

EXPLAINING THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Many slides courtesy of Tom Patterson, Bradlee Professor of
Government and the Press, Harvard University; Steven Rattner,
Willett Advisors

Three Key Factors to Explain Elections:

- 1. POLITICAL PARTY
- 2. CANDIDATES
- 3. ISSUES

I. POLITICAL PARTIES

- Elections are Mostly about Activation, Not Persuasion
- Parties and candidates have two jobs in an election: activate the faithful, and persuade the dubious.
- This process was first identified in a pioneering study of the 1940 presidential election (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, *The People's Choice*) studying voters in Erie County, Ohio. They found that the chief purpose of a nationwide political campaign was to “activate [voters’] political predispositions.”
- Most voters had decided how they were going to vote before the campaign began.

This is Even More True in this Era of Heightened Political Polarization

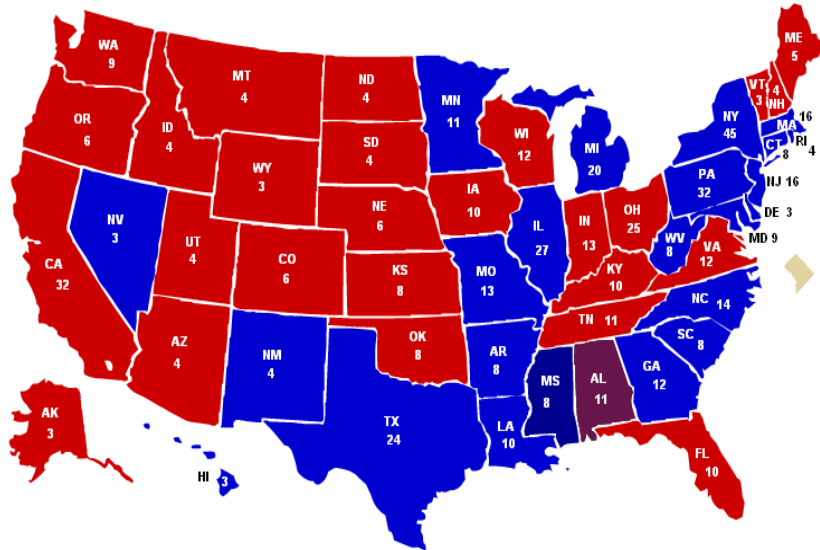
- Why current era of polarization?
 - The two political parties are closely matched, which historically enhances polarization. Each party is dedicated to undermining the other in hopes of winning the next election.
 - When one party dominates (e.g. Republicans 1896-1928, Democrats 1932-1968), the dominant party focuses more on governance as it is less concerned with electoral defeat, and the weaker party moves closer to the dominant party in hopes of gaining support (e.g. by the 1950s Republicans had largely accepted Social Security (enacted 1935) and other New Deal era programs).
 - The current era of polarization is unlikely to subside until one party wins domination.

Polarization Political Dynamics

- Political leaders play to and enhance polarization.
- Media and information “siloeing” that emerged in the 1990s was greatly enhanced by the proliferation of electronic media and internet sources.
- One-time media dominance of big three networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) and print newspapers is gone, pushed aside by dozens of ideological electronic news outlets, thousands of ideological web sites, and decline/disappearance of print newspapers.

Partisan Change

1960 Election
Pre-realignment



2000 Election
Post-realignment



One Key Aspect of the Change: Intra-Party Takeover of the GOP

- Throughout most of this period of change, the Republican Party was dominated by its Establishment Wing (reflected in presidential nominations of Bush 1 and 2, Dole, McCain, Romney)
- Republican rebellion from within on the party's Establishment Wing
 - Rise & institutionalization of the Tea Party (2009-2012)
 - Nomination of Trump who captures the party in 2016
- Political war on Democrats but also on establishment Republicans.

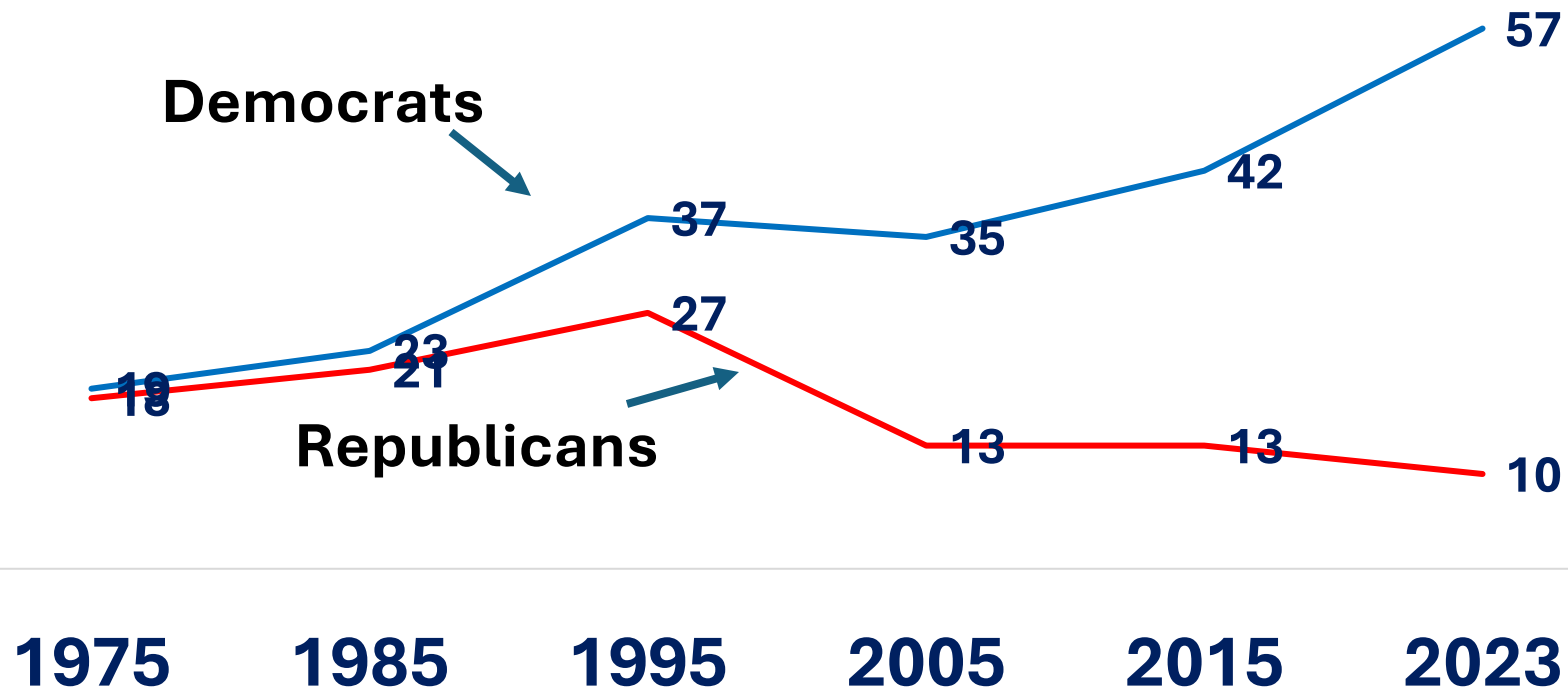
Cumulative Effect on Today's Parties

- **Democratic Party:** A product of its 1930s-1960s transformation – the party of economic security programs, civil rights, cultural liberalism. Call it the federal party.
- **Republican Party:** A product of its more recent transformation – the party of small government (economic sphere) & cultural conservatism. Call it the states-rights party.
- Our parties are as far apart as at nearly any time in their history. Even leading up to the Civil War, both parties (Democrats and Whigs) had sharp intra-party factional divisions: pro- and anti-slavery factions. No similar intra-party factions now.

The Partisan Divide: Issue Polarization

Example of Abortion Issue

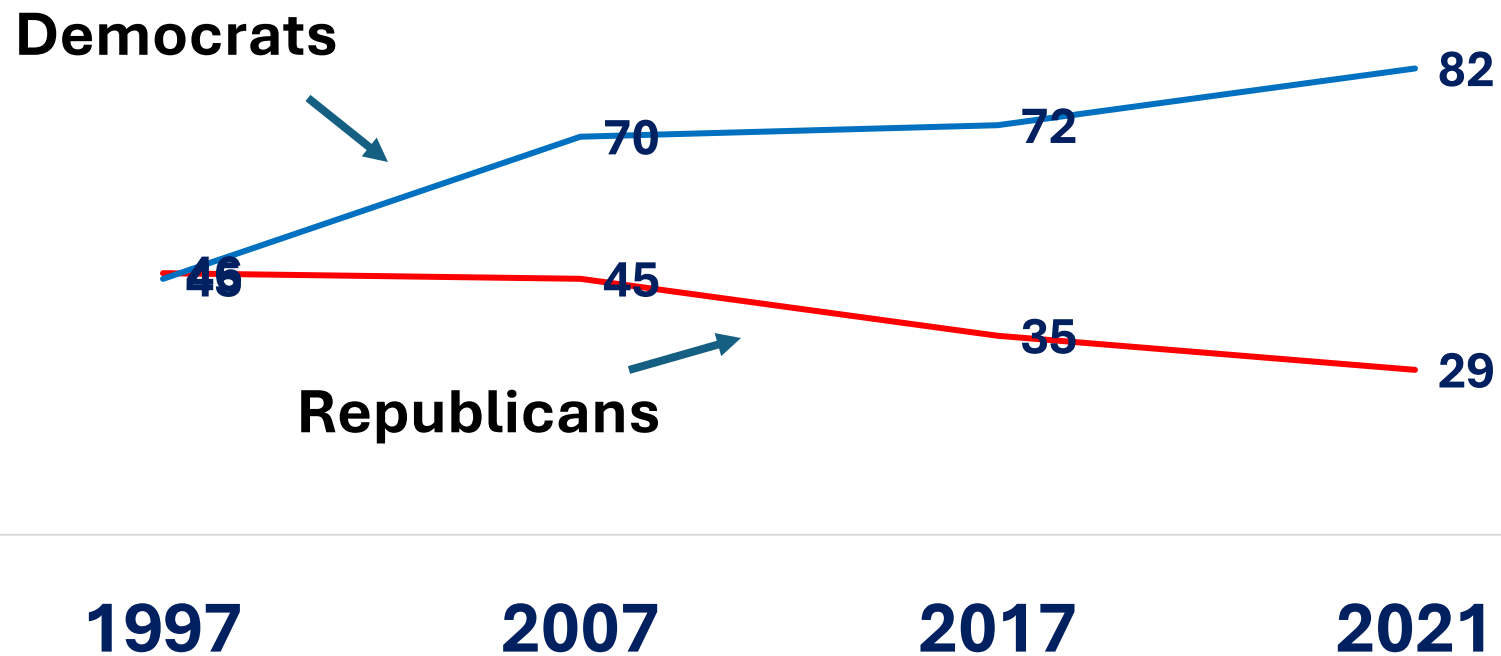
Percentage of respondents saying abortion should be allowed in “all circumstances.”



Source: Gallup
polls

The Partisan Divide: Perceptual Polarization (alternative realities) Example: Global Warming

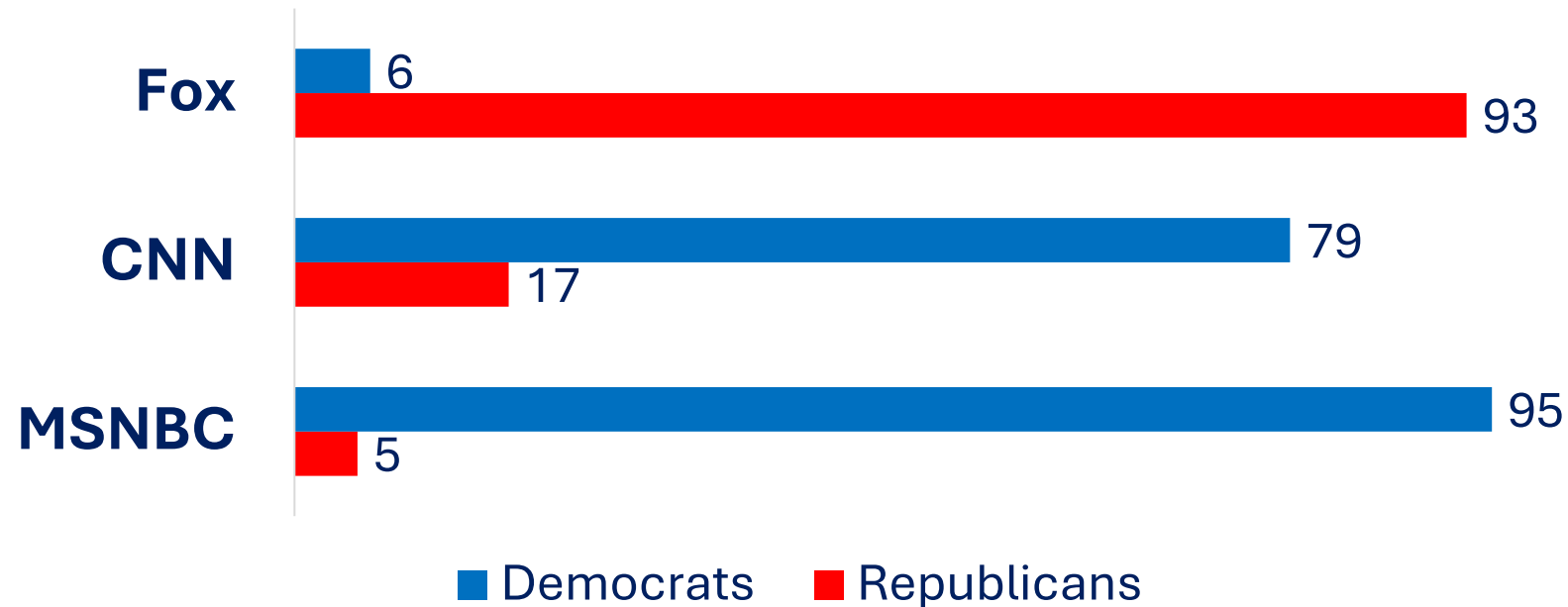
Percentage of respondents believing effects of global warming have already begun



Source: Gallup
polls

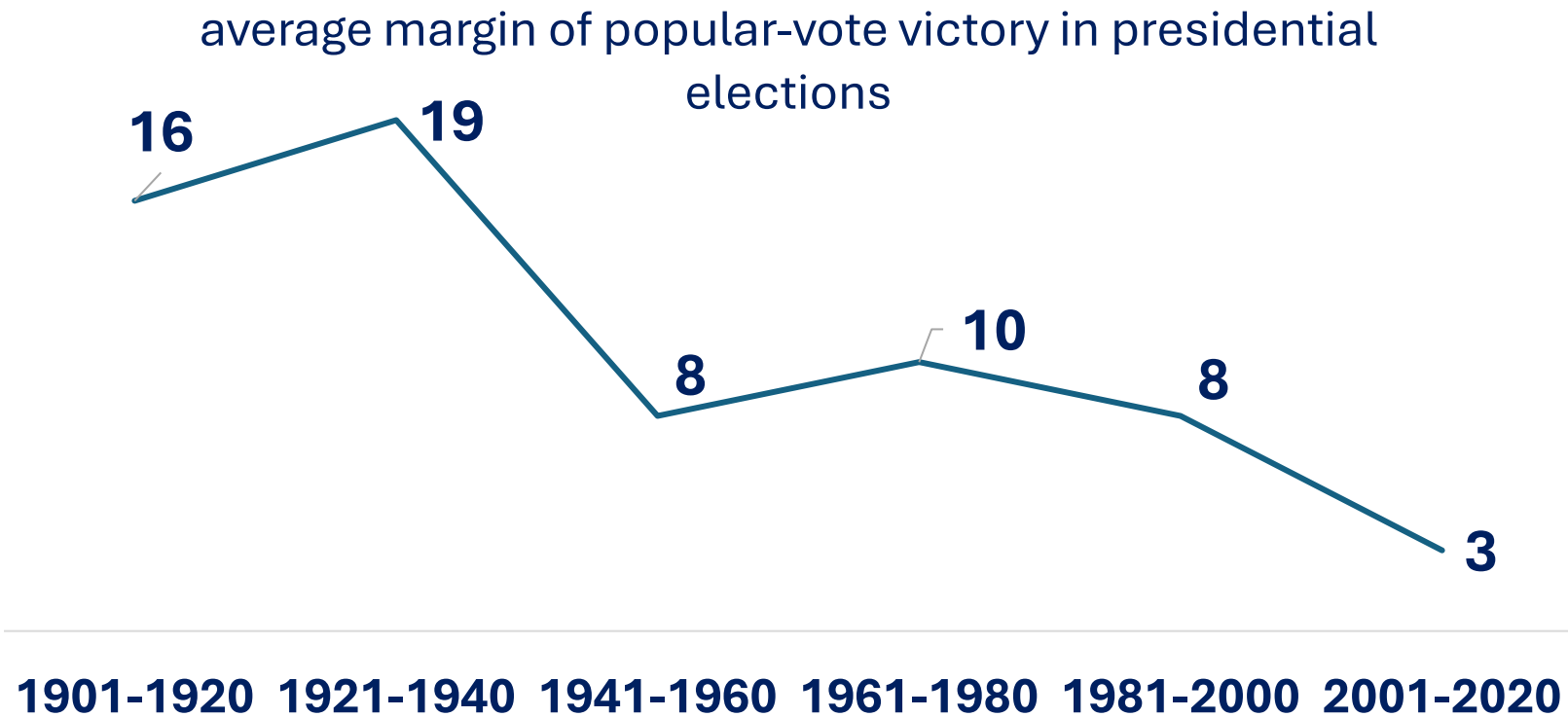
Partisan Sorting: Cable News Audience

percentage of partisans who say outlet is “a main source of news”



