

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## 2023 Gubernatorial Overview: Three's Company

By Jacob Rubashkin & Erin Covey

There's no such thing as an off-year in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi, which will all elect governors this year.

The trio of states offers a little bit of everything: both a Republican and Democratic governor running for re-election, as well as an open seat. A majority of the action will be on the Republican side in three states that firmly vote GOP at the federal level. But at least one of them will be competitive later this fall.

### KENTUCKY

The most fully-formed of the three 2023 gubernatorial contests is Kentucky, where Gov. Andy Beshear is running for a second term in a state that voted for President Donald Trump by 26 points.

Beshear won a 0.4-point victory over unpopular GOP Gov. Matt Bevin in 2019, just four years after his father Steve Beshear left office. But in the time between the two Beshears, Democrats have gone from the dominant party in state politics to an endangered species. Beshear is the only Democratic statewide officeholder left, and the GOP has supermajorities in the state legislature.

The filing deadline for the GOP primary was Jan. 6, 2023, and the primary will be held on May 16.

### The Republicans

Twelve Republicans ultimately filed to run for governor against Beshear. But there are three tiers of candidates, according to GOP sources involved in and following the primary.

In the first tier are the three candidates with the financial resources, organizational strength, or constituency to seriously contend for the nomination: state Attorney General Daniel Cameron, state Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles, and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Kelly Craft.

State Auditor Mike Harmon and Somerset Mayor Alan Keck are in the second tier. And in the third tier are seven lesser-known candidates. Eric Deters, a suspended attorney who has a small anti-vaccine following, is running. So are Kentucky National Guardsman David Cooper, perennial candidate Bob DeVore, math teacher Robbie Smith, Harrison County resident Johnny Ray Rice, Jefferson County resident Dennis Ormerod, and Grayson County resident Jacob Clark.

Craft, 60, was born in Lexington and graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1984. She worked as a business consultant and became increasingly involved in state GOP politics as a fundraiser, and her first foray into public service came in 2007 when President George W.

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## 2023 Gubernatorial Ratings

### Toss-up (1D)

Beshear (D-Ky.)

**Tilt Democratic**

**Tilt Republican**

**Lean Democratic**

**Lean Republican (1R)**

*LA Open (Edwards, D)*

**Likely Democratic**

**Likely Republican (1R)**

*Reeves (R-Miss.)*

**Solid Democratic**

**Solid Republican**

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

## 2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

### BATTLEGROUND

**Democratic-Held (1)**

*NC Open (Cooper, D)*

**Republican-Held (1)**

*Sununu (R-N.H.)*

**Solid Democratic (2)**

*DE Open (Carney, D)*

*Inslee (D-Wash.)*

**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>Feb. 1</b>	Mississippi Governor filing deadline
<b>Feb. 21</b>	Virginia's 4th District Special General Election
<b>May 16</b>	Kentucky Governor Primary
<b>Aug. 8</b>	Mississippi Governor Primary
<b>Aug. 10</b>	Louisiana Governor filing deadline
<b>Aug. 29</b>	Mississippi Governor Primary Runoff (if necessary)

# Illinois 4 Special: The Potential Race to Replace Chuy García

By Erin Covey

The upcoming Chicago mayoral race has drawn a crowded field of candidates hoping to unseat Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Chief among her challengers is Democratic Rep. Chuy García, a progressive congressman from the southwest side of Chicago. If he wins, it'll put another congressional special election on the docket.



Chuy García

This is García's second run for mayor. Eight years ago, the then-Cook County commissioner challenged Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and with the support of labor unions and progressive allies forced the incumbent into a runoff. García lost to Emanuel by 12 points, but was elected to Congress in 2018, succeeding Rep. Luis Gutierrez.

The nominally nonpartisan election is Feb. 28, but it's almost certain that no one will win a majority of the vote and the top two candidates will face each other in a runoff election on April 4. The race has divided Illinois' congressional delegation — freshmen Democratic Reps. Delia Ramirez and Jonathan Jackson are backing Brandon Johnson, a Cook County commissioner, and Sen. Tammy Duckworth and Reps. Danny Davis and Robin Kelly have endorsed Lightfoot.



Celina Villanueva

Illinois Democrats believe the race will likely come down to García and Lightfoot, and if the congressman unseats the mayor, voters in Illinois' 4th District will have a special

election to fill García's seat.

With the runoff still three months away, it'll be a little while before prospective candidates start making moves to position themselves for a special election. But Illinois-based political strategists agree that García would have a tremendous influence in the potential race to succeed him, and whoever received the congressman's blessing would be the obvious frontrunner to win the Democratic primary.

Illinois' 4th District is majority Latino and stretches around the west side of Chicago, encompassing Latino communities such as Little Village and Humboldt Park. García defeated his Republican opponent by 40 points last November, and Joe Biden won it with 72 percent in 2020, so whoever wins the Democratic primary would be poised to succeed García.



Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda

Courtesy MWRD of Greater Chicago

Several local elected officials would be well-positioned to replace the congressman. Multiple Democratic strategists mentioned state Sen. Celina Villanueva, an ally of García and a former progressive organizer in the region.

Other potential candidates include 26-year-old state Rep. Edgar Gonzalez, state Rep. Aaron Ortiz, and Eira L. Corral Sepúlveda, the first Latina elected to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

Several aldermen could run as well; Byron Sigcho-Lopez and Michael Rodriguez were mentioned by Democratic strategists who spoke with *Inside Elections*.

The inauguration for mayor is not till May, and so if García wins, the special election to replace him would likely not be held till late summer or early fall. According to Illinois state law, the governor has five days from the time the seat is vacant to call a special election, and the special general election must be held within 180 days of that command. **IE**

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Bush appointed her as an alternate delegate to the United Nations. Her political giving became supercharged after she married billionaire Joe Craft — the two donated millions to Trump’s 2016 campaign after initially supporting Sen. Marco Rubio in the GOP presidential primary. In 2017, Kelly Craft was appointed ambassador to Canada, and in 2019 she was appointed ambassador to the United Nations after Trump’s initial pick to replace Nikki Haley removed herself from contention.

