

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## Mississippi Governor: If Democrats Can Dream

By Jacob Rubashkin

The battle lines have been formally set in the Mississippi gubernatorial contest, with incumbent Republican Tate Reeves and Democratic challenger Brandon Presley advancing to the general election after the August 8 primary.

Presley, the public service commissioner for the state's northern district, ran unopposed in the Democratic primary, after the state party disqualified two minor contenders.

At 46 years old and hailing from the state's northeastern corner, Presley is a backslapping throwback to a previous era of Mississippi Democrats that once dominated the state's politics. He styles himself as an "FDR-Billy McCoy" Democrat, a reference to the thirty-second president and the last Democratic speaker of the state House, and never misses an opportunity to mention that he's pro-life and pro-gun.

Reeves, 49, won his primary with 75 percent of the vote over two underfunded challenges, physician John Witcher and veteran David Hardigree. Witcher, who won 18 percent of the vote, is best known for his anti-vaccine mandate activism during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reeves' 75 percent is relatively low for an incumbent governor. Mississippi's last three GOP executives all won their second-term primaries with around 92 percent of the vote. But it doesn't rise to the red-alert levels of the primary challenges that nearly took out Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin in 2019 (who won just 52 percent), or Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner in 2018 (52 percent), or Mississippi's own Democratic Gov. Ray Mabus back in 1991 (51 percent), all of whom went on to lose the general election.

Nevertheless, some Democrats are hopeful that, with few if any other notable races on the ballot this fall, a portion of GOP voters who don't like Reeves will ultimately stay home. (An April *New York Times* poll put his disapproval rating among Republicans at 21 percent.)

Presley is a credible candidate with a path to victory. And Reeves has some unique baggage due to the ongoing scandal over the misuse of welfare money that engulfed his predecessor's administration. The scandal has ensnared numerous former state officials as well as former Gov. Phil Bryant and football legend Brett Favre, and while Reeves himself hasn't been directly implicated, Presley is hammering him on the issue in TV ads (Reeves' campaign calls the attacks "nonsensical").

But Presley is still very much the underdog in a state where Democrats have struggled up and down the ballot for 20 years.

Looming large over Presley and the 2023 race is what happened four years ago. That year also looked like Democrats' best chance at winning the governor's seat in a generation, and featured an old-school Democrat

*Continued on page 9*

### 2023-2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

#### Toss-up (2)

NC Open (Cooper, D)

NH Open (Sununu, R)

#### Tilt Democratic (1)

Beshear (D-Ky.)# - 2023

#### Tilt Republican

#### Lean Democratic

#### Lean Republican (1)

Reeves (R-Miss.)# - 2023

#### Likely Democratic (1)

WA Open (Insee, D)

#### Likely Republican (1)

LA Open (Edwards, D)\* - 2023

#### Solid Democratic (1)

DE Open (Carney, D)

#### Solid Republican (7)

IN Open (Holcomb, R)

MO Open (Parson, R)

WV Open (Justice, R)

Burgum, R (N.D.)

Cox, R (Utah)

Gianforte, R (Mont.)

Scott, R (Vt.)

*Takeovers in italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, \* moved benefiting Republicans*

### CALENDAR

<b>Sept. 5</b>	Rhode Island 1st and Utah 2nd Special Election Primaries
<b>Sept. 27</b>	Second Republican Presidential Debate
<b>Oct. 27</b>	World Series starts
<b>Oct. 14</b>	Louisiana Governor Primary
<b>Nov. 7</b>	Kentucky and Mississippi General Election
<b>Nov. 18</b>	Louisiana Governor Runoff (if necessary)
<b>Jan. 15</b>	Iowa Caucuses
<b>Feb. 11</b>	Super Bowl LVIII

# Report Shorts

**Arizona Senate.** 2022 Senate candidate Blake Masters plans to run again, according to the Wall Street Journal. He joins Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb in the GOP primary — and 2022 gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake is still mulling a Senate campaign too. Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema has yet to announce her 2024 plans, making it difficult to forecast Republicans' chances in this swing state. Toss-up.

**Michigan Senate.** Former Rep. Mike Rogers is poised to jump into the race, giving Republicans a serious contender for the open seat. For the past several months, Republicans have struggled to find a top recruit to run in this battleground state. Other potential GOP candidates include former Rep. Peter Meijer, who just launched an exploratory committee, and New York Stock Exchange vice chair John Tuttle. Whoever wins the GOP nomination is likely to face Rep. Elissa Slotkin, the frontrunner in the Democratic primary. Lean Democratic.

**Kentucky Senate.** Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell had another scary episode at an event in the state on Wednesday, becoming unresponsive for 30 seconds while answering questions from reporters. The senator similarly froze up while speaking to reporters on Capitol Hill in July. If McConnell leaves his seat before the end of his term in 2026, the governor of Kentucky — currently Democrat Andy Beshear, up for re-election this fall — doesn't get to appoint whomever he wants to the seat, under a recently passed law. Instead, the state GOP would submit a list of three Republicans to Beshear to select from, ensuring the seat stays in Republican hands. However, there's speculation that Beshear, if faced with such a situation, might contest the validity of that law, appoint his own choice, and fight it out in the courts. The next governor, either Beshear or GOP state Attorney General Daniel Cameron, will begin their term in December.

**Rhode Island's 1st District Special.** Wealthy lawyer Don Carlson dropped out of the crowded race for the Democratic nomination after WPRI reported about inappropriate conduct while he was a professor at Williams College. Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos is dealing with an investigation into her campaign's signature-gathering process. Former state Rep. Aaron Regunberg, state Sen. Sandra Cano, and former White House aide Gabe Amo are trying to take advantage of the late developments to eke out a win in the Sept. 5 primary. Solid Democratic.