Source: Pew Research Center poll, 2019

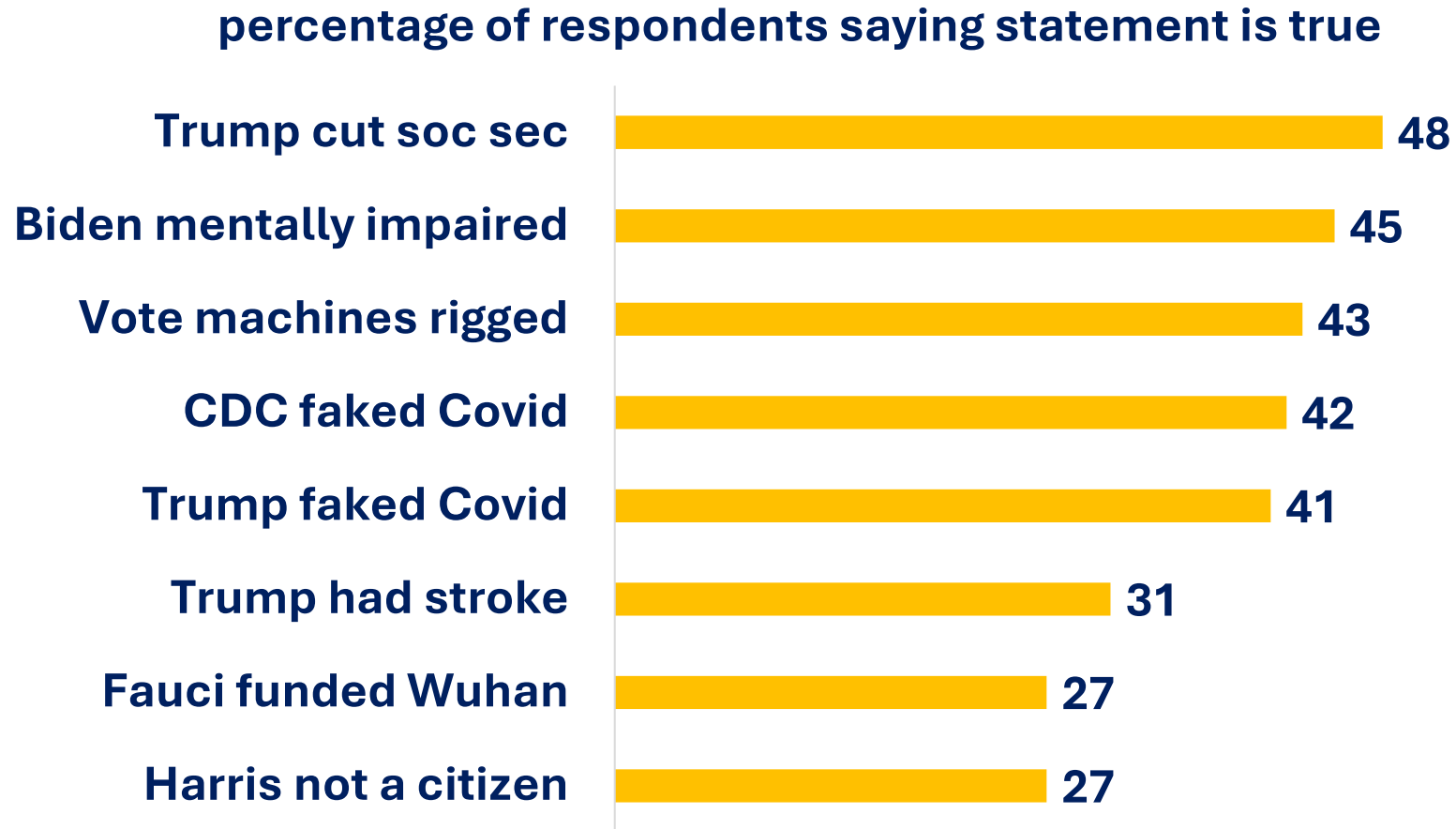
The Parties are Closely Matched: Presidency Outcomes



Examples of Factual Claims from 2020:

- Donald Trump faked having Covid-19 in order to win sympathy votes
- Joe Biden is mentally impaired
- Dr. Anthony Fauci funded a lab in Wuhan to develop the coronavirus
- If reelected, Donald Trump planned to eliminate social security and Medicare
- Kamala Harris was not born in United States
- CDC manipulated numbers to exaggerate fatalities from Covid-19
- President Trump went to the hospital while president after suffering a stroke
- Vote counting machines overcounted the Biden vote

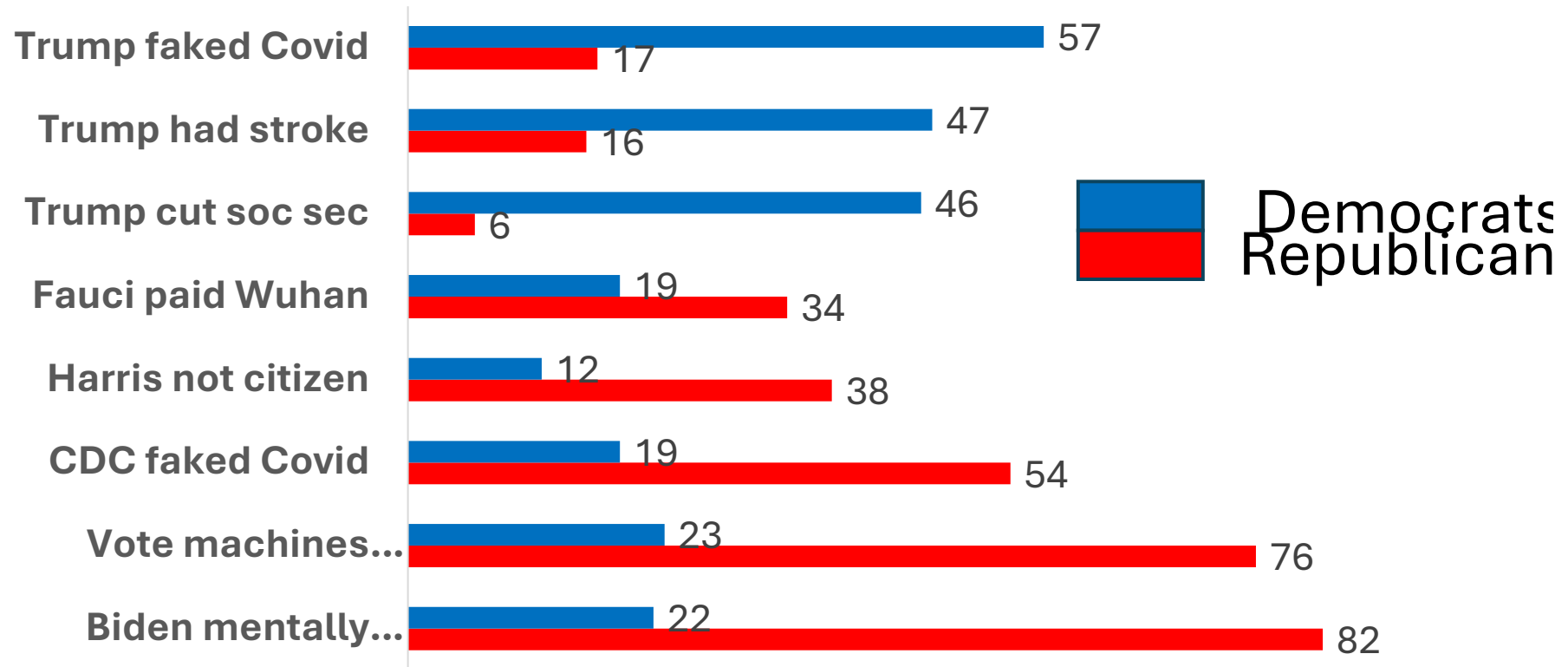
None is True, but Each is Believed by Tens of Millions of Americans



Explanation: Confirmation Bias

- The psychological tendency to interpret claims in ways that align with our preexisting beliefs and biases.

Confirmation Bias affects Republicans & Democrats Alike: accepting false claims that align with one's partisanship



Source: Indiana University's Observatory on Social Media survey, November 2020

II. THE CANDIDATES

The 2024 Political Earthquake:

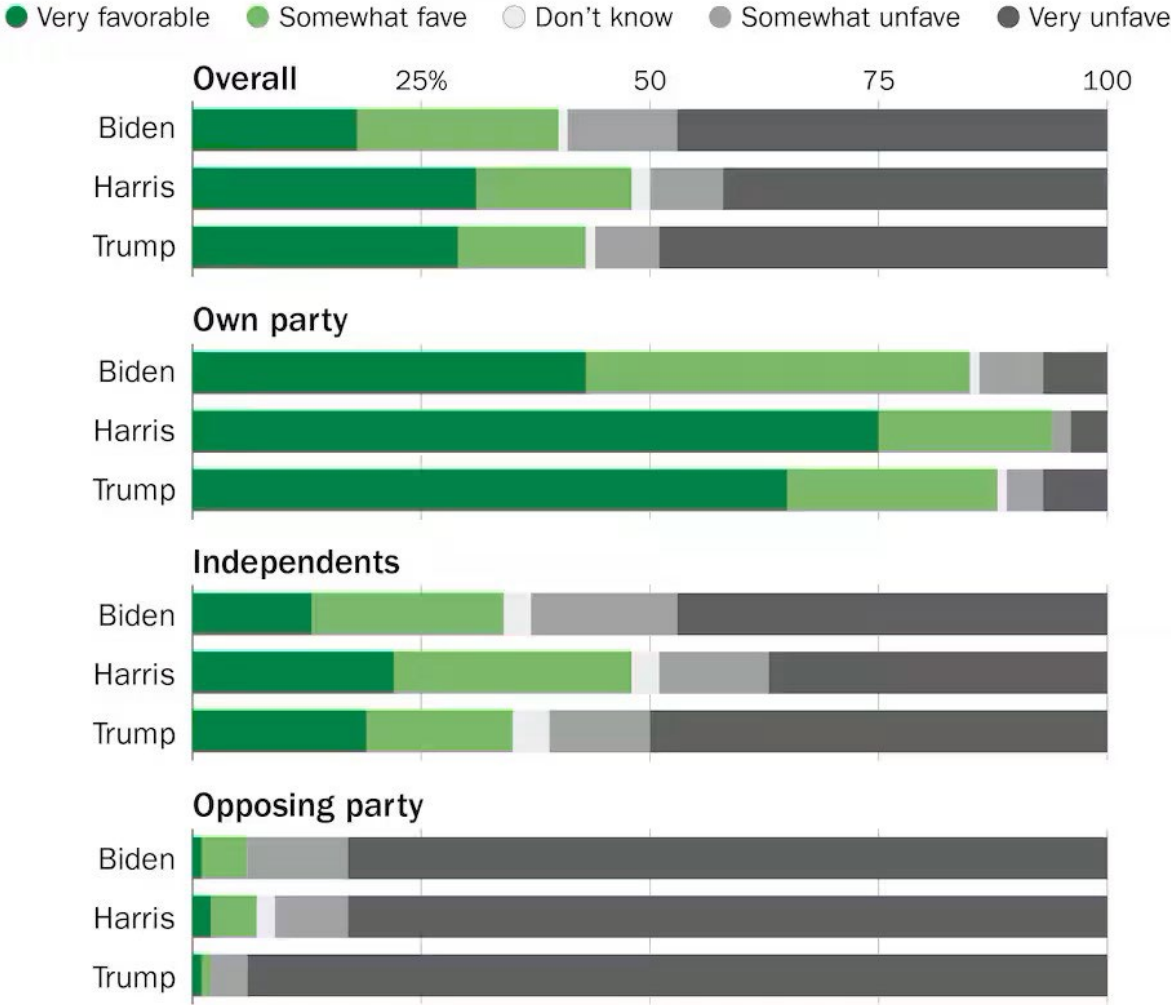
- This presidential election would have been the fifth candidate rematch and second time an incumbent president has faced a former president (Grover Cleveland vs. Benjamin Harrison, 1892) had Joe Biden stayed in the race.
- **July 21:** Bowing to pressure from Democratic leaders in the wake of low poll numbers and poor debate performance, Biden announced withdrawal from the race.
- The rapid selection of VP Kamala Harris to replace Biden on the ticket is unprecedented in history of the presidency (nearest analogue: Lyndon Johnson's decision not to run for a second full term in March 1968).

Harris-for-Biden Provides Rocket Fuel for Democrats and Favorable Media Coverage

- Media coverage has been slightly more favorable to Harris than Trump, even on pro-Trump Fox News. Favorable coverage isn't necessarily a story of "liberal media bias" but rather a story about how the news media reflects the "fundamentals" of a story.
- In this case, the fundamentals are clear. The Democratic Party was deeply uncertain about Biden. They had every incentive to rally behind Harris and thus showered her with enthusiasm and praise. Democrats avoided the sorts of intra-party divisions that often attract negative news coverage.
- Harris has managed to avoid major missteps, scandals, or gaffes—in part by limiting her interactions with the news media. She's not been perfect, but the memorable controversies have mostly been Trump's—such as his appearance at Arlington Cemetery or the ginned-up panic about immigrants eating pets.
- Generally, candidates who gain in the polls get more positive coverage. Good poll numbers help sustain a "winner" narrative that translates into positive coverage and a feeling of "momentum."

Comparative Favorability Ratings After Harris Becomes Nominee

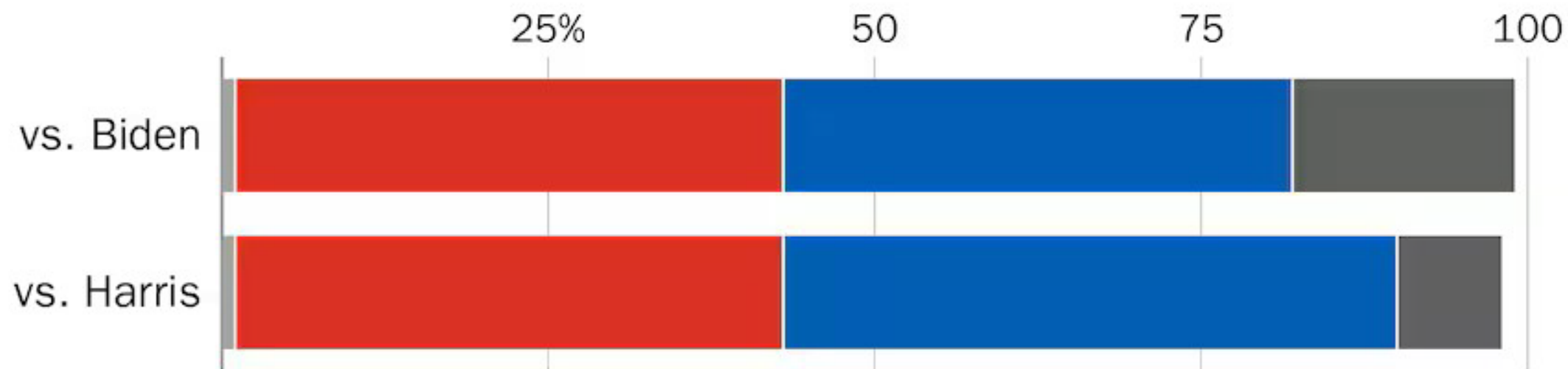
Favorable views of politicians



Source: Monmouth University, August 2024

The decline of the double-hater

- View both favorably
- View neither favorably
- View **only Trump** favorably
- View **only the Democrat** favorably

