

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WEBINAR

WHAT HAPPENED ON NOV. 5: A DEEP DIVE INTO THE RESULTS OF THE
PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL RACES

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UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

PANEL 1: PRESIDENTIAL RACE ANALYSIS

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PANEL 2: ANALYSIS OF CONGRESSIONAL RACES

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KAMARCK: Good morning, everyone. My name is Elaine Kamarck. Welcome to Brookings. This morning, we're going to discuss what else what happened in the 2024 presidential election. To do this, we have some great scholars and and political analysts here. And I'd like to get started. It was a surprising election, as you can imagine, as I'm sure everybody knows, people were sort of as the word that comes to mind is a sophisticated political science term. Gobsmacked. We were just gobsmacked. I mean, a lot of people just did not see this coming. So today, to sort of unpack what's happening, I've got four wonderful analysts with me and I'll introduce them as they speak. But let's start with my colleague, Bill Galston, who is the senior fellow here at Brookings, and the Ezra Zilkha chair holder here at Brookings. He's also a columnist for The Wall Street Journal and the author of nine books and hundreds of pieces. And among those of us here at Brookings, Bill was the one who probably was the most accurate in calling what was going to happen to this election. So therefore, he gets the first roll today. So, Bill, tell tell us what you think. And particularly the question I'm interested in is the difference between the economic and the cultural issues and their impact on the election.

GALSTON: Yeah. Well, thanks for the shout-out, Elaine. I am tempted to begin and end with the statement, that was when all was said and done, Trump's supporters turned out to vote for him, and many of Harris's supporters didn't. I think we're beginning to see now that Trump will exceed the number of votes he got in 2020 by some millions, and Harris will fall short of Biden's high watermark by even more. And for whatever reason, the efforts of the Harris Walz ticket to mobilize the passions and concerns of people who might not have welcomed the return of Donald Trump fell short. Details to come. There's going to be an enormous amount of analysis. So that's that's one headline. I'd offer a second headline I'd offer is that a number of Republican strategists, most notably a man by the name of Patrick Ruffini, have been talking about the effort to turn Republicans into a multi-ethnic, working-class party. This is in part because these analysts understood that a party built on the white working class alone, which was a declining share of the population, was a formula for defeat over time. And I think it's fair to say that the results of the 2024 election suggest that Trump is at least moved the Republicans down the road in that direction. I fear I'm going to rely on the not the exit polls, but AP's vote cast, you know, which represents more than 100,000 Americans and, you know, and represents not only people who came out of the polling booth, but people who voted in a variety of ways. I think it may be more accurate than the exit polls. At any rate, Trump succeeded in doubling his share of the African-American vote from 8 to 16%, largely because almost a quarter of African-American men voted for him. Similarly, he dramatically increased his share of the Hispanic vote and may actually have gotten a majority among Hispanic men. We don't know the the educational breakdown yet, but we but we do know

that in 2020, there was already a sizable gap between Hispanics with and without college degrees, a 14 point gap. And I wouldn't be surprised to discover when the fine grained analysis was done that that gap wiped in in 2024. So I'd offer the following headlines. I remember when I was a college student, the holy trinity of oppression was race, class and gender, you know, and different elements of that trinity have dominated the scene at different points in American political history over the past half century. I would suggest that we are witnessing the emergence of a new politics of class. Your class, defined as educational attainment, dominates the scene in the United States and throughout the industrialized world. And I'll leave that to my colleague E.J. Dionne to expand on that hypothesis or perhaps qualify. Gender matters clearly. But class trumps gender. So, for example. White working class women. I voted a lot more like white working class men than they did women with college degrees. It wasn't it wasn't even close. I guess the final generalization that I would make is that the Harris Walls theory of the case just didn't pan out. One of the you know, one of the assumptions was that that emphasizing, you know, emphasizing the overturning of Rove v Wade and the threat to women's reproductive rights would summon up an army of angry and fearful women who would who are the larger share of the electorate, of course, and who would doom the Trump candidacy. This simply didn't happen. You know, Harris did succeed in increasing the women's vote marginally, you know, by as a share of the electorate. But she did not improve on Biden's share of women. And so it was that was basically a wash. Another hope was that young people would turn out in droves. But amazingly, if you believe vote cast are Harris's share of young adults ages 18 to 29 was only 51%, down from Biden's 61%. Nor finally, did the suburbs yield the yield, the kind of rich load of votes that many Biden-Harris strategists had hoped. We are learning that turnout was actually down significantly in, for example, the counties around Philadelphia and that your and and that Harris and share of that vote was lower than Biden's including among suburban women which you know sort of delivered the coup de grass to that entire theory of the case. I could go on, but that's enough to get us started.

KAMARCK: Great. Thank you, Bill. And that's plenty to get us started. We'll come back to some of these things. I'd like to next turn to Mona Charen. Mona is a American columnist, journalist and political commentator, a political conservative. Her writings can also be found in the bulwark. She's written four books, the most recent. I really love the title of Useful Idiots How Liberals Got It Wrong in the Cold War and Still Blame America First. Mona in the closing weeks. And I've got two questions for you. In the closing weeks, a great deal of time and effort was spent by the Harris campaign trying to get Republican voters to cross over. What happened? Do you think that worked? What do you think of that? And also, I noted that in a recent column you were skeptical that Harris could have done really anything on immigration or inflation that

would have been believable. So could you take a crack at both of those? And then, of course, anything else you want to say? Put your put your.

CHAREN: First of all, thank you for the invitation. It's great to be here. It's particularly great to be with my colleague William Galston, who appears on a podcast that we do every week called Beg to Differ. So if anybody needs to hear more of us, you could do that every week. Okay. First, let's go to the Cheney, you know, campaigning with Cheney issue. So first reaction is, look, a coalition of conscience is almost doomed to be a small gathering no matter when or where. So so that's the first thing I would say. The other the other thing it does remind me of that great story about Adlai Stevenson, who was, of course, running against Eisenhower. And the voter approached him after a speech and said, Governor Stevenson, you are every thinking man's candidate. And he said, thank you, ma'am, but I need a majority. So it's it's. It is the case that Republican women basically returned back to to Trump. The 95% voted of Republicans voted for Trump. And there was the fantasy that some of us indulged for a while during the past frightful year where we thought, well, you know, look at the number of Republican primary voters who are even though Nikki Haley was no longer on the ballot, we're still going to the polls to vote for her to signal their dissatisfaction with Trump. But in the end, that wasn't enough. And, you know, most voters do come home to their own party. You know, it's very difficult, especially now in our super hyper polarized era, to get people to switch. The other problem is that Harris, while she conducted a great campaign, in many respects, I loved the patriotic notes that she introduced into the convention. And I loved her, you know, talking about the democratic traditions and having the most lethal military on the planet and on and on. She was hampered in her effort to persuade Republicans by the same thing that hampered her with independents and other voters, which is that she had taken such left wing postures in 2019 and never explained really why she was changing her views now. And so people felt there was an inauthenticity there, that she was being opportunistic. She was changing her tone now. But how much could they trust that this is the real Kamala Harris that they would get rather than the, you know, defund the police, Medicare for all? No fracking Kamala of of 2019. Regarding the abortion matter that Bill noted the other he said it all, basically. But let me just add one other point, which is that the strategy of saying to voters, you don't have to worry about what is going to happen on the federal level. This is going to be decided on a state by state basis and the feds aren't going to do anything. Seems to have worked. People were perfectly capable of going to the polls and voting for a state measure that would guarantee or enshrine, for example, abortion rights in their state constitutions, which happened in a number of states and also voting for Trump. So voters made that distinction. And I think this election probably represents the turning point as far as abortion being a winning issue for Democrats. They're going to have to

find other other issues. The other thing, again, following up on Bill's point about minorities and and Hispanics, the Democratic. There are many, many, many lessons to learn from this. And this is preliminary because as I said in a column this morning, all elections are provisional and the voters can flip in two years and deliver a resounding victory to the Democrats in the midterms. That is fully within the American tradition. But it is worth pausing for the Democratic Party to consider that their analysis of how to put together a coalition of minorities and working class people that and that the minorities would include black and brown and Asian peoples. They're going to have to reevaluate that whole brown issue because, first of all, what we know is that Hispanics, most of them, do not consider themselves brown. They consider themselves white, and they are no longer a reliable voting constituency for the Democratic Party. They tend to be pretty hawkish on immigration, which is the issue that Democrats thought was the key to this constituency. And and so there's going to have to be a serious rethink by the Democrats about appealing to so-called Brown voters on the basis of immigration alone.

