WIKI VERIFICATION

Assessing How Wikipedia Shaped the 2024 Campaign Narrative

Key stats and insights on how the world's most visited website influenced the election

Background

Where do voters turn when they want information about a candidate they don't know? Wikipedia. There's debate about the size of the universe of persuadable voters, and how politically literate these voters are, but we can be sure of one thing: if they actively seek out information about candidates online, the information they access will come from Wikipedia or be shaped by it.

Wikipedia is the world's most valuable internet real estate and generates over 76 billion page views in 2024.

While not a U.S. politician, results for Roberta Metsola, the president of the EU Parliament, in Google are instructive. Wikipedia dominates the results, capturing the majority of above-the-fold screen space. For American politicians, official and campaign websites generally have better visibility but the KnowledgePanel and "People also ask" sections will typically be populated with data from Wikipedia.

Aside from being the most visited source of information on the internet, Wikipedia has value beyond direct results. It's the largest source of information for Google's Knowledge Graph (Google pays for this data) and Siri's responses. In the age of AI, it's also the most likely source of training material for LLMs including Open AI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, and even Elon Musk's xAI/Grok. Meanwhile, with limited resources, journalists are stretched thin and regularly rely on Wikipedia to write their stories.

With that in mind, how impactful were Wikipedia articles in key races in the run-up to the election? While the amount of data made available by Wikipedia is limited, pageview

information can be [collected and compiled](). The insights that follow are largely derived from that data.

1. Wikipedia pages get high traffic in the run-up to election day

Across the seven competitive Senate races in 2024 (Arizona, Nevada, Michigan, Montana, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania), incumbents saw their articles get an average of 472,464 of pageviews year to date on election day. Overall, 10 of the 25 most visited pages on Wikipedia in 2024 [were political]() and pages for both presidential candidates and the 2024 presidential election saw more than 25 million views each.

Challengers (and those running for open seats) received more visits, perhaps reflecting their lower name recognition allowing for more persuasion. They received an average of 546,095 pageviews in 2024 through election day. Dragging down the average is 90,959 views for Tim Sheehy, Senator Jon Tester's successful challenger in Montana, who only got an article on October 7th. Excluding this outlier, non-incumbents saw over 600,000 article views in 2024 before the election.

Much of this traffic comes in the 30 days before election day when voters are making up their minds. Approximately a quarter (23%) of views for most candidates came in the 30 days before the election. The number is lower for incumbents at 19%. However, an incumbent (Bob Casey) had the highest percentage of his 2024 visits in the runup to the election at 25%.

Across Senate campaigns in 2024, candidates saw their articles get an average of slightly over 100,000 views in the 30-day run-up to election day.

In the House, 22% of views to candidate articles came in the 30 days before election day. However, the proportion was higher for non-incumbents who saw 29% of views come in the 30 days before the election reflecting higher interest as voters made up their minds. In competitive House races, the average article saw over 15,000 views in the 30-day run-up to election day.

2. Almost all Senate candidates have Wikipedia articles; House races are less consistent

Wikipedia has strict general notability guidelines that subjects of articles must meet requiring sustained coverage, which can be a tough bar for first-time candidates. Incumbents have an easier threshold to meet: all members of Congress (and state legislatures) are considered inherently notable on Wikipedia and deserving of articles.

When it comes to Wikipedia articles in competitive elections, this created a divide between House and Senate races. In the seven competitive Senate races, only Eric Hovde, Tammy Baldwin's unsuccessful challenger in Wisconsin, was not the subject of an article.

The picture is different in House races. In 38 competitive races included in our data, 14 challengers did not have articles.

This may play to some candidates' advantage, but it can only be a disadvantage. Wikipedia articles are expected to be written from a neutral point of view but they are community-edited and campaigns cannot directly control them. For candidates with widely covered scandals or liabilities, removing them from Wikipedia (or at least reducing their visibility) can be a challenge but is important as part of a larger SEO strategy to uplift a positive narrative about the candidate.

While managing an *existing* Wikipedia page is a no-brainer for every candidate, non-incumbents will want to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of creating a page if one does not exist, even if their candidate is eligible.

3. More views ≠ victory

Kari Lake was the candidate with the most visited page in the 30 days before the election and overall in 2024. Her page got over a million views. Ruben Gallego defeated her in a bright spot for Democrats this cycle. Sam Brown in Nevada is next on the list with slightly over 800,000 views in 2024. He also lost to Senator Jackie Rosen who had slightly over a quarter of his views. Rosen had the least visited Wikipedia page out of all of the Senate candidates.

Although correlation does not equal causation, among the six competitive Senate races where both candidates had articles, Michigan was the only one in which the candidate with more Wikipedia views ultimately won.

