

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## Arizona Senate: Open Seat Battle

By Jacob Rubashkin

Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema's decision not to seek re-election transforms Arizona's upcoming election from a unique three-way contest, to a more conventional but still highly competitive race.

And a blockbuster ruling from the state Supreme Court effectively instituting a near-total ban on abortion has only multiplied the attention being paid to the swing state's Senate race, as well as its top-tier presidential and House contests.

Senate Democrats are on defense in a half-dozen states that have trended away from the party over the past decade. But in Arizona, they are looking to keep up momentum built over the past six years, and the state court's ruling could be a further shot in the arm heading into the general election.

Whichever candidate wins this seat will be a significant break from its current occupant, who has strived to position herself in the middle of the chamber to the frustration of many of her colleagues. A win by Democrat Ruben Gallego would bring his party one step closer to abolishing the filibuster. A win by his likely opponent, Kari Lake, would add to the growing ranks of Trump loyalists in the Senate that have little connection to leadership.

### The Lay of the Land

Once a reliably Republican state at the federal level, Arizona has quickly transformed into a top-tier battleground. The harbinger was a hotly contested 3-point GOP Senate victory in 2012, followed by Donald Trump's 3.5-point victory in the 2016 election, and then Democrats began a hot streak in 2018 that has yet to let up.

Joe Biden's 49.4 percent of the vote in the 2020 presidential election was the largest share for a Democrat since Harry Truman in 1948, and he was only the second Democrat to carry the state since that year.

Since 2018, Democrats have won three straight Senate races (2018, 2020, and 2022), a presidential race (2020), and flipped three top statewide offices in a midterm election. Prior to Sinema's party switch, Arizona had two Democratic senators and a Democratic governor for the first time since 1950.

Ground zero for the state's shift has been Maricopa County, home to Phoenix and slightly more than 60 percent of the state's population. The rapidly growing and diversifying county was traditionally Republican, but Biden carried Maricopa by 3 points, the first Democrat to do so in 72 years.

At 32 percent non-White Hispanic, Arizona's population is among the most Hispanic of any state. But the substantial gains that Trump made

*Continued on page 5*

## 2024 Senate Ratings

### Toss-Up (3)

AZ Open (Sinema, I) Tester (D-Mont.)  
Brown (D-Ohio)

### Tilt Democratic (3) Tilt Republican

MI Open (Stabenow, D)  
Casey (D-Penn.)  
Rosen (D-Nev.)

### Lean Democratic (1) Lean Republican

Baldwin (D-Wis.)

### Likely Democratic (1) Likely Republican (1)

MD Open (Cardin, D) Cruz (R-Texas)

### Solid Democratic (14) Solid Republican (11)

CA Open (Butler, D) IN Open (Braun, R)  
DE Open (Carper, D) UT Open (Romney, R)  
Cantwell (D-Wash.) WV Open (Manchin, D)  
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) Barrasso (R-Wyo.)  
Heinrich (D-N.M.) Blackburn (R-Tenn.)  
Hirono (D-Hawaii) Cramer (R-N.D.)  
Kaine (D-Va.) Fischer (R-Neb.)  
King (I-Maine) Hawley (R-Mo.)  
Klobuchar (D-Minn.) Ricketts (R-Neb.)  
Menendez (D-N.J.) Scott (R-Fla.)  
Murphy (D-Conn.) Wicker (R-Miss.)  
Sander (I-Vt.)  
Warren (D-Mass.)  
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

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

## CALENDAR

<b>April 20</b>	NBA Playoffs begin
<b>April 23</b>	Pennsylvania Primary
<b>April 30</b>	New York's 26th District Special Election
<b>May 7</b>	Indiana Primary
<b>May 14</b>	Maryland, Nebraska & West Virginia Primaries
<b>May 21</b>	Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Oregon Primaries

# Report Shorts

**California's 16th District.** As it stands, three Democrats will progress to the general election, after Santa Clara Supervisor Joe Simitian and state Assemblyman Evan Low tied for second place in the March 5 primary (former San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo finished first). But a potential recount could change that. Joe Biden won the Silicon Valley district with 75 percent in 2020, and obviously no Republican made the general election. Solid Democratic.

**Colorado's 4th District Special.** Republicans chose former Parker mayor Greg Lopez to be their nominee in the race to fill the remainder of GOP Rep. Ken Buck's term. Lopez has some baggage but is still the favorite against Democrat Trish Cavalese in the June 25 special election. The district covers most of western Colorado and President Donald Trump won it with 57 percent in 2020. Lopez is not running in the regular primary, also taking place on June 25, in a crowded GOP race that includes 3rd District Rep. Lauren Boebert. Solid Republican.

**New Hampshire's 2nd District.** The race to replace retiring Democratic Rep. Annie Kuster is taking shape. Former Executive Councilor Colin Van Ostern is the only announced Democrat and secured an endorsement from Kuster. State Sen. Becky Whitely has formed an exploratory committee, and White House aide Maggie Goodlander is also considering a bid. Republican Vikram Mansharamani is the only announced GOP candidate — the author and business consultant placed fourth in the 2022 GOP Senate primary. Likely Democratic.

**New York's 16th District.** A March 26-30 Mellman poll for Democratic Majority for Israel found Westchester County Executive George Latimer ahead of Rep. Jamaal Bowman, 52-35 percent. DMFI PAC supports Latimer. The primary is June 25. Solid Democratic.

**New York's 22nd District.** A March 25-27 GBAO survey commissioned by state Sen. John Mannion's campaign found the former schoolteacher outpacing DeWitt town councilor Sarah Klee Hood, 42-20 percent, in the June 25 Democratic primary. Law professor Clem Harris took another 9 percent. The winner will be a slight favorite against GOP Rep. Brandon Williams. Tilt Democratic. 

## 2024 House Ratings

### Toss-Up (5D, 5R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NC 1 (Davis, D)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NY 4 (D'Esposito, R)
CO 8 (Caraveo, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)
MI 7 (Open; Slotkin, D)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

### Tilt Democratic (8D, 1R)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
MI 8 (Open; Kildee, D)
NY 22 (Williams, R)
OH 13 (Sykes, D)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)
VA 7 (Open; Spanberger, D)

### Tilt Republican (9R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
CA 41 (Calvert, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

### Lean Democratic (7D)

CT 5 (Hayes, D)	NH 1 (Pappas, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)	NY 18 (Ryan, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)	PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)	

### Lean Republican (8R)

CO 3 (Open; Boebert, R)	MT 1 (Zinke, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)	NY 1 (LaLota, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)
MI 10 (James, R)	TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

### Likely Democratic (16D, 2R)

AL 2 (Open; Moore, R)	OH 1 (Landsman, D)
CA 49 (Levin, D)	OR 4 (Hoyle, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)	OR 6 (Salinas, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)	TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
LA 6 (Graves, R)	VA 10 (Open; Wexton, D)
MD 6 (Open; Trone, D)	WA 8 (Schrier, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)	
NH 2 (Open; Kuster, D)	
NV 1 (Titus, D)	
NV 3 (Lee, D)	
NV 4 (Horsford, D)	
NY 3 (Suoizzi, D)	

### Likely Republican (8R, 3D)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)	NC 14 (Open; Jackson, D)
CA 40 (Kim, R)	PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)	SC 1 (Mace, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)	WI 1 (Steil, R)
NC 6 (Open; Manning, D)	WI 3 (Van Orden, R)
NC 13 (Open; Nickel, D)	

	GOP	DEM
Solid	188	175
Likely/Lean/Tilt	28	34
Total	216	209
Toss-up		10
Needed for majority		218

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

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# 2024 Presidential Battlegrounds: Michigan

By Bradley Wascher

Michigan will host competitive House and Senate races this November, but it is also a top presidential battleground.

