



NATIONAL JOURNAL

PATH TO 270

# All bets are off in Nevada

Surprising polls, a wavering economy, and an abortion-rights ballot initiative make predicting the state's presidential result a fool's errand.



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The Trump Tower in Las Vegas (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

**Zac Weisz and Abigail Turner**

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Democrats [sounded](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4661153-joe-biden-donald-trump-polls-wisconsin-pennsylvania-nevada-arizona-georgia-michigan/) [\(https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4661153-joe-biden-donald-trump-polls-wisconsin-pennsylvania-nevada-arizona-georgia-michigan/\)](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4661153-joe-biden-donald-trump-polls-wisconsin-pennsylvania-nevada-arizona-georgia-michigan/).

the alarm after two major news outlets released a [poll](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/13/us/elections/times-siena-poll-registered-voter-crosstabs.html) [last month showing President Biden trailing in five of six battleground states.](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/05/13/us/elections/times-siena-poll-registered-voter-crosstabs.html)

Biden was furthest behind in Nevada. He trailed former President Trump by 12 points in a head-to-head race and by 14 points in a more crowded field that included independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Biden even trailed Trump in Clark County, an area of the state that has long tilted blue. Highlighting the president's personal struggles, the poll found Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen leading Army veteran Sam Brown, her likely GOP opponent, by 2 points.

Yet Democrats say they aren't concerned about these results in the Silver State.

"Nevada is always a tricky place to poll," Democratic pollster Zac McCrary told *National Journal*, adding that the state's young and transient population means there are lots of new people entering the electorate each year. As of 2022, half of Nevada's voters had [only registered there](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/us/politics/nevada-midterms-democrats.html) [within the preceding 6 years.](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/us/politics/nevada-midterms-democrats.html)

Republicans say they remain bullish about Trump's chances.



DAILY

## National Journal Radio Bonus Episode: The Path to 270

*Hotline* editor Kirk Bado and *Cook Political Report* with Amy Walter founder Charlie Cook discuss the presidential candidates' paths to 270 electoral votes.

KIRK A. BADO, CHARLIE COOK

(/s/724690)

### “Heading into 2016

(<https://www.nvsos.gov/sos/home/showpublisheddocument/4591/636854918831430000>),

the Democrats had a 6-point voter-registration advantage in Nevada. In 2020

(<https://www.nvsos.gov/sos/home/showpublisheddocument/9092/637402716833070000>

), that shrunk a little bit to a 4.8 [points] ... As of today

(<https://www.nvsos.gov/sos/home/showpublisheddocument/13815/638530026440770000>

o), it's only 1.5 [points],” said Axiom Strategies partner Robert Uithoven, who acknowledged that the Siena College poll won't be reflective of the final results.

Though Nevada has only six Electoral College votes, fewer than any other major battleground state, the anticipated narrowing of this year's presidential election means its victor could take home the spoils.

Nevada's large unions will again try to help Biden retain a state that hasn't voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 2004.

With Nevada making a slower economic recovery from the pandemic, each candidate must explain how they will tackle inflation and woo a heavily Hispanic electorate.

“[Nevadans] are very money focused; they’re very economic or pocketbook focused,” said pollster Mike Noble, adding that Trump is in a better position on this issue.

This is especially pertinent for the fastest-growing group in Nevada: Hispanics. This group [comprises](#)

(<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/geo/chart/US/RHI725222>), 30 percent of the population and made up 15 percent of all Nevada voters in the 2020 presidential election, per the Democratic-aligned group Voto Latino, which expects this number to rise significantly.

“We anticipate that over 60,000 Latinos in the state will turn 18 and become eligible to vote this coming election cycle,” said Voto Latino Managing Director Ameer Patel. In polling shared exclusively with *National Journal*, the group found that Biden led Trump among Hispanic voters, 48 percent to 34 percent, in a multi-candidate field, with Kennedy Jr. garnering 12 percent.

But Noble said Democrats' Hispanic base “has been eroded a little bit” since 2020 because of the significant rise in prices.

