

Leadership 2028

An Early Look at the State of Leadership & National Direction

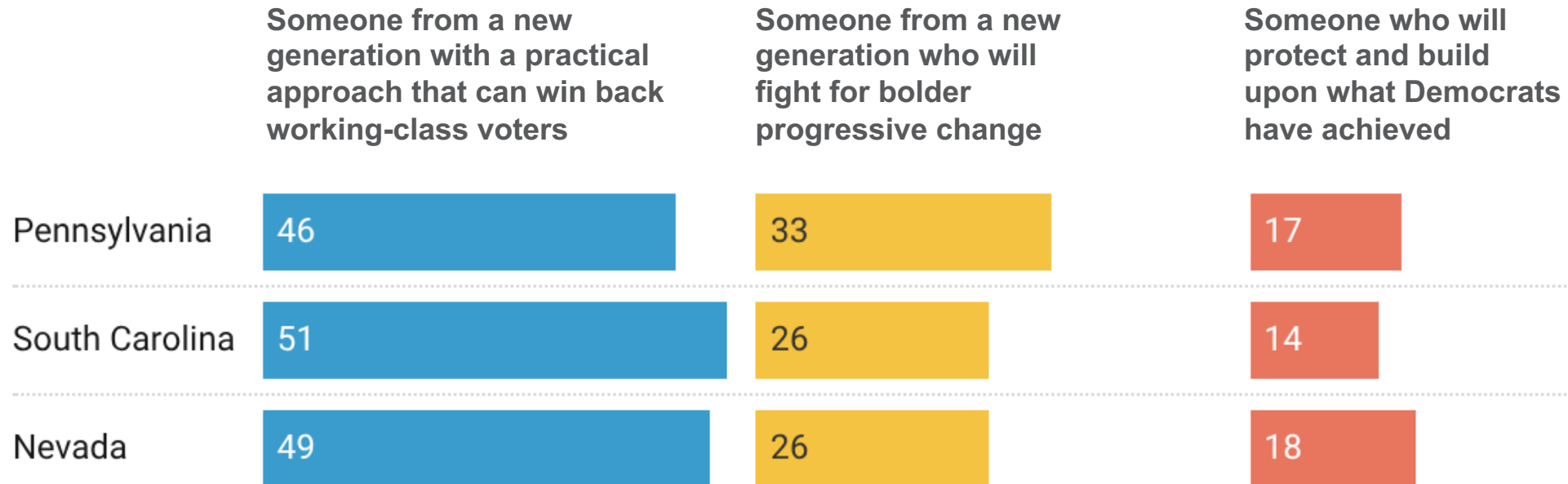
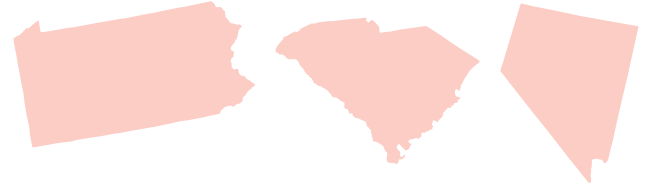
Toplines & Analysis

Overview: This report features data from three surveys fielded simultaneously across one general election battleground (Pennsylvania) and two anticipated early Democratic primary states (Nevada, South Carolina). All three surveys were conducted by Change Research between January 30 and February 5, 2026, among registered voters (PA n=1,350) and Democratic primary voters (NV n=806, SC n=1,018). Each survey tested figure favorability, biographical messaging, vulnerabilities, and leadership priorities. Pennsylvania additionally tested generic ballot, institutional approval, and respondent preferences in hypothetical general election matchups. Chart totals may occasionally not equal exactly 100 due to rounding.

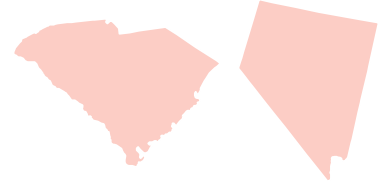
- **The Democratic electorate wants a new generation that can win and deliver.** Across all three states, a consistent supermajority of Democratic-aligned voters expressed three clear preferences for their next nominee. Combined, 75-79% of Democrats want "someone from a new generation" (split between **a practical/working-class-focused approach (46-52%)** and **bolder progressive change (26-33%)**). Only 14-17% want a leader who will "protect and build upon what Democrats have achieved."
- **Pennsylvania remains competitive territory.** The generic 2028 presidential preference is D+2 (46%-44%). Governor Josh Shapiro enjoys a home-court advantage, and Arizona U.S. Senator Mark Kelly is the only Democrat to hold steady support in presidential preference since our similar statewide survey in October. Other than Shapiro and Kelly, only two Democrats lead Vice President JD Vance in a hypothetical matchup: Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear (47-46%) and Maryland Governor Wes Moore (47-46%).
- **The figures considered contenders for national leadership is broad.** Gavin Newsom leads first-choice primary preference in both NV (27%) and SC (21%), with high favorability and broad name recognition. Mark Kelly and Pete Buttigieg compete for a strong second position, with Kelly consistently performing strongest on the "consider voting" metric (86% in NV, 79% in SC). Former Vice President Kamala Harris retains significant support (10-15% first choice) but carries the highest "would disappoint" numbers (25-28%). AOC's support is heavily front-loaded with progressives and does not offer much room to grow. Beshear has a limited profile, but does win over voters after they hear more about him.