Former President Donald Trump carried the Wolverine State by two-tenths of a point in 2016, and then lost it by almost 3 points in 2020. But he boasts a consistent — yet very narrow — lead in early polls against President Joe Biden. Inroads made by Democrats after the 2018 and 2022 midterms will be crucial to keeping the state's 15 electoral votes in their party's column, while the GOP will hope to remind white working class voters why they first fell in love with Trump eight years ago.

## Michigan in Recent Elections

Trump in 2016 became the first Republican to carry Michigan since George H.W. Bush 28 years earlier. Along with Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, the Wolverine State had been foundational to Democrats' "blue wall" strategy in the Electoral College. But Trump's close win over Hillary Clinton — by just 10,704 votes, or 0.2 points, the smallest percent margin of any state in 2016 — was a remarkable flip following Barack Obama's 16-point and 9-point walkovers in 2008 and 2012.

Democrats bounced back in 2018. Democratic women flipped Michigan's three statewide offices — winning the gubernatorial, secretary of state, and attorney general races by an average of 7 points, the same margin as Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow elsewhere on the ballot — and the party also picked up two House districts and 10 state legislative seats. In 2020, Michigan swung back toward Democrats in the Electoral College, with Biden finishing ahead of Trump by 154,000 votes, or nearly 3 points.

Democrats found more success in 2022, when national issues including abortion and election denialism played out directly in the state and proved costly for Republicans. Democrats not only swept the statewide races again — this time winning the three row offices by an average of 11 points — but also flipped both chambers of the Michigan Legislature (which had been recently redrawn under fairer lines by the state's new redistricting commission), cementing the party's first trifecta in Michigan since the 1980s. The Michigan GOP has meanwhile experienced its own internal strife.

According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline, a typical Democrat is expected to earn 51.1 percent in Michigan, while a typical Republican is expected to earn 46.1 percent.

## Wayne County and the Uncommitted Vote

One of the most important counties in Michigan for Democrats is Wayne County. The largest county by population in the state, it includes the city of Detroit and its close-in suburbs. Wayne County has historically been a major source of Democratic votes in statewide elections, voting Democratic at the presidential level in every election since 1928 — meaning turnout here is key.

While Obama defeated Mitt Romney by 380,000 votes in Wayne County in 2012, Clinton's margin in 2016 was only 291,000 votes; this 91,000-vote dropoff was almost nine times as large as Trump's 10,700-vote margin statewide. The Clinton campaign notoriously paid very little attention to Michigan throughout the campaign, as it did not air television ads until the final week and booked few public appearances compared to other battleground states.

In 2020, Democrats put more attention toward boosting turnout, especially among Black voters. (38 percent of Wayne County's residents are Black, the highest share of any county in Michigan.) Approximately 100,000

more votes were cast here compared to 2016, and Biden defeated Trump by 332,000 votes in Wayne County on the back of this higher turnout.

The war in Gaza has resonated especially strongly here. According to 2022 ACS calculations and Arab American Institute estimates, 392,733 people in Michigan (2.2 percent) have Arab ancestry, the highest share of any state. Wayne County, which itself has 7 percent Arab ancestry, is home to more than half of Michigan's Arab population.

Presidential primary voters in Michigan have the option to cast their ballot for "uncommitted" in place of an actual candidate. In the lead-up to the 2024 Democratic primary in February, a campaign emerged to vote for "uncommitted" as a protest warning against President Biden's handling of the war in Gaza. In total, 101,000 "uncommitted" ballots — including that of Democratic Rep. Rashida Tlaib — were cast statewide, earning 13 percent and two delegates. Wayne County cast 26,000 votes (17 percent) for "uncommitted." A *New York Times* analysis found that "uncommitted" earned 79 percent in the county's majority-Arab precincts, including in communities like Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, and Hamtramck.

It's unlikely this group alone could make the difference in November based on available evidence. Put simply, Biden's 154,000-vote margin in 2020 is still greater than the 101,000 protest votes cast in February, and it's hard to imagine all of those voters staying home plus another 50,000 defecting. Still, it's notable that the president is facing such vocal discontent from a sizable share of his party's supporters.

## Democratic and Republican Opportunities

Oakland County, north of Detroit, is the second largest county in the state. Fifty-one percent of adults have a bachelor's degree, according to the 2022 ACS — 14 points higher than the national average. In 1996, Bill Clinton became the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry the county since Lyndon Johnson, and it hasn't voted for a GOP nominee since: it backed Hillary Clinton by 8 points in 2016 and Biden by 14 points in 2020. Whitmer carried Oakland County by 17 points in 2018 and 23 points in 2022. Its Democratic Baseline is 57 percent and its Republican Baseline is 40.9 percent.

Kent County, which includes the city of Grand Rapids and some surrounding suburbs, is traditionally Republican turf that has shifted swiftly toward Democrats in recent elections. It voted Romney+8 in 2012, Trump+3 in 2016, Whitmer+4 in 2018, Biden+6 in 2020, and Whitmer+10 in 2022 — and was one of only five counties statewide where Clinton ran ahead of Obama. This lurch to the left was partially driven by the county's high college education level: 39 percent of adults in Kent County have a college degree, well above the statewide average of 32 percent. It is the fourth most populous county in the state, and favors Democrats by 3.8 points according to Baseline.

Washtenaw County, the sixth most populous county, is home to two major colleges, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. It has the highest percentage of adults with a college degree in the state, 58 percent. This was another place with a high protest vote against Biden's handling of the war in Gaza: 17 percent picked "uncommitted," tied for the highest share of any county in Michigan. The typical Democrat is expected to earn 72.1 percent here.

Trump's strength with white working class voters was seen throughout the state eight years ago. Seventy-eight of Michigan's 83

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counties shifted to the right from 2012 to 2016, and a dozen flipped from Obama to Trump between those elections.