KAMARCK: Thank you. That's a perfect segue into our next speaker. Gabe Sanchez is a senior fellow here at Brookings and a professor of political science and the founding Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Chair in Health Policy at the University of New Mexico. He's also director of the University of New Mexico Center for Social Policy and vice president of research at BSP Research, a leading firm focused on the Latino electorate. So, Gabe, what about those Latino men? I and many other Democrats heard the warnings but didn't quite believe it. And as we've come to understand, the Latino community is very different depending on, among other things, country of origin. What can you tell us about what happened?

SANCHEZ: Yeah. Thanks Elaine for the warm welcome having me on the panel and picking a great question from even able to jump into the conversation about this. Obviously something we could talk about for an hour. So I'm going to try to synthesize this as briefly as possible. But I think like let's put some context out here before I start breaking down what happened in terms of what we saw in the numbers with the shift among Latino men towards Trump. One thing is just I know all of us are staring hard at exit poll numbers and trying to make the most of that analysis. Let's just keep in mind that the exit poll, the national exit poll released has not really been designed to capture nuances among subgroups of the electorate. That's not what it's designed to do. And consequently, historically, it's had major challenges with the Latino vote, in particular, something I've written about quite a bit in my career. So let's put some context to that as we start the exit poll numbers. We can debate about how big the movement was towards Trump. But in the day we know and it's clear from from all the other data that we have available to us pre-election post-election

surveys, etc., that Trump significantly improved his support among Latino males overall and among particular segments of that population that I'll break down in a moment. The gender gap, which we've talked a lot about here at Brookings right leading up to the election and we know is incredibly wide among Latinos, might actually be the widest we'll be able to actually observe once we have enough data to really dig into this. And the thing that was probably most powerful for me is that that gender gap among Latinos is apparently wide across all age groups of the Latino population, including between Latino men and women under the age of 40, the 18 to 39 year olds. Our data will release later this afternoon has added about 15% of Latinos under the age of 40. That's an important age group to look at because many of us here at Brookings had been projecting that among younger segments of the American population, the gender gap might not be as wide as it is among older Americans. So again, that movement seems to be consistent across most of the subgroups, the Latino population, which I think is important to note. It's not just being driven by one group or another. The other thing that I want to make sure that we know before we jump into this is just keep in mind the fact that because Latino Americans are so much younger than white Americans, we need to make comparisons that go all the way back to, let's say, Trump's first election against Clinton in 2016. Let's just put some context on this, right. In 2024, roughly 36, 38, somewhere in there, a percent of all Hispanic voters will cast a ballot. We're new to the electorate completely since that Trump Clinton matchup of 2016, brand new all that. Is there some part of their history and 1 in 5 or 20% of Latino voters in 2024. This is the very first time they ever cast a ballot in an election. Right. And the reason why that's very important context is those brand new voters, Right. Even those that have voted maybe on one election before this, they don't have a strong relationship to either party at this point. Right. They're still formulating their opinions about the party. They're still trying to figure out where they fit right in the tense of both parties, etc.. So we need to be cautious of the fact that, you know, that for a positive say. Right. Democrats should have some confidence they can win back Latino men and other segments. The Latino population. And Republicans should have some caution about long term implications of their performance with Latino men in 2024, given again that folks are still trying to formulate their opinions about the party. And it's not a cemented relationship by any stretch of the imagination. Finally, and this is again context before I jump into the economy and immigration and this cycle, I think two election cycles in a row now, Latino voting behavior did not match all of our pre-election analysis. I'll say I've been on the right side of these predictions the last two elections, but most folks talking about Latinos have basically got this completely wrong in advance of the election outcomes. Right? Recall. Latinos outperformed Expect expectations in 2022 to help Democrats have a big election cycle. Right? That was something nobody predicted. Everybody thought this massive Republican shift was going to happen in 2022. It did not happen yet. Right. Again, gives Democrats some confidence and and should give

Republicans some caution about making more of this election cycle than than we might want to do, just given that we've seen complete shifts almost one election cycle two years later to another. All right. Context out of the way. Let me let me jump in too quickly. Like what? What do we see right in the data so far that explains this this shift among Latino males to Trump? Clearly, the economy was the driving force of the shift. Right? Everybody's been talking about that. I think for the most part, that's dead on according to the American electorate voter poll that our team released later this afternoon. Just give you some some sense of saliency of the economy, the top four issues among all Latino voters in this cycle, cost of living, inflation, economy, jobs, housing costs and health care costs. Before we get to anything else about cultural dynamic is clearly right streaming. And this is why I'm with you, Elaine, that for most of us, we saw these trends in the data. We just kind of didn't want to believe them. That overwhelm. The economy is what Latino men have actually been talking about for three election cycles in a row. For Latino men, the economy was number one issues. And that just continues the dialog if you're thinking about one Latino. Overall, the population, particularly Latino men, prioritized. When we look deeper into the qualitative data we've been staring out for for months, right. Even though Democrats were trying to sell to Latino families, things are getting better. There's all these indicators that the economy is improving. At the end of the day, grocery costs and housing prices are the two cornerstones of most consumers in the United States. Right? Views of the economy, but definitely so among Latino families, budgets at home. And because those continue to remain high, it translated into rough perceptions about the economy among Latinos. Overall, regardless of whether or not other trends that Democrats were trying to utilize in their marketing and outreach that they were stressing, we're looking positive and we're looking up the other day that just completely missed Latino men who simply did not feel like things were going well for them and their families economically. Right. So the other thing to keep in mind is the subgroup dynamics of Latinos in the workforce. We look specifically at Latino males. 1 in 5 of those folks, roughly 20% of Latino men work in the construction industry. And again, we have to remind ourselves, right when we think about Covid and the transition of power between Republicans and Democrats, Trump and Biden. Right. The construction industry was probably hit the hardest during the Covid 19 closures. A lot of Latino men and I was doing so much research back then. I remember this vividly. A lot of Latino men that worked in construction or were connected to the construction industry that was hit very hard. They blame Biden and Democrats for that. And I remember hearing a lot in focus groups that a lot of those voters were on the fence basically saying, I understand why we need to close things down. Covid is extremely scary, etc.. I'll probably stick with Democrats. But at the end of the day, I might lose my business, the family might lose business, I might lose my job. This is hurting us economically. And I think, unfortunately, the wider segment of Latino men who either own small businesses or worked for small

