

South Carolina Primary: What Does It Mean?

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Global Research, March 02, 2020

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

What are the political 'takeaways' from yesterday's South Carolina primary? In just few words: not many.

None that change the fundamental dynamics that have in play throughout the primaries in general thus far to date.

Biden bought himself some time, at the expense of Bloomberg and the other mainstream candidates like Klobuchar, Steyer, and Buttigieg.

Steyer & Buttigieg Drop Out

Although having come in third, Tom Steyer announced first thing next day that he's dropping out of the race.

Then, in a bombshell of sorts, Buttigieg announced his departure from the race today as well. It was strange that he reaffirmed early in the day his intent to stay in the race to the end. Then, at day's end, abruptly announced he was dropping out. What's behind the about face? Most likely, the dozens of billionaires who began footing Buttigieg's campaign bill in December decided to pull their funding at mid-day. Was it just because the boy wonder from Indiana had no chance of winning the nomination? That was true from the beginning. It's always been hard to imagine how a small town Indiana mayor of 38 could ever be a real candidate.

Buttigieg was kept in the race this far, funded by the three dozen or so billionaires, in order to pull the youth vote from Sanders. Or so it was possibly reasoned. Having failed that, the moneybags today, a day after South Carolina, decided to stop writing him checks. It is likely their decision was also to refocus money to Biden, now that South Carolina injected some life support into his campaign.

The money moves around, as it bets on the next possible long shot, or as the strategy of the moneybag wing of the Democrat Party shifts from splitting Sanders delegate votes in the primaries to concentrating the money game on the horse they think best to beat Sanders. Bloomberg doesn't need the funding...yet. So the money shifts from Buttigieg to Biden.

Klobuchar Next!

Expect the same to happen within days, perhaps hours, to the other 'centrist' female candidate intended to shift votes from Sanders based on gender, rather than youth. Amy Klobuchar will go next, and quickly. Not much else to say about that.

Biden Taken Off Political 'Life Support'

Biden had to win by a large margin. He did, with around 48% to Sanders' 21%. All the rest falling far behind, including Bloomberg and, even further, Warren.

Biden's last minute surge can be attributed to the 'pull out the stops' by the Democratic party leadership and the moneybags behind them. On the surface this was reflected in the various last minute endorsements from the Party elite, from outside the state as well as within by leading black political leaders in state.

Older black voters in South Carolina (and true of much of the South) tend to follow the recommendations of their black politicians, community leaders, and churches. Younger black voters not so much. While that phenomenon is typical of the South, it is less so of other states. It won't be repeated significantly in California, New York, and elsewhere. Biden won't have any black vote in his pocket beyond South Carolina.

The important point about the South Carolina black vote, which comprises 60% of all Democrat voters in South Carolina yesterday, is that Biden won most of the over-35 black vote. But Sanders won a clear majority of the under-35 black vote. That youth black vote in South Carolina made up only 18% of the potential black vote. So it was an older generation of blacks that dominated the total black vote and voted for Biden. Sanders reportedly won the 18% under-30 black youth vote.

That divide within the black vote in the state may suggest that the churches, community organizations, and black political elite in the state may be losing hold on the younger voters. That may be the takeaway. (Latinos in the state make up only 3% of all Democrat eligible voters, so Sanders' support there made little difference).

Another takeaway is that the analysis of the black vote and Biden's margin of victory shows is that the main dynamic in play throughout the Democratic primary season continued in South Carolina despite Biden's win: i.e. Sanders continued to rally the 'youth' vote behind him—including blacks, Latinos, and others; in contrast, Biden's support derived from the older crowd. It's reflective over all of a major youth-not youth division within the Democrat party that may, in the end, sink it. For the party leadership is clearly aligned with the older voter than the younger.

Generation v. Class Divide (Or Both?)

On the other hand, that there is a major 'generational divide' within the Democratic Party may be more appearance than essence. The South Carolina black youth v. black elders split—a reflection of a similar generational divide elsewhere in the country—may actually be covering up something more fundamental. It may all appear generational, but the real divide is economic and class. Working class youth, students, and young adults vs. a mix of older, better well off middle age boomers-silent generation voters, many of whom are not working class unlike the youth who are virtually all so.

Black, Latino, or white, the youth movement behind Sanders is overwhelmingly working class: whether low-paid employed, underemployed working multiple jobs, or student.

They are the millennials, the GenXers, and now GenZers, who have been, and continue to be, devastated by economic policies that have been in effect from Obama through Trump, and now intensifying under the latter.

They carry most of the economic burden of low paid, no benefits, no job security service jobs. They are the vast majority of the uninsured, or trying to get by on bare bones Medicaid coverage, or who manage to obtain some lower cost ACA coverage (in some states) albeit with \$1,000 or more deductibles. They are the new class of the indentured working class, with student debt totaling more than \$1.6 trillion. They are the most heavily burdened with accelerating rental costs, having to triple and quadruple up together to share apartments, or else return home to parents, to secure accommodations. The thought of home ownership isn't even on their imagination radar. They are the students who are sleeping in their cars, frequenting community food banks, or even 'dumpster diving' outside restaurants to make ends meet. They are the hundreds of thousands of 'Dreamers' who have virtually given up on either party allowing them US citizenship. They are inner-city youth hustling by whatever means necessary to get by day to day and week to week. They are the millions who have graduated from college and can't find meaningful work that pays the bills—let alone the exorbitant interest charges on their student loans.

