

Inside Elections

with
Nathan L. Gonzales
Nonpartisan Analysis

JUNE 4, 2021

VOLUME 5, NO. 11

2022 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.)
Hassan (D-N.H.)
Kelly (D-Ariz.)
Warnock (D-Ga.)

Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)
PA Open (Toomey, R)
Johnson (R-Wisc.)
Rubio (R-Fl.)

Solid Democratic (10)

Bennet (D-Colo.)
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)
Duckworth (D-Ill.)
Leahy (D-Vt.)
Murray (D-Wash.)
Padilla (D-Calif.)
Schatz (D-Hawaii)
Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Wyden (D-Ore.)

Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)
MO Open (Blunt, R)
OH Open (Portman, R)
Boozman (R-Ark.)
Crapo (R-Idaho)
Grassley (R-Iowa)
Hoeven (R-N.D.)
Kennedy (R-La.)
Lankford (R-Okla.)
Lee (R-Utah)
Moran (R-Kan.)
Murkowski (R-Alaska)
Paul (R-Ky.)
Scott (R-S.C.)
Thune (R-S.D.)
Young (R-Ind.)

CALENDAR

June 8	Virginia Democratic Gubernatorial Primary
June 8	New Jersey Gubernatorial Primary
July 27	Texas' 6th District Special Election
Aug. 3	Ohio's 11th & 15th District Special Election Primaries
Nov. 2	Florida's 20th District Special Election Primary
Nov. 2	Virginia & New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections

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Florida Senate: Not Swing, But Still Battleground

By Jacob Rubashkin & Nathan L. Gonzales

After cycles of GOP success, Florida has shed its swing state status. But the Sunshine State is still competitive and should still be considered a battleground, particularly when the majority in the Senate hinges on a single seat.

Six years ago, Marco Rubio was running for president and content with leaving his Senate seat behind. Now, he's seeking his third term in office and seemingly transitioned from a consensus future leader of the GOP to making sure he still has a place in President Donald Trump's Republican Party.

Even though Democrats have fallen short in all of the big elections in Florida in recent years, there's renewed energy building about the 2022 Senate race. Rep. Val Demings has emerged as the likely nominee at a time when the Democratic Party is looking to elevate Black women.

At the same time, when it comes to Florida, Democrats feel like Charlie Brown in his iconic scene with Lucy. Just when Democrats think victory is within reach, Lucy pulls the football away and Charlie Brown falls flat on his back.

The Lay of the Land

Republicans are very confident in a state where they consistently win by a couple of percentage points or less in key races. National Republican Senatorial Committee chairman Rick Scott, who holds Florida's other Senate seat and served two terms as the state's governor, recently said he believes that Florida is a "red state," despite his three razor-thin victories over the past decade.

The Sunshine State was one of just seven states where Trump improved his performance from 2016, winning by 3.4 points over Joe Biden compared to his 1.2 percent victory over Hillary Clinton. His increased margin of victory was powered by substantial gains among Hispanic voters, particularly in South Florida.

Exit polling paid for by the National Election Pool found that Biden won the Hispanic vote in Florida by just 7 points, 53-46 percent, after Clinton carried those voters by 27 points, 62-35 percent. The shift was most noticeable in Miami-Dade County, the state's most populous county and where roughly 70 percent of residents are Latino or Hispanic. After Clinton won there by nearly 30 points, 63-34 percent, Biden won by just 7 points.

Biden did make some gains in the state, particularly in the traditionally Republican suburbs of Duval County (Jacksonville), where he was the first Democrat to win since Jimmy Carter in 1976, and Seminole County in Central Florida, where he was the first Democrat to win since Harry Truman.

Continued on page 5

Biden's Job Rating and the 2022 Midterm Elections

By Ryan Matsumoto

Joe Biden has only been president for a few months, but pundits and prognosticators alike are already looking at what the tea leaves may suggest about the 2022 midterm elections. Democrats currently maintain the slimmest of majorities; House Republicans need to gain just five seats to flip the chamber. Historically, the president's party has lost 30 House seats, on average, over the past 25 midterm elections. As such, Democrats definitely have their work cut out for them if they want to maintain their federal trifecta.

One key metric to track over the next year is Biden's presidential job approval rating.

As of June 1, Biden's approval rating was at 54 percent approval and 40 percent disapproval in the FiveThirtyEight polling average. One month before, on May 1, Biden's approval rating was at 54 percent as well. Two months before, on April 1, his approval rating was at 54 percent. And three months before, on March 1, his approval rating was at — yep, you guessed it — 54 percent.

In fact, since Inauguration Day, Biden's approval rating has stayed between 53 and 55 percent the entire time. Biden's disapproval rating increased somewhat from the mid-30s in January to around 40 percent in early March, but has stabilized at that level since then.

So far, Biden has had the most consistent approval rating of any president since at least World War 2. By this point in previous presidencies, many incumbents' approval ratings had started to decrease as "honeymoon periods" waned. President Donald Trump's approval rating had fallen from 45 percent to 39 percent, Barack Obama's approval rating had fallen from 68 percent to 60 percent, and Bill Clinton's approval rating had fallen from 54 percent to 37 percent.

