

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

FALK AUDITORIUM

WHAT DO THE 2023 OFF-YEAR ELECTIONS MEAN FOR 2024?

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, November 9, 2023

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

PANEL:

ELAINE KAMARCK

Senior Fellow and Founding Director, Center for Effective Public Management
The Brookings Institution

ZACH MONTELLARO

State Political Reporter
Politico

CHARLOTTE RENE WOODS

State Politics Reporter
Richmond Times-Dispatch

MODERATOR: E.J. DIONNE, JR.

Senior Fellow and W. Averell Harriman Chair, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

* * * * *

DIONNE, JR.: I want to welcome everybody here today and welcome all of our friends online. I've been looking forward to this event for, for a while, and it turns out to be more interesting than we thought. To begin with a very tortured metaphor, three days ago, Joe Biden was toast, and now he is a rising souffle. And when I told our friends here that I was going to use that metaphor, Ramesh Ponnuru said, "Souffle is now an excellent democratic metaphor," but-- so I will let him elaborate on that. This election was supposed to create, in many eyes, a rising star in Glenn Youngkin. Instead, that star fell, and it created a rising star in Steve Beshear. Many said the abortion issue is dead or not nearly as powerful as it was before all over the country, particularly in Virginia and Ohio, to some degree in Kentucky too. We saw that that was not the case. And we had a historic Republican debate last night. Historic because it is, as far as I can tell, careful historical research shows that it is the first debate in American history where one candidate called another candidate scum. It also appears to be a debate — if I read the pundits accurately — where the two leading challengers to Donald Trump are now clearly Ron DeSantis and Nikki Haley, perhaps in reverse order. We're going to get to these and many other questions today. And I just want to thank my colleague, Elaine Kamarck. This is all part of a great ongoing project she has going on our politics. If you want to know how any aspect of our politics works, any rule, any oddity about primaries, you can ask Elaine and she'll be able to answer.

KAMARCK: A trivia expert.

DIONNE, JR.: Yeah, she's good at the big picture too. And we've got an awesome panel. I'm going to go in the order in which I'm going to call on people. Charlotte Rene Woods is the state political reporter at the Richmond Times-Dispatch. And I can tell you, she's a very generous colleague because, on deadline, when I called her on Tuesday night to get some information on what was happening in Virginia, she was kind enough to take my calls, so thank you so very much. Zach Montellaro is the state political, state political reporter for Politico. So, he is going to report on all kinds of things that happen across the country, including perhaps some obscure ones — for some people — like the Suffolk County executive's race. Ramesh Ponnuru is someone I have admired since he started writing. I am proud to say he is a colleague of mine as a columnist for The Washington Post. He's a senior editor at the National Review and a visiting fellow next door at AEI. Welcome, Ramesh. So, Charlotte, I want to start with you, because I think in broad terms, what happened in Virginia may be the most relevant outcome for looking at the country as a whole. This was 140 races across the state that had been thought to be trending blue, but then elected Glenn Youngkin and the entire Republican statewide ticket in 2021. And then, something really interesting happened on Tuesday that made people scratch their heads again, but not you. So, tell us what happened and why it happened.

WOODS: Yeah. So, you know, Virginia's been seen as a trending blue state, and I've continued to see it as like purple, maybe indigo every — in every red wave, it gets a blue wave, it gets a red wave. And so, that's just kind of been what's happening. I know that Republicans, after the election of Governor Glenn Youngkin and flipping the House of Delegates to their majority back in 2021, they wanted to continue that. So, in some ways, this election was sort of like a litmus test of will the parents' rights movement continue, will this rising Republican star keep shepherding us into more victory, and eventually, you know, will-he or won't-he flirtation with running for higher office. But Democrats, and then-- you know, Democrats hustled hard to campaign primarily on abortion. So, this race was a lot about abortion law — what is palatable, reasonable for Virginians? Current law allows abortion up to the end of the second trimester with very, very, very specific exceptions for anything later.

Governor Glenn Youngkin really got most of the GOP candidates to coalesce under this 15-week proposal, which would allow it up to 15, with very limited exceptions for afterward. That didn't include fetal anomalies, which tend to be diagnosed around or after 15 weeks. And the B-word, ban, became just this hostile word over the summer because, you know, it's a verb, it's an adjective, but then becoming a noun. And then, you know, Democrats are hurling it at Republicans saying, "They want to ban abortion. They want to ban abortion." You've got Republicans saying, "No, we're not banning, we're just limiting," which you could also use that to describe current law and the 15-week proposal. And, you know, it really became in some ways a message of what's going to resonate with voters. And voters in Virginia said, "No, we don't want 15 weeks. Let's keep it where it is." Obviously, I, as someone who's been watching this, I sort of knew that the Democrats may hold the line in the Senate. I was surprised when the House flipped back-to-back to Democrats. And so for Youngkin, now he has to cope with what McAuliffe did, which was with who he ran against in 2021, which is having, you know, he's going to we're going to be looking at a lot of vetoes going down the rest of his term.

DIONNE, JR.: And could I ask one thing to follow up? Looking at a lot of commercials and visiting the state a bit, it struck me that it was a contest, in a way, between abortion and crime —or abortion versus crime —and parental rights. So, two things about that. Crime, at least on its face, did not have the power Republicans thought it had. You really saw it in the race near here. Russet Perry, you know, beating back against that attack. And parental rights, in two years, it was Youngkin's main issue in a way, in winning in 2021. It's not 2021 anymore. Could you talk a little bit about the crime and parental rights?

WOODS: Yeah. I think starting with the parental rights movement, obviously, Loudoun County was a bit of a mess in 2021, and Youngkin didn't have too much of a concrete platform until August 2021, a couple of months before his election. And then he really drove that home. Attorney General Jason Miyares jumped

on. A lot of Republicans really coalesced around it because there were a lot of issues happening in Loudoun County, and things got into various levels of proportion. But it really worked for Republicans in 2021.

But in the time since, we've seen like state laws have changed, that gives schools more censorship material over books. But then, and it-- you know, regardless of the intention, there have been school boards that have been composing lists to pull books from the shelves. And then, there's been model policies around trans and non-binary students that's been met with pushback from, you know, certain parents and advocates saying, "This is going to harm our children." So that brewing pushback, I think, kind of contributed to how that issue didn't resonate the same way two years later. And then on crime, that's sort of an ever-present issue that should be more bipartisan. But, you know, you've got Republicans accusing Democrats of being too weak on it. You got Democrats accusing Republicans are being too hard on prosecutorial instead of, you know, restorative justice labels. So, I think we might see, particularly crime rate, you know, be, again, an issue may be going next year into state-level elections. But yeah, that's so far what we can ascertain at this moment.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you so much. Zach, what-- take us to Kentucky, Mississippi, Suffolk County, and anywhere else in our great nation you wanna go.

