

Biden's Bounce: The African American Vote and Biden's South Carolina Comeback

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Intro

African Americans make up 27% of the population of South Carolina and with most African Americans being registered Democrats, getting the African American vote can mean the difference between winning and losing. Joe Biden swept the 2020 South Carolina primary by appealing to those African American voters, and they helped him secure his spot as the presumptive democratic nominee. African American voters in South Carolina are an important part of the primary process and looking at where they live in the state and how they voted in the election is an important part of analyzing Joe Biden’s big win.

Background

The first people of African descent were brought to the South Carolina colony as slaves in the 1600’s. For a time in the 1700’s they even constituted the majority of the population and were mostly enslaved on plantations that grew indigo and rice. Today the state still has a large African American population, at 27%, most African American voters belong to the Democratic party and since the Voting Rights act was passed have been an important part of deciding elections in the state. Since 2000, the winner of the South Carolina primary has gone on to win the Democratic nomination (except for John Edwards in 2004). The state is an important part of the Democratic Primary process and African American’s in the state can help decide these important elections.

The Biden Bounce

Joe Biden’s campaign before the South Carolina primary seemed to be losing steam, he had been a previous front runner, but Bernie Sanders, his progressive rival, had beaten him in the Nevada and New Hampshire primary. However, the Biden campaign understood that a lot of Biden’s support is amongst African American voters. After a promising debate in South Carolina Biden had a \$2 million surge in donations and a major endorsement from Democratic House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn. Rep. Clyburn, an African American congressman, is highly respected by the African American community in South Carolina, so his endorsement carried a lot of weight with prospective Democratic voters. Joe Biden is a moderate candidate, and many African American voters identify with his policies more than Bernie Sanders more progressive ideals. Joe Biden was also Vice President to Americas first Black President Barack Obama, who had overwhelming African American Support and won the South Carolina primary in 2008 and 2012.

Table 1

County	Biden Vote Percentage
Allendale	58.29
Bamberg	58.77
Clarendon	68.5
Fairfield	61.09
Hampton	53.09
Jasper	52.7
Lee	68.91
McCormick	48.22
Marion	66.85
Marlboro	61.43
Orangeburg	69.86
Williamsburg	70.7

Table 2

County	Turn out as % of 2018 registered Democrat
Allendale	16.73138016
Bamberg	20.31063321
Clarendon	17.68992039
Fairfield	25.45791179
Hampton	16.90118196
Jasper	18.75725579
Lee	23.74967269
McCormick	22.06675412
Marion	19.68594962
Marlboro	14.20928865
Orangeburg	23.41528383
Williamsburg	24.88747809

Table 3

SC County	County Population	Total # Registered Democrats	Registered Democrats as a % of the Population
Allendale	9045	5666	62.64234384
Bamberg	14434	9207	63.78689206
Clarendon	33951	22233	65.48555271
Fairfield	22653	15123	66.75936962
Hampton	19922	12437	62.42847104
Jasper	28465	18089	63.54821711
Lee	17635	11457	64.96739439
McCor-mick	9643	6861	71.15005704
Marion	31726	20761	65.43844166
Marlboro	29945	17010	56.80414093
Orangeburg	87903	55562	63.20830916
Williams-burg	31955	21107	66.05226099

Research

I gathered data on county population, number of registered democrats, number of votes cast in the 2020 democratic primary, the percent that voted for Joe Biden by county, and the percentage of African Americans in the county. I also looked at Voter turnout and the African American vote in South Carolina. To find the percentage I took the number of registered Democrats as of the 2018 election (as those are the most recent numbers available) and the number of votes cast in the 2020 primary and divided them and found the percentage of Democrats that came out to vote in those counties in the 2020 primary.

Results

In every one of the African American majority counties, listed on the right side in table 1, the percentage of registered democrats is 56% or higher as shown in Table 2. McCormick county has the highest percentage of registered democrats with 71% of the county population. In every one of the counties with a majority African American population Joe Biden got the largest share of the vote and got over 50% of the vote in every majority African American county except for McCormick County where he got 48%. Overall, Joe Biden won every single county in the state, some by smaller margins, but this win was led by African American voters as the main counties where they live voted for him overwhelmingly. As shown in Table 2 many of the counties had over a 15% turnout rate for the primary election, turnout for primary elections is usually very small but one county even had 25% turnout rate. Every single majority African American county overwhelmingly supported Joe Biden and this helped him pull off a strong win.

Conclusion

South Carolina is an important primary state; the number of delegates and the diverse population create an environment that can truly test how well a candidate will do across the country in the general election. Joe Biden was the one that came out on top in the South Carolina primary, and the momentum from his South Carolina win propelled him towards a win on Super Tuesday and as of now becoming the presumptive Democratic nominee after Bernie Sanders dropped out. Today the decedents of those brought to the US because of slavery in South Carolina and denied the right to vote just because of the color of their skin can influence and decide major elections. African American voters helped bounce Joe Biden back on to the top in the democratic primary race.