Balance of Power

	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS	INDEPENDENTS
Senate	**50***	49	1
House	213	**222**	0
Governors	24	26	0

Majority Party in bold
*Angus King (I) and Bernie Sanders (I) caucus with Democrats.
Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema is not caucusing with either party.

2002 Results From the Most Competitive Open House Seats

DISTRICT	DEMOCRAT	DEM %	GOP	GOP %
AZ-06	*Kirsten Engel*	49.3	**Juan Ciscomani**	50.7
CA-13	*Adam Gray*	49.6	**John Duarte**	50.4
CO-08	**Yadira Caraveo**	48.4	Barbara Kirkmeyer	47.7
IL-13	**Nikki Budzinski**	55.9	*Regan Deering*	44.1
IL-17	**_Eric Sorensen_**	51.7	Esther Joy King	48.3
NC-13	**Wiley Nickel**	51.3	*Bo Hines*	48.7
NY-03	*Robert Zimmerman*	45.9	**George Santos**	54.1
NY-04	*Laura Gillen*	48.1	**Anthony D'Esposito**	51.9
NY-19	*Josh Riley*	48.9	**Marc Molinaro**	51.1
NY-22	Francis Conole	49.2	**_Brandon Williams_**	50.8
OH-13	**_Emilia Sykes_**	52.6	Madison Gesiotto Gilbert	47.4
OR-04	**_Val Hoyle_**	50.6	Alek Skarlatos	43.1
OR-05	Jamie McLeod-Skinner	49.	**Lori Chavez-DeRemer**	51.
OR-06	**Andrea Salinas**	50.1	Mike Erickson	47.7
PA-17	**_Chris Deluzio_**	53.2	Jeremy Shaffer	46.8
RI-02	**_Seth Magaziner_**	50.5	Allan Fung	46.8

Incumbent party italicized
Winners in bold

CALENDAR

Jan. 6	Kentucky Governor filing deadline
May 16	Kentucky Governor primary

New York 4: Recipe for a GOP Upset

By Jacob Rubashkin

Republicans entered the midterms with high hopes of taking back Congress. And while the GOP did win back the House of Representatives, they did so in underwhelming fashion, picking up just nine House seats after anticipating more significant gains.

But while the "Red Wave" fizzled out in most places, it crashed with full force on Long Island, New York. Republicans won all four competitive congressional districts in Nassau and Suffolk counties, holding two seats and flipping two more, and in 2023, the region will boast an all-GOP delegation for the first time since the 1950s.

One of the two districts Republicans flipped was the 4th District, where Democratic Rep. Kathleen Rice declined to run for re-election, and Republican Hempstead Town Councilman Anthony D'Esposito defeated former Hempstead Town Supervisor Laura Gillen, 51-49 percent.

D'Esposito's win was a minor upset, though not a total surprise. *Inside Elections* rated the race as Tilt Democratic heading into Election Day.

In the next Congress, D'Esposito will represent the most Democratic-leaning district of any Republican. In 2020, Joe Biden would have carried the 4th by 14.5 points, a wider margin than any other district won by a Republican this year.

Interviews with party strategists on both sides of the aisle involved with the race illustrate four main ingredients to D'Esposito's upset win: a surprise retirement and prolonged redistricting process, a strong GOP nominee, a lack of resources for the Democrat, and the best statewide political environment for New York Republicans in decades.

A Late Start and a Contentious Primary

In the aftermath of the election, many Democrats have turned their ire to New York's chaotic redistricting process. The months-long saga saw an independent commission stripped of its powers, a map drawn by the state legislature tossed by the courts as an illegal gerrymander, and multiple iterations of a map drawn by court-appointed special master.

But redistricting almost certainly did not doom Democrats in the 4th District. In fact, in the map passed by the legislature, the district would have actually been slightly less favorable to Democrats; Biden would have carried it by 11 points rather than 14.5 points in the special master's map.

The more pernicious effect of the redistricting for Democrats was the delay in the primary that it caused. Originally scheduled for June 28, the congressional primary was ultimately pushed back two months to Aug. 23.

That meant Democrats — already left scrambling by Rice's surprise

Colorado 8: Democrats Win an Uphill Race

By Erin Covey

The battle for control of Colorado's 8th District had ramifications far beyond 2022 — it established the political identity of a brand new congressional seat.

In a midterm cycle where Republicans should have had an edge, Democrats narrowly won this battleground district centered in the growing Denver suburbs. All signs pointed to a competitive race, though many operatives from both parties believed that Republicans had the edge in an open seat that Joe Biden would have won in 2020.

In the end, Democratic state Rep. Yadira Caraveo won by a mere 1,632 votes out of 236,402 cast, defeating Republican state Sen. Barbara Kirkmeyer 48.4-47.7 percent.

Colorado has become a blue harbor in the West, largely due to significant population growth over the past decade that necessitated the creation of a new congressional seat. And unlike in other western blue states such as Oregon and California, Democrats had a remarkably strong performance in the Centennial State in 2022.

The 8th District is divided between Adams County, in the Democratic-leaning Denver suburbs, and Weld County, a more rural region dominated by cattle farms and oil and gas wells. The district has been trending blue for the past several election cycles — though at a slower pace than other suburban Denver seats.

In 2012, President Barack Obama would have won the seat by 8 points. But Donald Trump would have won the seat by 2 points in 2016. The district swung 6 points back in Democrats' direction in 2020, when Biden would have won it by 4 points. In comparison, the neighboring 7th District (anchored in the western Denver suburbs) swung 11 points toward Democrats between 2016 and 2020. Comparing midterm election cycles, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis won the seat by 2 points in 2018 and 9 points this November.

Both Democratic and Republican strategists who spoke with *Inside Elections* were not particularly surprised by the result — Colorado's 8th District was on both parties' radars since its conception, and those on the ground expected it to be a coin flip. But placed in the larger context of this midterm cycle, when strategists expected the country's economic woes would favor the GOP, both parties expected Republicans to have the edge in this open seat. *Inside Elections*' final rating on election night was Tilt Republican.

The Top of the Ticket

Democratic nominees for Senate and governor in states such as New York and Oregon severely hampered the party's ability to win competitive U.S. House races, while the party's nominees in states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania bolstered Democratic candidates. The latter phenomenon also played out in Colorado, largely thanks to the state's popular governor, Polis, who easily won re-election by 19 points..

