

THE RECENT STRING OF DEMOCRATIC VICTORIES AT THE POLLS VERSUS RECENT POLLING DATA

Democratic victories on Tuesday in Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia and Pennsylvania, likely representing the last formal expression of voter sentiment before the 2024 elections, are welcome news.

Andy Beshear's re-election (52.5%-47.4%) in a deep-red state the President lost by 26 points in 2020, the decisive support for abortion rights in Ohio (56.6%-43.4%) and the outcome in Virginia that saw Democrats maintain control of the House of Delegates (with 51 to 48 seats) while flipping the Senate (with 21 to 19 seats) confirmed that abortion rights remain a potent weapon for Democrats.

Ohio became the seventh state (along with California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana and Vermont), and the first Republican-led state, to reaffirm abortion access or defeat attempts to undermine that access, since *Dobbs*, and voters thwarted Gov. Youngkin intention to bring Virginia's abortion access into line with all of the other southern states (and likely thwarted his 2024 presidential ambitions as well). Interestingly, as noted by [POLITICO](#), support for abortion in Ohio in counties Trump won exceeded Biden's 2020 margins by an average of ten points, and the counties with the highest turnout this time had voted for Trump in 2020. According to the DNC, more than 70% of Hispanic voters and more than 80% of Black voters and voters under 30 voted to support reproductive freedoms.

Gov. Beshear won his re-election notwithstanding efforts of his Republican opponent to tie him to the President's popularity, castigating him for "supporting failing Bidenomics." That opponent refused to deny Trump's Big Lie and was endorsed by Trump. And holding a Supreme Court seat in Pennsylvania echoed the win in Wisconsin earlier this year. The Republican candidate for the court refused to say who won the 2020 election.

These 2023 results, together with 2023 special elections and the 2020 midterms, tell a compelling story that stands as a counterweight to a string (though not the entirety) of recent polling. The 2023 off-year election victories, in particular, come on the heels of the NYT/Siena College [poll](#)¹ across six battleground states, as well as a CNN national [poll](#),² which admittedly make for more difficult reading.

¹ The NYT/Siena College polling shows Donald Trump leading 48%-44% overall among registered voters across the five key battleground states that Biden won in 2020 – Pennsylvania, Michigan, Georgia, Arizona and Nevada. The President led in the sixth, Wisconsin, by two points. Interestingly, women have greater support for Biden (50% - 42%) and men have greater support for Trump (55%-37%). Among seniors, the two split 46%-46%, and among 18-29 year olds, Biden leads 47%-46%. Biden also leads among Black voters (71%-22%) and among Hispanic voters (50%-42%).

² The CNN poll shows Trump leading Biden 49%-45% among registered voters. Nationwide, 51% say there is no chance they would vote for Biden, and 4% are not currently supporting him but say there is a chance they would, and 48% say there is no chance they would vote for Trump, and 2% are not currently supporting him but say there is a chance they would. On approval rating, Biden has 39% approval and Trump 38%.

We should, however, put those polling results into perspective and should recall that polling has failed on multiple occasions to predict actual election results, most recently in the run-up to the 2022 midterms. I note that the NYT/Siena College poll's headline Trump-Biden 48-44% figure would shift overall, according to the same poll, by 6 points in Biden's favor were Donald Trump convicted and sentenced to prison.³ I note too that a Center Square poll cited by Simon Rosenberg in his November 7 email update ("[New Poll has Biden Up 48-44 over Trump](#)") puts Biden ahead of Trump 48%-44%, though behind DeSantis (47% -44%) and behind Haley (44% -41%).⁴

Borrowing heavily from Simon Rosenberg's November 5 email update ("[Some early thoughts on the NYT polls](#)"), I note further that:

- Democrats have won the popular vote in seven of the past eight Presidential elections, and Democrats have received over 51% of the vote in three of the last four elections (Obama-McCain, Obama-Romney and Biden-Trump). From 1948 to 1964, Democrats broke 50.1% only once (in 1964).
- In 2022, against all odds and the consensus of the pundits, Democrats notched important victories in Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania. Democrats flipped four state legislative chambers, flipped two governorships and gained one Senate seat (the latter two based on victories by Evers (WI), Hobbs (AZ), Kelly (KS), Shapiro (PA) and Whitmer (MI), and by Fetterman (PA), Hassan (NH), Kelly (AZ) and Warnock (GA)).
- Democrats have outperformed in special elections since the 2022 midterms. According to FiveThirtyEight ("[Democrats have been winning big in special elections](#)"), in 29 special elections for congressional and state legislative seats this year to date, on average Democrats won by margins 11 points higher than the weighted relative partisanship of the relevant district. At the very least, this suggests Democrats winning the House back in 2024, on the basis that in each of the past three election cycles, overperformance in all special elections that cycle has "been a close match for the eventual House popular vote in the eventual

³ The breakdown by state:

- Arizona – 10 point shift (Trump +5 to Biden +5);
- Georgia – 18 point shift (Trump +6 to Biden +12);
- Michigan – 17 point shift (Trump +5 to Biden +12);
- Nevada – 23 point shift (Trump +11 to Biden +12);
- Pennsylvania – 8 point shift (Trump +4 to Biden +4); and
- Wisconsin – 12 point shift (Biden +2 to Biden +14).

