

UMass Lowell
Survey of South Carolina Democratic Primary Likely Voters

February 12-18, 2020

N=400 South Carolina Democratic Primary Likely Voters

The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-7.5% for LVs

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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Do you have a question about this poll? If so, tweet @UML_CPO and we'll get back to you.

HIGHLIGHTS

Biden up by 2 on Sanders as close race emerges in South Carolina

In a new poll of likely Democratic primary voters in South Carolina, former Vice President Joe Biden, coming off disappointing 4th and 5th place finishes in Iowa and New Hampshire still sits atop the race for delegates in South Carolina at 23%. Closely trailing Biden by only 2 points is Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont; Sanders is supported by 21% of South Carolina Democratic primary likely voters surveyed, inside the poll's margin of error. The poll was written and conducted by the University of Massachusetts Lowell Center for Public Opinion, a nationally recognized non-partisan polling center located in Lowell, MA.

There is another cluster of candidates in 3rd-5th place with businessman and activist Tom Steyer polling at 13%, South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg at 11%, and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren at 11%. Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota is at 9% and Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii is at 4%; another 4% of voters prefer a candidate not listed and 4% are undecided.

Biden is bolstered by African-American voters, who support him over Senator Sanders by 23 points, 43% to 20%. Among white voters, however, Sanders leads with 23% of the vote, Buttigieg is at 16%, Klobuchar 15%, Warren 14% and Biden is at 11%.



There is also a large age divide in the electorate with those under the age of 45 preferring Sanders 34% to Biden at 15% whereas Biden has the support of 26% of those 45 and older compared to Sanders at just 15%.

Sanders, the Independent Senator from Vermont also does substantially better with Independents who plan to take the Democratic primary ballot in South Carolina; 27% support Sanders compared to 17% who support Biden. Among Democratic identifiers, however, 31% support Biden compared to just 18% who support Sanders.

Vote Stability and Undecided Voters

With the election ten days away, our survey asked voters how certain their vote choice is or if there's a chance they might still change their mind and vote for another candidate. Overall, three in ten voters (31%) said they could still change their mind. With 10 days until South Carolina Democrats weigh in on the party's nominee, there is still a fair amount of indecision. Interestingly, however, the support for the two front-runners in South Carolina, Biden and Sanders, is the most stable. For Sanders, 85% say they will definitely vote for the Vermont Senator, and for Biden, 82% say they will definitely vote for the former Vice President. There are much higher levels of instability in support for Klobuchar (66% of supporters say they could still change their mind), Steyer (39% could still change their mind), Warren (38%), and Buttigieg (34%).

Candidate Favorability and Electability

We asked whether respondents had favorable or unfavorable views of the candidates for the Democratic nomination and other prominent Democrats. Here, Biden and Sanders both do very well with net positive favorability of +38 (Biden) and +37 (Sanders). Perhaps not surprisingly, President Barack Obama had the highest net favorability rating of any Democrat at +61 (78% favorable to 17% unfavorable). The other candidates are all seen in a favorable light: Warren has a net favorability rating of a +33, Klobuchar is at +43, but also a quarter (25%) of those surveyed have "no opinion" of the Minnesota Senator. Tom Steyer is at +39 and Pete Buttigieg is at +26. Perhaps the most surprising number in the favorability table is that former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who is not on the ballot in South Carolina, but has blitzed the airwaves in anticipation of Super Tuesday, has a negative net favorability rating of -2 (35% favorable and 37% unfavorable).

Biden has worked hard to connect his legacy to the Obama legacy and to the extent that he can hold his edge in South Carolina, it is because voters connect him to Obama and reward him for this association. Asked which candidate best continues the Obama legacy, 42% say Biden and the next closest candidate comes in 28 points lower at 11% (Pete Buttigieg). However, South Carolinians are not eager for the former President to weigh in on the 2020 nomination; just 31% say he should make a public endorsement while 69% say he should stay out of it. Asked



who they think Obama might vote for, again it's clear that Biden is associated with Obama with 33% saying Obama will vote for Biden, 13% say Warren, and no other candidate reaches double digits; 32% say they are unsure.

One of the enduring questions of this primary campaign has been about the notion of who do Democrats want to represent their party as opposed to who do Democrats think is best suited to defeat Donald Trump in November. We asked South Carolina Democratic likely voters if they think Bernie Sanders or Joe Biden are more likely to beat Donald Trump in November. Here, Biden does better; 41% say Biden compared to 30% Sanders, with 28% saying they would do about equally. We also asked respondents whose policies they tended to agree with more, Biden or Sanders. Here, Biden also comes out on top, 44% to 32% for Sanders, with 25% saying they agree with them about equally. Head to head, Biden is clearly favored against Sanders in South Carolina, and yet his lead is just two points, within the margin of error. This may be attributable to the overall shift in frontrunner status from Biden to Sanders. Asked who they think will go on to eventually win the Democratic nomination, a plurality of South Carolina Democratic primary likely voters now think Bernie Sanders is most likely to be the nominee at 28%; Biden is at 22% and no other candidate is above 10%.

Other Findings

- Only 18% of South Carolina primary likely voters think that the country is headed in the right direction; this number plummets among Democratic identifiers only (excluding independents) to 5%.
- Asked if House Democrats should accept a compromise bill with Donald Trump and Mitch McConnell that creates Medicare for All, but fully funds a wall at the United States border with Mexico, 22% say yes compared to 78% who say no. Clearly the current Democratic primary electorate has no taste for compromise with the current President and Republican Senate.
- South Carolina likely Democratic primary voters were asked if they thought Iowa and New Hampshire should continue to vote first in Presidential primaries, or if other states should get a chance to vote first through a rotation – 23% said Iowa and New Hampshire should continue to go first, while 77% said other states should get a chance through a rotation.