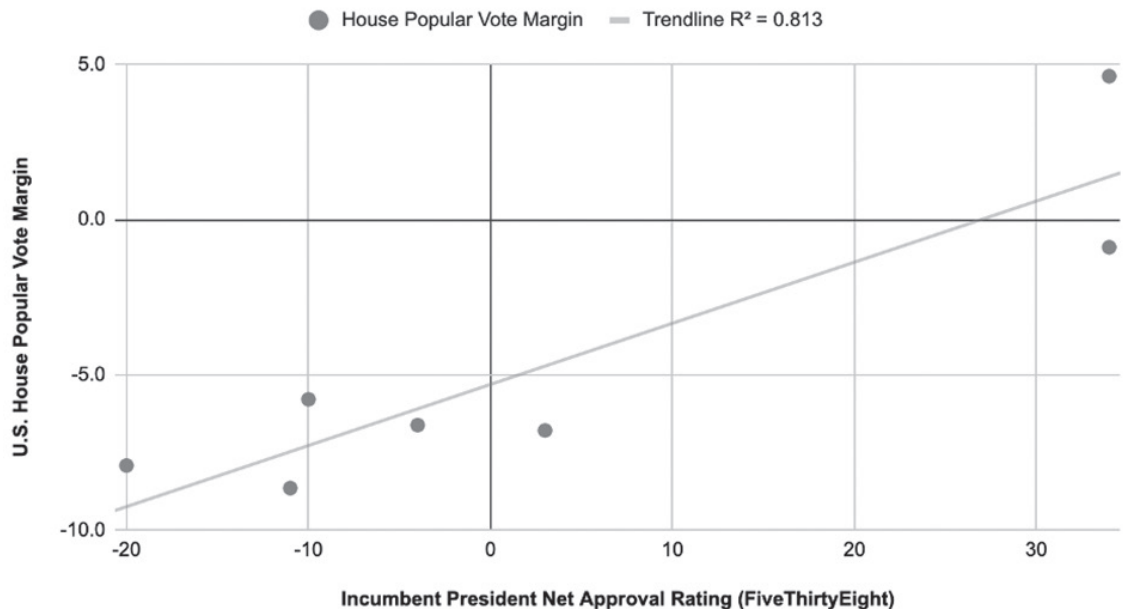
Biden's consistent approval rating reflects one of the major trends we've observed in American politics recently: polarization. Biden's approval rating

doesn't seem to have fallen because of a honeymoon period ending, nor has it increased in response to passage of the popular \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. Perhaps public opinion of the president is so baked in, even at this early point, that it won't vary much based on the ebbs and flows of governing. One possibility is that the 54 percent of Americans who approve of Biden do so largely because of one simple reason: he's not Donald Trump. In fact, if we look at Trump's approval rating polls, he seemed to land at about 54 percent *disapproval* for much of the second half of his presidency.

What does this mean for the 2022 midterm elections? If Biden's approval rating remains stable and the political environment in 2022 is about the same as it was in 2020, the battle for the House would be highly competitive. Republicans need to gain just five seats to win the House majority, and according to post-apportionment analysis from *The Cook Political Report's* David Wasserman, Republicans might be expected to gain 3.5 seats on average through redistricting alone. Of course, there

Continued on page 2

House Popular Vote Margin vs. President Net Approval (1994 to 2018)



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Continued from page 2

is a lot of uncertainty here as dozens of states redraw congressional district lines this year to reflect population changes from the Census. *Inside Elections* is waiting until new maps are finalized before making more specific projections.

On the other hand, it is possible that Biden may need to increase his approval rating beyond 54 percent for Democrats to maintain control of the House. Looking at the last seven midterm election cycles (1994 through 2018), the incumbent president's party lost seats in five of them. We can use this data to create a formula to predict the House popular vote margin based on the president's net approval rating the day before that year's midterm election. With this formula, we'd expect that the party of an incumbent president with a +14 percent net approval rating would still be expected to lose the House popular vote by 2.5 percentage points. Under this scenario, Republicans would likely flip the House because of their structural geographic advantages. This statistical regression suggests that Biden may actually need to exceed 60 percent approval for Democrats to hold the House.

However, there are several major caveats to this type of analysis. First, polarization is much stronger today than it was in the 1990s or 2000s. It's possible that 54 percent approval may carry a lot more weight nowadays than it did several decades ago, when voters of the opposition party may have somewhat approved of the incumbent president but still voted against him down ballot. Second, this dataset doesn't have any examples of presidents with net approval ratings specifically between +10 percent and +20 percent, so we're exploring uncharted territory. And finally, we have a small sample size of just seven data points over the past three decades, leaving room for a wide margin of error.

Overall, Biden's approval rating has been remarkably consistent over the first few months of his presidency. It will be interesting to see if it fluctuates as the coronavirus pandemic fades and other policy issues step into the limelight. Because of polarization, there is a good chance that it remains fairly constant for the remainder of his term. If that happens, we'll get some interesting insights about what factors really drive midterm election performance.



Candidate Conversation



Gillian Battino (D)

Wisconsin Senate —
Rating: Battleground

Interview Date: May 25, 2021
(Zoom)