The governor's more moderate approach to statewide restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic earned him support from independent and conservative voters, and throughout his re-election campaign he focused on his work to lower costs through health care regulations and programs such as free kindergarten.

His decisive victory buoyed Democrats further down the ballot, including Caraveo and Adam Frisch, who came close to unseating Rep. Lauren Boebert in the Republican-leaning 3rd District. Democrats also flipped eight seats in the state Legislature, forcing the GOP into its smallest minority in the state's history. The other statewide Democrats on the ballot, including Sen. Michael Bennet, all won their races by double digits.

Throughout the cycle, polls from both parties showed Polis and Bennet winning this district even as Kirkmeyer was leading or tied with Caraveo. Over $38 million was spent on radio and broadcast TV ads in the Senate race between Bennet and Republican nominee Joe O'Dea, a construction company CEO who Republicans considered to be one of their strongest recruits. Bennet ended up defeating O'Dea by 15 points after outspending him about 2 to 1 on the air. That injection of Democratic spending into the state had a trickle down effect on competitive down ballot races.

Ultimately, both Polis and Bennet won this district by 9 and 4 points, respectively — evidence that the Democrats' coattails were an important, if not necessary, factor in Caraveo's victory.

The Fundraising Gap

While Caraveo outraised Kirkmeyer 2-to-1, outside Republican groups spent more than outside Democratic groups in the 8th.

Campaigns and outside groups spent close to $18 million on TV and radio ads, with the bulk of that spending coming from the NRCC,

the GOP-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund, and the Democratic-aligned House Majority PAC.

CLF alone spent $4.8 million on the air, while its Democratic counterpart, HMP, spent $3 million on the air, according to data from Kantar/CMAG. Republicans also outspent Democrats on the campaign committee side; the NRCC spent $3.6 million on TV and radio and the DCCC spent $2.2 million.

Adding to the deluge of outside spending, the political arm of Americans for Prosperity, a conservative advocacy group affiliated with Charles Koch, spent over $1 million supporting Kirkmeyer throughout both the Republican primary and the general election. Caraveo benefited from six-figure buys from Democratic outside groups including Fair Share Action, the League of Conservation Voters Victory Fund, and 314 Action Fund.

Courtesy Caraveo Campaign

Yadira Caraveo

Altogether, Republican outside groups outspent Democratic groups by more than $4.2 million, according to Open Secrets.

But Caraveo had a consistent fundraising advantage over Kirkmeyer — and those dollars stretched further than outside groups' spending, since candidates have access to a lower advertising rate on broadcast TV.

In total, Caraveo raised $3.5 million to Kirkmeyer's $1.6 million. Her campaign spent $2.3 million on TV and radio ads, while Kirkmeyer's campaign spent $1.7 million on coordinated ad buys with the NRCC.

Caraveo's fundraising advantage was helped by the fact that she didn't have a primary, unlike Kirkmeyer. Her one primary opponent, Chaz Tedesco, did not receive enough support from delegates in the Democratic Party's assembly to make the primary ballot and dropped out of the race in April, allowing Caraveo to shift to general election mode three months earlier than Kirkmeyer. But even after the primary, Caraveo consistently outraised Kirkmeyer — and Republican outside spending wasn't enough to carry her over the finish line.

The Latino Vote

Latino voters were crucial to Caraveo's victory. The district is nearly 40 percent Latino, making it the most Latino congressional district in the state, and it was intentionally created to increase Colorado Latinos' political power.

As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, Caraveo's own identity was a key part of persuading Latino voters to vote for her. Despite Latinos making up one-fifth of Colorado's total population, the state has been without Latino representation for the past 12 years, and Caraveo is the state's first Latina to be elected to Congress.

Throughout the cycle, the two parties' approaches to targeting Latino voters differed in size and scope.

Democrats invested significantly more in Spanish-language paid media. Caraveo's campaign and the DCCC ran Spanish-language and bilingual radio and digital ads. The League of Conservation Voters Victory Fund, an outside group focused on environmental issues, also spent $300,000 on Spanish-language TV, radio, and digital ads

contrasting Kirkmeyer and Caraveo's position on the oil and gas industry. BOLD PAC, the political arm of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, also sent English-language and Spanish-language mailers critical of Kirkmeyer's stance on energy issues.

Republicans did not invest in Spanish-language advertising to the extent that Democrats did in the district. But Libre Initiative Action, a conservative group affiliated with Americans for Prosperity focused on outreach to Latinos, knocked thousands of doors for Kirkmeyer, and the Republican National Committee opened a community outreach center in Thornton to target Latino voters.

In the final weeks of the race, America First Legal Foundation, a nonprofit group founded by former Trump adviser Stephen Miller, ran Spanish-language mailers and radio ads attacking Democrats over transgender issues. Local LGBTQ and Latino advocacy groups criticized the ads, accusing them of spreading misinformation to Latino voters.

Much has been written about the rightward shift of the Latino electorate since 2020, but Latinos in the Centennial State remain fairly Democratic.

The Colorado Latino Exit Poll, a survey conducted by BSP Research for local Latino political advocacy organizations, found that Latino voters in the 8th District actually skewed slightly more Democratic than Latino voters statewide. The survey found that statewide, more Latino voters said they had grown more conservative since 2020 than said they had grown more liberal. But the opposite was true in the 8th District, where more Latino voters said they had become more liberal. In both cases, the majority of respondents said their ideology had not shifted.

Statewide, the BSP Research poll found that 69 percent of Latino voters supported Bennet. Seventy-five percent of Latino voters in the 8th District supported Caraveo (using a smaller sample size of nearly 200 voters). In comparison, the Associated Press exit poll found that 60 percent of Latino voters supported Bennet and 65 percent of Latino voters supported Polis.

Alex Sanchez, the founder of Voces Unidas Action Fund, one of the groups that commissioned the exit poll, told *Inside Elections* that "we did not see in Colorado a big shift like we're seeing in Florida and Texas."

The Impact of Abortion

Even when their state was a bonafide battleground a decade ago, Coloradans were relatively liberal on social issues, including access to abortion. Nearly 60 percent of Coloradans believed abortion should be legal in all or most cases in 2014, according to the Pew Research Center, and an influx of new liberal-leaning residents has solidified the state's pro-choice bent.

Anticipating that the U.S. Supreme Court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the Democratic majority in the Colorado state Legislature passed a bill preserving the right to an abortion that Polis signed into law at the beginning of April.