businesses were also incredibly hit hard during that time period. I think those memories really hurt Harris And Democrats. At the end of the day, I heard in a lot of focus groups that our survey data this pre-election cycle that Latino men were saying over and over again, look, I believe Trump will prioritize the economy over everything else because he did that during Covid, right? We might not like the fact that he prioritized the economy over even health. Right. And closing businesses down. But I heard over and over again Latino men saying we know he'll do it again because he did it. You prioritize the economy over everything else. And again, remember, the Latino men were screaming over and over again, economy is what we care about above and beyond any of the other issues that were out there. Other thing that clearly changed this election cycle was mobilization and outreach by both parties. This was a low mobilization year for Latinos this cycle relative to your past overall. So both parties could have done a much better job connecting with the Latino electorate. All the data is clearly suggesting that. But Republicans significantly improved their outreach to Latinos and particularly Latino men in this cycle. There was still a small advantage in reported outreach among those who reported somebody contacted them from either party for Democrats. But I think this is the closest margin of advantage for Democrats that I've seen in watching elections in my career closely over any election cycle that we've seen in the past. That clearly had an impact. Latino men felt that Republicans were reaching out to them. And that's important for the next subtheme. I'm almost done. Just a couple more to go. And that's, I think, attitudinally right when we think about the psychological aspect of Latino man's attitudes towards the candidates, towards the party. I think what I heard consistently from colleagues on the ground that we're doing door knocking, etc., for the Democrats in particular, as they were hearing from both Latino men and black men, that there was a perception that they were just being ignored by the Harris campaign and Democrats more broadly. Biden before that right hand part of that story, I don't want to over push this right. But part of that story was as Democrats have prioritized abortion and reproductive health care, cultural issues, transgender policy, all these other really important policies that it's really important to know Latino men actually support across the board. The end of the day, all of that conversation might have felt like Latino men were being left out of discussions. And again, they're screaming inflation, cost of housing. These are the things where those things just didn't materialize. And so a lot of the outreach, I think a lot of Latino men in particular, felt like they just didn't have a place in these conversations. And the flipside to that, obviously, is that, you know, at the end of the day, Trump and Vance were communicating a much different message, even symbolic, right, than men. You belong here. We appreciate you and everything you bring to the table. And I just don't think Democrats really captured the importance of just starting a conversation there before moving to policy and everything else. I think at the end of the day that that had some traction. Finally, I can't leave a conversation about Latinos in 2024 without talking a little bit about immigration policy, which was

clearly a factor. I think I agree with you. I'm honored that that was part of the conversation. And I think it was one of the factors that led Latino men to support Trump at a wider clip than only seen in the past. And again, let's be clear. The overwhelming majority of Latinos oppose mass deportations and other aspects of Trump's immigration agenda. In fact, by wide margins, Latino voters support for immigration policy that includes a path to citizenship overall, a significantly enforcement only approach. All of those things trend well for Democrats. And in fact, when you look at the deeper range of public policy issues, Latinos, including Latino men, support progressive and liberal policies to a much greater extent than they supported Harris and Democrats when they decided who they were going to vote for. So, again, caution for Republicans is not a mandate to do everything that they talked about. It really was just a mandate on reducing cost of goods, in my opinion. But however, all that being said, I'm almost done knowing that the percentage of Latinos who prioritize border enforcement clearly increased over time, particularly among Latino men. Right. More of those folks we saw in polls indicated. Let's have a balanced approach. Path to citizenship. But start with border enforcement. And I think that clearly had an impact on their perception that Trump was stronger on immigration than than a lot of us thought that it would play out. But the one thing that I'll close with that I think is going to take some time for us to unpack and really understand is during the Obama years carrying over into 2016, most of us that studied Latino political behavior perceived that it was anti-immigrant language that Trump was using that was fueling an underlying sense of ethnic solidarity among Latinos. This was fueling a sense of even if they're not talking about my national origin group, are still angry about it. That simply did not manifest itself in 2020 for my quick analysis is just like we've seen in American history forever. When the economy is going bad, immigrants get the blame. And we saw Republicans capitalize on that. Blamed immigrants for the cost of housing prices. Jobs not paying as well. Basically, immigrants were the negative for everything bad with the economy. Latino men believe that we saw in the data they bought into that. And I think more than anything else, that's what drove the trends that we saw in the election.

KAMARCK: Right. Thank you. Thank you, Gabe. Okay. And by the way, it's it's interesting to me we've seen this in our some of our data on Congress, how much there's a sort of Covid hangover going out there in the public. And I don't think that has that got enough attention? Anyway, finally, we have my colleague, E.J. Dionne. E.J. is a senior fellow here at Brookings, a columnist for The Washington Post and university professor in the Foundations of Democracy and Culture at Georgetown University. He's the author of many books, including his latest "One Nation After Trump A Guide for the Perplexed, The Disillusioned, The Desperate and the Not Yet Deported" with Tom Mann and Norm Ornstein. E.J., is this, as someone has said, a run of the mill election with an earth shattering result?

DIONNE: And my line, Elaine!

KAMARCK: Okay.

DIONNE: I know I just told you that.

KAMARCK: I thought you were just talking about it, but I thought you were quoted someone know.

DIONNE: No that was me.

KAMARCK: As we've referenced, there was a stunning education gap between non-college white men and college educated women. Women? We first saw this in 2020. It seems to have grown. Talk to us about this.

DIONNE: First of all, thank you. It's good to be with everyone. And Bill got it right. We should give him credit for that. And I will get to why those of us who didn't expect quite this outcome got it wrong. I just want to say I'm so glad Mona quoted that Adlai Stevenson line because I have hated hated that Adlai Stevenson line for decades. But it is my view that if you are if you believe in democracy, which I do and which I do today, as I did two weeks ago, you cannot believe that about the electorate. And that's why Adlai Stevenson got clobbered two elections in a row. Besides the fact that everybody loves Ike. But I think it's very important. That's why I'm glad you put it on the table that we sort of look for the rationality of what happened here. And the reason I believe this is a run of the mill election with an earth shattering result and what those of us pushed back, we thought two things were going on. Those of us who thought Harris had a good chance of winning. One was that she would rally much broader support among women than she did. And we thought, I'm not blaming women for this outcome. I'm just saying that many of us thought that the flow of the campaign was such that she would rally a much bigger share of women. And the other was that we thought and this goes to the Liz Cheney strategy, that Trump's unpopularity and the danger he posed to the republic would move more voters. That actually happened. It was a run of the mill election because people were still deeply upset about the economy. And I agree with you, Elaine, that there's a Covid hangover here. In a funny way, Covid worked two different ways in favor of Trump. One is voters gave Trump a pass for the performance of the economy for the entire last year of his presidency because it was called off Covid. On the other hand, Covid help caused the great inflation, not the great inflation, but the substantial inflation that I

believe allowed Trump to win. The most revealing data on this election, one came from a slide a friend of many of ours, the Republican pollster Whit Ayres, included, as part of his presentation, Average inflation under Trump, 1%. Under Biden, 5%. Interest rates under Trump, 3% under Biden. 6%. Cost of a market basket of food 100 bucks under Trump, 125 bucks under Biden. But that relates to the fact that the electorate that went to the polls, according to his polls and I agree with everyone. Exit polls are imperfect. Biden had a 40% approval rating. It is extremely difficult to win for an incumbent party to win an election when the president has a 40% approval rating. These are the numbers Bill kept sending us over the last several months. And lastly, the right track wrong track number is the country moving in the right direction or on the wrong track was overwhelmingly negative. When you look at all those numbers and abstain and forget about who Donald Trump is, you might say the miracle is that Harris didn't lose by more. We are making the fact is this is a much Trump did not win a landslide by any means. And I think it's very important to underscore that that when all the votes are counted, it could be a point or point and a half victory in the popular vote. The swing states, particularly the three northern tier states, the margins were not large in any of those states. They were quite close to Michigan and Wisconsin in particular. And that Democrats surprisingly held on quite well below the top of the ticket at the moment. He thinks he might still get the votes. But at the moment in the swing states, the only Democratic Senate candidate who appears to have lost is Bob Casey in Pennsylvania. What, however, the House turns out, victorious presidential candidates often bring in a substantial House majority. If this is a Republican majority and it seems to lean that way at the moment, it's going to be a very narrow majority. So we shouldn't exaggerate the size of this. But nonetheless, it is a deeply important election because of what could happen. I think that Bill is right that this election will I suppose you could say that after this election, this nation has a rendezvous with class. Again, one of the striking things, one of the things that hit me personally was. What happened in my hometown of Fall River, Massachusetts. Now, you may ask, why should anyone care about my dear hometown of Fall River, Massachusetts? Other than the fact that I love in Fall River, Massachusetts, has voted Democratic in every election since 1928. For the first time in 100 years, this Labor, a largely Catholic, loyally Democratic town, voted for Donald Trump. Narrow margin. But consider that in the late for 96 through the last Obama election, Democrats got 70 to 75% of the vote in Fall River. That's an enormous swing. Over a period of time. And that does speak to the decline of the Democratic vote among non-college whites and others without a college degree. And this is something Democrats are going to have to think about. The last point I want to make is that the educational divide, if you believe, again, the exit polls, the education divide did not grow enormously among white voters. And to the extent that it did it among white voters. It came because there was a continued shift of college educated voters toward the Democrats. CNN put up a very helpful summary