One such Obama-Trump county was Macomb County, the third largest county in the state. It voted for Obama by 9 points in 2008 and 4 points in 2012, then for Trump by 11.5 points in 2016 and 8 points in 2020, but it went for Whitmer by 3.5 points in 2018 and 5 points in 2022. According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline, the typical Democrat is expected to earn 49 percent and the typical Republican is expected to earn 48.7 percent, which would put Macomb County among the top 12 most evenly-divided counties in the nation, based on our preliminary calculations. This will be one of the most important counties to watch in November.

All the way west is Muskegon County. A Republican presidential nominee hasn't won here since George H.W. Bush, but it's become increasingly competitive in recent elections. It voted Obama+29 in 2008, Obama+11 in 2012, Clinton+1.5 in 2016, and Biden+0.6 in 2020. The only Republican to carry Muskegon County in a statewide election since 2016 was now-Rep. John James, who won the county by half a point — 445 votes — in the 2020 Senate race that he ultimately lost by 1.7 points statewide. Per Baseline, Democrats typically beat Republicans by 6.5 points (51.5 percent Democrat vs. 45 percent Republican).

## Other Places to Watch

Ahead of 2020, attention was paid to Genesee County, where the Democratic margin dropped from Obama+28 in 2012 to Clinton+9.5 in 2016. Biden ended up carrying the county by a near-identical margin of 9.3 points. Although no candidate has reached Obama's highs here, multiple statewide Democrats did notch 20-point wins in both midterm years. One-fifth of Genesee County's population is Black, the second-highest share of any county in the state. It is the fifth-largest county in the state overall, containing the city of Flint. Democrats have a 16-point

advantage according to Baseline.

Saginaw County shares some similarities with Genesee County, its southeastern neighbor, although Saginaw has a lower population and is even more competitive. The county voted for Obama by 17 points in 2008 and by 12 points in 2012, then flipped to Trump by 1.1 percent in 2016 and back to Biden narrowly in 2020. But Whitmer carried it by nearly 8 points in both 2018 and 2022, and it has voted for the Democrat in every statewide election since 2018. 18 percent of the county's population is Black, the third-highest in the state. Democrats have a 4.5-point advantage in Baseline (51 percent Democrat vs. 46.5 percent Republican).

Bay County, where 87 percent of residents are white and 22 percent have a bachelor's degree, voted for Trump by around 12 points in both 2016 and 2020. He was the first Republican to carry the county since Ronald Reagan. But Bay County has still been slightly favorable for Democrats in midterm cycles, voting by 3 points for Whitmer in both 2018 and 2022. Republicans have a narrow edge in Baseline of 1.8 points (47.5 percent Democrat vs. 49.2 percent Republican).

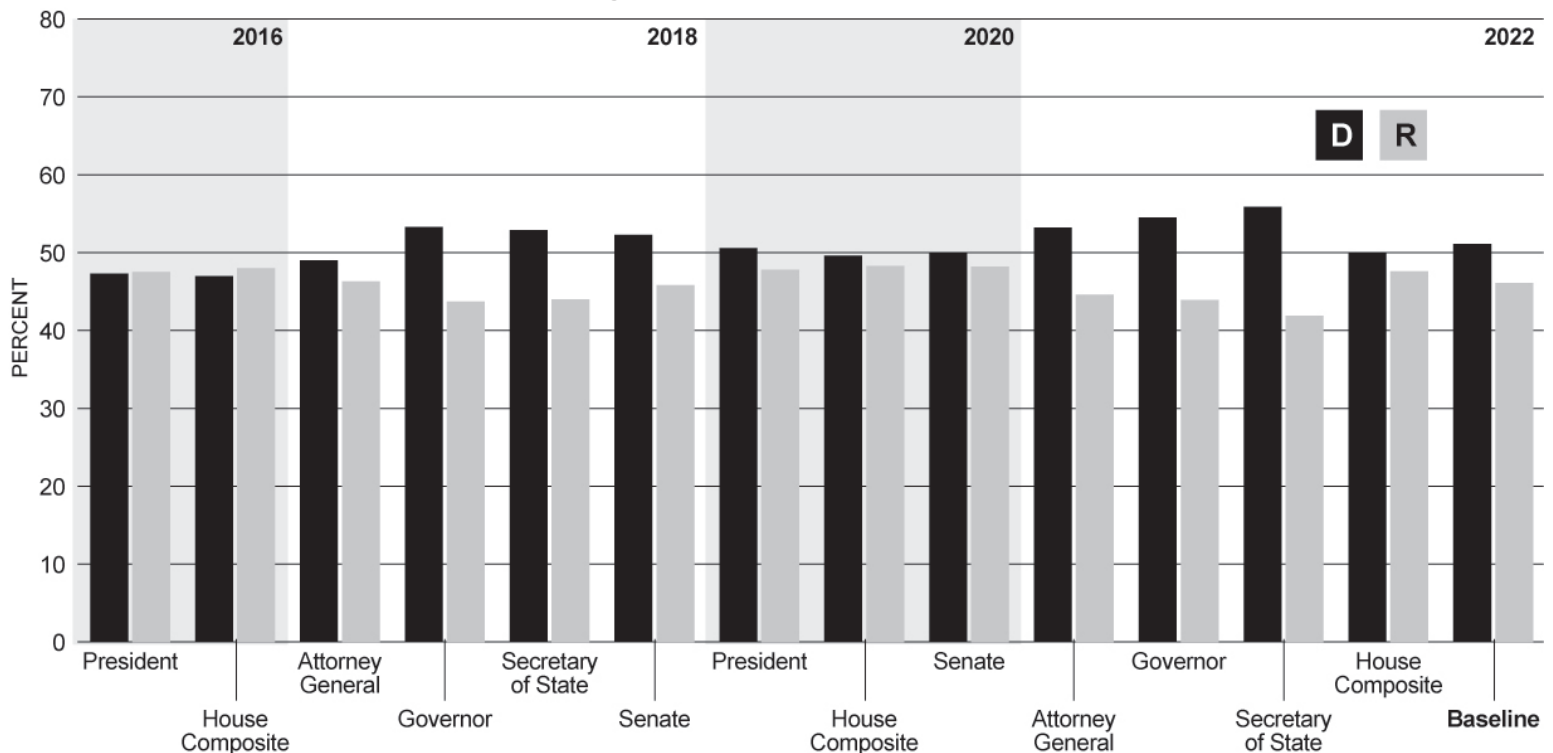
Less than a hundred miles west, Isabella County has a similar story. Although Trump flipped the county in favor of the GOP in 2016 for the first time since the 1980s and then carried it again in 2020, Democrats continue to win here by around 5 points in midterm contests. One difference from Bay County is that a higher share of Isabella County's population, 31 percent, have a bachelor's degree. The typical Democrat is expected to earn 48.3 percent and the typical Republican is expected to earn 48.5 percent, which would make Isabella County the eighth most evenly-divided county in the nation, according to Baseline.

