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# Gingrich win shakes up GOP race

## Dramatic comeback slows Romney's roll into South

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Republican presidential candidate, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, campaigns at a Chick-Fil-A in Anderson, S.C., Saturday, Jan. 21, 2012, on South Carolina's Republican primary election day.



Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney campaigns at Tommy's Country Ham House, Saturday, Jan. 21, 2012, in Greenville, S.C., on South Carolina's Republican primary election day. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

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Ashley Myers, 28, left, and Melvin Bryant, 89, right, wait to cast their vote in the South Carolina Republican presidential primary at Caughman Road Elementary School in Columbia, South Carolina, Saturday, January 21, 2012. (C. Aluka Berry/The State/MCT)



CHARLESTON, SC - JANUARY 21: Jene Boner, of Charleston, South Carolina, votes in the South Carolina primary at W L Stephens Aquatic Center on January 21, 2012 in Charleston, South Carolina. Voters decided between four major candidates in the key conservative state. (Photo by Andrew Burton/Getty Images)

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COLUMBIA Newt Gingrich surged to an upset win in South Carolina's Republican presidential primary Saturday, derailing Mitt Romney and setting up a protracted battle for the GOP nomination.

Gingrich won 40 percent of the vote to Romney's 28 percent. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum trailed with 17 percent; Rep. Ron Paul of Texas had 13 percent.

The vote capped a volatile week that saw Romney's double-digit lead in the state collapse as momentum shifted to Gingrich, whose strong debate showings overcame a barrage of attacks and embarrassing claims by an ex-wife.

"It's not that I'm a good debater, it's that I articulate the deepest-held values of the American people," Gingrich told cheering supporters at the Hilton Columbia. "... We want to run not a Republican campaign, we want to run an American campaign."

It was the latest twist in a campaign that has seen almost all the candidates surge and sink. It's also the first time that different candidates won each of the first three GOP contests. Since 1980, the winner of the S.C. primary has gone on to win the GOP nomination. That claim could now belong to Florida, site of the next primary on Jan. 31.

In South Carolina, it was Gingrich who emerged as the conservative alternative to Romney.

"Gingrich united social conservatives and economic conservatives, just like (Ronald) Reagan did," said former U.S. Rep. John Napier of Bennettsville, a Gingrich supporter. "When Newt Gingrich meets Barack Obama in the fall, I have no question who will be the victor."

Network exit polls showed Gingrich, despite his marriage issues, winning 44 percent of white evangelical voters, who made up 63 percent of the electorate. Romney took 23 percent while Santorum, who made social issues a centerpiece of his campaign, won just 19 percent.

For Romney, it was a dramatic collapse.

As recently as a week ago, the state appeared poised to all but anoint the former Massachusetts governor as the nominee. But despite the backing of Gov. Nikki Haley, his poll numbers eroded. And late in the week he learned that he'd actually lost an Iowa contest he once appeared to have won.

"We're now three contests into a long primary season," Romney told supporters Saturday night. "This is a long fight because there's so much worth fighting for."

Romney needed a big win along the coast, where moderate Republicans traditionally fare well. But relatively strong showings in the Lowcountry and the Midlands couldn't offset Gingrich's strength in the Upstate, rural South Carolina and the counties just south of Charlotte.

Romney's loss was a black eye for Haley. At the Hilton, Gingrich supporters chanted, "Nikki Who?"

## **A brutal race**

Like previous S.C. GOP primaries, the race was bruising.

At least \$13 million worth of attack ads blitzed the airwaves. A pro-Gingrich super PAC hammered the jobs record of Bain Capital, the investment company Romney founded. A pro-Romney group blasted what they called Gingrich's "baggage."

In fact, polls were still open when Romney's campaign emailed that the House had reprimanded Gingrich for ethics violations 15 years ago to the day. "Happy 15th Anniversary, Mr. Speaker," the headline read.

"Baggage doesn't count," said Carol Willcox, a Greenville Republican. "People are seeing he's the real deal. It's

the issues that matter and he's willing to do whatever it takes."

Exit polls showed voters focused on the economy and on selecting a candidate who can beat President Barack Obama in November.

Electability, which once appeared to be Romney's trump card, turned out to be a winning hand for Gingrich. Nearly half of those who said beating Obama was the most important factor in their vote went for the former Georgia congressman.

Not even Thursday's televised interview in which the thrice-married Gingrich's last wife said he asked her for an "open marriage" deterred supporters.

"We're electing a president, not the husband of the year," said Stacey Campfield, a state senator from Knoxville. "Jimmy Carter was probably a great husband. But I wouldn't want his as president again."

## **A fiery Gingrich**

Gingrich's momentum took off after last week's debates. At Thursday's, he met moderator John King's opening question about his former wife with a fiery denunciation that won a standing ovation from the audience.

"There was nobody else on that stage during those first five minutes than Newt Gingrich," said Scott Huffmon, a political scientist at Winthrop University. "South Carolinians love a fight, and love a fighter."

Rema Thomas, 60, of Chapin, is an evangelical who decided to vote for Gingrich after the debates.

"It's time for a bulldog president," she said. "Grab 'em by the pants leg and don't let go until you draw blood. That's Newt."

For many voters, the debates were game changers.

"One of the worst things in this country is the media," said Steve Chase, 61, of Chapin. "They have an agenda. And (Gingrich) is the only one, probably since Reagan, who stands up to them."

Saturday night, casting himself as the anti-establishment candidate, Gingrich attacked the "elite media" as well "the elites in Washington and New York." Contrasting himself with Obama, he said he would be a president of "paychecks not food stamps."

"This is the most important election of our lifetime," he told the crowd. "Just think how radical (Obama) would be in a second term."

Obama, he said, "is a president so weak he makes Jimmy Carter seem strong."

For their part, Democrats are still targeting Romney. In a news release, national party chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz said the results showed "the central rationale of Mitt Romney's campaign is cratering." She never mentioned Gingrich.

Josh Putnam, a political scientist from Davidson College, said the calendar appears to favor the better-funded, better-organized Romney.

Gingrich would disagree.

"We don't have the money that at least one candidate has," he said. "But we do have ideas and people. You proved in South Carolina that people power with the right ideas beats big money."

Staff writer Tommy Tomlinson, Gina Smith of The (Columbia) State and the Associated Press contributed.



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pirates85

Obama not vetted? were you under a rock in 2008? first by Hillary who has the meanest vetting machine out there (you could