

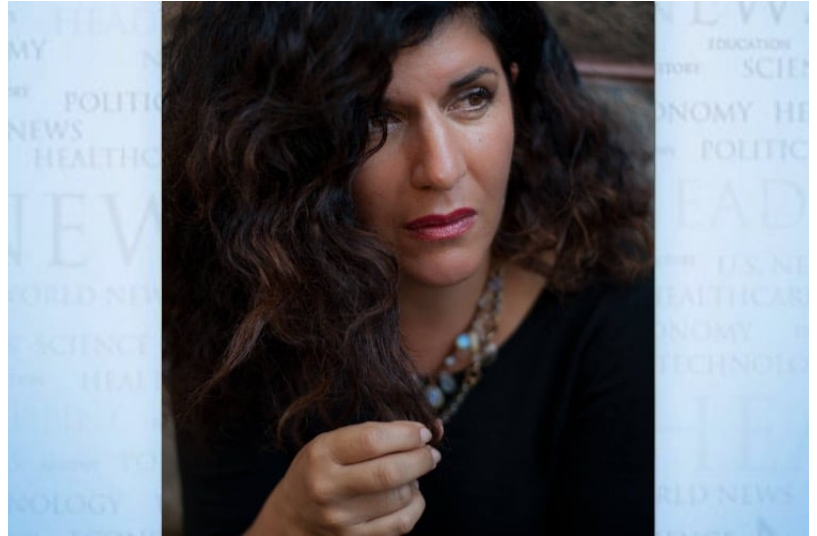


Written by [Salena Zito](#) on March 13, 2024

Biden Cannot Afford to Lose a Single Pennsylvania Voter

PHILADELPHIA — Northeast Philadelphia native Marc Rayfield is a registered Democrat, considers himself a liberal and voted for Democrats John Fetterman (for Senate) and Josh Shapiro (for governor) in 2022 and for Joe Biden in 2020. Now, though, he says he finds himself estranged from the party due to rising crime and homelessness in his beloved city of Philadelphia.

Because of his crime concerns, Rayfield is now doing something he thought he'd never do in his life: buying a gun and going to target practice. So is his wife.



Salena Zito

"I see what's taken place in cities across the country," said Rayfield, who is well-respected in the community for his years of volunteer efforts for various Philadelphia organizations. "I travel a lot. I've been to every major city in the last year in the country."

Rayfield is a 60-year-old former executive at CBS Radio who took the skills he learned in the news business for over three decades into the organic spirit business as an entrepreneur. His new gun decision, he said, was "largely influenced by a lot of the social policies that are really impacting our cities coming out of the death of George Floyd and COVID."

"We decided, as somebody who had never fired a gun in my life, that it was about time to be open-minded and considerate," he explained of taking gun safety lessons through a program that uses certified instructors.

"The final straw was sort of seeing what's taking place as a result of what's going on in Gaza and how that's impacting college campuses and the rise in antisemitism," he said.

Rayfield is by no stretch of the imagination an uninformed voter. He says he knows what is at stake in this year's presidential election, yet he finds himself unhappy with his choices thanks to issues such as crime and the southern border crisis.

"Well, first of all, I would never vote for Trump, never, but I don't feel great about Biden at all, and I would not vote for Kamala Harris."

Rayfield says he is hoping for two things: Either a third-party candidate emerges who would ensure Trump loses, or Biden dramatically deciding over the summer to bow out.

"I'm hoping that maybe during the convention, he pulls the Lyndon Johnson and says that he's not going to run again and they've already identified somebody ... it would have to be anyone else but Biden and Harris," he said.

Pennsylvania is arguably once again the most important state in the country in determining who the next president will be. Trump narrowly won it in 2016, but Biden narrowly won it in 2020.

If Biden wants to hold on to that narrow margin of victory, he cannot afford to lose one vote — in



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particular, voters such as Rayfield, who is a reliable Democrat, lives in the Philly suburbs and does not espouse the social justice requirements demanded of Biden from the progressive left.

Yet Biden has lost him.

Chris Borick, a political science professor at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, says the reality is that neither Trump nor Biden has much of a margin of error in this evenly divided state.

“It’s hard to imagine large shifts in the electorate short of a historic event,” Borick said. “Biden has a number of weak links in his coalition, and while many of his 2020 voters wouldn’t flip to Trump, the lack of enthusiasm for Biden can translate into some voters taking a pass on the election or taking a flyer on a third-party candidate.”

Rayfield isn’t the only part of the Biden coalition that is detaching from the president, who won the state by a single percentage point in 2020. A large chunk of that support came from Black voters, 92% of whom chose Biden.

Muhlenberg’s survey of voters in Pennsylvania in late December showed Biden only garnering the support of 52% of people of color while Trump was earning a solid 29%, an eye-popping number for a Republican presidential candidate.

The survey also showed that 65% of registered voters in Pennsylvania don’t believe Biden deserves to be reelected.

Larry Ceisler, a Democratic Philadelphia-based public affairs professional, says Biden cannot afford to lose someone like Rayfield when the current president is facing his left flank saying they are not going to vote for Biden because Biden has not sided with the Palestinians in Gaza.

“It could be a real problem,” said Ceisler.

“Neither Biden nor Trump can afford to lose votes because you look at the states that are going to be competitive ... and you’re talking a handful of votes across all these states,” he said.

“So while it bothers me that Biden is sort of pulling back on Israel, or at least talking a different game because he’s concerned about Michigan, and Trump is now sending out mixed messages on abortion, both candidates and their teams realize how tight things are.”

Ceisler was referring to Biden’s remark at a press conference in which he criticized Israel’s military operations in Gaza.

Ceisler said if Biden goes too far in favor of the Palestinians, he loses legacy Democrats like Rayfield, but if he seems too supportive of Israel, he loses young social-justice-type voters. Losing too much of either group could open the door for a third-party candidate.

“It is unbelievable to me that they are willing to say, ‘OK, well, we’ll let Trump win, who is even going to be more supportive or more contrary to what we feel about Gaza and all the other things we care about are going to go down the drain,’” he said of young progressives who have voiced their decision to either stay home or vote for a third-party candidate.

For example, Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., pleaded with Michigan Democrats to vote “uncommitted” in the state’s Feb. 27 primary rather than for Biden.

Ceisler said this clamoring on the far left leads him to believe there are people and organizations on the left that want Biden to lose, “because I think that they want to rid the Democratic Party of the influence



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that comes from sort of the establishment centrist part of the party.”

Between 1996 and 2016, Pennsylvania was a reliable electoral win for Democratic presidential candidates, but it kept getting tighter every four years.

In 2020, Trump narrowly lost the state. In 2024, Pennsylvania is up for grabs. But if Biden is losing middle-of-the-road suburban Democrats like Rayfield, then his problems are deeper than many realize.

Salena Zito is a CNN political analyst, and a staff reporter and columnist for the Washington Examiner. She reaches the Everyman and Everywoman through shoe-leather journalism, traveling from Main Street to the beltway and all places in between. To find out more about Salena and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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