Craft and her husband are also philanthropists, and have donated tens of millions of dollars to Kentucky universities.

Craft’s campaign team includes

general consultant Kristin Davison of Axiom Strategies (the firm is also doing direct mail), Poolhouse for media, and WPAi for polling — all three firms previously worked on Republican Glenn Youngkin’s successful run for governor of Virginia in 2021.

Cameron, 37, was born in Texas but raised in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, less than an hour south of Louisville. The attorney general has long been a protege of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, earning a McConnell scholarship to the University of Louisville (undergraduate in 2008 and law degree in 2011) and later working for McConnell from 2015-2017. Cameron also did two stints at private law firms before running for state attorney general in 2019. He defeated state Sen. Wil Schroder in the GOP primary, 55-45 percent, and went on to beat former state Attorney General Greg Stumbo in the general election, 58-42 percent.

As one of the few Black Republicans who holds statewide office in the country, Cameron has been pegged as a rising star in the party and gave a keynote address at the 2020 Republican National Convention. Before he announced his campaign for governor, many Democratic and Republican strategists described him as “McConnell’s chosen successor” in the Senate.

Cameron’s campaign team includes general consultant Brandon Moody of Right Line Communications, OnMessage for TV ads, pollster Rob Autry of Meeting Street Insights, and Creative Direct for direct mail.

Quarles, 39, grew up in Scott County and attended University of Kentucky, where he received four degrees (undergraduate in 2005, two master’s degrees in 2006, and a law degree in 2010); he also earned a masters in education at Harvard as a Truman Scholar, and later an Ed.D. from Vanderbilt (2018). He won his first election to the state House in 2010, defeating an incumbent Democrat, 51-49 percent, and won re-election twice. In 2015, he narrowly defeated state Rep. Richard Heath in the GOP primary for agriculture commissioner by just 0.8 points, and went on to win the general election 60-40 percent. He was re-elected in 2019, 58-39 percent.

One notable name who didn’t toss his hat in the ring is Bevin — much to the relief of many Republican strategists who view him as a uniquely weak candidate. State Sen. Savannah Maddox, considered one of the most conservative members of the state legislature, dropped out of the race at the end of last year.



Daniel Cameron

Courtesy Office of Daniel Cameron

## The GOP Primary

Strategists agree that Cameron begins the race with the highest name recognition but that the contest is only now beginning to take form. With so many candidates running, it may only take around 30 percent of the vote to win. In 2015, three evenly matched candidates in the GOP primary finished with 33, 33, and 27 percent, with the fourth taking 7 percent.

Craft is the only candidate airing TV advertisements so far, with three different ads airing statewide on broadcast and cable since the end of December backed by \$1 million. That’s early by Kentucky standards; in the 2019 Democratic gubernatorial primary, the first TV ads aired in mid-March.

The former ambassador has reported spending just \$32,000 of her own money on the campaign but still leads the field in fundraising, having raised \$1.3 million through the end of 2022. She’s also spent more than any other candidate, but can afford to do so because she can always fall back on her personal wealth later.

As the only major candidate who hasn’t run for office before, Craft is unknown in the state. Going up on TV early gives her a chance to define herself positively before the other candidates can attack her. So far, her ads have stuck to biographical messaging focusing on her Kentucky roots, and on the fentanyl crisis.

Craft, Cameron, and Quarles have all raised significant sums through the end of 2022, all over \$900,000. Keck has raised \$205,000 and Harmon, the state auditor, has raised just \$69,000. Contributions are limited to \$2,000 per person and corporations cannot donate to candidates.

Quarles is known for his hustle and commitment to retail politics. “He’s been working the longest and the hardest, he’s been to every rubber chicken dinner in the state” said one longtime Kentucky Republican. A GOP operative involved in the race said Quarles “has been running for governor since high school.” And while he has racked up an impressive list of local endorsements, he also reported a concerning low \$54,000 raised in the final quarter of the year after raising \$575,000 and \$300,000 in the preceding two quarters.

One Kentucky Republican hypothesized that Quarles hasn’t been able to keep his pace up because there isn’t as much donor money in agriculture anymore, and because energy industry money is steering clear of the race given Craft’s husband’s business interests.

Cameron’s campaign has been quieter — to the chagrin of some of his supporters, who wish he was more visible on the trail — but he also has the largest megaphone due to his statewide office, which often clashes with the governor on issues such as abortion rights. He has put his adversarial relationship with Beshear front and center in the campaign, arguing that he’s already doing more for Kentucky Republicans than the other contenders.

In addition to having an initial name ID advantage — Cameron put out a poll last June showing him with 46 percent among GOP likely voters and all other candidates in single digits — Cameron has a valuable endorsement from Trump, who remains popular in the state. It’s an important validator, especially in the more conservative rural parts of the state, for a candidate whose other closest association is with the unpopular McConnell.

The tenor of the primary is friendly so far, but that will change before voters go to the polls on May 16. Strategists from several of the campaigns say that the hopefuls will likely start throwing punches in mid-to-late April; traditionally the Kentucky Derby (the first Saturday in

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May) is the start of negative campaigning, but in recent years candidates haven't waited that long.

## Political Geography

Kentucky politics is heavily regional. Cameron is from Louisville, Craft is from Lexington, and Quarles is from Scott County (outside of Lexington) but is leaning on his agriculture bona fides to appeal to the more rural areas. Craft is also making a play for those areas with her choice of running mate, state Sen. Max Wise, and support from 1st District Rep. James Comer, himself a former agriculture commissioner and gubernatorial candidate. In 2015, Comer lost the GOP nomination to Bevin by 83 votes.

When Maddox, the state senator, dropped out of this race, she left her corner of the state — the deeply conservative Northern Kentucky region currently represented by libertarian Rep. Thomas Massie in Congress — up for grabs. None of the remaining candidates, save for Deters, the suspended attorney, are from the area, which is expensive and inefficient to advertise in because it is covered by the pricier Cincinnati media market.

