



Democrat
 Republican
 Independent

Voters to Washington in 2022:

“It’s the Year of the Independent”

An analysis of the 2022 Congressional Election

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Key Points

A Missed Republican Senate Majority Because of Candidate Quality: If Republican Senatorial candidates in Arizona, Georgia, and Nevada had simply gotten the same number of votes as House Republicans got in their states, Republicans would now have a 52-48 majority.

Republicans Had A Significant Turnout Advantage Over Democrats, But A Muted House Result Because Of The Independent Vote: Republicans ended up with their best party ID advantage (+3) from 1984 forward. However, Republicans lost Independents by 2 (47-49). This resulted in Republicans winning 222 seats. In 2010, Republicans were even in terms of party ID, but won Independents by 19. This resulted in Republicans winning 242 seats, a 20 seat difference.

Independents Increased To 31% Of The Electorate In 2022: This is the highest portion of the electorate that they have represented from 1984 forward.

Trump Hurt Republicans Among Independents: Independents' memory of Trump from the previous two elections was significant. His brand image (favorable-unfavorable) among Independents was 30-66. This follows his poor 2020 performance when he lost them by 13, the biggest losing margin of a major party candidate since Walter Mondale in 1984.

Independents Didn't Vote For The Party Out Of Power: In 17 out of the last 18 elections prior to 2022, Independents have voted at the Congressional level for the party not holding the White House, typically as a vote for change reflecting some dissatisfaction with the President. In 2022, many Independents saw voting for change as a potential return to the prior administration, which they voted against two years ago. As a result, Independents split their vote between both parties.

Strategy, Not Tactics, Was The Problem: Many Republicans have focused on Democrats' mail-in effort to explain the election outcome, but Democrats made up only 33% of the electorate, their lowest level from 1984 forward. So this was not a turnout problem.

A Missed Policy Opportunity: House Republicans spent a year putting together a policy agenda called a "Commitment to America." Only 15% of the country said they heard about it. Those who were aware of it voted for Republicans 64-35. A majority who had heard about it were *not* Republicans. In contrast, Republican campaigns focused on making sure Biden was getting the blame for the economy. Among those voters who somewhat disapproved of the job Biden was doing as President (10%), Democrats won them 49-45.

Ineffective Economic Messaging: As a result of not promoting the Commitment and focusing on attacking Biden (and Pelosi), Republicans did not effectively win the inflation/economic issue even though Independents trusted them to handle the issue of inflation more than Democrats by a margin of 52-41. Among those Independents who thought the economy was not so good, Democrats won them by 29 points 62-33. In contrast, in 2010, Republicans won this same group 49-43. Independents wanted solutions, not the blame game.

Republicans Reduce Negative Margin With Women: Although abortion and the Dobbs decision were a factor in this election, Republicans actually improved with women voters, only losing them by 8. In 2018, they lost women by 19, and in 2020, they lost them by 14. The 2022 margin for Republicans was better than 6 of the 8 prior elections. The two elections that Republicans did better with women were their decisive victories in 2010 and 2014. In the 2022 election, women comprised about the same percentage of the electorate as previous elections.

Overview

In this election, Republicans, Democrats and the media expected a significant Red Wave. Projections of Republicans winning 240 seats were not uncommon, and most had the number at 230 or higher. On election night, it was not clear that Republicans could reach 218, and it wasn't until over a week later that media entities began calling the House for Republicans. Republicans won 222 seats, a pick-up of 9 seats, which was well under the 20 to 35 predicted by many, with some going beyond these overly rosy predictions.

The obvious question is: Why didn't a Red Wave materialize? First and foremost was that most of the focus was not on the portion of the electorate that would decide the majority, but rather on which party base was the most motivated. As news report after news report and pundit after pundit argued which base was motivated, the issues surrounding that motivation were given the prominence in the election. The discourse became climate change versus immigration or abortion versus cultural issues. All these issues were important at some level, but were not the issues on which Independents focused the most.