MONTELLARO: Yeah. So, so, I think Virginia was the highlight of the night, but we had elections across the country. I'll focus on two. One, Kentucky, where a Democratic governor, Andy Beshear, won reelection. I think if you knew absolutely nothing about Kentucky other than the presidential results, this is a huge shock, right? How does a Democrat win in Kentucky? It's a little bit more nuanced than that. If you could create a Democratic candidate in a lab to win statewide in Kentucky, I think Andy Beshear is the one you create. He's the son of a former popular governor. He himself is very, very popular, he had something like a 60% approval rating. He-- the state had unfortunately, under his tenure, suffered quite a few natural disasters that he, by all accounts, you know, navigated the state well through. His father and told my colleague that, you know, Andy's appeal is just that. That to Kentuckians, he is Andy. He's not Governor Beshear. He's Andy. So, he's kind of a Democrat who has been able to separate himself from the national party to a degree. And we saw that in his campaign, too.

He didn't campaign with President Biden. President Biden, I believe, was in the state once to-- for a bridge unveiling that--Governor Beshear was there, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell was there. So, kind of separated himself from Biden and focused on economics. So, yes, it's still a big deal that he won, but it's not the same as like a president winning. But, you know, now Governor Beshear already, if he wasn't before this election, kind of has that, "Oh, maybe he'll be a 2028 vice presidential candidate." It's a little absurd to talk about 2028 when we haven't done 2024 yet — maybe a lot absurd —but that's the kind of

guy who won out there. And then the other interesting race, and I'm picking this one out because it's different, it was a great night for Democrats, but in Suffolk County, it's a continuation of Democrats st--.

DIONNE, JR.: New York on Long Island, right?

MONTELLARO: Yes, my home county, actually. It's a continuation of Democrats struggling in New York and in New York, New York suburbs. There was a Democratic incumbent who was term-limited for the county executive role. And again, in a race really focused on crime, a Republican won. Suffolk County is maybe kind of the opposite of where we've seen suburban shifts across the country. It's still very suburban. I can speak very well of that; I live there. We went to Applebee's, you know, for dinner —that kind of suburbs. But it's the largest county in the state that voted for Tru-- or in the country rather, that voted for Trump in 2020. So it's kind of that rare suburban area of the country that we're really only seeing in New York that is still moving a little bit more towards Republicans. Of course, New York's not going to be competitive in 2024 at the presidential level. I feel very confident in saying that Joe Biden is going to win New York. I'll put my money on that one. But this matters a lot for congressional districts. It matters a lot for the battle for the House. New York has — you know, Long Island, specifically, has a all-Republican delegation, and part of that is due to the maps. The maps are really, really competitive. And Democrats would love to be able to gerrymander them to make them a little bit less competitive. But part of that is the New York suburbs and Long Island suburbs in particular are that rare place that Democrats haven't quite figured out how to do suburban voters in the way they have across the country.

DIONNE, JR.: Now, I appreciate that. In fact, I appreciate your putting Suffolk County in my head ahead of last week to keep an eye on that. It's the one, if you-- you know, the Republicans held Mississippi, they held Louisiana earlier in the month, Louisiana. But if the Republicans have to brag about that, they've got a problem. Whereas Suffolk County, I thought. was the one indicator, particularly for the House races, not the presidential, that was good for them. But take-- could you take us to a couple other places? The-- I thought the Pennsylvania judge race, the Supreme Court race, was really significant. And anywhere else you notice something of the interest out there?

MONTELLARO: Yes. So the other two big statewide was Pennsylvania, as you mentioned. There was an open state Supreme Court race that's overtly partisan in Pennsylvania — unlike some other states that don't have labels, that one's partisan — and Democratic candidate won. It doesn't have that big of an effect on the balance of the court. The court was already Democratic-controlled. It went from four-two with a vacancy to five-two with a vaccine, so still a Democratic-leaning court. But just about everything — if you're a Democrat — just about everything in that race is a good sign heading into 2024. They did well in the suburban areas. In fact, they had more votes from suburban Philadelphia and, you know, a larger margin

basically coming out of the suburbs of Philly than from Philly itself. So maybe there's some warning signs there. But it just, it shows that under former President Trump's kind of leadership of the Republican Party — and I'll say he's the de facto leader now, if he's not the actual leader, as he will be probably in three months when he wins the nomination — Pennsylvania's just kind of trickled away. You know, we saw that with Dr. Oz in the Senate campaign. They can get tantalizingly close. Republicans can get right there and not win. So, this is also a huge warning sign for Republicans in Pennsylvania that-- you know, there's some things that if you're Democrat, you don't feel thrilled about. You would love to see more votes come out of Philly. But they keep winning these statewide races over and over and over again in what is supposed to be a nominally competitive state in 2024.

And then the last one I'll mention: Ohio. It's just a continuation of the trend of pro-abortion rights groups winning ballot initiatives. They win ballot initiatives that are anti-abortion, so they, they knock them down. They win ballot initiatives that are pro-abortion, so they codify abortion rights. You know, we've seen kind of run the gamut from Kansas in 2022, which was an effectively an anti-abortion ballot initiative that lost in Kansas. We see it in Ohio, another red-leaning state. This, this ballot initiative will codify abortion rights in the state constitution wasn't particularly close at the end of the day, in a state that also probably won't be competitive in 2024. So it really goes into that puzzle of, you know, is this the, is this the turnout motivator that it looks like it will be for Democrats? Democrats are trying to get these ballot initiatives on other competitive states in 2024. They'd love to have one teed up in Arizona. They're trying to get one on the ballot in Florida. And the question is, will this translate over? That if there's a ballot initiative in the presidential year, can it move votes in the presidential year? I think there's, at this point, no question which way these ballot initiatives would go, that they would almost assuredly pass in many states. I don't think there's been — since the overturn of Roe — I don't think there's been an antiabortion ballot initiative that's been successful. The next step is that in a presidential election, will that matter elsewhere on the ticket?

DIONNE, JR.: You can imagine Democrats trying to get abortion referenda on as many states as they can. New York's trying to get one. Ramesh, two things. One, I'd like you to comment on anything that's been said up to now, including Ohio. But also, how did you see the Republican debate last night? You were writing, you were tweeting, you were a multi-multimedia commentator last night. So, you can see a lot of, what Ramesh thinks. But what did you make of that last night?