Date of Birth: March 30, 1970;
Athens, Ohio

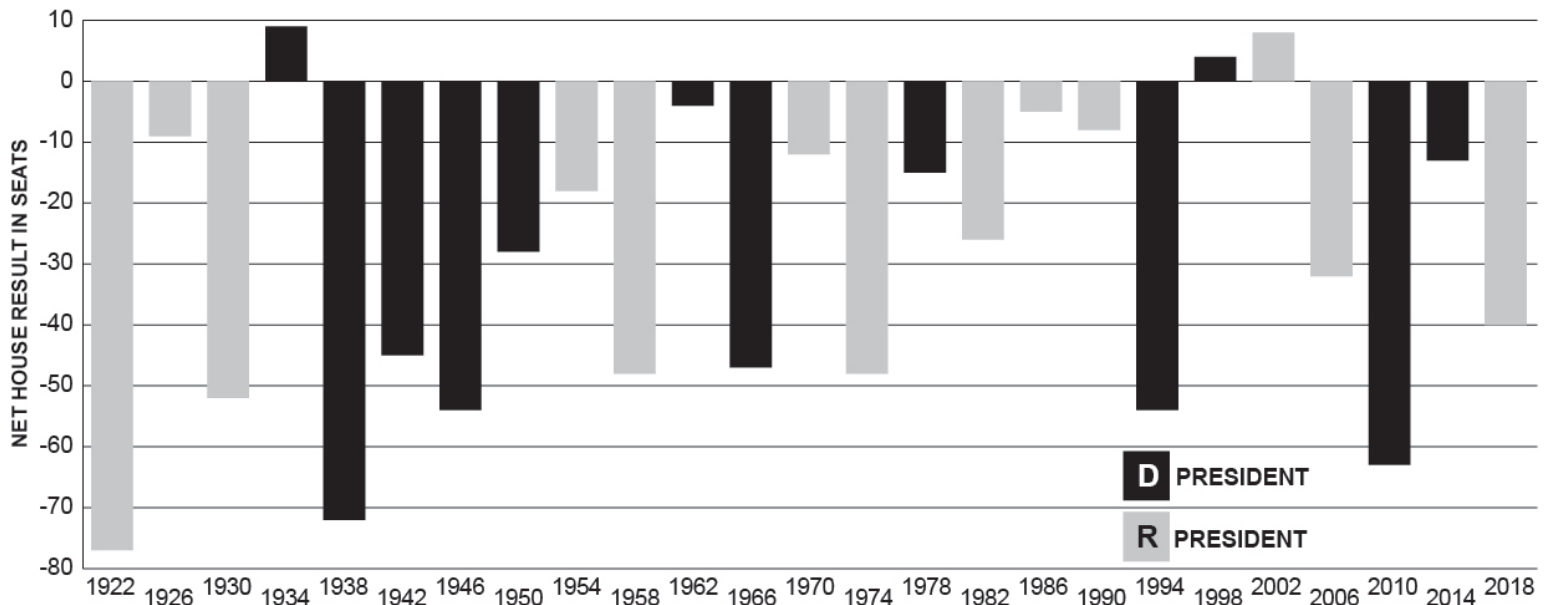
Education: John Carroll Univ.
(1992); The Ohio State College
of Medicine (1996)

Elected Office: None; First run for office

Current Outlook: Battino starts as an underdog in an increasingly crowded Democratic race to face GOP Sen. Ron Johnson (although he hasn't said if he's running again). State Treasurer Sarah Godlewski, wealthy Milwaukee Bucks Senior Vice President Alex Lasry, former state Senate Minority Leader Chris Larson, and Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson are running. And everyone is waiting on Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes to make a definitive decision on what he's running for next year. The Democratic nomination is valuable in a state that Joe Biden won narrowly in 2020, but a rough decade has left the state party with a relatively thin bench.

Evaluation: Calling Battino a radiologist (which she is) only scratches the surface of a fascinating biography. She's spent time developing clinics and helping patients in Nicaragua and Guyana. Back in the states she's the mother of six kids, including an adopted son from Ethiopia. Battino's been deaf since she was 10 years old, but can hear with the use of two hearing aids. She's also been the guardian for her handicapped brother, who was operated on by Ben Carson years ago. Battino is sincere and earnest in her effort and was refreshingly definitive on some specific issues (she is in favor of removing the legislative filibuster). It's just not clear how she wins the nomination without a constituent base or significant personal money to compete with some of the other contenders.

Midterm Election Results in the House for President's Party



New Mexico 1 Special: Status Quo Results

Democrat Melanie Stansbury prevailed in Tuesday’s special election, keeping New Mexico’s 1st District in Democratic hands after Rep. Deb Haaland joined the Biden Administration as Interior Secretary.

Considering Joe Biden’s big victory over President Donald Trump in the Albuquerque-anchored district in 2020, there wasn’t much of a chance for a GOP upset. But the Republicans’ focus on crime and policing and the sometimes-unique circumstances surrounding special election turnout created some uncertainty.

Because there’s a dearth of election outcomes at this stage of a cycle, there’s a temptation to over interpret the results. But please don’t. Here are a few takeaways.

The House majority was in play before the special election and it’s in play after the special election. Republicans still need a net gain of five seats for a majority and midterm history is on their side with a Democrat in the White House. Republicans didn’t need to win in New Mexico in June and they don’t need to win it next November. If Republicans were (or are) seriously competing in districts like this a year from now, it’s going to be a GOP wave.

This was a status quo election. Not only did Democrats hold a seat they’ve held for more than a decade, the special election margin was very close to Biden’s margin in the presidential race. It’s unwise to draw dramatic conclusions from a couple point difference in either direction.

Turnout in the district was 29 percent of registered voters. That’s far lower than the 69 percent of registered voters who showed up last November, though special elections always see a decrease in participation. But 29 percent is also noticeably higher than any other special election so far this year, exceeding Texas’ 6th (16 percent, down from 68 percent) and Louisiana’s 2nd (18 percent in the first round and 17 percent in the runoff, down from 60 percent). That could mean voters are starting to tune in more, or it could be because the New Mexico 1 race was the first traditional Democrat vs. Republican matchup of the cycle.

Yes, Republicans were all-in on the defund the police messaging and GOP nominee Mark Moores lost by more than 20 points. But this is a firmly Democratic district and neither national party made a significant investment in the race. Stansbury did respond to the attacks, which showed Democrats thought the message had the potential to do damage. This result doesn’t mean Republicans won’t use the attack in 2022 or that Democrats are completely clear of the political liability.