But the Supreme Court's reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in June still had a significant impact on the race in the 8th District, persuading late-breaking voters to support Democrats like Caraveo.

Polling data from Caraveo's campaign showed the salience of the issue, even relative to the economic issues that Republicans expected would be the deciding factor among these late-breaking voters. The Democratic campaign's poll conducted at the end of July showed a generic Republican leading a generic Democratic on the ballot, 46-42 percent. But when asked if they would prefer "A Democrat who supports Joe Biden's policies on taxes and inflation and will fight to protect a woman's right to choose an abortion" or "A Republican who

will fight to lower taxes and combat inflation and will vote to ban abortion nationwide, even in cases of rape and incest," voters in the 8th District preferred a generic Democrat, 46-41 percent.

The issue of abortion dominated ads from Caraveo and Democratic outside groups. Caraveo placed her background as a pediatrician front and center, highlighting her medical background in her approach to the issue, while her campaign relentlessly attacked Kirkmeyer for her position.

The nail in the coffin for Kirkmeyer was a clip of the Republican saying in 2014 that she didn't support any exceptions to an abortion ban. Though Kirkmeyer attempted to moderate her position on abortion during the general election campaign, the clip was used in several TV ads up until Election Day. Highlighting her position on abortion, climate change, and gay marriage — Kirkmeyer opposed gay marriage in her 2020 state Senate bid — Democrats accused her of being too extreme on social issues for the 8th District.

The Economic Piece

Along with abortion, the economy and energy policy were the most important issues for voters in the 8th District. The two issues are inextricable in this region of Colorado — Weld County produces over half of the state's oil and natural gas, and the state's energy policies have a disproportionate impact on the economic livelihood of Weld County residents.

Kirkmeyer's campaign focused heavily on these issues, and Republicans' initial line of attack against Caraveo was her support for a state law that increased regulation of the oil and gas industry. Democrats in the state Legislature passed the legislation, which Caraveo sponsored in the state House, in 2019.

Caraveo didn't shy away from the issue on the campaign trail, framing energy policy as not just an economic issue but also a public health issue. Democrats who spoke with *Inside Elections* said Republicans underestimated the concrete effects that pollution from oil and gas production had on residents of the 8th District. And Kirkmeyer's later ads were more focused on taxation and crime.

An Independent Streak

Forty-seven percent of registered voters in the 8th District are unaffiliated with any political party — a slightly higher percentage than the 45 percent of unaffiliated voters across the state. (Democrats make up 27 percent of registered voters in the 8th, while Republicans make up 24 percent.)

Colorado also happens to be the birthplace of the Libertarian party in America, which was founded over 50 years ago in Colorado Springs.

In a district with such an independent streak, it's no surprise that a third-party candidate would receive a significant amount of support. Libertarian nominee Richard "Dan" Ward, an electrician and soundman for a local metal band, won 4 percent of the vote, or 9,280 votes, in the 8th District (Caraveo won by just 1,632 votes). In comparison, Libertarian candidates on the ballot in Colorado's other congressional races garnered between 1.7 and 2.5 percent.

Kirkmeyer has blamed Ward for acting as a spoiler in the race, arguing that she would have won a match-up without the Libertarian on the ballot. In a race with such a narrow margin, Ward's candidacy was certainly a significant factor. While some Republicans accused him of being a liberal "plant," others who spoke with *Inside Elections* were hesitant to overstate how much of a spoiler role he actually played.

Ward, who was registered as a Green Party voter up until last year, took a nontraditional approach to his campaign, campaigning at concerts

and distancing himself from the national Libertarian Party — making it difficult to tell how many of his supporters would have supported a Republican like Kirkmeyer if he wasn't on the ballot.

The Trump Factor

Unlike Caraveo, who cleared the Democratic field early on, Kirkmeyer went through a contentious, four-way primary with candidates that spanned the ideological range of the post-Trump Republican Party.

Lori Saine, a Weld County Commission and former state lawmaker, planted her flag firmly in the MAGA lane of the GOP primary. Thornton Mayor Jan Kulmann campaigned as a relatively more moderate Republican, focusing on economic issues and her background in the energy industry. As an elected official from the more liberal-leaning part of the district, she was seen as a Republican who could appeal to more independent voters. And Tyler Allcorn, a first-time candidate and retired Green Beret, was motivated to run for Congress by Biden's handling of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Kirkmeyer, who has been active in local GOP politics for the past 30

Courtesy Kirkmeyer Campaign

Barbara Kirkmeyer

years as a state senator and Weld County commissioner, hailed from the Republican-leaning portion of the district and had a conservative record to match her home base. But her opposition to Trump in 2016 became a significant issue in the primary. Democratic outside group 314 Action aired an ad spotlighting Kirkmeyer's criticism of the former president in an effort to boost Saine, seen as the easiest Republican to beat in November, and House Majority PAC also aired a spot during the primary calling Saine a "conservative warrior" who "supported Donald Trump from day one."

Democrats' meddling in the primary was unsuccessful, and Kirkmeyer won decisively with 39 percent. Kulmann came in a distant second with 23 percent, while Saine garnered 21 percent of the GOP primary vote.

Trump himself did not get involved in this primary, though Republicans believe his later public feud with O'Dea, the Senate nominee, likely dampened GOP voter turnout across the state.

Unlike most GOP Senate nominees, O'Dea actively distanced himself from the former president, saying that he hoped Trump wouldn't run in 2024. Trump retaliated, saying that "MAGA doesn't Vote for stupid people with big mouths" in a Truth Social post.

2024 and Beyond

Republicans believe their prospects in 2024 will largely depend on the presidential nominee — and if Trump is the nominee again, they're skeptical they could flip the 8th.

"If we nominate Trump, just write it off. Just forget it," Colorado-based GOP consultant Dick Wadhams told *Inside Elections*.

Thanks to the suburbs in Adams County, which has been trending more Democratic as the population has grown over the last 10 years, the 8th District appears to be slowly moving in Democrats' favor.

But in the near future, this district will remain Colorado's most competitive district and is sure to be a GOP target in 2024, regardless of what happens at the top of the ticket. **IE**

Vote Above Replacement: 2022 Senate Elections

By Bradley Wascher

Democrats defied expectations by expanding their Senate majority in 2022 — but what exactly were those expectations? And Republicans nominated a number of underwhelming candidates, but how much did they actually underperform? Vote Above Replacement (VAR) can provide some empirical context to 2022 narratives.