Democrats want new leaders

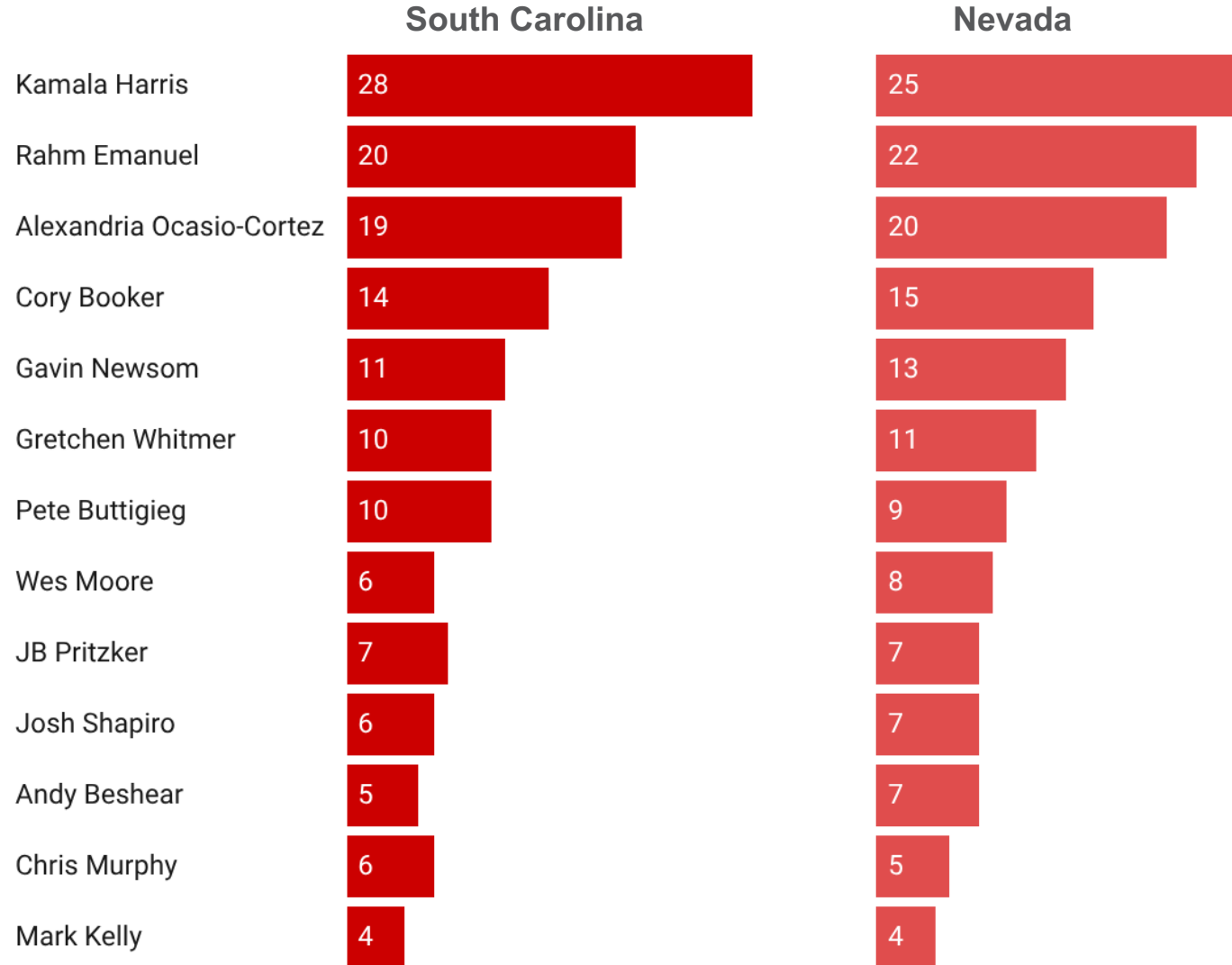
Looking ahead to the next presidential election, which of the following would you prefer as the Democratic nominee?



Disappointment if Selected

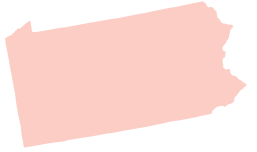


Which, if any, of the following would disappoint you if they were the Democratic nominee? Choose all that apply.
(% Selecting)