## Polls

In recent Michigan polls, Trump is leading by approximately 3 points. The RealClearPolitics average shows Trump+2.6 while the Decision Desk

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## Statewide Election Results for Michigan



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HQ / The Hill average is Trump+2.8. CNN/SSRS found Trump up 8 points, 50–42 percent, in mid-March, while Quinnipiac reported Trump ahead by 3 percent, 48–45 percent, and Morning Consult / Bloomberg saw an even race.

It's worth acknowledging the perception that Michigan polls have "missed" in recent presidential cycles. Polls in 2016 showed Clinton ahead here by about 4 points, although Trump would go on to win by two-tenths of a point; polls in 2020 suggested a Biden lead of around 8 points, overshooting his eventual margin by five points. The 2016 error was due in part to deeper flaws in polling methodology that pollsters sought to fix before the next election, while much of the error in 2020 seemed fairly normal albeit large. But some amount of survey error between election years is purely random, so it's improper to assume that the polls will flop in one state just because they did last time.

(Instead, for a true example of an epic polling fail in the Wolverine State, look no further than the 2016 Democratic primary.)

## The Bottom Line

Biden won Michigan in 2020 by leveraging upturns in Oakland and Kent counties while managing downturns in Macomb County. Democrats' 2024 playbook will probably look similar: keep turnout high and continue neutralizing the gains Trump made in 2016 among working class voters. Biden even has opportunities to improve on his 2020 showing. Across three counties where he performed better than Clinton

— Genesee, Saginaw, and Bay — Democrats gained an average of 3 points in statewide races between 2018 and 2022. Notably, these counties also form 90 percent of Michigan's highly competitive 8th District, an open Democratic seat which is currently rated by *Inside Elections* as Tilt Democratic, making the trio precious for both the Electoral College and the House majority.

Meanwhile Republicans should hope for a repeat of 2016. Of the 12 counties in Michigan that flipped from Obama to Trump between 2012 and 2016, nine shifted back toward Democrats in 2020 — and one, Saginaw County, flipped again to Biden. So this time, Trump might focus on rebuilding his margins in those nine counties while also improving his margins in the three remaining Obama-Trump counties that supported him more in 2020 than in 2016: Lake, Monroe, and Shiawassee.

He could also look to places like Clare County, where just 12 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree (the lowest of any county in the state) and 94 percent of the population is white. Trump carried this county by 32 points in 2016 and 35 points in 2020, after Romney and Obama each won it by 5 points in 2012 and 2008. Even though it only casts around 14,000 total ballots on average, this is the type of county where Trump needs to run up the score.

Based on Democrats' success in recent elections, on top of how various national issues have ended up playing out within the state, Michigan might feel like Democrats' to lose. But then again, isn't that what some people said in 2016?

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*Arizona, Continued from page 1*

among Hispanic voters between the 2016 and 2020 elections were not necessarily reflected in Arizona. While Trump improved his margin by 17 points among Hispanics nationwide, exit polling indicates that his margin among Arizona Hispanics improved by just 6 points — a shift outweighed by Biden's 8-point improvement among white voters in Arizona.

## The Democratic Candidate

Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego, 44, was born to Colombian and Mexican immigrant parents in Chicago and raised by a single mother. While working odd jobs and a shift at a meatpacking plant, he earned a scholarship to Harvard, where he had a bumpy tenure but graduated in 2004 and enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Gallego's service took him to Iraq, where he was a part of the hardest-hit Marine battalion of the war — one of the casualties

was Gallego's best friend. In 2006, after Gallego left the reserves, he moved to Arizona to be with his future wife Kate Widland (the two divorced in 2017; she is now the mayor of Phoenix and still uses the name Gallego) and worked in marketing and political advertising, which was his introduction to electoral politics.

Following stints as a staffer on the Phoenix city council and the state Democratic Party, in 2010 Gallego won a multi-member state House seat



Ruben Gallego

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

in the Laveen and South Mountain neighborhoods, placing first in the Democratic primary by 4 percent (ousting an incumbent) and winning the heavily Democratic district in the general election.

In 2014, Gallego ran to succeed retiring Rep. Ed Pastor in the downtown Phoenix congressional district Pastor had held for 24 years. The Democratic primary was contentious; Pastor backed Gallego's opponent, Maricopa County supervisor Mary Rose Wilcox, who hit Gallego for his past membership in the NRA and votes against gun control measures. Gallego won, 48-36 percent, and has not had a competitive primary or general election since.

In Congress, Gallego serves on the Armed Services and Natural Resources committees, and has made veterans' issues a priority. Once a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, he left at the end of 2023, but has compiled a reliably Democratic voting record. In 2022, he was endorsed for re-election by Everytown for Gun Safety, Human Rights Campaign, Planned Parenthood, and a number of labor unions, as well as AIPAC.

## The Republican Candidates

2022 gubernatorial nominee Kari Lake is the favorite to win the nomination, though Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb is also running.

Lake, 54, was born in Rockford, Illinois but grew up in Iowa as the youngest of nine children. After graduating from the University of Iowa in 1990, Lake embarked on a long and successful career in local news that took her from Davenport, Iowa to Rock Island, Illinois, to Phoenix in 1994, where she has remained since except for a brief stint in Albany in 1998.

From 1999 to 2021, Lake was an anchor on KSAZ, the Fox affiliate in Phoenix, and became one of the most popular local news figures in the state. Toward the end of her tenure, Lake began to make news for

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more controversial reasons — statements deriding a teacher’s labor movement and hot mic comments cursing out the station’s management over her account on a right-wing social media site — and resigned after she appeared at a 2021 CPAC event. She launched her campaign for governor soon thereafter.

Lake became an immediate frontrunner in a crowded GOP primary, thanks to her high name ID, and fully embraced electoral conspiracies surrounding the 2020 election, making central to her campaign the false claim that Trump had won Arizona. Trump endorsed her early on.

The crowded field ultimately shrunk to a two-person race between Lake and wealthy attorney Karrin Taylor Robson, who had support from former Vice President Mike Pence and outgoing Gov. Doug Ducey, who Lake regularly criticized. Lake defeated Robson, 48-43 percent.

Lake lost a closely watched general election to state Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, 50.3-49.6 percent, a margin of 17,117 votes.

Lake has never accepted her loss and maintains she won, citing discredited theories centering on ballot printing and counting in Maricopa County. She has repeatedly filed lawsuits aiming to overturn the results of the election but has been turned back by state and federal judges. The US Supreme Court this week dismissed her latest challenge without explanation; her lawyers have been sanctioned multiple times.

Lake is in the middle of a defamation lawsuit brought against her by Maricopa County Recorder Stephen Richer, which is currently in the damages phase of trial.