**Wisconsin's 3rd District.** State Sen. Brad Pfaff will not run for this seat again, after coming closer than expected to defeating Republican Derrick Van Orden last year. Former Army/CIA officer Deb McGrath also won't run. That leaves 2022 candidate/boutique owner Rebecca Cooke as the Democratic frontrunner. The filing deadline isn't until June 3. Republicans have a very narrow 49.3-48.6 percent Baseline advantage in the district, making it one of the most evenly divided seats in the country. Likely Republican. **IE**

## 2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up	
Brown (D-Ohio)	Tester (D-Mont.)
Sinema (I-Ariz.)	
Tilt Democratic	Tilt Republican
Casey (D-Penn.)	Manchin (D-W.V.)
Rosen (D-Nev.)	
Lean Democratic	Lean Republican
MI Open (Stabenow, D)	
Baldwin (D-Wis.)	
Likely Democratic	Likely Republican
	Cruz (R-Texas)
Solid Democratic	Solid Republican
CA Open (Feinstein, D)	IN Open (Braun, R)
DE Open (Carper, D)	Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
MD Open (Cardin, D)	Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Cantwell (D-Wash.)	Cramer (R-N.D.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)	Fischer (R-Neb.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)	Hawley (R-Mo.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Kaine (D-Va.)	Romney (R-Utah)
King (I-Maine)	Scott (R-Fla.)
Klobuchar (D, Minn.)	Wicker (R-Miss.)
Menendez (D-N.J.)	
Murphy (D-Conn.)	
Sander (I-Vt.)	
Warren (D-Mass.)	
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)	

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, \* moved benefiting Republicans*

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# 2024 Gubernatorial Overview: Toss-up Races Emerge

By Jacob Rubashkin and Erin Covey

Gubernatorial races during presidential cycles are usually sleepy. Just 11 states are slated to elect a chief executive in 2024, compared to 38 states in midterm cycles, and only one of them ranks among the 10 most populous in the country.

But there is plenty to pay attention to in 2024, which is shaping up to be a year of substantial turnover on the gubernatorial front. At least seven (and potentially nine) states will not have an incumbent governor running for re-election, meaning there are competitive primary elections on both sides of the aisle taking shape across the country, many of which will determine the direction of the state's leadership because the general election is not expected to be competitive.

Democrats control three of the governor's seats up for grabs in 2024, while Republicans hold eight, and both parties will have prime opportunities to flip battleground states.

These marquee races will take place in North Carolina, where Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper is term-limited, and New Hampshire, where Republican Gov. Chris Sununu is retiring. We have both races initially rated as toss-ups.

The rest of the map is much less competitive. Democrats are favored in two of their three states, and Republicans favored in seven of their eight states.

Currently, there are 26 Republican governors and 24 Democratic governors nationwide.

Three governorships are on the ballot this fall, including competitive races in Kentucky and Mississippi. While state races often have unique dynamics that don't translate to future federal contests, there could be some key lessons about the efficacy of attack ads next year.

**Delaware. Open; John Carney Jr. (D) term-limited. July filing deadline. Sept. 10, 2024 primary.** New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer is the only announced Democrat in the race. Meyer is term-limited as the leader of Delaware's largest county — New Castle is home to 60 percent of the state's residents and a slightly larger portion of its Democratic voters — and had \$1 million left over in his campaign account at the beginning of 2023. He could face competition from Lt. Gov. Bethany Long-Hall, who reported \$423,000 in the bank on Jan. 1. State Attorney General Kathy Jennings could also run, though she is coming off a closer-than-expected win in 2022, only beating her GOP opponent by 7 points. This race is sleepy, and will likely remain so for a while longer, since Delaware holds the latest primary in the nation (the second Tuesday of next September). Solid Democratic.

**Indiana. Open; Eric Holcomb (R) term-limited. Feb. 9 filing deadline. May 7 primary.** Sen. Mike Braun launched his gubernatorial bid as the obvious frontrunner. Last December, his campaign touted early internal polling that showed he had a commanding lead in the Republican primary. But his path to the nomination looks increasingly complicated as the primary field grows.

Two notable candidates have announced campaigns over the summer — former Indiana Attorney General Curtis Hill, and former Indiana Commerce Secretary Brad Chambers. Hill was accused of sexual harassment by several women in 2018, and his law license was suspended in 2020 after the state's attorney disciplinary commission

ruled that he committed battery. But despite Hill's baggage, he still has a considerable base of support. Chambers, who owns a real estate investment company, also led the state's Economic Development Corporation before stepping down this summer. Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and Fort Wayne businessman Eric Doden round out the field.

As of the end of June, Braun had \$4.6 million in his campaign account, while Crouch had \$3.9 million and Doden had \$3.8 million (Hill and Chambers announced their campaigns after the last fundraising reporting deadline). Both Braun and Chambers are wealthy and could inject their own money into the race, though Braun has said that he doesn't plan to spend on his gubernatorial bid.

Democrats' likely nominee is Jennifer McCormick, a former Republican state superintendent of public instruction who switched parties in 2021. Solid Republican.

**Missouri. Open; Mike Parson (R) term-limited.** March 26 filing deadline. August 6 primary. The son of former U.S. Attorney General/Missouri Governor/U.S. Senator John Ashcroft is still the favorite to



Courtesy Ashcroft Campaign

Jay Ashcroft

win this Republican primary. But Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft is facing some stiff competition.

Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe has been gearing up for the gubernatorial contest since last year, and has maintained a fundraising lead

over Ashcroft. The third Republican candidate, state Sen. Bill Eigel, is a staunch Trump supporter and could pull his primary opponents to the right — though Kehoe is clearly trying to carve out a more moderate lane in the primary. After Missouri Right to Life endorsed Ashcroft, Kehoe released a statement saying he would support anti-abortion legislation, but his support for exemptions for rape, incest, and protecting the life of the mother set him apart from his Republican rivals.

On the Democratic side, House Minority Leader Crystal Quade looks poised to win the nomination. But she faces a steep uphill battle against the eventual GOP nominee in a state Trump won by double digits in 2020. Solid Republican.

*Remington Research Group for Missouri Scout, July 5-7 (LVs) — GOP primary ballot: Ashcroft 34%, Kehoe 14%, Eigel 4%.*

**Montana. Greg Gianforte (R) elected 2020 (54%). March filing deadline. June 4 primary.** Gianforte hasn't officially declared his intention to run for a second term. First-term state Rep. Tanner Smith, who owns a construction company in Lakeside, MT, is running for the GOP nomination but would be a serious underdog versus the wealthy Gianforte. On the Democratic side, Ryan Busse, a firearms manufacturing executive-turned-gun safety advocate and advisor to gun control group Giffords, has expressed interest in running. Busse's two young sons were

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among the plaintiffs who recently won a major climate change lawsuit against the Montana state government. He would be a credible candidate for Democrats, but would begin as a clear underdog in the increasingly Republican state. Solid Republican.