VAR measures the strength of a political candidate relative to a typical candidate from their party within the same state. That initial benchmark is derived using *Inside Elections'* Baseline, which captures a state or congressional district's political performance by combining all federal and state election results over the past four election cycles into a single trimmed mean. VAR is simply the candidate's share of the vote minus the party's Baseline. A higher VAR indicates a strong performance relative to expectations.

Across the 32 Senate races featuring one Democrat against one Republican (Alaska, Louisiana, and Utah are therefore excluded), each politician performed an average of 3.1 points better — or worse — relative to a typical candidate from their party in that state. (For comparison, the same figure for 2022 gubernatorial candidates was 4.7, possibly suggesting that the gubernatorial races were more heavily influenced by candidate quality, or less constrained by partisanship.) These averages are close to the post-2020 VAR numbers, which makes sense given the small movements in Baseline over the last two years, never mind the general forces of political polarization and partisan sorting.

A candidate's VAR arguably mattered the most in key battleground races. Across the eight states rated as Toss-up, Tilt, or Lean in our final Senate ratings, Democratic nominees overperformed their party's benchmarks in six of those states (with an average 1.7 VAR across the eight battlegrounds). Republicans underperformed in six states (an average -1.1 VAR).

One state where both nominees exceeded Baseline expectations was Nevada. Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto ran only slightly ahead of the typical Democrat, finishing with a VAR of 0.25 (she received 48.8 percent compared to the 48.6 percent Democratic Baseline). Her Republican challenger, former state Attorney General Adam Laxalt, outperformed the typical statewide Republican by 1.2 points (48 percent vs. 46.8 percent Republican Baseline). The fact that both major party nominees outperformed expectations showed the less prominent role of third-party candidates in the Nevada Senate race this cycle — the Silver State has a history of supporting more third-party candidates, and Nevada voters also have the option to vote for "none of these" candidates.

While Laxalt was one of the GOP's stronger nominees in a battleground this cycle, most of his counterparts in other states fell short. In Arizona, venture capitalist Blake Masters ran behind the GOP Baseline by 3.9 points, while Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly ran ahead of the average Democratic Baseline by 2.8 points. In Georgia, football legend Herschel Walker lost with a -3.1 VAR against Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock's 4.1-point overperformance. (For reference, Warnock won the 2021 special runoff by outpacing the typical Democrat by 5 points, compared to GOP nominee Kelly Loeffler's -4.1 VAR.) And most crucially in Pennsylvania, Democratic Lt. Gov. John Fetterman landed 0.5 points above the Democratic Baseline, while celebrity surgeon Mehmet Oz lagged 0.2

Vote Above Replacement
2022 Senate Republican Candidates

STATE	CANDIDATE	PERCENT EARNED	REPUBLICAN BASELINE	VAR
SC	**Tim Scott**	62.9	56.8	6.1
SD	**John Thune**	69.6	64.4	5.2
NY	Joe Pinion	43.2	38.0	5.2
AL	**Katie Britt**	66.7	62.1	4.7
KS	**Jerry Moran**	60.1	56.2	3.9
FL	**Marco Rubio**	57.7	53.9	3.8
IA	**Chuck Grassley**	56.1	52.8	3.3
KY	**Rand Paul**	61.8	59.2	2.6
IN	**Todd Young**	58.7	56.6	2.0
WI	**Ron Johnson**	50.5	48.6	2.0
AR	**John Boozman**	65.7	64.1	1.7
OK	**James Lankford**	64.3	62.7	1.6
NV	Adam Laxalt	48.0	46.8	1.2
PA	Mehmet Oz	46.3	46.6	-0.2
NC	**Ted Budd**	50.5	51.1	-0.5
MO	**Eric Schmitt**	55.5	56.3	-0.9
WA	Tiffany Smiley	42.7	43.6	-0.9
OK	**Markwayne Mullin**	61.8	62.7	-1.0
OH	**J.D. Vance**	53.3	54.9	-1.6
CO	Joe O'Dea	41.3	43.6	-2.3
NH	Don Bolduc	44.4	47.3	-2.9
GA	Herschel Walker	48.6	51.8	-3.1
ID	**Mike Crapo**	60.7	64.2	-3.5
AZ	Blake Masters	46.5	50.4	-3.9
ND	**John Hoeven**	56.5	66.4	-10.0

Winners in bold; Margin discrepancies due to rounding

points behind the Republican Baseline.

The GOP-held Senate seats produced a mixed bag of VAR scores. In Ohio, Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan ran 3 points ahead of the Democratic Baseline, despite losing to author J.D. Vance, who posted a -1.6 VAR. In North Carolina, former state Supreme Court chief justice Cheri Beasley underperformed a typical Democrat by 0.8 points. Republican Rep. Ted Budd also fell short of his party's benchmark by 0.5 points, but because North Carolina has a GOP-leaning Baseline (R+2.9), Budd didn't need an overperformance to secure his spot in the Senate.

A similar situation played out in Wisconsin, where Democratic Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes fell just short of his party's Baseline (VAR: -0.1) but Republican Sen. Ron Johnson did 2 points better than a typical statewide Republican. Although Wisconsin as a state flipped in Democrats' favor in

Continued from page 5

the post-2022 Baseline update, Johnson's overperformance kept the seat in Republican hands.

Other VAR results provide a peek at how Baseline works under the hood.

In the lead-up to the election, New Hampshire Sen. Maggie Hassan's seat was considered vulnerable. She finished 1.3 points below the Democratic Baseline in 2016, though that was enough to eke out a photo finish win against GOP Sen. Kelly Ayotte. But this time, Hassan won with a VAR of 4.1, while her challenger, retired Army Brigadier General Don Bolduc, had a -2.9 VAR.

Hassan's overperformance follows a strong showing in 2020 from New Hampshire's senior senator, Jeanne Shaheen, whose 6.7 VAR was the highest of any Senate Democrat that year. But it isn't shocking that the Granite State is friendlier to its incumbent Democratic senators than VAR might suggest. New Hampshire's Baseline averages are heavily influenced by the state's popular Republican governor, Chris Sununu, who won re-election by 31.7 points in 2020 and 15.5 points in 2022.

That's why the state's post-2022 Baseline margin (D+2.1) is noticeably narrower than the 2020 presidential margin (Joe Biden's 7.4-point victory). Sununu's 2020 win is excluded from Baseline's calculations because the trimmed mean ignores the single best performance from each party, but if his other victories are also removed from the mix, New Hampshire's margin jumps to D+7.