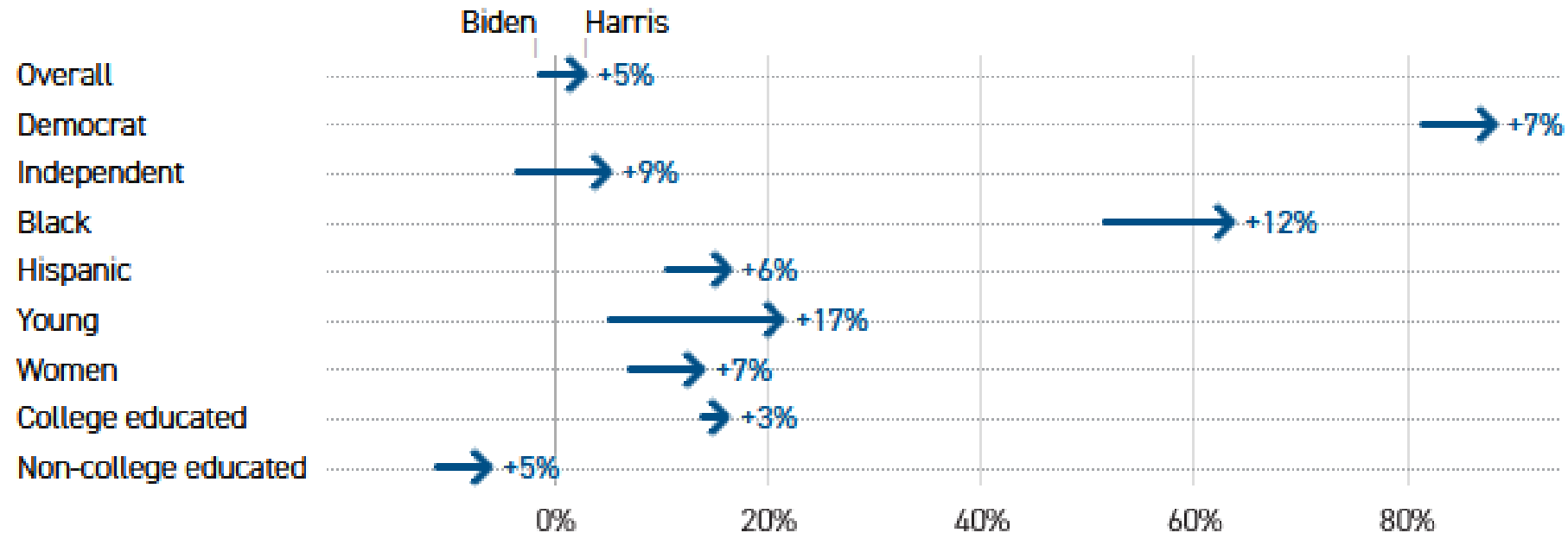


Source: Monmouth University, August 2024

THE WASHINGTON POST

Harris gains support across demographics compared to Biden

Joe Biden's margin over Donald Trump in his pre-dropout polls compared to Kamala Harris' most recent polls, according to crosstabs of the highest-rated pollsters



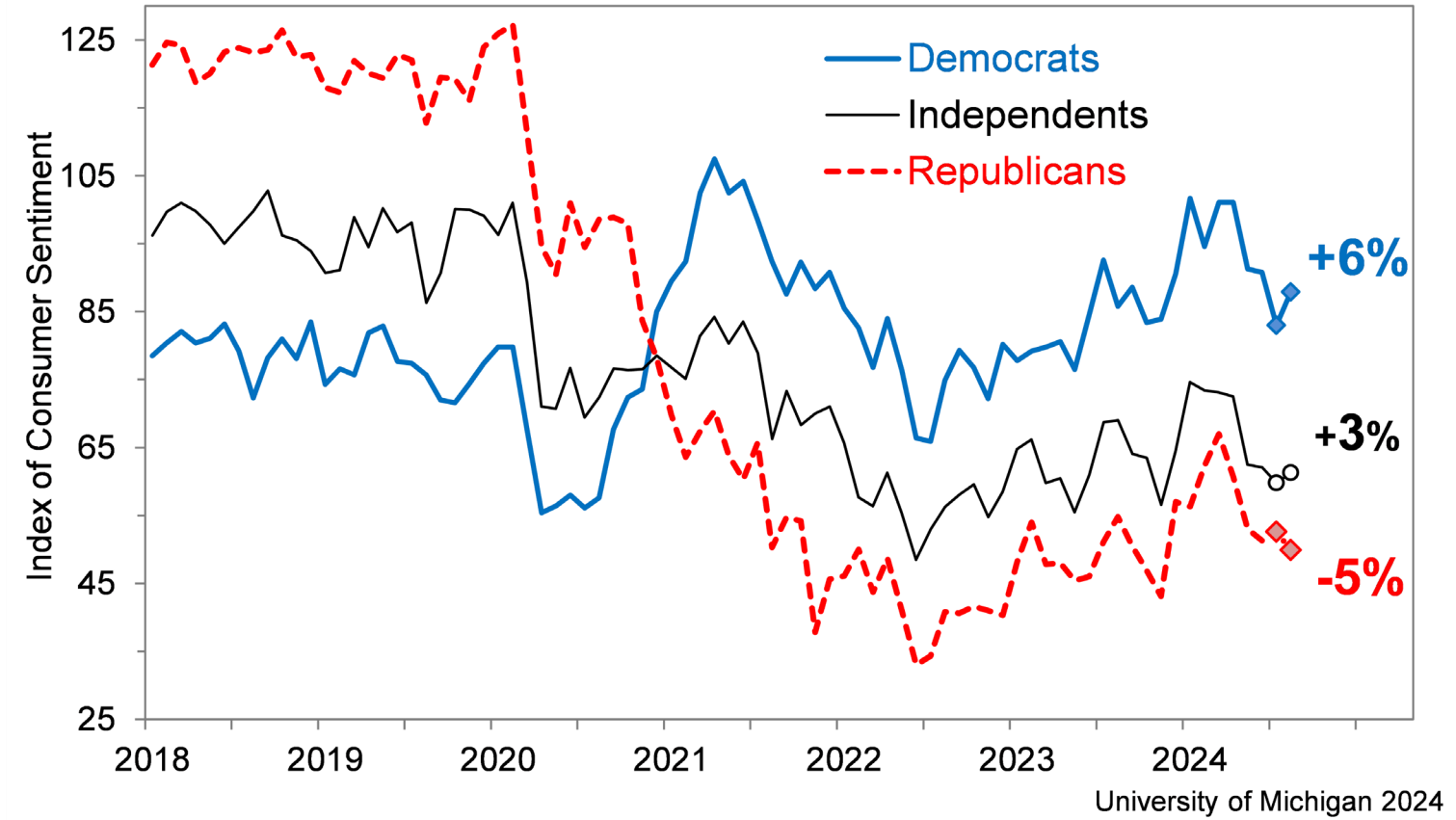
Note: To control for pollster differences in age categories, "young voters" is defined as the youngest demographic measured in the surveys. The highest age included by any poll in this category is 39.

Source: FiveThirtyEight

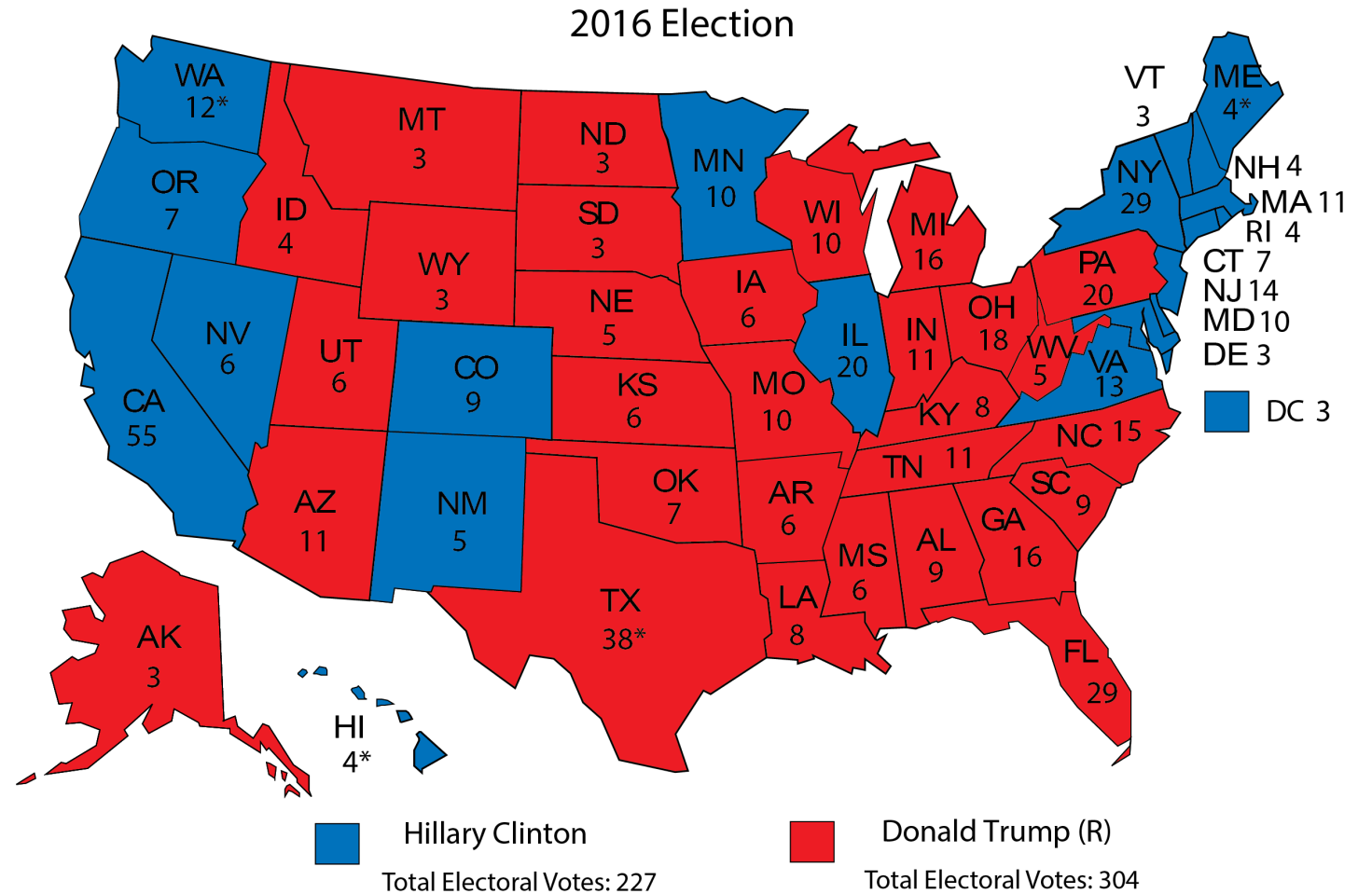
Catherine Allen/POLITICO

Harris Candidacy Boosted the Democratic Party

Sentiment Rose for Democrats, Fell for Republicans in August 2024



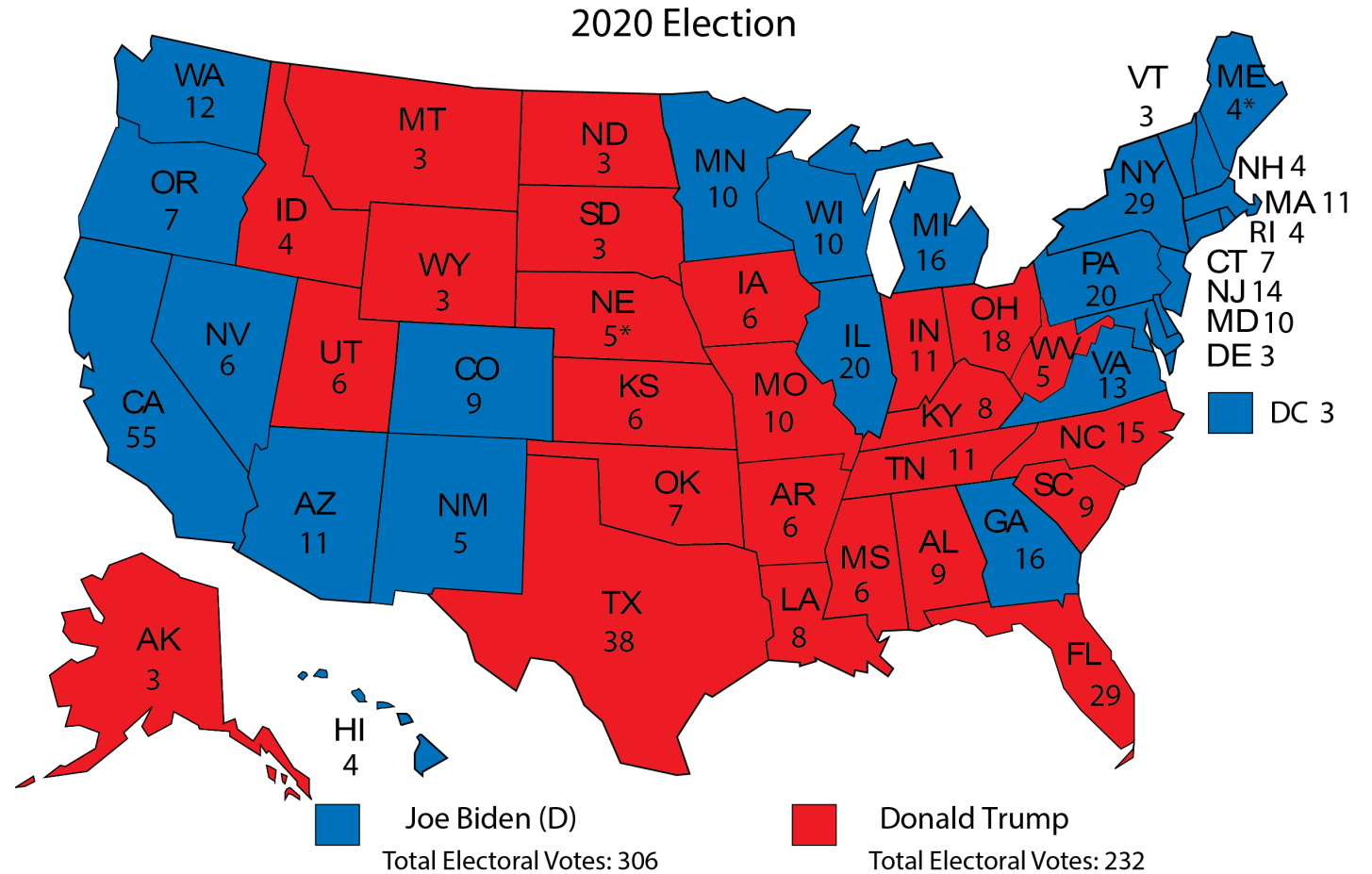
2016: Trump Wins by Breaching Blue Wall



*Note: Two of Maine's four electoral votes were determined by its congressional districts; Trump won ME-2, thus the state's electoral vote was Clinton three, Trump one. Four Clinton electors from Washington and one from Hawaii did not vote for her; two Trump electors from Texas did not vote for him.

2020: Biden Wins Over Trump

- Biden recaptures Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Arizona



*Note: Two of Maine's four electoral votes were determined by its congressional districts; Trump won ME-2, thus the state's electoral vote was Biden three, Trump one. Three of Nebraska's five electoral votes were determined by districts as well; Biden won NE-2, thus the state's electoral vote was Trump four, Biden one.

Survey of Political Scientists Who Specialize in the American Presidency (PEP) on Trump and Biden presidencies

Political scientists rank Trump last in presidential greatness

Presidents ranked by overall greatness on a scale of 0 to 100, based on a survey of 154 political scientists.

