Opinion
NCR Voices



A woman casts her ballot at a polling station in Detroit as Democrats and Republicans held their Michigan presidential primary Feb. 27. (OSV News/Reuters/Dieu-Nalio Chery)



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The New York Times' Nate Cohn opened his analysis of why so many Michigan voters selected "uncommitted" in the Democratic primary Feb. 27 with this lede: "In Tuesday night's results in Michigan, around one in eight Democrats voted 'uncommitted' in the Democratic primary — a protest of the Biden administration's policies toward Israel and the war in Gaza."

Had that sentence been uttered in court by a lawyer, opposing counsel would have objected, "Assumes facts not in evidence." On MSNBC, the first "man on the street" interview I saw had an older voter in Detroit say he cast his ballot for "uncommitted" because he thought Biden was too old and Trump was too extreme. He didn't mention Gaza.

Cohn acknowledges that the last time a Democratic incumbent sought the presidential nomination, in 2012, 11% of Michigan voters cast their ballots for "uncommitted" but he never explores the reasons for the different interpretations of what is only a two-percentage-point difference.

"President Biden won Michigan's Democratic primary on Tuesday but faced a notable challenge from voters selecting 'uncommitted' to protest his handling of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, a potential sign of vulnerability for Biden among rank-and-file Democrats," was the lede in The Washington Post's article by Yasmeen Abutaleb and Marianne LeVine. Later, they called the uncommitted vote a "strong showing" and failed to mention the 2012 results.

Politico's Elena Schneider and Adam Cancryn were more balanced in their lede: "President Joe Biden scored a decisive win in the Michigan primary on Tuesday evening, clearing an organized protest vote against his handling of the Israel-Hamas war though not necessarily by enough to calm Democratic jitters."

> While all three articles featured representatives of the pro-Palestinian community claiming victory, no one asks what would happen if Biden were

to throw one of the United States' strongest allies under the bus.

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Biden won Arab-American voters overwhelmingly in 2020, and given his stalwart support for Israel, there is sure to be a reaction on the part of those voters. In Michigan's Wayne County, home to Dearborn and its large Arab American population, "uncommitted" took 17% of the vote. In Washtenaw County, home to the University of Michigan, "uncommitted" garnered the same 17% percent, so white liberals who read Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* are angry with Biden about the war in Gaza too.

"Overall, Arab Americans make up 2 percent of the state's population and probably an even smaller share of the electorate," Cohn acknowledged. Still, in a close race, and Michigan was close the last two election cycles, even a sliver of the electorate can make a difference.

Where, then, is the liberal media bias? Because while all three articles cited above, and the coverage on CNN and MSNBC Tuesday night, featured representatives of the pro-Palestinian community claiming victory, no one asks what would happen if Biden were to throw one of the United States' strongest allies under the bus.

Let's set aside the fact that some of us believe there are still politicians who consider national interests on a par with electoral viability, that Biden might be one of them, and that abandoning America's long-standing ally Israel in order to garner votes in Dearborn might cause us to question that belief. We still wouldn't vote for Trump.

Let us set aside, too, the fact that Arab Americans are unlikely to vote for Trump either. They may sit the election out. They may cast a protest vote for a third-party candidate. But voting for someone who is explicit in his hatred for Muslims is an odd way to punish someone, Biden, who is trying to negotiate a cease-fire.

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The political reason Biden won't shift his policy on Israel anytime soon is because doing so would hand the GOP a bludgeon with which they could wreck his campaign. The ad would start with gruesome images of the pogrom last Oct. 7, when more Jews

were killed than on any single day since the Shoah.

Then the GOP attack ad would probably cut to video footage from Sept. 11, 2001, the day more American civilians died from terrorism than any other.

After showing the planes flying into the World Trade Center, the ad might highlight images of the citizens of Newfoundland, Canada, heading to Gander Airport to take care of those whose planes were forced to land when the U.S. closed its airspace, Pope John Paul II denouncing the attack at his general audience the next day, or the Queen's Guard playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, signs of solidarity and mourning.

Finally, this section of the ad would show footage of Palestinians celebrating the attacks on 9/11. That footage was disturbing at the time. It has lost none of its emotional power.

Do the political analysts at these major media outlets not think through how any shift away from support for Israel would play out? Most journalists went to elite schools like the University of Michigan and would be disproportionately inclined to buy the narrative that has emerged about Israel being the bad guy in the war. Do you hear anyone on MSNBC point out anymore that the killing of civilians is high in large part because Hamas embeds itself in civilian targets?

The first question of journalism — cui bono? — goes unasked and unanswered in reporting on this war. Hamas, not Israel, profits from civilian deaths, which could cease tomorrow if Hamas cared to turn over Yahya Sinwar, who plotted the pogrom of Oct. 7. Did that play a part in the media's failure to think through the implications of Biden backing off his support for Israel?

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Look at the reporting noted above. In his piece, the Times' Cohn discusses the defection of Arab American voters from the Democrats. He writes: "And their arguments for defection — complicity in genocide — are plainly enough to switch a

vote if taken at face value."

There is nothing technically wrong there. Cohn is not saying if he thinks the Biden administration is guilty of "complicity in genocide" but the phrase is repeated nonetheless, and it is not qualified or balanced by someone who points out that it is Hamas, not Israel, that openly states genocide is its raison d'etre.

The Post article quoted a Palestinian-American activist, Layla Elabed, who said, "We are trying to save lives right now. This is beyond electoral politics." Very high-minded and the message is clear: Biden's support for Israel is responsible for lives being lost in Gaza. The reporters apparently did not press her about Hamas' responsibility for the loss of life in Gaza.

When the narrative gets repeated enough, people believe it.

Media bias didn't win in Michigan, Joe Biden did, and he won big. The media focus on the small vote for "uncommitted" was disproportionate and difficult to explain. It may be no more complicated than that it gave the pundits something to discuss.

It was the accompanying laziness with which the war was discussed that is more worrisome. It is shocking the way people in the West, after almost 80 years of shouting, "Never again," are so quick to believe narratives that may not be explicitly antisemitic, but which are difficult to explain otherwise.