Economically, when the country gets a cold, Nevada gets a flu due to its heavy reliance on tourism. This was especially prevalent than during the COVID-19 pandemic: The state’s economy [contracted](#)

(<https://www.bea.gov/news/2021/gross-domestic-product-state-4th-quarter-2020-and-annual-2020-preliminary>), by 4.6 percent in 2020, among the worst

decreases in the country, and the unemployment rate [reached](#)

(<https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST320000000000003?>

[amp%253bdata\\_tool=XGtable&output\\_view=data&include\\_graphs=true](https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LASST320000000000003?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true)), 30 percent in April 2020, higher than any other state. Though the economy has



largely recovered, inflation—especially the rising [cost of housing](#) (<https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/higher-interest-rates-home-prices-result-in-fewer-sales-at-start-of-2024>),—is ranking voters.



📷 Trump supporters outside of the Clark County Elections Department in North Las Vegas on Nov. 7, 2020. (AP Photo/Wong Maye-E, File) ASSOCIATED PRESS

Noble added that some voters see Biden as responsible for the sluggish post-pandemic economic recovery, just as they did with former Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak, who lost his reelection bid in 2022.

Uithoven, who was a senior adviser to Trump's 2020 team in Nevada, says that Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo's victory over Sisolak could also help the former president.

“[Lombardo] has raised a tremendous amount of money that he's putting directly into the field and into the grassroots,” said Uithoven, adding that the governor has recruited “very strong” state legislative candidates who could help others up the ballot.

Democrats still hold supermajorities in both chambers of the Nevada Legislature, though, and Uithoven acknowledged that Republicans have a mountain to climb when it comes to besting Democrats on the ground.

“The Reid machine isn’t what it used to be, but it is still a factor, and it is still the dominating factor in Nevada,” said Uithoven.

Combining the forces of local unions like the [Culinary Union](https://culinaryunion226.org/union) (<https://culinaryunion226.org/union>), with the state Democratic Party, the late Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid built a massive campaign unit in Nevada that has become synonymous with the state’s politics. Democrats and Republicans alike touted the effectiveness of this operation, which effectively hands Biden a comprehensive ground game.

“Democrats have won pretty much every race in Nevada over the last decade, but none of it has been easy,” McCrary said.

Democrats still aren’t unified in Nevada, as exemplified by the recent leadership shifts atop the state party. Biden’s foreign policy and his [new immigration plan](https://apnews.com/article/biden-asylum-migration-immigration-mexico-border-dec5f83b468b5795479bf1f5e49799d5) (<https://apnews.com/article/biden-asylum-migration-immigration-mexico-border-dec5f83b468b5795479bf1f5e49799d5>), have also exacerbated divides between progressives and moderates.

Other issues have united Democrats, such as abortion access—and that issue could be [on the November ballot](https://724966/where-abortion-could-be-on-the-ballot-in-2024/) ([/s/724966/where-abortion-could-be-on-the-ballot-in-2024/](https://724966/where-abortion-could-be-on-the-ballot-in-2024/)). Nevadans for Reproductive Freedom, an abortion advocacy group, said that it has [collected](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/abortion-rights-activists-believe-they-have-enough-signatures-to-get-measure-on-ballot) (<https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/abortion-rights-activists-believe-they-have-enough-signatures-to-get-measure-on-ballot>), more than enough signatures to

put a measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution on this year's ballot. Nevadans currently have abortion access up to 24 weeks.

University of Nevada, Las Vegas political science assistant professor Kenneth Miller said that while abortion won't bring out those who weren't already planning to vote, "people are going to be talking about it, and the more that people talk about abortion, the worse it is for Republicans."

Both McCrary and Josh Siegel, who managed Republican Mark Robertson's 2022 House campaign in Nevada's 1st District, agreed that the ballot initiative could hurt the GOP again.

"I can certainly see it being a big issue for the [GOP] again if it's on the ballot," Siegel said.