**New Hampshire. Open; Chris Sununu (R) not seeking re-election. June 14 filing deadline. Sept. 10 primary.** Sununu's decision

not to seek a fifth two-year term makes this seat much more winnable for Democrats, who struggled mightily against the scion of New Hampshire's most prominent GOP dynasty. But the state's offbeat politics and penchant for split-ticketing means the governor's race will be highly competitive even as Democrats begin with an advantage at the presidential level.



Kelly Ayotte

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Both parties are staring down the barrel of competitive primaries.

Former Sen. Kelly Ayotte and former state Senate President Chuck Morse are both running for the GOP nomination. Ayotte lost a brutally close re-election in 2016 to then-Gov. Maggie Hassan. Morse also ran for Senate, in 2022, and was the backup plan for Republican leadership after Sununu declined to run; but Morse lost the primary to the more Trump-friendly Don Bolduc. Morse and Ayotte could be joined by Department of Education Commissioner Frank Edelblut, who narrowly lost the 2016 GOP gubernatorial primary to Sununu and hails from the more libertarian wing of the party, but GOP insiders say it's looking less likely that Edelblut runs. That's good news for Ayotte, who would begin a one-on-one contest with Morse as the favorite.

On the Democratic side, Manchester Mayor Joyce Craig is making her long-anticipated push for governor, but she won't have a clear field, as Executive Councilor Cinde Warmington is also running. Both have support from local party leaders but Craig likely begins with slightly higher name recognition due to her longer time in politics and leadership of the state's largest city. Ideologically the candidates aren't that different, but Craig will have to defend her record on homelessness, while Warmington is already facing questions about her lobbying work for OxyContin maker Purdue in the early 2000s. Toss-up.

**North Carolina. Open; Roy Cooper (D) term-limited. Dec. 15 filing deadline. March 5 primary. May runoff.** In 2022, North Carolina Republicans won a supermajority in the state Senate, took control of the state Supreme Court, and later secured a supermajority in the state House after a Democratic legislator switched parties. Flipping the governor's seat in 2024 would cement the party's control of the Tar Heel State.

But despite Republicans' victories in recent years, North Carolina remains stubbornly purple. And the GOP's likely nominee, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, is one of the party's most controversial figures in state politics, with a long record of bigoted remarks that will be front and center of the race. Attorney General Josh Stein, the likely Democratic nominee, has already featured some of Robinson's comments in his launch video (In

church services Robinson called homosexuality "filth" and suggested that women shouldn't hold leadership roles).

By all the usual metrics — fundraising, endorsements, and early polling — Robinson is the clear frontrunner in the GOP primary. Robinson had \$3.2 million in his campaign account at the end of June, outpacing all of his primary opponents. State Treasurer Dale Folwell had \$1.2 million on hand, and former Rep. Mark Walker had \$500,000 on hand. Over the summer, former state Sen. Andy Wells (who ran against Robinson in the 2020 lieutenant governor's race) and former health care executive Jesse Thomas jumped into the race, and have yet to announce any fundraising numbers.

Meanwhile, most Democrats have coalesced around Stein, who has long been seen as the natural successor to Cooper and announced his gubernatorial campaign early this year. But Stein might have a primary after all, as outgoing state Supreme Court Justice Mike Morgan said he's considering running for governor. A few days after Morgan announced he was stepping down from his seat, Cooper formally endorsed Stein.

Though Democrats have struggled to win federal races in North Carolina in recent years, Cooper has been able to distinguish himself from the national party and run ahead of the party's presidential nominees. Stein will need to replicate that success in 2024 if he hopes to succeed the governor. Toss-up.

**North Dakota. Doug Burgum (R) elected 2016 (77%), re-elected 2020 (77%). April 8 filing deadline.** Burgum is currently waging a longshot bid for president, but if he doesn't catch fire in that race he will likely come back to North Dakota to run for a third term as governor, which he should win easily. If "Burgumentum" does in fact sweep the nation and he stays in the presidential race, the list of potential successors is short, but includes at-large Rep. Kelly Armstrong, Sen. Kevin Cramer, and Lt. Gov. Tammy Miller. Solid Republican.

**Utah. Spencer Cox (R) elected 2020 (63%). March filing deadline. April nominating conventions. June 25 primary.** Cox may not have many fans in the conservative media — Tucker Carlson once called him a "low-IQ weekend MSNBC anchor" and the *National Review* said he supported "radical aspects of left-wing cultural ideology" — but in Utah, he's pretty popular. A recent Noble Predictive Insights poll found his approval rating among Republicans was 61 percent approve/27 percent disapprove (overall it was 53 percent/30 percent). Nobody is champing at the bit to take him on in a primary. Former Rep. Jason Chaffetz, the one-time tea party favorite who left Congress to be a Fox News contributor, has mused about running for governor but doesn't seem enthusiastic about challenging Cox. There's a lot more intrigue surrounding the state's Senate race. Solid Republican.

**Vermont. Phil Scott (R) elected 2016 (53%), re-elected 2018 (55%), 2020 (73%) and 2022 (71%). May 30 filing deadline. August 13 primary.** The direction of this race hinges on whether the wildly popular Scott seeks a fifth two-year term in office. But the stock car driver keeps his cards close to the racing jacket. Scott has always waited until late May of the election year to announce his plans. If he does run, he'll probably face a GOP primary challenge from the right, but he's easily dispatched those in the past. And in the general election it's not clear there's a Democrat who can beat him. But if he doesn't run, Republicans would be hard-pressed to find anyone else who can win the uber-liberal state. Solid Republican.

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**Washington. Open; Jay Inslee (D) not seeking re-election. May 24 filing deadline. August 6 primary.** Democrats have held the governor’s seat in Washington for 40 years — the longest stretch of one-party control in the country. Republicans now have a strong candidate in former Rep. Dave Reichert, a former King County Sheriff who helped catch the “Green River Killer,” but ending the Democrats’ winning streak will be a difficult task.



