

# [***Trump keeps returning to his birther playbook***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B4F-TR01-JBSS-S006-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; It is a well-worn page in former President Donald Trump's playbook to sharply attack his political rivals with insults, conspiracy theories and nicknames to make them seem different from the White voters who primarily make up the GOP base.

He did it over the course of years and on repeat to [*former President Barack Obama*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/09/politics/donald-trump-birther/index.html), with lies about Obama's birth and frequent use of Obama's middle name, Hussein. Trump has also [*baselessly questioned*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/13/politics/trump-news-conference-birtherism-kamala-harris-biden-attacks-fact-check/index.html) whether Vice President Kamala Harris, whose parents are immigrants, was eligible.

He [*did it to Ted Cruz*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/23/politics/worst-things-donald-trump-ted-cruz-said-about-each-other/index.html), the Texas senator who was his most formidable challenger in the 2016 Republican primary, when Trump fanned a false National Enquirer report that sought to tie Cruz's father, who was born in Cuba, to the John F. Kennedy assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald.

Cruz, by the way, like most Republican officeholders running for reelection, has moved on from that, and this week [*endorsed Trump's reelection bid*](https://www.texastribune.org/2024/01/16/ted-cruz-endorsement-donald-trump/) after the former president's victory in the Iowa caucuses.

Sen. Marco Rubio, the Florida Republican who Trump also bested in that 2016 primary with taunts of "Little Marco," also again endorsed Trump this week.

And so it is not at all surprising that as the GOP primary campaign refocuses on New Hampshire ahead of the January 23 primary, Trump has turned forcibly against Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor who once served as his administration's ambassador to the United Nations.

While Haley has always gone by her middle name, Nikki, [*Trump used*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/16/politics/trump-attacks-haley-birth-name/index.html) her given first name, Nimarata, misspelling it in social media posts and putting it in quotes as "Nimrada." Haley is the daughter of Indian immigrants.

Again with the 14th Amendment

Trump has also pushed a ridiculous theory on his social media platform that Haley should be disqualified from running even though she was born in the US and thus definitively a natural born citizen qualified for the office under the 14th Amendment.

It is actually Trump who faces more legitimate questions about his eligibility under the 14th Amendment.

In [*Maine*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/17/politics/maine-14th-amendment-trump/index.html), a judge deferred her decision on whether Trump can appear on the 2024 presidential ballot in that state until the US Supreme Court issues a decision on a Colorado case, in which Trump was declared to be ineligible for office under the 14th Amendment's insurrectionist clause. Oral arguments are scheduled for February 8 at the Supreme Court.

Opposing Trump without too much criticism of him

Haley has been extremely careful in making her own argument that Republicans should move beyond Trump, trying hard not to alienate his supporters and wrapping her criticism of Trump in a generational message that also smacks at President Joe Biden, the other senior citizen in the race.

The turn on Haley represents a shift

Trump has until recently focused his insults on Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who Trump likes to call "DeSanctimonious." With DeSantis finishing a distant second in the Iowa caucuses, he sees it's time to focus on Haley, who polling suggests is a threat to Trump's dominance in New Hampshire.

"It's clear that Nikki Haley is squarely on his mind, because he believes she could be in his way to really that glide path to the Republican nomination," CNN's Jeff Zeleny, reporting from New Hampshire, said on "Inside ***Politics***" on Wednesday.

"He's trying to otherize Nikki Haley," said the CNN political analyst and Bloomberg columnist Nia-Malika Henderson, appearing after Zeleny's report on "Inside ***Politics***."

"One of the things that this ends up doing, in sort of the context of White identity ***politics***, is it reminds voters that they're White ... and that sort of activates their ***politics***, that activates them to get off the couch and into the voting booth," Henderson said.

[*RELATED: Trump escalates attacks on Haley as he seeks New Hampshire knockout*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/17/politics/trump-escalates-attacks-on-haley-as-he-seeks-new-hampshire-knockout/index.html)

Appeals to independent voters

In remarks in New Hampshire Tuesday night, Trump criticized Haley's record in his Cabinet andat the United Nations and complained that she is trying to encourage independents to take part in the process and support her in the GOP primary next week.

"If you want a nominee who was endorsed by all the RINOs, globalists and demented never-Trumpers," he said, choose Haley. "RINO" is short for Republican in Name Only and has essentially become shorthand, in Trump's parlance, for any Republican who questions him.

New Hampshire's primaries allow for independent voters to register with either party on primary day, which in Trump's telling is equal to an infiltration of the GOP primary. It is not true, as he alleges, that Democrats can take part in the GOP primary.

"You have a group of people coming in that are not Republicans, and it's artificially boosting her numbers here," Trump said.

If Haley is able to score a surprise win in New Hampshire, it will be with help from these undeclared voters. Their support was behind Haley's rise in a [*CNN New Hampshire poll*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/09/politics/cnn-new-hampshire-poll/index.html) released last week.

From campaign trail back to courtroom

On Wednesday, Trump was off the campaign trail and back in court, where he was tangling with the judge overseeing a defamation lawsuit featuring the former columnist [*E. Jean Carroll*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/trump-defamation-trial-e-jean-carroll-01-17-24/index.html). Last year, a jury in a separate trial found him liable for sexually abusing Carroll in 1996.

One Republican who has not wavered in his opposition to Trump since January 6, 2021, is Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, who was the Republican presidential nominee in 2012, four years before Trump.

Romney was asked by CNN's Manu Raju about [*entrance polls*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/16/politics/iowa-voter-turnout-trump-what-matters/index.html) showing that a majority of Iowa caucusgoers didn't believe that Biden was elected legitimately.

"I think a lot of people in this country are out of touch with reality and will accept anything Donald Trump tells him," Romney told Raju. "You had a jury that said that Donald Trump raped a woman. And that doesn't seem to be moving the needle. There's a lot of things about today's electorate that I have a hard time understanding."

Note:Romney overstated the facts there. The jury found Trump liable for sexual abuse, not rape.

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