a year when women hold a record percentage of seats in Congress, occupy the vice presidency and sit in four of the nine seats on the U.S. Supreme Court. Women CEOs run a record 10.4% of Fortune 500 companies, according to Forbes. Women are heads of state or government in 26 countries, according to the United Nations. [*Mexico is poised to elect its first female president.*](https://apnews.com/article/mexico-election-female-president-debt-budget-constraints-ff107d2e0655b04c5e7c75d9f50041c8)

It's not the brightest moment for the advancement of women in American ***politics***. With Trump squeezing every other rival out, the former South Carolina governor even lost her home state.

But in losing, Haley may have developed a skeleton key of sorts for women seeking the nation's “masculinized” highest office in the post-Trump era. She scored some [*muscular fund-raising*](https://apnews.com/article/nikki-haley-koch-network-endorsement-desantis-trump-938d932aaf2b9b299c32b4d736aaade4) and displayed a temperament aimed at taking on the “fellas" without violating the “likability” standard that plagues women candidates far more than men.

At a polling place in rural Lexington, South Carolina, Crystal Tager said that she faced “a very hard decision” in choosing between the GOP candidates — but ultimately backed Haley, and not because she's a woman.

“I think at the end, it was really about who could go against Biden,” and that was Haley, said Tager, who will vote for Trump if he clinches the nomination. “I think people focus too much on whether it be the first woman or the first this or the first that."

But in any post-Trump campaign, Haley would have to prove to people like Amy Casel of Lexington, S.C., that she’s not merely someone other than Trump. Casel said she refuses to vote for Trump but likes Haley.

“I think we need a woman president," said Casel, 50, who has voted in Republican primaries for decades. “I think that it would be amazing, awesome, and I think that that would be a great new option for our country.”

**FOR HALEY, THERE'S TIME**

Haley's cross-country dash ahead of Super Tuesday may have built the beginnings of a national network even as [*powerful donors backed out*](https://apnews.com/article/haley-trump-michigan-south-carolina-republicans-campaign-ee571b2024cb6bba665507dd63c6a730) and she began to acknowledge the inevitability of Trump's GOP nomination.

At 52, Haley has time to wait out Trump's control of the GOP. Her run, said Laurel Elder, professor and chair of political science at Hartwick College, “may bode well for future prospects of a woman in the White House."

“The Republican party does not do much to recruit women candidates, which is a problem as often women need encouragement to run,” Elder said in an email. The GOP's stronghold is now in the American South, "the toughest environment for women candidates. But Haley was able to overcome both of these challenges.”

She might, too, fit the profile of what analysts theorize would be the nation's first female president.

“Most scholars of gender and the U.S. presidency believe that the first woman to be elected as U.S. president will be a moderate or conservative candidate, because a Republican woman is less likely to be deemed a ‘radical feminist,’” Vasby Anderson said. Majorities in a Pew Research Center study last year said that a woman president would be neither better nor worse, or that the president's gender doesn't matter.

Democrat Hillary Clinton showed that Americans are willing to cast a ballot for a woman at the top of a major party ticket when [*she won the popular vote*](https://apnews.com/article/2c7a5afc13824161a25d8574e10ff4e7) by nearly 2.9 million ballots cast in 2016. She lost the electoral college vote and the presidency to Trump, [*only the fifth time in American political history*](https://apnews.com/article/ap-explains-elections-popular-vote-743f5cb6c70fce9489c9926a907855eb) that has happened.

Eight years later, what Clinton dubbed, “the glass ceiling” is cracked, but holds. The woman closest to the presidency is Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman of color to hold that office. But any ascension she might make to the top job depends ever-so-delicately on the political and personal health of her boss, a man: Biden.

Women have run for president since before they won the legal right to vote in 1920. [*In 1872, Ohioan Virginia Woodhull was the first.*](https://apnews.com/victoria-woodhull-first-woman-to-run-for-president) Since 2000, five Republican women, including Haley, have launched campaigns for major party nominations. A dozen Democrats, including Harris, have done the same.

As for Haley, "I think now it’s just not the right time for her,” said Annie James, a healthcare professional in Lexington County. James said she thought Haley “did a really good job” as governor but that she “just needed to grow politically” before running for president. “I don’t think she’s quite ready yet to lead our country yet. We’ll be following her.”

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Associated Press writers Matthew Brown and James Pollard contributed to this report from South Carolina. Follow Laurie Kellman at [*http://www.twitter.com//APLaurieKellman*](http://www.twitter.com//APLaurieKellman)

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