



## Potential Impact of the Gaza War on the Biden-Trump 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

With incumbent President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump having become the presumptive Democratic and Republican presidential nominees respectively back in mid-March, analysts are anticipating a tight race in the upcoming November 2024 U.S. presidential election. Due to the expected close nature, there are some factors which could undoubtedly play a determinant role in the outcome of the race. One of these is voter perception regarding the handling of the Gaza War, something that may prove to be especially relevant in several important battleground states where the margin of victory is likely to be extremely small. During the course of the presidential primary process, we have seen a notable level of dissatisfaction with the Biden administration's handling of the Gaza War via protest votes in numerous places including what have historically been swing states such as Michigan and Wisconsin. In both of the aforementioned states, organizers of the protest vote movements exceeded their total vote tally goals, and there were also a considerable number of 'uncommitted' ballots cast in Minnesota, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Colorado, among others. Since both Biden and Trump appear to be suffering from their fair share of a shortage in voter enthusiasm, a substantial drop-off in turnout for either candidate this electoral cycle would probably end up being the difference.

A recent NBC News survey found that the share of voters who say that they have a high interest in the upcoming 2024 general election has hit a nearly 20-year low at this juncture in a presidential race – with majorities holding negative views of both major party candidates. The level of interest towards the November election is particularly low among independents and voters aged 18 to 34. Thus, the outcome of the presidential election may very well come down to whether Biden or Trump turns out more supporters among these two groups. The latest presidential election polls, which also take into account the independent candidates that are running, highlight just how narrow the gap is between Biden and Trump – as all reputable ones show a slim margin ranging from 1 to 5 percentage points nationally. At the state level, election forecasters have identified seven that are of noteworthy significance in particular – Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The Cook Political Report currently categorizes six of these as toss-ups for the 2024 presidential election, with North Carolina listed as a "Lean Republican" state that many still deem to be a battleground one as well.

The relevance of voter attitudes regarding the handling of the Gaza War is evident, as a large number of protest votes have been cast in the 2024 battleground state presidential primaries. In Michigan, there were more than 100,000, and in Wisconsin nearly 50,000. Additionally, in North Carolina, over 88,000 voted 'no preference,' and in Georgia, the combined total of 'leave it blank' votes and Marianne Williamson votes – more than 15,000 – exceeded Biden's margin of victory in the state back in the 2020 general election, which was around 12,000 votes. With this suspected to be the case again in these battleground states during the upcoming 2024 general election, the outcomes may be determined by how many of these same primary voters cast ballots for an independent candidate or abstain from voting in November altogether. While some voters have voiced disapproval with Biden's handling of the Gaza War, there is also expected to be a decline in support for Trump as well. Surveys have indicated that a portion of Republicans – especially college-educated, moderate, and suburban voters – have serious reservations about Trump due to his array of legal and criminal woes. Thus, there is a segment of the Republican electorate that may end up gravitating towards non-major party candidates or deciding not to vote at all, as there is among the Democratic electorate as well. In fact, some polls seem to suggest that Biden has slightly

more support among Democratic-leaning independents than Trump does among Republican-leaning independents – a factor that could tip the scales in a close election.

On top of balancing the potential drop-offs for both Biden and Trump, it is also important to weigh the significance of foreign vs. domestic policies when it comes to the most vital issues for voters. There is certainly a sizable chunk of citizens, particularly young voters aged 18-34, that tend to be more critical of Biden's stance on the Gaza War. However, at the same time, for a lot of others, this individual issue might not hold enough sway to influence their decision to cast a ballot for the incumbent president. In general, surveys consistently show that domestic policies tend to hold more issue salience for American voters than foreign policy considerations. Inflation, health care, housing, and immigration are often four of the most high-priority for voters, while foreign policy normally ranks a bit lower down between five and ten. In the end, the Gaza War does have the potential to play an impactful role on the overall outcome of the 2024 presidential election due to the narrow margins anticipated in battleground states which had sizable primary protest votes, and it just remains to be seen whether or not the voter drop-off is big enough to outweigh those who will still cast their ballots for one of the two major party candidates regardless.