

# Haley remains defiant as Trump ratchets up attacks on last-standing 2024 GOP rival

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Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley holds a rally in North Charleston, South Carolina, on January 24, 2024.

**(CNN)** Former South Carolina Gov. [Nikki Haley](#) is growing more defiant in the face of [Donald Trump](#)'s efforts to push her — out of the [2024 Republican primary race](#), poking and prodding at the former president and encouraging supporters to wear Trump's attacks as a badge of honor.

Returning to her home state Wednesday, Haley mocked Trump's victory speech in New Hampshire the night earlier — one in which the former president raged about the concession speech Haley had just delivered.

She said Trump "pitched a fit," called him "insecure" and declared he "should feel threatened, without a doubt." She cast doubt on his mental competency — the same line of attack Trump and his allies have long leveled at President Joe Biden — and dared Trump to debate her one-on-one.

"Bring it, Donald," she said in North Charleston. "Show me what you got."

Haley's [increasingly pointed attacks on Trump](#) come amid pressure from many Republicans for her to drop out of the 2024 primary race so that the party can coalesce around the former president — who is seeking a third consecutive nomination.

Polls show Haley is far behind Trump in South Carolina, where many of her former allies have turned on her and the Republican primary electorate is much more conservative than that of New Hampshire — [where she lost to Trump](#) by 11 points.

Still, she remains a thorn in the former president's side, provoking his ire in ways the 2024 Republican presidential contenders he's already dispatched never did.

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And Haley's aides say that's intentional.

Her campaign is bracing for Trump to go too far in attacking Haley and believes those attacks are likely to boost her support in South Carolina. One campaign official said Trump's attacks would be a "key piece" of Haley's pathway to winning over Palmetto State voters ahead of the [February 24 primary](#).

It's the same strategy she used in her home state in 2010 — when she seized on allegations of affairs and racist attacks to fend off three Republican primary rivals in the governor's race.

"Those attacks were one part of why she won," the campaign official said. "South Carolinians didn't like it then and they won't like nasty attacks now."

## 'Now she is an enemy'

With Haley refusing to drop out of the race, Trump has shifted from viewing her as a primary rival to a full-blown enemy, and has grown increasingly angry with her, sources close to the former president said.

"Before she was a gnat. Now she is an enemy, and Trump plans to bludgeon her in the lead-up to South Carolina," a person who spoke with Trump following his victory in New Hampshire told CNN.

He is also targeting Haley's donors, warning that they'll be "permanently barred" from his orbit if they continue to contribute her campaign.

"Nikki 'Birdbrain' Haley is very bad for the Republican Party and, indeed, our Country. Her False Statements, Derogatory Comments, and Humiliating Public Loss, is demeaning to True American Patriots," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform Wednesday night.

"Anybody that makes a 'Contribution' to Birdbrain, from this moment forth, will be permanently barred from the MAGA camp. We don't want them, and will not accept them, because we Put America First, and ALWAYS WILL I!" he said.

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Haley's campaign leaned into those attacks Thursday, releasing T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Barred. Permanently." Haley posted a photo of the new T-shirts on social media, saying, "Enough said ... Grab your shirt here."

Haley also told supporters in North Charleston that her campaign had already raised \$1 million after her concession speech and Trump's election night address in New Hampshire.

Trump's latest attacks are an escalation of weeks of digs at Haley, who served as his US ambassador to the United Nations.

Trump has already attacked Haley with a racist dog whistle, referring to her on Truth Social by her first name Nimarata, which he misspelled "Nimrada" and later "Nimbra." He has also falsely suggested Haley is not eligible for the presidency.

Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants, was born Nimarata Nikki Randhawa. She has gone by "Nikki" since childhood and took her husband Michael Haley's last name after they married. The attacks were reminiscent of Trump referring to former President Barack Obama by his middle name, Hussein, and demanding to see his birth certificate.

"It's a little bit of a take off on her name — you know, her name, wherever she may come from," Trump said of Haley on Fox News.

Former President Donald Donald Trump speaks in Nashua, New Hampshire, after he was projected to win the state's Republican primary on January 23, 2024.

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## Pressure from Republicans to drop out

Trump and his campaign had hopes that a win in New Hampshire would effectively end the GOP presidential primary, his advisers said. They are eager to declare that the former president has become the presumptive Republican nominee as soon as possible and pivot their efforts toward a general election rematch with Biden.

Emboldened by the flood of endorsements he has received in recent days — from former primary rivals, congressional leaders and governors — Trump personally believes the party has fallen in line and wants to move forward with the weight of the GOP behind him, his advisers said. But from Trump's point of view, Haley is getting in the way.

"We need to unite around our eventual nominee, which is Donald Trump," Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said Tuesday on Fox News.

The RNC [is weighing a move](#) to formally declare Trump the party's presumptive 2024 nominee even though he is yet to amass the delegates needed to win the nomination.

Haley's decision to stick it out for now has infuriated the former president, the sources said, and he is now determined to hurt her as much as possible ahead of South Carolina, where his campaign will continue to try and paint Haley as being unpopular with people in her own backyard.

Trump's attempts to embarrass Haley were on display in New Hampshire. In the final days before the GOP primary there, Trump paraded a series of South Carolina Republican officials onstage at his rallies, including Gov. Henry McMaster, Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette and multiple congressmen.

