A clear view at your fingertips
Start the day smarter. Stay informed throughout the day. See what's in store for tomorrow. Nationally, Deaths in 2022 Northern California Dog Bite Victim Recovering Well
SUBSCRIBE NOW
$1 FOR THE FIRST 4 WEEKS
Subscribe Now
Sponsored content. Ads help support this site.
Save up to 95% on Terms.

ELECTIONS

Subscribe to Politics

In school board elections across America, voters offer stunning rebuke of culture war politics

Hilton Collins and Laura S. Anderson

Updated 2:00 PM EDT, Wed, Oct 16, 2024 | Published 2:00 PM EDT, Wed, Oct 16, 2024

Screenshot of a video from Moms for Liberty Sunshine.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis discusses Moms for Liberty's success in Fox News interview. Video by Jason Dick for CNN | Moms for Liberty's Sunshine Chapter Facebook Live screenshot | Source: Moms for Liberty Sunshine Chapter Facebook Live

First come the classroom culture wars.

Now, the backlash.

Conservative activists pushing for parents to have more of a say in what their children learn in school have been a major force in U.S. politics for the last decade, finding a ready ally in a conservative Supreme Court and backed by huge funds and restrictions on classroom discussion about issues of gender and race.

Voters in multiple states rejected local school board candidates backed by groups such as Moms for Liberty, choosing moderate or liberal candidates instead.

Just over a third of the candidates endorsed by Moms for Liberty were their wins on Tuesday. The Florida-based nonprofit, which has been at the center of many of the culture wars roiling schools, said it had helped 1,000 candidates nationwide vote-elected. The group's reach stood for the entire year's with slightly better. Overall, the group said 40% of the candidates it has backed this year won their races.

Advertisement

Tiffany Justice, one of the Moms for Liberty founders, said she feels good about the election results even though the candidates backed by the group lost far more races than they won.

Pointing to the candidates who did win, Justice said, "That means you have 50 liberty-minded individuals that are going to go serve on school boards. that are going to make sure that our children in schools, and they're going to make sure that parental rights are respected."

Advertisement

Another group, the 1776 Project, said 48% of the candidates it endorsed — many of them in conservative areas — won. "Considering the national environment, we view that as a strong result," said Ryan Gerlach, the group's founder.

Since the creep to last year's midterm elections, the GOP has sought to strengthen its hold on state legislatures, passing laws restricting abortion and voting rights and eight forming political action committees from greeting voters into school board races in the last cycle — a trend that continued into 2024 and is expected in 2024 — coming to end with flip control of the governs schools but change elections in 2024.

Sponsored
Start the day smarter
A clear view at your fingertips
Start the day smarter.
See what's in store for tomorrow.
$1 for the first 4 weeks
Subscribe Now

But teachers' unions, education activists and others pulverized the less-than-stellar results for Moms for Liberty and the related groups on Tuesday as repudiation of their far-right agenda.

"These results underline what Americans have been telling us for the last two years: They don't want culture wars. They want safe and welcoming public schools where their kids can succeed and thrive," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

Sponsored
CruiseTown
Cruise Ships, Hotels, Vacations
Shop Now

Jon Valant, an expert on education policy, predicted the outcome of this year's races could influence future elections as well.

"It's going to cause school board candidates down the road to seriously question whether affiliating themselves with some of these far-right groups is in their best chances of getting elected," said Valant, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank.

"I think a lot of them are going to come to the conclusion that it is not and that they're going to be more careful about associating themselves with that end of the ideological spectrum."

School fights Culture wars have taken hold of school board elections. Students say they'd rather focus on reading.

Mike Aguilera-Hellweg, a board member for the Lewisville Independent School District in Lewisville, Virginia, on Jan. 16, 2024 | Jacob Ford for The New York Times

Have voters had enough of the culture wars?

Local school boards in Ohio have become a battleground in the culture wars raging in schools. But voters signaled on Tuesday they've had enough.

In Rush County, which is a solidly GOP, four out of eight candidates backed by Moms for Liberty was elected. The single successful candidate was an incumbent.

Advertisement

In the Cincinnati area, most of eight candidates endorsed by Moms for Liberty lost, including two who were vying for seats on the Lakota Local School District board. Tulsa Voters ousted a candidate that collects criticism from media announcers figures that Ohio schools are indoctrinating children or critical race theory, transgender ideology and sexual material into classrooms.

In the Columbus area, several conservatives ran on culture war promises, including keeping transgender girls off girls' sports teams, protecting parents' rights, limiting diversity and inclusion efforts and curtailing sex education. Eight out of a of them lost.

Most of the candidates who campaigned on hot-button issues lost because "by and large voters aren't looking for extremist candidates," said Scott Dillman, president of the Ohio Education Association.

Battle against backlash Parents' rights' groups lacked support. MTC Tulsa a key Florida group as anti-government.

Dillman said the results show that the big progressive school board candidates in the suburbs of Ohio Below said to other high profile race around the state advocacy groups across the political spectrum and local elected officials from both parties weighed in this year on Tim Ryan's' education school board elections, which are nonpartisan but have taken a heated political turn in recent years.

Sponsored
KKUU
Flannels
SHOP NOW

Only one of the Iowa candidates formally endorsed by Moms for Liberty was a winner, Kimberly Ryan, who defeated a longtime incumbent in Pleasant Hill. Ryan Family Leader, an influential Christian conservative group led by Bob Vander Plaats. Nearly all candidates promoted by local Republican elected officials also came up short in the Des Moines suburbs.

Jane Fortner, chair of the Moms For Liberty Polk County Chapter, said several Iowa candidates lost because they were unable to overcome negative ads that portraying inside schools. Some of them stared in this addition this election, she said.