As inflation began to significantly impact voters, it began to overwhelm the two party base issues. The responses of both parties' political operations were to focus on how to shape this issue for their respective bases, and blame the other party. Democrats blamed Republicans for not wanting to "tax the wealthy and end fossil fuels" and Republicans wanted to "fire Pelosi and blame Biden". This led to a uniquely unmotivating discussion for Independents because neither side defined for them what the possible solutions for inflation were. But the campaigns and the media didn't really care whether their the political discourse and issue focus didn't motivate Independents; it was motivating to the party bases and that's where daily engagement and fundraising efforts were centered.

For this election, the most important issue was the economy, specifically inflation. Biden had a terrible economic job approval, and voters had more confidence in Republicans on a variety of economic issues. Inflation was the top issue in the Edison exit poll, and in our post-election survey 50% called economy/jobs/inflation/gas prices the most important issue, with abortion at a distant second at 10%. Abortion played a role in the election that needs further understanding.

On top of that, in the exit poll, 73% of voters were negative about how things were going in the country; 76% said the economy was not so good or poor; 79% said that inflation had been either a severe or moderate hardship for their family, and finally the President's overall job approval was at 44-55. So pre-election, things looked very bad for the "party in power."

As the country went into the election, the expectations were that Republicans would overwhelmingly win based on historical precedent, although our internal surveys led us to the conclusion that the Republican pick-up in the House would be more limited to the 10-15 seat range with the Senate being a toss-up.

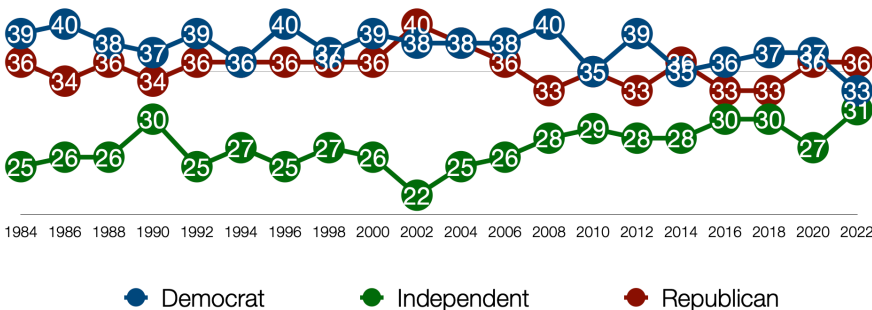
2022: The Best Party ID Advantage for Republicans From 1984 Forward

One of the remarkable outcomes in the 2022 elections was Republicans' +3 party ID advantage over Democrats, according to the Edison exit polls. Republicans made up 36% of the electorate, with Democrats at 33%, and Independents at 31%. This was the best party ID advantage for Republicans from 1984 through the present election. Over that time period, there were only two

other elections when Republicans had an advantage, +2 in 2002,

and +1 in 2014 when Republicans won 247 House seats, the most they had held since 1928. However, this was not due to a higher than normal Republican turnout. In the last 20 elections, Republicans have been at 36% 11 times. Where the differences were were among Democrats and Independents. **At 33%, Democrats had the lowest percentage of the electorate they**

Congressional - Party ID 1984-2022



have had over the last 20 elections, well under their previous low of 35% which came in the significant House Democratic Congressional defeats in 2010 and 2014. This was also a significant drop of 4% from 2018 and 2020, when Democrats made up 37% of the electorate.

The one group that did significantly increase their makeup of the Congressional level electorate was Independents. They comprised 31% of the electorate, the highest result over the last 20 elections and a 4% increase from 2020. Independents have made up 30% or more of the electorate in three out of the last four elections. The role of Independents was enhanced as both parties, by a 96-3 margin, voted for their party's House candidates.