Maggie Hassan

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

For evidence beyond New Hampshire that a uniquely electable GOP governor can pull up the Republican Baseline and bring down the Democratic Baseline in an otherwise blue state (thereby inflating the Democratic candidate's VAR), look next door. The candidate with the highest Senate VAR for either party in 2022 was Democratic At-Large Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont, who outperformed a typical statewide Democrat by 9.5 points in his 41-point rout of GOP retired Army officer Gerald Malloy (VAR: -7.5). Welch can thank GOP Gov. Phil Scott for making him look good, as Scott's big wins — 46 points in 2022, 41 in 2020, 15 in 2018 and 9 in 2016 — shift Vermont's Baseline toward Republicans. Incidentally, Welch's share of the vote in November (68.6 percent) is much closer to Biden's 2020 share in Vermont (66.1 percent) than the statewide Democratic Baseline (59.1 percent).

By contrast, North Dakota Sen. John Hoeven had the lowest VAR of any Senate candidate in 2022 at -10. This is probably not his fault — Hoeven posted a 14.5 VAR in 2016.

State Rep. Rick Becker, an independent candidate and former Republican, finished third with nearly one-fifth of the vote, and it's likely that Becker's attempt at playing spoiler also contributed to Democrat Katrina Christiansen underperforming her own party's benchmark by 4.8 points.

Following Republican Sen. Jim Inhofe's resignation announcement, Oklahoma was home to two Senate elections this cycle, and the VAR scores tell two different stories. In the regularly scheduled race, Sen.

Vote Above Replacement
2022 Senate Democratic Candidates

STATE	CANDIDATE	PERCENT EARNED	DEMOCRATIC BASELINE	VAR
VT	**Peter Welch**	68.6	59.1	9.5
NH	**Maggie Hassan**	53.6	49.5	4.1
GA	**Raphael Warnock**	51.4	47.3	4.1
OR	**Ron Wyden**	55.9	52.6	3.3
OH	Tim Ryan	46.7	43.7	3.0
CO	**Michael Bennet**	55.9	52.9	3.0
AZ	**Mark Kelly**	51.4	48.6	2.8
HI	**Brian Schatz**	71.2	68.5	2.8
MD	**Chris Van Hollen**	65.9	63.8	2.1
WA	**Patty Murray**	57.3	55.5	1.8
MO	Trudy Busch Valentine	42.1	40.6	1.5
OK	Kendra Horn	35.2	33.8	1.5
CT	**Richard Blumenthal**	57.5	56.0	1.4
PA	**John Fetterman**	51.2	50.7	0.5
IL	**Tammy Duckworth**	56.4	56.0	0.4
NV	**Catherine Cortez Masto**	48.8	48.6	0.3
CA	**Alex Padilla**	61.5	61.3	0.1
WI	Mandela Barnes	49.5	49.6	-0.1
NC	Cheri Beasley	47.3	48.1	-0.8
KY	Charles Booker	38.2	39.3	-1.1
IA	Mike Franken	43.9	45.4	-1.5
FL	Val Demings	41.3	45.1	-3.8
NY	**Chuck Schumer**	56.4	60.4	-4.0

Winners in bold; Margin discrepancies due to rounding

James Lankford overperformed the typical statewide Republican by 1.6 points, while cybersecurity professional Madison Horn finished 1.7 points below the typical Democrat. Meanwhile in the special election, Sen.-elect Markwayne Mullin ran behind the typical Republican by 1 point, although he still easily defeated former Rep. Kendra Horn, who overperformed a typical Democrat by 1.5 points. Polls conducted before the election had shown Lankford slightly outpacing Mullin, but neither Republican was in serious danger.

There are many possible explanations for this divergence, including Kendra Horn, a former officeholder, being a higher caliber politician than Madison Horn (no relation). But one of the simplest is that Lankford was an incumbent senator while Mullin was not. Although the incumbency advantage seems to have shrunk over time, recent research still estimates the boost to be worth around 2 or 3 points. As it happens, among Oklahoma's two Republican Senate nominees the difference in vote share (and VAR) between the incumbent and the non-incumbent was 2.6 points. More broadly, the difference in median VAR between the incumbents and the non-incumbents was 2.3 points across all 32 Senate races — inspiring some confidence in Baseline's ability to capture the relative performance of candidates, both typical and not.

IE

Georgia Senate Runoff: How Warnock Won

By Ryan Matsumoto

After two decades of GOP dominance, Georgia has now voted for Democratic senators three times in the past two years, most recently in this month's runoff election. How did it happen?

A handful of key trends propelled Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock to victory in the Senate runoff. The Democratic senator defeated Republican football legend Herschel Walker by 2.8 points on Dec. 6, winning re-election to a full term and cementing Georgia's status as a battleground state.

Improved Margins in Metro Atlanta

Rural counties were the first to report results on election night, and those initial returns had Warnock roughly matching his margins from November, suggesting a razor-thin race. But once counties in metro Atlanta started reporting complete results, it became clear that Warnock would expand his margin.

In Fulton County, which contains Atlanta proper and some of its suburbs, Warnock improved his margin from 49 points in November to 53 points in December. In neighboring DeKalb County, Warnock's margin increased from 70 points to 74 points.

Warnock also did well in suburban areas further out from Atlanta. In recently Democratic Cobb and Gwinnett counties, Warnock improved his margins by 3 and 4 points, respectively. And in Rockdale and Henry counties, which have zoomed to the left thanks to changing demographics, Warnock improved his margins by 3 points.

Turnout Patterns

Statewide, the total number of votes cast in the runoff was 90 percent of the total number of votes cast in the Senate race in November. At the county level, there was not a strong relationship between Warnock's margin in November and runoff turnout relative to November. However, there were some interesting patterns under the hood in key counties.

Turnout relative to November was particularly low in the five counties that gave Walker his biggest raw vote margins in November. In heavily Republican Cherokee and Forsyth counties, which contain Atlanta's northern exurbs, the total number of runoff votes was at just 87 percent of November's totals. Turnout also lagged in Hall, Coweta, and Bartow counties, which are critical to Republican margins.

One potential reason why turnout may have lagged in these key Republican counties is low voter enthusiasm for Walker. As *Inside Elections*' Jacob Rubashkin pointed out, pre-election polling data suggested that Warnock supporters backed their candidate more enthusiastically than Walker supporters. In four of these five counties (Bartow being the exception), Walker's margins in the GOP primary were lower than they were statewide, suggesting that Republican voters in these counties were less enthusiastic about him as early as May of this year. With Senate control not on the line in the runoff, some of them may have decided to stay home.