of the exit polls. If you look at white voters with a college degree, Trump carried them by three points in 2016. They flipped two plus three Biden in 2020. They flipped two plus seven. Harris In this election. So it was one group in which Harris appears to have gained ground. White voters without a college degree did not shift enormously from where Trump had moved them by 2016. And by the way, this movement goes back way before Trump. And one of the things we need to be careful about with white voters without college degrees is to look at the fact that in the Deep South, voting is racialized rather than class oriented. So there are a whole lot of working class whites in the South who have been loyal Republicans for a very long time. But according to these exit poll numbers, Trump was plus 37. In 2016 among white voters with no degree, plus 35 in 2020, plus 34. This time where you saw enormous movement on both sides of the college divide. And this goes back to where you began. Elaine is among Latinos and to some degree, black voters. Now, unfortunately, the exit poll numbers combined voters of color. And that's complicated because black voters are quite distinct from Latino voters who are in turn distinct among themselves. There are a lot of different kinds of Latinos. Nonetheless, the numbers are striking. Voters of color with a college degree plus 50, Clinton plus 43, Biden plus 33 Harris. That's a real decline. White voters of color with no degree. Clinton plus 56, Biden plus 46. Harris plus 30. We're going to make a lot that's that's something that really will and Gabe will have a lot of useful work to do in the coming months to sort this out. Now, again, I believe a lot of this is just a backlash on prices and frustration with the economy and some of that Covid backlash. The most one of the most useful numbers I saw I just saw this morning in a column by my colleague at The Washington Post, Heather Long, In the last four years, inflation was up 20%. Wages for rank and file workers she showed were up 20.5%. So no real gain. Why do voters feel squeezed? Because average voters felt no gain under Trump. Look. Percent inflation, 15 4.4% average wage growth. Now, Democrats argued that was a continuation of the Obama economy in many ways. That's right. But politically, it didn't matter to a lot of voters. That gap, that impressive gap happened under Trump. And so I think it's very important that we be realistic about how much this election hung on the economy. I think immigration mattered. We're going to talk a lot about cultural issues. And, you know, the famous ad that Trump ran about, you know, trans folks and what Kamala Harris said. I happened to be in Massachusetts yesterday and I could not resist stopping by in my hometown and meeting with some folks who couple of really good local journalists at Al Mack's Diner, which has been around for us since 1910. It seemed like good good to meet at a classic diner in my hometown. And one of the points one of my interlocutors made is that the problem with the cultural issues is not simply that some people may have different views on trans issues and all of that. It's that it's about the priorities shown. And that the tagline in that ad that Trump ran is she's for that and he's for you. Now, if you support trans rights and thinks trans people should be defended, which I do, you can look at that ad and say,

this is a nasty little ad that Trump ran. But I think what's important to think about is how most voters in the exit polls did say that Harris cared more about people like them, which is important, but it mattered less than the economy. And I think the issue and I'll just end with this the issue is how can Democrats support equal rights for everyone and at the same time make clear that their priorities on economic issues, as the Biden record shows erotically, is on the side of working people. And I think that's the work they.

KAMARCK: Perfect place to end. Good. We are really very short on time because we're doing only 45 minutes. We have to move to a congressional panel. I'm going to ask there's three questions that have come up and each of you can take only one of them and answer very quickly. Okay. First question comes from the audience. What guardrails exist to control or change or stop what Trump might want to do and the his Republican Congress guardrails. The second one is, is a question could Harris have some done something different or was she doomed from the beginning by the hand she'd been dealt? Mostly inflation and the Biden administration's reluctance to do something about immigration quickly. And third, how and this is a big one. So you could talk for hours on it, but we don't have ours. How big an election was this? Was it a real realignment? Democrats down ballot often did better than Harris. And at the state level, frankly, there were very few changes in composition of state legislatures, etc.. So is this a realigning election or was it just another normal election? So why don't we start with Mona, just pick one, okay. And then I'll go around. Go ahead. But you're.

CHAREN: Sorry. So I do think this election was a trend election. Things that we have been seeing before we saw more of. But not an earthquake. The country remains pretty evenly divided. We still have 23 Democratic governors controlling in 23 states. We still have the Congress is roughly evenly divided. The House looks to be as all as narrowly divided or slightly more narrowly divided than it was before this election, etc.. The Senate picked up three seats. That's not an earthquake. It's not a realignment. However, just a suggestion going forward will be for Democrats who recognize the new class element of of the Trump appeal. And the Republicans appeal in general would be to to to make the administration accountable and not to constantly harp on the effects of Trump's policies on women, minorities, trans people, etc., which is the sort of default thing that Democrats do, but instead to be focused on the ways in which Trump's policies may betray his own voters. The working class.

KAMARCK: Bill quickly. They're going to throw us off here.

GALSTON: There are fewer guard rails left than one might wish. You know, Trump will enjoy unified government, and he has clearly both the inclination and the opportunity to press executive power to the hilt. And finally, he will use the power of government to put other institutions, such as the press, on the defensive. And it is going to be a struggle to preserve. Seems to me the basic building blocks of a liberal, democratic constitutional order in these circumstances. And it is, I'd say, the single most important question to focus on over the next month.

KAMARCK: Perfect. E.J., quickly.

GALSTON: I agree with what my colleagues have said, and so I'm going to agree with them that the guardrails are limited. But I think the courts I don't trust anymore. The Congress? Probably not, although there is some noise you can make blue state governors and I think could be a very important guardrail. And I think using this to organize all the way down that the Trump first Trump victory led to a lot of useful organization. A lot of that just stopped happening. And I think people should organize all the way down. And by the way, I agree with Mona. I think it's very important to call Trump's bluff on his phony populism. He's surrounded by billionaires.

KAMARCK: Gabe. Last words.

GALSTON: Yeah. Well, quickly, I'll take the last question. I agree with everybody who's noted. I don't think it was an earthquake election, but I think Republicans have a real golden opportunity to cement some of the gains that they've made. And the number one question will be, can Trump and Republicans deliver on bringing down the cost of goods? I perceive, at least among Latinos, that was the mandate. If they're successful, as well as not only making that happen, but communicating things, we might see a longer term relationship movement towards Republicans.

KAMARCK: Okay. Thank you very much, Mona, Bill. E.J. and Gabe. And I'm going to now turn this over to my colleague, Molly Reynolds and her panel to discuss the other races that happened last Tuesday. Thank you very much.

REYNOLDS: Great. Thank you, Elaine. And thanks to everyone for a great first panel. All my fellow panelists make their way onto the screen. I will do a quick round of introductions and then we will get started. My

name is Molly Reynolds. I'm a senior fellow in the governance studies program here at Brookings. I'm joined by my colleague Sarah Binder, as well as by Erin Covey, who is the editor for the House of Representatives at the Cook Political Report with Amy Walter and Emily Ekins, the vice president and director of polling at the Cato Institute. So it's great to have the three of you with us. Erin, I'm going to start with you and I'm going to ask you to talk a little bit about the how things played out in House races. As of right now, we have not called all of the races in the House. But what does the state of play look like? How did the two parties fare in the most closely contested races? So a little bit of an overview of where we are with that.

