



THE FAILED RED WAVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is consensus among political analysts that Republicans underperformed in the 2022 midterm elections. Various reasons have been given to explain this outcome: poor “candidate quality,” ineffective turnout operations, too much of a focus on social issues, etc. However, after an in-depth analysis of the results, the American Principles Project believes the primary cause of this underperformance can be traced mainly to one factor: the failure of the national Republican Party message on several key issues. The GOP was also hurt by a massive discrepancy in ad spending in important toss-up races.

BAD ECONOMIC MESSAGING

Republicans’ midterm campaigns largely centered on economics, emphasizing their plans to cut spending and lower gas prices and trying to tie inflation to Democrats. However, voters were not overwhelmingly swayed by this message. Moreover, Democrats responded effectively by promising to cut healthcare costs and protect Social Security and Medicare. Republicans also

let Democrats co-opt Trump’s popular economic message of reshoring manufacturing and protecting American jobs.

BAD CRIME MESSAGING

Though Republicans attempted to blame Democrats for rising crime rates, this message was not as resonant with voters outside of a few areas like New York. Moreover, Dem-

ocrats effectively countered by simply adopting GOP talking points and running great, poll-tested ads.

BAD ABORTION MESSAGING

Following the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, Democrats quickly made abortion their central campaign issue. Republicans largely chose not to respond, which was a significant mistake. The GOP's lack of a unified message on the issue allowed Democrats to set the contrast in their favor, and they were successful in portraying Republicans as the extremists.

BAD CULTURE-WAR MESSAGING

Despite culture-war issues (particularly school policies and curricula relating to race, sexual orientation, and gender identity) driving GOP successes in the 2021 Virginia and New Jer-

sey elections, Republicans largely ignored this winning strategy in 2022. The exception was Ron DeSantis in Florida. But while some GOP consultants mistakenly see these issues as only appealing to base voters, they in fact offer Republican candidates a significant advantage among the general electorate as well.

ADVERTISING DISADVANTAGE

An analysis of various races shows a correlation between Republicans' performance and their advertising dominance (or lack thereof) in October. Where pro-GOP ads were more prevalent, candidates did well. Conversely, if less than 30% of October ads were pro-GOP in a competitive election, the candidate performed poorly. Republicans also relied too heavily on spending from outside groups, which are not able to get the preferential ad rates that campaigns do.

In summary, the 2022 midterm elections exposed weaknesses in the Republican Party's messaging and strategy. To succeed in future elections, the GOP must reclaim Trump's economic agenda, unify around an abortion message that sets an advantageous contrast with Democrats, capitalize on their advantage in culture-war issues, and address the advertising imbalance. By placing a strong focus on social issues and a populist economic platform, the Republican Party will have the best chance at persuading a broader range of voters—including independents, soft Democrats, and suburbanites—to vote Republican in 2024.

