

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

It can be easy to overlook off-year elections, particularly when they take place in other states. Turnout is [always lower](#), and if you're not an Extremely Online Political Person (me), you probably don't know much about the candidates and issues on the ballot. I can't say for sure that being hyper engaged in every contest is a good thing — I suspect my blood pressure would argue otherwise — but what I can tell you is that every election is relevant to your life, regardless of where you live.



The Big Takeaway

Thirteen states held general elections on Tuesday, including marquee races for governor in [Kentucky](#) and [Mississippi](#), key mayoral contests in Philadelphia and Houston, and a pair of proposed constitutional amendments in Ohio that would enshrine abortion rights and legalize recreational marijuana. Polls will close after I file this newsletter, so I won't have results for you until Wednesday (the perennial plight of the Election Day reporter), but fear not — I've still got plenty to tell you (the other perennial plight of the Election Day reporter).



Happening as I write this!
(Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images)

For better or worse, Tuesday's contests will be interpreted as a bellwether for 2024. Democrats have been bullish on their chances since [last year's midterms](#), when abortion became a galvanizing issue for left-wing voters. Candidates across the country have leaned into that success this year, focusing their campaigns on reproductive rights in hopes of scoring similar wins. If it works, expect Democrats to continue running on abortion, effectively transforming every contest into a referendum on reproductive health care.

To be fair, most elections in the post-Roe world already function as de facto abortion referendums. Only [Ohio](#) will literally vote on abortion Tuesday, but it's a key factor in almost every other race, regardless of whether it's actually on the ballot, according to [reporting from our national team](#).

For example, abortion rights [advocates](#) and [opponents](#) poured money into a [state Supreme Court race](#) in Pennsylvania, where abortion is legal but not explicitly protected by state law. Every legislative seat is up for grabs [in Virginia](#), where Republican majorities would clear the way for Gov. Glenn Youngkin to enact a 15-week abortion ban. (Or a "bill that will protect life at 15 weeks," which is how Youngkin [would prefer](#) that you think of it.) And in Kentucky, Republican

Attorney General David Cameron [vowed to sign legislation](#) carving out exceptions to the state’s abortion ban after [a pressure campaign](#) from Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear, who has blasted the policy as “extremist.”



*THE DOORS OF DEMOCRACY
(Photo by New Jersey Monitor)*

Not everyone appreciated this strategy. Progressive activists in New Jersey bemoaned the [relentless focus on abortion](#) among state legislative candidates as a missed opportunity to connect with voters on other important topics, like public transit, racial justice and immigration, [the New Jersey Monitor reported](#).

“There’s an enthusiasm gap because people aren’t seeing themselves, aren’t seeing their families, aren’t seeing their communities reflected in policies,” said Amy Torres, executive director of the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice. “Parties and campaigns are following an outdated political playbook.”

The singular messaging is typical in off-year election cycles, particularly among state legislative candidates with low name recognition and small campaign operations. Turnout is traditionally low, and most voters make up their

minds before the election, leaving little time — or incentive — for candidates to craft personalized messages. The goal is mobilizing the existing base, not building a new one, said Dan Cassino, professor of politics and government at Fairleigh Dickinson University. And party-approved messaging works just fine for that, he added.

“It’s cynical, but unfortunately, that’s the way that the electoral campaigns work,” he said. “At least in New Jersey, at this time.”



*Party-approved messaging, probably.
(Photo by McKenna Horsley/Kentucky Lantern)*

Advocacy groups in Ohio took a different approach, opting to canvass neighborhoods and knock on doors in hopes of connecting with unregistered Black voters. Roughly 20% of the state’s inactive voters are Black — a massive, untapped voting bloc that one activist likened to “a sleeping giant,” [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#).

“It is the one electorate in Ohio that no one is counting on to show up,” said Prentiss Haney, co-executive director of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative. “And

so when they do show up, it makes a big impact on elections.”

In addition to canvassing, volunteers reached out to student groups and formerly incarcerated adults, while voting rights groups set up websites to help voters register or find information about upcoming elections. The effort proved successful — since June, the collaborative and other groups have registered 22,000 new voters. Ninety percent of them are Black, Haney said.

“If you are a citizen, and you are someone who is engaged in your local community, you should be able to cast your ballot,” he said.



Come on down!

(Photo by Stephen Maturen/Getty Images)

Mobilization efforts seemed to be paying off in other states, where early voting totals favored Democrats. In Kentucky, more than 133,000 Democrats cast early ballots, compared to 112,000 Republicans, [according to state data](#). Experts said that could portend a Beshear victory, though polling had him [in a dead heat](#) with Cameron as recently as Friday, [per the Kentucky Lantern](#).

“If we have indications that there’s early voting and numbers are high, then we know that there’s enthusiasm behind that candidate,” said Sandra Curry Ardrey,

a political science professor at Western Kentucky University. “And we can expect that the regular turnout is going to be higher also.”