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2	Roosevelt, Franklin D.	91	1933
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4	Roosevelt, Theodore	79	1901
5	Jefferson	78	1801
6	Truman	75	1945
7	Obama	74	2009
8	Eisenhower	74	1953
9	Johnson, Lyndon B.	73	1963
10	Kennedy	68	1961
11	Madison	67	1809
12	Clinton	66	1993
13	Adams, John	63	1797
14	Biden	63	2021
15	Wilson	62	1913
16	Reagan	62	1981
17	Grant	61	1869
18	Monroe	60	1817
19	Bush, George H.W.	59	1989
20	Adams, John Quincy	55	1825
21	Jackson	55	1829
22	Carter	54	1977
23	Taft	52	1909

24	McKinley	51	1897
25	Polk	50	1845
26	Cleveland	48	1885
27	Ford	46	1974
28	Van Buren	45	1837
29	Hayes	41	1877
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35	Nixon	36	1969
36	Hoover	34	1929
37	Tyler	33	1841
38	Taylor	33	1849
39	Fillmore	30	1850
40	Harding	28	1921
41	Harrison, William	26	1841
42	Pierce	25	1853
43	Johnson	22	1865
44	Buchanan	17	1857
45	Trump	11	2017

Sources: American Political Science Association; Encyclopedia Britannica - Note: Ratings have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

One Reason for Trump's Low Ranking

CRIMINAL INDICTMENTS BY ADMINISTRATION

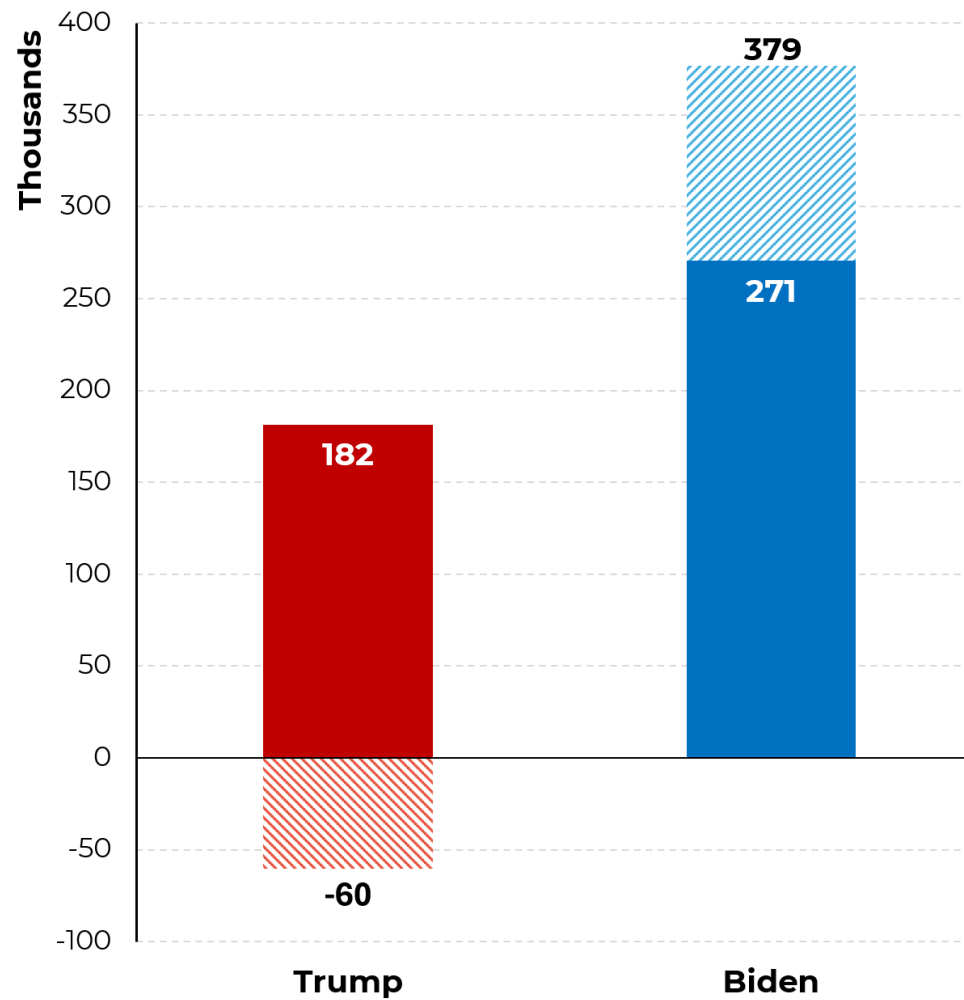
BARACK OBAMA	0
GERALD FORD	1
JIMMY CARTER	1
GEORGE H.W. BUSH	1
BILL CLINTON	2
GEORGE W. BUSH	16
RONALD REAGAN	26
RICHARD NIXON	76
DONALD TRUMP	215

III. ISSUES

- Economy (jobs/deficit/economy)
- Crime
- Oil
- Abortion
- Immigration
- Ukraine aid

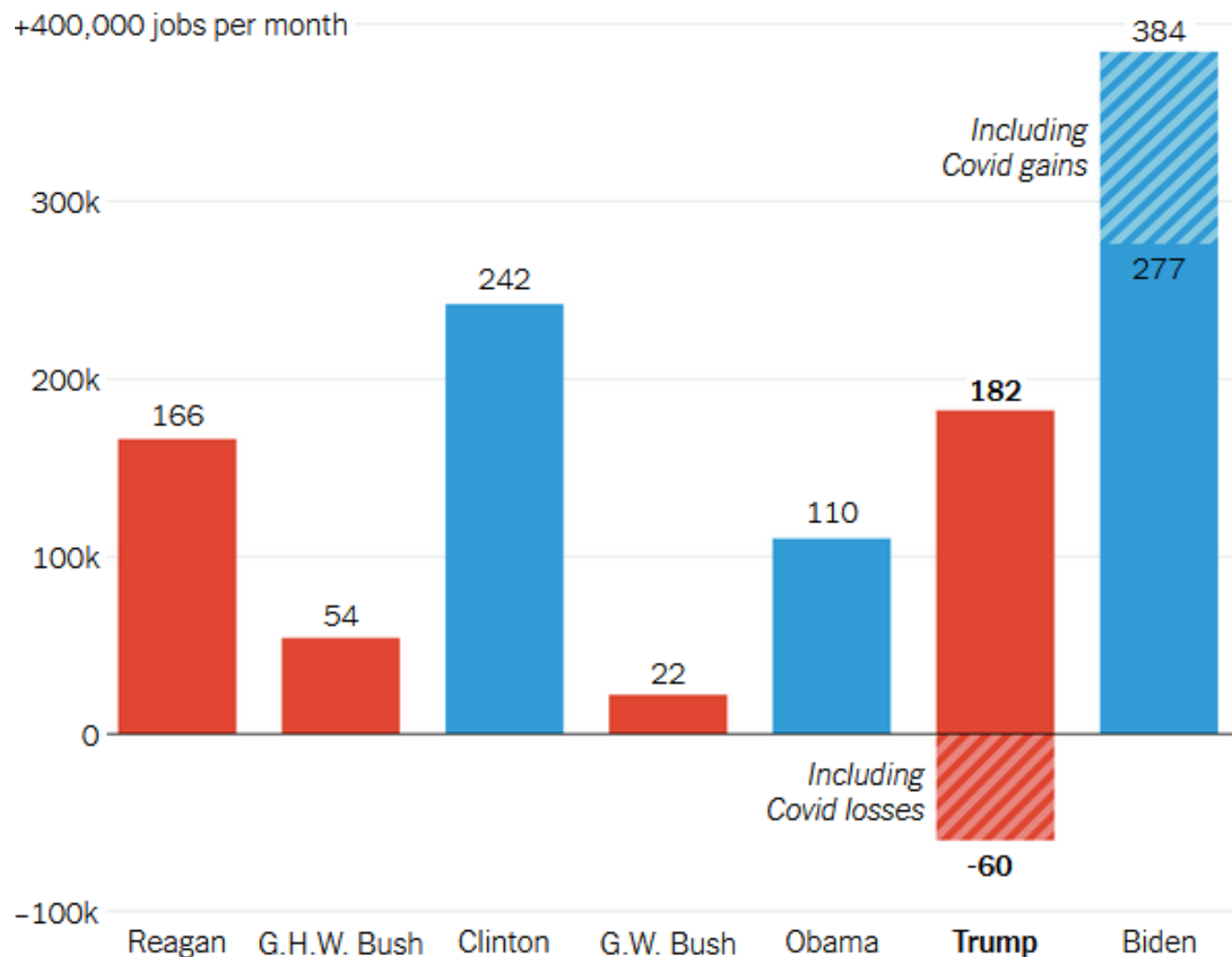
Solid bars are
job growth
minus effects of
pandemic.

**Average Monthly Jobs Growth
During Presidency**



Job growth under Trump lagged behind Biden and Clinton

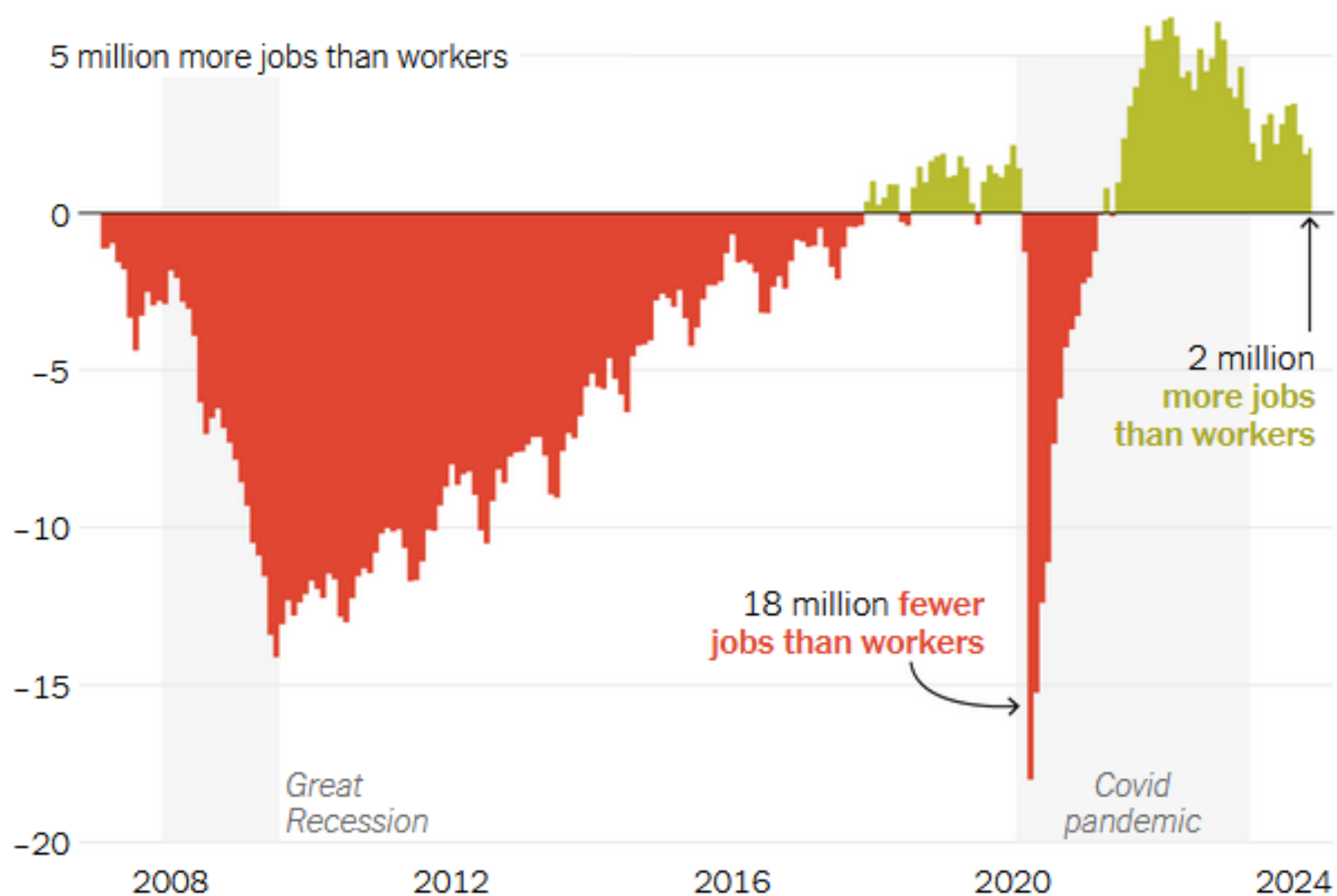
Even when the effect of the pandemic is excluded, the Trump administration's figures are lower than those of other recent presidents.



Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; U.S. Department of the Treasury

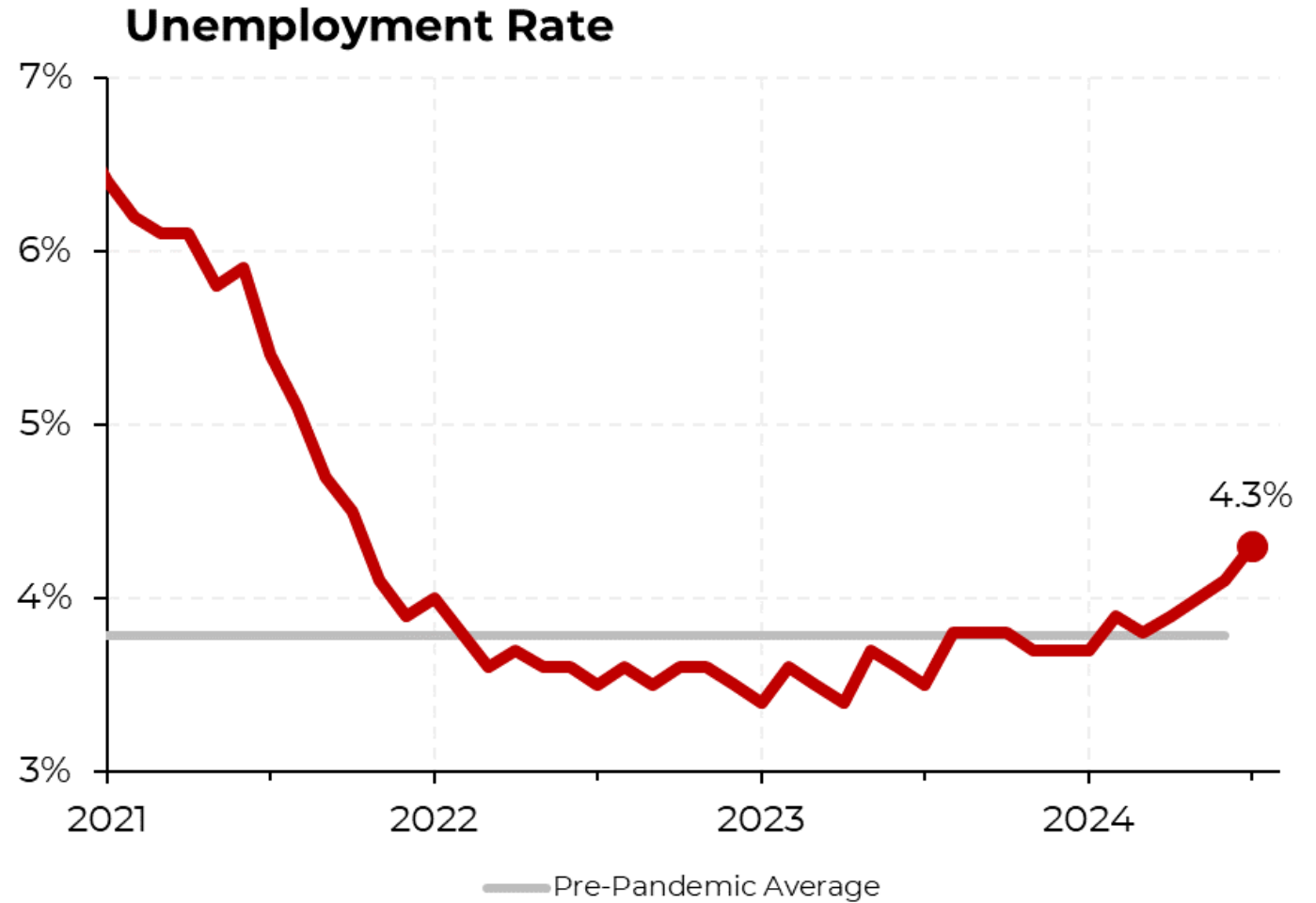
A shortage of workers as Americans retire

Since July 2021, the United States has had more jobs than workers to fill them.