COVEY: Yeah. Thank you all for inviting me, and thanks, Molly, for the introduction there. So with the house, it still remains uncalled. The AP has yet to call 16 races that are still too close to call. But in most of those races, we can tell which party has a lead. So at this point, what I'm estimating is that Republicans will have a 220 to 222 seat majority, which is basically identical to their current majority of 221 seats. And as we've seen in the past 24 hours, Trump has already picked two Republican members of Congress to serve in his administration. That's Elise Stefanik in New York and Mike Waltz in Florida, which could effectively give Republicans an even more narrow majority initially while those seats are vacant, because it'll take a little bit for those special elections to be set to replace those two outgoing Republican members. Now, they're very likely to be replaced by two more Republicans. But in the meantime, it's going to make governing very difficult. Mike Johnson, the speaker, is running for speakership again and should win that role. But it's going to be another really difficult position for him corralling this incredibly narrow majority. We saw what that looked like over the past two years. And I don't expect much to change with that. Most of the outstanding races are out west in California, Arizona, Alaska, Colorado. And that's because these are places that mostly cast their ballots by mail, and those just take longer to count and process, depending on the state's laws. So it's probably going to be a couple more days, at least, until we actually get a final call on the House majority. But what I've been telling folks is that Republicans are very likely to have a majority. There is still technically a path for Democrats, but that would involve them turning around their leads that Republicans currently have in several House races that remain uncalled. But where I think we can say that Republicans are strongly favored. And so that's what we're looking at. The Senate was also actually I'll say a little bit more on the House. So remarkably, despite the fact that Trump overperformed in a lot of parts of the country, particularly in blue states and red states, in places we weren't expecting, the House results were not and were perfectly in line with what we were expecting. We were expecting it to be a really similar outcome to what we currently have. Democrats had a really good opportunity to take the House, but Republicans had just as good of an opportunity to retain their narrow hold. And that's because the battleground itself, the number of competitive

House seats, is so small, and many of these were so close that it was unclear which party had a clear advantage in holding a majority at the end of the day. But the reason that this majority of Republicans is not bigger in the House and this is also true in the Senate, is that Democrats were able to overperform Harris in a lot of these key places, particularly where it mattered and in some of these swing districts. So, for example, you have seats in New York. Democrats were able to pick up three seats in the Empire State after losing them to Republicans in 2022. And I believe in all three of those districts. It's hard to tell at this point because we don't have all the county level data, but it looks like all these Democrats are on track to outperform Harris. And so I think that was a crucial part of Democrats ability to blunt their losses in the House. And we saw this in safe seats, too. One really striking example is Grace Meng's district in Queens in New York. This is a district that Harris looks like she's winning by only five points, which is a huge swing compared to Biden's margin in this district in 2020. But the congresswoman won reelection by 22 points. And so we've seen, you know, that a lot of this seemed to have been specific specific reaction to the Biden Harris administration. That did not necessarily trickle down to these Democratic members of Congress and in the Senate in particular. What we've seen is that the Republican nominees were not able to reach Trump's number. So it was maybe even less about Democrats overperforming Harris in the Senate and more about Republicans underperforming Trump. Then we can see that when we're looking at the specific vote shares in these states. So what the Senate Democrats are on track to have four seats, hold four seats that in states that Trump carried, and that is Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona and Nevada. I believe all those Senate races have been called. I've been deep in the House races. But those should all be safe for Democrats. The Pennsylvania Senate race, Bob Casey hasn't conceded yet, but the AP has called that race for David McCormick. And so that is going to give Republicans a 53 seat majority in the Senate, most likely, which again, is not a huge surprise. These were all races that we had expected to be close. And polls showed that these Democratic senators in purple states were running ahead of Harris. But the closer we got to Election Day, this. Mohler Their leads became because the number of split ticket voters is just that much smaller at this point in the country. So that's what we're looking at right now. Republicans effectively have a pretty narrow majority in both chambers of Congress.

REYNOLDS: Great, thanks, Erin. Sarah, I'm going to turn to you next to talk a little bit more about the Senate. Erin mentioned a number of states where we saw split results there, where President Trump won the state's Electoral College votes, but we had victories by Democratic senators. We also saw a couple of Democratic senators I'm thinking here about Jon Tester in Montana, Sherrod Brown in Ohio. And as Erin said, Bob Casey has not conceded the Pennsylvania race yet. Also, Bob Casey, who had previously been

able to sort of withstand some partizan headwinds, this be kind of the the elections that ultimately led to their defeat. So I'd love to hear you sort of give your take on the on the Senate results, particularly in the context of these these.

BINDER: States where we did see split results. Sure. So first, thanks very much for including me, all for some sort of broad observations taking starting where you left off about the Senate outcomes. So first, this is very much a, I think, a split screen election season for the Senate, right? On the right, we have a very red screen. Plus, Casey, who's going to be the outlier throughout this discussion today. These elections look like the dominant pattern in contemporary elections rising, if not peak partizanship in the voting booth. Senate elections increasingly correlated with the presidential vote in the state. So Susan Collins, our example from 2020. Right. The anomaly, the only state where Biden wins and a Republican senator. So again, with the exception of Bob Casey, it's not really surprising that where Democrats lost their Senate races, they lost in three deep red or pretty red states West Virginia, Montana, Ohio and Casey, purple state Tester, Brown. Manchin, Right. They just could not withstand that broad sweep to the right if, in fact, the election was a referendum on the party in power. They could well have lost even if Trump wasn't the nominee. I take that as a in part a testament to how long hard their core work as incumbents for the trust of voters. How long that insulated these incumbents from partizan headwinds. Now, having said that, those three plus Casey had never been on the ballot with Trump before. They were lucky they only ever faced voters in good years. For Democrats, especially like Tester, Brown, 2006, 2012, 2018, and in Manchin and of course, joins in after his first election, 2012. So on the red screen here, like the writing was on the wall. For those for those Democrats, I might have just mixed my metaphors between screens and walls, but that's okay. On the left hand, that sure, then the Democrats and blue states won, just as we'd expect in this very strong partizan nation. So to get to your point, Molly, your questions. Not surprising. The action is in the middle in those purple states, as we've said, like 4 to 5 Democratic senators in the battleground states that had elections, said elections, withstood the Republican push. Arizona, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada. So how did they pull it off? How the Democrats pulled it off, as you just said. Right. First, they were clearly more popular on average than Harris on average. What you include, Casey, about by about a point. Senate Democrats just below 49%. Harris In those states, just below 48%, largely running, largely running against amateur challengers here. Mike Rogers, Michigan, the only one, I think, who would have had elective office before. And then, as we've just mentioned, like some pinch of incumbency advantage. Right. Able to campaign on bipartisan records. Impact we know of incumbency these days on outcomes is really small. Maybe 1 or 2 points at best, but that can be enough. So first brought observation, split screen, different experiences and takeaways from

red and purple states, begging the question how is that possible in such a partizan nation that we get split results? And to your question, Molly, it's tempting to surmise there must have been a lot of split ticket voting, but it's not clear that's the case. Of course it's possible you're going to vote for Trump in Nevada and then you vote for Jacky Rosen, and maybe you'll put scientists we call this anticipatory balancing Some prospective effort to keep Trump in check. Sounds a little sophisticated for voters, but we know there's in past elections, we've we've have evidence of it. The other possibility is just roll off. I think the day the term these days we call it under voting. Right. Like me at the end of the ballot, we get the Board of Education races without a partizan. Q And I forget to pick up the apple outside the voting center and so forth. So in this case, it's you vote for Trump, but then you don't cast a vote in the Senate race or in Nevada. You can actually vote for something close to quote, None of these guys none of these guys got 41,000 votes. Rosen won by 20,000. So just two examples. Michigan here, Slotkin was about looked like about 96,000 votes behind Trump, but the Republican was 116,000. Wisconsin. Tammy Baldwin, about 25,000 votes behind Trump, the Republican, 54,000 votes behind Trump. And so it's a possibility here. It's not it may not be really take a split the voting to get voting, but does suggest that Democrats benefited from being better known and reasonably well liked incumbents. Good bets for four purple states and luckily for them, immature Republican candidate. Just finally, very quickly, impeccable state party delegations. We thought we were at a record low. The last current Congress of five or so delegations, Republican and Democratic caucus. Indication in the Senate post-election will be at three. Wisconsin. Maine. Pennsylvania. The lowest in history because history started in 1913 with direct election. So I think that is something just a reminder like how strong and argues partizan winds blow, how different senators are right in red and blue states. And that's how hard it is going to be yet again to get to 60, the magic number in the Senate with these Republican Democratic coalitions quite, quite apart from what I think.

