

MEMORANDUM ON THE 2022 ELECTION CYCLE

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: RAGNAR RESEARCH PARTNERS
DATE: JANUARY, 2023

On January 3, 2023, the 118th Congress convened, and the House of Representatives has a Republican majority. While some in the media are painting the 2022 election as a defeat for the GOP, the end result is that a Republican will be sworn in as the Speaker of the House and the party took a net of nine seats from the Democrats.

Even better, the political board is set for Republicans to build on a victorious 2022, to grow our majority in the House, take back the Senate, and win back 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in 2024. To do that, we will need to minimize unforced errors and learn the right lessons from 2022. We believe in cutting through the chatter and calling the plays like we see them. There are three things that mattered in 2022:

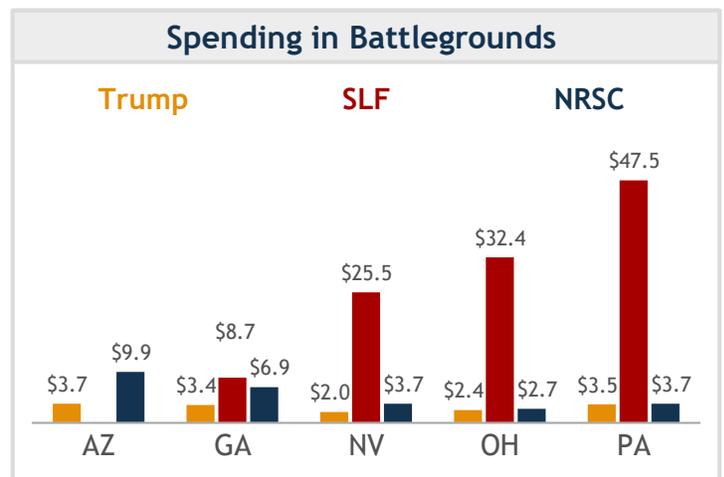
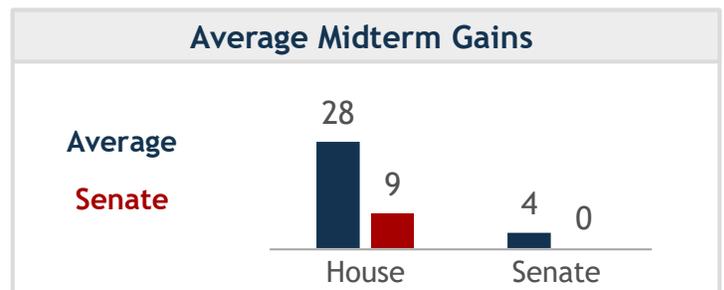
- **Narrative Sets Expectations** and controlling, or at least contesting, the narrative with a big picture strategy is critical.
- **Methodology Matters** and has strategic importance for how campaign decision making happens.
- **Getting Off Message** will burn you every time.

Narrative Sets Expectations and Strategy Matters

The “Red Wave” narrative got out of control. Fueled by poor public polling, a misunderstanding of *why* midterm elections traditionally lead to losses for the in-power party, and GOP “operatives” saying whatever got them facetime on TV, the idea that the GOP would cruise to a crushing victory swept through the chattering classes like wildfire.

These expectations were created by people who vastly overstated their understanding of the electoral environment and understated the necessity of persuading voters. The challenge with the view that the political environment would guarantee victory meant that some **candidates who had no business getting out of a primary were ill-equipped to face off with well funded and disciplined Democratic campaigns.**

Republicans lost Senate races in AZ, GA, NV, and PA, with flawed candidates, many of whom had cleared the primary field with the support of former President Trump. Party leaders advocating for candidates isn’t always a problem: **it’s good to advance conservatives, but only if they can win.** Winning a primary and losing a general gets you exactly 0 votes in Congress.



This unforced error was exacerbated by shrewd Democratic committee moves supporting candidates that could be painted as extreme in moderate states during the GOP primaries. [Governor’s races in Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, and Pennsylvania](#), as well as several congressional districts were all lost by Republicans who were aided by the Democrats in the primary and frequently endorsed by Trump.

Win Ratio Trump v. DCCC/DGA

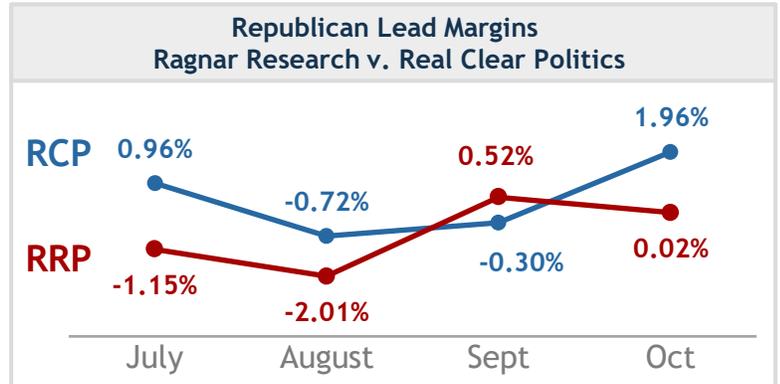
Trump - Senate	16 Wins / 8 Losses
Trump - Governor	9 Wins / 12 Losses
DCCC	6 Wins / 0 Losses
DGA - Governor	5 Wins / 0 Losses

By helping problematic candidates knock out moderates in mostly purple states and districts, Democrats picked up some cheap wins and could spend their money in tighter contests. Republicans need to advance the most conservative candidate that a state or district will support, but we must have a realistic appraisal of what independents and moderates will support, as they are the most critical vote in the General.