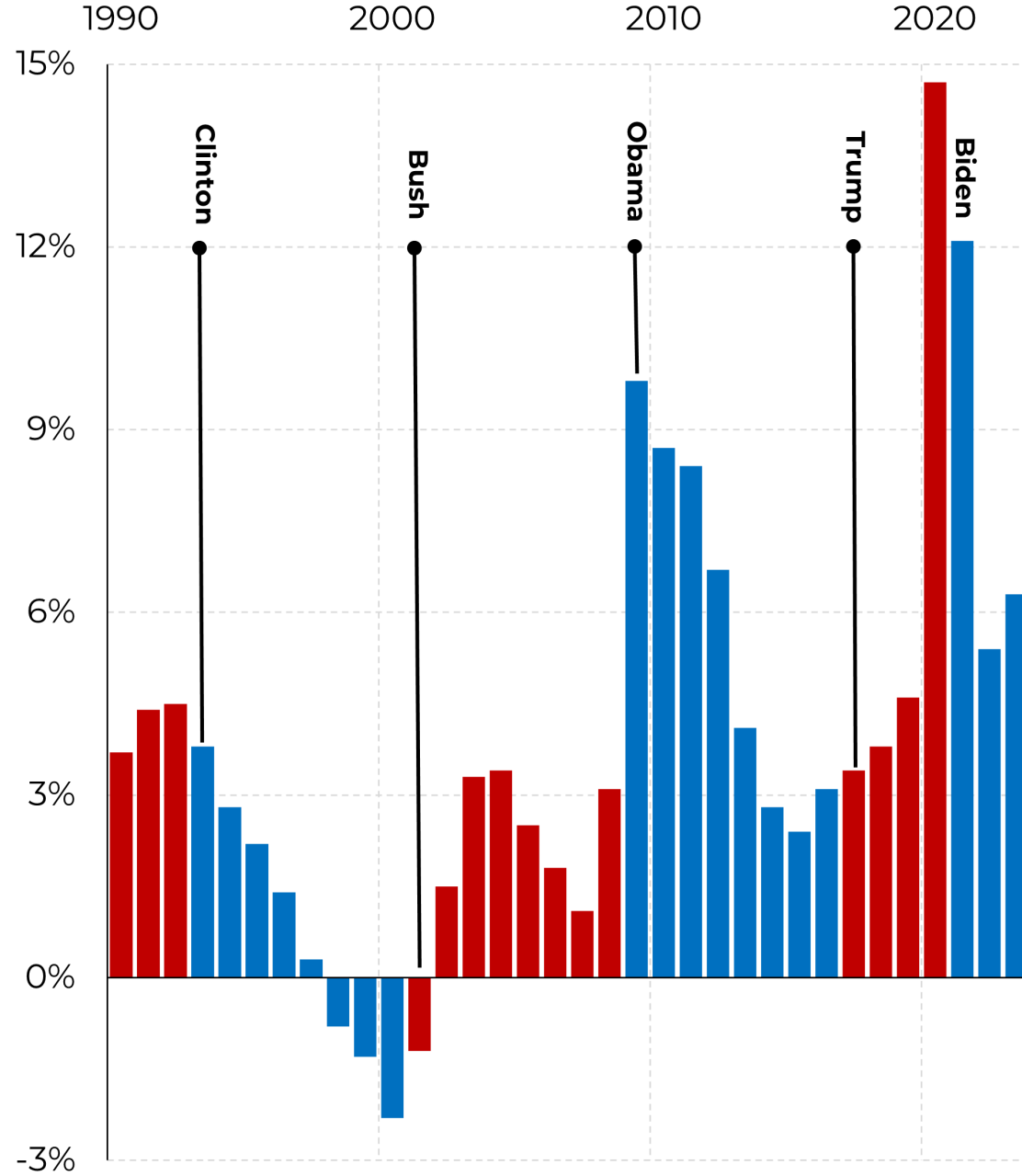


Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

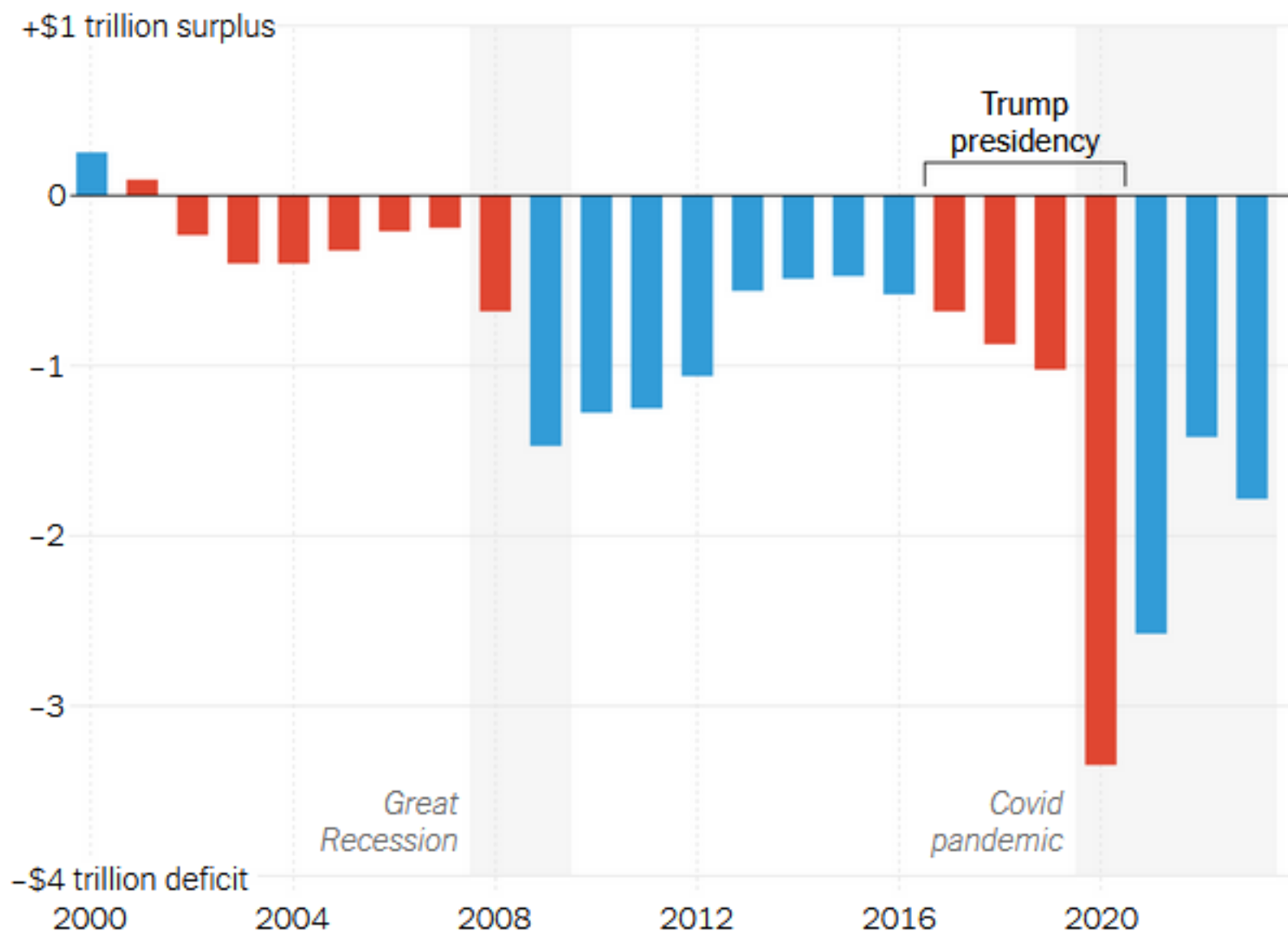
4% unemployment
was once
considered “full
employment”



Budget Deficits as a Percent of GDP

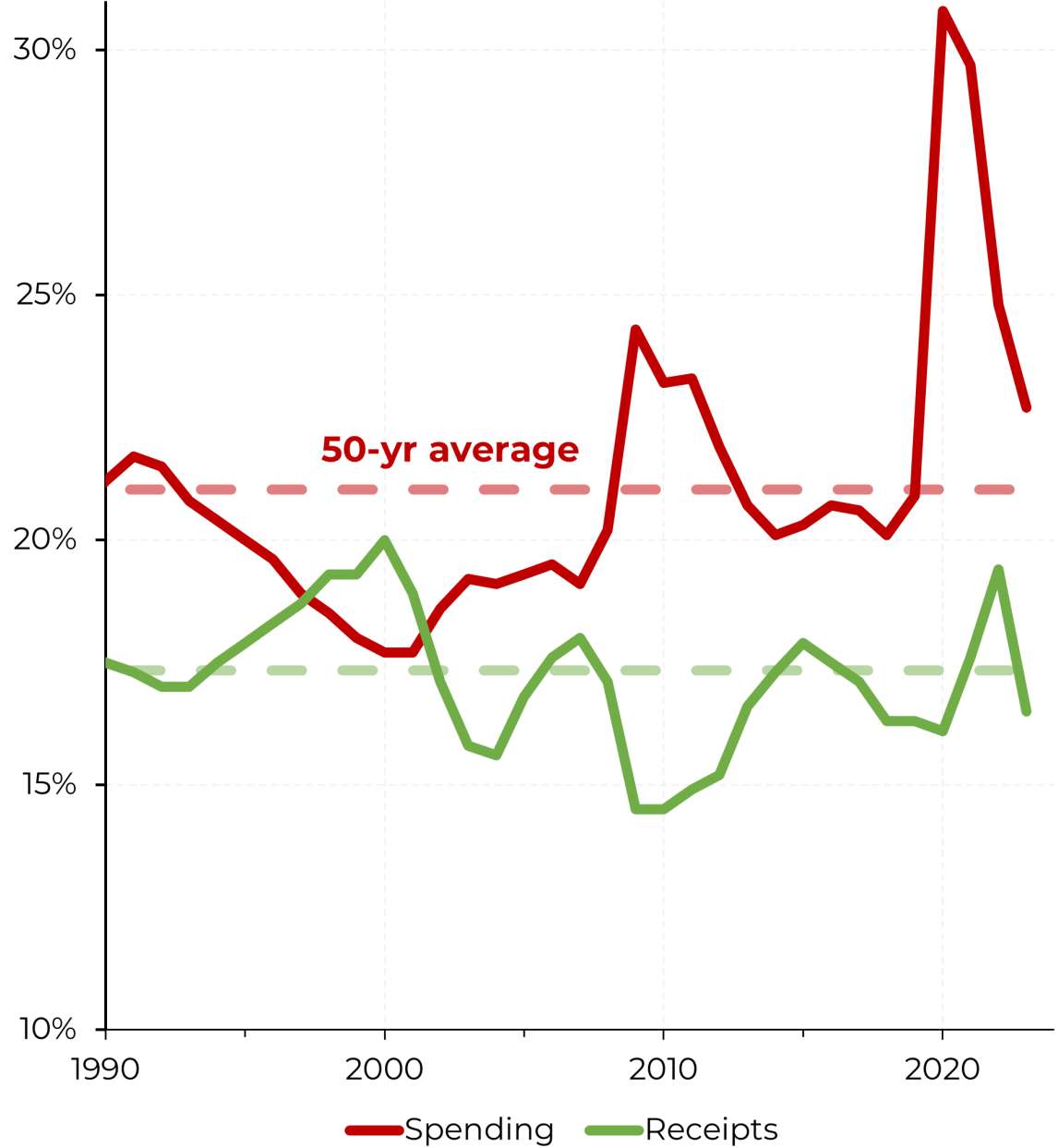


The federal deficit grew during the Trump years



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

US Federal Spending vs Receipts as a Percent of GDP

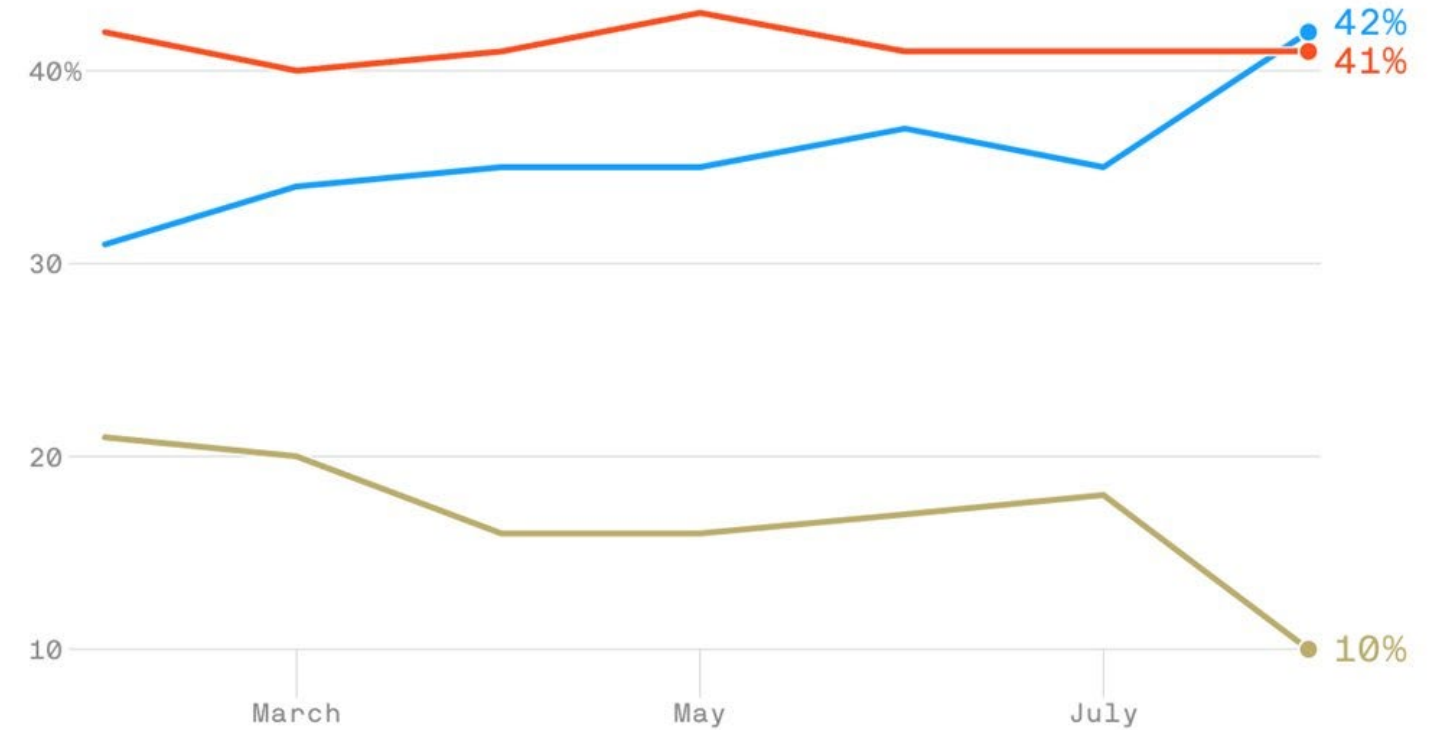


Harris performs better on trust with economy than Biden did.

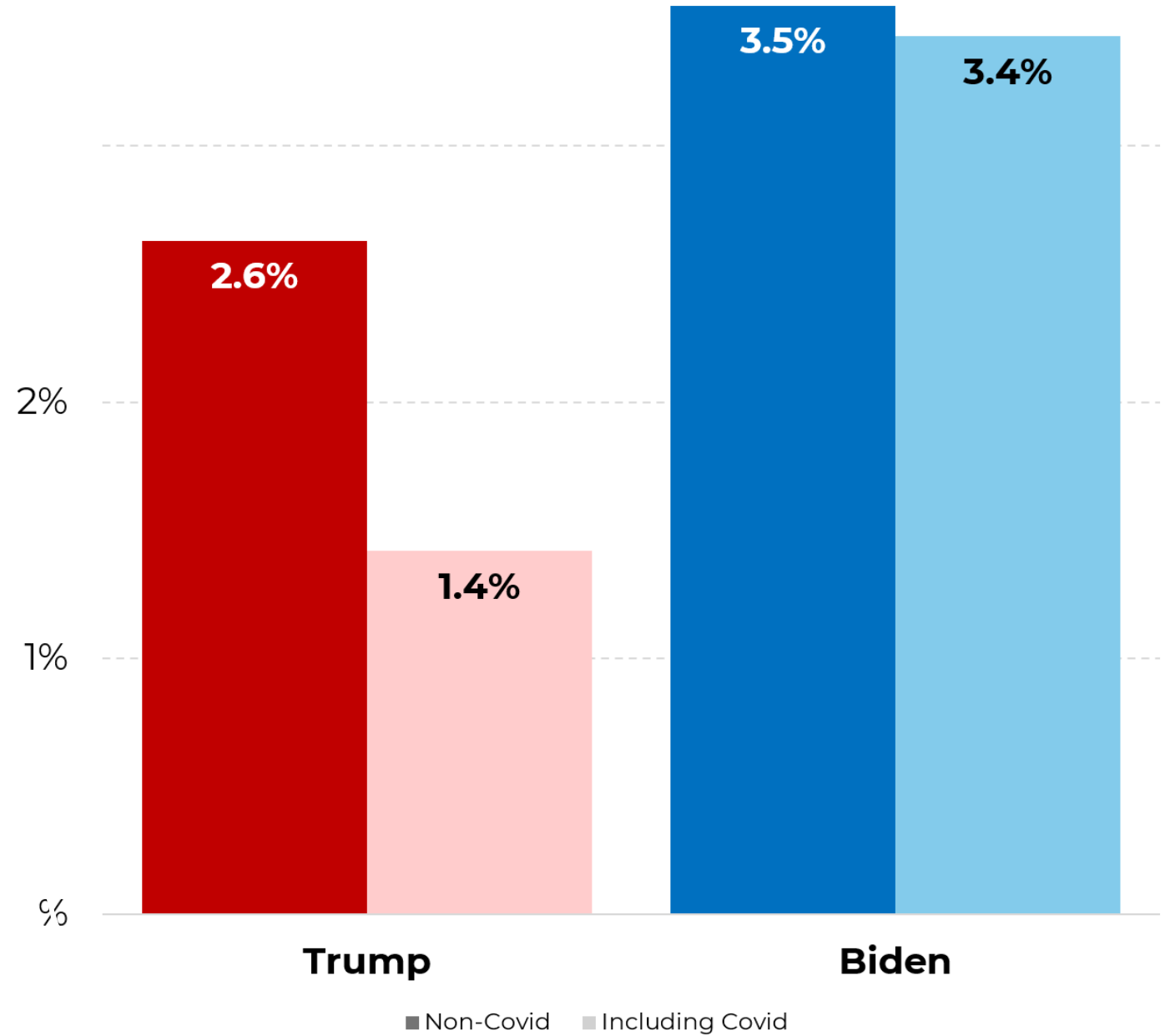
Which candidate voters say they trust more with the economy

