

Doubts about candidates tipped scales

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Associated Press

ATLANTA — Casting his vote this month in one of the most politically competitive states in the U.S., Seung Lee happily backed Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp's reelection. But when it came to the other top Republican on the ballot, Senate candidate Herschel Walker, he was uneasy.

Walker "doesn't know what he's talking about," said Lee, a software tester in the Atlanta suburb of Decatur who ultimately backed Democratic incumbent Sen. Raphael Warnock.

He was just one of hundreds of thousands of voters across the U.S. who split their tickets this year in critical contests for governors' mansions and congressional seats.

Voters deciding to split their tickets or buck their party altogether may have helped Democrats mount a stronger-than-expected performance in the midterm elections. AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of this year's electorate, underscores how voters were selective in their choices in spite of today's starkly polarized political climate, often rewarding candidates seen as mainstream while rejecting those viewed as too extreme.

In Georgia, Kemp won more than 200,000 more votes than Walker, a former football star who faced difficulties throughout his campaign, including his exaggerations about his business record, accusations of violence toward his first wife and allegations from two former girlfriends that he paid for their abortions. His underwhelming vote count forced him into a runoff with Warnock.



BRYNN ANDERSON, ASSOCIATED PRESS

A marquee in downtown Atlanta displays the word "vote" on Election Day, Nov. 8, in Atlanta.

While 7 in 10 Georgia voters for Kemp said they enthusiastically backed him, only about half of fellow Republican Walker's voters said that, according to VoteCast. Among Walker supporters, about 4 in 10 said they backed him with reservations and about 1 in 10 said they were simply opposing the other candidates.

The dynamics were even clearer elsewhere.

In Pennsylvania, Josh Shapiro won the governor's race by a larger margin than John Fetterman in the Senate race, earning nearly 280,000 more votes. Fetterman, who experienced a stroke in May, battled concerns about his health in a tight race with Republican celebrity surgeon Mehmet Oz.

VoteCast showed 8% of voters in Pennsylvania split their tickets. Among voters identifying as Republicans, a notable 9% went for Democrat Fetterman, and even more — 18% — went for Shapiro.

Ticket splitting in this election was especially notable given that it has been less evident in recent cy-

cles "as voters have become more polarized and more partisan," said G. Terry Madonna, senior fellow in residence for political affairs at Millersville University of Pennsylvania.

VoteCast shows voters for Oz and Doug Mastriano, the Republican candidate for governor, were less enthusiastic than voters for Fetterman and Shapiro.

Shapiro's voters outpaced fellow Democrat Fetterman's in enthusiasm. Still, despite many voters lacking confidence in Fetterman's health, VoteCast shows Pennsylvania voters were somewhat more concerned about Oz's familiarity with the state.

About 4 in 10 voters for Republican Mastriano said they supported him with reservations, and about 1 in 10 supported him in order to oppose other candidates. Overall, about two-thirds of Pennsylvania's voters were concerned that Mastriano, who commissioned buses for people to attend the Jan. 6 assault on the U.S. Capitol, had views that are "too extreme." Only about 4 in 10

said that of Shapiro.

Mastriano "had a base among (former President Donald) Trump's most loyal supporters, that's why he got the nomination, but he could not expand that base," Millersville University's Madonna said. "Establishment Republicans also moved away from him." Madonna suggested many were content to do so given some of Shapiro's more moderate issue positions, including on fracking.

In Wisconsin and Michigan, incumbent Democratic governors overcame Republican challengers who were endorsed by Trump and repeated his denial of 2020's outcome.

Sixty-three percent of Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers' voters but only 47% of Republican Tim Michels' supporters said they backed their candidate enthusiastically. About as many Michels voters said they supported him with reservations. By contrast, in the race for U.S. Senate, 54% of voters for victorious Republican incumbent Ron Johnson were enthusiastic about him.

Michels was a weaker can-

didate — "he had some liabilities," said Charles Franklin, director of the Marquette Law School poll in Wisconsin. And in the Senate race, though Johnson won reelection over Democrat Mandela Barnes, the margin was narrower than his 2016 or 2010 victories.

"I think there's a strong case here that the Democratic advantage in turnout boosted the governor's race a little over two points from where it was four years ago, and also in the process tightened the Senate race to just that one point margin for Johnson," Franklin said.

In Michigan, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer was more enthusiastically supported than her Republican competitor Tudor Dixon.

More were concerned that Dixon was "too extreme" in her political views than said that of Whitmer, 62% vs. 46%. About 1 in 10 Republican voters backed the Democrat.

Arizona stands out from the rest in measures of enthusiasm. Democrat Katie Hobbs defeated Republican Kari Lake in the race for governor despite Lake's voters being more enthusiastic about the former television news anchor.

Forty-six percent of Hobbs supporters said they enthusiastically supported her, compared to 56% of Lake supporters. Forty-one percent of Hobbs voters backed her with reservations, while 12% were voting against the other candidates.

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