



June 17, 2024 – For Immediate Release

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Suffolk University/USA TODAY Network Poll of Black Voters in Pennsylvania and Michigan: Less Enthusiasm for Biden Than in 2020

Third Party Candidates and Biden Missteps Cited as Factors

BOSTON—An exclusive new Suffolk University/USA TODAY network poll of Black voters in Pennsylvania and Michigan shows President Joe Biden is struggling to garner the support he enjoyed in 2020, when Black voters in both states voted for him in landslide margins.

Three-quarters of Black voters in both states surveyed said they voted for Biden in 2020. But today—just under five months before Election Day 2024—Biden leads Trump by just 56%-11% in Pennsylvania and 54%-15% in Michigan.

An important factor seems to be Biden’s performance over the past four years. When Michigan voters were asked why they supported a third-party candidate over Biden, 47% said he had “done a poor job/not kept his promises,” while 14% cited his age/mental state, and 13% did not like the “funding of wars/support for Israel.” In Pennsylvania, the numbers for those same categories were 36%, 16%, and 15% respectively.

A significant number of the Black voters surveyed selected third-party candidates over Biden, including Independents Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Cornel West. In Pennsylvania, West received 8% and in Michigan 6%, while RFK Jr. received 7% in Pennsylvania and 8% in Michigan.

However, 13% of Michigan 2020 Biden voters who didn’t pick him as a first or second choice said that he hasn’t lost their support, they just weren’t sure. In Pennsylvania that number was 16%.

Among these voters, Trump has also lost ground. Of the 8% of Black voters who voted for Trump in 2020 in Pennsylvania, four out of ten said they could no longer support Trump because he is a “criminal.” In Michigan, where 10% of those polled said they chose Trump in 2020, past

Trump supporters used words like “criminal,” “lost faith,” “mental instability,” “racist,” and “worries me” to describe their unwillingness to vote for the former president again.

Despite the current popularity of third-party candidates, Biden was the top second choice in both states by a wide margin. In Pennsylvania, Biden was the second choice among those voting third-party by a 22%-6% margin over Trump. In Michigan Biden’s advantage over Trump was wider at 45%-6%.

“This suggests that if third party candidates don’t qualify for the Michigan and Pennsylvania ballots, those voters will rotate directly to Biden,” said David Paleologos, director of the Suffolk University Political Research Center.

Voters in both states focused on inflation and the economy

The issue of inflation/economy dominated the thinking of Black voters in both states. In Michigan the economy (43%) was the top issue followed by threats to democracy (15%), and healthcare (14%). In Pennsylvania, the economy/inflation was also the top concern at 38%, followed by threats to democracy (18%), and crime at 12%.

This finding is vastly different than the Suffolk University/*USA TODAY* national poll taken in March which showed three issues polling close together: economy (29%), immigration (24%), and threats to democracy (23%). Additionally, a majority of Black voters in both states—59% in Pennsylvania and 54% in Michigan—said that they felt, overall, the country is on the “wrong track.”

Methodology

The nationwide Suffolk University/*USA TODAY* surveys were conducted from June 9-13, 2024, through live interviews of 500 black voters in the states of Pennsylvania and Michigan. Quota and demographic information—including region, gender, and age—were determined from 2020 national census data and 2020 exit polling in Pennsylvania and Michigan. The margin of sampling error for results from each state is +/-4.4 percentage points. Marginals and full cross-tabulation data are posted on the [Suffolk University Political Research Center](#) website. For more information, contact David Paleologos at 781-290-9310, dpaleologos@suffolk.edu.

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