Another region to which none of the candidates have a clear claim is the “Old Fifth,” represented by Rep. Hal Rogers. The southeastern Kentucky district is among the most rural, poor, and white congressional seats in the country, and is historically the most Republican part of the state. Somerset, where Keck is mayor, is in the district, which might give him a slight leg up given the parochial nature of the politics. Though he doesn't appear to be in a position to win, he could pick up votes there if he continues to fundraise well, affecting the math for the other candidates.

## The General Election

Beshear begins the general election in a strong position. Limited polling indicates the governor is popular: a Sept. 2022 poll from Garin-Hart-Yang, a Democratic firm, found his approval rating at 62 percent approve/36 percent disapprove, and *Morning Consult's* fall 2022 poll pegged his rating at a similar 60 percent approve/34 percent disapprove.

The governor also reported a substantial \$4.7 million in campaign funds on Dec. 31, 2022. His campaign team includes manager Eric Hyers, pollster Fred Yang of Garin-Hart-Yang, and media consultants David Eichenbaum of Eichenbaum Skinner Strategies.

But Kentucky has become a deeply Republican state. Trump won it by 26 points, which is a greater margin than Louisiana (19 points) or Kansas (15 points), two other red states with Democratic governors. And Beshear only narrowly won in 2019 despite running against a highly unpopular governor, while all other statewide GOP candidates won easily.

In 2019, Beshear won not only by driving up margins in the most populous parts of the state such as Lexington and Louisville, where he outperformed Biden's eventual 2020 margins by 13 and 15 points respectively, but also by outperforming Biden by herculean strides in the southeastern part of the state. Biden lost the 5th District by 59 points, after Beshear lost it by a mere 21 points. In some counties around Prestonsburg, Beshear won outright while Biden went on to lose them by 50 points one year later.

Replicating that feat will be no easy task. Beshear has the resources he needs, and begins with a consolidated Democratic base and goodwill among Republicans, who are evenly split on his job performance. And he has decent lines of attack on his potential opponents, including a populist angle on

Craft's wealth, and Cameron's handling of the Breonna Taylor case in 2020.

As the race kicks into high gear, and especially once the primary ends and the GOP turns its focus solely to Beshear, the governor's approval rating will likely drop. If Republicans can get Beshear below 50 percent, they'll be in a good position. For now, this race begins as a Toss-up.

## LOUISIANA

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards represents a dying breed — a pro-life, pro-gun rights Democrat who was able to unite Louisiana's liberal base and more moderate, Republican-leaning voters.

But Edwards is term-limited, and Democrats' odds of holding on to the Pelican State look increasingly slim. After 2023, Republicans will more likely than not have total control of the Deep South.



Courtesy, Office Louisiana Attorney General

Jeff Landry

An open seat could have drawn a wide field of Republican candidates jostling for a chance to take control after eight years of Democratic leadership in the state. But with Bill Cassidy and John Kennedy deciding not to leave their Senate seats, and

Lt. Gov. Bill Nungesser running for re-election, Republican state Attorney General Jeff Landry has become the de facto frontrunner in the race.

Louisiana uses an open primary system, meaning that all candidates regardless of party affiliation will run on the same ballot. If no candidate is able to win 50 percent of the vote in the Oct. 14 primary, the top-two candidates will face each other in a runoff election on Nov. 18.

Even though the primary is nine months away, two key questions remain: will Louisiana Democrats find a strong candidate to rally around, and if not, could a more moderate Republican or independent candidate get into the runoff?

## The Republican Field

A former congressman aligned with the Tea Party wing of the GOP, Landry announced last October that he would run for governor. At that point in the cycle, a contentious primary battle was anticipated, as neither of Louisiana's Republican senators had ruled out campaigns and the more moderate lieutenant governor was expected to run.

But over the past few months, Landry — known as the “chief critic” of Edwards — has locked up support from the state party and multiple members of Louisiana's congressional delegation, and his most formidable potential opponents have decided not to run. Landry's campaign announced it had \$5 million in the bank at the end of 2022, and his leadership PAC had \$1.5 million on hand.

Landry's aggressive consolidation of support from the state GOP naturally drew criticism from his opponents, who compared the party's endorsement to a “coronation” and a “back room deal.” The state GOP's executive committee voted to endorse Landry last November, a year before the election. The party also backed Landry when he ousted sitting Republican Attorney General Buddy Caldwell in 2015 (Caldwell was first elected to the office as a Democrat), but at a significantly later point in the cycle.

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Several lesser known Republicans have announced campaigns: state Treasurer John Schroder, state Sen. Sharon Hewitt, and state Rep. Richard Nelson. But Louisiana Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections* are skeptical that these candidates could get into the runoff, and believe that Landry's support from the conservative Republican base is almost certain to guarantee him a spot in the November race.

Schroder is probably best positioned to compete with Landry. Without Nungesser on the ballot, he could run as the more moderate alternative who has won a statewide race before. Hewitt, the current Senate majority leader, represents St. Tammany Parish, a white, Republican-leaning suburb of New Orleans, in the state Legislature.

Nelson is the dark horse in this race. The 37-year-old state representative, also from the New Orleans area, is running a campaign critical of the old generation of Louisiana politicians — his launch video featured a gaggle of inflatable dinosaurs roaming the state Capitol. He's taken some unorthodox positions in the state Legislature, pushing for legalizing recreational marijuana and eliminating the state's income tax, and says he's "catering to the middle" in his campaign.

The biggest question on the Republican side is whether Rep. Garret Graves will decide to run. Graves, first elected to the Baton Rouge-based 6th District in 2014, could run in the moderate Republican lane and would have the donor network to compete with Landry.

It appears that Landry and his allies see Graves as the biggest potential threat right now. The chairman of the state GOP published a statement saying Graves would make "a terrible mistake" if he ran for governor and urged Republicans to back Landry.

But Louisiana Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections* were skeptical that Graves would run. Two of Graves' colleagues, Rep. Mike Johnson and Rep. Clay Higgins, have already endorsed Landry.

And Republicans are doubtful that any moderate Republican would have a path to victory. Edwards locked up support from moderate independent voters and Democrats over the past eight years, and these voters have less of an incentive to vote for a moderate Republican if they see that a Democrat in Edwards' mold has the ability to win Louisiana.

