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# What Happened in Virginia in 2023?



**Lucas Holtz**

Political Analyst

[@LucasHoltz](https://twitter.com/LucasHoltz)

## Takeaways

- Democrats put the GOP on the defensive in competitive Republican-leaning districts, and the results show that where Democrats invested resources, they overperformed 2021 results.

- 14 of the 15 most competitive House races swung left from the 2021 gubernatorial race to 2023—on average, a 4.5 percentage point swing blue from Glenn Youngkin’s performance.
- Six of the seven most competitive Senate races swung left from 2021—on average, a 3.6 percentage point swing blue from Youngkin’s performance across these districts.

The 2023 Virginia election results have been certified, and the results show that Democrats met the expectations that they set for the 2023 legislative elections—if not slightly exceeding them. Crucially, Democrats effectively halted any mandate that Governor Youngkin believed he had by holding the Senate and flipping the House of Delegates. And the Virginia off-year elections can indeed be a bellwether for the nation as a whole, as 2017 and 2019 have shown. We saw 2017’s strong performance among Virginia Dems preview the 2018 blue wave, and when Dems captured the Virginia legislature in 2019, it signaled an energized base heading into what would be a razor thin 2020 presidential election. Democrats hope that their success last month is a preview for how 2024 will play out.

All told, Democrats narrowly won a 51-49 majority in the House of Delegates, regaining the chamber after losing it in 2021, and they kept a slim 21-19 majority in the Senate. Statewide, Democrats cumulatively held a 2.6% advantage in Senate races (51.3%-48.7%), while Republicans managed a slim 0.9% advantage in House of Delegates races (50.4%-49.6%)—excluding uncontested races that did not feature both a Democrat and Republican running. Obviously, this Republican advantage didn’t translate to the party winning the chamber, likely as a result of the fact that the contested races had a marginal GOP partisan lean and Democrats already held more uncontested House seats. That dynamic was

flipped in the Senate, where Republicans started with one more uncontested safe seat than Dems.

Year-to-year, Democrats ran 7 points behind Biden in contested House races and 8 points behind Biden in contested Senate races, which is on par with their 2019 performance of contested races in both chambers. But elections are won and lost on the margins, so we dove into the most competitive races to see how districts swung compared to 2021, when Republicans nabbed a statewide victory—aided by the state being redder in off-year elections than presidential elections.

## Competitive House and Senate Races

Going into the election, Republicans had a small 48–46 majority in the Virginia House with six vacant seats, and Dems held a 22–18 majority in the Senate. Of the 100 House seats up for election, 39 seats were solid GOP (including 14 uncontested races), and 46 seats were solid Dem (including 18 seats uncontested). On the Senate side, there were 18 solid Dem seats and 15 solid GOP seats going into the election. Setting those races aside, we examined the top 15 most competitive Virginia House races and the top seven most competitive Virginia Senate races. They were categorized as toss up, lean, or likely DEM/GOP by SplitTicket and CNAlysis.

Across the 15 battleground House races, Republicans cumulatively held a 51%–49% advantage over Democrats in the two-way race—this was a 4.5 percentage point swing to the left from Glenn Youngkin’s 2021 performance in these districts. Additionally, 14 of the 15 most competitive House races swung left from the 2021 gubernatorial race to 2023. Despite this leftward swing, Democrats only won five of these races since the vast majority of these were in territory more friendly to the GOP than the state as a whole.