For Trump's victory speech Tuesday night, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott — a onetime presidential rival whom Haley appointed to the Senate in 2012 — stood onstage behind Trump days after endorsing him.

"She actually appointed you, Tim," Trump said. "You must really hate her."

Scott stepped forward and leaned into the microphone in an effort to defuse the situation. "I just love you," he said.

"That's why he's a great politician," Trump responded.

Even as her campaign team plans for a monthlong fight in South Carolina, officials say Haley is gauging the support of donors and taking the temperature of longtime supporters about her path forward. Those private conversations could help influence any campaign decisions.

Trump did not do well with independents in New Hampshire, which further bolsters Haley's argument that he would lose in the general election, her aides said. Haley got the vote of about 6 out of 10 independent voters in New Hampshire, according to CNN exit polls.

## How donors are reacting

Art Pope, a North Carolina retail magnate who is supporting Haley, sharply criticized Trump's threat to blacklist [the former governor's donors](#), saying it "emboldens me" and only increases his commitment to her candidacy for the GOP presidential nomination.

"I and most Americans do not respond well to a bully," Pope, an influential player in North Carolina Republican politics, told CNN on Thursday while noting that he voted for Trump in 2016 and 2020. "President Trump wants to be the leader of the country ... but rather than unifying, reaching out and building support, he's basically telling us to go away and take a hike and threatening us. I decline to be threatened. I'm not going to be intimidated."

He said Haley clearly is "getting under the skin" of someone "who wants an anointment, rather than letting the voters have a choice in the primaries."

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However, other donors, including a prominent Democrat who had crossed party lines in a bid to stop Trump, said they will no longer back Haley's efforts financially after her loss in New Hampshire.

Reid Hoffman, the co-founder of LinkedIn and a prominent Democratic donor who initially gave \$250,000 to the pro-Haley super PAC, SFA Fund Inc., has no plans to continue donating to Haley's presidential campaign after she lost the New Hampshire primary, his adviser Dmitri Mehlhorn said.

"If she had won New Hampshire there would have been a huge push to raise many tens of millions for her to build on that momentum in SC and Super Tuesday. The investment was based on winning NH," Mehlhorn told CNN.

## Biden's campaign happy to see GOP race continue

Biden campaign officials have been privately cheering on Haley's decision to stay in the presidential race, sources say, as they monitor Trump lashing out at her.

The Biden campaign made clear after the New Hampshire primary that it fully believes Trump will be the president's GOP opponent. Still, Biden's reelection team has welcomed seeing Haley prolong the Republican contest and force the Trump campaign to use its resources and time to attack her.

"Go forth and prosper," one Biden campaign official said in describing the team's delight to see the Trump-Haley battle continue.

The Biden campaign account on Truth Social has amplified some of Haley's ongoing attacks on Trump, including her saying in an interview this week that Trump is prone to throwing "temper tantrums" when he is nervous or feels threatened.

## 'Part of her strategy is to make him mad'

Haley and her supporters have embraced her status as a long-shot candidate, drawing connections to tough fights she has waged, and won, at the start of her political career in South Carolina.

"This is nothing new to her," said South Carolina state Rep. Nathan Ballentine, a longtime Haley ally. "She's always been the underdog, and frankly, she thrives in that environment."

She won her first race, a 2004 contest for a state House seat, after beating a 30-year incumbent in a Republican primary by 9 points.

In this November 3, 2010, photo, Haley greets supporters in Columbia, South Carolina, after delivering her victory speech in the governor's race.

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Six years later, she faced the real test of her political fortitude during her 2010 bid for governor. First, a key political ally – South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford – became a major liability after he revealed he'd secretly left the country to visit his mistress in Argentina.

"People looked at me with pity," Haley wrote in her 2012 autobiography. "They no longer treated me like a real candidate. Worst of all, no one returned my calls."

Fundraising dried up, and Haley's campaign directed most of its funds to TV. She ran on a shoestring budget with donated office space and supplies, and charged supporters for yard signs.

"Any other person probably would have just quit and caved in there, but she knew that South Carolina needed her," Ballentine said.

Haley went on to win the endorsement of Sarah Palin, which helped propel her in a GOP primary field that included McMaster, then the state's attorney general, the state lieutenant governor and a congressman. And she stayed in after two men claimed without evidence that she'd had extramarital affairs. Haley won the nomination in a runoff election by about 30 points.

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The pressure Haley may have faced to drop out in 2010 is a fraction of the national pressure she's facing now. The Republican Party has also changed dramatically since then. There is no Palin-figure whose endorsement might change the tide of the race – an overwhelming majority of South Carolina politicians, as well as national leaders, have fallen in line behind Trump.

That hasn't stopped Haley from attempting to get under his skin.

"I think part of her strategy is to make him mad, which seems to be very effective," said Chip Felkel, a South Carolina GOP strategist not working for any campaign. "He gets off script, he says stupid stuff, he tweets stupid things, and it's been indicative that he's not controlled."

Felkel, who described Haley's approach as "guerrilla warfare," said he doesn't think she can win South Carolina but

speculated that she may try to stay in until the convention.

“She got a lot of fight in her, but at some point conventional wisdom says you’ve got to get a W somewhere or the mind dries up,” Felkel said. “And maybe she’s banked enough, going to be judicious enough with it, that she thinks she can be in for the long haul.”

CNN’s Fredreka Schouten, Jeff Zeleny, Ebony Davis, Daniel Strauss and Kristen Holmes contributed to this report.

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