## The Other Side

But the Democratic Party does not have a clear successor for Edwards — and time is running out for a candidate to launch a campaign and build the infrastructure they would need to compete seriously.

Shawn Wilson, the secretary of the state's Department of Transportation and Development appointed by Edwards in 2016, is seen as the strongest potential Democratic candidate. But Wilson has yet to make a decision yet. Democratic state party Chairwoman Katie Bernhardt and East Baton Rouge District Attorney Hillar Moore have also been mentioned as potential candidates.

And so far, one independent candidate has announced a campaign. Hunter Lundy, an attorney from Lake Charles, hails from the Acadiana region of the state — also where Landry and Wilson are from. He ran for Congress as a Democrat in 1996.

Candidates technically have till Aug. 10 to file to run for the governor's race. But any serious contenders will need to launch campaigns soon if they hope to raise the funds they need to compete with Landry. Lean Republican.

## MISSISSIPPI

Democrats believe GOP Gov. Tate Reeves is vulnerable despite Mississippi's Republican lean — Trump carried the state by 16 points

in 2020 — because of an ongoing welfare scandal involving the alleged misappropriation of \$77 million in state funds from 2017 to 2020. Multiple former state officials have been criminally charged; Reeves, who was lieutenant governor prior to 2020, has not been accused of a crime. But the *Mississippi Free Press* has reported that football legend Brett Favre sought help from Reeves in Favre's effort to use state welfare funds to build a volleyball facility at Southern Miss (Favre's daughter's college and his alma mater).

Reeves' tenure has been marked by his rocky relationship with other GOP power players in the state, several of whom have expressed interest in challenging him in the primary: outgoing state House Speaker Philip Gunn, Secretary of State Michael Watson, and former state Supreme Court Justice Bill Waller, Jr., who lost to Reeves in the 2019 GOP primary.

As an incumbent with the support of the party apparatus in Mississippi and D.C., Reeves would be favored in a primary, but history still offers a cautionary tale. In 1991, Democratic Gov. Ray Mabus fended off a primary challenge from Rep. Wayne Dowdy but was damaged heading into the general election, which he lost narrowly to Republican Kirk Fordice.

In the general election in 2023, Reeves is likely to face Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley, the only announced Democratic



Courtesy, Presley Campaign

**Brandon Presley**

candidate. Presley, a pro-life, Second Amendment supporter who backed George W. Bush for president in 2004, is running a populist campaign as an "FDR Democrat." His campaign hopes to thread the needle of high Black voter

turnout and just enough support among white voters to win. In 2019, Democratic state Attorney General Jim Hood did well among white voters but struggled to win over Black voters and ultimately lost by 5 points. Presley's trying not to make the same mistakes, and rolled out an endorsement from Rep. Bennie Thompson, the most prominent Black politician in the state, on the first day of his campaign.

This is also the first gubernatorial election in a century that will be decided by the popular vote rather than the state's old "electoral college" system, which required a candidate win not only a majority of the vote statewide, but also a majority of the vote in a majority of the state's 122 legislative districts. If no candidate did both, then the state House would elect the governor instead. In a boost to Democrats, who are locked in a minority in the state House, voters scrapped that system. Now, a candidate must win a majority of the popular vote statewide, and if none does, the top two performing candidates progress to a runoff election.

Any Democrat is going to be an underdog in Mississippi, but Presley is a compelling candidate with a professional team, a clear berth to the nomination, and about \$1 million in campaign funds at his disposal that he's saved up from previous runs for local office. And Reeves has some unique vulnerabilities that could transcend partisanship. A Siena College/*Mississippi Today* poll conducted from Jan. 3-8 found Reeves leading Presley, 43-39 percent, among registered voters. Likely Republican.

# Report Shorts

## Arizona

**Senate.** Two recent polls suggest that independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema has a tough road to re-election if she runs for a second term. A Dec. 19-20 Public Policy Polling survey commissioned by Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego found Sinema in third place with 13 percent, behind 2022 GOP gubernatorial nominee Kari Lake (41 percent) and Gallego (40 percent). Both Lake and 2022 GOP Senate nominee Blake Masters have said they're considering runs. And a Jan. 5-8 survey from Democratic firm Blueprint Polling found Lake leading Gallego, 36-32 percent, with Sinema at 14 percent.

**4th District.** GOP businessman Kelly Cooper announced his challenge to Democratic Rep. Greg Stanton in a rematch of last cycle. In 2022, the race was on the outer edge of the House battlefield and was a barometer of the size of a GOP wave. Stanton defeated Cooper by 12 points.

## California

**Senate.** Democratic Rep. Katie Porter jumped into the race without waiting for Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein to announce whether she'll seek re-election. Porter won't be alone. According to media reports, Democratic Rep. Barbara Lee has told people privately that she'll get into the race. And Rep. Adam Schiff is expected to run as well. This race has a long way to go and, because of California's top two primary system, could end with two Democrats facing off in the November 2024 general election.



Katie Porter

**30th District.** 2022 West Hollywood City Council candidate and former child star Ben Savage filed to run for what is expected to be an open seat when Schiff runs for the Senate. Savage, 42, is most famous for his role as Cory in ABC's *Boy Meets World*. Other Democrats will likely jump in for what is a very Democratic district. Los Angeles Unified School District board member Nick Melvoin and state Assemblymember Laura Friedman have both filed to run, and tech entrepreneur Joshua Bocanegra announced he's running for the seat.

**47th District.** Porter's Senate run leaves this Orange County seat open. Democratic state Sen. Dave Min joined the race this week with Porter's endorsement. He also currently represents a majority of the district in the state Legislature. Former Democratic Rep. Harley Rouda, who was unseated by Republican Rep. Michelle Steel in 2020, is running as well. On the Republican side, former state Assemblyman Scott Baugh is running. He lost to Porter by 3 points in 2022, but the open seat race should be very different than running against a well-funded incumbent.