Lamb, 51, has been the sheriff of Pinal County, Arizona’s third-largest, since 2017. He won his first election, 58-42 percent, and won re-election uncontested four years later. Lamb has cultivated a following among sheriffs for his support of a movement that posits that sheriffs are the ultimate legal authority in America, and he became prominent in Arizona’s “Stop the Steal” movement following the 2020 election. In 2022, his story took a tragic turn when his son, daughter-in-law, and infant granddaughter died in a traffic collision — an event that featured prominently in Lamb’s announcement video.

## The Republican Primary

Lamb, though well-liked among Republicans strategists in the state, is not viewed as a serious contender for the nomination. He reported just \$256,000 in campaign funds at the end of the year. With more resources, higher name ID, a dedicated following, and an endorsement from Trump, Lake remains the overwhelming favorite in the primary.

However, her overall level of support on July 30 may be an indicator of how much work she has to do to shore up support among Republicans. A smaller-than-expected victory over Lamb, especially if he receives any number of what essentially amounts to protest votes in Democratic-trending suburbs, could illustrate some of Lake’s weak spots.

## The General Election

Gallego enters the general election with a significant financial advantage over Lake; his campaign says it raised \$7.5 million over the first three months of 2024 and had \$9.6 million in the bank at the end of March. Lake has yet to report her 2024 fundraising but ended 2023 with just \$1.1 million in campaign funds.

The Democrat is pressing that advantage with a \$5.1 million TV ad buy, which began March 5 and is scheduled to run through April 16, that emphasizes his military background and working class roots.

“What’s scariest to me,” said one national GOP strategist, “is that you

see Gallego using the Sinema playbook,” referring when Sinema began TV advertising early in the 2018 Senate race and had already defined herself by the time opponent Martha McSally began spending on the general election.

Lake’s allies acknowledge that she is not popular in the state. And there’s recognition among GOP strategists that however polarizing Lake was prior to her narrow loss in 2022, she damaged her standing after the election by refusing to acknowledge defeat, suing to overturn the results, and fully donning the mantle of a conservative celebrity who travels the country in support of other Trump-aligned candidates in far-flung states.

But they see opportunity in Gallego being less well-known and with an extensive voting record (unlike when Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly was first elected).

Republicans plan to portray him as an uber-liberal who votes in lockstep with Biden (Gallego voted for Biden’s position 100 percent of the time in the 117th Congress and 97.9 percent in the 118th Congress, per FiveThirtyEight), and a Phoenix progressive who backs Medicare for All and aggressively attacked Trump and other GOP politicians on Twitter. Republicans may also look to contrast him with Sinema, who often made news for bucking Biden and working with Republicans, and who Gallego ultimately muscled out of the Democratic Party and then out of this race.

And Republicans are also not shy about attempting to weaponize Gallego’s personal life, particularly the details of his divorce from his first



Courtesy Gage Skidmore

Kari Lake

wife, Kate, just before she gave birth to their child. A conservative outlet is suing to unseal their divorce records; Kate Gallego has endorsed Ruben and is campaigning for him.

Lake’s most potent weapon may be immigration, which

one Arizona consultant not working on this race described as a “home run” for her; a Republican consultant not working for Lake concurred, saying “immigration is a huge problem for Biden, she can run the crap out of that.” Gallego, who backed the bipartisan immigration deal that died in the Senate, has notably sharpened his rhetoric, referring to a “crisis at the border”

Ultimately, Republicans’ best bet is to disqualify Gallego in the minds of enough voters that Lake-skeptical independents feel they have nowhere to go but the Republican. (And perhaps receive a boost from the presence of a Green Party candidate on the ballot — in 2018, a Green Party nominee won 2 percent of the vote.)

Gallego’s allies see that as highly unlikely, and are banking on unpopular stances Lake took in her 2022 race, most notably her embrace of the stolen election conspiracy but also policies such as putting cameras in classrooms, to continue to dog her in 2024.

Democratic strategists believe that Gallego’s profile as a Latino veteran is tailor-made to shore up Democrats’ coalition in Arizona. Hispanic men were a rare bright spot for Lake in her 2022 gubernatorial race. While white voters broke evenly in both the Senate and gubernatorial races, per exit polling, Kelly won Hispanic voters by 18 points over Blake Masters, while Hobbs won the same group by just 4 points over Lake. Men similarly broke for Masters by 4 points but Lake by 9 points, while both Republicans performed equivalently to each other among women.

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But equally important to Democrats' path to victory are suburban women, in Maricopa County especially.

Democrats were already hopeful that the likely presence of an abortion rights referendum on the ballot would boost Gallego and other Democrats by motivating turnout among younger voters more apathetic about Biden.

But Arizona's Supreme Court threw a curveball in the race this week when it overturned an existing 15-week abortion ban, reverting the state to an 1864-era near-total ban on surgical and medical abortions except in cases where the life of the mother is at risk. One longtime Arizona GOP strategist said of the effect of the ruling, "if we're dealing with the territorial ban, that becomes much more difficult."

In the aftermath, Lake issued a statement saying she did not support the decision and also opposed federal bans on abortion. However, Lake is on tape during the 2022 election praising the 1864 statute as a "great law" and calling it a model for other states to follow — a clip sure to be featured in many Democratic campaign ads.

Hanging over the race is a national dynamic that may deprioritize Arizona in favor of not only Montana and Ohio, which are Republicans' two best pickup opportunities (and likely sufficient for reclaiming the majority) but also Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Nevada, where self-funding candidates or favorable political trends make for more attractive pickup opportunities.

Lake's fractious relationship with Senate leadership also works against her here. And while the main Democratic super PAC, Senate Majority PAC, included Arizona on its list of initial reservations, with \$23 million in advertising booked beginning Sept. 1, the GOP counterpart, Senate Leadership Fund, has not reserved any time in Arizona yet. That could change, and Lake does have backing from the NRSC, but she's viewed differently by many Republicans in DC than the prized recruits in other states.

### The Early Polling

Public polling of the race has been scant, and nearly all of it was conducted before Sinema announced she would not seek another term. Few top-tier firms have weighed in on the contest.

A RABA Research poll from March 28-31 found Gallego ahead of Lake, 36-28 percent, with an unusually high number of undecided voters (36 percent). Two mixed-mode polls from Emerson College, one fielded in mid-February and one in mid-March, found Gallego ahead by smaller margins, 46-39 percent in February and 44-40 percent in March. A Feb. 21-26 survey from Republican pollster Rasmussen Reports was the most recent to find Lake leading, 45-42 percent; Rasmussen has backed Lake's discredited theory that she won her 2022 race.

A Feb. 6-13 poll from Noble Insights, an Arizona-based firm, found Gallego with a larger lead, 47-37 percent.