Courtesy Ferguson Campaign

Bob Ferguson

After Inslee announced his retirement in May, state Attorney General Bob Ferguson and Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz quickly launched campaigns. State Sen. Mark Mullet announced his bid a month later, attempting to position himself as a more moderate alternative to Ferguson and Franz.

Though the primary is a year away, Ferguson appears to be the clear frontrunner — he made a name for himself suing the Trump administration, and is following a well-worn path of Democratic attorneys general ascending to the governor’s seat. He’s picked up endorsements from five of the state’s eight Democratic members of Congress, and has a large fundraising lead. Since he announced his campaign, Ferguson has raised \$3.6 million (including \$1.2 million he transferred from previous campaigns into his gubernatorial campaign account), while Franz has raised \$400,000 and Mullet has raised \$600,000.

Washington’s top-two primary, where all candidates regardless of party run on the same ballot, can result in general election races between two candidates of the same party. But at this point in the race, the most likely general election scenario is a match-up between Ferguson and Reichert, who would almost certainly need to run ahead of the Republican presidential nominee by double-digits. Likely Democratic.

**West Virginia. Open; Jim Justice (R) term-limited. Jan. 27 filing deadline. May 14 primary.** For the first time in the Mountain State’s history, an open GOP primary will almost certainly decide the next governor. After 150 years of highly competitive gubernatorial races, the state’s sharp Republican turn means that the real contest will take place in the primary, with Democrats not expected to mount a serious challenge in the general election.

The already-shifting field of GOP contenders includes state Attorney General Patrick Morrissey, state Del. Moore Capito, state Secretary of State Mac Warner, and auto dealership owner Chris Miller, who is the son of 1st District Rep. Carol Miller. State Auditor J.B. McCuskey was running but dropped out of the race to run for state attorney general.

Morrissey begins as the polling leader, though that’s at least in part due to his higher name recognition; he’s won three statewide elections as attorney general and was also the GOP’s nominee for Senate in 2018. Also benefiting from his name is Capito, who polls in second place and who shares a name both with his mother, Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, and grandfather, former Gov. Arch Moore, Jr., a dominant figure in the

state’s politics for half a century.

Miller, despite his congressional connection, is less well-known than the other candidates who have more political experience. But he’s the best-funded candidate in the field, thanks to his own deep pockets; he’s loaned his campaign \$2.9 million and reported \$3.5 million in the bank on June 30. Morrissey reported \$1.1 million, Capito reported \$948,000, and Warner had just \$196,000. Morrissey may also benefit from ads funded by the anti-tax Club for Growth, which has said it will spend \$10 million to support his bid for governor (the Club has not begun advertising on his behalf yet).

On the Democratic side, 2020 nominee Ben Salango, a Kanawha County Commissioner, has ruled out a bid, leaving Huntington Mayor Steve Williams as the only potential candidate worth mentioning. The three-term mayor and former investment banker is term-limited next year. But he would face an uphill climb in a general election in a state where the GOP presidential nominee could win by 40 points. Solid Republican.



## 2024 Presidential Ratings (Electoral Votes)

Toss-Up (56)			
Arizona (11)	Georgia (16)	Pennsylvania (19)	Wisconsin (10)
<b>Tilt Democratic (21)</b>		<b>Tilt Republican (16)</b>	
Michigan (15)		North Carolina (16)	
Nevada (6)			
<b>Lean Democratic (15)</b>		<b>Lean Republican (31)</b>	
Minnesota (10)	Nebraska 2nd (1)	Florida (30)	
New Hampshire (4)		Maine 2nd (1)	
<b>Likely Democratic (15)</b>		<b>Likely Republican (63)</b>	
Maine Statewide (2)		Iowa (6)	Texas (40)
Virginia (13)		Ohio (17)	
<b>Solid Democratic (196)</b>		<b>Solid Republican (125)</b>	
California (54)	New York (28)	Alabama (9)	Nebraska 1st (1)
Colorado (10)	Oregon (8)	Alaska (3)	Nebraska 3rd (1)
Connecticut (7)	Rhode Island (4)	Arkansas (6)	North Dakota (3)
Delaware (3)	Vermont (3)	Idaho (4)	Oklahoma (7)
District of Columbia (3)	Washington (12)	Indiana (11)	South Carolina (9)
Hawaii (4)		Kansas (6)	South Dakota (3)
Illinois (19)		Kentucky (8)	Tennessee (11)
Maine 1st (1)		Louisiana (8)	Utah (6)
Maryland (10)		Mississippi (6)	West Virginia (4)
Massachusetts (11)		Missouri (10)	Wyoming (3)
New Jersey (14)		Montana (4)	
New Mexico (5)		Nebraska Statewide (2)	
		<b>GOP</b>	<b>DEM</b>
		2020 Results	232
		2024 Ratings	235
		Toss-up	56
		Needed to Win	270

# Louisiana Governor: Democrats Losing Their Grip

By Erin Covey

Gov. John Bel Edwards, a pro-life, pro-gun Catholic from rural Louisiana, is the only Democrat who's won statewide in Louisiana in the past 15 years. Now that he's term-limited, Republicans have a prime opportunity to take control of the governor's mansion — if they can avoid the pitfalls of the 2015 and 2019 races.

For the past two gubernatorial cycles, the GOP has been hampered by fierce intra-party battles and stuck with flawed nominees. Thanks to his conservative credentials, Edwards has effectively capitalized on Republican disarray and assembled a coalition of Democrats, independents, and enough Republicans to win twice in a state that Donald Trump won by double digits in 2016 and 2020.

Once again, Republicans are stuck with a polarizing frontrunner in Attorney General Jeff Landry, a conservative firebrand with a history of ethics issues. But Democrats' candidate, former Transportation Secretary Shawn Wilson, is unlikely to have the same crossover support that Edwards enjoyed — and Republican infighting hasn't reached the same level of rancor that it did in the last two races.

Louisiana's races tend to break late due to the state's unique jungle primary, so there's still time for other Republicans candidates to make a dent into Landry's support, which would work to Wilson's advantage. But with just six weeks until the Oct. 14 primary (and four weeks until early voting starts), that window is quickly shrinking.