Money matters. In April, Moores was outspending Stansbury on TV, boosted by \$200,000 of his own money, and hammering Stansbury on the crime issue. That’s also when Democrats began getting a little nervous about this race. But in May, Stansbury kicked her spending into high gear and outspent Moores nearly 10-to-1 on the air, \$715,000 to \$78,000. Her numbers picked up, Republicans lost whatever interest they had in the race, and the rest is history.

Democrats get (some of) their mojo back. A loss or even a closer-than-

expected win here after failing to get a candidate into the Texas 6 runoff would have portended serious trouble ahead for the party, with the potential for damaging news cycles that would have distracted from the economic recovery narrative Democrats have tried so hard to make stick. It could have also hampered recruitment efforts or even made vulnerable members more likely to retire. Fortunately for Democrats, they dodged that bullet — at least for now.

We consistently had the race rated as Solid Democratic, and Stansbury won by more than 20 points. There’s still a pulse for the political handicapping business.

It may be a while before there’s an exciting special election. Upcoming races in Ohio’s 11th and 15th districts aren’t likely to be competitive, at least in the general election; Biden carried the 11th by 60 points and Trump carried the 15th by 14 points.

IE



Melanie Stansbury

Courtesy Stansbury Campaign

State-by-state control of redistricting

Every state sets its own processes for redistricting. Some empower a commission, rather than the state legislature itself, to draw the lines. Others have more complex systems. The following is a breakdown of which party -- if either -- controls the process in every state. It takes into account the state’s unique laws, as well as party control of the state legislature and the party of the governor.

STATE	2021 CONTROL	STATE	2021 CONTROL
Alabama	Republican	Montana	Commission
Alaska	Single District	Nebraska	Republican
Arizona	Commission	Nevada	Democratic
Arkansas	Republican	New Hampshire	Republican
California	Commission	New Jersey	Commission
Colorado	Commission	New Mexico	Democratic
Connecticut	Democratic/Commission	New York	Democratic/Commission
Delaware	Single District	North Carolina	Republican
Florida	Republican	North Dakota	Single District
Georgia	Republican	Ohio	Republican/Commission
Hawaii	Commission	Oklahoma	Republican
Idaho	Commission	Oregon	Split
Illinois	Democratic	Pennsylvania	Split
Indiana	Republican	Rhode Island	Democratic
Iowa	Republican/Commission	South Carolina	Republican
Kansas	Republican	South Dakota	Single District
Kentucky	Republican	Tennessee	Republican
Louisiana	Split	Texas	Republican
Maine	Split	Utah	Republican
Maryland	Democratic	Vermont	Single District
Massachusetts	Democratic	Virginia	Commission
Michigan	Commission	Washington	Commission
Minnesota	Split	West Virginia	Republican
Mississippi	Republican	Wisconsin	Split
Missouri	Republican	Wyoming	Single District

- Republican-** GOP controls the map-making process
- Democratic-** Democrats control the map-making process
- Split-** Map-making process is divided between the parties
- Commission-** An independent or bipartisan commission
- Single District-** No redistricting necessary with one, at-large district

Continued from page 1

The 2020 results capped a disappointing decade for Florida Democrats. Back in 2010, Rubio defeated Democratic Rep. Kendrick Meek and then-independent Charlie Crist with 49 percent in the three-way open seat Senate race and Scott won the gubernatorial race over Democrat Alex Sink, 49-48 percent.

Four years later, Gov. Scott defeated now-Democrat Crist 48-47 percent. Rubio defeated Democratic Rep. Patrick Murphy 52-44 percent in 2016. And in 2018, Scott defeated Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson by 10,000 votes (a 0.1 percent loss that many Democrats blame on poor ballot design in Broward County) and GOP Rep. Ron DeSantis defeated former Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum by 0.4 percent in the gubernatorial race to replace Scott.

Of the 18 statewide contests between 2010 to 2020, Democrats won just three: the 2012 presidential contest, the 2012 Senate race, and the 2018 Agriculture Commissioner race. And the party's two bright spots in 2018 — congressional pickups in the 26th and 27th districts — were both undone in 2020 with the surge of Hispanic support for the GOP.

The Likely Democratic Nominee

Demings, 64, is the youngest of seven children and grew up poor outside of Jacksonville. She graduated from Florida State University with a degree in criminology. Before entering politics, Demings spent 27 years with the Orlando Police Department, joining in 1983 as a patrol officer and rising all the way to the department's top spot, becoming the city's first female police chief in 2007.

In 2012, she ran for Congress in a newly-drawn 10th District.

She lost 52-48 percent to GOP Rep. Daniel Webster, with considerable help from Democratic outside groups in a high-profile race. Demings slightly over-performed the top of the ticket, where President Barack Obama lost the district by 8 points.

In 2014, Demings launched a campaign to oust Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs, a Republican, but dropped out after just three months. The decision surprised Florida Democrats and left them without a candidate to run against Jacobs. Demings told the *Orlando Sentinel* in 2015 that a medical issue had caused her exit, though staffers on her campaign later told *Business Insider* that Demings' team was also struggling to see a path to victory. (Demings' husband, Jerry Demings, who was Orange County sheriff for nine years, was later elected to succeed Jacobs in 2018 and is up for re-election in 2022.)

In 2016, the state Supreme Court demanded Florida's congressional map to be redrawn. Webster ran in the neighboring 11th District (which was more Republican) and Demings won the newly-drawn 10th District general election with 65 percent while Clinton carried it with 62 percent in the presidential race.

Demings raised her profile considerably in the last 12 months. First, she was one of seven impeachment managers who presented the case against Trump in the U.S. Senate during the president's first impeachment trial. Later in the year, she was on Biden's short list for

potential vice presidential running mates, impressing Democrats along the way even though she wasn't ultimately chosen.