PONNURU: Sure. Well, let me, let me start. Well, first of all, let me thank Brookings for having me. And it's great to be with E.J. and Elaine and to meet Zach and Charlotte. Let me just comment a little bit about Virginia and Kentucky. In Virginia, I think that it has to be remembered, the audacity of the Youngkin goals. I think they were the right goals to set in getting unified control the government. There's no point in

setting them lower. But this is a state that went for Joe Biden by ten points in 2020, and the contested legislative races were largely in places that had gone for Biden, that had, that had gone for Democratic congressional candidates last year, and measured against almost-- so it's a failure from the Republicans standpoint first. I mean, they obviously lose seats in the House, partially because of redistricting. But second, it's obviously a failure within relation to Youngkin's goals.

But if you abstract away from those things, you know, Youngkin, I'm not sure that Youngkin's-- first of all, I'm not sure that there's gonna be greatly different policy outcomes in Virginia than there were the previous two years. And second, you know, just the turf that he's fighting on has to be remembered. And we should be careful, I think, about overreading lessons for other places and for other kinds of elections to try to make the way to put this is I tend to think of Virginia as actually a pretty blue state. Now, blue states will elect Republicans sometimes, and red states will elect Democrats sometimes, particularly with respect to the office of the governor, you're more likely to get an executive across parties than you are to get legislators across parties. So, you'll see Massachusetts has actually pretty frequently had Republican governors. It isn't-- it very infrequently has Republican senators. And I think that what has to happen for that kind of-- you have to have particularly good circumstances, which may include the, the dominant party overreaching or having-- or pushing people to the limit in some way, in a way that I think the Democrats in Virginia were seen to have done in 2021. And that is not something you can just count on to last forever, particularly when they're no longer in power.

Now, in Kentucky, of course, you've got a very red state. But the interesting thing there, in addition to the Beshear brand being so solid is, one, they actually don't have a tradition of electing Republican governors. There's only been two Republican governors, both one-termers, in the last 30 years. And the stakes of the election are also low in the sense that the Republicans have, have-- can override vetoes in the legislature. And Republicans, the rest of the ticket, did fine. So, you end up with a situation where Beshear doesn't-- you know, it's not as though there's any possibility of liberal overreach by a Democratic governor in this, in this particular situation. And there's, you know, and reelecting him is not particularly-- you know, even if you're a rock-ribbed conservative, it's not a particularly dangerous thing.

Turning to the — well, there was one other thing about this. It does strike me that Biden, Youngkin, and Beshear all have in common the fact that their popularity actually and/or unpopularity just didn't translate to anybody else. Beshear didn't help down ticket, Youngkin didn't help down ticket, and Biden didn't hurt down ticket. And I think that, you know, people are separating these races more than we had maybe assumed that people would separate races based on the trend that we had for so many years of increasing partisan synchronization across different types of races. Well, I should probably stop there.

DIONNE, JR.: Yeah, but let me just ask you about the Republican debate. I think you--.

PONNURU: Yes, I'm just trying to--.

DIONNE, JR.: I can understand why you'd want to forget about it, but I am sympathetic.

PONNURU: Yeah, I mean, it's very peculiar because this is the first time we've had this set of presidential debates that don't include the person who is the far and away frontrunner for the race, and that drains a lot of the drama and significance of it. And it does seem like this primary is kind of the 'crabs in the barrel' primary where, you know, each of them is just trying to keep the others from becoming the rival to Trump, and that appears to be succeeding. I think you saw some divisions inside the party illuminated. Ukraine, which has been a division that's, that's appeared in each of the three debates; abortion, which has been in two of them; and then, a little bit on entitlements last night. So, you can see some of the divisions in there. But, but it's just, you know, it's just hard to pay minute attention to it, given that it does-- it's not clear that there really is a primary. That doesn't mean there won't be, but right now, it's not clear that there is one.

DIONNE, JR.: Just to accept the conventional wisdom, which I think I do in this case, didn't DeSantis or Haley do any particular good for themselves or not last night?

PONNURU: Well, I think that Haley has had the steadiest performance across all three debates of any Republican. You could say, you could quibble about well, maybe she overreacts sometimes to Ramaswamy, pays him more attention than he deserves, or you can say she did fine on that. But regardless of where you come down on that, I think she is, is the best briefed of the candidates and, and has processed her brief. She always gives you a kind of-- she hits a lot of points in quick succession without sounding, say, as glib as Ramaswamy does. DeSantis, you know, it's-- if he were following a strategy of not trying to stand out in the debates and still hoping that there's some way that Trump will fade and he will be acceptable to a lot of Republican voters, including Republican voters who like Trump, well, then when he was executing that strategy.

DIONNE, JR.: That's, that's not even damning with fake praise. I think to try to describe that. If I ran a conspiracy website, I think I'd want to sell the idea that Ramaswamy is a Nikki Haley plant because she looks great every time she swings at him.

PONNURU: Tim Scott, I would say the first debate, he thought, "I should be inspirational." And then, people said, "Yeah, you need to get there in the mix." And in the second debate, he was aggressive. And I think probably what they said for the third debate is, "You need to throw in some more Bible verses," because that was very clear--.

DIONNE, JR.: It was really astonishing, astonishing how he leaned on the Christian, clearly trying to play to Iowa.

PONNURU: He takes this antidebt message and quotes proverbs. So, that's fusionism.

DIONNE, JR.: Love that. Elaine, you-- I wanted to ask you about why Biden was finished on Sunday and resurrected on Tuesday, to continue with the religious metaphor.

KAMARCK: Well, that's that's a great question. And really, that's the question of the week, right? Which is what's what's going on? Which way is this going? All right, we now know from special elections in '21, from midterm elections in '22, and this recent set of elections, that Joe Biden's unpopularity doesn't seem to have much to do with Democratic votes. Democrats overperformed expectations in all three of these years, with '21 being the special elections. Democrats increased their margins over what they had done before, and often their margins over Joe Biden. So maybe there's just simply no connection here.

I would add something that hasn't been discussed here, which is the New Jersey legislative elections. In New Jersey, they were really worried. They thought that Republicans were going to make some headway because Republicans have been playing the culture wars big time. Not only did Democrats hold both houses in New Jersey, but they expanded their margins in both houses, and no one, no one really expected that. So, first of all, there's this seeming disconnect between Joe Biden and what's happening among voters. Secondly, where the right to choose is front and center on the agenda. Abortion is an incredibly powerful motivator. I think the most-- I think in my lifetime in politics, which has been pretty long, it's, it's probably the biggest push I've ever seen, really.

WOODS: And not totally partisan either.

KAMARCK: What?

WOODS: And not totally partisan either, not totally partisan either.