On the flipside, turnout was strong (92 percent of November's total) in DeKalb County, which gave Warnock his largest raw vote margin on Nov. 8 and the runoff.

Long-term Democratic Gains in the Suburbs

The key trend that has turned Georgia into a battleground state is Democratic gains in metro Atlanta (which accounts for more than half of the state's total votes), particularly in the suburbs. These long term shifts have largely been driven by education polarization, population growth, and diversification.

Historically Republican Cobb County voted for Mitt Romney by 12 points in 2012, for Hillary Clinton by 2 points in 2016, for Joe Biden by 14 points in 2020, and for Warnock by 19 points in the 2022 Senate runoff. Nearby Gwinnett County, which is a few points more Democratic, has followed a similar trajectory. Both are highly educated counties; about 49 percent of adults (25 years and older) in Cobb and 39 percent in Gwinnett have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the state's 33 percent rate.

Some of the largest swings toward Democrats over the last decade have been in the suburbs to the south and east of Atlanta. Henry County has shifted from voting for Romney by 3 points in 2012 to voting for Warnock by 33 points in 2022. Rockdale County has shifted from voting for President Barack Obama by 17 points in 2012 to voting for Warnock by 51 points in 2022. These two counties have lower levels of college degree attainment than Cobb and Gwinnett, so education polarization is less of a factor here. Instead, these counties have likely shifted left because of increasing diversification as the nonwhite share of each county's population has increased.

In fact, Henry and Rockdale were two of only a handful of Georgia counties where Democrat Stacey Abrams outperformed Biden in November's gubernatorial race, despite her losing statewide by 7.5 points. This suggests that these two counties may continue to move left regardless of candidates, thanks to demographic trends that are strongly favorable for Democrats.

Just as important to Democratic success in Georgia has been the party's inroads in the large, heavily Republican exurban counties north of Atlanta. Forsyth County gave Obama just 18 percent of the vote in 2012, but gave Warnock 34 percent of the vote in the 2022 runoff. Cherokee County gave Obama just 20 percent of the vote in 2012, but gave Warnock 31 percent of the vote in the 2022 runoff.

Candidate Quality Matters

Perhaps the most critical factor was the incumbent's strength in contrast to Walker's significant personal and professional vulnerabilities.

In November, Republicans won all of the other statewide elections by anywhere from 5 to 9 points. Republicans also won the aggregate U.S. House vote in Georgia by 5 points.

At the same time, Warnock won a plurality of the Senate vote. This makes it clear that Walker did not lose because of low or unfavorable Republican turnout; he lost because a sizable chunk of Georgia voters voted for Republicans in other statewide races but chose to split their tickets for Warnock in the Senate race. Thanks to this dynamic, Walker failed to clear 50 percent in November, forcing a runoff election where Warnock expanded his narrow margin by a couple of points.

The Bottom Line

Recent Democratic wins at the presidential and Senate levels as Republicans continue to win at the state office level make it clear that Georgia is a battleground state. Warnock's victory was driven by many of the same trends that have made the state as a whole competitive: education polarization, population growth, and increasing diversification. While the GOP sweep of state executive elections suggests that the state still has a lot of Republican DNA, Democratic gains in metro Atlanta should continue to help them in the years ahead.

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February announcement — had two more months to fight among themselves and two fewer months to take the fight to D'Esposito, who ran unopposed. Gillen won her primary with 63 percent, defeating Nassau County Legislator Carrie Solages (24 percent) and Malverne Mayor Keith Corbett (11 percent).

But the intraparty contest depleted her resources, and the late date gave her little time to reestablish herself financially. Gillen had raised around $800,000 before her primary but spent nearly all of it by Aug. 23, according to several Democratic sources, and spent the following month rebuilding her war chest. She raised another $1 million before the general election, for a total of $1.8 million raised over the course of the cycle.

Multiple Democratic sources complained that state Democratic Party chairman Jay Jacobs (also the chairman of the Nassau County Democratic Party) damaged Gillen's campaign when he publicly disparaged her in a March interview with *Newsday*. Jacobs told the paper he had tried to dissuade Gillen from running and that she "would have a very tough time winning," and that while Gillen told him "this was a dream of hers since she was a little girl," he was "not here to help people with their dreams."

Jacobs — who endorsed Corbett in the primary — also sent an email to donors in March with a thinly veiled directive to not donate to Gillen, a move one Democratic source said hampered Gillen's ability to stockpile cash early in the race.

Compounding the issue was a reticence among national Democrats to believe that this seat was highly competitive. While local party operatives were saying early on that both the 3rd and 4th Districts were potential problem spots for Democrats given the party's collapse in November 2021, when Republicans made major gains on Long Island at the municipal level, Biden's 2020 performance seems to have papered over some of those concerns.

With limited resources and a "Red Wave" on the horizon, national groups allocated their funds elsewhere rather than going on offense against D'Esposito over the summer, expecting the partisanship of the district to take care of itself.

Laura Gillen

Courtesy Gillen Campaign

One Democratic source mused that "to have Democratic PAC world playing in the 4th District in July or August would have been a really terrible place to be seen setting up your levees." Another agreed that early spending in the 4th would have sent a message that there was going to be a "catastrophic year."

As a non-incumbent with average fundraising, Gillen was not a particularly attractive target for outside support. And even when it became clear in October that New York was a trouble spot for Democrats, Gillen was competing for attention with five other New York districts, all of which looked like more urgent concerns given their partisan leans.

There was no significant involvement from outside groups until the closing week of the general election, though the NRCC and the DCCC both did small coordinated cable buys with the campaigns earlier — $177,000 from the NRCC beginning in mid-September and $103,000

from the DCCC in mid-October. Neither the Kevin McCarthy-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund nor the Nancy Pelosi-aligned House Majority PAC began advertising on TV until Nov. 1, just seven days before the election.

That made the 4th District the last of any of the competitive New York House districts to see major outside spending (HMP also placed a small buy in the 25th District on Nov. 1). The 3rd, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 22nd districts all saw spending from one or both super PACs before the 4th. Both groups placed broadcast TV buys of roughly $1.3 million, giving neither side an advantage.

A Strong Challenger

Democratic and Republican sources agreed that D'Esposito had a particularly strong profile for the political moment.