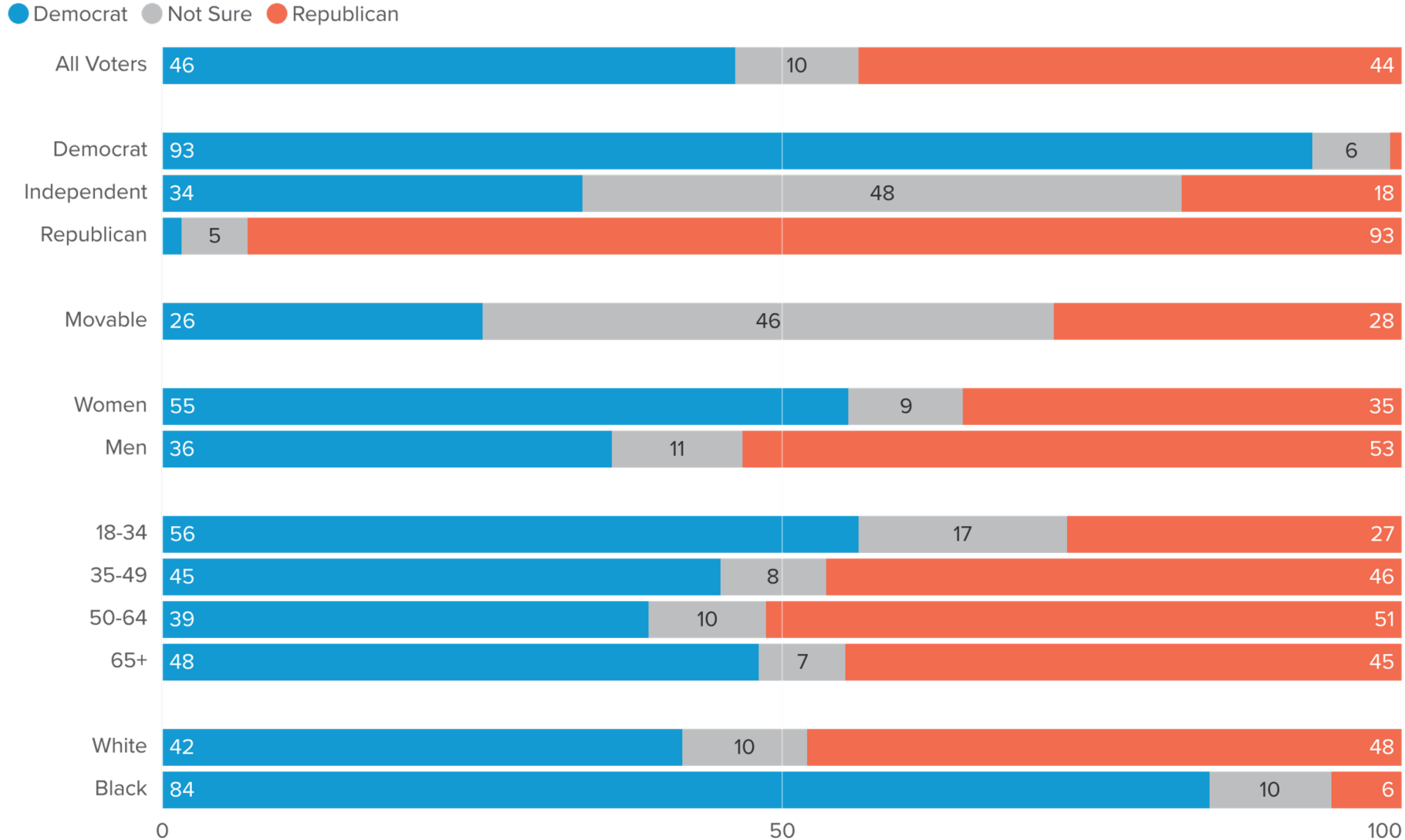


2028 Generic Preference

Among All Pennsylvania Voters

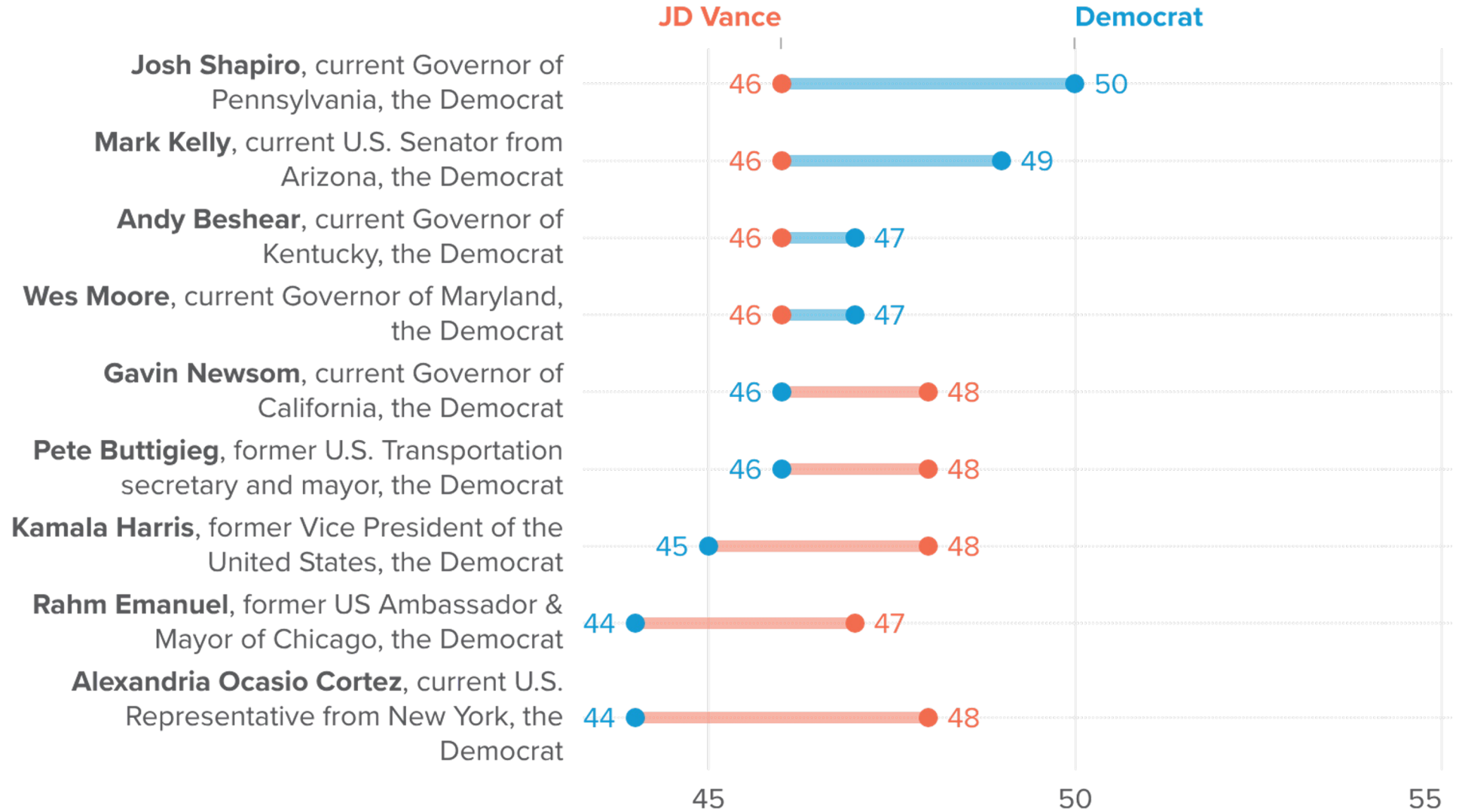


It is a long way off, but please look ahead to the next presidential election in 2028. If the general election were held today, please indicate which you are most likely to support.



