

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

WHAT'S ON THE BALLOT IN NORTH CAROLINA? ABORTION, TRANS LIFE, A GOVERNORSHIP, & MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY

LAURA FLANDERS - Election 2024 is just weeks away and it's a cliché by now to say that it's the election of a lifetime. But after all the drama, elections come down to voters and places. State by state, polling place by polling place is where elections are actually lost or won. As followers of this program know, we believe that studying what happens at the local level teaches us a lot about our nation as a whole. Over the last four years, we've looked closely at North Carolina, a place with an increasingly multiracial population that's roughly split 50-50 between the two major parties. It's controversially gerrymandered at the local level and firmly held by Republicans there. But in national elections, it is very much a battleground. In late July, I had a chance to discuss where things stand with some of those we featured in past episodes, and that's the special report we have for you now, Election 2024, the North Carolina view. In a conference room in the Durham Convention Center this summer, I sat down with some guests that regular viewers may recognize, and one newcomer. I'm very happy to welcome back Serena Sebring, Executive Director of [Blueprint North Carolina](#). Mab Segrest who is the Research Director at Blueprint. And joining us for the first time is Courtney Patterson, who is the Eastern North Carolina organizer for Blueprint, North Carolina. Welcome, all. So Mab, I'm going to start with you. You've always made the case to me that what happens in North Carolina isn't just important for people to live there with all due respect, but also for the nation. Why?

MAB SEGREST - One of the things I was thinking about kind of in preparation here is both literal and metaphorical. Like I'm a terrain person, I want to know the terrain. And in North Carolina, we live in a hurricane season for six months of the year. And we know about hurricanes that there's five categories. You know, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth, and the fifth is devastating in terms of winds like from 200 miles an hour down to 70 for that. And you don't want to be hit by cat five. This is the storm season, you know, and there's no telling where they're going to hit, but there seeing some Cat 5 possibilities there. And so when they do hit, what do we do and how do we prepare for that and so forth. And it seems to me it's a Category 5 offshore.

LAURA FLANDERS - Now we're talking politics.

LAURA FLANDERS - Yeah, yeah. I think you, Serena, have said it more than once on our program. This moment, what's the choice? What is the choice facing us?

SERENA SEBRING - Well, I think that this moment in North Carolina is telling because in some ways, because of the political history here, North Carolina is often a state in which you'll

see one outcome at the presidential level and another at the gubernatorial. In this year, we know that both of those races will be determined by a margin of approximately 1.5%. We are as much of a swing state as could possibly exist. And in that swinging, what we see are decks that are not stacked evenly. On the one hand, we do have, you know, a robust progressive infrastructure that is battle tested, that has come through storms together, that is woven through Eastern North Carolina, where rural Black folks will make the difference in this race. But on the other hand, we have a well-funded and powerful opposition that is the getting the spotlight of the country on it. And really, what's at stake at both levels, at the gubernatorial and at the presidential level is safety. Is about whose safety matters and who will provide it. The next months in North Carolina will not just determine what happens in one election or another, but what this country is willing to invest in the South, what the South is willing to offer to Black rural populations who have for so long on their backs, democracy is being built. Against terror, against racism, against, you know, voter intimidation patterns that have gone in some ways, unchanged for decades.

LAURA FLANDERS - Talk about where voting rights stand at this moment in your county and statewide. What are the challenges?

COURTNEY PATTERSON - Well, you know, voting rights in the state has taken a big hit. It has really taken a big, a big hit. This year, we passed a House Bill 747. Now you have to have your ballots in by 7:30 on election night. Whereas previously, you had three days. You had the three day grace period to get the ballot in. And most people, I think that vote absentee ballot pretty much are people who can't get to the polls. They're in a rest home, they're in a hospital somewhere. 747 allows people to roam around in the polling places. With all of the things that are happening, we talk about safety and everything, this is going to cause some real issues. They're allowed to listen to conversations, even take photos in those polling places. I think about before 1898 and the Wilmington coup d'état, I think that's the best description of what happened there.

LAURA FLANDERS - Segregationist planters backed by violent white terrorists called Red Shirts, carried out a massacre in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898. They overturned an elected government, instituted Jim Crow and set back multiracial democracy for decades across the South.