Demings' Senate decision appeared to be a departure from her intention to run for governor. When fellow congressman Crist announced his candidacy against GOP incumbent Ron DeSantis on May 4, Demings released a campaign video the same day, leading many observers to believe she had her eye on Tallahassee.

Behind the scenes, there was less certainty in Demings' mind, as evidenced by the ambiguity of the video itself. It wasn't clear which office she was running for and the timing was more of an effort to keep her options open rather than a specific step toward the governor's race. On May 18, Demings signaled that she would challenge Rubio.

Her campaign team includes campaign manager Zack Carroll (a new addition and Jaime Harrison's manager in South Carolina in 2020) coupled with her longtime team of media consultant Ann Liston of AL Media, pollster Jef Pollock of Global Strategy Group, and direct mail consultant Ed Peavy of Mission Control.

The Vanishing Democratic Primary

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee had been the last of the four major party campaign committees to endorse candidates and be unabashed about their favorite. But this cycle, in a departure from the past, the committee signaled that it would not be as heavy-handed. Yet it's clear to sources following this race that Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and the DSCC were working behind the scenes to lure Demings into the race despite Rep. Stephanie Murphy laying her own groundwork for months.

On paper, Murphy seemed to bring some assets to the table. She has a great story (she was rescued with her family from Vietnam by the U.S. Navy) and eventually worked for the Department of Defense before defeating GOP Rep. John Mica in 2016. She's building a moderate reputation in Congress as a leader of the Blue Dogs, she speaks Spanish, and at 42 years old, she'd be the third-youngest senator in an aging chamber.

But Murphy bowed out of the race she hadn't yet officially entered soon after Demings' decision made the news. After being told the DSCC was staying out of primaries this cycle, Murphy's team could see the writing on the wall, including the rollout of Demings' decision in the national press, background quotes from a national strategist, and on-the-record quotes to the *Tampa Bay Times* by Democratic donor/attorney John Morgan.

Murphy probably also realized that Demings would have been tough to defeat in a primary. The two women share an Orlando area base, and Black voters make up approximately 25 percent of the Democratic primary electorate in Florida, giving Demings a leg up. In addition, Demings has spent time cultivating relationships with Democrats in the state while Murphy's strength has been with fellow Blue Dogs around the country, according to Democratic sources.

While Murphy would have been a credible nominee, she didn't do enough early on with her fundraising to dissuade Demings from getting into the race. (Murphy raised a modest \$339,000 in the first three months of the year.) Nor did her campaign operation inspire enough confidence to prevent Schumer and Democrats from looking elsewhere. Considering competitive U.S. Senate races are topping \$100 million these days, Democrats (and Republicans) want greater certainty in what and who they are investing in, and Democrats believe that Demings, rather than Murphy, will be able to create the necessary enthusiasm among grassroots donors nationwide.

Continued on page 6



Val Demings

Caroline Brehman/CQ Roll Call

Continued from page 5

Given Florida's late primary date — August 23, 2022 — Democrats really wanted to avoid an intra-party fight that would divert attention and resources away from attacking Rubio. A bitter primary would have left the nominee with just a couple of months to focus on the well-funded incumbent.

With Kamala Harris' move to the White House and the consistent recognition that Black women are a critical part of the Democratic Party, there's pressure on the DSCC to elect Black women, or even more Black candidates in general. Demings would be just the third Black woman in the Senate in history.

Former Democratic Rep. Alan Grayson could also run, but he hasn't been regarded as a serious politician by Democratic strategists for quite awhile. And Ken Russell, a member of the City of Miami board of commissioners, has said he will run as well. Former 9th judicial district state attorney Aramis Ayala has shifted her attention to Demings' House seat.

The GOP Incumbent

Rubio, 50, has gotten a head start on his campaign for a third term. That's in contrast to 2016, when he said he wouldn't run for re-election and instead launched a highly anticipated but unsuccessful presidential bid, only to re-enter the Senate race just a few days before the filing deadline.

This time around, Rubio made his intentions clear early on, announcing his candidacy shortly after the 2020 election and hiring a manager in March. Earlier in the year, there were rumors that Ivanka Trump, the former president's eldest daughter, might challenge Rubio in

the GOP primary — some of Donald Trump's most fervent supporters still view the Florida senator with suspicion after the 2016 presidential primary — but Ivanka Trump ruled out a run in February and expressed public support for Rubio.

More importantly, Rubio secured an endorsement from Donald Trump



Marco Rubio

himself, who has made Florida his post-presidency home base. That should be enough to insulate Rubio from any serious primary trouble.

Born to Cuban émigrés, Rubio graduated University of Florida, and then University of Miami