2028 Hypothetical Scenarios

Among All Pennsylvania Voters



Vote came after messaging on several figures

First or Second Choice – South Carolina



	All	Women	Men	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	White	Black	
Gavin Newsom	37	37	37	25	27	44	40	36	40	Gavin Newsom
Kamala Harris	27	32	18	41	37	27	20	15	46	Kamala Harris
Pete Buttigieg	25	24	26	19	24	24	26	35	9	Pete Buttigieg
Mark Kelly	24	23	27	10	8	25	33	33	12	Mark Kelly
Cory Booker	13	14	10	4	21	13	11	5	24	Cory Booker
Josh Shapiro	11	9	13	4	4	10	16	15	6	Josh Shapiro
AOC	11	11	10	43	17	7	4	10	9	AOC
Wes Moore	7	7	8	4	11	6	8	3	15	Wes Moore
JB Pritzker	6	5	8	2	6	4	8	8	2	JB Pritzker
Andy Beshear	6	3	9	5	4	7	6	8	2	Andy Beshear
Gretchen Whitmer	5	6	5	3	6	7	5	6	5	Gretchen Whitmer
Chris Murphy	2	2	3	4	1	2	3	3	1	Chris Murphy
Rahm Emanuel	1	1	2	3	2	0	1	2	0	Rahm Emanuel

Note: All respondents saw a description of their current or former position

First or Second Choice - Nevada



	All	Women	Men	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+	White	Hisp	
Gavin Newsom	47	50	43	43	42	47	51	45	58	Gavin Newsom
Pete Buttigieg	31	30	32	13	36	30	34	34	33	Pete Buttigieg
Mark Kelly	30	31	29	11	18	31	37	34	18	Mark Kelly
Kamala Harris	23	26	20	43	27	27	16	17	39	Kamala Harris
AOC	16	14	19	43	27	17	7	17	14	AOC
Josh Shapiro	10	10	9	4	4	10	13	10	8	Josh Shapiro
Cory Booker	7	7	7	8	5	5	8	7	6	Cory Booker
JB Pritzker	5	4	6	1	3	2	8	7	0	JB Pritzker
Andy Beshear	4	3	4	1	6	3	4	4	4	Andy Beshear
Gretchen Whitmer	3	2	5	2	7	3	1	3	0	Gretchen Whitmer
Wes Moore	3	3	3	0	3	2	4	2	2	Wes Moore
Chris Murphy	3	3	2	0	4	2	3	4	0	Chris Murphy
Rahm Emanuel	2	2	3	0	2	1	3	2	2	Rahm Emanuel

Note: All respondents saw a description of their current or former position

Leadership Profiles

The figures profiled in this section were tested to begin to measure how effectively a leader's biography and record deliver on what voters are asking for and where critical gaps may exist. No single leader checks every box. The profiles reveal distinct archetypes emerging:

- **The Known Quantities (Newsom, Harris, AOC):** High name recognition and strong favorability among Democrats but carrying baggage that limits general election ceiling. Their challenge is persuading swing voters, not introducing themselves.
- **The Hidden Gems (Kelly, Shapiro):** The strongest general election performers in the field, with high competence and electability marks from voters who know them. But 13-20% of primary voters in potential early states have never heard of them. Their challenge is distribution and getting their story in front of the primary electorate at scale before preference hardens around name recognition alone.
- **The Compelling Cases (Moore, Beshear):** Strong governing records, low "would disappoint" numbers, and upside when voters hear their biographies. But with 26-36% "Never Heard Of" rates in early states and single-digit primary preference, they face a steeper climb to viability requiring both a visibility breakthrough and a credible theory of the case.

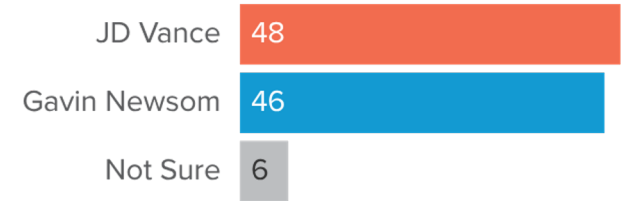
This round of leadership profiles is the just a starting point. Several figures who showed strong favorability numbers merit the same level of biographical and opposition research testing in future waves. The field will continue to evolve as figures make decisions about 2028, and our research program should expand accordingly. Future waves should also test how these profiles perform after sustained exposure to varying types of media.