Multiple Republican strategists described the Italian and Puerto Rican D'Esposito as a "perfect fit" for the district, noting his background as an NYPD detective, Island Park fire chief, and local elected official, especially with crime emerging as a top issue for voters on Long Island. His "Elect an Expert" ad, which cited his 600 arrests as a cop, earned positive reviews even from Democrats.

Democratic strategists acknowledged that D'Esposito's profile made him far more difficult to run against than other top candidates across the country — or even on Long Island, where the GOP nominees in the 1st and 3rd districts had personal or professional vulnerabilities tailor-made for attack ads.

D'Esposito had few obvious vulnerabilities, and was careful not to stake out extreme positions on social issues such as abortion or guns, depriving Democrats of any easily clippable moments to weaponize. And according to one Gillen ally, "he was generally pretty careful in how he talked about Trump, MAGA, election denial, that sort of thing," making any attack along those lines a less salient "guilt by association" argument.

Democrats' strongest specific hit on D'Esposito's abortion policies only came in late October, when he told *Semafor* that he "probably" would vote for a 15-week abortion ban, before reversing himself later in the interview. But even the potency of that hit was muddled by the interview appearing in text only, and was initially published with a transcription error.

One Democratic source noted that even the specific opposition research hits against D'Esposito — stories about his service weapon being stolen, and civil rights complaints lodged against him — may have been a wash politically because they reminded voters of his time as a police officer. And Gillen's financial constraints mean she ultimately did not litigate other potential hits on D'Esposito, including accusations of nepotism and involvement in machine politics.

D'Esposito, who one Republican said succeeded because he "ran like he was running for mayor," built a reputation as a hustler on the campaign trail. He ran individualized digital ads highlighting his endorsements from local political leaders, and he has a gladhanding streak and strong attendance record at local events that has drawn comparisons to his mentor and fellow former Hempstead councilman, former U.S. Sen. Al D'Amato.

Democrats' September Slump

Unlike Gillen, D'Esposito did not face any primary challengers. The only other candidate in the race, entrepreneur Bill Staniford, quickly

exited when the Nassau County GOP endorsed D'Esposito in late March, allowing the Republican to immediately jump into general election mode.

D'Esposito's team, knowing that he was an underdog given the district's partisan lean, knew they had to get in front of voters early. "If it's just driving home the message, you can do that late," said one operative familiar with the strategy, "but when you're educating voters, it's a slow-moving process."

The Republican had a golden opportunity after the Aug. 23 Democratic primary. While Gillen had spent down to zero, D'Esposito was relatively flush with cash, with $545,416 in the bank on Aug. 3 (overall he raised $1.3 million for the year). Armed with that financial advantage, D'Esposito began a cable, digital, and direct mail push in late August, with spots introducing himself as a retired detective and fire chief and hammering Gillen on inflation and crime.

With Gillen needing September to fundraise, D'Esposito had a month of clear air to define himself. By the time Gillen

Anthony D'Esposito

Courtesy D'Esposito Campaign

finally began airing cable ads in late September, D'Esposito had already spent $200,000 on TV unanswered.

And while Gillen ultimately outspent D'Esposito on digital, she did not overtake his combined spending on Facebook and Google platforms until the middle of October.

Unlike D'Esposito, Gillen went on broadcast TV. But her one spot, which was backed by a $79,000 buy and aired in the final week of the race, showed a candidate on her heels: it featured Gillen responding to a previous D'Esposito attack ad.

Had Gillen had more resources, Democratic sources say, her campaign would not have given D'Esposito a clear berth in September, and would have begun running positive spots immediately after the primary.

Instead, that month appeared to be integral to D'Esposito's eventual victory. A previously-unreleased NRCC poll from early August found the Republican down 10 points to Gillen, 47-37 percent. But on Sept. 30, the committee did another poll and found D'Esposito ahead, 45-44 percent. That shift, from a clear Gillen lead early on to a tied race after September, was mirrored, though less intensely, in Democratic polling as well.

The Messaging Fight

As was the case all throughout New York, crime issues took center stage in the 4th District. D'Esposito zeroed in on the cashless bail law passed by the state legislature in 2019 that has become a flashpoint for Republicans and even some Democrats in the state.

Long Island in particular was fertile ground for Republicans to wield New York City crime as an electoral issue, given the large number of police officers and other first responders that call the Island home (approximately 26 percent of the NYPD), and because Long Islanders receive all of the media coverage of crime in the city, but do not experience the city themselves every day, heightening the salience of the news itself.

Gillen did not support the cashless bail law and blamed its

implementation for her loss, writing after the election that the reason crime messaging was so effective in New York but not elsewhere was because of the "wildly unpopular" law, which ended up "casting a shadow over every Democratic candidate in the state." Democrats also lost three state Senate seats in Nassau County that Biden would have carried in 2020.

This was not unexpected. Democrats suffered massive local election losses on Long Island in November of 2021 as Republicans used the bail reform law as a cudgel against Nassau County District Attorney candidate Todd Kaminsky, a well-funded state senator who the GOP branded as the "author" of the law. Kaminsky lost in a landslide, 60-40 percent, and dragged down Nassau County Executive Laura Curran with him — she lost by a much narrower 0.76 percent.

Nassau County had just been named as the safest county in America, Curran was one of the most prominent Democratic opponents of bail reform, and she received endorsements from several police unions. But that was not enough to prevent her loss, and at the beginning of this year she predicted a "bloodbath" for Democrats in the midterm elections.

Low on resources, Gillen was not able to counter D'Esposito's message on crime by litigating his record as a police officer. Nor did she aggressively burnish her own credentials, choosing instead to direct what resources she did have on abortion access and gun control while tying the Republican to unpopular GOP leaders such as Sens. Mitch McConnell and Ted Cruz.

But D'Esposito worked to neutralize attacks on abortion. In addition to the message discipline that helped him avoid offhand comments on abortion like other GOP nominees, D'Esposito emphasized the protections for abortion rights codified in New York state law — several sources noted that Republicans seemed to have the most success countering abortion arguments in Democratic-controlled states such as California, Oregon and New York that already had abortion access laws on the books.

He also went on offense on the issue, with mailers and digital ads accusing Gillen of supporting "abortion up to the moment of birth and allowing non-doctors to perform abortions," and using his NYPD service to argue that he had a history of protecting women from violence.

A Banner Night for the GOP Statewide

D'Esposito's win might have been the most impressive Republican victory in New York, but it certainly wasn't the only one.