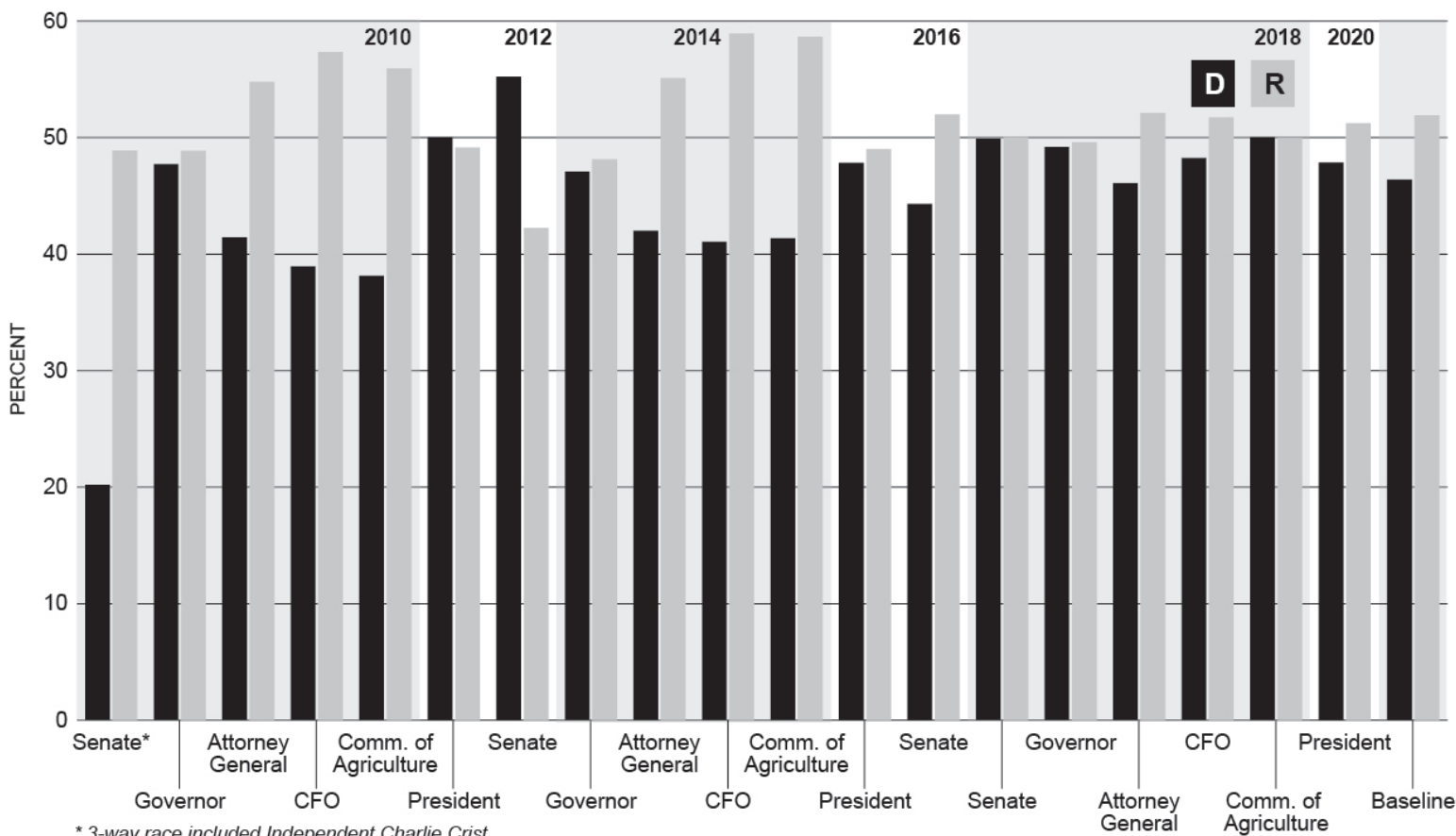
Law School, and spent eight years as a state legislator, rising to be Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives.

In 2010, he won a three-way contest for U.S. Senate to succeed Republican Mel Martinez with 49 percent, defeating Democrat Kendrick Meek (20 percent) and Gov. Charlie Crist (30 percent), who was then a moderate Republican who dropped out of the GOP Senate primary to run as an independent.

Six years later, Rubio ran for president as an establishment darling but was unable to gain traction against Trump in the historically crowded

Continued on page 7

Statewide Election Results in Florida



Continued from page 6

field. He took a politically fatal shot from Chris Christie during the New Hampshire debate and finished a disappointing fifth in the Granite State primary. Rubio won just three contests — Minnesota, DC, and Puerto Rico — and dropped out of the race after finishing a distant second to Trump in Florida.

Returning to the Senate race in 2016, Rubio defeated Democratic Rep. Patrick Murphy (no relation to Stephanie Murphy), the preferred candidate of the DSCC. Rubio won by nearly 8 points, which counts for a landslide in Florida politics. Murphy was a former Republican who was hounded by a disorderly conduct arrest when he was 19 years old and questions about his resume; GOP-aligned outside groups also spent three times as much money on the race as did outside Democratic groups.

With Trump's victory at the top of the ticket, Rubio had some help, but the senator overperformed the presidential nominee. Rubio ran especially strong in his home base of South Florida, losing Miami-Dade by just 12 points compared to Trump's 30-point deficit, but also ran significantly ahead of Trump in urban centers across the state, including Duval (Jacksonville) and Orange (Orlando) counties.

In the Senate, Rubio currently serves as the vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee.

Rubio's campaign team includes longtime media consultant Todd Harris of Something Else Strategies and Mark Morgan, the new campaign manager who was recently the deputy political director of the NRSC.