Impact of President Biden's Job Approval

President Biden's job approval in the exit poll was negative at 44% approve and 55% disapprove. This was not dissimilar to the last two elections where the House majorities changed. In 2018, President Trump's job approval was 45-54, and in 2010, President Obama's job approval in 2010 was 44-55. In all three cases, the voters who disapproved voted overwhelmingly for the opposition party. **However, what was different this time was how those who somewhat disapproved (a subset of the overall disapprove) voted.**

- In 2010, 14% of the electorate somewhat disapproved of President Obama, and his party lost those voters by a 27-68 margin.
- In 2018, 8% somewhat disapproved of President Trump, and his party lost those voters by a 34-63 margin.
- In this election, 10% somewhat disapproved of President Biden, but in this case, his party won them by a 49-45 margin. Among Independents, however, who somewhat disapproved of him (12% of them), they voted for the Democrats by a larger 52-36 margin.

President Biden and Independents

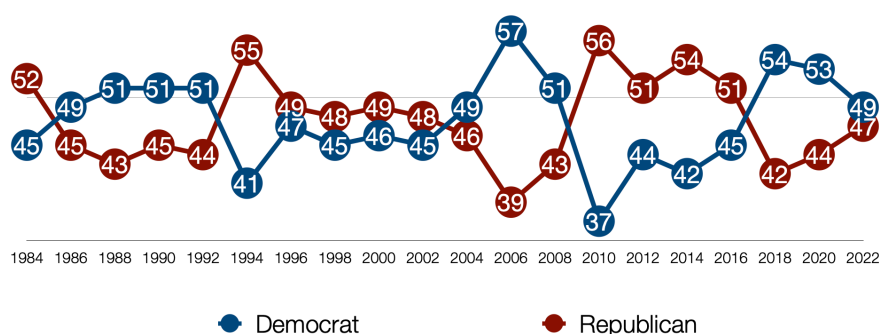
President Biden's 2020 victory was due to winning Independents by 13 points (54-41). The last Presidential candidate to win Independents by a larger margin over a major party candidate was

President Reagan in 1984 in which he carried 49 states. In the 2020 election, Biden’s brand image among them was 51-45 favorable-unfavorable. However, given his focus on base Democrats over the last two years, his brand image with Independents has plummeted to 37-60 with a job approval at 44% approve and 55% disapprove among them.

Independents Vote for the Party of the White House

Despite President Biden’s poor standing with Independents, they broke from their traditional behavior of voting for the party not in the White House. In 17 out of the last 18 elections prior to 2022, Independents

Independents - Congressional Vote 1984-2022



have voted for the party out of power. The one exception was in 2002 when George W. Bush had remarkable job approval numbers post-9/11. However, in this election, they voted for Democrats by a 49-47 margin. it was this break from this traditional performance that was the central reason a significant Red Wave did not materialize.

In looking at previous elections when Republicans won the House majority, there was clearly a wave effect. In 1994 and 2010, there were no party ID advantages, but Republicans won Independents by a significant double-digit margin. In those two elections, they won 230 and 242 seats respectively. In this election, Republicans had a significant party ID advantage, but lost Independents by two and ended up with 222 seats. In the two elections when Democrats won the House majority, they won Independents by 18 in 2006, and by 12 in 2018. These statistics show the difference that Independents make in elections.

	1994	2010	2022
Party ID Advantage	Even	Even	+3R
Independents	+14R	+19R	+2D
Seats Won	230	242	222

What Happened with Independents?

The question about this election is how did Independents, who had such a negative opinion of President Biden, end up slightly favoring Democrats?

1.) Role of inflation/economy, and shortcomings in the Republican economic message. In the exit poll, 33% of Independents identified inflation as their top issue, slightly higher than 31% for the electorate overall. In looking broadly at the economy, 79% of Independents thought the economy was “not so good“ or poor. Republicans had a clear advantage on this as Independents

preferred Republicans to handle the issue of inflation by an 11-point margin, 52-41. However, among those who preferred Republicans, 19% still voted for the Democratic House candidate. Additionally, among the 41% of Independents who said the economy was “not so good,” they voted for the Democratic candidate by a 29-point margin, 62-33. So while Republicans had an 11-point advantage on the top issue for Independents, they lost them by 2 points, a swing of 13 points. This was a missed opportunity for Republicans, and indicates that Independents needed to hear a more substantive economic message from Republicans.