What could further harm Trump—beyond his [felony conviction](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/06/us/politics/donald-trump-biden-trial.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/06/us/politics/donald-trump-biden-trial.html>)—is his lack of campaign presence. After the midterms, the Republican National Committee and the Nevada GOP quietly [closed](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/gop-minority-outreach-centers-in-nevada-quietly-shuttered-after-2022-election-cycle?mkt_tok=NTU2LVlFRS05NjkAAAGTjS5Tq6NgF7x_S5ZsR26ucCti2HW8OOeB-AkoXq0aUYT9W0Vpt88TdJKanIA_xFe-qGOJOfFxZf3Qiiw8vq-jUu2oITz2EPNWBK3rynLEU7vnEg) ([https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/gop-minority-outreach-centers-in-nevada-quietly-shuttered-after-2022-election-cycle?](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/gop-minority-outreach-centers-in-nevada-quietly-shuttered-after-2022-election-cycle?mkt_tok=NTU2LVlFRS05NjkAAAGTjS5Tq6NgF7x_S5ZsR26ucCti2HW8OOeB-AkoXq0aUYT9W0Vpt88TdJKanIA_xFe-qGOJOfFxZf3Qiiw8vq-jUu2oITz2EPNWBK3rynLEU7vnEg) [mkt tok=NTU2LVlFRS05NjkAAAGTjS5Tq6NgF7x\\_S5ZsR26ucCti2HW8OOeB-AkoXq0aUYT9W0Vpt88TdJKanIA\\_xFe-qGOJOfFxZf3Qiiw8vq-jUu2oITz2EPNWBK3rynLEU7vnEg](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/gop-minority-outreach-centers-in-nevada-quietly-shuttered-after-2022-election-cycle?mkt_tok=NTU2LVlFRS05NjkAAAGTjS5Tq6NgF7x_S5ZsR26ucCti2HW8OOeB-AkoXq0aUYT9W0Vpt88TdJKanIA_xFe-qGOJOfFxZf3Qiiw8vq-jUu2oITz2EPNWBK3rynLEU7vnEg)), multiple outreach centers that aimed to garner support from voters of color. A vape store replaced one of these centers. The Trump campaign also [hasn't spent any money](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/05/19/biden-nevada-voters-economy-election-2024/) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/05/19/biden-nevada-voters-economy-election-2024/>), on ads there this year.

“The RNC doesn’t have the operation on the ground that it’s had in previous elections, [but] I’m not super concerned by it,” GOP strategist Raymond Serrano said.

The Biden campaign said it now employs 70 staffers across the state. The Trump campaign and the RNC refused to say whether they have any campaign staffers on the ground. In a statement to *National Journal*, a Trump spokeswoman argued that high inflation is encouraging Nevadans to opt for the former president.

Voters have shown interest in another candidate, though. Kennedy, who is [suing](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/independent-candidate-rfk-jr-suing-nevada-over-access-to-2024-ballot?mkt_tok=NTU2LVlFRSo5NjkAAAGTgsPdxF_tuYQCblsFo71aYAeboGLr9aVJr3wQm7A1bo_uYVMYP5DFnm6iv1UZrM3OCVgXJTchNRKfCRCnak) ([https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/independent-candidate-rfk-jr-suing-nevada-over-access-to-2024-ballot?](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/independent-candidate-rfk-jr-suing-nevada-over-access-to-2024-ballot?mkt_tok=NTU2LVlFRSo5NjkAAAGTgsPdxF_tuYQCblsFo71aYAeboGLr9aVJr3wQm7A1bo_uYVMYP5DFnm6iv1UZrM3OCVgXJTchNRKfCRCnak)

[mkt\\_tok=NTU2LVlFRSo5NjkAAAGTgsPdxF\\_tuYQCblsFo71aYAeboGLr9aVJr3wQm7A1bo\\_uYVMYP5DFnm6iv1UZrM3OCVgXJTchNRKfCRCnak](https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/independent-candidate-rfk-jr-suing-nevada-over-access-to-2024-ballot?mkt_tok=NTU2LVlFRSo5NjkAAAGTgsPdxF_tuYQCblsFo71aYAeboGLr9aVJr3wQm7A1bo_uYVMYP5DFnm6iv1UZrM3OCVgXJTchNRKfCRCnak)), to get on the ballot in

Nevada, garnered 12 percent in the Siena College poll, although Miller says this only reflects voters’ dissatisfaction with the two front-runners.

“Third-party candidates tend to look the best in early summer, and then they fade,” he said.

Noble says the race in Nevada will ultimately come down to a head-to-head race between Biden and Trump.

“It’s like the electorate has a terrible choice ahead of them: They have to choose between cyanide and anthrax,” Noble said. [NJ](#)

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