

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

It's election eve in [dozens of states](#), including 13 where statewide contests will decide everything from legislative control and governorships to the future of abortion rights. But there's plenty of election drama in states without imminent elections, too. All the country's a stage, basically. But occasionally, we — the audience — get a chance to change the programming.



The Big Takeaway

Among Tuesday's marquee matchups is a gubernatorial race in Mississippi, where Republican Gov. Tate Reeves is vying for a second term against Democrat Brandon Presley, a former mayor and state utilities regulator (and [cousin of Elvis](#)). Republicans have controlled the governorship for the past two decades, but this year's race has been [unusually close](#), thanks to Presley's [well-funded](#) campaign and Reeves' connection to a [massive welfare scandal](#) that unfolded during his tenure as lieutenant governor. If neither candidate clears 50% of the vote, both would advance to a runoff contest three weeks later — [a first in state history](#).



*A must-get for Mississippi gubernatorial candidates.
(Photo via Mississippi Today)*

Against that backdrop, both candidates made their final pitches to voters on the Gulf Coast, a traditional Republican firewall where Presley hopes to peel off support, precinct by precinct. That’s a tall order for a northern Mississippi Democrat who’s never appeared on a coastal ballot, but Presley said internal polling indicated that his campaign had succeeded in building name ID in the region, [Mississippi Today reported](#).

“We’re already beginning to see data that shows we’re going to be extremely competitive down here,” he said Saturday. “One of the things that I think Tate has shown in this campaign is he’s kind of taken the Coast for granted, as if it’s somewhere they’re just supposed to vote for him for some reason.”

In previous election cycles, Democrats had also accepted that narrative, largely ignoring pockets of left-leaning voters on the Coast because of the region’s overall conservative tilt. State and local leaders retooled their strategy this year, highlighting diverse populations and union workers in Harrison, Hancock and Jackson counties.

“Look, people are fired up down here,” said state Rep. Jeffrey Hulum, a Gulfport Democrat. “My advice to anyone is to stop taking us for granted.”



Different coast, similar politics.
(Photo by Danielle Heminghaus/for the New Jersey Monitor)

New Jersey Republicans are hoping to reclaim legislative dominance on their own shore Tuesday by flipping the lone Democratic seat in a traditional GOP stronghold that drifted left in the early aughts. The win would solidify the party's hold on the coast and whittle Democratic majorities in both chambers of the state legislature, where [all 120 seats](#) are up for grabs Tuesday, [the New Jersey Monitor reported](#).

“The pendulum is swinging to the right,” said John Froomjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University. “The state has been trending Republican, a little bit, and especially in South Jersey.”

Statewide, registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by roughly one million. But the GOP holds a 75,000-voter advantage in the seven Jersey Shore legislative districts, where populations are dominated by retirees and older residents who skew conservative. Democrats flipped a handful of those seats after 2001, but Republicans have since reclaimed all but one, leaving state Sen. Vin Gopal the lone blue peg in a sea of red.

Gopal, a Monmouth Democrat, attributed his most recent reelection to a history of bipartisanship and a basic understanding of how Jersey Shore residents felt

about certain issues. State party leaders often failed to grasp those nuances, he said — most recently as it related to a Democratic-backed plan to [transition the state to renewable energy](#).

“The Democrats failed to understand any of the concerns that voters had about cost, about tourism, about construction,” he said. “I think it’s overall broad communication.”



*BROAD COMMUNICATION
(Photo by Caitlin Sievers/Arizona Mirror)*

Communication has been a bit *too* effective for some election-denying Republican candidates, who find themselves in the awkward position of begging for votes from people who no longer trust that their votes will be counted. Proudly leading that pack is Kari Lake, the self-proclaimed “true governor” of Arizona who never conceded her [true 2022 election loss](#) even though she’s now running for U.S. Senate. And that’s a tricky bit of multitasking, because you can’t be a governor *and* a senator, and also because Lake spent the past year telling her supporters that elections are rife with fraud and rigged against Republicans, [the Arizona Mirror reported](#).

Lake seems to know this is a problem, even if she won’t (or can’t) acknowledge it directly. At her [campaign kickoff rally](#), she urged supporters to vote early — a sharp departure from 2022, when she [tried to abolish](#) early voting altogether.

“If you choose to vote that way, fine, vote early. I’m OK with that,” she said. “If you want to vote on Election Day, vote that way. Just vote. Don’t sit home because you’re pissed off at the system.”

The crowd responded with boos.



*More effective messaging.
(Photo by Jerod MacDonald-Evoy/Arizona Mirror)*

The good news, if you can call it that, is that the voters who attend a Kari Lake rally are not the voters that the Kari Lakes of the world need to convince. It’s the infrequent voters who need to be persuaded — and those voters are “hearing very mixed messages, at best,” according to David Becker, executive director and founder of the D.C.-based [Center for Election Innovation & Research](#), a nonprofit that aims to restore trust in U.S. elections and ensure election integrity and security.

Occasional voters are important because most people vote infrequently, Becker said. Even in high-turnout presidential elections, [only 60% of registered voters](#) cast a ballot. A lot of Americans simply need to be persuaded to participate, and if they’re already on the fence, it doesn’t take much to dissuade them, Becker said. A single message — say, that voting is difficult (a common refrain from Democrats) or that elections are rigged ([paging Republicans](#)) — [can be enough](#) to keep voters from the polls.

“This isn’t speculation,” he said. “Ask Georgia Republicans. The talk of rigging of elections cost them Senate seats. Some Republicans just didn’t show up because of that messaging.”

That rhetoric likely impacted the outcome of last year’s elections in Arizona, including the gubernatorial contest and the race for attorney general, in which Democrat Kris Mayes defeated election denier Abe Hamadeh [by just 280 votes](#). In a state where more than 80% of voters cast their ballots early, GOP-backed conspiracy theories can “absolutely” swing a race to a Democrat, said Tyler Montague, a longtime Arizona Republican Party precinct committeeman and activist.

“[Hamadeh] reaped what he sowed,” Montague said. “They had these [\(polling place\) problems](#) day-of, and I absolutely believe that he probably lost that election because a couple hundred people is all it would take to say, ‘I don’t have time, I’ve got to go,’ and leave because the line was too long.”

“In these super tight races that are won by fractions of a point ... this stuff makes a difference and has cost Republicans elections,” he added.

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The 18.

(Photo by Emma Davis/Maine Morning Star)

National media may have moved on from the deadliest mass shooting in Maine history, but those who knew the 18 victims are just beginning to mourn, the Maine Morning Star reported. Across the state, friends, families, colleagues and communities are gathering for funerals and memorials. On Tuesday in Auburn, loved ones will celebrate the lives of Robert and Lucille Violette. On Wednesday, there's a funeral and memorial in South Portland for Josh Seal, who served as an American Sign Language interpreter during the state's COVID-19 briefings. On Friday, people will gather in Manchester to remember William Young, an avid wrestling fan, and his 14-year-old son Aaron.

Two days after the shooting, Maine Gov. Janet Mills encouraged people to join her in "reading their stories, learning who they were, celebrating them as beloved people and mourning them as irreplaceable." You can, and should, do that [here](#).



From The Newsrooms

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One Last Thing

Matthew Perry convinced “Friends” writers to nix a storyline about Chandler cheating on Monica, arguing that the audience would “never forgive” them for it, [according to the woman](#) tapped to play the, uh, other woman. (Left unsaid: *Chandler would never.* [Thank you, Matthew Perry.](#))

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