## Landry's Early Lead

The attorney general has been a fierce opponent of Edwards over the past seven and a half years, clashing with the governor over issues ranging from LGBTQ rights to the state budget. After Landry announced his campaign, Edwards called Landry "the most extreme and partisan — and extremely partisan — person that I know."

Landry, a former police officer from Acadiana, got his start in GOP politics in 2007, when he ran unsuccessfully for a state Senate seat. Three years later, he won an open congressional seat running as a tea party conservative. After one term in Congress, redistricting forced him into a district with fellow GOP Rep. Charles Boustany Jr., who defeated Landry in the 2012 race. Three years later, Landry unseated Republican Attorney General Buddy Caldwell, a former Democrat who had switched parties in 2011.

Landry has dealt with a series of controversies over the course of his political career. While working for the St. Martin Parish Sheriff's Office, Landry's roommate (another officer) was caught hiding \$10,000 worth of cocaine under their house. In 2020, *The Advocate/The Times-Picayune* reported that firms owned by Landry and his brother had illegally hired undocumented immigrants.

Landry has also faced criticism for funneling campaign funds into a staffing company he owns rather than paying campaign staff directly, making it difficult to track how much he's paid staff over the past several years. And last year, the attorney general was reprimanded by the Louisiana Board of Ethics for using campaign funds to pay off a Chevy suburban.

Initially, the 2023 governor's race looked like a free-for-all, and Landry was one of several prominent Louisiana Republicans eyeing the open seat.

The attorney general launched his campaign last fall and secured an

early endorsement from the state GOP, even as Republican politicians and donors in the state continued to look for an alternative. Then one by one, Landry's most formidable potential opponents announced they wouldn't run in the governor's race — first Sen. Bill Cassidy, followed by Sen. John Kennedy, Lt. Gov. Billy Nungesser, and Rep. Garret Graves.

The anti-Landry contingent of the GOP is now divided between several candidates — former Louisiana Association of Business and Industry president Stephen Waguespack, state Treasurer John Schroder, state Sen. Sharon Hewitt, and state Rep. Richard Nelson. Hunter Lundy,

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## 2024 House Ratings

### Toss-Up (4D, 8R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NY 3 (Santos, R)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NY 4 (D'Esposito, R)
CO 8 (Caraveo, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)
MI 7 (Open; Slotkin, D)	NY 22 (Williams, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

### Tilt Democratic (3D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)

### Tilt Republican (7R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 10 (James, R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

### Lean Democratic (14D)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)
WA 8 (Schrier, D)

### Lean Republican (6R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 1 (LaLota, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	172	168
Likely/Lean/Tilt	25	29
Total	197	197
Toss-up		12
Ohio/North Carolina		29
Needed for majority		218

### Likely Democratic (12D)

CA 49 (Levin, D)	MI 8 (Kildee, D)
FL 9 (Soto, D)	NV 4 (Horsford, D)
FL 23 (Moskowitz, D)	NH 2 (Kuster, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)	TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)	TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
MD 6 (Open; Trone, D)	VA 10 (Wexton, D)

### Likely Republican (12R)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)	MT 1 (Zinke, R)
CA 40 (Kim, R)	PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)	SC 1 (Mace, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)	WI 1 (Steil, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)	WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

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an attorney running as an independent, could also draw support from Republican voters with his mix of economic populism and social conservatism.

Over the summer, polls have shown Landry consistently leading the jungle primary with support in the mid-30s. He's followed by Wilson, whose support is roughly in the mid-20s, while the other candidates are stuck in the single digits.

A mid-August survey from Faucheux Strategies, a nonpartisan firm, showed Landry with 36 percent, followed by Wilson with 26 percent, Lundy with 7 percent, Waguespack with 6 percent, and the rest of the field under 5 percent. Emerson College also polled the race in mid-August, showing Landry with 40 percent, Wilson with 22 percent, Waguespack with 5 percent, and Hewitt with 5 percent.

The attorney general also has a significant fundraising lead over the rest of the field — as of the end of July, he had \$9.15 million in his war chest, while Waguespack came in a distant second place with \$1.85 million on hand.

Over the past several months, Landry has picked up endorsements from a range of Republicans, including Trump and Cassidy (a Trump critic who's lost support among some Republicans in the state).

Some key groups that backed Edwards in previous cycles have also gotten behind the attorney general. The Louisiana Sheriffs' Association, which supported Edwards in 2015 and 2019, endorsed Landry in August. And many of the state's trial lawyers, which have historically been aligned with Democrats, have donated to Landry — *The Advocate/The Times-Picayune* reported that trial lawyers who spent millions supporting Edwards are backing Landry this year.

## GOP Fighting Escalates

For the past several months, Landry, Waguespack, and Schroder have been the only candidates who've spent at least six-figures on TV ads. Lundy, who's able to self-fund his campaign, went on TV with an introductory ad this week.

Landry's campaign has invested more than \$3.7 million on TV, radio, and digital ads, according to AdImpact. The next biggest spender is Reboot Louisiana, a PAC supporting Waguespack, which has spent \$2.8 million on ads since May (though those dollars don't stretch as far since candidates have access to cheaper advertising rates). Schroder has spent \$2.4 million, and Waguespack himself has invested close to \$1 million. Protect Louisiana's Children, the outside group supporting Landry, has spent \$1.5 million.

Waguespack, a former chief of staff to Gov. Bobby Jindal, spent 10 years leading the state's largest business advocacy organization in the state, and some Louisiana Republicans looking for an alternative to Landry had hoped that the well-connected lobbyist could cut into Landry's lead.

The PAC supporting Waguespack has largely aired positive ads attempting to introduce Waguespack, a first-time candidate, to voters. But his polling numbers have remained in the single digits, with the exception of a June poll commissioned by the pro-Waguespack PAC that showed him at 16 percent. Reboot Louisiana also aired one negative spot blaming Landry for the state's crime issues.

In response to Waguespack's attempts to run as a political outsider, the pro-Landry PAC has aired ads reminding Louisianans of Waguespack's ties to Jindal, who left office unpopular for his handling of the state's economic troubles.

