

Democrats' gains in Tuesday's elections reflect shifts within the upper-middle class

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As more details become available from the off-year elections held November 5 in a half-dozen US states, it becomes increasingly clear that the Democratic Party made gains by mobilizing a section of the upper-middle class.

Far from appealing to the vast working-class discontent with the Trump administration and the capitalist system, the Democrats mounted largely right-wing campaigns that aimed to win support in higher-income suburban areas, which were the main battlegrounds in most of the states where voting took place Tuesday.

The Democrats won the most hotly contested race, for governor of Kentucky, and gained control of both houses of the state legislature in Virginia, overturning Republican majorities. They also made significant gains in local offices in Pennsylvania, a key battleground state in the 2016 presidential election and widely viewed as critical in 2020 as well.

Republicans won the Mississippi gubernatorial race and Democrats retained control of the state house in New Jersey, but these two results amounted to no more than holding serve: Mississippi has had a Republican governor since 2003, while Democrats have controlled the New Jersey state legislature since 2001.

While there are no exit polls in the off-year elections, making impossible a more detailed analysis of who voted and why, the pattern of where the Democrats made gains has an obvious demographic component: In state after state, the biggest change in margins came in suburban areas, particularly those populated by higher-income voters who in the past would have voted Republican, but who began moving toward the Democrats in 2016 and accelerated this movement in 2018 and 2019.

Voter turnout was higher in the suburbs, but not in

either the rural or inner-city areas, an indication that workers of all races and backgrounds found little to attract them in either party's campaigns.

The most important aspect of the Virginia vote was this shift by sections of the upper-middle class toward the Democratic Party, which now controls every seat in the state legislature from northern Virginia, by far the most populous and wealthiest region of the state. There is not a single Republican in either state or federal positions elected from the four counties of that region, which is home to the Pentagon, the CIA and hundreds of companies doing contract work for the vast military-intelligence apparatus.

Democrats also control local government in this region. They captured control of county boards in Loudon and Prince William counties, adding them to Arlington and Fairfax counties, for a clean sweep of local government in northern Virginia.

This shift of sections of the upper-middle class was evident also in Kentucky, where Democrat Andy Beshear ran up higher vote totals in the suburbs of Louisville and Lexington, as well as the northern Kentucky suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio, than the Clinton presidential campaign did in 2016. Even the losing Democratic candidate for governor in Mississippi, Jim Hood, far outperformed Clinton in the Mississippi suburbs of Memphis, Tennessee.

But the clearest indication of this class shift came in local elections Tuesday in Pennsylvania. Democrats captured control of every county in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, taking three suburban counties ruled for generations by the Republicans. Democrats took control of Chester County (with a median household income of \$97,000) for the first time in history. They won control of Delaware County for the first time since the American Civil War, and of Bucks County for the

first time since 1983.

The political appeals made by the Democrats were tailored to avoid offending these higher-income voters. In Virginia, their main issue was gun control—in the wake of a recent workplace massacre in Virginia Beach—and improvements in the roads and other infrastructure.

Both Democrats and Republicans claimed to support improvements in education and health care, including a bipartisan bill to expand the state Medicaid program, passed last year. Democrats now control both US Senate seats from Virginia, the governorship and other statewide offices, and both houses of the state legislature.

In Kentucky, there was a similarly narrow focus in the Democratic campaign, but in this case it was directed at Governor Matt Bevin, while the Democrats made little more than token efforts to win the other five statewide races, which were won by Republicans with double-digit margins.

Bevin was the most unpopular governor in the country, largely because of his ultra-right attacks on education and public health. He vilified public school teachers when they engaged in strikes and protests against his efforts to gut their pensions. He targeted the most vulnerable sections of the working class by dismantling Kentucky's state-run insurance exchange, KYNECT, established under Obamacare, and imposing work requirements on Medicaid recipients.

His Democratic challenger, Attorney General Andy Beshear, is the son of former governor Steve Beshear. He focused his campaign entirely on Bevin, attacking him on education and health care, naming a little-known assistant principal as his running mate—in an obvious bow to angry public school teachers—and distancing himself from all of the candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020.

One top Democratic adviser told the *Louisville Courier* that there was an informal ban on mentioning Trump in the Beshear campaign. Beshear's name was well known because of his father's eight-year administration (2007-2015).

The final Republican campaign rally in Lexington was a desperate effort to save Bevin by bringing in Trump and trying to turn the election into a referendum on impeachment. This connection was magnified by Trump's warning at the rally, "If you lose, they will

say Trump suffered the greatest defeat in the history of the world," while pointing to the assembled news media. He continued, telling the crowd, "You can't let that happen to me," in words that were frequently cited in media accounts after Bevin's defeat.

Trump's campaign manager Brad Parscale made a blustering attempt to correct Trump's words and downplay the implications of the defeat. "The Democrats nominated a moderate, whose dad was a moderate, who didn't talk about impeachment or Trump, and who acts like a Republican," he said. "Talk about Kentucky when an actual Democrat runs."

There is an element of truth in this statement. Beshear ran a right-wing campaign, avoiding any discussion of the vicious attacks by the Trump administration on immigrants, or Trump's systematic promotion of racist and fascist elements. He avoided national politics entirely, counting on popular hatred of Bevin and his ultra-right record.

As for a referendum on impeachment, there is no evidence that the issue played any role in the elections in any state, either to help Trump or his Democratic opponents.



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