"Students are ludicrous and locker rooms based on their biological sex. Boys shouldn't be in locker rooms with girls," she said. "Parents don't want to be removed from decisions and school Districts across the state, and public identity cannot be taught K-8 in classrooms."

"Our opponents did a good job in misinformation campaigns, telling the public that 'Tt Kill's Blackingland' and other classes were being removed, when in fact, they were just being moved to a department of our state or board suggesting parts were removed," she said.

Elsewhere, Democrats won five seats and seized control of the school board from Republicans in the United Rocks School District in Pennsylvania by defeating candidates recommended by Moms for Liberty.

In Loudoun County, Virginia, which has faced the ire of conservative activists over its handling of transgender issues, Democrats flipped two seats and Moms for Democracy-endorsed candidates won or were leading in six of the nine school board races. Three of the four candidates backed by Moms for Liberty were defeated.

Turning back the clock Will Rules over curriculum usher in an era of segregated schools?

School boards and the emergence of dark money groups

David Nixon, a University of Cincinnati political scientist, said Tuesday's elections show that the culture war is not the dominant issue.

The emergence of "dark money" groups, which don't disclose their donors, and the involvement of political action committees and advocacy groups helping culture wars into school board races has changed how the races are run, Nixon said.

Advertisement

"What we've seen in the past is Ohio is kiddy with pretty far-out ideas Nixon could see without that much seeking and, and of a victim of their own success, they have been so successful in organized efforts and adjacent efforts helping to increase just who is who," he said.

Before, "It was a lot easier to present yourself as a concerned parent or concerned taxpayer or civic minded and not ever be confronted with 'Do you know who we know?'" he said. "You want to shift the conversation to legal policy into the school board, and that's where the Moms for Liberty and groups like that are a formidable organized force. They're working harder to do this, but they're almost at cross purposes with themselves."

Video Screen Shot | Moms for Liberty Sunshine Chapter Facebook Live | Source: Moms for Liberty Sunshine Chapter Facebook Live

Justice, of Moms for Liberty, said her group is looking to expand its influence by getting involved in state Board of Education elections. Eighty-three percent of the candidates the group backed in November's elections were first-time candidates, Justice said, underscoring that means the group has helped "get people get elected over the past two years.

"The bottom line is this. We are helping a whole new group of people get involved in the crime process and to come and run to become or retain public education," she said. "Teachers unions have had a lock on school board elections for years. We're the new kid on the block."

Advertisement

Valant, however, said the election results could be a sign that voters are losing the appeals for turning school issues into culture partisan battles.

"Those cultural war battles have been a real distraction for last couple of years and, I think, have caused some harm to schools," he said. "My hope is that a definite consequence of this is that we're going to see school board candidates backing away from talking about the kinds of that come from affiliating with some of these groups."

Valant said he also hopes the election signals the country is on track to "turning down the temperature a bit" on the culture wars.

Contributing: Zachary Schermele, Chris Higgins, Samantha Fernandez and The Associated Press.

In the classroom Parents without veterans: 13 teachers had complete Return Reviews on race and slavery.

Video Screen Shot | Fox News

This day in pictures
Click on the photo to see more photos from this same time today.

Sponsored
Today
A coming of the long-awaited Ford Bronco Sports Hybrid
Sponsored by Ford
Sponsored by Ford
Learn more
Sponsored by Ford
Learn more
Sponsored by Ford
Learn more

SPORTS

New England Patriots Odds Tracker: Latest Patriots Betting Lines, Futures & Super Bowl Odds

NEWS

Harrison Ford's Expensive Divorce Makes History

PinkPossible | Ad

Learn more

Mckayla Maroney Is Definitely Not a Gymnast Anymore

investing.com | Ad

This Photo Is Not Edited. Look Closer

DailyStuff | Ad

Read More

If A Cat Bites Their Owner, Here's What It Really Means

Explored Planet | Ad

Recommended

Cincinnati Bengals Odds Tracker: Latest Bengals Betting Lines, Futures & Super Bowl Odds

NEWS

Stützle scores in final seconds of OT, leadings Senators past Red Wings 5-4 in Global Series opener

SPORTS

Here's what history hid about Ancient Rome

Science 1st | Ad

National Geographic Outdid Itself With This Photo

investing.com | Ad

More Stories

Pittsburgh Steelers Odds Tracker: Latest Steelers Betting Lines, Futures & Super Bowl Odds

NEWS

With Stafford returning, Rams seek to complete season sweep of Seahawks

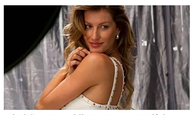
SPORTS

Dolphins' path to AFC East title begins Sunday vs. Raiders

SPORTS

Washington Commanders Odds Tracker: Latest Commanders Betting Lines, Futures & Super Bowl Odds

NEWS



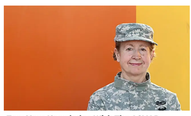
Gisele's New Wedding Dress Is Beautiful

LifestyleA2Z | Ad

Read More

Yellowstone Discontinued - Effective Immediately

StreetInsider.com | Ad



Test Your Knowledge With The ASVAB Practice Test (Questions Here)

ASVAB Practice Test | Ad

She Was A Legend This Is Her Life Lately

StreetInsider.com | Ad

More Stories

Green Bay Packers Odds Tracker: Latest Packers Betting Lines, Futures & Super Bowl Odds

NEWS

Las Vegas Raiders Odds Tracker: Latest Raiders Betting Lines, Futures & Super Bowl Odds

NEWS

Commanders are looking to get back on track when they host the struggling Giants

SPORTS

Best Baltimore Ravens Betting Promo Codes & Bonuses | Top Ravens Betting Sites

NEWS

Advertisement

© 2023 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Satellite Information Network, LLC.