

# [***2024 Primaries: Well, That Was Pointless. Now We're Screwed | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BGR-7VC1-DY68-122K-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** David Faris

**Highlight:** For the first time since 2004, when George W. Bush was the incumbent Republican and Democrat John Kerry eliminated what remained of his competition, the two parties' presidential primaries are completely over after Super Tuesday.

**Body**

Well, that was perfectly pointless. For the first time since 2004, when [*George W. Bush*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/george-w.-bush?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) was the incumbent Republican and Democrat [*John Kerry*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/john-kerry?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*eliminated*](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/mar/03/uselections2004.usa1) what remained of his competition, the two parties' presidential primaries are completely over after Super Tuesday. Now both parties head into the general election with [*unpopular nominees*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/02/upshot/poll-biden-trump-2024.html) who give their beleaguered strategists night sweats at noon. Former South Carolina Gov. [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/nikki-haley?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s challenge to former President Trump, which looked like it had maybe a way, way outside chance of succeeding before the voting started, will be remembered for little other than how unsuccessful it really was.

Just like in Iowa, where Haley really needed to place at least second to build momentum, and New Hampshire, which she needed to win outright, Haley fell short not just of the delegate targets she needed to remain a plausible candidate, but also of any kind of threshold of surprise that would make voters or analysts reconsider their appraisal of her longshot bid. Despite [*clobbering her opponents*](https://www.google.com/search?q=haley+wins+debates&oq=haley+wins+debates&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCDI4MjRqMGo0qAIAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8) in the debates that Trump boycotted, [*scoring the backing*](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/network-founded-by-koch-brothers-says-it-will-stop-spending-on-nikki-haleys-presidential-campaign/) of wealthy right-wing donors like the Koch network, and excelling at the kind of retail ***politics*** that were [*once thought*](https://www.concordmonitor.com/On-The-Trail-53903584) to be the hallmark of a good campaign, Haley was really never in this thing.

Republican primary voters just proved themselves to be one of the most uniquely unreachable groups of people on the planet. Presented with a candidate who is, if nothing else, of sound mind, faces zero rather than [*91 felony indictments*](https://www.citizensforethics.org/reports-investigations/crew-reports/trumps-91-criminal-charges-and-where-they-stand/) and polls [*dramatically better*](https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/columnist/2024/02/25/haley-trump-gop-south-carolina-primary/72710319007/) against President Biden than Trump, the GOP primary electorate issued a collective "no thanks."

There is no peeling Trump's most ardent supporters away from him, but it is now also clear that a large slice of the party's remaining moderates are willing to sign off silently on his nomination. This is not an electoral bloc that votes strategically or agonizes over its choices, like Democrats who poured over *New York Times* polling in the fall of 2019 to determine who would give them their best shot at winning the general election. Trump will be their guy until he dies, goes to jail, or decides he doesn't want to keep running for president, whether he wins or not.

There was zero introspection on the Republican side. Between elections, Democrats have frequently tinkered with the sequencing of their primaries and caucuses in an effort to grease the skids for the establishment's preferred candidate. That is what President Biden's team did when they muscled South Carolina [*to the front of the line*](https://abcnews.go.com/US/democrats-approve-new-primary-calendar-2024/story?id=96894345) and demoted poor, hapless Iowa– to head off any potential dark horse challenge by putting the president's very best state first. Trump and his campaign not only didn't try to do anything like that, but they also really didn't even have to try. They let Iowa and New Hampshire go 1-2, even though they are both states where Trump has struggled, and he won them both going away.

They also left the first half of the schedule—where the nomination is almost always decided—virtually untouched since 2016. That lack of maneuvering suggests that the RNC is highly confident that whatever it's doing is working and that there is little need to mess with any of it. The debates that were held without Trump rarely featured serious intraparty jockeying over significant issues and instead were dominated by [*Vivek Ramaswamy*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/vivek-ramaswamy?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s smug preening and the occasional exchange about whether the Republican Party still opposes fascists conquering America's allies in shooting wars. The takeaway from these primaries: it does not.

And why would they change? The critical dynamic on the Republican side of this race is that the party's rank-and-file, as well as the Trump cultists who now run the RNC, [*genuinely believe*](https://www.prri.org/spotlight/after-three-years-and-many-indictments-the-big-lie-that-led-to-the-january-6th-insurrection-is-still-believed-by-most-republicans/) that they won the 2020 election and that it was stolen from them by Big City Libs who somehow forgot to also rig several critical senate elections. That pervasive magical thinking is enforced as the party line by Trump and his associates and rather obviously informs the GOP's overall strategy in 2024. Why engage in a post-mortem, or shift rhetoric and strategy around important issues when you think you've already landed on a winning formula? Months of polling consistently showing Trump ahead of President Biden in head-to-head matchups have only hardened the perception that Trump is a winner and that it's best to get out of the way and let him do his thing.

And so, here we are, trapped for eight more long months in a nightmare election between two radioactive old men who could only possibly beat each other. A generic Republican would crush Biden, and a generic Democrat would crush Trump. Instead, the party's voters and elites have somehow managed to steer these two unwieldy Titanics on a direct collision course with one another and have asked us all to politely stay down in steerage and enjoy the carnage. Don't be surprised if many people refuse to comply.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

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[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2358194/oh-well.jpg)

**Graphic**

Oh Well...

JOSEPH PREZIOSO/AFP via Getty Images

Republican former presidential hopeful Nikki Haley in Portland, Maine, on March 3.

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