### The Bottom Line

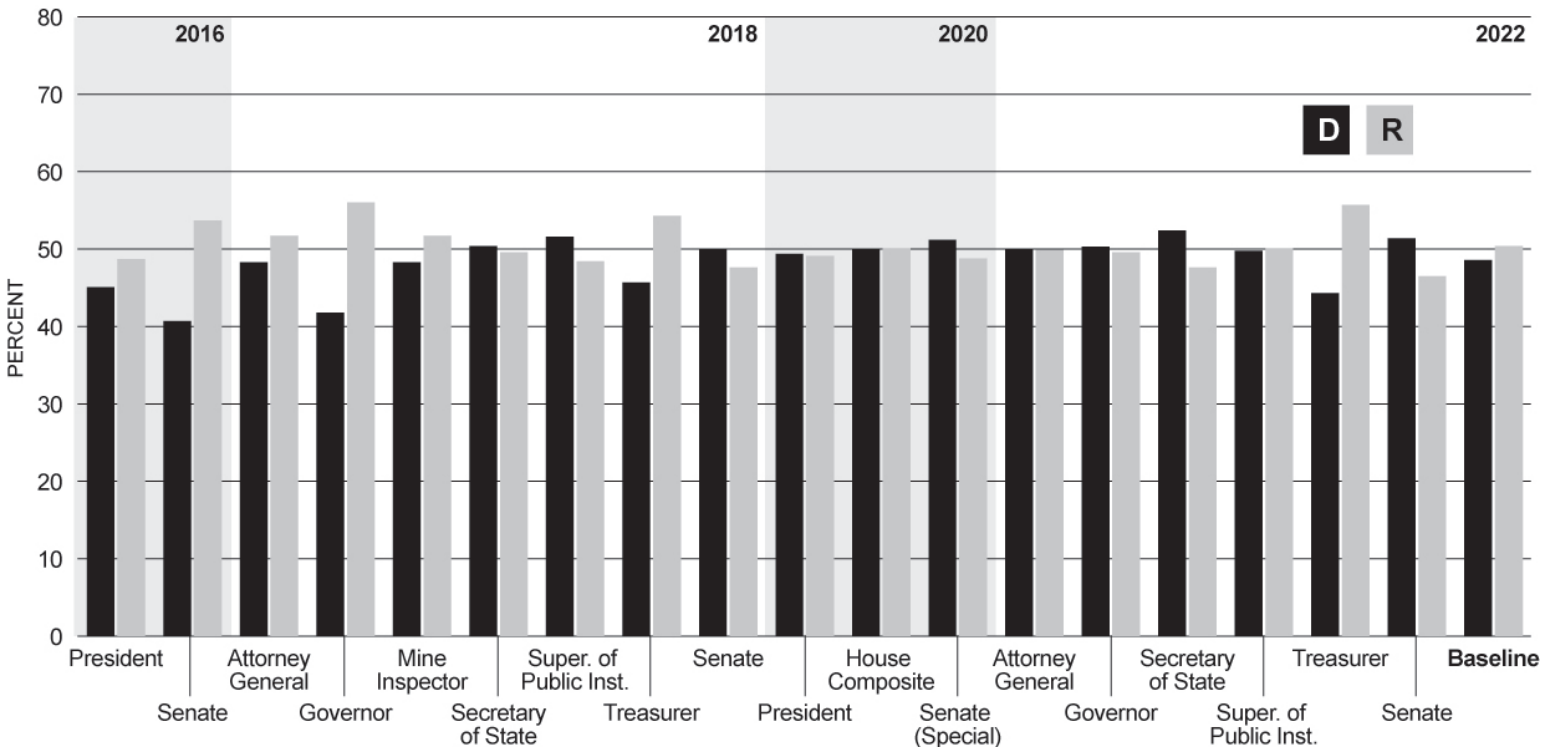
Arizona is on its fifth competitive Senate race in as many cycles, and the looming Gallego-Lake matchup looks to continue that trend.

While Gallego has had a strong start, he has real vulnerabilities Republicans will look to exploit. And he could be battling an unfavorable political environment that requires him to win over a sliver of Trump voters.

Lake has more clearly defined weaknesses, and her attempt at a rebrand may live or die depending on how disciplined she can be in moving on from 2020 and 2022, and how much money she can raise to counter the battery of Democratic advertising that will weaponize her past comments and political stances against her from now until Election Day.

Even though Democrats don't technically hold the seat anymore because of Sinema's exit from the party, Democrats likely need to keep the seat out of GOP hands in order to maintain control of the Senate. **IE**

## Statewide Election Results for Arizona



# What Biden's Approval Suggests About November

By Bradley Wascher

Prediction: President Joe Biden will earn more than 39 percent this November.

Biden's approval rating, which has been underwater since late summer 2021, hit a new low in the 538 polling average last month. Their March 12 tracker suggested that only 37.4 percent of Americans approved of the president's job performance, while 56.5 percent disapproved — a net negative of 19.2 points.

While it's likely this particular dip was just statistical noise (Biden's approval was already back "up" to 38.4 percent the next day) the cause for concern among Democrats is clear. According to 538's tracking, Biden's current popularity is the lowest of any modern president seeking re-election at this point in the cycle. The two presidents with the next-lowest mid-April scores, George H.W. Bush (40 percent approval in April 1992) and Donald Trump (42 percent in 2020), would go on to lose in November.

There is an obvious connection between a president's approval rating and their eventual share of the popular vote. Elections are often framed as a referendum on the incumbent, so if voters don't think the president is doing a good enough job, they'll be less inclined to grant a second term. Political scientists have studied this link seriously since at least the 1970s, and presidential approval continues to be one of the most reliable predictors of the final result in November.

But it's only April, and a lot can change over the next seven months. Based on our own calculations using adjusted R-squared values, a president's share of the popular vote is approximately 75 percent correlated with their approval rating in November, while April approval is less explanatory at 56 percent. That means the polls this spring probably won't be as predictive as the polls this fall. Actually, of the 12 presidents since 1948 who have run for another term (including Gerald Ford, Lyndon Johnson, and Harry Truman, who were not true elected incumbents), six saw a bump in approval between April and November — good for an extra 3 or 4 points on average.

As always there are caveats. First and foremost, the presidency is won through the electoral college, not the popular vote. And not only is our sample size small with just a dozen presidents, but polls were less abundant during many of those early administrations. In fact, Gallup — the organization with perhaps the most storied back catalog of survey topline — traditionally did not even ask about presidential approval beyond June of an election year.

But for the purposes of this thought experiment, historical context helps. If Biden saw the same 4-point boost in popularity as previous presidents within the next eight months, his approval rating by November would rise to around 43 percent. While an improvement over his current situation, that would still only bring him in line with the one-term losers.

