

# [***Nikki Haley's Problem: Being a Woman Who Doesn't Fit the GOP Mold | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDV-0YS1-JBR6-933D-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

February 26, 2024 Monday 1:51 PM EST

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**Length:** 782 words

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**Highlight:** This primary season raises an important question: does the GOP hate women, or just Nikki Haley?

**Body**

In South Carolina this weekend, former ambassador [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/nikki-haley?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) put up a brave fight, but ultimately lost her home state's primary by 20 points to [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). As the primary season unfolds, it's becoming clearer that there's more to Trump's lead than Republican voters' policy preferences.

As Haley distanced herself from Trump, he became openly hostile about her. But he wasn't not the only one. Whether they're obsessed with Trump or full of disdain for Haley—or perhaps a mix of both—many conservatives seem to be circling the wagons around the former president and pushing her out. They're nasty about it too. The process was uncomfortable and revealing.

Nikki Haley's treatment exposes one of the GOP's glaring contradictions. The party claims to be pro-woman, but only if she adheres to a specific lifestyle. What's more, it embraces a presidential candidate who treats women poorly. This primary season raises an important question: does the GOP hate women, or just Nikki Haley?

Haley's candidacy showed real promise. Even though she has lagged behind Trump, she didn't flop either. Where [*Vivek Ramaswamy*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/vivek-ramaswamy?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and [*Ron DeSantis*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ron-desantis?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) faltered, she rose a bit. This seems to have infuriated many conservatives. Across right-of-center media, [*headlines*](https://thefederalist.com/tag/nikki-haley/) bashing Haley abound.

At the [*Daily Wire*](https://www.mediamatters.org/matt-walsh/matt-walsh-nikki-haley-not-really-brown), Matt Walsh recently took to questioning whether Haley was ever teased for her brown skin. "The claim that she as someone who barely even qualifies as brown was teased on a daily basis her entire childhood because of her brownness is just impossible to believe. If it was true, I would say it's not the worst thing in the world," he said on his podcast. It's hard to see conservatives saying this about any of the male candidates.

The disdain conservatives exhibit for Nikki Haley is palpable. While the *Houston Chronicle—*Texas' largest newspaper, and hardly a conservative one—endorsed her for the GOP primary over Trump, the *American Conservative* [*slammed Haley*](https://www.theamericanconservative.com/haley-hanging-on-to-presidential-ambitions/)'s "desperate search for relevance."

It's possible, of course, and many conservatives will argue, that they simply don't like Haley because they don't like her ***politics***. They see her as a "[*neocon*](https://www.newsweek.com/ignore-neocon-smears-gop-isolationists-arent-living-reality-opinion-1848114?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)" or a RINO or whatever other label seems like a catchy smear. Or they might insist they just like Trump more, or that he has more of a shot at beating Biden.

But their level of vitriol and ongoing disdain for Haley suggests there could be more to it. Especially because, ironically, the same conservatives pummeling Haley for not being the right kind of conservative are also happily promoting Trump, a man who not only isn't very conservative himself.

In fact, the same people who seem to disdain Haley for being a strong female candidate—one who pairs success in ***politics*** with being a working wife and mother—shrug off the fact that a jury found Trump liable for sexual abuse and ordered him to pay [*$83.3 million to E. Jean Carroll*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/26/nyregion/trump-defamation-trial-carroll-verdict.html).

Many of the conservatives who promote Trump and can't stand Haley make clear they only respect women if they follow a traditional lifestyle that heralds marriage and motherhood above all else. Marriage and motherhood are good things, but make for narrow definitions of success in a world where many women enjoy working, motherhood, and marriage—or even none of the above—but still possess value and worth.

Recently on X, Matt Walsh and Megyn Kelly debated the confines of feminism and traditional gender roles. [*Walsh argued*](https://www.mediaite.com/news/megyn-kelly-rebukes-matt-walsh-for-saying-women-should-be-traditionally-feminine-men-find-working-wives-smokin-hot/) that if self-described feminists want one aspect of traditional life, like a man who pays for dinners out, they must also "accept the rest of it" and "be willing to...be traditionally feminine." Kelly—a wife, working mom, and media icon—disagreed and suggested men can be happy with a woman who doesn't fit traditional definitions of femininity.

While motherhood and marriage are incredible, not everyone fits into a single mold. Women who do not opt for conservatives' preferred lifestyle should be treated with dignity and respect. A party that doesn't get that principle, and that embraces a man who treats women poorly, won't win over more women.

Nikki Haley may not get the GOP nomination, but she's been successful in many other ways. One of those ways is how she exposed the GOP's narrow definitions of women's success as the party backed a candidate who treats women with disdain. For the Republican Party to succeed again, it needs to do a lot of things, and one of them is to reevaluate how it sees women.

*Nicole Russell is a mother of four who has worked in Republican* ***politics****. Her writing has appeared in The Atlantic, The Daily Beast, and the Washington Examiner. She is an opinion columnist at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2353961/nikki-haley.jpg)

**Graphic**

Nikki Haley

Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

TROY, MICHIGAN - FEBRUARY 25: Republican presidential candidate, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley speaks during a campaign event at the Detroit Marriott Troy on February 25, 2024 in Troy, Michigan. Michigan holds its Republican primary on February 27.

**Load-Date:** February 26, 2024

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