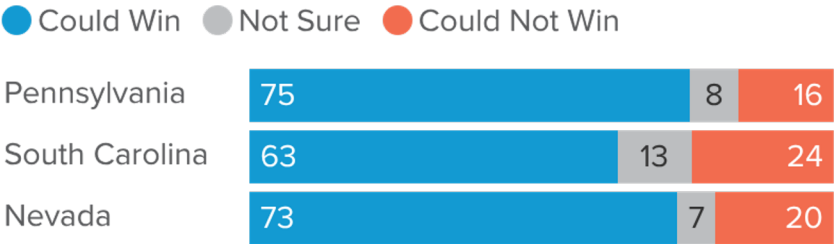
Gavin Newsom | CA Governor

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

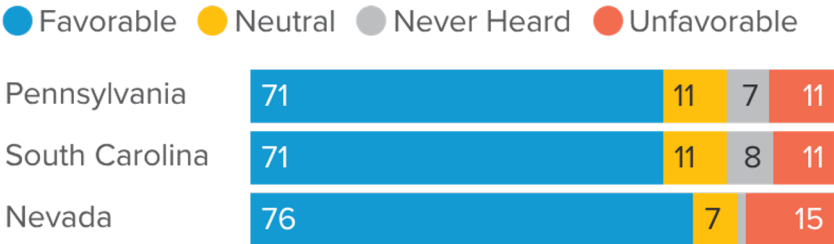
General Election Choice (All PA Voters)



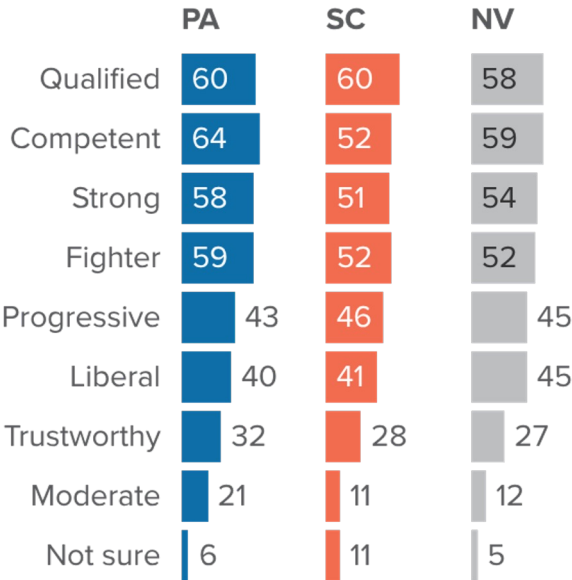
Ability to Win (Democrats)



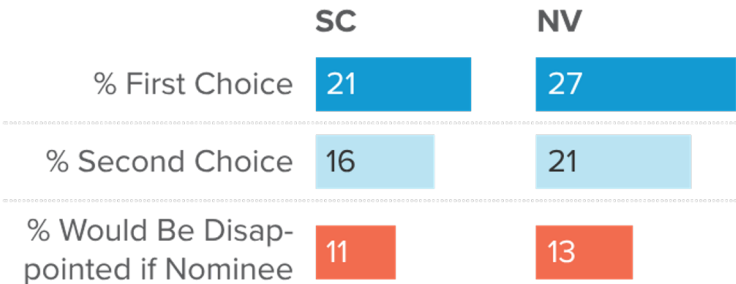
Personal Popularity (Dems Only)



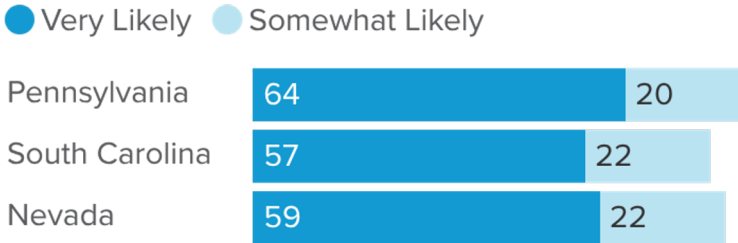
Traits Post-Messaging (% Democrats Selecting)



Primary Vote Choice



Willing to Consider Support Post Bio (Democrats)



Top Concerns (Somewhat/Strongly Concerned)

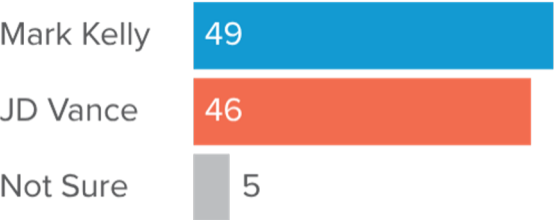
- Opposes California state lawmakers' efforts to implement a wealth tax on billionaires
- California's homelessness population increased during his time as Governor
- Has received significant campaign contributions from corporate interests
- His former chief of staff was indicted on federal corruption charges in 2025



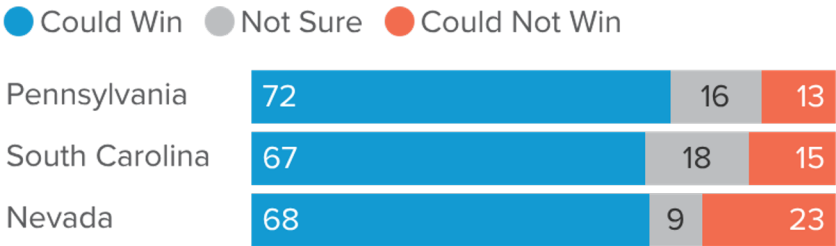
Mark Kelly | U.S. Senator

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

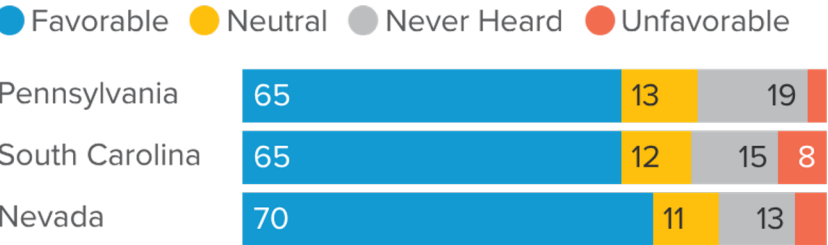
General Election Choice (All PA Voters)