## Podcast Episode 20

Nathan, Jacob and Bridget Bowman of NBC News discuss the fight for the House majority, including *Inside Elections* recent rating changes in a dozen races, and upcoming primaries to watch.

Available on all podcast platforms and YouTube

Another prediction, though: Biden will earn more than 43 percent.

Nine of the 12 modern presidents who have run for re-election ended up performing better in the popular vote relative to their November approval ratings. And the three leaders who ran behind their ratings found themselves in very different circumstances from Biden: Johnson in 1964 and Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 both enjoyed ratings near 70 percent, so it makes sense that they would lose some ground on the actual ballot; Bill Clinton in 1996 had to grapple with a strong third-party showing from businessman Ross Perot that ate into Clinton's vote share but not the electoral college result.

Across the nine modern presidents who ran ahead of their November approval ratings, the median overperformance was 2.5 points. Add that figure to our earlier back-of-the-napkin 43 percent approximation for Biden's November approval, and we arrive at a hypothetical vote share of about 45 percent, depending on how you round. To be clear, this would still be an exceptionally weak showing in today's age of highly polarized elections: the last major-party nominee to finish below 45 percent was Bob Dole in 1996 (in a race that also featured a strong third-party candidate). This is one of the strongest reasons to believe Biden's support by November will extend beyond the high 30s. And even though we've purposely added the best-case boosts for Biden in each calculation here to demonstrate one potential path, other recent evidence corroborates that he has room to grow.

Zooming in to the 21st century, the two most recent presidents, Trump and Barack Obama, both experienced a bump in approval between April and November of their re-election campaigns. Moreover, each of the last three presidents, adding George W. Bush, went on to overperform their November ratings by an average of 3 points.

There's no telling exactly where Biden will land this November, in terms of his approval rating or his share of the popular vote. Meeting the benchmarks set by previous presidents would still put him just a hair behind where he needs to be to win. But elections don't happen in a vacuum, and not all disapprovers are the same.

A Pew Research Center survey from late January found Biden to be particularly unpopular among young people (27 percent approval) and Hispanics (32 percent). Importantly, those same groups also seem to have soured on the president in general election polling, despite historically backing Democrats by wide margins. What's more, only 61 percent of Democrats in the Pew poll said they approved of Biden, although it's unlikely that the other two-fifths of the party's supporters will stay home or vote for Trump.

Biden also still has the opportunity to win over the 20 percent of respondents overall — including the approximate one-quarter of self-identified moderates — who said their disapproval was "not strong" rather than "strong." If history is correct and the president does see a modest boost in popularity between now and November, it will likely be among these groups.

Regardless, it helps to have a majority of Americans on your side. As Jeffrey M. Jones of Gallup put it: "Historically, all incumbents with an approval rating of 50 percent or higher have won re-election, and presidents with approval ratings much lower than 50 percent have lost." And even in the best-case scenario, Biden will likely have to figure out how to buck the trend of other underwater presidents.





# Maryland Senate: Primary Focus

By Jacob Rubashkin

With fewer than five weeks to go before Election Night — and three weeks before early voting begins — Maryland’s Senate Democratic primary is tightening and drawing national attention.

The long-simmering clash between 6th District Rep. David Trone and Prince George’s County Executive Angela Alsobrooks has picked up steam now that Alsobrooks is finally advertising on television. And popular former GOP Gov. Larry Hogan drew national eyes to the Old Line State when he jumped in at the last moment, turning a one-party party into a marquee race with implications for the Senate majority.

The recent collapse of the Key Bridge that spanned the Baltimore Harbor has put a spotlight on the state’s governor and congressional delegation.

Thus far, the main story of the race has been Trone’s money versus Alsobrooks’ deep political connections. The billionaire owner of liquor empire Total Wine has opened up his pocketbook to a historic degree as he vies to succeed retiring Sen. Ben Cardin, while Alsobrooks, in her second term leading the state’s second-largest county, has backing from Gov. Wes Moore, Sen. Chris Van Hollen, and Reps. Jamie Raskin and Steny Hoyer, among others.

A former prosecutor, Alsobrooks would also make history as the first Black senator, and first Black woman elected statewide, in Maryland.

The primary is on May 15, but early voting in Maryland begins two weeks earlier, on May 2.

## Baltimore Bound

Trone has dominated the airwaves from the beginning of the race, to the tune of \$31 million spent across broadcast, cable, satellite, and OTT channels. Since September of last year, he has been a constant presence on the airwaves, blanketing the state with 41 different advertisements at 1,000 or more gross ratings points (the industry standard for advertising volume) per week.

The state is roughly evenly divided between the Washington, DC and Baltimore media markets (the two have significant overlap given their proximity), and while Trone has advertised heavily in both, his campaign’s focus has been Baltimore, where he spent his first \$2.5 million on ads back in May.

Nearly 70 percent of Trone’s broadcast TV advertising, by GRPs, has been focused on Baltimore.

And he’s not alone in his focus on Charm City. As Alsobrooks has spun up her paid advertising, her priority has been the same. Of the \$1.7 million in TV ads Alsobrooks has aired since February, 88 percent has gone to the Baltimore media market. “She will win or lose this race in Baltimore,” said one Alsobrooks ally.

Baltimore is such a focus for both candidates because neither have a natural base in the city. Both Trone and Alsobrooks hail from the suburbs of Washington, DC, and neither were well known in Baltimore prior to the start of the race. With no Baltimore candidate in the race, those voters are up for grabs. Speaking on Trone’s strategy, one ally of the congressman said he “made it his business to become the candidate of Baltimore.”

Furthermore, Baltimore is a much more efficient media market to advertise in than Washington, DC because it is half as expensive and is wholly contained within Maryland, while the DC media market caters to Maryland, the District, and a third of Virginia’s population. In the week of April 9, campaign ads on DC television paid for by candidates (not

outside groups) cost \$540 per point while Baltimore cost just \$250, but each market reaches a similar number of Maryland residents.

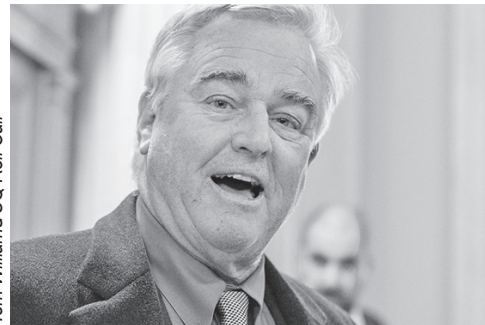
All this means Trone will have a spending advantage in the DC market, where the race has been relatively stable and evenly split, according to public polling and Maryland sources.

“I think it makes sense to put all of her money in Baltimore,” said one Maryland Democratic consultant not working on the race. “She’s going to have to hope that field and word of mouth is good enough in the very expensive DC market.”

## The Messaging

Much of Trone’s messaging to date has been intended to get ahead of the suspicions Democratic primary voters may have about the politics of an uber-rich older white man.