How It Plays Out

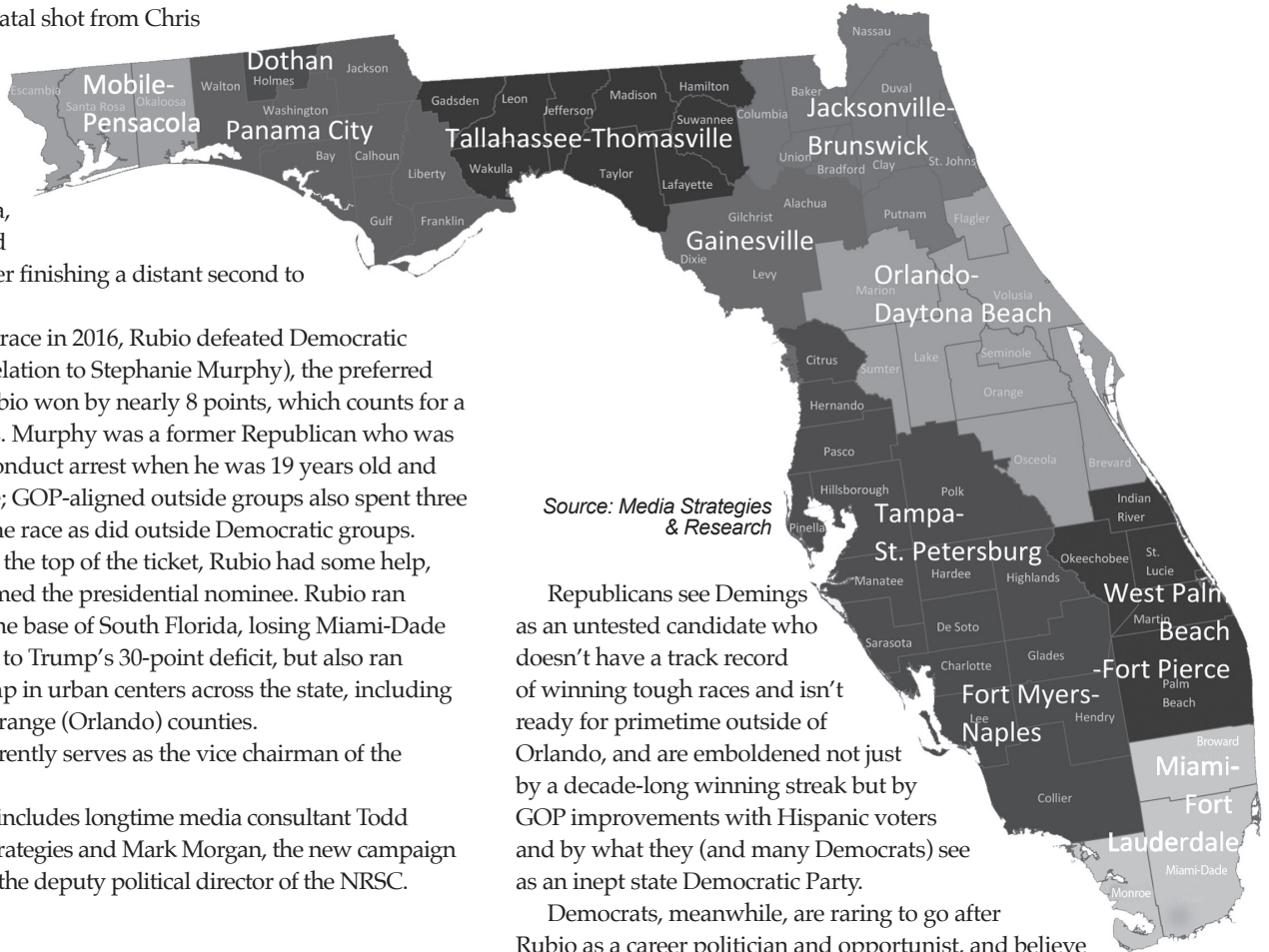
In the midst of a long-losing streak, albeit by narrow margins, Democrats are at a bit of a crossroads when it comes to Florida. Do they cede the state to Republicans and focus their resources and energy elsewhere, or is the Sunshine State simply too big for Democrats to fail?

Getting Demings in the race is a sign that Democrats aren't giving up just yet. By (likely) nominating a Black woman, it makes it difficult for the donors, outside groups, and the national media from ignoring the race at a time when Democrats currently don't have a Black woman in the U.S. Senate. It looks like former justice Cheri Beasley in North Carolina is the only other legitimate opportunity Democrats have to elect a Black woman this cycle, and Beasley starts with a lower profile and a competitive primary.

Democrats are hopeful Demings will run strong with Black voters in key areas including Jacksonville and Miami Gardens. That was a similar path for Gillum in the 2018 gubernatorial race. But Democratic strategists note that he only lost by less than one half of a percentage point and was under a cloud from an FBI investigation into the city where he was mayor, even though he was not the target.

Democratic strategists are confident Demings' law enforcement credentials will insulate her from the defund the police attacks that some people believe dragged down Democrats in 2020. That doesn't mean Republicans will cede the issue (see Max Cleland in Georgia in 2002 and John Kerry's 2004 presidential run), but that resume line was part of the thinking in getting Demings to run for the Senate. Her ability to hold the line in GOP-friendly areas and appeal to independent voters will be critical to victory in a state where Democrats have no margin for error.

Television Markets in Florida



Republicans see Demings as an untested candidate who doesn't have a track record of winning tough races and isn't ready for primetime outside of Orlando, and are emboldened not just by a decade-long winning streak but by GOP improvements with Hispanic voters and by what they (and many Democrats) see as an inept state Democratic Party.

Democrats, meanwhile, are raring to go after Rubio as a career politician and opportunist, and believe Demings' bio as a former police officer stacks up well against the incumbent's. There's also some frustration that Democrats weren't able to make that case as effectively with Patrick Murphy in 2016, given Murphy's own history, and that Demings gives them a better shot.

At least one thing is certain: fundraising in Senate races has exploded since the last time Rubio was on the ballot. In 2016, Rubio and Murphy raised slightly more than \$41 million combined. While that was the third-highest total of that cycle, it would not have cracked the top 10 Senate races in 2020 (#10 North Carolina, came in at \$76 million for the candidates), and several strategists estimate that Rubio and Demings will need to raise at least that much *each*, and likely substantially more.

