



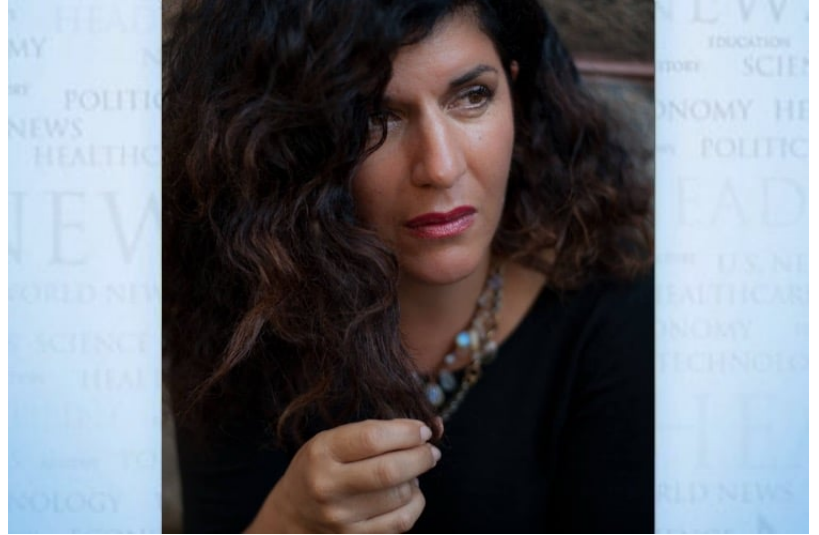
Written by [Salena Zito](#) on April 30, 2024

The Media Ignored the Anti-Biden Protest Votes Among Pennsylvania Democrats

SOMERSET, Pennsylvania — Just about 236 miles from here lies Montgomery County, where reporters and analysts are beside themselves (over-)scrutinizing what the message is from all those Republican primary votes that went to former U.S. United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley over former President Donald Trump, the party's presumptive nominee.

And what that means for November.

The interest is understandable. Pennsylvania is a vitally important state for Trump and President Joe Biden. Biden arguably needs it even more than Trump does.



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So why are the media asking only about Trump's semiweak performance?

When looking for trends, it makes sense to ask what these suburban Republican voters are telling Trump with their protest vote for Haley. Will they continue their rejection of him into November, or are they just irritated but will come home to the party then?

On Tuesday, Haley earned more than 12,000 votes to Trump's 38,000 in Montgomery County. Overall, in Pennsylvania, the former South Carolina governor netted just over 16.6% to Trump's 83.4%.

However, while reporters and strategists should wonder what it means to Trump, they should also ponder what happened in the Democratic primary results, not just in counties like this one but all over the state.

That is, if you really do want to understand what might happen in this state in a few months.

Ignoring what happened to Biden in Pennsylvania is no different than ignoring former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's missteps here in 2016 and then wondering how Clinton lost.

In short, while the highly populated, highly educated suburban counties like Philadelphia matter, it is more than likely that blue-collar counties such as Somerset, Erie and Northampton will matter at least equally. They sure did in 2016, and they are giving reporters and strategists a wealth of information to dissect.

Rep. Dean Phillips (D-Minn.) — who, despite being in the first handful of primaries challenging Biden before dropping out months ago, never really became a household name — earned an impressive 7 percentage points, or nearly 70,000 votes as of Wednesday morning, against Biden in Pennsylvania.

Just for perspective, Biden defeated Trump by a little over that number in 2020.

But that is not all. The elusive write-in vote in the Democratic Party — which, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State, won't be tallied for weeks — was pretty significant.

First, the big counties. In Philadelphia, 15,921 Democrats chose to write in a candidate rather than vote



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for the sitting president. There were 13,000 Democrats who did that in Allegheny County and just under 3,500 in Montgomery County.

For perspective, four years ago, only 2,000 Democrats in Philadelphia, 6,000 in Allegheny, and 1,800 in Montgomery County wrote in a candidate in the Pennsylvania presidential primary.

In other words, it is not just Phillips whom Biden lost votes to. He lost votes to no one in particular.

What deserves further examination are the percentages in rural, post-industrial counties where Phillips received double-digit support. I counted at least 24 of those counties, including here in Somerset, where Phillips earned 13% of the Democratic primary vote.

That is just the beginning. In Greene County, Phillips won a whopping 20% of the Democratic primary vote; in Fulton County, 18%; Montour and Juniata counties, 14%; Elk and Cambria counties, 15%; and Armstrong and Cameron counties, 13%. The list goes on and on.

And if you are of the belief that rural, lower-populated counties don't matter in Pennsylvania, then you were not paying attention to what happened here in 2016, when turnout in counties such as Luzerne, Erie, Northampton, Cambria, Beaver and Greene changed everything for Clinton, for the worse, on election night.

The Phillips numbers in the rural counties don't take into account the write-in numbers statewide, which, again, won't be tabulated for weeks, but current estimates calculate that number is around 60,000. Nothing is official yet, but if you add up the Phillips protest vote and the write-in protest vote, it starts to look similar to the Haley numbers on the Republican side.

There are two very important questions that should come out of the results of Pennsylvania's primaries. Do wealthy suburban Republican voters on the Main Line come back out for Trump in November? As for Biden, can he convert Phillips voters to his side in the important rural counties, or will they even vote for president?

Both matter in a state decided by just tens of thousands of votes.

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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