

15 Hours and Counting: One Last Look Inside the Final South Carolina Polls

The last few polls conducted ahead of Saturday's South Carolina Republican Primary indicate the Palmetto State is Donald Trump's to lose.

The real question will be how the other candidates will fare, and how that may impact their ability to continue the race. For at least a couple candidates, the pathway to the White House will end in South Carolina.

Businessman Donald Trump, the current front-runner, can afford to finish second, if it's a close second. Anything less than that would be an absolute disaster.

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, like Trump, needs a top-two finish to avoid any serious questions about his viability. A third-place finish, regardless of how close to second he comes, would be devastating in a state with so many evangelical voters that often serves as a bellwether for the rest of the Deep South.

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio will be OK anywhere in the top three, and does better the closer he is to the top. How he fares likely has more impact on the campaigns of former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and Ohio Gov. John Kasich than on his own aspirations.

Bush, in particular, is feeling pressure to drop out. Rumors have been swirling in recent days that his campaign is nearly out of money, and a poor finish in a state that both his father and brother dominated in the past would be the last straw.

Kasich has garnered newfound attention after his surprising

finish in New Hampshire, but his socially liberal views haven't resonated as well with more conservative southern voters. He lacks the ground game in many of the states that follow to be able to hang on for long as an also-ran.

Ben Carson seemingly has the resources to continue a wait-and-see campaign. But falling to last place in a state he's spent the better part of two years trying to establish as his "signature win" would be a clear sign the voters aren't ready to elect him to the nation's highest office.

So, here's what the final polls say:

Palmetto Poll

The Clemson University poll, like all the other South Carolina polls, shows Donald Trump with a sizable lead. The survey, which focused on voters who participated in at least two of the last three South Carolina primary elections, found the businessman had 28 percent of the support, while Ted Cruz garnered 19 percent and Marco Rubio 15 percent.

Jeb Bush came in fourth at 10 percent, with John Kasich in fifth at 9 percent. Dr. Ben Carson rounded out the field of remaining candidates at 6 percent. The poll has a margin of error of 3 percentage points.

"Honesty and integrity" were the aspects voters seemed to like most about their first choices, taking 21 percent of the vote. "Political ideology" came in second at 15 percent, while "strong leadership," "shared views," and "standing firm on issues" each tied for third at 11 percent.

Surprisingly, the top "second choice" candidate was Rubio, who got 23 percent support, compared to Ted Cruz at 18 percent.

Emerson College

The latest Emerson College Polling Society survey puts Trump in the lead with 33 percent support, followed by Cruz at 20

percent, and Rubio at 19 percent. Bush and Kasich were each tied at 9 percent, followed by Carson at 5 percent.

The poll, which has a margin of error of 5 points, found that among evangelical voters, Trump holds a 39-27 advantage over Cruz. Surprisingly, the poll also found them to be the “most dishonest” in how they have conducted their campaign to-date.

Ben Carson, despite languishing in the single digits for actual support, was by far the candidate who has left voters with the most favorable impression (70 percent). Meanwhile, Trump is at the other end of the spectrum with a favorable rating of only 41 percent.

The Emerson poll was the first to break down support by congressional districts, a key factor in delegate allocation (some delegates are winner-take-all at the district level, with the rest are given to the statewide winner). Based on the survey, the poll predicts Trump could walk away with the statewide delegates, as well as the delegates from five of the state’s seven congressional districts.

Other Polls

A number of other polls only provided the results of their presidential preference surveys. Here is a summary of those results:

American Research Group (tracking) – 1. Trump 34% (steady), 2. Rubio 22% (up), 3. Kasich 14% (steady), 4. Cruz 13% (steady), 5. Bush 9% (steady), 6. Carson 4% (up).

Harper Polling – 1. Trump 29%, 2. Cruz 17%, 3. Rubio 15%, 4. Bush 14%, 5. Kasich 13%, 6. Carson 8%.

Opinion Savvy – 1. Trump 27%, 2. Rubio 24%, 3. Cruz 19%, 4. Bush 11%, 5. Carson 8%, 6. Kasich 7%.