⁴ An [NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist](#) poll (October 4) has Biden at 49% to Trump's 47% in a head-to-head matchup among registered voters, though Trump is +8 among independents (50%-42%). A [Quinnipiac](#) poll (November 1) has Biden at 47% to Trump's 46% in a two-way race, and in a three-way race with RFK, Biden would be at 39%, Trump at 33% and RFK at 22%. In that three-way match-up, 39% of independents would support RKF, 30% would support Biden and 31% would support Trump.

general election....” The Daily Kos [special elections tracker](#) shows Democrats up 7.6 points over 2020 in 27 special elections this year.

- The latest Economist/YouGov favorable/unfavorable Congressional [polling](#) (October 21-24) benefits Democrats (Congressional Democrats 39/50 (-11) versus Congressional Republicans 30/59 (-29)).

Navigator [polling](#) (November 3) shows Congressional Republicans favorability has declined by 10 points since July (-12 to -22), while Republican incumbents hold the lowest favorability (-7) and approval (-10) ratings this year, Democratic incumbents remain net positive on favorability (+9) and approval (+8).

Navigator polling also shows that between the shutdown threats and speaker chaos, overall belief that the GOP is prioritizing the right things declined 32 points in net terms; only 18% of independents believe the GOP is prioritizing the right things, and indeed fewer than half Republican respondents (42%) believed their party is prioritizing the right things. These figures are unlikely to yet reflect the extremism of the new Speaker.

- As for the Hispanic vote, in 2004 Bush senior won heavily Hispanic Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada and the GOP controlled five of their eight Senate seats and 14 of their 21 House seats. In 2020, Biden won all four states (the first Democrat to do so since FDR) and today Democrats control all eight Senate seats and 14 of 24 House seats.
- Grassroots funding for Democrats is hitting unprecedented levels (the campaign has \$91 million cash on hand).

Rosenberg, speaking to CNN, commenting on the NYT/Siena College poll, argues that, if nominated in 2024, Trump is unlikely to match his 2020 47% share of the vote. In his November 6 email update (“[More on the NYT Poll](#)”), Rosenberg notes that Republicans have only exceeded 48% of the vote once since 1988 (in 2004). Trump garnered 46.1% and 46.8% of the vote in 2016 and 2018, and thus polls showing him in the high 40s or low 50s or with large leads over Biden “place him in territory he has never himself achieved with voters, and that the Republican Party has only achieved once in the last 8 years. That 2023 Trump could be running many points above where Republicans have been over the past generation of Presidential politics seems implausible.”

As a November 8 DNC update reminded readers, a year before the 2012 Obama re-election, the New York Times questioned whether “Obama was toast,” the New York Times headlined “Democrats Fret Aloud Over Obama’s Chances,” and the Washington Post posited “Obama ratings sink to new lows as hope fades.”

Shifting the Message

The Biden-Harris campaign, in its “one-year out” overview ([reprinted](#) by Axios), which projects a very close race characterized by a clear choice between the extremist MAGA agenda and the historic record of Biden administration accomplishments, notes that:

- 88% of voters, including 85% of independents, support the \$35 monthly insulin cap;

- 83% of voters, including 81% of independents, support Medicare negotiations for lower prescription drug costs;
- 73% of voters, including 65% of independents, support the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law;
- 69% of voters, including 59% of independents, support the CHIPS Act
- In battleground states, 76% of voters support the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act;
- by a 2:1 margin, voters support codifying *Roe*.

A 16-week, \$25 million DNC-funded ad campaign was launched in August to reach key voters in battleground states, including Hispanic and Black voters. This campaign is intended to test messaging contrasts around administration accomplishments (including nearly 14 million jobs created, investment in infrastructure, return of American manufacturing, reduced inflation below its peak and successfully negotiating lower prescription drug costs). Message salience, media consumption and ad recall among core constituencies and persuadable targets were also tested. As Michael Shear reported in his New York Times piece (“[Democrats Express Deep Anxiety as Polls Show Biden Trailing Trump](#)”), Biden-Harris campaign staff members say they are confident the polls will improve in their favor once the war chest is deployed to attack Trump and reach out to voters.