Schroder, meanwhile, is accusing both Waguespack and Landry of corruption; the state treasurer's latest spot accuses Waguespack and Jindal of "wrecking our public universities and the state budget" and accuses Landry of misusing campaign funds.

Lundy, the independent candidate, appears to be targeting his message toward more moderate and Democratic-leaning voters — in his initial TV ad, he talks about raising the minimum wage and addressing pollution from oil and gas companies. This approach could pull support away from Wilson, who's yet to air any TV ads.

## Democrats' Narrow Path

Wilson's path to victory depends on a Republican "car crash," as one Democratic operative put it. But Republican infighting has been relatively subdued, compared to the 2015 and 2019 races.

Eight years ago, then-Sen. David Vitter was hammered by his Republican opponents for his 2007 involvement with a prostitution ring in D.C. — a scandal that didn't prevent him from winning re-election in 2010, but forced him to air a TV ad acknowledging the affair in the final weeks of the gubernatorial race. One Republican candidate, Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne, went as far as endorsing Edwards in the runoff between him and Vitter.

Edwards' double-digit victory in 2015 was also propelled by backlash to Jindal, whose approval rating had plummeted to the low 30s.

Four years later, GOP Rep. Ralph Abraham was edged out of the runoff by businessman Eddie Rispone, who hammered the congressman from the right and accused him of being disloyal to Trump. The 2019 runoff was much closer, despite Edwards running as the incumbent, and he defeated Rispone by just 3 points.

Wilson will have his own challenges replicating Edwards' success regardless of the GOP's divisions. Unlike Edwards, Wilson has campaigned as a pro-choice Democrat much more in line with the national party.

And the racial dynamics are impossible to ignore in a state as polarized as Louisiana, where about 90 percent of Black voters typically vote for Democrats, and about 75 percent of White voters tend to support Republicans. While nearly one-third of the state's population is Black, Louisiana hasn't had a Black governor since Reconstruction, when P. B. S. Pinchback briefly served as acting governor in the early 1870s.

Wilson, who is Black, will need to turn out support from Black voters while persuading at least 30 percent of White voters to support him. Edwards, who is White, is the only Louisiana Democrat in recent years who's garnered that level of support from White voters.

## The Bottom Line

While national Republicans are confident that the race is moving in their direction, they're not taking it for granted — the Republican Governors Association just placed a seven-figure ad buy attacking Wilson. In 2015, outside groups didn't start hitting Edwards until after the October primary.

Meanwhile, national Democratic resources are scarce. The Democratic Governors Association is focused on races in Kentucky and Mississippi, and has yet to go on the air in the Pelican State.

With 16 candidates on the ballot, it's unlikely that anyone will win the majority needed to avoid the runoff, which is scheduled for Nov. 18. The most likely scenario by far is a race between Landry and Wilson, who'd be the clear underdog.

Inside Elections is moving this race from Lean Republican to Likely Republican.



# Kentucky Governor Shifts Toward Democrats

By Jacob Rubashkin

The general election campaign in Kentucky is more than halfway complete, with less than three months remaining before voters head to the polls to choose their commonwealth's next chief executive.

And in the three months since Republicans nominated state Attorney General Daniel Cameron to take on Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, Cameron has struggled to leverage Kentucky's partisan lean against the popular incumbent.

President Joe Biden is unpopular in Kentucky, but that isn't dragging Beshear down. Most Kentuckians approve of the job he's doing, and he has a persistent lead in public and private polling. And as Beshear and Cameron head into the final turn, the Democrat has a hefty financial advantage over his opponent.

While the race is still highly competitive, and will continue to be given the deep red hue of the Bluegrass State — President Donald Trump won it, 62-36 percent, in 2020 — it doesn't look like a toss-up anymore. Inside Elections is moving this race to Tilt Democratic.

## High Approval Rating

One thing that Democrats and Republican operatives agree on is that Beshear is very popular. Thanks to his prominent role shepherding the state through the Covid-19 pandemic and a series of natural disasters, Beshear is universally known, and enjoys high approval ratings and personal image ratings.

A Public Policy Polling (D) survey from Aug. 9-10, commissioned by the Beshear campaign, found his image rating at 56 percent favorable/40 percent unfavorable, and his job rating at 58 percent approve/39 percent disapprove.

And it's not just Democratic polls. A Public Opinion Strategies (R) survey from June found Beshear's job rating at 63 percent approve/35 percent disapprove; even 38 percent of Republicans approved of his performance. And a May poll from Cygnal (R) pegged Beshear's image rating at 55 percent favorable/41 percent unfavorable.

Beshear won't win all of the voters who approve of the job he's doing. Polling shows that a segment of the electorate likes what he's done as governor but, in an era of increased polarization, won't vote for

any Democrat for governor, especially one facing an opponent who is well-regarded by his own party and has a decent image statewide. But Beshear doesn't need to win all of those voters, just most of them. And



Courtesy Commonwealth of Kentucky

Daniel Cameron

it's far easier to win a voter that approves of your performance than one who is unsatisfied.

Governors typically win re-election — data from the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers and Larry Sabato's *Crystal Ball*

indicate that 74 percent of governors around the country have won re-election over the last 80 years, a figure that goes up when not including governors who lose their primary. And the governors that fall short are usually unpopular heading into their re-election, while popular governors seldom lose.

In 2022, 28 governors sought re-election in the face of economic concerns and criticism for their handling of Covid-19, and just one, Steve Sisolak of Nevada, lost his race. His image was several points underwater (his disapproval rating was higher than his approval) in several polls heading into Election Day.

In 2020, no incumbent governors lost re-election. And in 2018, 20 incumbents sought re-election and just four lost. One lost in his primary, and two others, Illinois' Bruce Rauner and Alaska's Bill Walker, were deeply unpopular. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's image was either even or underwater, depending on the poll.

In Kentucky, two governors have lost re-election since 1992, when it became legal for governors to run for consecutive terms. Both elections involved Beshears.

In 2007, Republican Gov. Ernie Fletcher lost in a landslide to Democrat Steve Beshear (the current governor's father). Fletcher was embroiled in a patronage scandal during which he had pardoned nine administration officials facing criminal charges, and his approval rating dipped below 30 percent before it rebounded to a still-anemic 42 percent approve/48 percent disapprove in a September Louisville Courier-Journal poll.