COURTNEY PATTERSON - We are headed in that direction again. We are basically slowly headed in that direction through gerrymandering. It takes away the power of the people and it gives the power to politicians. They decide who their constituents are. And so voting rights in North Carolina are not in a good place right now.

LAURA FLANDERS - North Carolina has one of the most dramatic governor's races currently happening in the nation, pitting Attorney General Josh Stein, a democrat against Lieutenant

Governor Mark Robinson, a Trump-endorsed Republican. We had a chance to talk to Stein about the importance of the race in March of 2023.

JOSH STEIN - The people of North Carolina, we are in really, existential may be too melodramatic, but there is a crystal clear choice where at a crossroads in North Carolina. Which way are we going to go? Are we going to go forward? Are we going to be dragged backwards? And of course, I want to do everything I can to keep us moving in the right direction. Well, North Carolina really is a bit of a microcosm of this country. We're a 50-50 state, elections swing back and forth. We're on the front lines of a number of critical battles, whether it's people's right to vote or whether it's their right to exercise decisions about their own bodies through reproductive decisions. You know, we're the last southern state other than Florida, in which abortion remains legal. And so our clinics are being, you go in the parking lot, the stories have said. They have Tennessee plates, Georgia plates, South Carolina plates, Mississippi plates, Alabama plates, even Texas. People are coming here because they're being deprived their personal freedoms in those states. And so I feel like we're really on the front lines about protecting people's freedoms.

LAURA FLANDERS - Not long after we spoke with Stein, the GOP controlled state legislature in North Carolina overturned Democratic Governor Roy Cooper's veto in order to ban most abortions after 12 weeks. That's a ban gubernatorial candidate Mark Robinson would like to take further. Our correspondent, Lewis Raven Wallace took a deeper look at Robinson's plans for the state.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson came onto the political scene in 2018 after a speech he gave on gun rights at the Greensboro City Council.

(**MARK ROBINSON**) You want to restrict my right to buy a firearm and protect myself from some of the very people you are talking about in here tonight.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - [Lewis] Since then, he's been a fount of colorful remarks.

(**MARK ROBINSON**) Let me shut up before I get in trouble.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - [Lewis] Now that he's running for governor of the state, his opponent Josh Stein, has made this clip famous.

(**MARK ROBINSON**) Abortion in this country is not about protecting the lives of mothers, it's about killing a child because you aren't responsible enough to keep your skirt down.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - But it also reflects his actual policy stance. If Robinson became governor, he would push a total ban on abortions.

(MARK ROBINSON) It's time for us to stop letting these children be abused at these schools.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - And his agenda is also cultural. He wants to restrict what kids here are taught about sexual health, sexuality, and gender identity. Here he is speaking at a Baptist church in late June.

(MARK ROBINSON) There's no reason anybody anywhere in America should be telling any child about transgenderism, homosexuality, any of that filth. And yes, I called it filth.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - Robinson refused to recant this statement after many Democrats in the state called for him to resign.

(MARK ROBINSON) I'm going to resign. I'm going to resign myself to continue to keep kicking them in the teeth.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - With Robinson's support, the North Carolina legislature passed the [Parents' Bill of Rights](#) that restricts young people from accessing sexual and gender identity education or changing their names or pronouns without parental consent. In the lead up to that, Robinson led a task force that claimed to be investigating quote, "indoctrination" in schools. The critics said the task force violated state law by not announcing or recording its meetings or creating any record of what they actually did.

(MARK ROBINSON) They don't believe that your children should be educated. They believe that they should be indoctrinated.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - He called it The [F.A.C.T.S Task Force](#). The F.A.C.T.S report claimed that kids were indeed being indoctrinated with critical race theory, so-called white shaming and sexualization of kids.

(MARK ROBINSON) You are the soldiers that stand on that hill in this defense.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - Robinson's speeches tend to be apocalyptic with lots of insinuations of violence or direct suggestions of violence to defend what he calls a Christian patriotic nation.

(MARK ROBINSON) Get mad at me if you want to. Some folks need killing. It's time for somebody to say it.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - In a recent campaign speech, he implied that Christian Patriots should and will have an armed uprising if need be.

(**MARK ROBINSON**) The angry and indignant patriots of the United States and North Carolina are going to reign this government back in control.

LEWIS RAVEN WALLACE - From North Carolina, this is Lewis Raven Wallace reporting.