KAMARCK: Yeah, that's right. And not totally partisan, that's right. It's huge. I mean, it's just huge. But it-- but one condition has to be met, which is it has to be sort of front and center on the agenda. So Kentucky, for instance, you had this weird situation where the Roe was reversed. Kentucky had a trigger law, which meant automatically they were going to ban abortion. Right after that, they put an amendment on the con-- on the ballot for a constitutional amendment, which would prohibit the Constitution from. from allowing abortion. And it failed, okay? It failed substantially. Not as big as some others, but failed by about four to five points, right? But the Kentucky legislature said, "Well, we're not paying any attention to that," and they went ahead with an abortion ban, and the Supreme Court left it in place. So, here you've got an electorate that has seen, "Wait a minute," all this back-and-forth stuff going on. And obviously, that was front and center. And then as we discussed, in Virginia, Youngkin decides to make this a centerpiece — why, was beyond me. I mean, I think that was a real rookie mistake. And this is his first, first merry-go-round. So, you know, I guess he can make these mistakes. But that seems--.

PONNURU: You know, you only get one turn on the merry-go-round in Virginia, though.

KAMARCK: That's true. [inaudible] might want to come back and run for other things. And that struck me as interesting. And so you have the two places, the two big marquee places, where it was an issue, and it helped Democrats, but it helped them because the issue was placed first and foremost in their minds. In other places, you know, New Yorks, the Californias, etc., I don't think you can see it as such a motivating issue because it's not really at risk. So that's the, that's the catch there. Abortion is very powerful, but it has to be-- the voters have to perceive it as at risk.

DIONNE, JR.: That's-- could I just interrupt and ask a question there because that's really interesting, which means California, New York are not competitive. If they are, Joe Biden is really in trouble. So the fact that abortion is not a competitive or not a salient issue in those states probably doesn't matter, but it is salient in certain red states, certainly in some red states, but also in some swing states. So, that, in a way, it's potentially more harmful to Republicans--.

KAMARCK: Yeah, well, that's--.

DIONNE, JR.: Then we already think it is--.

KAMARCK: Right. And that that Pennsylvania Supreme Court vote was enormous, okay? That was a big, big win for the pro-choice candidate so-- and Pennsylvania being the swing state is showing the power of this. But let's go back to the central question then, okay? Why is there this difference, big difference between Joe Biden, who everybody on Sunday afternoon was saying, "Oh, my God. Dead in the water," and the results of the election? So let me give you a couple hypotheses, okay? The easiest answer is the one I started with. Maybe there's just no relationship between the president's popularity and down-ballot voting, that voters vote on very different things. And maybe we — just because we have a president-centric kind of culture — maybe we just get that wrong all the time. A second possibility is that the polls are wrong, okay, the polls are wrong, that there's there's a systematic bias that we're not picking up, that they're weighting the different groups in the polling wrong. Remember, these polls, the individual state polls, were fairly small numbers — about 600, 650 in each of those polls that struck such terror in the hearts of Democrats.

A third possibility is something we haven't mentioned, which is inflation or the cost of living. And it's possible that the electorate says the president's responsible for that, but they don't hold the governors, they don't hold state legislators. They see this as a macroeconomic problem, to use the fancy word. But they see that-- they say, "The president, that's his job. And boy, he screwed up, and boy, are we mad at him. But we're not necessarily mad at our governor or our state senator." And a fourth possibility is that the voters just don't like Joe Biden. And they don't like him because they think he's too old, because they think he's sort of out of it, because, you know, he's not-- they think he's not vigorous, etc. And that that's what you're really

getting in the in the poll responses. Now, the question is, right, so what if they don't like Joe Biden? Does that mean that they're not going to vote for him? We already know that they're not voting-- they don't like him, but they're voting for Democrats. And I think the \$64 question — or \$64,000 question — is, does this mean anything at all for 2024? I can't give you an answer on that, but I'll tell you that E.J. and myself, and one of our colleagues here at Brookings, have a, have an ongoing sort of ridiculous email chain where we send each other, you know, notes and--.

DIONNE, JR.: And lots of data.

KAMARCK: And lots of data. And our-- one of our colleagues calls himself "the bedwetter" because he-- if there's bad news, he finds it, right? He finds it and says, "This is terrible." E.J. is very balanced, as you can know from reading his columns over the years. He's very balanced.

DIONNE, JR.: Ramesh says, "Huh?" But anyway, go ahead.

KAMARCK: I am a absolute eternal optimist, so I find it hard to believe that voters who are consistently, through the years, voting for Democrats down-ballot are suddenly, in the presidential race, going to vote for a Republican candidate. I just find it hard to believe. But I want to caveat that with the fact that I am an eternal optimist. So, so, I may very well be wrong.

WOODS: If I might jump in here.

DIONNE, JR.: I know, I wanted you to jump in. And can I-- as you answer, I wanted to ask you something anyway, which is related to this. Which is, I was really struck that the ads that I saw did not just go after the abortion issue, but MAGA extremists were the two favorite words of Democratic candidates, which had a broader reach and did link to the presidential. But so, say what you want to say and please talk about it.

WOODS: Yeah, and I'll go ahead and start with what you were saying real quick, and just say like, yeah, if it were a drinking game every time I heard, "MAGA extremist, MAGA extremist," and you know, the Republicans calling the Democrats extreme, particularly on abortion, saying, you know, "They have no limits; current law has limits." But I think to your point about being an optimist, and also voters and their habits-- I've spent the last month going canvassing. I've been shadowing Republican and Democratic state legislative candidates and various organizations as they've canvased, and I just kind of hang back and watch their conversations with voters. And, you know, voters are all over the spectrum on-- you know, you've got your, your hardcore nerds who pay attention to every little thing, they're involved with their party, they're very allegiant to their party. But they've got a lot of people that are living busy lives, they're tuning in at the last second, studying up before they head to the polls. I met a voter last weekend who almost forgot that Tuesday was Election Day. And she goes, "Oh my God, I need to be reading things." And I think a lot of

things come down to gut feelings, and if you trust that Republicans or Democrats are gonna have your best interests at heart. And so, that's where I think all of this like, can we read the tea leaves on the impact of Biden or Trump, or insert whoever else's name... Sometimes it just comes down to gut feeling on specific issues or party allegiance if you are someone who feels like you're a Republican or a Democrat.

PONNURU: If I could piggyback on the, on the point you make about the sort of different types of voters and sort of how sort of politically involved they are. One tentative theory I've got about some of these recent elections is that, you know, part of what we've seen in the shifting coalitions where Republicans have shared some of their college-educated voters and picked up non-college-educated voters, they've also belatedly and simultaneously shed high propensity voters for low propensity voters, which means that the advantage that they used to have in midterm and off-year elections is, if not reversed, at least significantly blunted. But then at the same time, maybe they'll do better in presidential years in the high turnout races, because the fact is, 2020 Republican turnout was pretty strong. That ended up being a tighter race than a lot of people thought. And that's one-- I would say, you know, your 'bedwetter' friend should, should pick up on this.