## Florida

**Senate.** Sen. Rick Scott is running a national \$1.3 million ad campaign on Fox News defending his run for Senate GOP leader against Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell, and using his controversial "Rescue America" plan to collect phone numbers ahead of his re-election (or bid for higher office).

## Indiana

**Senate.** Rep. Jim Banks announced his candidacy for Sen. Mike Braun's open seat. Other potential candidates include former governor/former Purdue University president Mitch Daniels, Rep. Victoria Spartz, and others. But Banks is off to a strong start with endorsements from House Republican Conference Chairwoman Elise Stefanik, fellow Indiana Rep. Larry Buschon and Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton.

The anti-tax Club for Growth, which has endorsed Banks, is running TV ads against Daniels, the most formidable potential opponent to Banks. This is shaping up to be one of the most competitive Senate GOP primaries of the 2024 cycle and has attracted attention from Trumpworld.

## Ohio

**Senate.** GOP state Sen. Matt Dolan became the first Republican to challenge Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown in what will be one of the most competitive Senate races in the country. Dolan ran in 2022 and was the highest-profile Republican to not cater to former President Donald Trump. That was enough for 23 percent and a third place finish in that race. But it's too early to know what the GOP field looks like this time and how GOP primary voters will feel about Trump next year.

## South Carolina

**1st District.** South Carolina's Republican-controlled state legislature drew a new congressional map in 2021 that made the Charleston's-based 1st District significantly more Republican — largely by drawing Black residents in Charleston County into the already Democratic 6th District. But a federal court has ruled that the state's congressional map is an



Nancy Mace

unconstitutional racial gerrymander, and it ordered the state legislature to draw a new map by the end of March with a fair 1st District.

While South Carolina Republicans are expected to appeal the case, legal experts believe it's unlikely

that the Supreme Court would reverse the ruling — meaning it's more likely than not that Republican Rep. Nancy Mace will have a more competitive election battle in 2024 than she did last year.

The 1st District, once a Republican stronghold, had been trending more Democratic, and former Rep. Joe Cunningham flipped the old version seat in 2018. But Mace ousted Cunningham in 2020, defeating the Democrat by just 1 point, and after the 2021 round of redistricting she had a much safer district.

Mace beat back a Trump-backed primary opponent last year, and she defeated her Democratic opponent, pediatrician Annie Andrews, by 14 points. But next year Mace probably won't be as comfortable. It appears that the congresswoman is already trying to burnish her moderate, independent credentials. Last week, she criticized House Republicans for taking up anti-abortion legislation at the start of the 118th Congress — though she still voted for both bills.

# 2024 Gubernatorial Overview: Focus on the Few

By Erin Covey, Jacob Rubashkin, and Nathan L. Gonzales

Democrats had a better-than-expected 2022 — and not just in Washington, D.C. Though the party was defending seats won in the 2018 “Blue Wave” election, including in GOP-leaning and swing states, they managed to increase their number of governors nationwide.

But fresh off their successes, Democrats now face a daunting two-year election cycle that presents more places to lose ground than pickup seats.

Unlike Senate seats that are divided evenly between three classes so that one-third of the Senate is up for election every two years, races for governor are not proportional across a four-year cycle. Thirty-eight states elected a governor in 2021 and 2022, but just 14 states will elect a governor over the next two years. Those numbers total more than 50 because Vermont and New Hampshire elect their governors every two years.

Similar to the results in the House and Senate, incumbents showed remarkable strength in the 2022 gubernatorial races. Just one sitting governor, Democrat Steve Sisolak of Nevada, lost re-election, and that was by less than 2 points. In spite of that loss, Democrats netted two governorships and closed the gap with the GOP nationwide. There are currently 26 Republican governors and 24 Democratic governors.

But this is a particularly difficult map for Democrats over the next two years. President Donald Trump won 10 of 14 states in 2020 that will elect a governor in 2023 or 2024. Even though voters are more likely to cross the partisan line for governor than they are for federal office, the presidential result is still a key indicator of a state’s partisan preference.

Democrats easily won open seats in Massachusetts and Maryland without Republican Gobs. Charlie Baker and Larry Hogan on the ballot. This cycle, Republicans are looking to benefit from open seats in Louisiana and North Carolina, where popular Democratic governors are term-limited, while Democrats are hoping GOP governors step aside in New Hampshire and Vermont.

In the short term, the table is set for Republicans to gain governorships in 2023, with takeover opportunities in Kentucky and Louisiana. There will be a temptation to extrapolate those results onto next year’s races. But off-year races can be poor predictors of future results. Republicans’ big gubernatorial win in Virginia in 2021, which didn’t turn into a “Red Wave” in 2022, is a good example. The best approach is to view 2023 races as important, individual contests as the 2024 battlefield remains in place.

**Delaware. Open; John Carney Jr. (D) term-limited.** With Carney unable to run for a third term, there could be a crowded Democratic primary to succeed him. Lt. Gov. Bethany Hall-Long, New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer, and state Attorney General Kathy Jennings could all run. State Insurance Commissioner Trinidad Navarro and state Treasurer Colleen Davis both have personal baggage that could complicate bids. Republican candidates ran closer than expected in 2022 in Delaware, but the GOP still has a long way to go to prove they can win statewide. Solid Democratic.

**Indiana. Open; Eric Holcomb (R) term-limited.** After serving just one term in the Senate, Republican Sen. Mike Braun has decided to leave Washington and run for governor of the Hoosier State. Though the senator is the clear favorite in the GOP primary, he’ll face at least two other serious Republican candidates: Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch and

businessman Eric Doden.

Crouch would become Indiana’s first female governor if she’s elected, but she doesn’t have the financial resources of her wealthy Republican opponents. And Doden, who was appointed by then-Gov. Mike Pence to lead the Indiana Economic Development Corporation a decade ago, isn’t as well known as Braun and Crouch. Former Rep. Trey Hollingsworth, another wealthy businessman, is also considering running for either governor or Senate.

No Democrats have announced campaigns yet. But Jennifer McCormick, a former Republican who served as State Superintendent of Public Instruction, has formed an exploratory committee. Whoever becomes the Democratic nominee will face an uphill battle in the increasingly red state. Solid Republican.