LAURA FLANDERS - We invited Mark Robinson's campaign to respond, but received nothing back but silence. Meanwhile, in Durham, our guests were clear that the stakes in this election couldn't be higher. As Alex Lafferty, a trans activist from Moore County explained, in 2023 GOP super majorities in the house and the Senate banned gender-affirming care for young people like Alex if they hadn't already started their transition.

ALEX LAFFERTY - Medically, I have my rights, you know. In this state, minors cannot take gender-affirming care. I was grandfathered in because I already had my full plan, which is great and fantastic, but there's a lot of people I know, a lot of trans people who want to go on hormones who don't have the ability to. And there are things coming up where they want to ban gender-affirming care for not just minors, but of any age, which is genocide. Which is genocide. Like, you can't destroy an entire community and see that as legal.

LAURA FLANDERS - For Serena Sebring and other organizers, the focus now is on building safety before the storm. At the level of community safety building, what have you been doing? What's exciting perhaps to share? What's important to share? Because if you are right and this hurricane is coming our way, it's not just North Carolina that's going to need to have certain networks and facilities in place, relationships in place. So I know this is a rough question, but what are you doing to stop the worst happening? And if it happens, what will you have in place that you're proud of?

SERENA SEBRING - When I think about what's important to do with regard to safety and democracy in this moment, I have to start by listening to folks who have been registering, turning out, educating voters in North Carolina, in rural places where the news doesn't cover too often. Conditions that are preventative of voting because of fear, because of very real threats to safety at the polling places in Eastern North Carolina. And then we train on deescalation, we train on bystander intervention, and we train our folks as much as we are able to understand where the threats are to prevent and predict that violence so that we can get out ahead of it. What we know is that we have more people who believe in democracy. We have more people who believe that their neighbor's voices matter. And so it's our job to reach them and to bring them all into this. And it's not just the voters, it's the ones we want to vote. It's the ones that might stay away if we weren't out there. If they couldn't find someone who looked like them when they went to the

polling places or someone who they recognized because they helped them to survive a hurricane. So I think we use infrastructure and we use people in order to meet what is a threat that ultimately is countered by one thing. And that's massive turnout. The best thing that we can do to protect safety in North Carolina is register and turn out voters at a scale that is historic.

COURTNEY PATTERSON - And actually bringing trained persons to polling places to deescalate any kinds of possibilities. And they really counter a lot of things that would be happening at a polling place, which I think in 2024 with this Cat 5, it's going to be very, very important that we basically continue that.

LAURA FLANDERS - I mean, because we've also seen at school board meetings, Proud Boys show up in masks. This is a state where we've seen very emboldened right-wing action in public venues. Are you afraid of that?

COURTNEY PATTERSON - Yes, you know, I'm seriously afraid that they will show up in these polling places and they will take advantage of, they feel empowered right now. They feel that they are above the law. So they will do things. They'll take chances because they feel like they'll get away with it.

MAB SEGREST - To me what this is, is like the danger of white minority rule, like that these maps can be redrawn and then fewer and fewer white people make more and more decisions for more and more people, and that's a danger.

SERENA SEBRING - I think what Mab and Courtney have traced out is a recipe for disenfranchisement and a constriction of democracy. When we see a single party in control of all branches of government. And that, that is a capture of a state apparatus that we are seeing yes, in North Carolina, in other places as well. But this is a model for what it looks like for a single party to capture all of those branches. And as Mab says, in this case, we're talking about white governance and we're talking about minority rule.

MAB SEGREST - In 2024, state capture is possible at the national level because it's been petri dished in these other places like North Carolina. See that if they get it, they can do anything they want to and so they get more and more and more extreme, more violent, more dangerous because they're unchecked. And as, what's I think fearsome in national politics, which make this the Cat 5, is that there'll be state capture at the national level.

LAURA FLANDERS - In our award-winning five part series on the roots of the January 6th insurrection in North Carolina, our show went to half a dozen counties across the eastern part of the state and traced the very real threats that those working for multiracial democracy face. From the expansion of private paramilitary training facilities to white supremacist, well-armed police

to gerrymandering, domestic terror and the weaponizing of trans, queer, and homophobic hate. You can see how organizers on the ground are working and what they're up against in our archives. But it's not all doom and gloom. As Josh Stein put it.