2.) Another key factor with Independents was their view of President Trump and the negative impact it has had on Republicans. In the 2016 election, Trump won Independents by a 4-point margin, 46-42. In 2020, he lost them by a 13-point margin 41-54. This was the largest losing margin among Independents for a major party candidate since Walter Mondale in 1984. In 2020, his favorable-unfavorable among Independents was 40-58, and in the 2022 election, it dropped to 30-66 according to exit polls. President Trump’s structural negative impact with Independents is seen in a post-election survey done by Winning the Issues where we did two 2024 ballot tests: one with Trump against Biden and another testing a generic Republican candidate against Biden. Among voters overall, Trump trailed Biden by 3 points, 43-46, while the generic Republican led Biden by 10 points, 50-40. Among Independents, Trump trailed Biden by 7 points, 37-44, while the generic Republican led by 14 points 48-34. Again, it is important to repeat that in the exit poll, Biden’s favorable-unfavorable among Independents was 37-60.

That negative view of Trump impacted Congressional Republicans as well. While the Democratic Party had a negative image with the overall electorate of 44-53 favorable-unfavorable, among Independents it was about the same at 43-53. However, while the Republican Party had the same overall negative image at 44-52, among Independents, it was much worse at 33-63.

At the Congressional level in the two elections during the Trump Presidency, Republicans lost Independents by 12 (42-54) in 2018 and then by 9 (44-53) in 2020. In this election, Congressional Republicans lost them by 2 (47-49), an unusual outcome as normally Independents vote for the party not in the White House, particularly when the sitting President is unpopular.

So Independents, who normally vote for change when dealing with an unpopular President, in this case were concerned that Republicans would go in the direction that Independents had rejected in both 2018 and 2020. As a result, the split in their vote stymied a Red Wave.

Another factor related to Trump was that some of the candidates who he helped win Senate primaries struggled significantly. As one example, in Arizona, 54% of the electorate thought Masters was too extreme in his policy positions.

Additional Key Voter Groups

Women

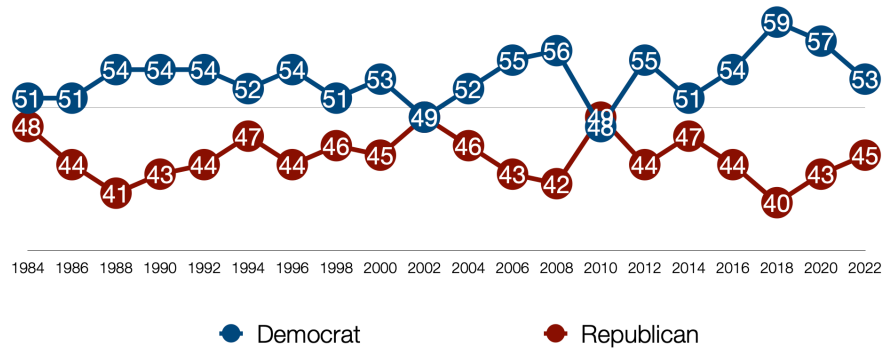
While the size of the gender gap has always been a dynamic in elections, the Supreme Court’s Dobbs decision introduced a new factor that could impact the women’s vote. The top issue for women was abortion at 33%, with inflation coming in second at 28%, and crime, gun policy, and immigration tied for third at 10%. When asked about their reaction to the decision to overturn Roe, 30% said they were enthusiastic or satisfied and voted overwhelmingly for Republicans. Two-thirds, 67%, said they were dissatisfied or angry, but those responses had different results. The larger portion of those voters who said they were angry (47%) voted

overwhelmingly Democratic by a 16-83 margin. Those that said they were dissatisfied (20%) voted for Republicans by a 53-46 margin.