**Missouri. Open; Mike Parson (R) term-limited.** The race to replace Parson has been fairly quiet so far, but the Republican primary is expected to be competitive. Once a bellwether state, Missouri has become increasingly red over the past few election cycles.



Courtesy: Kehoe Campaign

Mike Kehoe

Republican Lt. Gov. Mike Kehoe was the first to announce he was running for governor, launching his campaign last April. So far, no other Republicans have announced campaigns. But Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft is widely expected to run for governor, and state Sen. Bill Eigel has said he’s considering running as well.

The son of former U.S. Attorney General and Missouri Gov. John Ashcroft, the secretary of state has a natural advantage in the GOP primary thanks to his last name. Ashcroft also has also developed a reputation as a staunch conservative during his tenure, proposing a plan to limit certain children’s books at public libraries and pushing for stricter voter ID laws.

Kehoe has the support of Rex Sinquefield, a major Republican donor in the state who backed now-Sen. Eric Schmitt in last year’s GOP Senate primary. He’s also earned endorsements from a range of organizations, including the Missouri Fraternal Order of Police, the Missouri Automobile Dealers Association, and several agricultural groups. Meanwhile, Eigel was a member of the conservative caucus that spent the last two years at war with Republican state Senate leaders. The state senator has focused on pushing for tax cuts and fighting to reduce the state’s budget during his tenure.

On the Democratic side, House Minority Leader Crystal Quade and Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas have been mentioned as potential candidates. But a state that Trump won by 15 points in 2020 and Schmitt won by 13 points in 2022 shouldn’t be competitive in the general election in 2024. Solid Republican.

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**Montana. Greg Gianforte (R) elected 2020 (54%).** Democrats had a lock on the Montana governor’s mansion for nearly two decades but are on the decline in Big Sky Country. The party’s efforts will be focused on re-electing Sen. Jon Tester, the party’s one remaining statewide officeholder. 2020 gubernatorial candidate Whitney Williams could run again, but she may also run for Congress in the 1st District, the more competitive of the state’s seats and likely to be open if Rep. Ryan Zinke runs for Senate. Solid Republican.

**New Hampshire. Chris Sununu (R) elected 2016 (49%), re-elected 2018 (53%), 2020 (65%) and 2022 (57%).** Sununu passed up a run for Senate last year to run for re-election, but in 2024 he could set his eyes



Chris Sununu

Courtesy State of New Hampshire

on a higher prize: the White House. His decision will set the tone for the race to lead the Granite State. Sununu won in 2022, but by a diminished margin from his 2020 landslide, as the prominence of hot button issues such as abortion took a toll on

his support from Democrats and independents. That gives Democrats some confidence that, even if Sununu does run, they have a shot at knocking him off. But it will certainly be easier if Sununu opts out.

Any number of Republicans might throw their hat in the ring if that’s the case: both leading 2022 Senate candidates, retired General Don Bolduc and former state Sen. President Chuck Morse; former Sen. Kelly Ayotte; education commissioner / 2016 gubernatorial candidate Frank Edelblut; and executive councilors Joe Kenney (the 2008 GOP nominee for governor) and Ted Gatsas (a 2016 gubernatorial candidate). On the Democratic side, the caliber of the field likely depends on whether Sununu runs or not. Both Reps. Annie Kuster and Chris Pappas could run, as could executive councilor Cinde Warmington, 2020 gubernatorial candidates Dan Feltes and Andru Volinsky, or 2022 nominee Tom Sherman. Battleground.

**North Carolina. Open; Roy Cooper (D) term-limited.** This battle over North Carolina’s governor’s mansion is likely to be the most competitive gubernatorial race in the country next year. Democrats have struggled to win high-profile Senate races in this purple state, and Trump narrowly won the state both in 2016 and 2020. But Cooper has successfully threaded the needle in North Carolina over the past seven years, providing a path for Democratic success in the Tar Heel State.

Now that Cooper is term-limited, it will be more difficult for Democrats to hold on to this seat. But they have a strong contender in state Attorney General Josh Stein, who announced his candidacy for governor on Wednesday. Stein was first elected to the office in 2016, succeeding Cooper, who served as attorney general for 16 years before being elected governor. Stein actually worked in Cooper’s office as a deputy attorney general before being elected to the state Senate in 2008. His early announcement gives him an advantage over any other Democrats interested in running. And he quickly began consolidating

support from North Carolina Democrats, including Rep. Jeff Jackson and state Senate Minority Leader Robert Tyrone Reives, both of whom were previously mentioned as potential candidates.

A few other high-profile Democrats have been mentioned: Former state Department of Health & Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen, EPA Administrator Michael Regan, and former state Supreme Court Justice Cheri Beasley, who lost the 2022 U.S. Senate race by 3 points.

So far, no Republicans have announced they’re running yet. But Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, a conservative firebrand and the first Black North Carolinian to hold his office, is widely expected to run, and would be the likely frontrunner in a GOP primary. Stein’s announcement video calls Robinson out directly, criticizing the lieutenant governor for his history of incendiary comments about gay marriage, abortion, and women’s roles.

Other Republicans are mulling bids too. State Treasurer Dale Folwell said he’s been approached by Republicans looking for an alternative to Robinson. Agricultural Commissioner Steve Troxler, who’s been in office for the past 18 years, has been mentioned as a potential candidate as well.

Regardless of who Republicans nominate, North Carolina is the GOP’s best opportunity to flip a governor’s seat in 2024. But if someone like Robinson becomes the nominee, that task becomes harder. Battleground.

