



Wisconsin's 'Uninstructed' Protest Votes Serve as Yet Another Warning to the Biden Campaign

In this week's Wisconsin Democratic presidential primary election, a group of nearly 50,000 people voted 'uninstructed' in protest of President Biden's handling of the War on Gaza – yet another warning to the Biden campaign regarding the significant level of dissatisfaction surrounding this. The 'uninstructed' movement in Wisconsin is part of a wider national effort whereby citizens are using their vote to voice displeasure. This statewide push was undertaken by a group called 'Listen to Wisconsin,' whose original goal was to garner at least 20,000 votes – a number representative of Biden's margin of victory in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Their hopes were far exceeded having gained 48,162 votes, nearly two-and-a-half times the 2020 margin, in what amounts to over 8% of the total Democratic vote. With such slim margins of victory expected again this November in battleground states like Wisconsin, the primary results send a powerful message to Biden that he is at serious risk of losing important states that helped get him elected back in 2020.

While the number of 'uninstructed' votes were a good showing in the Wisconsin primary, it did not pass the 15% threshold needed to secure any delegates at the Democratic National Convention. However, leaders with the overall national movement itself have secured delegates from results in other states, an accumulated total of 26 of them, which will allow for representation at the upcoming Democratic National Convention in August. This form of electoral protest has been a common occurrence in various Democratic primaries across the nation, with voters casting 'uncommitted' or 'uninstructed' as a show of discontent with Biden's stance on Gaza. The national movement was brought about in Michigan's Democratic presidential primary, which saw an astounding 101,604 – around 13% of participants – vote 'uncommitted.' This campaign differentiates itself from the 'Abandon Biden' movement, in that the former focuses on persuading Biden to shift his stance through the use of primary results, while the latter has outright pledged to not vote for Biden in the general election. Michigan's actions started a chain reaction of similar primary protests, including in Minnesota where approximately 45,000 (19%) of Democratic primary voters chose 'uncommitted.' When the protest vote movement caught on, the architects of the Michigan campaign organized to support others, including in Wisconsin. The three states of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota account for 35 total Electoral College votes, with the first two in particular being critical swing states, meaning that neither Biden nor Trump can afford to lose all three states in the general election.

Other states including Hawaii, Washington, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Colorado, Connecticut, and Rhode Island have also had impactful 'uncommitted' turnouts. Michigan organizer Lexi Zeidman estimates that in total, the movement has generated around 500,000 votes nationwide, speaking to its significance. The relevance of the movement is especially evident in Michigan and Wisconsin, as experts consistently agree that both states could prove vital to Biden's re-election chances in 2024. Both Wisconsin and Michigan are considered major battleground states that can easily make or break a presidential candidate's campaign, and the significant number of votes behind the protests in each state certainly have the potential to do just that. The primary results in the three states of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota in particular demonstrate that the Gaza issue is of great salience to many Democrats. Analysts have warned that merely being an alternative to Trump will not be enough to convince certain constituents to vote for Biden, because as one commentator put it, "you cannot weaponize fear of Trump against the very real actions of Biden."

The 'uncommitted' movement is part of growing criticism towards Biden's handling of the War on Gaza, and calls for a full ceasefire to end the conflict. The Biden administration, seemingly in reaction to growing domestic criticism like this, has rolled back some of its support to Israel, at least rhetorically. The president and several high-ranking U.S. officials have made public statements on the importance of protecting civilian life and delivering more humanitarian aid. However, critics point out that the president continues to contribute to Israel's human rights violations and war crimes by failing to put a halt to weapons and munitions transfers to Israel. Through the 'uncommitted' movement, many voters have made it clear that words alone will not be enough. States like Wisconsin and Michigan hold substantial weight in presidential elections, and thus Biden would be wise to take note of what a potentially consequential number of voters there are telling him.