Survey of 1,000 registered voters taken monthly between February and August 2024

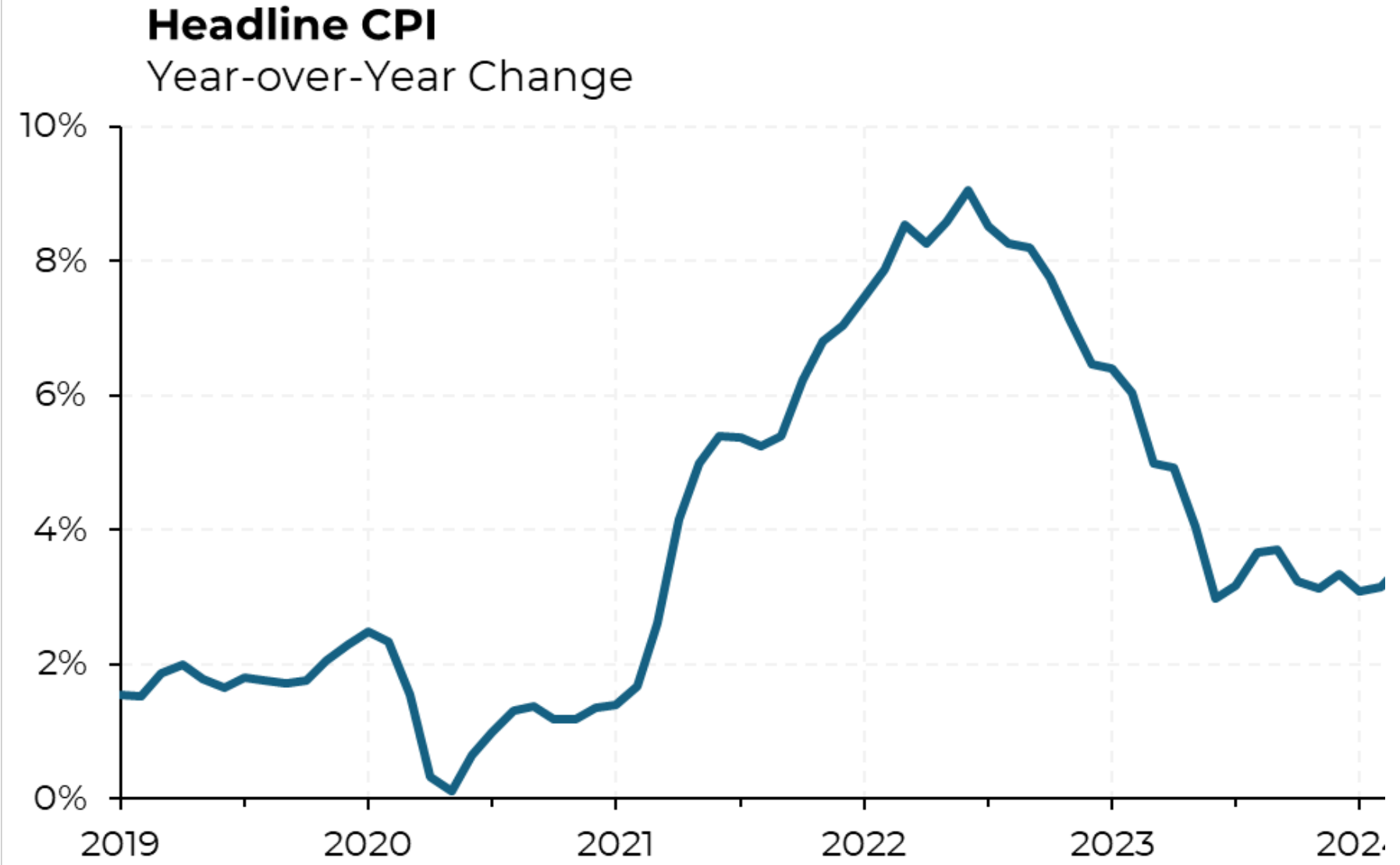
— Biden/Harris — Trump — Neither



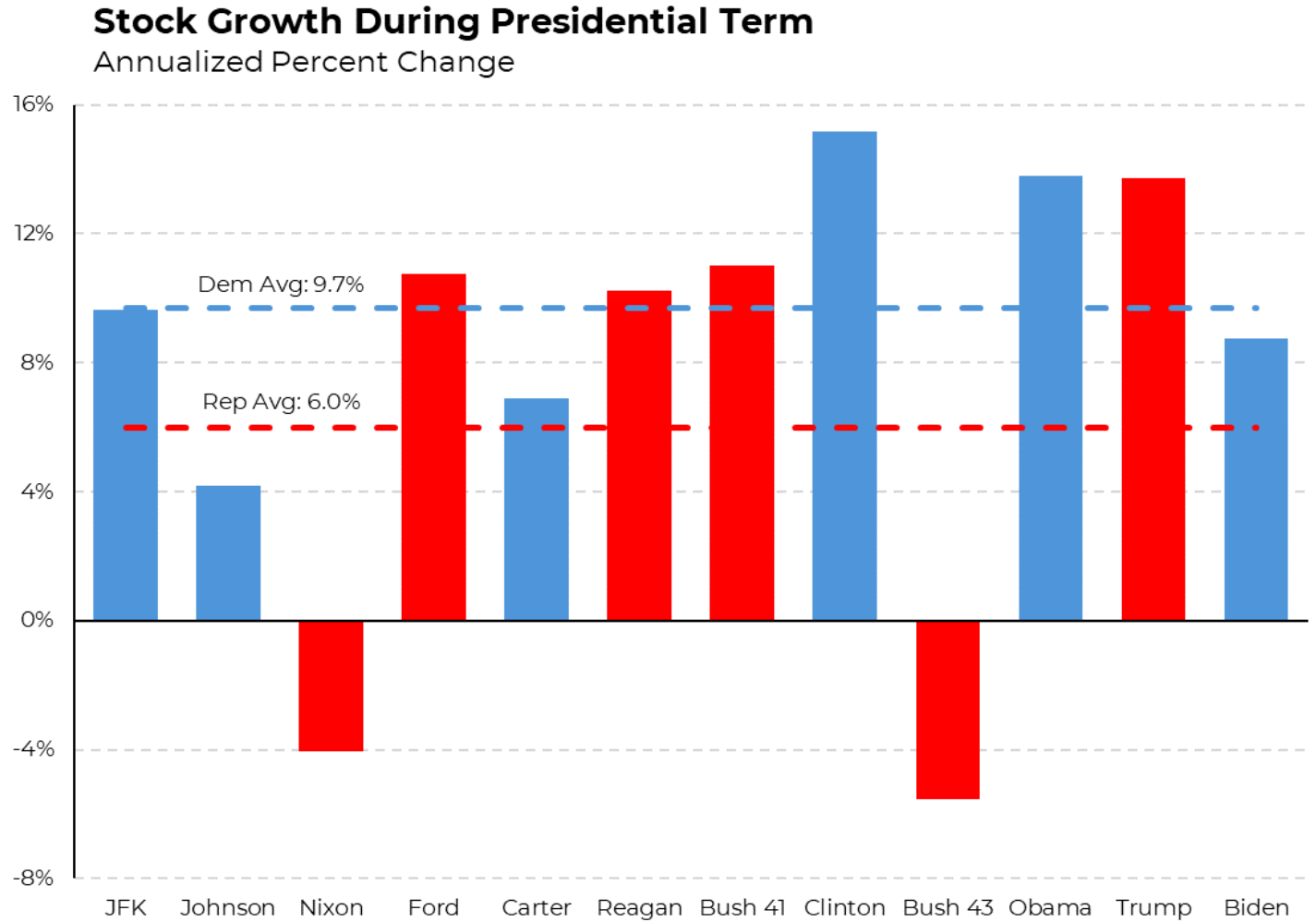
Average Real GDP Growth (quarterly)



As of
Sept.
2024
inflation
at 2.4%.



Wall Street does Fine Under Dems



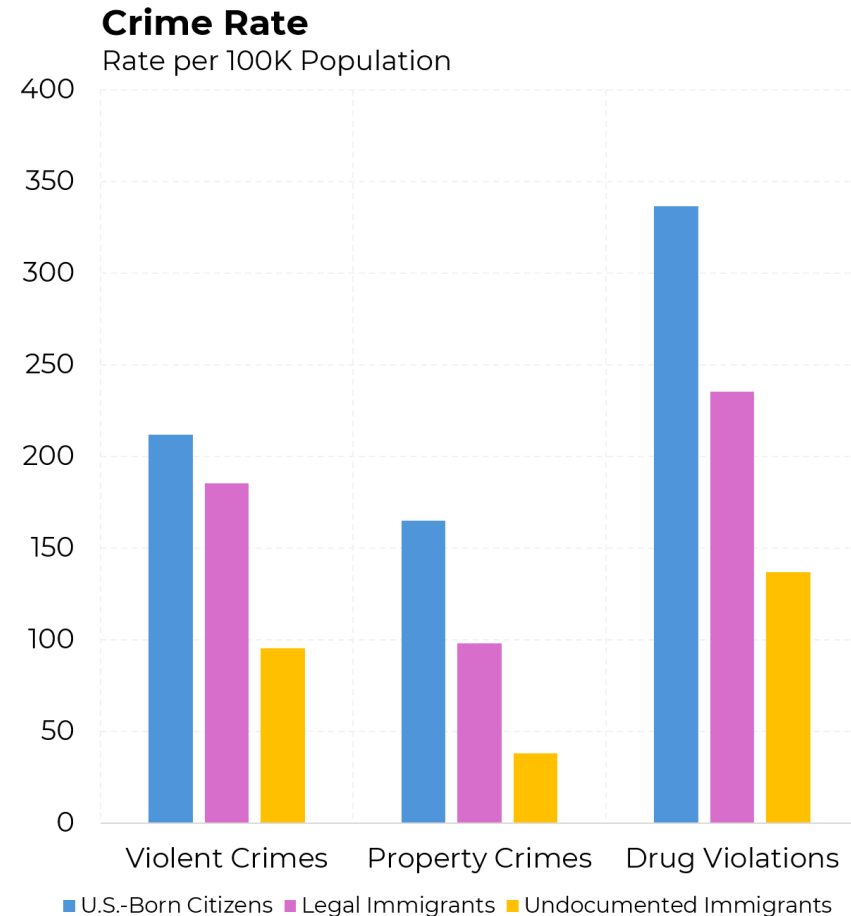
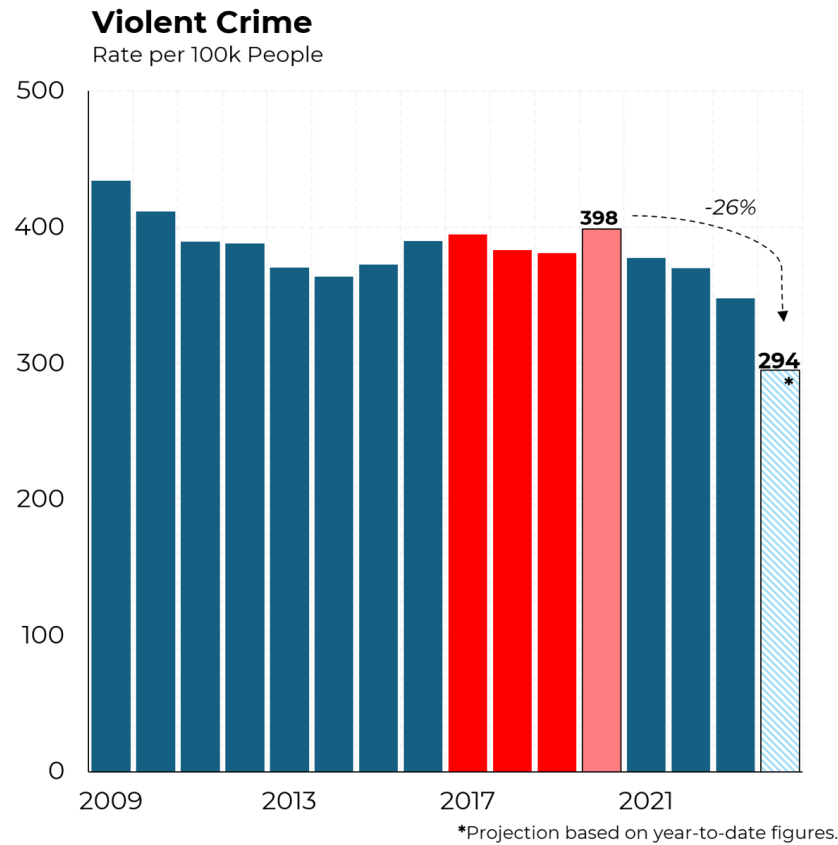
Consumers paid for Trump-era tariffs



Remember the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930?

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics - Note: Prices are indexed to January 2018 levels as 100.

Crime Rates: Overall Violent Crime; Crime Committed by Immigrants

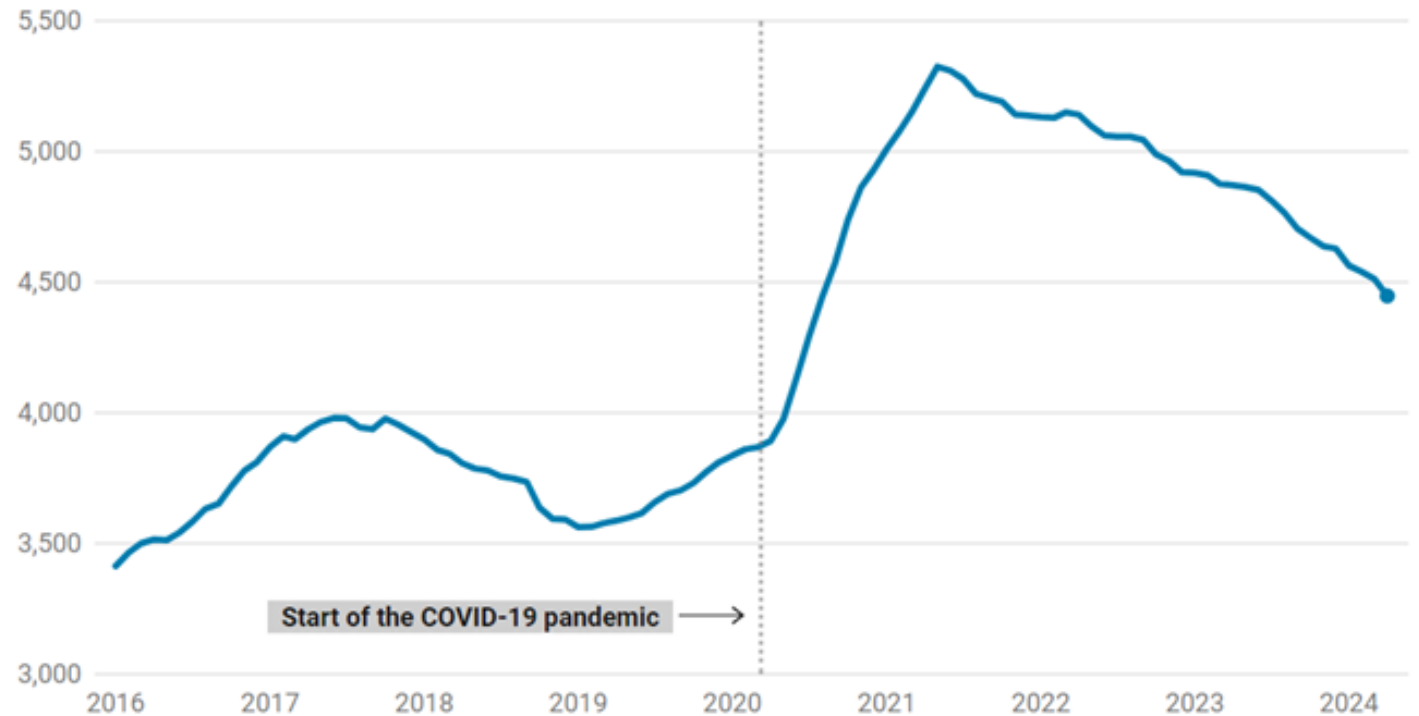


Source: FBI, Jeff Asher, Licht et Al. (2020)