And in 2019, Andy Beshear himself unseated an incumbent, Republican Matt Bevin, whose job approval was also underwater on Election Day and who faced a spirited primary challenge earlier that year.

## The Money Advantage

Beshear has a significant financial advantage over Cameron, thanks to his own fundraising prowess and robust support from national Democrats. Beshear had at least \$6.2 million in the bank across two accounts on June 15. Cameron had around \$15,000 at that same time after spending \$1.5 million to win the primary.

Beshear has spent \$10.1 million on general election advertising since the beginning of the year, and also benefited from \$5.8 million in

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## Podcast Episode 4

Nathan, Jacob and Erin discuss the impact of the first presidential debate on the GOP primary, the Nevada Senate race, and the upcoming special election in Utah. The Inside Elections podcast is sponsored by George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management.

Available to listen  
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spending from Defending Bluegrass Values, a group affiliated with the Democratic Governors Association.

Cameron, meanwhile, has spent just \$930,000 on advertising since the primary election, and has largely relied on outside groups funded by the Republican Governors Association (to the tune of \$5.3 million), the Club for Growth (\$1.5 million) and a nonprofit that does not disclose its donors called the Concord Group (\$1.4 million).

Overall, Democratic groups have outspent their GOP counterparts by nearly 2-to-1 thus far. And Beshear and the DGA are set to keep up the pace, with another \$15 million in TV ad reservations planned through Election Day, according to AdImpact. Cameron and his allies at the RGA and the Club for Growth have booked just \$2.6 million so far; Cameron's campaign has not booked any advertising after August (though that will change).

## Head-to-Head Polling

The limited head-to-head polling of the race shows Beshear with a persistent lead over Cameron.

An Aug. 9-10 registered voter poll from Public Policy Polling commissioned by the Beshear campaign found Beshear ahead of Cameron by 8 points, 49-41 percent. Two polls from Republican pollster Public Opinion Strategies over the summer also found Beshear with a lead: a June 22-29 poll commissioned by the education non-profit Prichard Committee found Beshear ahead of Cameron by 10 points, 52-42 percent, while a July 19-20 poll by the same firm for the Republican State Legislative Committee found Beshear's lead to be just 4 points, 49-45 percent. Cameron's best set of polls came in May, when his own pollster, co/efficient, found him trailing by 2 points, 45-43 percent, and GOP polling firm Cygnal found the race tied at 47 percent.

Republicans have lobbed \$9 million in attack ads against Beshear on a variety of topics, including transgender issues and early release of inmates during the pandemic, and many of those spots also link Beshear to Biden. But the ad campaign hasn't appeared to drag down Beshear's image rating or his position in the head-to-head race. It's not obvious that another two and a half months of advertising will accomplish what the last three months didn't do.

To the extent there are some warning signs for Beshear, it's in his absolute levels of support, not his margin over Cameron. Unlike in 2019, when a Libertarian candidate won 2 percent of the vote, the ballot will feature only Beshear and Cameron, meaning the Democrat will have to

capture a majority of the vote to win re-election, not just the 49.2 percent that ensured his victory last time.

Even Beshear's best polls only peg his support in the low 50s, and more often he is in the high 40s. And the undecided voters are bound to lean significantly more Republican. Beshear is well-known, popular, and has enjoyed a significant spending advantage — voters who are still on the fence are going to be hard for him to persuade.

Consider a poll that Beshear's allies at the DGA released ahead of the annual Fancy Farm confab in August. The PPP survey tested just the eight counties of the Kentucky Purchase, the conservative westernmost part of the commonwealth. The poll found Cameron leading Beshear by just 6 points, 47-41 percent, and noted that in 2019, Beshear lost the Purchase by 20 points.

But Beshear's 41 percent is only slightly ahead of his own 2019 performance in the Purchase, when he won 38 percent of the vote, and in line with 2015 Democratic nominee Jack Conway's performance in the region, when he won 40 percent. (Trump won the Purchase in 2020, 71-27 percent.) And while the poll found Beshear's image strong at 54 percent favorable/42 percent unfavorable, it also found Cameron similarly situated at 49 percent favorable/35 percent unfavorable.

Beshear doesn't need to win the Purchase — or come anywhere close — to win re-election. And he won't need to break even with undecided voters either. But he can't afford to lose all of them, or lose many of the people who currently support him. It's a better position than Cameron's, especially given the governor's financial advantages, but it's not one of overwhelming strength.

## The Bottom Line

Even though he has a narrow advantage in the final weeks, Beshear has little room for error and could still lose the race.

Republicans watching the race acknowledge that Cameron had a slow start after a bruising and expensive primary, but believe he's growing into his role at the top of the ticket; GOP strategists are heartened that Beshear rarely polls above 50 percent despite his high job approval, and believe Cameron will win the lion's share of undecided voters on Election Day. But he has more work to do and less time to do it.

Republicans should also be concerned that their attacks using transgender issues and other polarizing topics weren't immediately effective in Kentucky, considering the GOP will have to win in more competitive states next year when trying to take back the Senate. **IE**

*Mississippi, Continued from page 1*

from northeast Mississippi with a record of appealing to Republicans and white voters. State Attorney General Jim Hood had won four statewide elections, all by double digits, and was the only remaining Democrat in a top state position in the entire deep South by the time he finally ran for governor.

Polls showed a close race with Hood often in the lead, but the Democrat struggled to capture more than 46 percent of the vote in even his own surveys. Republicans eventually consolidated behind Reeves — who had to compete in a contentious primary runoff — and turned their sights on Hood, tarring him as a liberal in the vein of former President Barack Obama, 2016 presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, and Rep. Bennie Thompson.

Ultimately, Hood did win 46 percent of the vote, but little more than that, losing to Reeves 52-47 percent.

## An Emphasis on Black Voters

Voting in the state is highly racially polarized, and Presley can probably expect to win upward of 90 percent support from Black voters. His challenge will be boosting the Black share of the electorate to its fullest extent; to get a majority of the popular vote, Presley will likely need Black voters to make up a little more than a third of the electorate.

