

# [***What South Carolina exit polling tells us about Haley's home-state loss***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDD-K5S1-DY7V-G039-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 24, 2024 Saturday 10:23 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 1166 words

**Byline:** By Ariel Edwards-Levy, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley's pitch to her home state's primary voters - including arguments about her relative fitness for the presidency and her electability in November - largely failed to win over the conservative, MAGA-friendly electorate, according to the results of CNN's exit poll for South Carolina's Republican presidential primary Saturday. CNN has projected that former [*President Donald Trump will win*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/24/politics/donald-trump-south-carolina-primary/index.html) the primary, continuing his sweep this year.

More than three-quarters of voters said they made their minds up before this year even began, with an overwhelming majority of those early deciders backing Trump. By contrast, the small fraction who were still undecided in January or even more recently broke, by a somewhat narrower margin, for Haley.

The electorate for the South Carolina Republican primary looked much more like the one for January's Iowa caucuses than for the New Hampshire primary. Roughly 4 in 10 South Carolina primary voters described themselves as affiliated with the MAGA movement. Just over one-third acknowledged that Joe Biden was the legitimate victor of the 2020 presidential election - similar to Iowa, but lower than in New Hampshire, where nearly half of primary voters acknowledged Biden's victory. And only about 36% of South Carolina primary voters said they'd consider Trump unfit for the presidency if he were convicted of a crime.

Close to 70% of South Carolina primary voters identified as Republicans, and roughly 8 in 10 described themselves as conservatives, with about 4 in 10 calling themselves very conservative. Trump had the support of more than 80% of voters who described themselves as very conservative, as well as a smaller majority of those who considered themselves somewhat conservative, while Haley won over the small contingent of moderates. And echoing a dynamic that's been present throughout the campaign, there was a significant educational divide: Voters who are college graduates were closely divided between Trump and Haley, while three-quarters of those without a college degree - the majority of South Carolina's GOP electorate - supported Trump.

About 6 in 10 primary voters in the state are White evangelical or born-again Christians, a higher share of the electorate than in either Iowa or New Hampshire. Trump won roughly three-quarters of the vote among White evangelicals, while other voters in the state were more closely split between Trump and Haley. That's a shift from the 2016 Republican primary in South Carolina, when Trump performed only a few points better among White evangelicals than with the rest of the electorate.

Exit polls are a valuable tool to help understand primary voters' demographic profile and political views. Like all surveys, however, exit polls are estimates, not precise measurements of the electorate. That's particularly true for the preliminary set of exit poll numbers, which haven't yet been weighted to match the final results of the primary. But the results provide a glimpse into the types of voters turning out to participate, as well as the lenses through which they view the political environment.

Most South Carolina GOP primary voters like their chances in November, regardless of who's nominated. About 8 in 10 said Trump would be at least somewhat likely to defeat Biden in November if he's the nominee, with well over half saying Haley would be likely to win as the Republican nominee. But about 6 in 10 said Trump would be very likely to defeat Biden in November, with only about one-quarter saying Haley would be very likely to win.

About one-third of primary voters said that both Haley and Trump have the physical and mental health needed to serve effectively as president, with about 35% saying that only Trump does, and about 3 in 10 saying that only Haley does. About two-thirds of voters said they trust Trump more than Haley to handle border security and the economy, respectively. Those numbers, of course, may partially reflect voters' tendency to give the edge to their chosen candidate, regardless of the question asked, but they also reflect Trump's dominance in the state, as well as Haley's difficulty in gaining traction for any line of attack against him.

The exit poll also highlights Trump and Haley's disparate appeals to their supporters. About half of Trump voters in South Carolina said they were most looking for a candidate who would fight for people like them, and about one-third that they wanted someone who shares their values, with fewer prioritizing a candidate's temperament or potential electability against Biden. By contrast, Haley voters were most likely to prioritize temperament, followed by shared values.

Trump voters said, near-universally, that they cast their vote largely in support of him, rather than against his opponent. While most Haley voters also said they were primarily motivated by support for her, a substantial minority - about 4 in 10 - said their vote was mostly a way to express opposition to Trump. Although registered voters who didn't participate in South Carolina's Democratic primary were eligible to vote in the Republican contest, only about 5% of primary voters identified as Democrats.

Trump and Haley voters in the state also have radically different views of the nation's ***politics***. Trump voters are about 30 percentage points likelier than Haley voters to call immigration their top voting issue - and about 8 in 10 Trump voters say that most undocumented immigrants in the US should be deported, roughly doubling the number of Haley voters who share that view. Nearly two-thirds of Trump voters in South Carolina said they'd favor banning most or all abortions nationwide, while roughly two-thirds of Haley voters said they would be opposed to doing so.

Overall, nearly 4 in 10 South Carolina GOP primary voters called immigration their top voting issue, with about one-third picking the economy and fewer citing foreign policy or abortion. Nearly 9 in 10 said that they're unhappy with the way things are going in the country, and more than 4 in 10 that they're angry about the state of things. Only about 1 in 6 said the nation's economy was in good condition. But closer to home, about 8 in 10 described their own financial situation in neutral or positive terms, with most - about 60% - saying their own finances are holding steady.

The exit poll for South Carolina's Republican presidential primary was conducted by Edison Research on behalf of the National Election Pool. It includes 2,126 interviews with Republican primary voters across 40 different polling places on Election Day. Results for the full sample have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.0 percentage points; it is larger for subgroups.

This story and headline have been updated with additional information.

CNN's Nicholas Anastacio contributed to this report.

By Ariel Edwards-Levy, CNN

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** February 24, 2024

**End of Document**