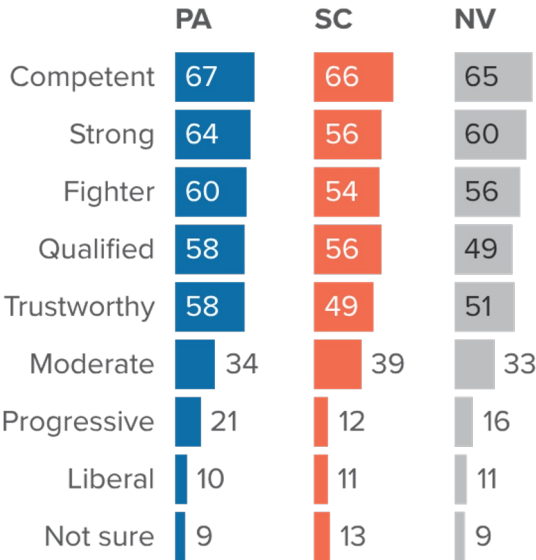
Ability to Win (Democrats)



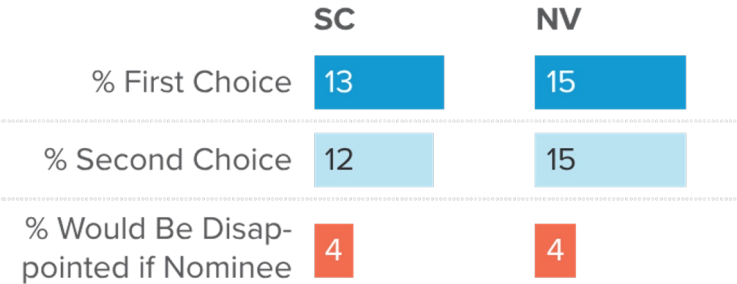
Personal Popularity (Dems Only)



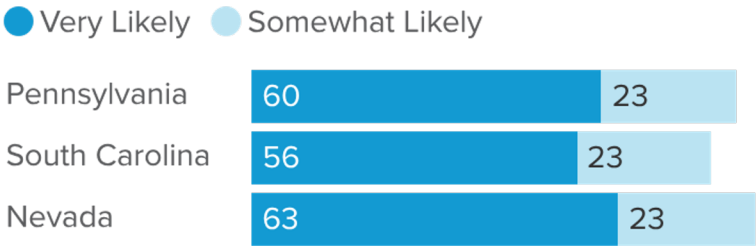
Traits Post-Messaging (% Democrats Selecting)



Primary Vote Choice



Willing to Consider Support Post Bio (Democrats)



Top Concerns (Somewhat/Strongly Concerned)

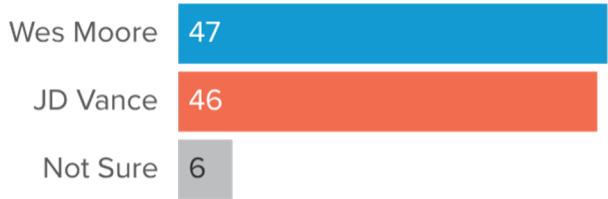
- Has not been a leading voice on progressive priorities like healthcare, climate, or economic inequality
- One of only three Democratic Senators who refused to support the PRO Act - labor's top priority - until he was being considered for Vice President in 2024
- Voted for the Laken Riley Act, which some Democrats opposed as too aggressive on immigration enforcement



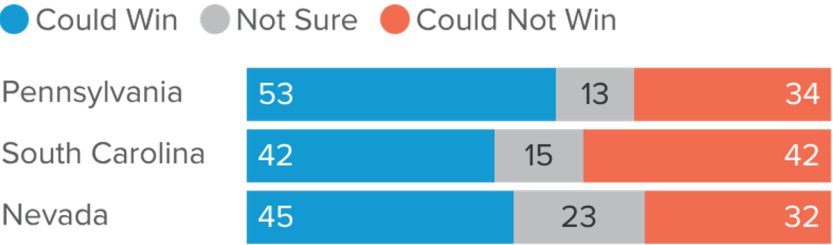
Wes Moore | MD Governor

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

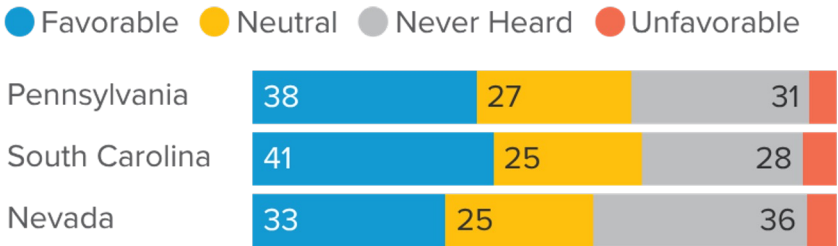
General Election Choice (All PA Voters)



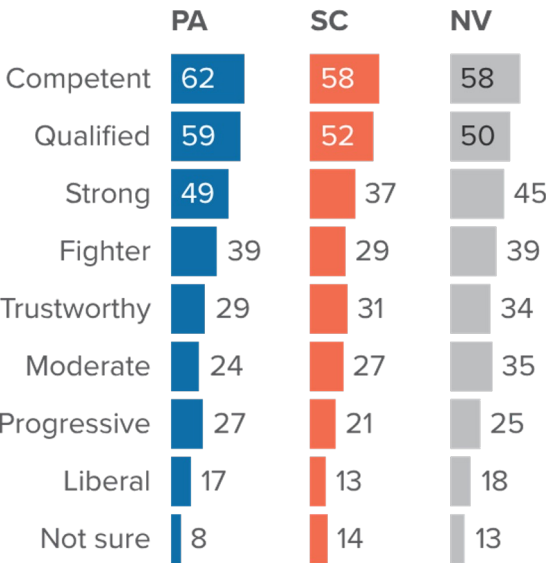
Ability to Win (Democrats)