House District	2023 Winner	2023 Margin	2021 to 2023 Swing
HD21	Josh Thomas (D)	D+3.6	D+5.5
HD22	Ian Lovejoy (R)	R+4.6	D+1.1
HD30	Geary Higgins (R)	R+6.4	D+7.1
HD41	Chris Obenshain (R)	R+0.7	D+10.4
HD57	David Owen (R)	R+2.0	D+1.6
HD58	Rodney Willett (D)	D+9.1	D+5
HD64	Paul Milde (R)	R+9.0	D+4.9
HD65	Joshua Cole (D)	D+6	D+8.8
HD71	Amanda Batten (R)	R+1.9	D+5.6
HD75	Carrie Coyner (R)	R+5.8	D+1.8
HD82	Kim Taylor (R)	R+0.3	D+1.9
HD84	Nadarius Clark (D)	D+6.2	D+3.6
HD86	A.C. Cordoza (R)	R+12.9	R+3.9
HD89	Baxter Ennis (R)	R+1.8	D+5.7
HD97	Michael Feggans (D)	D+4.8	D+6.9

**Source:** Analysis of Virginia 2021 & 2023 election results (margin and swings were calculated using two-way D–R results).



Looking a bit deeper at a couple of the closest contests, we saw that non-white precincts largely broke along recent historical margins for Democrats as far as Virginia off-year elections go. In HD-82, the most heavily concentrated Black precincts around Petersburg City either broke along their 2021 margins or slightly improved for the Democratic candidate Kimberly Adams—these precincts cumulatively swung a marginal 1.6 percentage points left. Republican Kim Taylor won this race by just 79 votes. In HD-21, Democratic candidate Josh Thomas outperformed Terry McAuliffe’s 2021 margins in the most densely concentrated Latino and non-white precincts of the district. Cumulatively, these

precincts swung 4 percentage points left from the 2021 gubernatorial. Thomas won the district by just under a thousand votes and helped push Democrats to a 51-seat majority in the House.

Across the seven Senate races, Democrats held a 51%-49% cumulative popular vote advantage over Republicans in the head-to-head. This represented a 3.6 percentage point swing to the left from Youngkin's 2021 performance across these districts. Six of these seven races swung left, and while Dems only won three of the most competitive races, they made some inroads where they didn't win.

Senate District	2023 Winner	2023 Margin	2021 to 2023 Swing
SD4	Dave Suetterlein (R)	R+6.7	D+3.8
SD16	Schuyler VanValkenburg (D)	D+9.5	D+3.9
SD17	Emily Brewer (R)	R+4.8	D+0.2
SD24	Danny Diggs (R)	R+1.1	D+2.4
SD27	Tara Durant (R)	R+1.9	D+6.5
SD30	Danica Roem (D)	D+3.8	R+0.8
SD31	Russet Perry (D)	D+5.7	D+6.3

**Source:** Analysis of Virginia 2021 & 2023 election results (margin and swings were calculated using two-way D-R results).



## Virginia Ads and Issues

According to analysis from [AdImpact](#), “40% of all Virginia State Legislature general election ads mentioned abortion...making it the most mentioned issue across the elections. The issue was in 58% of all Democratic ads, and 8% of all Republican ads.” Virginia Dem messaging on abortion was consistent with 2022, painting the GOP candidates as MAGA Republicans that would ban abortion in the state—a message that will surely be employed in 2024, as Republicans’

attempt to moderate with a 15-week abortion ban fell flat. Ads about “education, promising to fund public education and keep guns out of schools,” as well as tying Republicans to extremist book bans, all aired with significant frequency from Democrats this cycle.

Meanwhile, Republicans aired several ads attacking Dems for being soft on crime and tried to tie Dems to high inflation, reminiscent of 2022, but with a minor addition that alleged Bidenomics was failing. There’s no doubt those attacks will persist through 2024, though Republicans may need to tweak their playbook given that it didn’t pay off for them on this Election Night.

## Conclusion

In 2023, Virginia Democrats put the GOP on the defensive in Republican-leaning districts, and despite not winning more of these competitive races this cycle, the results show that where Democrats invested resources, they overperformed 2021 results and largely hit 2019 results among contested races. Given these are off-year, low turnout elections, it’s important not to read too much into these results and what they may mean for 2024, but it does show that Democrats can reconstitute the anti-Trump coalition if moderate swing voters believe there is an existential MAGA threat posed by the outcome. From what we’ve seen so far, that message will likely be the foundation for Biden and Democrats’ 2024 campaign.