Overall, Republicans lost women by 8 points 45-53. This was a significant improvement from the last off-year election (2018) when Republicans lost women by 19 points (40-59) and in 2020 when Republicans lost women by 14 (43-57). This margin was better than 6 of the last 8 elections.

The two elections that were better were in 2010 when Republicans won women by 1 (49-48) and picked up 63 seats winning the majority, and in 2014, when Republicans lost women by 4 (47-51) while winning 247 seats the largest number of seats since 1928.

Women - Congressional Vote 1984-2022



While women were basically split on which party they trusted more to handle inflation (47R-49D) among those who thought the economy was not so good (43%), Republicans lost by 34 points (32-66).

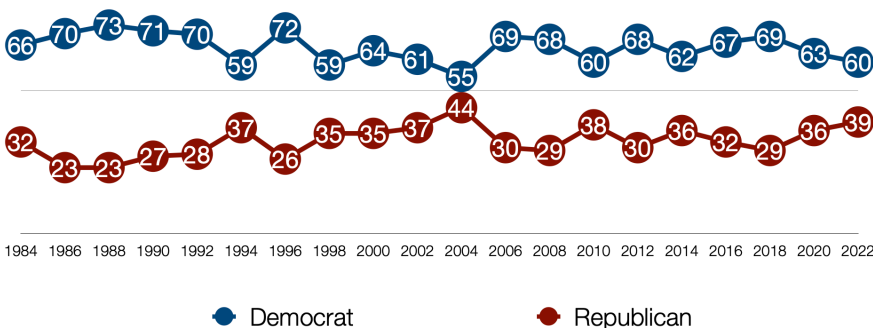
There were also significant brand differences as they viewed the Democratic Party slightly positively (51-46 favorable-unfavorable) in contrast to their negative view of Republicans (40-55 favorable-unfavorable) and Trump (35- 62).

Finally, Independent women were more difficult for Republicans who lost them by 12 (42-54), which was still better than 2018, when the GOP lost them by 17 (39-56), and 2020, when the GOP lost them by 18 (40-58).

Hispanics

Republicans improved slightly with Hispanic voters over the last three elections. In 2018, Republicans lost Hispanics by 40 points (29-69), gaining 29% of the Hispanic vote. That improved slightly in 2020 as Republicans gained 36% of the Hispanic vote (36-63). In 2022, that improved slightly again as Republicans won 39% (39-60). The challenge for

Hispanic - Congressional Vote 1984-2022



challenge for

Republicans with Hispanic voters is both economic and brand image. Among those who said inflation (25%) was the top issue, Republicans won 41% (41-58).

Additionally, the differences in brand are still stark. Democrats had a favorable-unfavorable of 51-46 while Republicans were at 33-61. Biden’s favorable-unfavorable was 55-44, while Trump was at 28-69.

The one very significant bright spot was that among Hispanic Independent men, Republicans won by 1 (47-46). Conversely, Hispanic Independent women represent a significant challenge as Republicans lost them by 40 (28-68).

Under 45 Vote

Overall, the under 45 vote improved significantly from the last off-year election. In 2018, Republicans lost this group by 25 (36-61). In 2022, they lost them by 13 (42-55). Most of this gain came from the 30-44 age group. Republicans lost them by 19 (39-58) in 2018 and then by 4 (47-51) in 2022. There was very slight improvement among 18-29 year olds as Republicans lost them by the very large margin of 35 points (32-67) in 2018 and in this election lost them by 28 (35-63).

The Close Senate Races

In the six Senate races where the final margin was within 5%, Republicans won two and Democrats won four. In all six races, Republicans had a party ID advantage. However, in five of the six Republicans lost Independents, and in three of the races they lost independents by double digits. The only race where the Republican won Independents was Wisconsin. In Arizona and Georgia, Democrats were able to overcome a six-point party ID advantage by winning Independents by double digits.