KAMARCK: Yeah. No, actually, he has, and I have too. But because I'm an eternal optimist, I try to ignore it. Okay.

DIONNE, JR.: No, I think you're really on to something because people asked, "How could Biden beat Trump, but Republicans pick up ten House seats?" Answer: some voters, there may be two or million voters out there, something like that, who only turn out for Trump. If Trump is on the ballot, they'll vote. And if Trump is not on the ballot, they're less likely to vote. That goes with your theory, I think.

PONNURU: Yeah. And also, the 2020, you know, the overall was just tighter than 2018. And therefore, you'd pick up some House seats, but not enough.

DIONNE, JR.: Yeah, but I think Biden did better than Hillary, and they still picked up seats. We have a good question, which I'd like to address to everybody or anybody who wanted to answer it, Charlotte, particularly because it's related to you, what was, what does the — this is from Julia Seward, a consultant — "What does the defeat of Youngkin's election strategy" — I assume she's talking about the abortion strategy, but it may be other things, too, but I was thinking of abortion strategy — "tell Republican governors and Republicans looking at 2024?" Their 15-week idea, I think is a really interesting case because if you poll it, a lot of voters will in a complete abstract, think--.

PONNURU: [Inaudible] question, actually.

DIONNE, JR.: Yeah. I will say, yeah, 15 weeks, that seems reasonable, and that's why Youngkin ran with it. But in practice, in Virginia, it meant rolling back. And then that whole fight over it was like a word fight,

you know, "depends on what the meaning of is, is," to quote a famous president. You know, "It's a ban." "No, it's a limit." You know, and talk about that, Charlotte. And I'd like Ramesh to talk broadly about, you know-- you've written powerfully on the 'right to life' side of politics. What does this say to the movement that you've written about a lot? But go ahead, Charlotte. And I also want to I want to bring back Zach because this played in a lot of other places.

WOODS: Yeah. I guess to start — I'm remembering the questions — someone asked what was the strategy, the feedback from the strategy, that Youngkin imposed, and like how that played out for him. And clearly, it didn't. I think when focusing specifically on abortion, like it is the most contentious thing in the world, and like, no matter what I write, I'm angering somebody. And I have cried on the phone with women who've shared their stories with me of, "I didn't get an abortion" or "I did get an abortion," and like, I take it very seriously. It's it's tough to report on, and I think it's tough for voters. And when you have someone telling you, or a group of people telling you, "This is reasonable," well, it's up to the voters to decide if it's reasonable or not. And, you know, it comes down to the messaging and the framing. And I think Republicans and Glenn Youngkin really wanted-- you know, a lot of these Republicans have presented 'life at conception' bills before, and even this year, and I think they wanted to make some movement. They saw an opportunity from Roe and Dobbs like, "Okay, we can get some traction. We can walk back some of these restrictions because they, you know, I don't, I don't want us to having this much access." And then you've got people who are just so used to, "Well, you have the option if something goes awry in your pregnancy," or "Oh, I don't want one. You have a lot of options. You have time to get it sorted out." And I think, in terms that it's just such a contentious issue, and I think the framing of telling people this is reasonable was off-putting to some people.

And then, obviously, there are, you know, very hardcore pro-choice people who were never going to be swayed by it to begin with. And then in terms of how it played out, I think, you know, Virginia had a chance to be like a lab and test this experiment of can this work? And I think as I think Elaine mentioned earlier, you know, abortion will be a big issue in the states that are swing states, or the states that are politically purple, or skew a little left or a little right, but aren't hardcore echo chambers for any particular policy arena. And I think, you know, Virginia definitely proved it didn't work here. And it probably could prove it won't work anywhere or in other places. But, you know, it might go in other places because we've seen North Carolina do 12 weeks. We've seen the battles that have happened with Georgia and Florida in six weeks. So, at this point, you know, the arbitrary pick of week, it will stick in different ways, in different places. But Virginia, at least for now, said no thank you.

DIONNE, JR.: It really struck me from the ads I saw that Republican candidates did not jump on it in their advertising. They didn't think this was — maybe a few did in a couple of places. There was at least one race. I know where they did that--.

WOODS: I'll touch on that real quick, yeah. And then, I know you have some answers, too. I've just been covering abortion so deeply all year, but amongst like a thousand other things because, you know, state politics is everything. But yeah, like the messaging is what I noticed. Some candidates, when asked, like I asked so many Republican candidates, "Where do you fall in the spectrum? Like, what do you prefer?" You know, obviously, a lot cozied up under Glenn Youngkin's umbrella of 15 weeks. For some, they really believed it, I'm sure. And for some, it provided cover because they really wanted more. That's why we saw so many, a handful of candidates who were, you know, secretly recorded by activists talking about wanting to go further.

DIONNE, JR.: Which, which helped Democrats.

WOODS: That helped the Democrats because Democrats were like, "See, I told you so," and tried to say that that applied to everyone, which we don't know. So, yeah, I think some Republicans wanted to test the waters with Youngkin and say, "Can we go on the offense about this issue, and have it work," or "I'm gonna stay quiet and I'm just going to fly under the radar on this." And, you know, we had candidates scrubbing pro-life language from their websites some. Over the summer, July, I swear, is where everything started to shift.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you. To, to--- we mentioned [inaudible], so let me just throw another question from our people who wrote them in, and then I'm going to go to the audience for your thoughts. A couple of people, Yeny Garcia of Voice of America, and Kayla Jones at the Tennessee Campus Democracy Network were interested in the youth vote in Gen Z'ers, and if we'd learned anything on Tuesday about that. But so, Ramesh, I would like you to elaborate on the abortion issue. Where, where does this go now?

PONNURU: So, let me start with Virginia and then try to zoom out a little bit. And I think that was really interesting point you made about Republican candidates insisting on how reasonable they were, and that be for voters to decide, because it does remind me of how, like of the two most enraging words in English language "calm down." You can't. It doesn't work. It never worked. I think that the 15-week strategy on abortion for pro-lifers is fundamentally a defensive strategy and is not going to work as an offensive strategy to win back seats, or at least if it's going to work, it is not going to work in the immediate aftermath of Dobbs. It is not going to work in a socially liberal state. And so, I think that a strategy that might have made sense as a way of trying to blunt a Democratic advantage in Virginia in 2023 was sort of allowed to get out of control by the Republicans, and they leaned on it too heavily. Zooming back on the way abortion is playing

out in, in different states across the country, I think there is very, very solid evidence now, seven in a row referendum, that when this is, when this is put up to a plebiscite, when it is framed as an up or down vote, essentially, do you want something like the pre-Dobbs regime or do you want all abortions illegal? The pre-Roe regime is going to is going to win.