Methodology Matters

The narrative got off track because unserious people were given serious attention. “Anchoring” is a legitimate cognitive bias where even junk data impacts your view of legitimate data and there are always plenty of people happy to go wish casting to fill airtime.

But let’s pull back the curtain a little bit and explain why this kind of data is so damaging to Republican political prospects.



Polling is a roadmap, not a scoreboard. There are pollsters who use Interactive Voice Response (IVR), are heavy on landlines at the expense of cell phones, or who use text-to-web (T2W) to paper over insufficient cell phone coverage. They do this for cost reasons, because live dials to cell phones are expensive. By using these techniques, they gamble that what they lack in terms of representativeness will be made up in quantity and by post-field weighting. **No amount of weighting can make up for critical elements of a voter population missing from your data because you used an insufficiently representative contact method.**

It’s clear at this point that landlines and T2W yield more partisan respondents than live dial to cell phones, meaning the people who answer landline phone calls and respond to text invitations to surveys are more likely to have a “rooting” interest and be responding to “win the poll.” Cell phone penetration exceeds 95% (CDC) of the adult population in **every single state** in the Union. No other single method of contact even approaches this. Due to virtually complete coverage of the population, cell phones are able to reach significantly more undecided voters, especially when paired with live interviewers conducting surveys. **Bargain basement contact methods have led too many in the political consultant industry to believe that elections are won by focusing on committed partisans instead of persuading the voters that are available to be in play.** Your pollster may have saved you a little money, but every decision you make using that data will lack the nuance that high quality polling **should** be expected to provide.

Getting Off Message

Politics is persuasion. Majorities are built by convincing undecided voters. Undecided voters need to hear your message repeated many times in the crowded late-game messaging environment. Therefore, stay on message. This is politics 101, but not everyone got the message. **Republicans faced several challenges staying on message this cycle: funding, distractions, and professionalism.** We have already addressed some of the funding challenges that lead to messages being taken off the air or candidates being left unprotected under withering fire from Democrats and the media, so let's turn to distractions.

The largest distraction was the Dobbs decision. Dismantling federal guarantees of abortion on demand is an unquestionable win for conservatives but in the campaign world of malleable opinions the decision energized liberal fundraising and gave hard leftists a reason to support Democrats even though they were unsatisfied with Biden. **Dobbs primarily served to take Republican candidates off more important messages about Democratic failures on the economy.**

Generic Ballot	Border/Crime			Economy			Abortion			Gun Ctrl/Health			Education		
	Aug	Sept	Oct	Aug	Sept	Oct	Aug	Sept	Oct	Aug	Sept	Oct	Aug	Sept	Oct
% of Total per Month	19%	13%	21%	23%	25%	28%	9%	11%	13%	8%	7%	6%	7%	7%	5%
Republican	65%	63%	69%	44%	52%	54%	7%	3%	7%	10%	9%	7%	25%	27%	21%
Democrat	12%	14%	13%	25%	22%	22%	75%	77%	77%	60%	66%	70%	46%	51%	47%

By getting off message, Republicans failed to make the spiraling Biden economy the central theme of this election. We did great with security voters, we struggled with social issue voters, but we dropped the ball on economic issues. Traditionally when a President's approval falls below 50% he can expect losses in the House of Representatives. While President Biden suffered losses in the House

Incumbent Midterm Party Losses in House of Representatives

President/Year	Biden 2022	Trump 2018	Obama 2014	Obama 2010	W. Bush 2006	W. Bush 2002	Clinton 1998	Clinton 1994	H.W 1990
POTUS Approval	40%	43%	42%	45%	37%	63%	66%	48%	34%
Incumbent Party Win/Loss	-9	-40	-13	-63	-30	+8	+5	-52	-8

the damage was minimized due to a lack of focus on his shortcomings. The GOP failed to capitalize on Biden's economic failures and focused instead on issues less likely to move voters toward Republican candidates.

Unfortunately, this is another situation where the former President did our party no favors. Trump inserted himself into the national discourse in the closing weeks of the campaign and further diluted what should have been a laser-focused GOP message about the terrible economic situation Biden has created.

These Things Are Important

Conditions for a large GOP victory were present, but a media narrative fueled by poor polling led to money being spent where it wasn't necessary, and this was exacerbated by unprofessional operations for both candidate teams and at higher levels.

In 2024 we will see a world that isn't slowing down. The international environment will continue to present challenges of increasing complexity, economic growth is by no means a certainty, and faith in our institutions is at an all-time low. Everyone knows that the stakes are high. Tactics matter. Let's get the details right in 2024.

About Ragnar Research

With over 50 years of combined experience in public opinion research, the pollsters at Ragnar Research have a track record of getting the numbers right on behalf of candidates, Fortune 500 companies, IE efforts, and some of the biggest associations in the country.

In each of the 2018, 2020, and 2022 election cycles Ragnar Research's final data was accurate within one percentage point of final outcomes.

In the 2010 - 2022 election cycles, the pollsters at Ragnar Research polled over 100 winning Republican candidates for state legislature, U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate, Governor and other statewide offices. The team at Ragnar has conducted public opinion research in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.