While Black residents make up a higher share of Mississippi's population than any other state (38 percent), they are underrepresented in the electorate and generally make up around 30-32 percent of voters. Black voters have historically faced hurdles in Mississippi, and a recent analysis suggested that 16 percent of all Black Mississippians have lost the right to vote under the state's strict felon-disenfranchisement law; much of that law was overturned this month but the state intends to appeal.

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The last two Democrats to achieve the composition of the electorate that Presley is targeting, around 35 percent, were Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election, and Mike Espy in the 2018 Senate special election. Both were Black candidates running in races with historical implications; Presley is white.

Conversely, Hood, who is white, struggled to motivate Black voters in the 2019 race. He had a poor relationship with Thompson, who did not endorse him, and focused more of his efforts on winning over the more conservative white voters who had backed him in the past. That strategy worked to an extent, and Hood did better among white voters than Espy and other Democrats, but most of those voters abandoned him anyway after backing his bids for attorney general.

A post-election analysis from NBC found that “[i]n Mississippi counties where white residents outnumber African Americans, 2019 turnout was down just 3 percent versus [2018] and Hood took 39 percent, up from Espy’s 37 percent. But in Mississippi counties where African American residents outnumber whites, 2019 turnout was down 8 percent and Hood took just 68 percent, down from Espy’s 69 percent.”

Presley’s allies maintain that the Democrat is focused squarely on winning over Black voters, and note Thompson’s day-one endorsement of Presley. And Democratic strategists believe that distaste for Reeves is significantly higher among Black voters now than before Reeves was an incumbent, giving Presley an opening. The Democrat often attacks Reeves in personal terms as an out-of-touch elitist and contrasts the wealthy Republican (who loaned his campaign \$1.3 million during the 2019 race) with his own hardscrabble upbringing.

But Presley also has to keep margins among white voters closer than any other Democrat has. Biden won just 18 percent of Mississippi white voters in 2020. Hood ran slightly better, winning close to a quarter of the white vote. Even if Presley gets the higher levels of Black turnout he is hoping for, he will still have to win close to 30 percent of the white vote to claim a majority.

## A Change in the Law

Democratic strategists are quick to point out a significant change in Mississippi election law that they believe will help Presley. Until this year, winning a gubernatorial election in Mississippi required not only winning a majority of the popular vote, but also winning a majority of the state’s 122 state House districts. If no candidate did both, then the state House would select a winner among the two candidates.

In 2020, Mississippi’s voters replaced the old election law with a more straightforward general election process that leads to a runoff if no candidate receives a majority of the vote.

The old system was originally implemented at the turn of the 20th century explicitly to dilute the power of Black voters, who were geographically concentrated. It has only come into effect once, in the 1999 gubernatorial race between Democrat Ronnie Musgrove and Republican Michael Parker. Musgrove led the popular vote, 49.5-48.6 percent, and each candidate carried 61 of 122 state House districts; the Democratic-controlled House elected Musgrove.

But given political shifts, by 2019 the system made it very difficult for a Democrat to win a gubernatorial race. In 2015, even as Hood won statewide by 11 points, he carried only 66 state House districts, just four more than he needed to avoid a contingent election in the GOP-dominated state House. In other words, anything less than a double-digit popular vote win for a Democrat was likely insufficient to win. In 2019, Hood won

46 percent of the vote but just 40 percent of the state House districts.

Presley’s allies say the old law prevented Hood from raising more money and motivating more voters because his path to victory was so slim, and that the public service commissioner doesn’t have the same burden.

Some of that discussion feels revisionist. Plenty of Democrats saw Hood as a legitimate, viable candidate even within the old electoral system, and the Democratic Governors Association spent \$2.4 million on his behalf, money the national party would not have spent if it saw the race as a lost cause. But it’s true that not having to navigate the “electoral college” system is a clear advantage Presley has over Hood. (The DGA has funneled \$750,000 to the Presley campaign so far.)

## Latest Polling

A recent internal polling memo from the Presley campaign shows the race between Presley and Reeves tied, with both candidates receiving 46 percent of the vote.

The poll, conducted by Impact Research, was fielded from Aug. 6-9, and polled 600 likely voters with a margin of error of 4 percent. The poll’s sample reflects the Republican nature of the state, with a recalled 2020 vote of Donald Trump 56-40 percent and a 17-point GOP party ID advantage (Mississippi voters do not register with a party).

Reeves’ own polling — albeit not earlier this summer — shows a dramatically different race. A July 7 memo from OnMessage Inc. for the Reeves campaign showed the incumbent leading Presley by 17 points, 49-32 percent.

Several polls commissioned earlier in the year by local news sites *Mississippi Today* and *Magnolia Tribune* found Reeves ahead by smaller margins. An April 16-20 *Mississippi Today* / Siena College poll put Reeves ahead, 48-39 percent, while a March 6-10 *Magnolia Tribune* / Mason-Dixon Polling survey had Reeves up, 46-39 percent.

The new Presley poll is the only publicized survey of the race since the Democrat began advertising on TV in the second week of July. But it also came out of the field right before Reeves began airing negative TV ads; since August 10, Reeves has attacked Presley as an extreme liberal by tying him to Biden, Thompson, and the Democratic Governors Association. The state of the race could be different after three weeks of anti-Presley advertising — Republican strategists certainly think it is — but the data available points to a close race.

## The Bottom Line

The election is now in full swing, with both candidates engaged on air with positive and negative TV ads. Each candidate has even run ads responding to the negative ads launched by the other side — Reeves on the welfare scandal attack, and Presley on a GOP spot that says he supports surgery for transgender minors.

Up until now, the two candidates have been relatively evenly matched on TV. Reeves has spent \$3.5 million on TV ads, while Presley has spent \$2.8 million. But that could change soon, since Reeves begins the general election with a significant financial advantage. He reported \$7.4 million in the bank on August 1, compared to just \$1.5 million for Presley.

As he did four years ago against Hood, Reeves will look to stymie any momentum Presley has by linking him to the national Democratic Party and pushing his numbers down with white voters.

Reeves is still the favorite, but this race is more competitive than previously thought. We’re changing the rating from Likely Republican to Lean Republican.