REYNOLDS: Thanks Sarah. Emily, I'm going to come to you now. And so acknowledging that exit polls are imperfect, that we're still getting better data. You know, you, me, Sarah, we're all quantitative social scientists, so we're going to start with that. But to the extent that we have an emerging sense of what was driving voters, how does that seem to have played out in the congressional races? I'm also interested to hear. So thinking about the comparison between 2022 and 2024, you know, there is or was that conventional wisdom that Democrats perhaps overperformed a little bit in the 2022 midterms? Do we do that? Anything that happened last week cause us to revisit that conventional wisdom? Just sort of your thoughts on those questions.

EKINS: Yes. Thank you so much. It's great to be with you this morning. A lot of really good questions there. I think one thing where I'd like to start with something that really stood out to me was although a lot of us were surprised by the systemic error in polling. And so kind of the focus is on Trump. There is another to me is surprising finding was how much Trump ran ahead a lot of of the Republican Senate and House candidates. So we're getting to that in this panel. But I think that really is kind of an underappreciated story. People are so focused on Trump, they're not thinking enough about why did Republicans underperform. And, you know, we've we've seen in some states like Nevada, there were 60,000 ballots that were cast only for Trump and none of the other candidates people voted for. So there were there was a certain type of voter that just came out to vote for Trump and they just didn't care about the rest. They don't care about the Senate. They don't care about the House. So there's there's a lot of other moving pieces going on here. And I think that another underappreciated, other underappreciated aspect is abortion and the role in which I think that Trump was able to distance himself from this issue in a way that was kind of surprising, but more so than how House and Senate Republicans could distance themselves from this issue. So if we look at what happened in this election, we had ten states that voted on the issue of abortion. Seven voted in favor of expanding or preserving access. One voted to expand it, but they didn't reach that 60% threshold that the state of Florida needs to enshrine in the Constitution. And then two voted against it. So in general, voters were voting in favor of preserving or expanding access to abortion. So what happened? You know, how how did you know the Republicans have a good night? But then we see this trend. And I think part of it is that we had a lot of crossover voting. So about a third, a quarter depending on the state, a quarter to a third of Trump voters also voted in favor of expanding abortion access. Whereas Harris voters, we didn't see that same crossover. So for people who voted for Harris, like less than 1 in 10 or voting in the anti-abortion direction. So we just saw more crossover. People could vote for Trump and vote in favor of abortion. Now, some people might find that surprising because Trump is the reason why, because of how he was able to appoint justices to the Supreme Court. That is how Ravi Wade was overturned. So people would have thought perhaps that he would be viewed as responsible for the overturning of Roe v Wade. What we're seeing is that voters just don't necessarily respond the way analysts and political pundits expect that they might. He was able to distance himself. He said that he did not favor a federal ban or a national ban on abortion and that the states should decide. And I think by doing that, he was able to distance himself and put it on the House and Senate Republican candidates to defend. They either are for or against their states ballot initiatives. So in places like Nevada and Arizona, where this is on the ballot and the Republican candidates underperformed Trump this may have been part of the reason why is that they had to defend something that Trump didn't have to defend. I think a lot of voters just believed it when he said, look, I'm going to let the states decide. He was

able to just people weren't voting for him with abortion on their mind. Also, J.D. Vance, you know, when he was in the debate, he talked about how Republicans had failed women or voters on the issue of abortion. He didn't tell you how Republicans had failed, but he said that there had been a failing and that seemed to land well. And so I think overall, what we can take from the. This selection is that there was a separation in how people thought about Trump and abortion and that that connection wasn't there. But it does seem to be affecting Republicans. And so what I'm curious to see is in the midterms. So our next election cycle, perhaps Republicans are going to continue to struggle with this until these issues get sorted out and it's not top of mind for voters. So one other thing I wanted to point out. In 2022, exit polls found that voters who believed abortion should be legal in most cases, so lean in favor of abortion favored Democrats by 22 points. But in this election, the margin was it was basically 5050. So zero margin, really. So there wasn't that same benefit for Democrats. So what I can't tell, is this a Trump effect or are voters, as they feel like their states are protecting abortion rights, those who would turn out to vote for it are less motivated to do so because they feel like even if it may not be legal in another state, it's legal in theirs, and that's what they care about. I'd also like to expand just a little bit beyond. We've talked a lot about the presidential election as well as Senate and House, and we've talked about exit polls. We've talked about issues. And one thing I would just like to add is I do think that there are some more system, there are more things going on that I think are really important to talk about when it comes to why voters make the decisions that they do. So obviously, voters care about the economy, inflation, immigration. But there are also these non tangible issues that matter to voters. And I think that that is important. In explaining how Trump could have run ahead of Senate, Republican and Senate House excuse me, and House Republican candidates. So, in particular, I think one thing we haven't talked about today, but I think it's worth saying, is that Trump survived an assassination attempt and while bleeding from the ear instead of running away, he shouts, fight. Now, I think some people that just, you know, they're glad that he's okay. They didn't want him to be killed, but that didn't necessarily resonate with them. But for some voters, that really resonated. And there was definitely a disparate effect, a disparate gender effect in how people responded to that. There were like half a dozen legal cases going on with Trump. And for voters that aren't paying a lot of attention, it may have come across, as, you know, turning Trump into the victim rather than him being the person held accountable for misdeeds. So when he made claims about the system being unjust, anyone who themselves have felt like the system is unjust may have resonated. So again, those are things that make Trump different than the Republicans running in Senate and House races. And so that's why I'm not sure if Trump's not on the ballot. Things could be very different for Republicans in these next few election cycles. And then the other thing I'll add is just there's something strange about the way voters vote. We think in DC that it's all about policy, but sometimes it's just

who voters like. Sometimes there are candidates that are stronger than others. And so whether it's at the Senate, House or presidential level, if you have a strong candidate, they're more they're going to win. They're more likely to win even with various structural factors. And I think that's something kind of unique to Trump. He would go out there and do these rallies for an hour, hour and a half. He did have some prepared notes, but you could tell that he wasn't really reading from them the whole time. He went on these unscripted podcasts like Joe Rogan for three hours. It was very hard for people to feel like he was giving them a canned response. I think most people felt like he would just say things that he thought and that that was very unusual. We're very used to politics being very scripted for each candidate, telling you exactly what you need to hear. And he certainly does not do that. And which is why he's offended many, many people throughout his multiple elections. But that may also be why at the end of the day, some voters, no matter what he says, are going to vote for him and no one else because they feel like he's one of the few authentic people that will stand up for people like them. And that is something that we did see in the exit polls. And we also saw in some post more post-election analysis like this analysis from Blueprint found that on the late deciders, the late deciders felt that they were more concerned actually about some cultural issues, and they felt like Democrats prioritized cultural issues ahead of economic issues of things that mattered for people like that. So there's a lot of different factors, a lot of different things going on all at the same time. But at the end of the day, what I'm not sure about is how much of this is a lasting change and how much of this are kind of unique, idiosyncratic factors associated with the unique candidates, particularly Donald Trump, on the ballot this year?