The question of how it translates to candidate votes, though, is a more complicated one. And I do think that there was a significant amount of overreading of how much it, how much it's affecting people's vote for a candidate. So for example, in Kentucky, you've got this veto-proof supermajority of anti-abortion Republicans. In Ohio, Governor DeWine passes the very heartbeat bill that now is being overturned by referendum, and he wins by a landslide. Every incumbent governor and senator who was pro-life won reelection in 2022, even in a. in a pretty bad year for Republicans. I would say that, that the evidence with respect to candidates is, if you don't position yourself as somebody who's against rape and incest exceptions, life of the mother exceptions, this is an issue where in red and purple states you can win, even now, even in, you know, '22, '23, and possibly '24. But if you take the, if you take the uncompromising position, which some candidates did in 2022 in particular, and some candidates sort of allowed themselves to be defined as, that's going to be a losing position almost anywhere.

DIONNE, JR.: Zach, are we overplaying abortion here? Just-- and number one, talk about that. But I'm curious if anybody-- I haven't seen much polling, so I can't-- I do think the folks asking about the under 35 vote, we'll call it that, are on to something because it's really important that Biden win that by a lot. And one of the things in that New York Times poll that people jumped on is, is, according to that survey, his relative weakness among young people. But take us around the country again. So what you were looking at when you were working away at all these races over the last couple of weeks?

MONTELLARO: Yeah. So I guess I'll steal a line from the debate last night. So as a man in talking about abortion — which is what Ramaswamy said last night — it played differently. I think Kentucky's the most illustrative part about this. I think you can read the wrong message from last night's, or Tuesday night's elections, is if you thought Kentucky was just about abortion, or even predominantly about abortion. Governor Beshear did advertise about abortion. And as you alluded to, his advertising was not, "I'm going to be a pro-choice champion." It was, "My opponent, Daniel Cameron, doesn't even support exemptions for rape and for incest." And Daniel Cameron really struggled with this. And sometimes he said, "No, of course I do," and sometimes he said, "I'll defend the current state law," which does not have those exemptions. So-- and it wasn't, it wasn't a majority of his message, wasn't even a tertiary issue. It was about 8% of his TV ads, give or take, of Democratic TV ads, talked about abortion. So there is no one overarching answer that this works in a blue state. You know, it works like a Virginia Democrat talking about "I am staunchly pro-choice.

You should vote for me because I'm pro-choice," versus Beshear who was not really doing that. He was just saying, "Look at this guy, look at Daniel Cameron, who doesn't even support these baseline exemptions." So, it's not one singular message to take away. But where we do see it's important is with young voters. I don't know how much you can read into that in the 2023 election, in off-off-year election. It's real brutal, turnout is real brutal.

The notable exception to that, I guess, is Ohio, and less so Tuesday night, which was still quite significant turnout for an off-year election. But I actually look back toward the August special election. That was that-- it was a proxy. So if you don't know, there was a proxy amendment about abortion. Republicans in the state proposed a ballot initiative that would make future ballot initiatives harder, harder to pass. It wouldn't just apply to abortion, but everybody knew it was about-- or everyone knew it was about abortion because the abortion ballot initiative was coming up in November. That saw incredibly high turnout for an election that shouldn't even-- that was a special election that was not regularly scheduled.

DIONNE, JR.: In August.

MONTELLARO: In August. It approached, I think, the primary turnout for the 2022 election — which is not exactly one-to-one, but that had a very, very, very competitive Republican primary for the Senate — it approached that level of turnout for an off-year, for an off-off-year special election. So, it is obviously very much driving voters to the polls. Does that translate to candidates? That's the million-dollar question. It translates to turnout. There's a reason Democrats want a ballot initiative in 2024 on the ballot in Arizona, on the ballot in Florida, maybe on the ballot even in New York, where they would really love to not lose all those House races again. Can a candidate jump on that? I still don't think we have a definitive answer. I look towards the governor races in 2022. Republican gubernatorial candidates got clobbered with very limited exceptions, if either an incumbent, Brian Kemp, or Joe Lombardo in Nevada. Every other Republican in a battleground state outside of like Chris Sununu, who was his own animal, got clobbered. Some of that was because there were independents or incumbents they are facing off against.

But I'm not sure yet if you could decouple that, the absolutely dismal performance from Republican gubernatorial candidates in 2022, from abortion rights. You know, you need-- it looks right now that abortion rights, pro-abortion rights, certainly drives people to the polls. And the ballot initiative after ballot initiative after ballot initiative will make voters--- voters will support those ballot initiatives. Does that translate to candidates? Joe Biden is certainly hoping so. House Democrats are certainly hoping so. But, and at least the early evidence in from the midterms certainly is that, yes, it helps. Does it help in a presidential election, which is different from everything we've ever seen, when we effectively have, like, two of the most well-

known people in American politics running against each other, is that cake not already baked, or the soufflé already risen? We'll have to wait and find out.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you. Let's go to the audience. The turnout thing is, I think, is a really big deal. And I was struck by A video — I have no idea if it's representative or not — of William and Mary gave their students the day off for the election, and the lines were really extraordinary. And I'm just curious if that it tells you if that's just one video at a particular time, or if that may tell us something about turnout.

WOODS: That's part of why the Monty Mason-Danny Diggs race was one of the harder ones to call. And also over in Virginia Tech, House District 41 saw the cousin of a sitting senator running as the Republican and then a rural Democrat — it's so hard for Democrats in rural parts of Virginia — and that race was much closer than it than I would have expected. And I think that's because of the young votes, which tend to skew Democratic, not always. And in Virginia, there's same-day registration. So. college kids who are just becoming politically aware and getting excited, get involved, then they're going to sign up and go vote.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you. Well, who wants to ask-- it's not the first question. Sometimes people are reluctant to ask the first question, but I've asked a zillion questions already. Sir, yeah there is a mic.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: This question is addressed to Charlotte and to Elaine. Well, a different question to you, though. With respect to Governor Youngkin, I guess my question is, in 2021, because of COVID, was that an issue that hurt former Governor McAuliffe in his race to return to, to Richmond, and governor — and candidate — Youngkin took advantage of that, along with the parental issue? Or was just governor, or former Governor McAuliffe such a weak candidate at that time, and governor, candidate Youngkin took advantage of that?

WOODS: A couple of things. COVID def-- sorry, sorry.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My, my question to Elaine is, with respect to President Biden, is part of the weakness that is maybe apparent because of the-- his vice president?

KAMARCK: Okay.

DIONNE, JR.: Good question.