Rubio begins with a head start in fundraising; he reported \$3.9 million in the bank on March 31, 2021, and has access to a robust donor list from his two previous statewide runs and nationwide presidential campaign. He also raised \$1.6 million in the first three months of 2021.

Demings, meanwhile, has not historically been a strong fundraiser, though Democrats hope her relatively new national profile will change that. The most she ever raised in a two-year cycle was \$1.9 million in her unsuccessful 2012 run. Demings raised \$354,000 in the first three months of this year and finished March with \$1.1 million in the bank.

With 10 media markets spanning nearly 54,000 square miles, running in Florida is an expensive endeavor. The goal is obviously to win statewide, but the recipe for victory involves running multiple, targeted campaigns in different regions.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

The Bottom Line

With the narrowest of majorities and few legitimate takeover opportunities to balance out potential losses elsewhere, Democrats can't afford to let Republicans skate by in Florida. The burden of proof is on Democrats to show how they finally get over the top, but Republicans can't get too complacent that the Trump coalition that delivered Florida for Republicans in 2020 will show up in full force when the former president isn't on the ballot.

Even though Demings lost the most difficult race she's ever had (a decade ago) and hasn't been an exceptional fundraiser (in part because she hasn't had serious races recently), Democrats are in love with her and her potential. Strategists are supremely confident she has the skills necessary to be a top-tier challenger. Only time will tell whether that's the case.

Ultimately, almost everything needs to go right for Democrats to win in Florida and midterm trends aren't in their favor with a Democrat in the White House. Yet Republicans have shown an ability to make races more difficult than they need to be.

Even though the race doesn't start as a toss-up, it's likely to be one of the most-watched races in the country because of Rubio's and Demings' profile, and because it's Florida.



2022 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (6)	Republican-held (5)
Kelly (D-Kan.)	AZ Open (Ducey, R)
Mills (D-Maine)	DeSantis (R-Fl.)
Whitmer (D-Mich.)	Kemp (R-Ga.)
Sisolak (D-Nev.)	MD Open (Hogan, R)
PA Open (Wolf, D)	Sununu (R-N.H.)
Evers (D-Wisc.)	

Solid Democratic (10)	Solid Republican (15)
Newsom (D-Calif.)	Ivey (R-Ala.)
Polis (D-Colo.)	Dunleavy (R-Alaska)
Lamont (D-Conn.)	AR Open (Hutchinson, R)
HI Open (Ige, D)	Little (R-Idaho)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)	Reynolds (R-Iowa)
Walz (D-Minn.)	Baker (R-Mass.)
Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)	NE Open (Ricketts, R)
Cuomo (D-N.Y.)	Noem (R-S.D.)
OR Open (Brown, D)	DeWine (R-Ohio)
McKee (D-R.I.)	Stitt (R-Okla.)

McMaster (R-S.C.)
Lee (R-Tenn.)
Abbott (R-Texas)
Scott (R-Vt.)
Gordon (R-Wyo.)

2021 RACES

Likely Democratic
CA Recall (Newsom, D)
VA Open (Northam, D)

Solid Democratic
Murphy (D-N.J.)

Report Shorts

Florida's 10th District

With Democratic Rep. Val Demings preparing to run for the Senate, the field to succeed her has started to take shape. Former 9th judicial district state attorney Aramis Ayala, who made national headlines several years ago when she announced she would not seek the death penalty in any case she prosecuted, is running. State Sen. Randolph Bracy, who represents part of Orange County and previously served as the chairman of the criminal justice committee in the state Senate, is running as well. And local trial attorney Natalie Jackson, a Black Lives Matter activist who once represented the family of Trayvon Martin, has thrown her hat in the ring too. Republicans control the redistricting process and will look to draw aggressive new lines, but the current 10th District was drawn under court order and will likely remain heavily tilted toward Democrats, making the Democratic primary the real contest here.

Florida's 13th District

St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman, a Democrat, surprised some observers when he announced he would not run to succeed Democratic Rep. Charlie Crist in this swingy Central Florida District. That leaves state Rep. Ben Diamond, who represents St. Petersburg in the state legislature, and Eric Lynn, a former U.S. Defense Department adviser who is now a partner at a title services firm, as the only Democratic candidates. Lynn previously ran for the seat in 2016 and raised a formidable \$800,000, but dropped out of the primary when former Gov. Crist entered the race. On the Republican side, 2020 nominee / Air Force veteran Anna Paulina Luna is running again.

Ohio's 11th District Special

In the race to replace now-Housing and Urban Development Secretary Marcia Fudge, former state Sen. Nina Turner secured a major endorsement from longtime Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson. Turner has been working to soften the bombastic national image she cultivated as a surrogate for Bernie Sanders in 2016 and 2020, by focusing on her deep ties to the local community and bipartisan bona fides from her days in the state legislature. Turner's pollster, Ben Tulchin, recently released a survey showing her at 50 percent in the seven-person primary field, with her closest opponent, Cuyahoga County Democratic Chairwoman Shontel Brown, at 15 percent. The all-important primary is on August 3.

Ohio's 15th District Special

Former Rep. Steve Stivers, who resigned to take a job leading the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, has taken the unusual step of spending his own campaign funds to air advertisements supporting his preferred candidate in the special election to fill his seat. So far, Stivers has spent \$158,000 on a spot announcing his endorsement of state Rep. Jeff LaRe that will air in the Columbus media market for two weeks. Twelve Republicans are running in the primary, including three other sitting state legislators. The primary is on August 3, and the winner will likely face Democratic state Rep. Allison Russo in November. The district, which President Donald Trump carried by 14 points last year, is Solid Republican.