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## Vote Above Replacement, 2022 Governor Democratic Candidates

State	Candidate	Percent Earned	Democratic Baseline	VAR
KS	Laura Kelly*	49.5	41.4	8.1
OK	Joy Hofmeister	41.8	33.8	8.0
PA	Josh Shapiro*	56.5	50.7	5.8
CO	Jared Polis*	58.5	52.9	5.7
MI	Gretchen Whitmer*	54.5	51.1	3.3
ME	Janet Mills*	55.4	52.9	2.5
AZ	Katie Hobbs*	50.3	48.6	1.7
WI	Tony Evers*	51.2	49.6	1.6
MN	Tim Walz*	52.3	51.2	1.1
MD	Wes Moore*	64.7	63.8	1.0
TX	Beto O’Rourke	43.9	43.4	0.5
MA	Maura Healey*	63.8	63.7	0.1
CT	Ned Lamont*	55.9	56.0	-0.1
SC	Joe Cunningham	40.7	41.3	-0.6
NV	Steve Sisolak	47.3	48.6	-1.3
IL	J.B. Pritzker*	54.6	56.0	-1.4
GA	Stacey Abrams	45.9	47.3	-1.4
RI	Dan McKee*	58.1	59.8	-1.7
CA	Gavin Newsom*	59.2	61.3	-2.2
NM	Michelle Lujan Grisham*	52.0	54.9	-3.0
FL	Charlie Crist	40.0	45.1	-5.1
HI	Josh Green*	63.2	68.5	-5.2
OR	Tina Kotek*	47.0	52.6	-5.6
OH	Nan Whaley	37.2	43.7	-6.5
NY	Kathy Hochul*	52.9	60.4	-7.5

Notes: Winners indicated with an asterisk (\*)  
Margin discrepancies due to rounding



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**North Dakota.** Doug Burgum (R) elected 2016 (77%), re-elected 2020 (77%). Voters recently implemented term limits, but Burgum can run for up to another two terms because he's grandfathered in. If the governor does run again, he'll win easily. If he doesn't, there is no shortage of Republican officeholders who will look at the race. At the top of the list is state Attorney General Drew Wrigley, a former lieutenant governor and U.S. Attorney. Tammy Miller, the recently appointed lieutenant governor, could also run. Solid Republican.

**Utah.** Spencer Cox (R) elected 2020 (63%). Cox won a very close primary in 2020 but looks set to sail to re-election. His more moderate stances and non-confrontational demeanor don't earn him fans in the conservative media, but he's still popular statewide and especially among Utah GOP voters. A recent OH Predictive Insights poll found his approval rating to be 59 percent overall and 75 percent among GOP voters. No challengers have emerged from either party. Solid Republican.



Spencer Cox

Courtesy: Office of Spencer Cox

**Vermont.** Phil Scott (R) elected 2016 (53%), re-elected 2018 (55%), 2020 (73%) and 2022 (71%). Scott's moderate brand and affable image continues to insulate him from the otherwise solidly Democratic bent of the state. His approval rating was an astounding 81 percent in the latest *Morning Consult* quarterly survey. If he runs, he'll win. If he doesn't run, Democrats have a great shot at flipping the state — once they sort out a crowded primary that could include former Lt. Gov. Molly Gray, incumbent Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman, state Sen. Keshia Ram Hinsdale, 2022 gubernatorial nominee Brenda Seigel, and any number of other current statewide officeholders such as Secretary of State Sarah Copeland-Hanzas, Attorney General Charity Clark, and Auditor Mike Peciak. Solid Republican.

**Washington.** Jay Inslee (D) elected 2012 (52%), re-elected 2016 (54%) and 2020 (57%). If Inslee is elected to a fourth term, he'll become the longest-serving governor in the history of Washington State. The 71-year-old governor hasn't yet announced his 2024 plans, but whether or not he decides to run, Democrats should be in a decent position to keep control of the governor's mansion.

A survey from *Morning Consult* conducted at the end of 2022 showed that Inslee's approval rating was at 50 percent, making him one of the 10 least popular governors in the country. If Inslee decided not to run, several Washington Democrats, including state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, state Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, and King County Executive Dow Constantine, would be well-positioned to succeed him.

Washington hasn't elected a Republican governor since Ronald Reagan was first elected president in 1980. And Republicans efforts to win statewide races in the Evergreen State have fallen flat over the past

few years — MAGA acolyte Loren Culp and the more moderate Tiffany Smiley both got 43 percent in their bids for governor in 2020 and Senate in 2022. So far, Richland school board member Semi Bird is the only Republican who's announced a campaign. Solid Democratic.

**West Virginia.** Open; Jim Justice (R) term-limited. With Justice unable to run again, it's a wide-open GOP primary field in the Mountain State. So far, the contest is largely a family affair. State Del. Moore Capito, the son of Republican Sen. Shelly Moore Capito and the grandson of former Gov. Arch Moore, is running, as is auto dealer Chris Miller, whose mother Carol Miller represents the southern half of the state in Congress. Secretary of State Mac Warner is also a candidate. State Auditor JB McCuskey is also considering a run, and former Rep. David McKinley has long talked about running but most recently lost a member vs. member House primary.

But the biggest open question in this race isn't in the Republican primary: Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin, a former governor, often talks about seeking his old office. If he does, Democrats have a chance to take this seat back. Huntington Mayor Stephen T. Williams is also considering a bid. For now, it's Solid Republican.



## Vote Above Replacement, 2022 Governor Republican Candidates

State	Candidate	Percent Earned	Republican Baseline	VAR
VT	Phil Scott*	71.3	35.6	35.7
NH	Chris Sununu*	57.1	47.3	9.8
NY	Lee Zeldin	47.1	38.0	9.2
WY	Mark Gordon*	78.7	69.8	8.9
HI	Duke Aiona	36.8	28.7	8.1
OH	Mike DeWine*	62.8	54.9	7.9
FL	Ron DeSantis*	59.4	53.9	5.5
AL	Kay Ivey*	67.4	62.1	5.3
IA	Kim Reynolds*	58.1	52.8	5.3
TN	Bill Lee*	64.9	61.3	3.6
NM	Mark Ronchetti	45.6	43.3	2.3
NV	Joe Lombardo*	48.8	46.8	2.0
OR	Christine Drazan	43.6	41.6	2.0
GA	Brian Kemp*	53.4	51.8	1.6
SC	Henry McMaster*	58.1	56.8	1.2
TX	Greg Abbott*	54.8	54.2	0.6
MN	Scott Jensen	44.6	44.8	-0.2
NE	Jim Pillen*	59.7	60.1	-0.4
AZ	Kari Lake	49.7	50.4	-0.8
WI	Tim Michels	47.8	48.6	-0.8
AR	Sarah Huckabee Sanders*	63.0	64.1	-1.1
AK	Mike Dunleavy*	50.3	51.9	-1.6
ME	Paul LePage	42.5	44.1	-1.6
MI	Tudor Dixon	43.9	46.1	-2.2
SD	Kristi Noem*	62.0	64.4	-2.4
ID	Brad Little*	60.5	64.2	-3.7
CO	Heidi Ganahl	39.2	43.6	-4.4
PA	Doug Mastriano	41.7	46.6	-4.9
OK	Kevin Stitt*	55.4	62.7	-7.3
KS	Derek Schmidt	47.4	56.2	-8.8