WOODS: I'll start. Youngkin, COVID 2021. So, there was a lot of like, you know, fatigue from-- I mean, it's a global pandemic. What were any of us supposed to do, you know? But it definitely hurt Democrats that year a little bit. And it hurt McAuliffe just-- or because, you know, also you got to remember McAuliffe and Northam were governor, lieutenant governor, you know, administration before that. And so, I think there was a lot of frustration among Republicans and independents about like the prolonged business closures, church closures, mask mandates. One of the first things Youngkin worked on when he took office was getting rid of mask mandates, in schools in particular. And so, I think that that definitely played a little bit

of a role. I think McAuliffe was also talking about abortion a bit prematurely, and it just was kind of falling on deaf ears. And then campaign-wise, having been at a bunch of these events, I think McAuliffe being the incumbent, he was-- in the Democratic primary, he definitely like 'Biden'd' his way in on name recognition. There were a lot of really qualified candidates.

DIONNE, JR.: 'Biden'd' his way in. There's a good-- I'll remember that.

WOODS: So, yeah, you know, he had the name recognition as former governor. And then you've got all these others, the slate of Democratic candidates in the primary. And he just came in and just there's a reason Jennifer McClellan is now a congresswoman instead of governor-- or could have gone up against Youngkin. or at least that's my theory. And there was a wide slate of Republicans running in the convention as well. And, you know, Glenn Youngkin has a lot of charisma. He's got like Obama energy for a Republican candidate. And, you know, just speaking of Obama, on that day in October, a couple of weeks before the election, I was at an event where Obama came to stump for Youngkin. Everyone stayed up on--.

DIONNE, JR.: For Youngkin? You mean against?

WOODS: For McAuliffe. Everyone stayed up on their podium. You know, McAuliffe, you know, and he was such a policy wonk, and his website had lots of debt-- if you're a policy wonk, like, his website was fun to go to. But the average voter is like, "No, you got to tell me, man." But Youngkin had charisma and energy. He got down off-- he didn't stay on podiums. He talked with people. He was more-- he kind of gave off "I can be your friend, let's go grab drinks, let's go hiking or something," kind of vibes.

DIONNE, JR.: In your vest.

WOODS: And yeah, your fleece sweater vest. You know, former college basketball player kind of guy — and he still uses a lot of sports metaphors. So I think he connected with voters a little bit more personally that year, too. And I'm going to stop because I can talk about this for like ever.

DIONNE, JR.: I got an email from a Democratic friend in Virginia on election night after the results were known. And it said, "I've got a pile of sweater vest to send you cheap." The-- after that. There's a great study, I'll just summarize it very briefly and probably oversimplify. Geoff Garin, the Democratic pollster, did a great study after Youngkin's election that concluded that the critical race theory issue was mainly a base mobilizer. And, but that there was so much frustration with the way the public schools handled COVID, whether fairly or not, that that really motivated a shift to the Republicans. But Elaine?

PONNURU: Can I say one thing about McAuliffe?

KAMARCK: What?

PONNURU: He's a smart guy, but he's not a good candidate. The fact that he barely won in 2013, two weeks after the Republicans shut down the federal government should, in retrospect, have told us something about his potential strength. Because, again, this is McAuliffe.

DIONNE, JR.: In defense of poor McAuliffe here, Democrats, or the party that holds the White House, usually lose in Virginia afterward. So, it was seen as a bit of a--.

WOODS: Twenty years of data on that.

DIONNE, JR.: So, it was seen as a strong 2%. But anyway, go ahead.

KAMARCK: So, to the vice-presidential question. I mean, yes, it is conventional wisdom that part of Biden's weakness is that people are not confident in his vice president, and given his age, that the vice president becomes more important. The problem with that analysis is that polling shows that she is very popular among young people and that is a big contributor to the Democratic vote. The lopsided Democratic performance of people under 45 has been, for the last several cycles, a big part of the Democratic vote. Whereas-- and it started in '08, started in '08, where Obama won under 30 by like 60%, and then he split all the other age cohorts. And so, that was his margin. What is it unique about the younger vote? They're, they're more diverse. They're the most diverse generation in American history. And the diver-- and so they see in Kamala Harris, right, one of them, in a way that baby boomers, and silent generation, and people older don't see that. So that is, that is a counter-narrative to the conventional one. And if you notice where they're sending Kamala Harris these days, she's on a lot of college campuses, okay? She's moving all over the country with young people. And so not only would it-- to the extent it hurts, it may hurt her among some people. It may hurt Biden among some people in the electorate. It's not going to hurt him among a group of people who he needs a big vote out of. And so, I think she's on the ticket. She's going to stay on the ticket. And I suspect it'll all balance out.

MONTELLARO: I also believe that New York Times poll I talked about had tested Vice President Harris against Trump, and she also ran slightly ahead of Joe Biden in that same poll that everyone freaked out about.

DIONNE, JR.: All right, now see everybody wants to get in at the end. So what I'm going to do, because Catalina will yank me off the stage by force, what I'd like to do is have mics over here. Can you ask-- get all four questions in. The panelists can, can evade all the hard ones and answer whatever they want as they close. So this gentleman, those two gentlemen in the back. If you can be brief, I'd be grateful. Just to save me from Catalina physically pulling me off.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sure. I guess that my question is, what happened to the economy stooping? You know, inflation, inflation, inflation. Not much discussion beyond that. We're going to get energy from

everywhere. But there doesn't really seem to be any kind-- I don't know what the core Republican message about the economy is, even in the debate yesterday, and I'm not even sure I know where in the presidential debate the rubber's going to hit the road on the economy. So I'm wondering about that.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you. That's a great question, sir. And then over here, if we can get the two hands on this side. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We've touched on this briefly, but I wonder if any of the panelists could expand on the theme of money. How did the two parties compare in the amount of fundraising, their success in fundraising? Much more importantly, why? And also, does it have implications for '24? So, how did they get there, why, and implications.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you, sir. And then I guess this gentleman.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Kentucky politics. Kentucky can be considered by some as three states in one. The fact that the Republican got over 600,000 votes, my question is, what impact do you think race will play in the future, in future elections?

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you, sir. And then the last question here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Getting back to Suffolk County in New York, in 2022, Democrats, I think, lost four seats, which would have meant that they would have controlled the House. And those four seats, probably areas that were comparable to Suffolk County, and that they were originally exurban counties and became suburban counties. And I think that that makes a difference in how you approach them.

DIONNE, JR.: Thank you. One sentence on the economy stooping question. I was thinking about this with Beshear. Beshear is not responsible for inflation, but he is responsible for economic growth. So he could brag on all the economic growth, some of which was helped by some of the Biden programs, without suffering any price on inflation. So the economy matters. But I agree with, I think it was, Elaine, that the inflation, I don't think hits governors and other people the way--.

KAMARCK: I think this is going to hit Congress. It doesn't hit governors.