REYNOLDS: Thanks Emily. Before we turn to questions from the audience, I want to. One follow up to all three of the panels. So you know all three of you in some way. I have mentioned the fact that Trump is a sort of particular phenomenon and that what people's choice is to vote for Trump may not have carried over to their choices to vote for congressional candidates. But as of January 20th, he will be in the White House and he will have to work with Republicans in Congress to try and get things done. So what, if any, takeaways do you have from the outcome of the election and sort of how it's played out? For what we could speculate on the legislative year ahead? Erin, maybe I'll come back to you first.

COVEY: Yeah, I think it's it's a good question. One thing that is not obvious and the results for the House but that I've been paying attention to is what the Republican majority in the House looks like and what kind of members have been elected to the House. The attrition rate in Congress between in Trump's first term was higher than any other president. And so I'll be curious if there is that similar kind of brain drain and

Republicans who are more in the old guard wing of the party in the House retiring ahead of 2026, rather than dealing with the drama of another of another Trump administration And what we've seen in the latest and one in the past few election cycles is that the Republicans who have been elected to Congress since 2016 have looked a lot more like him and have supported his agenda much more than the old guard. And so this new Congress that he's dealing with will be, in some ways a lot more in line with him ideologically in a way that he didn't have in 2016, so that that could give him more power. So, you know, I think that still there are still kind of a institutionalist who exists in Congress and there are still some within that wing who have managed to get elected to safe open seats over the past couple of years. But it's become increasingly difficult for those types of Republicans to win primary elections and then when general elections and these seats as well. .

REYNOLDS: Sarah, what are your thoughts on what the results, the election tell us for the legislative year ahead.

BINDER: Sure. So it's just the House and the Senate. Secondly, and and outside the number that's in my head from 2017, right up there in Trump election was that about 90% of House Republicans ran ahead of ran ahead of Trump. Right. And so we're in a much different, as we've been saying, much different scenario than we were in the Trump first first term. So and I'll be curious what the exact numbers flip out for for these races. We do know that the House will be very, very slim majority, and that's going to be complicated for the leadership. And it will be complicated because we know it's a pretty factionalized conference. And the question is like, what happens to those factions after What will be interpreted by Republicans as a red red realignment, not just a not just a 300 electoral vote, but a red realignment. I suspect the cross pressured members, the ones who are left will be a little less cross pressured. I mean, granted, they have to face voters in 26, but we know like New Jersey and another blue states where the Trump vote, Republican vote was was higher. And so it may be that they're a little more willing to go along for leadership. And we know they're they're asking for the party rules to to sanction members who vote against the party on on procedure votes. The question on the far right, do they do they pulled into the leadership in some ways and become loyal footsoldiers? I'm not so sure that's not the role they played in 2017 when they're trying to repeal Obamacare and they really pulled the house to the right. So was I guess we want to see do they soften their edges of those factions? But I think the factions are still there. And, you know, with Trump, the White House, it's more it may be more of a demand to say, look, now we can sign into law. So I think remains to be seen. On the Senate, we're really sort of back where we were in recent Congresses, which is 60, is really, really far away.

And as you know better than all of us, right, the power reconciliation and on nominations can be quite, quite important. So I I'm still think we live in a very partizan world. Unified party control is important, but it's never a silver bullet.

REYNOLDS: Thanks Sarah. Emily, your thoughts?

EKINS: Yeah, I'd like to zoom out a little bit and just talk about two somewhat conflicting threads that I'm observing with the current administration and what I expect to see with this upcoming Congress. So one one thread is a more populist thread that favors more government intervention in the economy. In particular, what we've been hearing from this, from these candidates and from Donald Trump is to protect American businesses from foreign competition and protect businesses and workers from foreign competition. So this takes the form of high tariffs, more industrial policy. And so you kind of have that populist thread, which we've heard very clearly from Trump. We don't know how much actually comes into effect, but there's that. And then there's this kind of libertarian leaning thread that, you know, I associate that I think we all associate with more that Elon Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy that are just very, very, very different in which which these people who have the ear of the president are talking about reducing government intervention in the economy in efforts to reduce impediments to innovation and technological progress. So for instance, for Elon Musk, for those of us who have read the Walter Isaacson biography on Musk, it's very clear he wants to go to Mars. He wants to go to Mars. And he feels that excessive risk aversion through government regulation is going to prevent this kind of technological progress from happening. And so you've got these very I mean, they're not necessarily going to contradict each other. But when you think about it, who has the ear of decision makers? You've got one side that's very much in favor of kind of more a more active government to address the concerns that they see and others that want to dramatically reduce the role for various executive agencies in the role of the federal government. We have Trump talking about abolishing the Department of Education at the federal level and sending it to the States. I mean, this is something that just Republicans at this level haven't talked about in a long time. And so I think that there are just these two threads to kind of competing coalitions within the on the Republican side that they don't necessarily contradict when it comes to specific policies that they're seeking. But their outlook and their view about how government works and how the economy works are very different. And so I'm curious to know how when they come into conflict with one with one another, how that shakes out.

REYNOLDS: Okay. I'm going to turn to some audience questions and I'll just say to the audience that feel free to submit additional questions if you have them. It feels a little cruel to ask us to start talking about the 2026 cycle when the 2024 cycle is actually not yet finished. Erin told us that we still have lots of outstanding House races. But I would add, we did we did get an audience question on that. So to the extent that we can start looking towards 2026, what do we what do we think we can or sort of where should we start in terms of our thinking about what might happen in a midterm election? Erin maybe I'll start with you.

COVEY: Yeah, I think Democrats will be in a pretty strong offensive position in 2026. And I think that may be in part because the electorate in a midterm cycle has still favored started to favor Democrats a bit more. And, you know, even as Trump did make some gains in the suburbs that we weren't expecting and Harris did not make the gains with white college educated voters that some polling data had indicated she she might. Previously, I think it's still an electorate that the highly engaged, really civic minded electorate is tending to skew a little bit more in Democrat's favor. So I think the environment there benefits them a bit. But it's also just the math, right? I mean, Republicans are probably going to have a 3 to 5 seat majority, and that would mean that Democrats would basically need to net probably 3 to 5 seats to take back the House, which, you know, is a very. Reasonable task. But, you know, I think the battleground is continues to shrink the number of competitive House races that we're fighting over. And so I'll be really curious how many of these seats the party is contesting, especially because we saw some unexpected outcomes, particularly in some of the more urban areas, like there's races that we weren't expecting to be competitive at all that were surprisingly close. Now, I don't know if these are races that Republicans are seriously going to contests in 2026, because if it's if the reason they were close is unique to Trump, then it might not be worth investing in those races. So I'll be really curious to see kind of what the party's mindsets are going into 2026. I do think so. So this for the past two years, there have been 16 Republicans who held seats that Biden won in 2020 and five Democrats who held seats that Trump won in 2020. And those, along with several other members of Congress, kind of made up the battleground in terms of the most vulnerable members there. I'll be curious to see how many members are in split districts again once the results are all in and tabulated. And I might guess, based on preliminary results, is that we're going to actually see a lot more Democrats in Trump seats than Republicans in Harris seats. And that's because a lot of these seats that Republicans held that voted for Biden in 2020 looks like they may have voted for Trump or voted for Harris by a much more narrow margin. So in some ways, you might look at that and think, okay, Democrats have a little bit more defense to play because they're on more difficult terrain. But again, it's hard to tell how much of this is going to be specific to Trump and how much of Trump's gains in some of these parts of the country Republicans will be will be able to

translate into victories. One example that I think about is in South Texas, which has obviously moved towards Republicans quite aggressively over the past couple of election cycles. Republicans still weren't able to flip one seat Texas 34th District held by Vincent de Gonzalez, which is a seat that now Trump is likely to carry after Biden carried it by double digits in 2020. And Republicans had a strong candidate there who was well-funded. So it's not even a it's not a race that they weren't contesting. It was a race that they invested in. Gonzalez is not the strongest fund raiser. So theoretically, that should have been a good opportunity for Republicans to flip that seat, especially now that Trump won it. But they still weren't able to. And so I I'm just not sure how much of Trump's appeal in some of these parts of the country that are moving most quickly is going to translate to Republicans down ballot. So I think Democrats are in a pretty good position in the House. The Senate, although over really quickly, is a little more difficult just because they're fewer competitive states. Democrats at best, opportunities are going to be Senate seats in North Carolina and Maine flipping those two. But even then, they would have to probably flip a third seat in a more Republican leaning in a more Republican leaning state in order to take the majority in the Senate. So that looks a lot less likely, I would say. But the House is a pretty good opportunity for them. So any thoughts on looking ahead to 2026?