To that end, he’s focused heavily on criminal justice issues and his addiction-focused philanthropic efforts, citing his work with a local



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

David Trone

substance abuse organization in Hagerstown, and the center at the ACLU he endowed in 2015 to promote sentencing reform.

A handful of his ads follow the same format, with a Black Baltimorean speaking directly to the

camera about why they support Trone. Three such ads feature formerly incarcerated men, one features a firefighter, and two ads feature diabetic women.

He’s also used paid media to advertise his support from prominent Black elected officials, including House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, state Attorney General Anthony Brown (his most prominent in-state endorser) and state Rep. Joseline Peña-Melnyk. Even Illinois Rep. Jonathan Jackson invokes his father, civil rights icon Jesse Jackson, in an ad that Trone has run more than any other.

Alsobrooks has aired five different commercials since February. Her first two spots were introductory and looked to make her relatable, contrasting her profile as a middle class Black woman with the overwhelmingly white and wealthy Senate (a not-so-subtle dig at Trone as well). Her most-aired ad includes a list of accomplishments and positions, packing a lot into just 30 cost-effective seconds.

In two other spots, Alsobrooks leans into her record as a prosecutor by featuring testimony from three women whose sons were murdered and whose killers were prosecuted by Alsobrooks. It’s a notable message for Alsobrooks to take on, one that has an eye toward a general election audience while also leaning into, rather than shying away from Trone’s focus on criminal justice (and implicit criticism that Alsobrooks is not progressive enough on crime).

The campaign’s latest ad, which began airing on April 8, is focused on abortion.

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## Purely Positive

Notably, there has been no negative advertising by either candidate so far, and no outside groups have stepped in to do that dirty work either (the candidates have thrown elbows on the campaign trail and at forums, but never in paid media). And sources aligned with both candidates suggest that may remain the case through the primary.

That's not to say neither candidate has vulnerabilities — especially Trone, whose history of political donations to Republicans was fodder for his primary opponents in his unsuccessful 2016 bid for Congress (Trone also has a long history of raising and donating millions to Democrats).

When asked that year about his donations to Republican governors including Texas' Greg

Abbott and Arizona's Doug Ducey, Trone told the *Washington Post*, "I sign my checks to buy access" — a quote seemingly tailor made for an attack ad but that may never appear in one.

There's some divide among Democrats on the importance of going negative, and the campaign doesn't have much time left.

"If she is going to shift traffic and messaging into negative, she better get to it," said one longtime Maryland Democratic consultant not working on the race. "I would have been negative by March 1."

Another consultant not working on the race said Alsobrooks's scarcer resources put her in a tough spot, saying "they can't go negative until they've really driven up her favorables and name ID."

"I might stop just short of calling it a 'necessity'" said one Alsobrooks ally, "but going negative is important."

Others disagree. "I don't think it's necessary to go negative," said another pro-Alsobrooks source. "I hope not," said a third.

EMILY's List, the major Democratic group that backs pro-choice women, is the most obvious candidate to make a splash late in the game for Alsobrooks. But the organization has less cash to throw around than in years past.

## The Polling

Strategists on both sides of the primary agree that the contest has narrowed significantly since Alsobrooks began advertising on TV, but that Trone still maintains a lead, likely in the high single digits.

Two recent nonpartisan polls suggest as much. A March 5-12 Braun Research Poll conducted for the *Washington Post* found Trone ahead of Alsobrooks, 34-27 percent, while a Goucher College poll conducted for the *Baltimore Banner* from March 19-24 had Trone up 9 points, 43-34 percent.

Earlier internal polling from Trone's campaign in February had the congressman up 17 points over Alsobrooks, 49-32 percent, but that was after Trone had spent \$23 million on unanswered advertising.

Democrats supporting Alsobrooks point to the polls as evidence of Trone's weakness as a candidate. "If you had told me a year ago that Trone would be on the air for a year, that his promise to spend \$50 million was true, I would have told you he should win and that it probably shouldn't

be close," said one. But Trone's allies maintain they always knew the race would tighten at the end and were not anticipating a blowout.

## A Historic Spending Spree

Trone's spending places him at the upper echelon of self-funding Senate candidates. As of Dec. 31, Trone had contributed \$23 million to his campaign, and while the full scope of subsequent self-funding will not be public until April 15, his campaign has spent upward of \$31 million in advertising over the course of the election, and he has publicly committed to spending \$50 million out of his own pocket to win the primary.

Trone's outlay likely makes him the top self-funding candidate in Senate primary in history. Investor Blair Hull spent \$28.7 million on the 2004 Illinois Democratic primary, a mark Trone has probably exceeded by now; Hull lost to a state senator named Barack Obama.

Those seemingly unlimited funds have been a source of frustration for Alsobrooks and her allies, who had raised \$5 million through Dec. 31 and says she raised another \$2.1 million in the first three months of the year. That's more money than any non-incumbent Senate candidate has raised through this point in Maryland history — but it's still a fraction of what she's up against.

## How It Plays Out

Alsobrooks' allies believe she has momentum heading into the final stretch of the race even as they acknowledge they are playing from behind. They are pleased to see movement in the polls following her paid media push, and hope that as the campaign continues to scale up their TV advertising that gap will continue to close to a tie by Election Day. This past week was Alsobrooks' biggest on TV yet.

And Trone's recent use of an antiquated racial slur in a congressional hearing (he has said it was an accident and he did not know the word's meaning) could be an opportunity for Alsobrooks to capitalize as she looks to consolidate Black voters — though its effect could be mitigated by the near-total focus of local news on the Key Bridge collapse which occurred just a few days later.

A debate on April 19 may be the last chance Alsobrooks has to take Trone on in person before early voting begins. Trone had to back out of a previous debate due to a brief hospitalization, and declined an invitation to another.

Another potential curveball is the *Washington Post* editorial board endorsement, which still carries weight in the DC suburbs and could be a big boost to Alsobrooks.

But while she may have momentum, she's still playing from behind.

## The Bottom Line

"She probably has a 50-50 shot at beating him," said one Alsobrooks ally; two others called her a slight underdog.

If Alsobrooks comes up short, it may not be because of how she ran down the stretch, say several Maryland Democrats, but rather the problems that plagued the early days of her campaign, before she reshuffled her team before Christmas. That may have cost her valuable fundraising potential and credibility at the same time that Trone was hammering the airwaves and developing his own momentum. Lower cash reserves delayed her clearly effective paid media push, perhaps too late to catch Trone.

Whichever Democrat emerges from the primary will be the favorite to take on Hogan, but that general election will be expensive and extensively covered given its proximity to Washington, DC — and the tantalizing if remote prospect that one of the bluest of states could deliver a GOP majority.



Angela Alsobrooks

Courtesy Alsobrooks Campaign