DIONNE, JR.: But anyway, who wants-- Zach, why don't you take the money and the Suffolk County question?

MONTELLARO: So, the money question, very simply, in Kentucky, in Pennsylvania, in Ohio — and I'll use the pro-abortion rights side as a proxy — Democrats blew them out of the water.

KAMARCK: A lot more money.

MONTELLARO: A lot more money. In Kentucky specifically, Andy Beshear, the RGA and DGA were not exactly at parity, but they were pretty close. They're close enough that it wasn't a big deal. Andy Beshear crushed Daniel Cameron just absolutely demolished him. In fundraising wire to wire, in television spending,

and all that. Charlotte probably knows better about Virginia, but Democrats had a lot-- there was a lot more attention because of Governor Youngkin. Governor Youngkin got more attention than Attorney General Beshear did. But the money was a big, big, big difference. I think in 2024, it'll probably a little bit less lopsided, but that certainly helped Democrats.

And then on Suffolk County, yeah, I think you're right. I [inaudible] of my age, Suffolk County has been suburban my entire life. And as you get further out west, or out east, rather, on the island, we still do get that exurban part. I think the control for the house will be decided probably in New York, both because of the redistricting lawsuit coming up and those New York House seats. I don't think at the end of next year, Republicans are going to have all four more House seats. If they do, that's a really good sign that they probably held the House. And how they do there, it won't exactly translate to other suburban parts of the country because New York is a little bit different, but I think it's probably the best place to watch. And yes, I'm biased. I'm a Long Islander. Best part, best place in America. But watch-- I would say Long Island is going to be super important next year.

KAMARCK: I think a little accent crept in.

MONTELLARO: A little bit, a little big. Go Mets.

DIONNE, JR.: So, let me just-- I'll go down the line with Charlotte, Ramesh, and I'll let Elaine finish. I'd love to address that gentleman's question, too, at some point. But go ahead. Anything you want to think we have missed or anything in response to these questions?

WOODS: I guess two things, I guess it goes to money because we have spent a lot of time on abortion today. But inflation should be, it should have been a bigger conversation this year, I think. And I definitely know it will be next year because presidential races, congressional races, there's this understanding at the federal level there can be a bit more of a magic wand waved, even though there's no magic wand. And I think it will also come in heavily at like your local city council or supervised races because you know, that's where all the-- you're taking the federal and state money and allocating it to things and programs. But then in terms of money, like since you mentioned Virginia, yeah, Governor Glenn Youngkin and his Spirit of Virginia PAC-- you know, Terry McAuliffe used to be known as like the fundraising guy. And McCaul-- not McAuliffe, Youngk — I'm mixing up all these governors, sorry. Clearly, I've been in Virginia a while. But yeah, no, Youngkin's PAC has hauled in a lot of money and also attracted because of his will-he/won't-he flirtation with 2024.

I think he'll go for things down the line, actually, if he can keep momentum and continue the rest of his governor and time getting at least some things done. But, you know, he attracted Thomas Peterffy, who was a DeSantis donor, who has been on record in The Washington Post, saying, you know, "I want him to

run." So I think Youngkin's PAC has had a huge impact. I think they want to play in bigger leagues. This was the testing ground. This was getting started. And obviously, the Democrats brought in a huge haul. This was probably one of the most expensive, like pure legislative races in Virginia in an off-off-year. So that was really just mind boggling to me to see. And I think that spoke to also the [inaudible] that we didn't discuss here is first year on new district maps. We had all hundred and 40 seats on new maps, maybe 12 of them were very highly competitive. So, I think everyone knew to throw their money at everything. So, I think-- I hope that was insightful.

DIONNE, JR.: And Ramesh and Elaine, it would be interesting to answer the gentleman's question. Daniel Cameron, Beshear's opponent, is black, and was really in many ways a good candidate. And the way he managed it — talk about being a diplomat — the way he managed the Mitch McConnell wing of the party, and the Trump wing of the party was pretty effective, but obviously not enough to win the race. But go ahead on that and anything else, Ramesh.

PONNURU: Sure. On the economy, I would say that the number to watch is real wages. That is wages adjusted for inflation. They're down still from their peak. They seem to be coming up a little bit earlier in the year and then started going back down again. There is time enough for that trend to work in favor of Biden, but I think it overwhelms all of the other things that people have been talking about. On funding for the parties, just two points I'd make here. One: both parties' donor bases remain more pro-choice than their voting bases, and that affects the way these things play out. And two: the Republicans have made a conscious decision — some of it forced, some of it a conscious decision — to divorce business. And that's going to affect your fundraising. On the race question, I think we are seeing a little bit of a racial convergence. Between 2016 and 2020, the Republicans picked up non-white votes and lost some white votes. And I think that there is some evidence that particularly among working class, [inaudible], non-college-educated Hispanics, and to a lesser extent, African Americans, there is a shift towards Republicans. It looks to me like it's a small shift, but a real one. One that is, is small. It doesn't mean that, you know, Republicans are going to take the Hispanic vote or take black votes. They're not going to get a majority of either group's votes. But it could be enough to make a difference.

DIONNE, JR.: Elaine.

KAMARCK: There is no indica-- [inaudible] juxtapose, juxtapose that New York Times poll and then what happened, right? New York Times poll showed this, and what Ramesh was talking about, a small shift among African Americans and Hispanics to the Republican Party. No evidence of that in Virginia. No evidence of that in Kentucky. I mean, and I think if there had been, we would have seen it right away. And we just, we just don't see it now. We don't have exit polls, so we can't know for sure. But given the

segregation of blacks in communities, I think we would have seen if there were turnout differentials for vote differentials. As for money, the Democratic National Committee poured \$16 million into Virginia races, okay? This was a big deal for Democrats. This was very much nationalized. The White House knew exactly what they were doing. They knew this was a test case. Little did they know when they started mobilizing for Virginia how important it would be because they didn't know they would have this disastrous New York Times poll at the beginning. But this-- there was a lot of money. I looked at 13 of the swings, the most competitive states, and in almost every single one, the Democrats had more money than the Republicans. Not by huge amounts, not by huge amounts, but by \$500,000, \$600,000. So, Democrats have been very competitive. My guess is financially, they'll be competitive throughout next year. And certainly, the abortion question brings in a lot of money.

DIONNE, JR.: So, I'll close with four words from President Biden's tweet, which he or his people must have really enjoyed writing: "Voters vote. Polls don't.: And I am very grateful that we had such an incredible group. Charlotte, Ramesh, Zach, and Elaine to discuss what we think those voters tried to say. And I'm sure we're going to go back to the polls to figure out what the real answer is. Anyway, thank you all very much for coming in. Thank you, guys.