Republicans won a slew of other Biden districts across the state, including the 1st and 3rd on Long Island (the latter being a flip), as well as two seats in the Hudson Valley, the 17th and the 19th. They also held onto the 22nd District, an open seat Biden would have carried.

The GOP surge was led by Rep. Lee Zeldin, the party's gubernatorial nominee, who held Gov. Kathy Hochul to an unimpressive 53-47 percent win statewide — the best GOP performance since 2002.

Both Democrats and Republicans attribute a significant amount of the GOP's success to Zeldin's efforts, arguing that he energized Republican voters and activists despite it being a midterm election. Having a highly competitive gubernatorial race also meant the state and county party organizations were heavily engaged in field and turnout efforts, which accrued to the benefit of candidates such as D'Esposito.

Hochul's operation left some to be desired, said several Democrats, who were frustrated that her campaign did not recognize it had such a close race on its hands until mid-October. And some Democrats working in New York felt she didn't adequately counter Zeldin's crime messaging,

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which dovetailed neatly with D'Esposito's own campaign strategy.

The 4th also sits entirely within the New York City media market, so its voters were hit with the millions of dollars that GOP mega-donor Ronald Lauder spent on crime-focused anti-Hochul ads in the closing weeks of the race.

And perhaps most importantly, Zeldin is from Long Island and focused much of his campaign energy there — to notable effect. Ultimately, Zeldin outperformed Trump's margin by 17.4 points statewide, but in Nassau County he outperformed Trump by nearly 20 points.

While detailed results won't be available for a little while longer, it is highly likely that Zeldin carried the 4th District in his gubernatorial run, even though Biden won the district by 14.5 percent in 2020.

The entirety of the 4th makes up slightly more than one-half of Nassau County. Zeldin carried Nassau overall by 10.5 points, while Trump lost it by 9.5 points — a 19.9-point overperformance by margin for Zeldin.

We can assume that the non-4th District portion of Nassau did not behave substantially differently from the 4th District: Between 2016 and 2020, both portions of Nassau shifted toward Democrats at similar rates— the 4th by 2.4 points and the non-4th by 4.5 points. In 2022, D'Esposito and 3rd District GOP nominee George Santos both overperformed Biden's margin by roughly 16 points.

Assuming Zeldin outperformed Trump in the 4th at the same rate he outperformed him in Nassau County overall, Zeldin likely won the 4th by low-to-mid single digits (19.9 percent - 14.5 percent = 5.4 percent).

Several Democratic strategists also suggested that a decrease in minority turnout may have hampered Gillen's ability to win. For instance, the state assembly district with fewest votes cast in the entire state, the 18th District, is a Hempstead-area seat that is home to more than 40 percent of the 4th Congressional District's Black and Hispanic populations. Turnout relative to the 2020 election dropped more in the 18th than it did in the surrounding state Assembly seats. Several sources suggested that Gillen should have invested more in turning out voters of color.

The Bottom Line

There were many ingredients to the Republican upset in New York's 4th, but it took the combination of all of them to get D'Esposito over the finish line.

The 4th is also a sterling example of the open seat debacle that plagued Democrats around the country. Rice was one of several incumbents who chose not to seek re-election to competitive seats, depriving the party of a battle-tested standard bearer with strong name recognition and a head start on fundraising who regularly outperformed the top of the ticket. Had more incumbents chosen to run again, Democrats might have saved the majority.

In 2024, D'Esposito will be close to or at the top of House Democrats' national target list. And unlike this cycle, Democrats know they cannot take Nassau County for granted.　　　　IE

Arizona Senate: Sinema's Decision Complicates 2024 Race

By Erin Covey

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema's decision to leave the Democratic Party doesn't have an immediate impact on Democrats' control of the Senate — but it does complicate the 2024 battleground race in Arizona.

Since the senator said she will not caucus with Republicans, her decision will not affect Democrats' new majority. If she caucuses with Democrats (similar to Angus King of Maine or Bernie Sanders of Vermont), then the party will effectively have a 51-49 majority. If Sinema doesn't caucus with either party, Democrats will have a 50-49 majority, and their Georgia runoff victory will not have been in vain.

After breaking with her party over voting rights legislation and domestic spending bills, becoming a crucial swing vote in the evenly divided chamber, Sinema has faced severe backlash from her own party; the Arizona Democratic Party censured the senator for voting to keep the filibuster and national Democratic-aligned groups pressured her to change her position.

That backlash was almost certain to culminate in a primary for Sinema. Arizona Rep. Ruben Gallego has openly weighed running in the Democratic primary in 2024 and has reportedly started interviewing paid media firms.

The senator has not said whether she will run for re-election in 2024. While Sinema can now avoid a contentious primary battle, her decision makes the general election more complicated (provided she can meet a higher signature threshold for ballot access).

If she runs, her ultimate relationship with the Democratic Party will determine whether she gets support as an incumbent seeking re-election or whether she will have to run on her own.

Independent Senators Bernie Sanders and Angus King, who caucus with the Democrats, don't face serious, organized opposition from Democrats running against them. But since she faces so much opposition within her own party, it's hard to see Democratic politicians and organizations allowing the official party apparatus to support Sinema. Democrats and Republicans are likely to field viable nominees, creating a competitive three-way race that would probably benefit Republicans.

Democrats don't have much margin for error in Arizona. Despite Sen. Mark Kelly's re-election victory and Joe Biden's win in 2020, Arizona still has a GOP tinge to it. According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline metric, which measures partisan performance, Republicans have a 50.4-48.6 percent edge.

Republicans also have a voter registration advantage. As of the November general election, the GOP led Democrats 34.67-30.66 percent, with 33.89 percent identifying as "other." And according to the exit poll from the 2022 Senate race, self-described Republicans outnumbered Democrats 33 percent to 27 percent in Arizona, compared to 40 percent of the electorate who identified as independent.

Sinema can't count on receiving all of those independent votes. She's universally disliked by voters in Arizona, and a poll conducted by the bipartisan duo of Impact Research and Fabrizio Ward showed her favorability at 37 percent favorable and 54 percent unfavorable in September. Her favorability is highest among independents at 41 percent — and among Democratic and Republican voters, it's essentially the same at 37 and 36 percent, respectively.

Arizona remains one of the nine initial battleground Senate races in 2024 regardless of Sinema's decision and will be heavily contested by both parties.　　　　IE