

Elections Lay Bare GOP's Abortion Liability

Several results point to the continued potency of the issue heading into 2024

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They were disparate elections in different states—for governor, state Senate, a state court seat and on a constitutional amendment. But the results of off-year races on Tuesday pointed in one direction: Voters will come to the polls to defend abortion rights.

In the Republican stronghold of Ohio and Kentucky, as well as politically purple Virginia and Pennsylvania, abortion-rights supporters spent millions of dollars to tell voters that GOP lawmakers couldn't be trusted to set state abortion policy after the U.S. Supreme Court last year eliminated a right to the procedure under the Constitution.

Those efforts worked, giving Democrats hopes that they can harness the issue again in 2024 to offset voter disenchantment with the economy and President Biden, who is running for re-election with weak, job-approval ratings.

"Abortion is an issue that motivates and turns out Democrats, and that advantage for them is not going to fade," said Tucker Martin, a longtime Republican political strategist in Virginia, where Democrats retained control of the state Senate and gained control of the House.

The abortion-rights side did Please turn to page A4

Abortion Is A Liability For GOP

Continued from Page One particularly well in suburban counties that will be crucial in 2024. And some Democrats were quick to point to Tuesday's results as evidence that the party shouldn't fret so much about Biden's personal unpopularity.

"What if—and just hear me out for a second—the Democratic brand and Joe Biden have policies people actually like? And the way people voted last night is a reflection of both those things?" asked Jim Messina, who managed Barack Obama's 2012 campaign, in a post on X.

The results also suggested that Republicans and anti-abortion groups haven't found their footing on the issue, as Democrats have zeroed in on strategy in some states to protect the other side as extreme. Tuesday's elections underscored that younger conservatives seek to paint themselves as compromising, push for tougher restrictions or try to avoid talking about abortion altogether, they continue to struggle when the issue is an electoral focal point.

In campaigning for Republican legislative candidates, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, a Republican, had called for a ban on abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, rather than the state's current limit after 26 weeks—an idea that is off the table now that Democrats will control both legislative chambers. He said national anti-abortion leaders had hoped Tuesday's contests would show that Youngkin's proposal, which

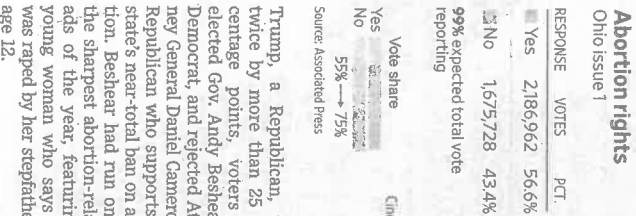


Abortion-rights backers cheered as they watched election returns in Columbus, Ohio, on Tuesday.

they are promoting as a compromise, would appeal to moderate voters.

In Ohio, voters approved an amendment to the state constitution protecting access to the procedure until a fetus can live outside the womb, generally at about 23 weeks of pregnancy. The decision was a rebuke to legislative Republicans and Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican who in 2019 signed a ban on abortion after about six weeks of pregnancy that has been blocked in court.

In Pennsylvania, Democrat Daniel McCaffrey won a state Supreme Court seat after running ads promising to defend abortion rights and voting rights. His win over Republican Carolyn Carduccio fortifies the existing Democratic majority on a court that decided important cases about voting access before the 2020 election in the nation's biggest presidential swing state.



Trump, a Republican, won twice by more than 25 percentage points, voters re-elected Gov. Andy Beshear, a Democrat, and rejected Attorney General Daniel Cameron, a Republican who supports the state's near-total ban on abortion. Beshear had run one of the sharpest abortion-related ads of the year, featuring a young woman who says she was raped by her stepfather at age 12.

"This is to you, Daniel Cameron," she says to the camera. "To tell a 12-year-old girl she must have the baby of her stepfather who raped her is unthinkable."

Cameron had at times indicated support for adding exceptions for rape and incest to the state's abortion ban. They appears to be leaving Pennsylvania on cultural issues."

Near Richmond, Va., a Republican state senator lost her seat to a Democrat after campaigning in favor of a 15-week abortion ban. Democrats also won a competitive Senate race in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., in which their candidate promised to prevent a rollback of abortion rights.

come a factor in the election, as did Beshear's highlighting of the issue. "In the past, Democrats didn't talk much about abortion," he said.

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Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade last June, abortion-rights groups have scored victories in states as wide-ranging as Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan and Wisconsin. The issue also helped bolster Democrats in last year's midterm elections in gubernatorial races in Arizona and Michigan as well as in congressional races.

The victory in Ohio is likely to create new momentum behind efforts to put abortion rights on the ballot in 2024 in states including Arizona, Florida, Nevada and Nebraska. That could help boost turnout by Democratic voters in places that could be key battlegrounds in the presidential election and other races.

The results from some states suggested that voters in upper-income suburbs outside big cities, who often lean Republican, are eager to support abortion rights. In Ohio, for example, close to 60% of voters in Delaware County, near Columbus, backed the constitutional amendment protecting abortion rights—substantially more than the 53% who backed Trump in 2020.

Tom Bonier of the Democratic voter data firm TargetSmart said the results showed that abortion could boost Biden's re-election effort, which has drawn muted enthusiasm from voters.

"What you're seeing in these limited results is that the issue of abortion has actually grown in saliency. People have had more than a year to live with the Dobbs decision," Bonier said, referring to the Supreme Court case that overturned Roe v. Wade, "and the lived reality is more stark and more impactful than anyone had anticipated."

Mike Madrid, a Republican political consultant based in California, said that many of these voters, particularly women, were leaving the GOP.

"The tendency of college-educated, suburban Republican women to vote Democratic is now more likely than less likely," he said. "Not all of them, but significant numbers. There is a very critical part of the Republican coalition that appears to be leaving Pennsylvania on cultural issues."

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