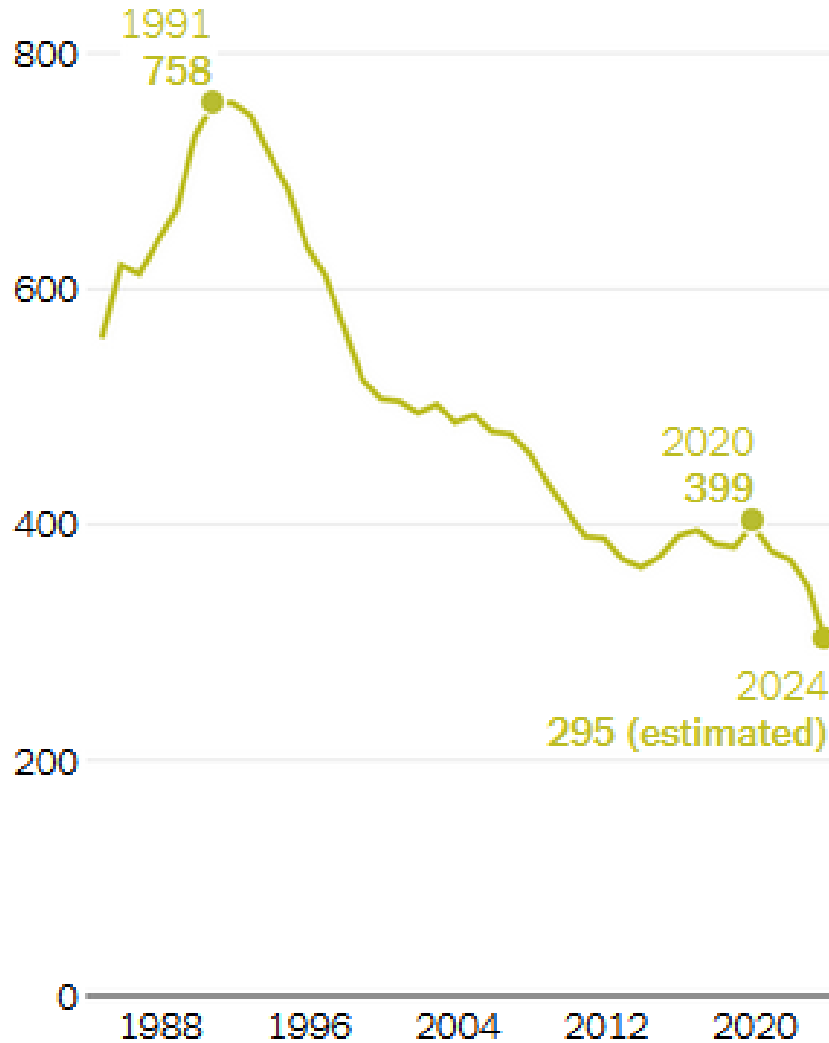
Violent Crime Rises During COVID Pandemic

- Rise in feelings of insecurity
- More people confined to home leading to escalating family violence
- Gun purchases spike
- Non-violent crime remained about the same during this period

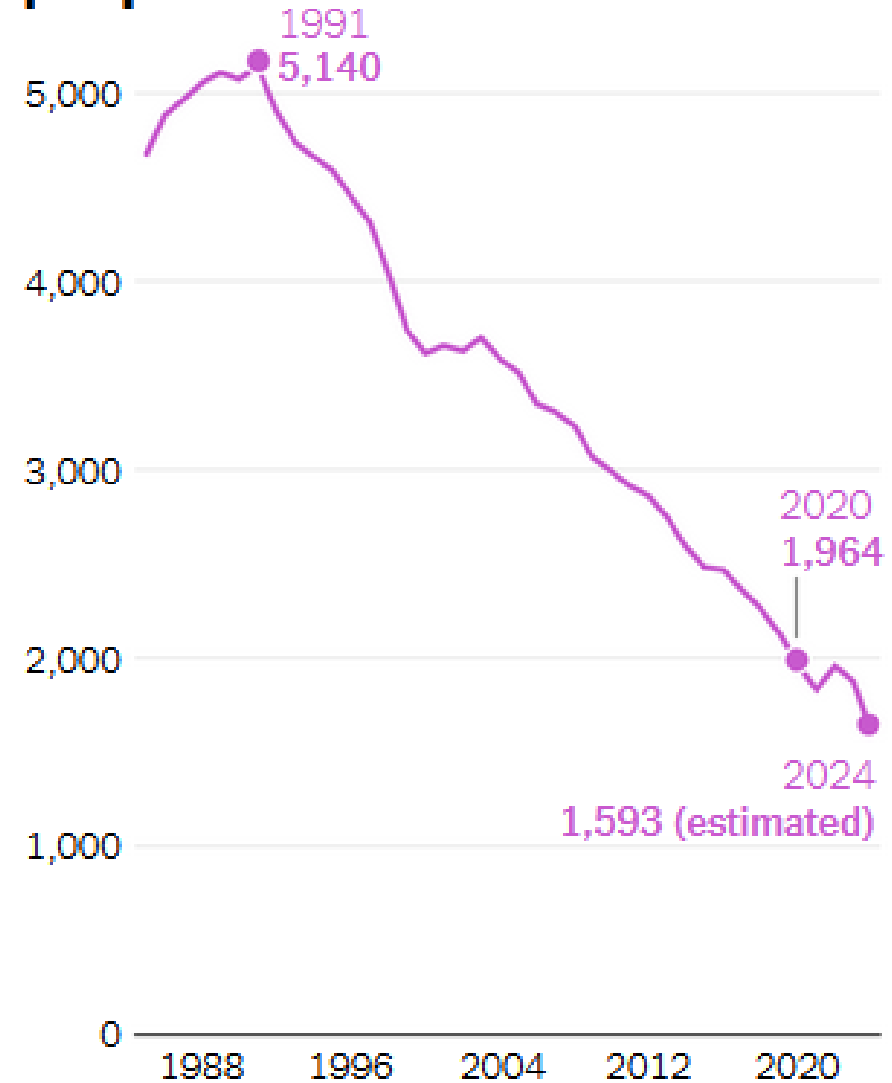
12-month rolling average of gun violence victimizations in the U.S., January 2016–April 2024



Violent crimes per 100,000 people

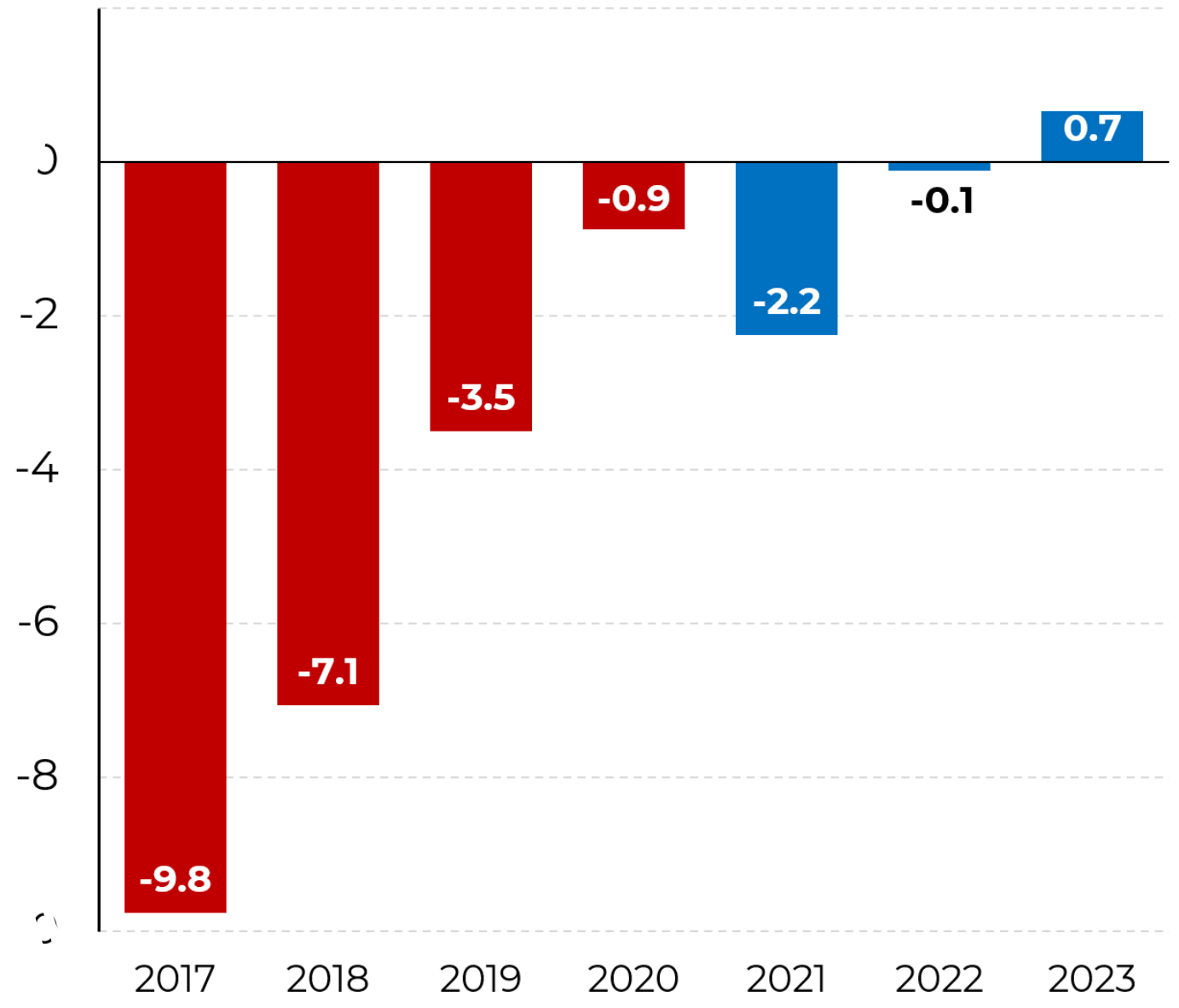


Property crimes per 100,000 people



Net Oil & Petroleum Exports

(quadrillion Btu)



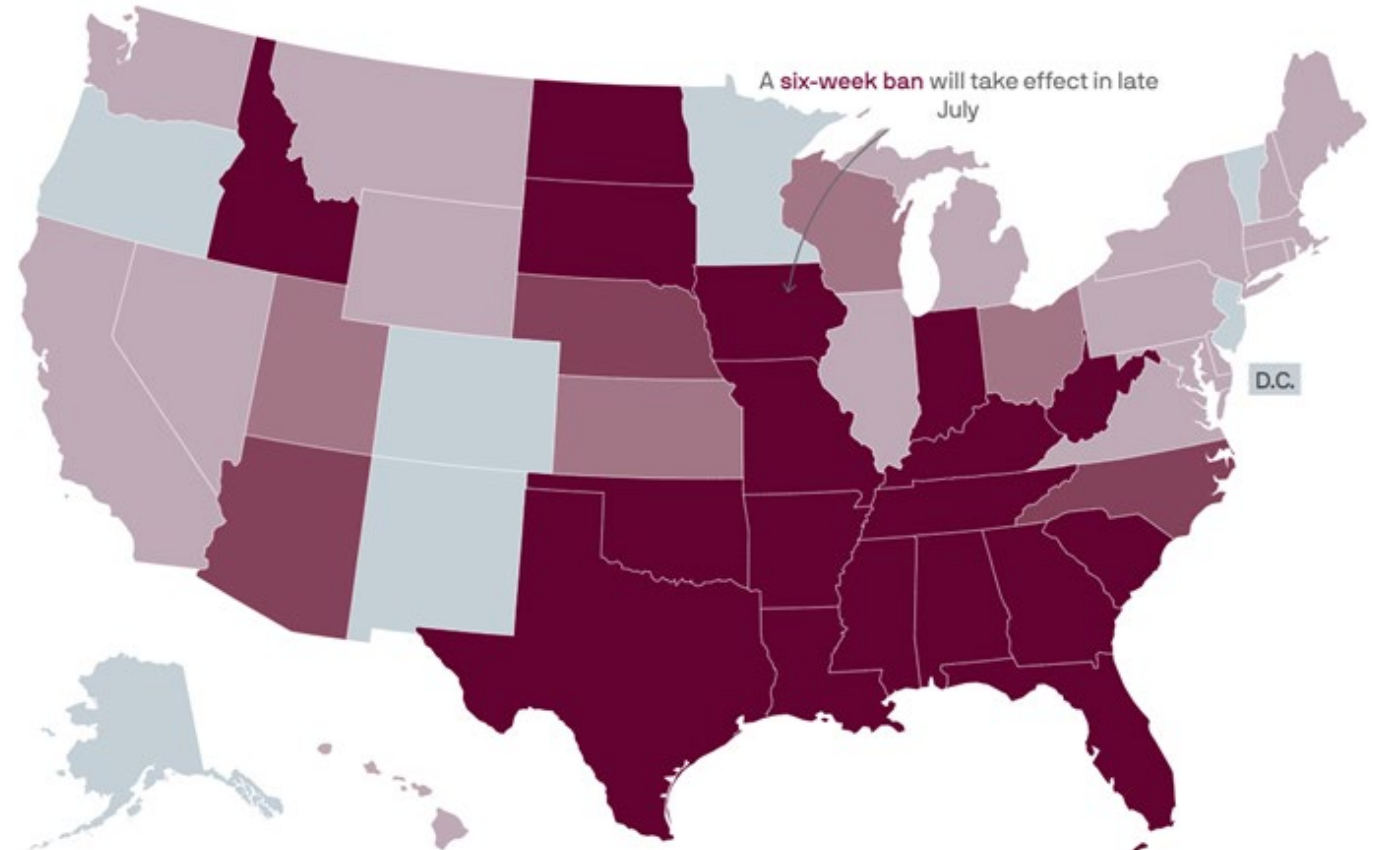
Abortion Salient Issue for Democrats

- 10 states have abortion referenda on the ballot in 2024, including Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada

How late into pregnancy abortion is legal

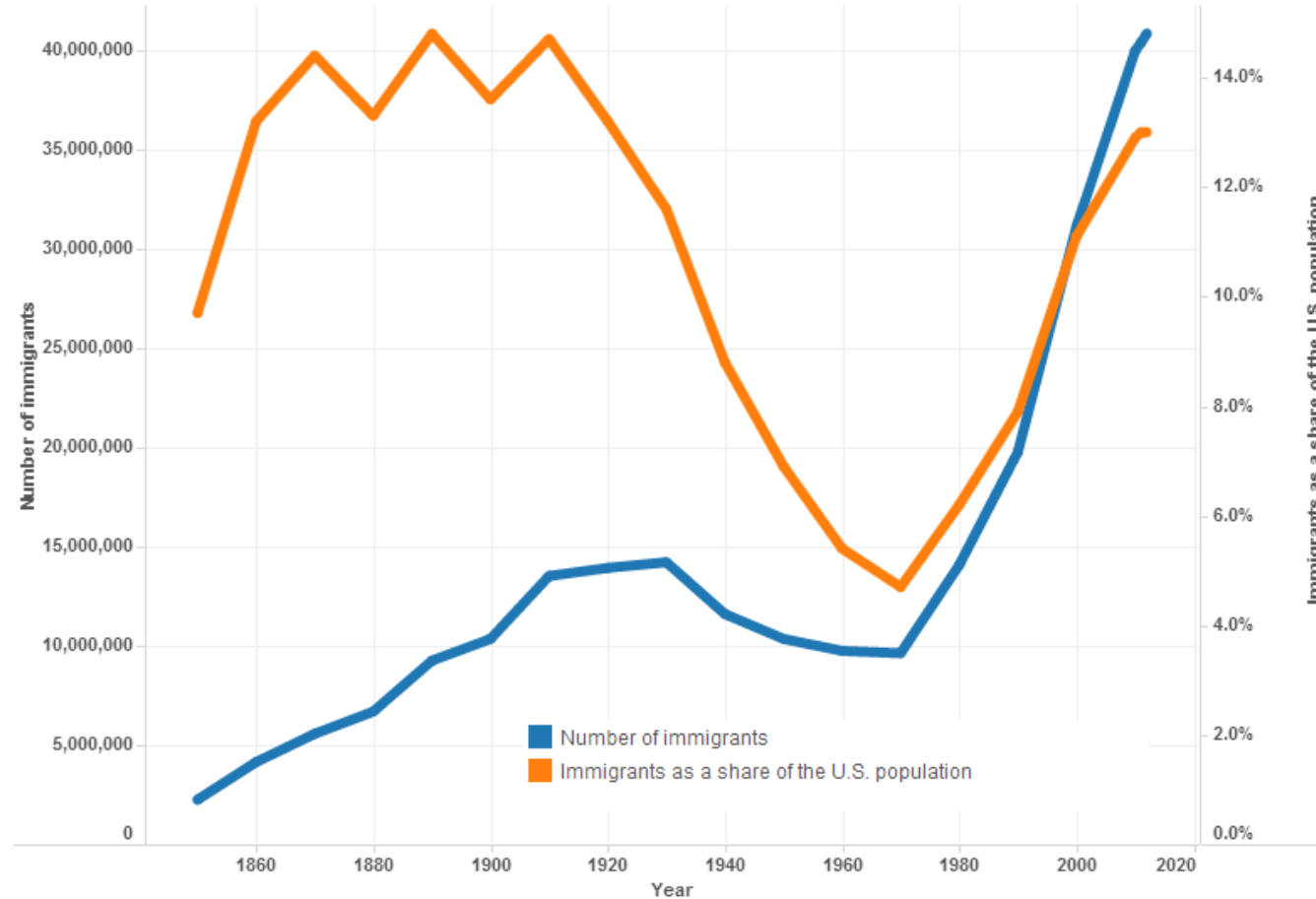
As of July 25, 2024

■ Six weeks or earlier (18 states) ■ 12 to 15 weeks (3) ■ 18 to 22 weeks (4) ■ 24 weeks or later (18) ■ No defined limit (8)



Data: KFF, Guttmacher Institute, Axios research; Map: Simran Parwani / Axios Visuals