BINDER: I just observe that over the long postwar period and in longer, unified party control didn't last very long, on average two, three years in. So typically majorities, certainly in the eyes of the opposition, sometimes their own coalition members majorities tend to overreach and doesn't always play well with midterm electorates. As you said, a different set of voters turnout. And granted, we don't know how exactly or what element of the Trump Republican agenda might provoke that type of reaction. But I'm sure we could all come up with quite a few, certainly on the immigration end, if not health care and as well.

REYNOLDS: I also have an audience question about how well the polls predicted the outcome, both of the presidential race, but also of congressional races. And Emily and Erin, you've both talked about this a little bit. So maybe I'll I'll turn this first to Emily and then come back to you, Erin. So to the extent that we know at this point, how well did the polls do at both levels and what should we take away from that?

EKINS: Well. So polls were within the margin of error. But like in 2016 and 2020, the error was in the same direction. And so pollsters will say, look, we're not going to get the result within a half a percentage point of the actual outcome. And so even before the election, pollsters were saying, you know, with the data that we have, it actually could be, you know, given the margin of error, it could be a sweep for either Harris or Trump

of all of the swing states. Based on the data that we have. I think that if we're going to be truly honest, though, we have to acknowledge that the error is always in the same direction when Trump is on the ballot 2016, 2020, 2024. And so what's going on there? Pollsters have tried to correct for it for this. The early theory, right, was the idea of a shy Trump voter, meaning people would lie to the pollster when they answered the survey. And so some pollsters tried to come up with clever ways to convince you to to true to reveal your true preference. But I think a lot of pollsters now, myself included, Nate Silver, Nate Cohn, they they don't really view it as a shy Trump voter phenomenon, but really more about non-response bias. And that is extremely difficult to overcome in polls. What non-response bias is, is that if the people who take your poll differ systematically from the people who don't in terms of who's actually going to vote on Election Day, you've got a big problem. Now, in our midterms, 2020 to 2018, the polls actually performed reasonably well. We didn't see that same systemic error that we've seen in the presidential elections. But there is something unique about these presidential elections that involve Trump. And so I think there's a couple of sources for that. One is we see there's a certain type of voter who only votes for Trump. And I think we've seen this in these swing states, like I mentioned, 60,000 ballots in Nevada just just vote for Trump and nobody else. Do you think that kind of person also takes a survey? I don't think so. I don't think they do. And so there's a certain type of voter who is not going to talk to pollsters that vote for Trump. And then I think there's another source of that non-response bias, which is people who might otherwise talk to pollsters. But when they know they're going to vote for Trump, they're just not going to talk to a pollster. And there is data that would explain why that we would do that. We found a lot We found a high percentage, especially of college educated Republicans, who feel like they could lose their jobs if it became known who they were going to vote for for president when Trump was on the ballot. And you'd say, well, these surveys are anonymous. Why would someone be afraid to tell a pollster who they're going to vote for if it's anonymous? Well, part of it is that people don't believe it. They don't believe it's anonymous. And we have seen, unfortunately, this cratering of public confidence in our institutions, particularly of Journal of Media and Journalism, as well as universities. So a lot of these surveys are conducted by universities. There's just been this cratering in confidence, particularly driven among Republicans, where they just don't trust these institutions to be fair. And so as a result, I think we've got a lot of people who, for some reason when Trump is on the ballot, I think probably because he's such a polarizing figure and has offended so many people that they are just not going to take a survey. And so I think that's what we saw again in this election. It's it's got better. There were some things that pollsters were able to do to try to solve to reduce this, but that that problem is still ongoing. But I expect by the time the midterms come around in 2026, I think that polls will be a lot more on target.

REYNOLDS: Erin, what do you have on on this question? You mentioned in one of your answers that you know that we are perhaps expecting more Democratic votes from college educated voters in the suburbs. And so that might be one example. But just curious to hear your thoughts on this question as well.

COVEY: Yeah, I'm still kind of parsing through the data on the House level. It's difficult because the number of public polls in House races this past cycle, I think was that at least a low compared to the past few cycles beforehand. And so I was when I was making my race ratings, I was relying on a lot of private data from both parties, which is not, you know, it has its pros and cons. The pros are that these campaigns and super PACs pay pollsters to get it right. And so I think that I was looking dealing with a lot of pretty high quality pollsters and I was looking at data from both sides over a period of time. And so it wasn't like it was one internal poll that was released to support in a specific narrative. I was looking at a lot of data that the parties never would have wanted to release. But I would say generally for the House races, it was pretty on target. The places where I was most surprised was districts like Nebraska's second, which was a pretty suburban, white, college educated district that we had expected. Harris to make gains and relative to where Biden was in, and that's what the public and private polling was showing. And so it kind of depends on where you're looking at. And with the Senate races, it seems like they were generally on track. You know, they showed Democrats having slight leads in a lot of the Senate races in battleground states. I think the Ohio race was they certainly showed it closer than it ended up being. Same with the Montana race as well. So maybe there was a little bit of a skew in favor of Democrats there. And then in the Nevada and Arizona race, they showed the Democrats with pretty large leads. They are going to have pretty decent sized leads at the end of the day, but they're going to be much smaller than what some of the polls were initially showing. So I think was generally on target. But it's hard to say, especially at the House level, considering most of it is not public.

REYNOLDS: Great. Thank you. We are just about out of time. Sarah, Erin Emily, anyone have any final thoughts that they want to share with the audience? Anything I haven't asked you about?

EKINS: I'll share one more thing. There was an interesting analysis that was conducted that that found that 2024 was the only year in which governing parties in developed Western democracies all lost vote share. And in other years, it's always been some gain, some lose. And this is the first year in which all governing parties lost vote share. So I think that there are some very interesting systemic global issues also at play that I think that we don't want to overlook. And I think we'll be playing a role going into 2026 and 2028, depending on how the the new administration and Congress handle the issues that matter most to voters.

REYNOLDS: Thank you, Emily.

BINDER: I'll just add one final. I think that the discussion, the debate going forward and has already started, was this realignment or was this referendum. And I just a reminder that realignment we don't know yet. And most of them are marked by durable policy change in their wake. And so one question is, can a split partizan, right? Can today's contemporary partizan, today's Congress actually deliver major policy change? And a related question do voters care about policy anymore or is Trump a phenomenon of his own and voting as one, he said, Like the personality, he's just quite, as we know, quite a bit different.

EKINS: Yeah. And I think I agree with all that, definitely. Sarah and I'll be curious how that translates to Republicans ability in Congress to hold seats in 2026 and going forward, just because it's not clear to me that a lot of the gains Trump was able to make in places will be able to be replicated by by Republicans. And, you know, I think that this was also, at least in the House races, this was an election that, again, proved that the financial advantage that Democrats have in terms of fundraising did matter. I think that did make the difference for them in some of these close races that they were able to hold. And so I'll be curious to see if that trend continues going forward as well.

REYNOLDS: Lots of great questions that are left for us to continue pondering over in the weeks, months and years ahead. So thank you, Erin, thank you, Sarah thank you, Emily, for being with us. And thanks to all of you for watching today.