That messaging is all the more important because, as Nate Cohn in his opinion piece “[Why Biden is Behind, and How He Could Come Back](#),” Democrats need to worry about the “disengaged, disaffected and dissatisfied” young and Black/Hispanic voters. The drop-off among young non-white voters is precipitous and these voters are harder to reach. That drop-off incidentally from Biden +39 to Biden +6, means that Trump and Biden currently are tied among 18-29 year olds, which historically have been reliably Democratic voters and key to offsetting the GOP advantage among white voters. That said, according to the Times/Siena polling, the generic ballot has Dems +8 (in 2020, the generic ballot had Biden +3), this compares to the Trump-Biden match showing Trump +5 and the Trump-Harris match showing Trump +3.

[Cohn](#) posits that the President would lead by three points among registered voters and two points among likely voters across the battleground states, including leads in five of the six states covered in the NYT/Siena College poll, were he to regain the non-White and young voters who would be willing to vote for Harris. At least among likely voters, the President’s lead among Black, Hispanic and young voters would return to 2020 levels as well.

Concluding Thoughts

I would be remiss in not mentioning a related theme, namely that overwhelming majorities of voters believe that neither Biden nor Trump should run again in 2024. *See, e.g.* poll (October 19) and the [NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist](#) poll. I set out my views in my September 17 [briefing note](#). This remains an issue we need to be cognizant of.

That said, I have trouble reconciling the polls that show Trump ahead of Biden with Tuesday's results. Were voters prepared to vote as those polls suggested, we would have had different electoral outcomes Tuesday. I read Tuesday's outcomes across Ohio, Virginia and Kentucky as confirming that personal liberties, including access to reproductive rights, matter to voters and as suggesting, particularly in Kentucky, that however voters see the impact of the economy/inflation today, they are not prepared to punish Democrats on economy-related concerns. Finally, I see the results in Ohio and Virginia as suggesting that voters are increasingly prone to see through GOP lies.

I see these results as confirmation of trends that emerged in 2018 and 2020, and clearly were evident in the 2022 midterms. Voters could have rendered a verdict on Biden's age and Biden's impact on the economy last November (as pundits broadly predicted), but did not. Moreover, the 2022 midterms represented a repudiation of Trump and his signature anti-democracy ideology. Not only were election-deniers roundly defeated in competitive races, but votes for Democrats galvanized by *Dobbs* often had a pro-democracy angle as well.

We must connect Biden administration accomplishments to the improving economy.

We must shore up support among young voters, Black voters and Hispanic voters, and we must continue to galvanize each of the other coalitions that turned out for Democrats in 2020 and 2022. We must regain the support of the Muslim-American and Arab-American communities.⁵ We must do a better job of rural outreach. We must make clear that when it comes to the interests, hopes and aspirations of so many Americans, a GOP victory would be catastrophic.

We must continue to drive the messaging around the threat that Republicans up and down the ticket pose to:

- personal liberties, including reproductive freedoms;
- freedom from further gun violence; and
- freedom from suffering from devastating impacts of climate change if we continue on our path of failing to reverse global warming.

We must be relentless in calling out Trump's stated intentions were he to win, for what they are - the end of our democracy as we know it (*see* my July 23 [briefing note](#)). We must equally call out the media when, in pursuit of reflexive equivalence, they fail to properly characterize the threats we face. As Jennifer Rubin noted in her Washington Post column ("[What responsible media coverage in the Trump era would look like](#)")

⁵ According to The Hill ("[Muslims disillusioned by Biden face difficult choice with Trump](#)"), citing AP [exit polling](#) data, Biden won 64% of the Muslim vote in 2020 (Trump won 35%). The Hill [cites](#) the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding for the proposition that most Muslims identify as Democrats, although 40% identify as independent. According to an Arab American Institute [survey](#) cited by The Hill ("[Biden's support among Arab American voters plunges since Israel-Hamas war](#)"), support for the President among Arab-American voters is down 42 percentage points from 59% in 2020 to 17% in the aftermath of the war. Recalling the narrow margins in 2020, note that Dearborn, Michigan has one of the largest Muslim-American communities in the United States. We must do more than count on Trump's vow to reinstate the Muslim travel ban if re-elected and his relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem.

“[t]reating the GOP like an ordinary party – and the 2024 election like a run-of-the-mill race – allows the media to cling to false equivalencies and feigned neutrality. However, as long as the mainstream media practices business-as-usual journalism, millions of voters will remain oblivious to the dire state of American democracy. And worse, Trump and his party will benefit from the bizarre insistence on treating neo-fascists and their apologists like normal politicians.”

Neither the threats to freedoms nor to our democracy are hypothetical. Trump and his allies, not to mention much of the GOP caucus, provide Americans with daily confirmation of those threats. When confronted with actual choices - most significantly between Biden and Trump, sufficient numbers of voters will do the right thing.

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