Formerly cynical or hopeless, they are the heart of those flocking to the Sanders movement. And it is not race or gender or other difference—easily manipulated by media and politicians—that drive their attraction to Sanders. It is economic. For them it is about someday maybe getting real affordable medical coverage, or relief from the crushing weight of student debt, or access to affordable education, or ending the prospect of being locked in for a lifetime of minimum or below-minimum wages, or being able to assume an independent adult existence. And Sanders' 'Green New Deal' offers the hope at least of turning around the growing climate crisis and a world in which they and their children will almost certainly have to pay a high price in which to live.

That is the meaning of the fundamental dynamic behind the primaries, and indeed the election of 2020 in general. South Carolina's primary and the win for Biden hasn't changed that.

Hey, Red-Baiting Works!

Another immediate 'takeaway' from the South Carolina primary is that Democratic Party leadership will now conclude that bashing Sanders as 'socialist', unelectable, incapable of ensuring 'down ballot' Congressional victories, or similar scare tactics works. They'll now conclude such charges helped put Biden over in South Carolina. And those big donors who threatened publicly to vote for Trump if Sanders was the nominee will also believe their threats worked. That means Sanders can expect even more intense bashing during Super Tuesday and after; and we can expect even more threats of big campaign donors bolting from the party in the general election from Super Tuesday contests to the Party convention in June.

Bloomberg Unfazed

Although the immediate fallout from South Carolina is Tom Steyer and Buttigieg, Bloomberg was only superficially wounded. Mike has billions of bucks to buy the best and quickest political medical repair to his campaign. He'll conclude that South Carolina is an 'outlier' primary with little significance to other state Super Tuesday primaries coming up. In that he's correct.

It remains to be seen this coming week, and Super Tuesday, how much South Carolina has impact the campaigns of Warren. For reasons having to do with the unique black vote in

South Carolina noted previously, South Carolina's outcome signifies little for her campaigns as well. However, if she doesn't perform at or near Sanders' totals—which is highly unlikely—she's the next to go sometime between Super Tuesday and June convention.

Warren vs. Bloomberg (Or Is It Sanders?)

What became very apparent in the pre-South Carolina Primary debate last week was Warren began attacking Sanders even as she continued her telling critique of Bloomberg. Warren can't move 'right' and peel away votes from either Biden or Bloomberg. She may accrete some votes from Klobuchar but that's insufficient to make a difference. Watch her therefore turn her critique more toward Sanders during Super Tuesday, especially in states like California. But her problem strategically is she's like Poland—caught between Russia and Germany. And the battle between the two real contending forces will soon run her over. She may last longer than Pete, Amy and Tom. But not much.

South Carolina: All 'Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing'

The obvious takeaway always there is that South Carolina means next to nothing for the general election. The Democrats, whomever their nominate, stand no chance whatsoever in getting the electoral votes in Republican South Carolina.

The same applies to most of the other southern 'red states', which are now locked into the Republican camp due to years of successful gerrymandering and voter suppression that went un-confronted by Democratic Party leadership under Obama. And that means a lock-in for Trump in the electoral college from those states. A couple 'long-shot' possible exceptions may be Virginia or Florida (a longer shot). But Democrats can forget North Carolina and Texas where they've been dreaming of possible general election upsets.

The election will still come down, as in 2016, to the swing states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and maybe Arizona. The general election will be determined there, as it was in 2016. And it was Hillary Clinton's virtual abandonment of working class voters in these states that 'turned' the 70+ electoral votes to give Trump victory in 2016. To repeat that: working class votes.

So the story is who best—Biden, Bloomberg, or Sanders—can turn out enough youth, under-35 working class voters to offset older, more comfortable voters, non-working class and older working class, staying with Trump in 2020. I'm referring to those 'comfortables' who have benefitted from Trump's massive \$4 trillion plus business-investor tax cuts, from the record \$1.2 trillion a year in stock buybacks and dividend payouts under Trump in both 2018 and 2019, those who shared some crumbs from the lion's share subsidies from Trump's \$28 billion dollar direct subsidies to big Agribusiness, from Trump's 'green light' to big Pharma to continue to gouge consumers, from the \$300 billion increase in defense goods government purchases, and from the deregulation of bankers, insurance, coal, oil and other climate crisis contributing companies.

What matters is who can turn out the working class and youth vote in the swing states? Not in South Carolina. Is it Sanders, or the candidate of the Democrat Party leadership, big donors, and moneybags? That's still likely Bloomberg, although Biden may surprise now that big money is flowing his way again as well. And the other 'centrist' candidates—Buttigieg, Klobuchar, Steyer—are being defunded and pushed out of the race to concentrate votes in favor of Biden or Bloomberg.

But Sanders may not even get the chance. Already pressuring is building within the party to commit the 500 plus Special Delegates held in reserve by the party leaders, to be released on the second ballot of the upcoming party convention in Milwaukee on behalf of the party leadership's preferred (read: corporate) candidate. That's still likely to be Bloomberg. Bets are Biden won't replicate his 'special case' South Carolina victory. And, except for Sanders, the rest of the field are already 'has beens' and 'also rans'. They'll drop like flies, one after the other, in the wake of Super Tuesday and the run-up to the June party convention.

Should Sanders' momentum continue through Super Tuesday, don't rule out the party releasing Super Delegates (who are mostly Congressional representatives and Senators) before the convention. But before that we'll hear the party big guns come out against Sanders—Bill Clinton and Barack Obama and, if necessary, Pelosi and Shumer.

And that will be the death-knell of the Democratic Party as we know it.

So from this point on the race is Sanders vs. whoever prevails in the 'race within the race', i.e. between Biden-Bloomberg.

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