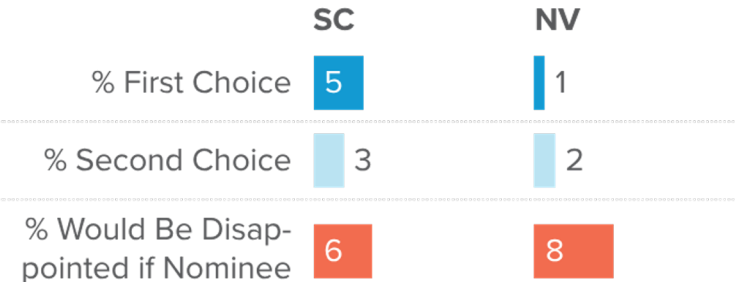
Personal Popularity (Dems Only)



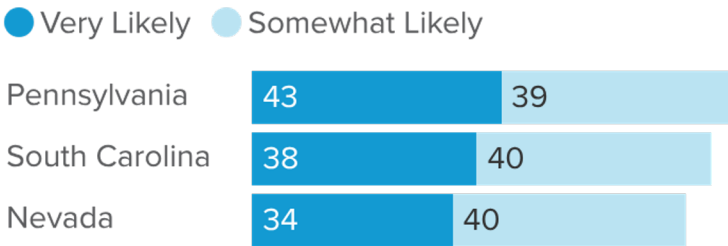
Traits Post-Messaging (% Democrats Selecting)



Primary Vote Choice



Willing to Consider Support Post Bio (Democrats)



Top Concerns (Somewhat/Strongly Concerned)

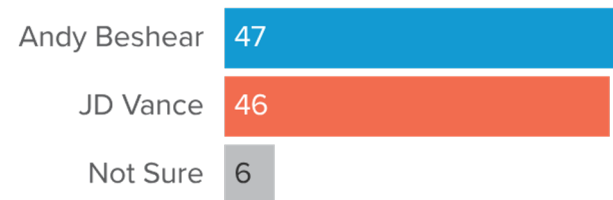
- Has been perceived as less aggressive in fighting the Trump administration than other Democratic governors like Gavin Newsom
- Is less well-known nationally than other potential Democratic candidates
- Maryland's violent crime rate remains above the national average despite recent improvements



Andy Beshear | KY Governor

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

General Election Choice (All PA Voters)



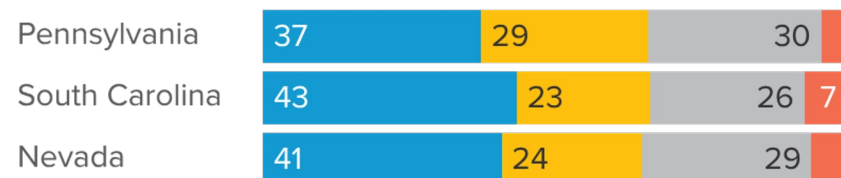
Ability to Win (Democrats)

● Could Win ● Not Sure ● Could Not Win

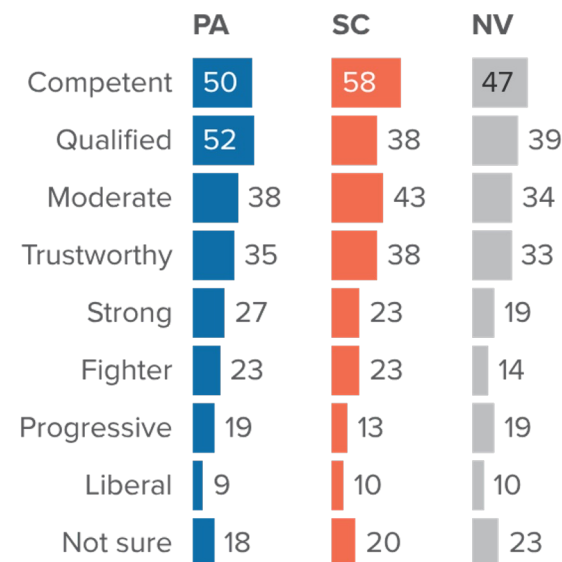


Personal Popularity (Dems Only)

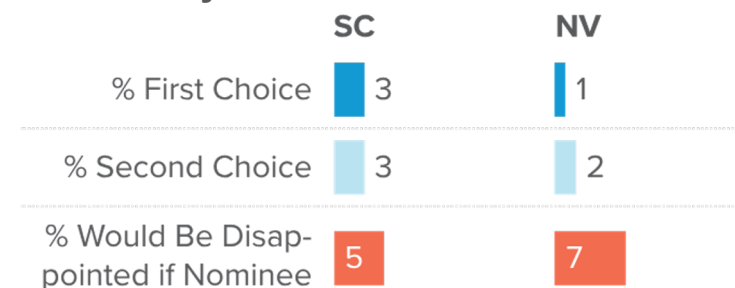
● Favorable ● Neutral ● Never Heard ● Unfavorable



Traits Post-Messaging (% Democrats Selecting)

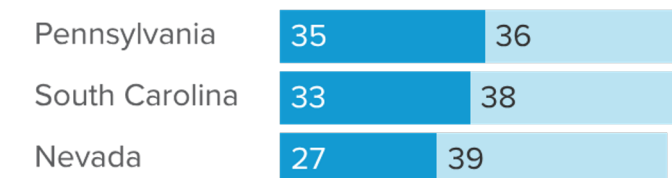


Primary Vote Choice



Willing to Consider Support Post Bio (Democrats)