Senate Race	Party ID	Independent Margin	Overall Margin
Arizona	+6R	-16R	-5R
Georgia	+6R	-11R	-1R
North Carolina	+5R	-6R	+3R
Pennsylvania	+3R	-20R	-5R
Nevada	+2R	-3R	-1R
Wisconsin	Even	+1R	+1R

In several of the Senate races, there was a high level of crossover vote, both in terms of Republican gubernatorial candidates, and among self identified Republicans. In New Hampshire, the Democratic Senate candidate, Hassan, was able to win 10% of the Republican vote and also win 21% of those who had voted for the Republican gubernatorial candidate Sununu. In Pennsylvania, 10% of the self identified Republicans voted for the Democratic Senate candidate Fetterman. In Ohio, Democratic Senate candidate Ryan won 18% of those who voted for the Republican gubernatorial candidate DeWine.

Impact of Candidate Quality in Senate Races

In the Senate races in Arizona, Georgia, and Nevada, if the Republican candidate had gotten the number of votes as the Republican House candidates in their state, they would have won their race. That would have given Republicans a 52-48 majority. In Arizona and Georgia the House candidates got over

125,000 more votes than their Senate candidate, and in Georgia the Republican vote total was enough to have avoided a run-off. In Nevada the numbers were closer, as House Republicans lost 3 out of 4 House

Senate Race	Dem Senate Vote	Rep Senate Vote	Rep House Vote	Margin Rep House Vote vs Rep Senate Vote	Margin Rep House Vote vs Dem Senate Vote
Arizona	1,322,027	1,196,308	1,324,961	128,653	2,934
Georgia	1,946,117	1,908,442	2,044,102	135,660	97,985
Nevada	498,316	490,388	515,535	25,147	17,219
Pennsylvania	2,751,012	2,487,260	2,702,262	215,002	-48,750

races. Finally, in Pennsylvania, House Republican candidates received 215,000 more votes than the Republican Senate candidate, although that would not been enough to win the Senate race. Clearly in all 4 states the House candidates outperformed the Senate candidates.

Policy Versus Personality: The Commitment to America

One of the most positive assets that Republicans could have used more effectively in campaigns was the policy agenda developed in the House. For over a year leading up to the 2022 election, there was a significant effort by House Republicans to develop a policy-based framework for what a Republican majority would do, and to positively shape the political discourse for the election. This framework was developed by Republican Member task forces working on specific issue areas. The result was a policy document named “The Commitment to America” that was released in September prior to the election.

The Winning the Issues post-election survey of midterm voters asked if a respondent had “seen, read or heard anything about a policy agenda called the Commitment to America.” The survey did not associate it with a political party so that voters would not respond based on the party label. 15% of the midterm electorate said they had heard of it. By party, 18% of Republicans had heard of it, 15% of Democrats, and 13% of independents. Of the 15% that had heard of it, Republicans won them by almost 2:1 (64-35 R-D).

That margin has some bias in it as 42% of those who heard of the Commitment were Republicans, and Republicans made up 36% of the electorate. However, a majority of

Seen, Read or Heard of the Commitment to America	Percentage	House Vote (R-D)
Yes	15	64-35
No/Don't know	85	48-50

those who did hear about the Commitment were not Republicans. Among those voters who did not hear about the Commitment or did not know, Republicans trailed by the very slight margin of 48-50 R-D.

These numbers show that the awareness level of the Commitment was low, given conventional campaign messaging and the barrage of negative ads. However, among the 15% of voters who

had heard of it, they voted for Republicans in much higher proportions, even with the majority of this voter group not identifying as Republican in party ID. If awareness of the Commitment had been higher, it would undoubtedly have helped Republicans.