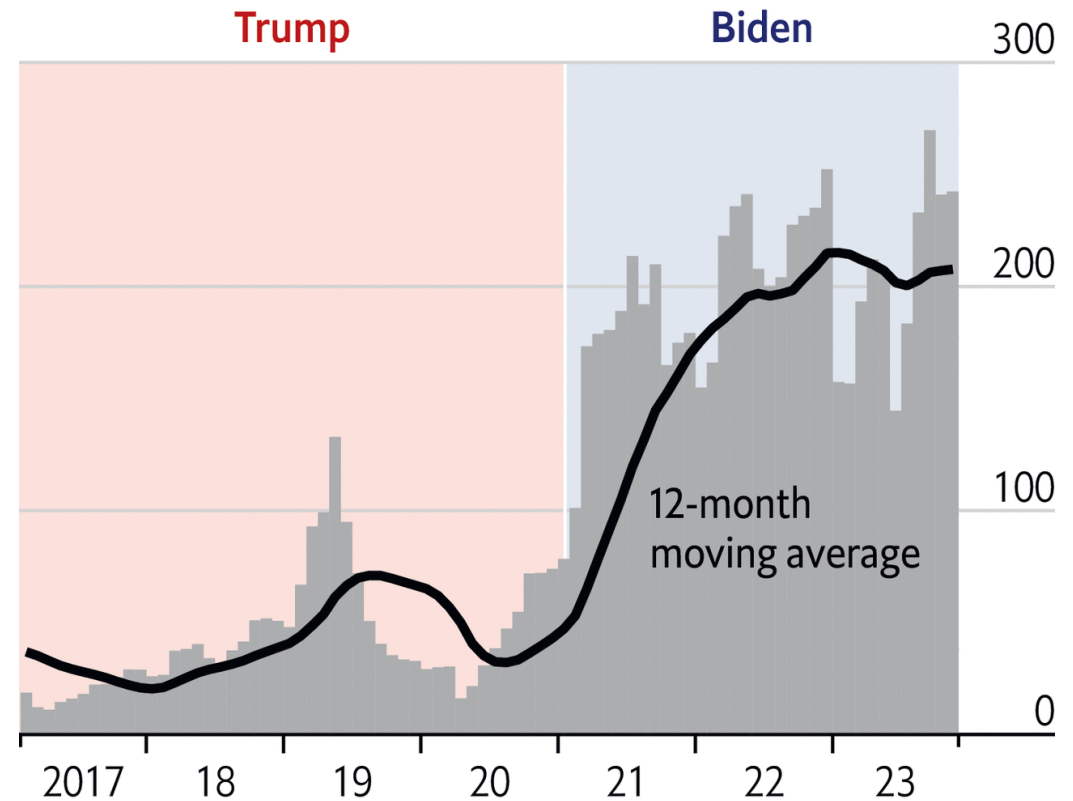
Overall Immigration Patterns, 1850-2020



Illegal Immigration Rose During Biden Administration

Crossing the line

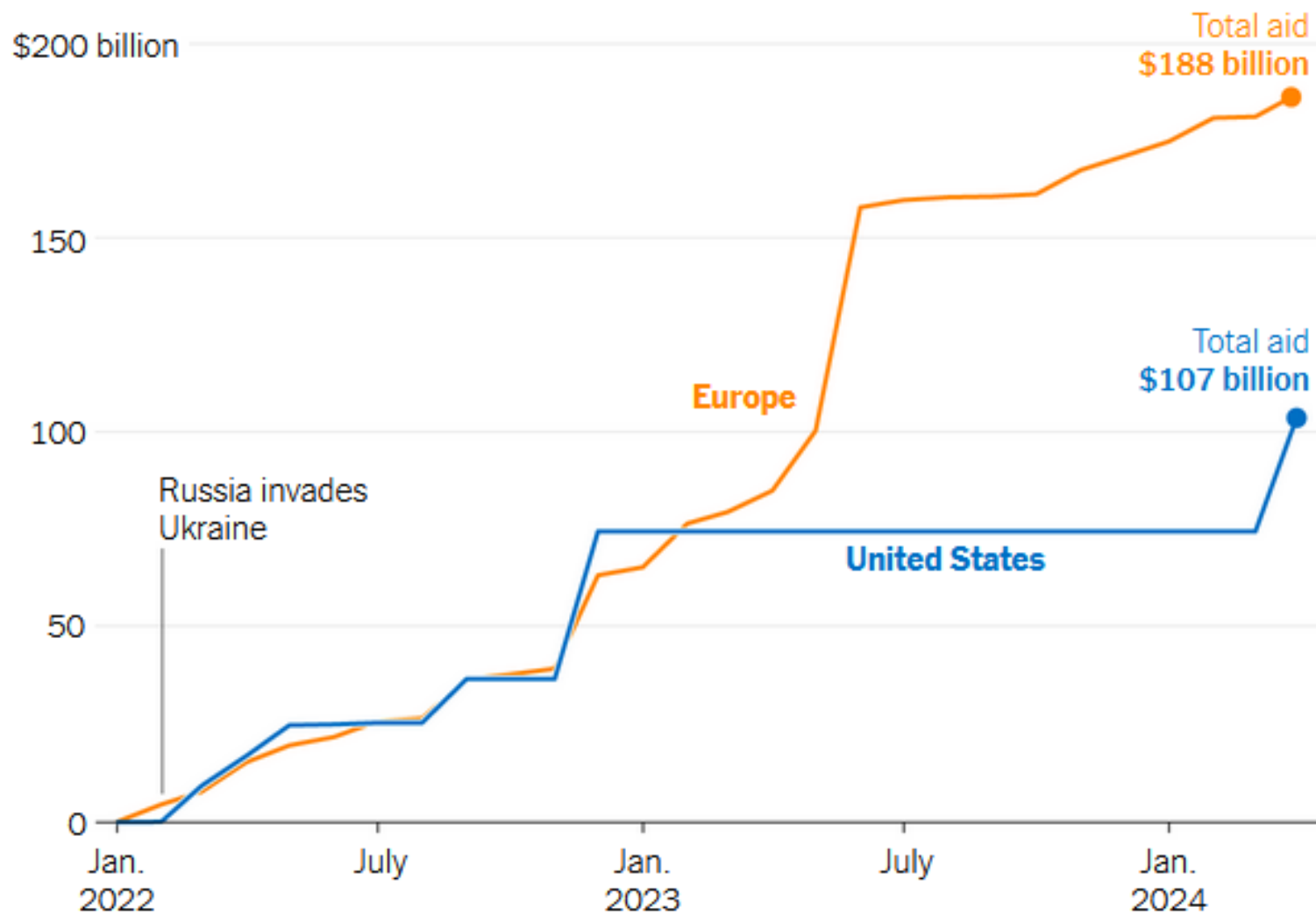
Illegal immigration, encounters at the south-western border*, '000



*Since March 2020 monthly totals include apprehensions and expulsions. Prior totals include apprehensions only
Source: US Customs and Border Protection

European nations spent more on Ukraine aid than the U.S.

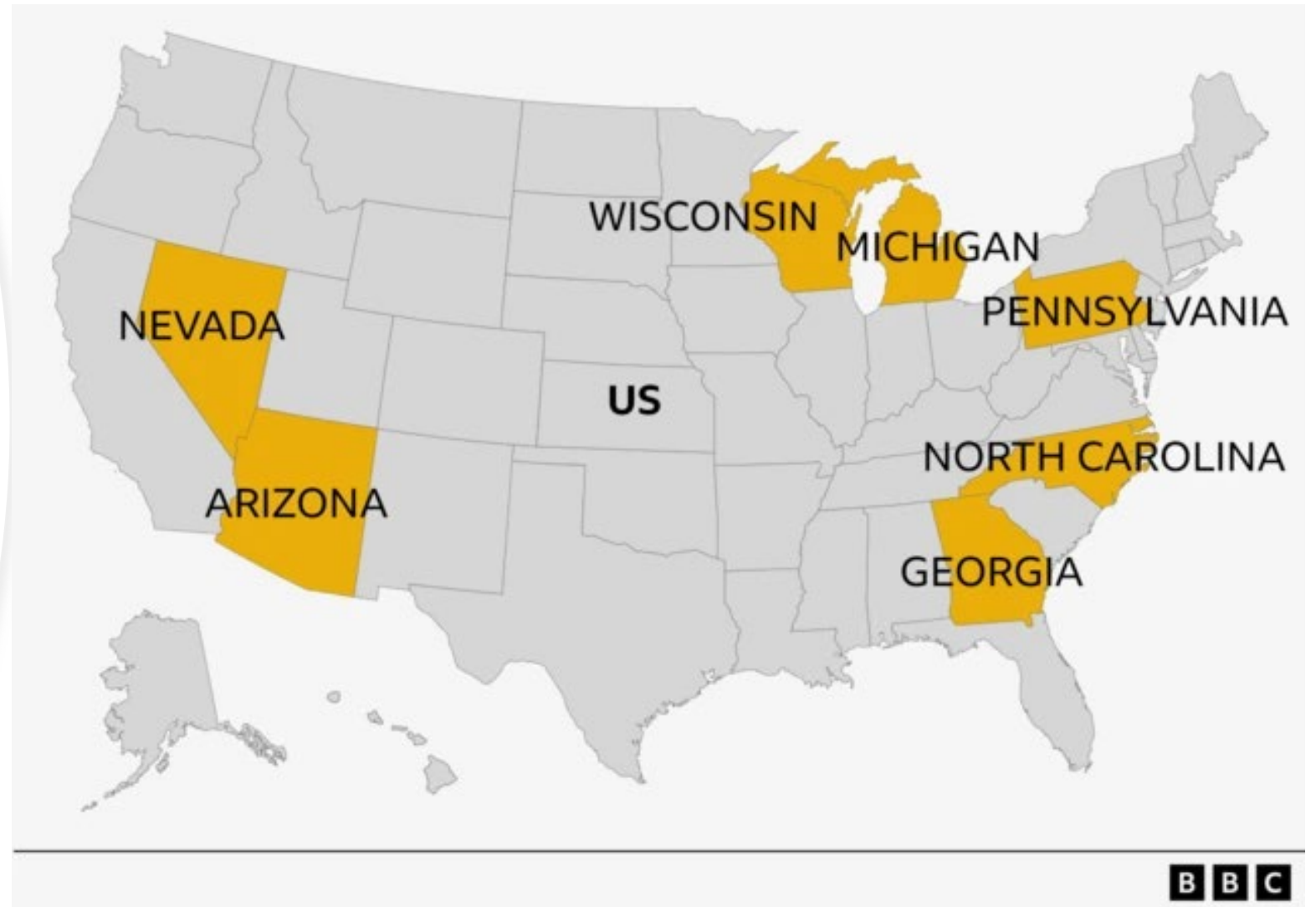
Cumulative aid for Ukraine since January 2022.



Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy - Note: European aid includes support from European Union members as well as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Britain.

7 Swing States Will Decide the Election

- Pennsylvania = 19 e.v.
- North Carolina = 16 e.v.
- Georgia = 16 e.v.
- Michigan = 15 e.v.
- Wisconsin = 10 e.v.
- Nevada = 6 e.v.
- Arizona = 11 e.v.



Recent Developments: the Final Weeks

Kamala Harris Advantages:

- Harris has bested Biden's poll numbers, and logged slim leads nationwide and in most swing states.
- Party seems energized to implement get-out-the-vote efforts.

Donald Trump advantages:

- Republican structural advantage in the electoral college.
- His base still committed to him (high floor but low ceiling).
- Republicans have already launched a blizzard of voter lawsuits challenging voting rules & practices in key states/localities challenging voter legitimacy, rules to make voting easier, etc. in anticipation of post-election challenges.

- These Republican challenges are being made in the name of voting integrity and security, to stave off “voter fraud” including voting by non-citizens (a federal crime).
- However, the 2020 election was one of the least fraud-free and most accurate in modern history.
- A 2016 study by the Brennan Center found that of 23 million votes cast in 2016 found only 30 cases of suspected non-citizen voting.
- A 2022 audit of voting in Georgia found that in the previous 25 years, about 2000 people who lacked citizenship documents tried to vote (average of 80 people per year). All were stopped from voting by officials. In 2020 and 2022 Heritage Foundation found 0 cases of voter fraud in Georgia.
- A 2020 Heritage Foundation study found 4 cases of voter fraud in Arizona.

- Outcome will hinge on two key factors:
 - Trump campaign versus Harris campaign ground games: i.e. get out the vote efforts.
 - Impact of voter suppression/litigation efforts.
- In 2016 Clinton lost while receiving 2.9 million more votes nationwide than Trump. Biden won in 2020 by nationwide margin of 7 million votes.
 - Winning “sweet spot” for the Democrats is between those numbers.
 - Republicans can win the presidency without receiving a majority of the popular vote nationwide (Trump 2016; Bush II 2000).

Thank You!

Questions?

Comments (no speeches please)?

REMEMBER TO VOTE!

Election Day: Tuesday Nov. 5, 6AM-7PM

(early voting until Nov. 2 at your local registrar's office)

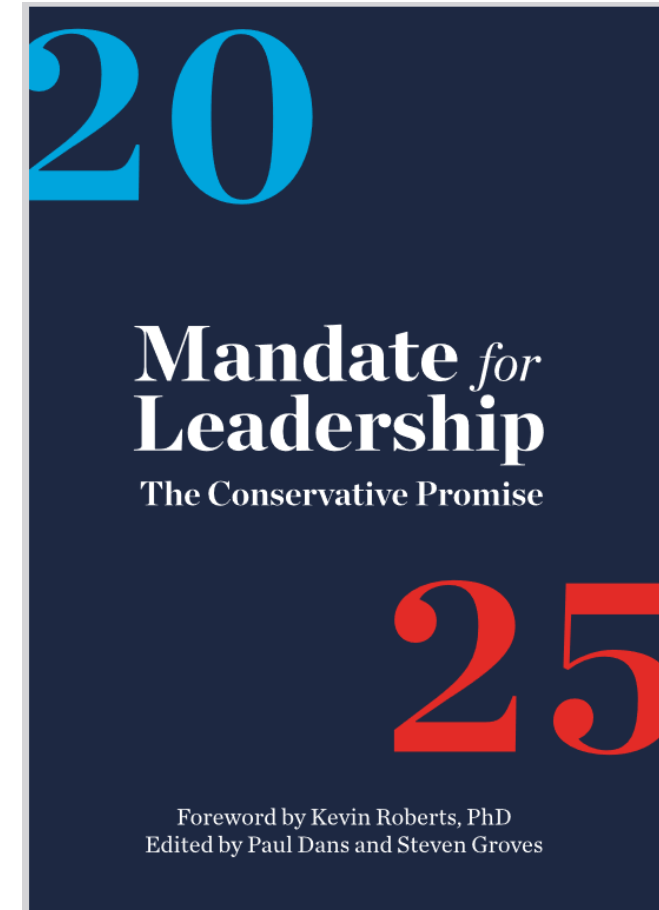
Be sure to complete course evaluation forms!

Project 2025

A 922 page detailed manifesto for implementing a drastic and sweeping plan to remake the federal government, focusing mostly on Executive branch agencies and departments. If implemented it would be the most sweeping change in federal administration since the enactment of the Pendleton Act in 1883, which replaced the spoils system with merit-based criteria for selecting most government employees.

Dismantle and politicize the administrative state:

- Increase number of political administration appointees from 4000 to 50,000 (Schedule F changes).
- Dismantle or privatize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Dept. Homeland Security, FEMA, Head Start, Dept. of Education, privatize Dept. of Veterans Affairs, shrink EPA, dismantle Dept. of HUD, CDC. DOJ and FBI (labels the FBI a "bloated, arrogant, increasingly lawless organization") under more direct political control
- A majority of project's authors worked in Trump administration.



Presidential rankings

Lie: “[President Biden is] without question the worst president, the worst presidency in the history of our country.”
— June 27, 2024

Truth: Presidential greatness may be in the eye of the beholder, but this assertion is laughable. A recent survey of more than 150 current and former members of the presidents and executive politics section of the American Political Science Association put Mr. Trump dead last, behind James Buchanan (tarred with allowing the Civil War to begin) and Andrew Johnson (impeached, like Mr. Trump, and nearly convicted). Mr. Biden was ranked 14th greatest, just above Woodrow Wilson and Ronald Reagan.

Political scientists rank Trump last in presidential greatness

Presidents ranked by overall greatness on a scale of 0 to 100, based on a survey of 154 political scientists.

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8	Eisenhower	74	1953
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11	Madison	67	1809
12	Clinton	66	1993
13	Adams, John	63	1797
14	Biden	63	2021
15	Wilson	62	1913
16	Reagan	62	1981
17	Grant	61	1869
18	Monroe	60	1817
19	Bush, George H.W.	59	1989
20	Adams, John Quincy	55	1825
21	Jackson	55	1829
22	Carter	54	1977
23	Taft	52	1909
24	McKinley	51	1897
25	Polk	50	1845
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Note: Ratings have been rounded to the nearest whole number.
Sources: American Political Science Association; Encyclopedia Britannica