Early turnout was up in Ohio, where more than 864,000 ballots had been cast by Sunday — roughly 200,000 more than in a special election in August, according to data from [the secretary of state’s office](#). Turnout was particularly strong in Democratic strongholds, including Cuyahoga (up 16% from August), Franklin (36%) and Hamilton (7%) counties, [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#).

Early turnout increased slightly among Republicans [in Virginia](#), where Youngkin spent months trying to reverse years of GOP fear-mongering about mail-in and absentee ballots. It worked, maybe, but also maybe not, because overall early voting was down 19% from last year and 35% from the year before, according to data from the [Virginia Public Access Project](#).

They’ll give you a sticker: [Arkansas candidates for state and federal offices begin filing for 2024 election ... Election Day in Connecticut going smoothly by midday; Turnout mixed ... Compelled by big questions and civic duty, Maine voters head to the polls ... What it’s like to do same-day voter registration in Maine ... We’re in the dark on most New Mexico school board race finances. That may change next year ... Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro stumps for McCaffery and other Democratic candidates in Bucks County ... Election Day in Pennsylvania starts with delayed polling place openings, malfunctioning voting machines ... Republicans fight to stay afloat on Philadelphia City Council ... Allegheny County, Pa. will elect its first new county executive in 25 years ... Voting is slow and steady in Rhode Island on Election Day morning ... Houston voters could select a new mayor as U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee and state Sen. John Whitmire lead crowded field ... Taxes, state parks, infrastructure: Texans will decide 14 constitutional amendments today](#)



Caught Our Eye

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds on Monday threw her “full support” behind Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, officially endorsing his flailing presidential candidacy in a speech laced with thinly veiled rebukes of Donald Trump, [the Iowa Capital Dispatch reported](#).

“We need someone who won’t get distracted but will stay disciplined, who puts

this country first and not himself ... who looks to the future, and not the past. Someone who, most importantly, can win,” Reynolds said before a crowd of supporters in Des Moines. “That person is Ron DeSantis.”



Woo.

(Photo by Robin Opsahl/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

The endorsement is a logical one for Reynolds, who, like DeSantis, took office in 2018 and was reelected by a comfortable margin in 2022. Both preside over onetime purple states that overwhelmingly elected Republicans in last year’s midterms, bucking national trends that largely favored Democrats. On Monday, Reynolds framed their similar track records as proof that DeSantis was aligned politically with Iowans, praising him as “one of the most effective leaders” she’d ever seen.

DeSantis embraced the comparison, telling the crowd that his reign “in Florida, and what Kim’s done here in Iowa, tells a different story” — an anti-woke tale of steely, ultraconservative Republicans who are willing to “fight for you,” unlike “some of these Republicans, many of them in Washington D.C.” who “refuse to come through.”

I have no idea if this endorsement will make a difference in Iowa, where Trump holds a [27-point lead](#) over DeSantis. But it certainly made a difference to Trump, who spent Monday night on Truth Social (lol) whining about Reynolds. *Why*, he mused, would *anybody* “endorse Ron DeSanctimonious, who is like a wounded bird falling from the sky?”

“His Poll numbers are terrible, he is totally against Ethanol, and fought to destroy Social Security and Medicare,” Trump continued. “Well, the ‘Nation’s most unpopular governor,’ Kim Reynolds of Iowa, just endorsed him. What’s that all about?”

I mean I’m just spitballing here, but it might have something to do with the fact that Trump spent *months* complaining about Reynolds after she pledged to “remain neutral” in the presidential race. Because how dare she? [He, like, invented her](#), you know what I mean?

“I opened up the Governor position for Kim Reynolds, & when she fell behind, I ENDORSED her, did big Rallies, & she won,” he said in July. “Now, she wants to remain ‘NEUTRAL.’ I don’t invite her to events! DeSanctus down 45 points!”

But whatever. Trump is fine with it, maybe. Depending on the moment. Or the specific Truth Social (lol) post.

“Two extremely disloyal people getting together is, however, a very beautiful thing to watch,” Trump wrote [on Sunday](#), a day before anyone of any level of loyalty had gotten together anywhere. “They can now remain loyal to each other because nobody else wants them!!!”

So that’s happening: [Federal judge sets March trial date for Alabama state Rep. John Rogers ...](#) [Two Arizona GOP senators appeared on an antisemitic talk show ...](#) [Wednesday’s GOP presidential debate in Miami will showcase a dwindling group of contenders ...](#) [Donald Trump Jr., U.S. Rep. Jim Banks \(R-Ind.\) push ‘anti-woke’ politics and shopping ...](#) [Indiana state Rep. Bob Morris named as defendant in disputed business merger lawsuit ...](#) [Knudsen, Jacobsen file to run for re-election in Montana in 2024 ...](#) [Ryan Walters’ administration tasked with offering Civil Rights Movement curriculum in Oklahoma ...](#) [Republican senators sue Oregon Senate president, secretary of state over absences](#)



From The Newsrooms

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One Last Thing

Homer Simpson is [done strangling Bart](#), because “times have changed.” I await the inevitable DeSantis campaign commercial about the anti-wokeness of the move.

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