In the House, candidates with higher views won 60% (30-day views) or 65% (total year-to-date views) of races but this is heavily influenced by the fact that incumbents, who won most races, had more page views in 57% of races (excluding challengers without a page, 95% if those are considered).

Seven challengers who won had more views than their incumbent opponent (CA-13, CA-27, CO-08, NY-22, OR-05, and PA-07). In 14 races (AZ-01, AZ-06, CA-22, CT-05, IA-01, ME-02, MT-01, NE-02, NM-02, NV-03, NY-17, OH-09, OH-13, PA-17), the non-incumbent had more views but went on to lose the election.

4. Article quality matters

In many close elections, it's clear minimal to no effort was put into managing the narrative on Wikipedia. Take for example Mondaire Jones' race against Mike Lawler in New York's 17th district. In the election, Jones tried to [rebrand himself as a moderate](#) and [disavowed his previous support for "defund the police"](#) as he attempted a comeback in a swing district.

His Wikipedia article failed to keep pace. Here's how the article introduced Jones' positions:

Before his 2022 defeat, Jones was described as a rising star on the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. He is an advocate for Medicare for All and the Green New Deal. In June 2020, he supported calls to defund the police, and said that his goal in running for Congress was to "fight systemic racism". When first elected, he became one of the two first openly gay Black members of Congress.

Despite raising millions, a view of the article's history shows little evidence that his campaign or allies made any effort to influence how Wikipedia described his record. In a race lost by ~23,000 votes, his Wikipedia had 149,196 page views in 2024 and 42,580 in the 30 days before the election (not taking into account numerous Wikipedia mirrors and information sources reliant on Wikipedia).

In contrast, his opponent infamously edited his own article, and reviewing the history of both articles hint at an ongoing effort by Lawler or his allies to influence the narrative perhaps accounting for the prominence of Jones' early leftwing positions.

Similarly, Matt Cartwright lost his campaign for reelection in a district won by Donald Trump. The first and most prominent non-biographical detail provided in his article on election day noted that he was "currently the only member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus from a district which voted for Donald Trump for president." Introducing his political positions, the article highlighted that "Cartwright votes with President Joe Biden's stated position 100% of the time, according to *FiveThirtyEight* analysis completed in January 2023."

5. Blunders can be costly PR

Wikipedia regularly sees ham-handed attempts at shaping the narrative both in and out of politics. Many are caught with their hand in the cookie jar causing PR damage. A few notable examples this cycle:

- As previously mentioned, *New York Magazine* reported on Congressman Mike Lawler (R-NY) editing his own page and being blocked by Wikipedia until he verified his identity. His account has been inactive since being unblocked.

- Vivek Ramaswamy paid an editor to scrub biographical details before announcing his presidential campaign. The editor disclosed that he was paid by Vivek resulting in media coverage.

- One of the many scandals George Santos (R-NY) faced before his censure and expulsion was revelations from his Wikipedia editing, including his own article as a member-elect.

- Portland city commissioner Rene Gonzales was discovered to have spent $6,400 in city funds for eight requested edits to his Wikipedia page.

- Outside politics, ultramarathon runner Camille Herron lost her Lululemon sponsorship after Wikipedia edits downplaying other runners' accomplishments while hyping up her own were reported on.

These examples underline that while managing reputations on Wikipedia is important for public figures, so is doing so without detection. Anyone can edit Wikipedia but it's usually not a good idea — Wikipedia is proactive in enforcing its policies against conflict of interest editing. Following Wikipedia's paid editing guideline through disclosures opens its own can of worms as Ramaswamy's experience shows. While technically against Wikipedia's terms of use, paid editing is the only way third parties can influence how Wikipedia covers areas of interest to them.

Managing Wikipedia packs a big punch for campaigns

Many voters, donors, and other stakeholders perceive Wikipedia as a credible source of information, or at least a neutral third party. Smart campaigns engage in a smart way to shape the contents of articles that affect their campaign without fingerprints.

Working under strict confidentiality, influence on Wikipedia helps campaigns control their narrative and build momentum. Successful insertion of talking points resulted in media reflecting campaign messaging given their reliance on Wikipedia for background.

Following successful adjustments to their article, one client remarked that having edits implemented on Wikipedia is like "writing the first draft of history". This cycle, we worked with some campaigns to minimize negativity in their articles. Other campaigns wanted to highlight their candidate's accomplishments while others simply needed to ensure that vandalism would be quickly responded to. Whatever the circumstances, influencing Wikipedia coverage is a key for campaigns to ensure their candidate's brand on Wikipedia and across media coverage reflects the campaign's messaging needs.

In the age of AI, Wikipedia is a crucial frontier for brand and reputation management. While campaigns, trade groups, and PACs are common clients, notable people and entities of all types globally can benefit. If we can help, reach out at contact@spd.llc for more on shaping your Wikipedia narrative and online reputation.