

Palmetto Poll

The first Palmetto Poll of 2014, taken just before Democratic and Republican primary voters go to the polls on June 10, finds incumbents doing well, some unfamiliarity with candidates and issues, and an early insight into the 2016 presidential primary in the state.

Republicans rule the roost in this red state, controlling all the constitutional offices and six of the seven congressional districts. The poll was of 400 frequent primary voters in each political party (400 Democrats and 400 Republicans) and was conducted from May 22-29 for the Republican sample, and May 26-June 2 for the Democrats. The poll has a plus or minus confidence of 6 percent and included roughly 8 percent cell phone users in both samples.

Republican Primary Voters:

GOP voters in South Carolina, like those in other parts of the country, seem content to return their incumbent office holders to power. Kentucky voters recently turned away a primary challenge to Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Texas voters did the same for incumbent John Cornyn. That appears to be the case in South Carolina as well. U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham has six challengers in the GOP primary, but in a head-to-head matchup he is close to having 50 percent support among primary voters. South Carolina law stipulates that winners in a primary must achieve 50 percent plus one to avoid a runoff. Senator Graham appears to have just enough to support to avoid that prospect.

Q1: If the election for U.S. Senator were held today, for whom would you vote?

a. Lindsey Graham	49%
b. Lee Bright	9%
c. Richard Cash	3%
d. Nancy Mace	2%
e. Det Bowers	1%
f. Bill Connor	1%
g. Benjamin Dunn	0%
h. Undecided/Don't know	35%

Total 100%

In the governor's race, Nikki Haley has little opposition in the primary, but Greenville attorney Tom Ervin and Democratic Senator Vincent Sheheen are lining up to challenge her in the fall. In anticipation of that race, the Palmetto Poll asked a question forecasting the race in November 2014. Governor Haley appears safe through the primary, and through the fall with her conservative Republican base intact.

Q2. If the following three candidates ran for governor in the fall, for whom would you vote?

a. Nikki Haley	73%
b. Vincent Sheheen	6%
c. Tom Ervin	2%
d. Undecided/Don't know	19%

Total 100%

Republican satisfaction with incumbents appears to be widespread. The numbers show that Haley leads in popularity among the three statewide officers, while Tim Scott is not as well known among the Republican base. When asked

about the job satisfaction of their elected statewide officials, Republican primary voters expressed contentment.

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	DK/NA
Nikki Haley	31%	49%	12%	6%	2%
Lindsey Graham	24%	35%	25%	14%	2%
Tim Scott	30%	35%	11%	3%	21%

The Palmetto Poll numbers suggest that Senator Lindsey Graham has re-election numbers sufficient for re-election, even if less than his colleagues.

In a crucial test of Senator Graham’s re-election bid, the Poll asked GOP voters statewide how likely they were to “re-elect Lindsey Graham regardless of who runs against him.” This so-called “re-elect regardless” measure is a baseline to test incumbent support. In a Palmetto Poll released in September of 2013, this figure was a paltry 31 percent, but this latest poll shows that the figure has rebounded to a healthy 46 percent, meaning that the primary base has better feeling about the senior senator than they did in the fall.

Q3. How likely are you to vote to re-elect Lindsey Graham regardless of who runs against him?

September, 2013	June, 2014
31%	46%

Voters were next asked their opinion of the direction of the country and the state, and the results – predictably – depended on party affiliation. Republicans opposed the Obama administration, while supporting GOP governor Haley, while Democrats felt just the opposite.

Q4: Do you think things in this country are generally going in the right direction, or do you think they have gotten off on the wrong track?

	Republicans	Democrats
Right track	7%	46%
Wrong track	86%	39%
Unsure	3%	12%
DK/NA	4%	3%
Total	100%	100%

Q5: What about things here in South Carolina, generally speaking, do you think things are going in the right direction, or do you think they have gotten off on the wrong track?

	Republicans	Democrats
Right track	63%	27%
Wrong track	23%	57%
Unsure	10%	13%
DK/NA	4%	3%
Total	100%	100%

Finally, the Palmetto Poll addressed the question of the presidential race. The position of the state, as an early contest in the presidential primary season, means that state politics are also national politics. In 2016, South Carolina is again poised to exercise influence disproportionate to its size in the presidential primary. About half of the voters are undecided, but of those who have an inclination former Florida Governor Jeb Bush is leading the field.

Q6. If the election for president were held today, for whom would you vote?

a. Jeb Bush	22%
b. Chris Christie	10%
c. Rand Paul	9%
d. Ted Cruz	9%
e. Marco Rubio	6%
f. Bobby Jindal	3%
g. Undecided, DK/NA	48%
Total	100%

Democratic Primary Voters:

As might be expected, Democrats have lower opinions of Nikki Haley than Republicans, with only about a quarter (26%) giving her excellent or good marks. Senator Lindsey Graham does better with Democrats, but his good and excellent rating is still low (31%), while Senator Tim Scott has the lowest rating among them with a paltry (21%) giving him good or excellent ratings. In sum, Democrats are hopeful they can make a change in the fall with new candidates to oppose both incumbent Republicans, but the Palmetto Poll finds that any challenger has a long way to go in improving name recognition among even base Democratic voters, let alone general election voters.

Q7. Thinking about those Democrats running in the primary to oppose Senator Lindsey Graham in the fall, if the primary election were held today, for whom would you vote?

a. Brad Hutto	8%
b. Jay Stamper	3%
c. Undecided	74%
d. DK/NA	15%
Total	100%

Q8. What about the other race for the U.S. Senate to pick a nominee to oppose Senator Tim Scott? If the election were held today for whom would you vote?

a. Joyce Dickerson	11%
b. Sidney Moore	7%
c. Harry Pavilack	3%
d. Undecided	62%
e. DK/NA	17%
Total	100%

The poll shows that most Democrats are undecided about their nominee.

Finally, the Palmetto Poll asked Democratic primary voters who they favored in the 2016 presidential election primary.

Q9. If the primary election for president were held today, for whom would you vote?

a. Hillary Clinton	50%
b. Joe Biden	12%
c. Andrew Cuomo	2%
d. Martin O'Malley	1%
e. Brian Schweitzer	-
f. Deval Patrick	-
g. Undecided DK/NA	35%
Total	100%