



Fall 12-10-2015

Latest Winthrop Poll is Out: S.C. Favors Trump

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Winthrop University, "Latest Winthrop Poll is Out: S.C. Favors Trump" (2015). *Winthrop News 2015*. 229.
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Latest Winthrop Poll is Out: S.C. Favors Trump

Quick Facts

- South Carolina is important in the GOP process to choose the 45th president because it is the first primary in the South, and it is the first time presidential candidates can be vetted by a variety of conservative voters – those who are in the military or have strong fiscal, social or financial beliefs.
- For this latest Winthrop Poll, callers surveyed 828 South Carolina residents by landline and cell phones between Nov. 30 and Dec. 7. Results which use all respondents have a margin of error of approximately +/- 3.4% at the 95% confidence level.

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*Scott Huffman*

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – In the crowded Republican field for president, 24% of the likely Republican voters in South Carolina back real estate tycoon Donald Trump. Seventeen percent remain unsure who they will support in the Feb. 20 primary, according to the latest [Winthrop Poll](#).

The poll came out of the field on Dec. 7, the same day Trump made his controversial stand about enacting a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.”

In descending order, **S.C. GOP Presidential Primary Likely Voters** support:

- New York tycoon Donald Trump, 24%
- U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, 16%
- Neurosurgeon Ben Carson, 14%
- U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, 11%
- Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, 9%
- Former HP CEO Carly Fiorina, 2%
- U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, 2%
- Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, 2%
- N.J. Governor Chris Christie, 1%
- Ohio Governor John Kasich, 1%
- U.S. Sen. Rand Paul, 1%.

Three candidates – former Virginia Governor Jim Gilmore, former New York Governor George Pataki and former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum – did not register any support. One percent of poll respondents refused to answer the question.

Winthrop Poll Director Scott Huffman noted, “Trump leads across multiple categories of voters from a high of 35% among those who wish to create a database of Muslims in the U.S. to a low of 22% among Evangelical Christians, who will make up nearly 60% of the S.C. GOP Presidential Primary electorate. Ted Cruz is tied with Ben Carson at 17% among Evangelicals. This is a significant drop for Carson among Evangelicals. He registered 33% support among this group in a Monmouth Poll a month ago. It is worth noting that 1 in 5 Evangelicals remain undecided.

“With 25%, Ted Cruz is within the margin of error of Trump’s 27% among those who approve of the Tea Party,” Huffman continued. “Trump’s support is high among those who express anger - as opposed to frustration or contentment - with the government. He rakes in nearly a third of the angry

voters, 9 percentage points higher than Ted Cruz, his nearest rival in this category.”

Poll respondents had a different take on the **14 GOP candidates** when asked if they have generally favorable or unfavorable views of them. The front runner Trump received a favorable rating from only half of respondents while 37% said unfavorable and 13% undecided.

Here is how the candidates fared in descending order:

- Ben Carson, 75% favorable, 14% unfavorable
- Marco Rubio, 66% favorable, 16% unfavorable, 12% undecided
- Ted Cruz, 59% favorable, 19% unfavorable, 14% undecided
- Mike Huckabee, 58% favorable, 26% unfavorable, 14% undecided
- Carly Fiorina, 50% favorable, 22% unfavorable, 12% undecided, 16% not familiar
- Donald Trump, 49% favorable, 37% unfavorable, 13% undecided
- Jeb Bush, 44% favorable, 41% unfavorable, 13% undecided
- Chris Christie, 42% favorable, 34% unfavorable, 18% undecided
- Lindsey Graham, 40% favorable, 51% unfavorable
- Rick Santorum, 33% favorable, 38% unfavorable, 20% undecided
- Rand Paul, 27% favorable, 48% unfavorable, 16% undecided
- John Kasich, 24% favorable, 31% unfavorable, 18% undecided, 28% not familiar
- George Pataki, 7% favorable, 38% unfavorable, 15% undecided, 39% not familiar
- Jim Gilmore, 3% favorable, 24% unfavorable, 11% undecided, 61% not familiar

According to Huffmon, “High unfavorable numbers, or – worse – being underwater with higher unfavorable than favorable, means your pool of potential new supporters is smaller than that of your competition.”

For this latest **Winthrop Poll**, callers surveyed 828 South Carolina residents by landline and cell phones between Nov. 30 and Dec. 7. Results which use all respondents have a margin of error of approximately +/- 3.4% at the 95% confidence level. Subgroups have higher margins of error. [Information about the poll methodology can be found here.](#)

[See questions and answers.](#)

South Carolina is important in the GOP process to choose the 45th president because it is the first primary in the South, and it is the first time presidential candidates can be vetted by a variety of conservative voters – those who are in the military or have strong fiscal, social or financial beliefs.

Most Important Election Issue

The threat of terrorism stands out as the most important issue for likely Republican voters. A third of respondents said terrorism/ISIS/ISIL/terrorists is key, while the economy and immigration (not refugees), at 13% and 10% respectively, round out the top three issues. Sixty-one percent of poll respondents said they are frustrated with the federal government; while 35% said they are angry and only 3% basically content. Of the Trump supporters, 52% were frustrated and 47% angry.

“Trump seems to draw a significant amount of his support from those who express anger at the government,” Huffmon observed.

Trump supporters were more likely to favor conducting surveillance of Muslim mosques (80%) and in creating a database of all Muslims in the United States (72%).

Approval Ratings, Religion and Misc.

How do likely GOP voters view their governmental leaders? Here’s a snapshot:

- President Barack Obama, 93% disapprove
- Congress, 85% disapprove
- S.C. Governor Nikki Haley, 81% approve, 84% approval among Tea Party supporters
- S.C. State Legislature, 54% approve, 28% disapprove, 17% don’t know
- U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, 76% approve, 81% approve who also favor the Tea Party
- U.S. Lindsey Graham, 53% approve, 40% disapprove

Huffmon noted, “While some had speculated that Governor Haley’s stand on the Confederate Flag this summer might hurt her with the Republican base, her approval of the S.C. GOP core – likely Republican voters – is as strong, or stronger, than ever.”

“While Senator Graham’s job approval among S.C. GOP likely voters is above 50%, his approval significantly trails that of S.C.’s junior senator, Tim Scott, and Graham’s approval rating among those who approve of the Tea Party is at 47%, a statistical tie with his disapproval numbers from that

group,” Huffmon added.

When asked if Christians in America experience discrimination, 46% of poll respondents said they see a great deal of discrimination. Only 17% said little or no and 38% said some discrimination.

Huffmon observed, “Even though Christians make up 71% of Americans and 78% of South Carolinians (source: Pew – ed.), S.C. GOP voters see Christians as the target of discrimination. A seeming siege mentality of Christian values being under attack from the secular world has been a regular feature of modern conservative politics, in general, and this presidential cycle, in particular.”

A third of respondents said Evangelical Christians have the right amount of influence in the Republican Party, while 42% said too little. Of those surveyed, 57% questioned described themselves as “born again” or evangelical Christian.

Sixty-five percent of respondents said marriage between a same-sex couple should not be valid, while 52% said business owners should be allowed to refuse service to gay or lesbian customers. Meanwhile, 70% said doctors should be allowed to prescribe marijuana for medical purposes to treat their patients.

Poll Funding and Contact Information

The **Winthrop Poll** is paid for by Winthrop University with additional support from [The West Forum on Politics and Policy at Winthrop University](#). For additional information, or to set up an interview with **Poll Director Scott Huffmon**, please contact **Judy Longshaw** at longshawj@winthrop.edu or 803/323-2404 (office) or 803/984-0586 (cell).

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