Notes: Winners indicated with an asterisk (\*)  
Margin discrepancies due to rounding

# Breaking Down the Demographics of the 118th Congress

By Erin Covey

Slowly but surely, the U.S. Congress has begun to better reflect the nation.

But even as the House and the Senate have gradually become more diverse, the rate at which that happens has appeared to decline. The number of women and nonwhite members in the 118th Congress has only marginally increased compared to the 117th, and this Congress is one of the oldest in the history of the United States.

## 118th Congress by Gender

Women serving in Congress added just two to their number after the 2022 election cycle: 149 women are in the 118th Congress, a slight uptick from 147 in the 117th Congress, according to the Center for Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

This is a significantly smaller increase compared to the past few years. After the 2020 election 20 more women joined Congress, and after 2018 the number of women grew by 16.

Altogether, women still make up less than 30 percent of Congress — 25 percent of the Senate and 29 percent in the House. This year marks the record for the largest number of women in the House, though not in the Senate, where the current record is 26 women.

The percentage of women in the freshman class of lawmakers is actually slightly smaller than the percentage of women in Congress as a whole. Twenty-three out of 81 new members, or 28 percent, of the freshmen are women.

Several women elected to Congress this past November made history in their states. Republican Sen. Katie Boyd Britt, who succeeded longtime Sen. Richard Shelby, became the first woman elected to the Senate from Alabama. And in the House, Democratic Rep. Becca Balint became the first woman ever elected to Congress from Vermont. Democratic Reps. Yadira Caraveo and Delia Ramirez became the first Latinas elected to Congress from Colorado and Illinois, respectively, and Democratic Rep. Summer Lee became the first Black woman elected to Congress from Pennsylvania.

In recent years the Republican Party has placed a higher priority on recruiting women to run for Congress — and on supporting women running in contested GOP primaries. But Democratic women still dramatically outnumber Republican women in Congress. Less than a third of women in the House and Senate are Republicans, and among the 23 new women in Congress this year, eight are Republicans.

## 118th Congress by Race and Ethnicity

While the number of Latino members increased marginally after the 2022 election cycle, the number of members who identify as Black or Asian American has effectively held steady.

There are 55 Latino members of Congress in the House and Senate, compared to 48 members at the beginning of the 117th. The new Congress is 10 percent Latino, significantly less than the national population percentage of 19 percent Latino. But among freshmen lawmakers, 14 out of 81, or 17 percent, identify as Latino — much more reflective of the United State's population.

Notably, five of those 14 freshmen are Republicans. After the GOP made gains with Latino voters in 2020, a historic number of Latino Republicans ran for Congress last cycle, to mixed success. Roughly

25 percent of all Hispanic members in Congress (14 out of 55) are Republicans.

Latina lawmakers also made history on the West Coast: Democratic Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez became the first Latino member of Congress from Washington, and Reps. Andrea Salinas and Lori Chavez-DeRemer became the first Latino members of Congress from Oregon.

However, the number of Black members of Congress has held steady at 60 members. Not counting Kamala Harris, who resigned from the Senate in mid-January, the 117th Congress had 60 Black lawmakers at the beginning of 2021.

In total, Black members hold 11.5 percent of seats in the 118th Congress. A higher percentage of freshmen are Black: 11 out of 81 members, or 13.6 percent, almost identical to the Black population in the U.S. according to the Census Bureau.

With the election of Rep. John James in Michigan and Rep. Wesley Hunt in Texas, five Black Republicans are serving in Congress (four in the House, one in the Senate) for the first time since the Reconstruction Era.

The number of Asian American and Pacific Islander members also remained the same after the 2022 election cycle. Eighteen Asian American and Pacific Islander lawmakers serve in Congress, just 3 percent. Asian Americans — the fastest growing racial group in the country — make up more than 6 percent of the country's population.

Rep. Jill Tokuda, who is Japanese American, and Rep. Shri Thanedar, the first Indian American elected to Congress from Michigan, are the only two Asian American members in the House freshman class. California Reps. And Michelle Steel and Young Kim, both first elected in 2020, are still the lone Republican Asian Americans in Congress.

The class of freshman senators is even less racially diverse. But it's worth noting that Oklahoma Sen. Markwayne Mullin, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, became the first Native American in the upper chamber in almost two decades. His successor in the House, Oklahoma Rep. Josh Brecheen, is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation.

## 118th Congress by Age

Even as Florida voters elected the country's first Gen Z member, this Congress is still one of the oldest in the history of the U.S.

Per data compiled by NBC, the average age of House members in the 118th Congress is 57.5 years-old, and the average age of senators is 63.9 years-old. Congress is just slightly younger than it was two years ago, when the average age of House members was 58.4 years and the average age of senators was 64.3 years.

Democratic Rep. Maxwell Frost, 25, is now the youngest member of the House — and the first member of Afro-Cuban descent.

Georgia's Sen. Jon Ossoff remains the youngest U.S. senator. But Ohio's newly elected senator, J.D. Vance, is now the second youngest senator (and the youngest Republican senator) at 38 years-old.

Perhaps the most consequential generational milestone this year was in House Democratic leadership. At 52 years-old, Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York succeeded Nancy Pelosi and became the first House Democratic leader born after World War II. With Jeffries, Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, and Rep. Pete Aguilar of California now at the helm, the average age of House Democrats' "Big Three" fell from 82 to 51 years old.