Conclusion

The environment for this election should have produced a Red Wave. The voters in the 2022 electorate were very negative about both the direction of the country and the economy as well as Biden's job performance as President across a number of issues. He was struggling at a personal level as well with only 41% of voters having a favorable view of him and 56% with an unfavorable view. The table was set. All that was needed, particularly for Independents, were some solutions to address these problems.

House Republicans spent a year putting together those solutions to create an agenda called the "Commitment to America" yet only 15% of the electorate said that they had heard of this agenda. As stated earlier, those that heard of it were very positive. Among those who didn't, Republicans marginally lost to Democrats. The Republican campaigns and political efforts generally did not promote the Commitment or a proactive policy agenda for candidates, relying instead on outdated negative ads, attacking Pelosi and Biden and an overwhelming focus on turning out the conservative Republican base (which represented only 25% of the turnout on Election Day). Given that Independents were the deciding voter group in the election, this strategy was not effective.

While Republicans were successful in achieving a party ID margin of +3, the highest in all the elections 1984 forward, this focus on the base and party turnout came at a strategic expense as 31% of the electorate were Independents, a historic high. Independents, who have historically voted for change in an off-year election when dissatisfied with a sitting President and the direction of the country, did not this time. This was ultimately for two reasons. First, Trump's presence was a significant negative for Independent voters. His 30-66 favorable-unfavorable among them reflected a long-term deterioration that has also taken a toll on Republicans' overall standing with Independents. Additionally, given Trump's ability to impact the outcome of some Senate primaries by supporting marginal candidates, Independents saw their choice as sticking with Biden despite their negative view of the direction of the country, or going back to Trump who they had rejected at a significant scale in 2020. This last combination was particularly difficult for Senate Republicans as evidenced by the fact if they had simply done as well as Republican House candidates (in terms of total votes) in AZ, GA, and NV, they would be in the majority with 52 seats. This choice between Biden's economy and what they saw as a return of Trump was made worse by ineffective Republican messaging on the economy.

For those looking to explain a disappointing Republican showing in 2022 as a result of a tactical problems like the Democratic mail-in voting program, the last key element was the Democrats' percentage of the electorate was 33%, the lowest it has been 1972 forward. The the lack of a Red Wave was not due to Democratic turnout or a progressive surge, quite the contrary. Democrat party ID hit a 50-year low.

But this was the year of the Independent, and both parties had equal difficulty in delivering effective messaging that resonated with this key group. In the Winning the Issues post election survey, among Independents who heard a Democratic message, 32% were more favorable to vote for a Democrat and 51% were less favorable. This was virtually the same for those who heard a Republican message, 33% being more favorable and 52% being less favorable. In the exit polls,

both Biden and Trump had unfavorables in the 60s among independents. This resulted in Independents splitting their vote as their choice was between two unfavorable options.

For Republicans, a content audit for their messaging and ad content is very much needed as well as revitalization and implementation of the Commitment to America. In the exit poll, Independents trusted Republicans more than Democrats to handle the issue of inflation, yet what Republicans were saying about economic issues was so ineffective that Independents who thought the economy was not so good voted overwhelmingly Democratic. Republican campaign messaging needs to learn how to be persuasive. For Democrats, they not only need to assess how to better message with Independents and develop more effective content, they also need to work through how their efforts and policies over recent years have produced the lowest percentage of Democrats in an electorate in the last 50 years.

In the last sentence of the 2020 Winston Group post-election analysis, we posed that the question to be answered was which party can better understand how to build a majority coalition in this very complicated environment? The answer was neither — and so the question still stands. This will be the central challenge for both parties for 2024.

Methodology

This report is based on the Winning the Issues Election survey of 1100 voters at the Congressional level (November 6-8, 2022) and Edison Research exit polls. *(Note: The Edison Research exit poll data and overall election results are as of January 11, 2023. Edison Research have not finalized the exit polls for Pennsylvania and Texas and there might be some minor changes in the final results in those two states.)*