

Subject: July 2003
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Date: Wed, 10 Nov 2004 15:29:22 -0500
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JULY 2003, Vol. 1 , Issue 2

CREEP – Sure thing in South Carolina?

<> <>Next year's statewide "first-in-the-South" Democratic primary is getting a lot of attention in both the local and national media, though most pundits write off South Carolina as a solid "red state." But, according to our latest poll, W. may be in for a difficult ride this election cycle. <>

The war in Iraq and the state of the national economy are going to be key factors in the 2004 Presidential election. The SCIndex found South Carolinians are strong patriots, with 59% vs. 36% supporting the President's handling of the Iraq war. Republicans overwhelmingly (90%) support the President; the same holds true for Independents (63%), an important indication that Bush continues to ride the wave of war popularity in South Carolina. <>

Those strong support numbers quickly fade when voters are asked about W.'s handling of the economy. 47% of South Carolinians disapprove of Bush's economic stewardship, while 44% have a positive view. The important numbers to watch, however, is the split among independent voters – in this category 46% approve while 45% disapprove; this close division could foreshadow a tough fight for the President in 2004 if the economy doesn't improve. <>

Ice Cream, You Scream, We all Scream for ... Vanilla? <>

When asked what their favorite flavor of ice cream, South Carolinians are as traditional as apple pie and shrimp and grits. 26% of those polled picked vanilla, followed by chocolate at 19%. Our gut feeling here at the SCIndex had strawberry coming in third, but yet again South Carolina added a regional flavor to the mix. Butter Pecan beat out strawberry 17% vs. 12%. <>

The SCIndex also found that even something as innocent as ice cream can be partisan. Republicans tended to prefer chocolate to vanilla (26% vs. 17%) while Democrats chose vanilla over chocolate (33% vs. 12%). What flavor should politicians serve at those summer rallies to attract swing voters? Independents sided with the Dems, choosing vanilla over chocolate 27% to 19%. Of course, peach might be a more neutral flavor (and the SCIndex's favorite), though it polled a dismal 3%. <>

Playing to Win?

<>Over half of SC voters (55%) have played the South Carolina Education Lottery; this number holds nearly steady regardless of race, party affiliation, income or gender. How voters feel about the lottery is divided. When asked to grade the lottery on a scale of 1 to 10 (1=lowest; 10=highest) on a variety of categories, South Carolina's voters barely give the Education Lottery passing scores. Reported below is the average 1 to 10 score for each variable. A score of 5 on the 10 point scale would be neutral. As the chart shows, South Carolina voters as a group barely break the neutral threshold on their feelings about the lottery. <>

<u>Statement Category</u>	<u>Mean 10 Point Rating</u>
Honestly Run	6.1
Benefiting Education	5.0
Fun to Play	5.9
Offering a Fair Chance to Win	5.3
Helping the State Generate Needed Revenue	5.7

<>

Teflon Mark vs. the Titanic Legislature <>

Governor Mark Sanford's approval ratings appear to be holding steady regardless of this year's budget storm; a majority of voters in South Carolina (54%) think Sanford is doing a good job as governor. The Governor's counterparts in the Legislature, however, seem to be bearing the brunt of the PR fallout over the cuts to state government. When asked to grade the legislature and their handling of this year's state budget, voters in South Carolina give them a C, a passing grade, but definitely not the top of the class (or enough to garner a state-sponsored scholarship). <>

Even worse news for the Statehouse crowd are voter expectations about the 2004 House and Senate elections – when asked whether they are more likely to vote to re-elect local incumbents or support new faces, a clear majority of South Carolina voters (55%) think it is time for new blood. Republican leadership didn't fair too well either among voters – only 35% believe the Republicans have been effectively controlling the direction of the state. All in all, it looks like the 2004 primary and general election cycles are going to be pretty interesting. <>

More Choices = Less Happy Meals <>

The fast food market in South Carolina is highly fragmented, according to the latest SCIndex results. While Wendy's and McDonald's top the list of fast food choices for South Carolina voters, garnering 19% and 13% respectively, 23 other restaurants are also mentioned as favorites by those polled. Wendy's held strong for most categories, including party affiliation and income, though McDonald's was favored by African Americans.