● Very Likely ● Somewhat Likely



Top Concerns (Somewhat/Strongly Concerned)

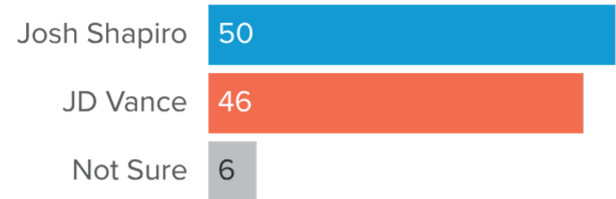
- Has taken a less aggressive approach to fighting the Trump administration than other Democratic governors
- As a private attorney, represented companies seeking tax incentives from his father's administration and defended the Boy Scouts of America during an investigation into allegations of sexual assault.
- Released nearly 2,000 inmates from prison during the pandemic, with reports that nearly half were charged with new crimes within a year
- Has declined to take a clear position on U.S. weapons sales to Israel



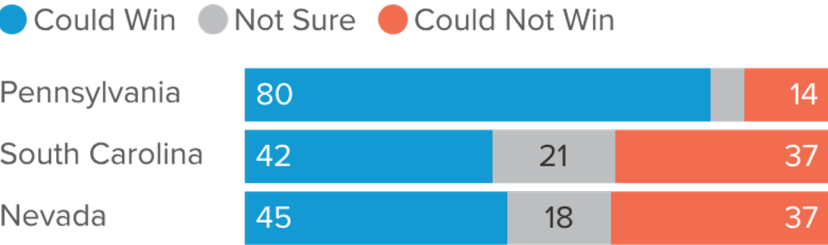
Josh Shapiro | PA Governor

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

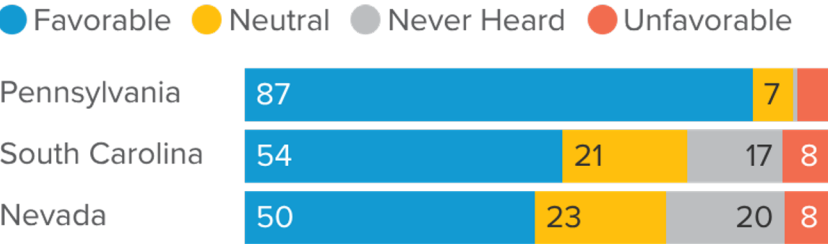
General Election Choice (All PA Voters)



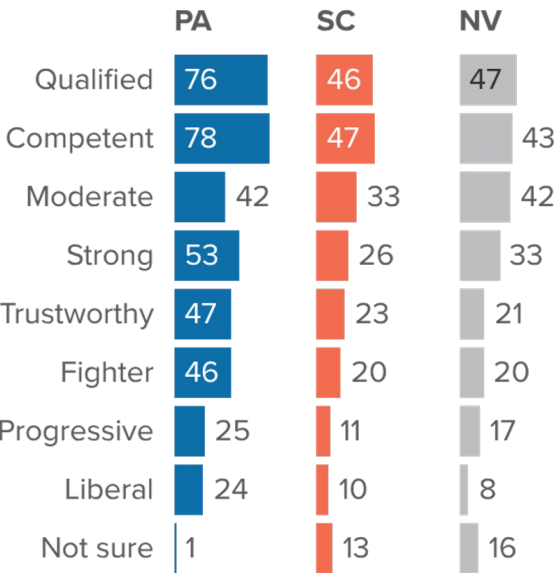
Ability to Win (Democrats)



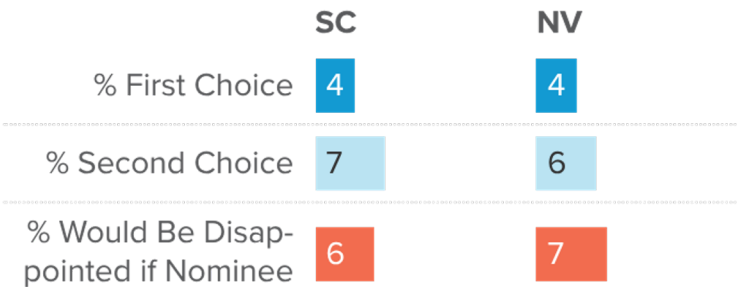
Personal Popularity (Dems Only)



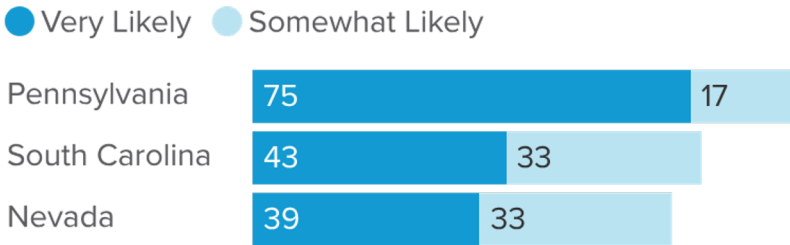
Traits Post-Messaging (% Democrats Selecting)



Primary Vote Choice



Willing to Consider Support Post Bio (Democrats)



Top Concerns (Somewhat/Strongly Concerned)

- Strongly supported Israel's military campaign in Gaza and refused to call for a ceasefire
- Supports natural gas fracking in Pennsylvania despite environmental concerns
- Supported private school vouchers, angering teachers' unions and fellow Democrats
- His administration paid \$295,000 to settle a sexual harassment complaint against a senior cabinet member, with both parties signing a confidentiality agreement
- Compared some pro-Palestinian campus protesters to the Ku Klux Klan



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