JOSH STEIN - We have an unfortunate history in North Carolina. There's no denying it, in fact we have to stare at it head on so that we're aware of what has happened, to ensure that we are not pursuing that path at all. I mean, we had the grandfather clauses, we had poll taxes, we had literacy tests. All of these things were tools by white people in power to keep Black people from participating fully. It's a privilege to be able to do this work. My family moved to North Carolina right after I was born so that my father, Adam, could join with Julius Chambers and James Ferguson, two of the premier civil rights lawyers in modern history. And they formed North Carolina's first integrated law firm. And those gentlemen and the other lawyers who joined them, including many talented women, went on to lead the legal battle against discrimination and for equality. Big cases on employment non-discrimination, integration of schools and public accommodations, voting rights, just the laws that really help make North Carolina closer to what it's supposed to be. And frankly, this entire country close to what it's supposed to be.

JAMES E. FERGUSON, II - Well, at that time, we didn't have to sit and wait for cases to come in the door. We knew that a part of our mission was to try to create a desegregated society.

JOSH STEIN - North Carolina is rich with people that we can look to who made an impact, made a difference in the direction of our state, but also the whole country.

PAULI MURRAY - If you rip away everything, repression is the business of not respecting one's personhood.

JOSH STEIN - Pauli Murray, who was fighting not only the fight on race, but on gender and sexuality. there's so much to look to and I agree that these people, they faced a much tougher fight, honestly, I think than we do because it's hard to remember. But I mean, my dad's law office was firebombed burned to the ground, Chambers' car was bombed twice, you know, people were killed. And we have to take inspiration from those folks and know that they were able to persevere through bleak times and tough political times where, you know, those in power didn't want to give it up, but they went and grabbed what was fair and right. And we have to keep moving forward.

LAURA FLANDERS - The most recent polling shows Stein is leading Robinson in the governor's race, but our panel is focused on the broader horizon.

MAB SEGREST - When the big storm's coming, you know, you can feel it in your bones. You can hear it in the wind and the trees, you know, and I think people across this country have a sense, the big storm's coming,

COURTNEY PATTERSON - The Cat 5 is the [Project 2025](#). That is it. And I tell you, I am afraid. I am very afraid that depending on what happens in this election, where we will end up with a democracy. I'm afraid for my children, for my grandchildren, and even those yet unborn.

LAURA FLANDERS - Project 2025 being the almost 900-page document you know, gathered by the Heritage Foundation, encompassing the kind of strategic planning for every department coming from the right wing's think tanks, that was released about a year ago.

MAB SEGREST - Grace Paley talked about enormous changes at the last minute, you know, and there's a lot of destabilization that people feel and you know, like there are these opportunities for the kind of big social rearrangements. And it could be a good big change. You know, it could be segregation is over, it could be apartheid is gone. It could be the Berlin Wall is down. I only want to get so despondent, but I also want to be prepared. And I feel like the thing that prepares us for community safety is also the thing that gets our muscles of self-governance and, you know, flexing and our ability to imagine different communities flexing and all those kind of things. So that 'enormous changes at the last minute' can bring good stuff too.

LAURA FLANDERS - It's been our habit, I think, Serena, to give you the last word on many of these episodes, so I guess I'm going to do it again. Yeah, enormous positive changes at the last minute, also possible?

SERENA SEBRING - I believe that positive changes are possible. I believe that in moments of chaos, there is possibility. I think we have to take care of each other in order to create the possibility for that change to happen. And it is exhausting for the leaders on the front lines of democracy in our state. And so if I think about what makes big change at the last minute possible, what makes these transformations even in chaos possible, it is the real human capacity to withstand this storm. We have to take care of each other now.

LAURA FLANDERS - Memo from Serena Sebring: 'We have to take care of each other.' Serena, Courtney, Mab, thank you so much for being with us tonight and for being part of this project together, for pulling in the show to participate in this reporting. It's been a real pleasure and an honor. Till the next time, stay kind, stay curious. For "Laura Flanders & Friends," I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us.

Election season 2024 has been marked by political violence. As I record this, there have been not one, but two assassination attempts on the GOP presidential candidate's life. Now politicians are

blaming one another. Ideologues are saying it's the ideologues of the opposing camp. Is it media? Is it social media? Is it just possibly guns? While those are questions for tomorrow, right now, it is important to get perspective. It's not mostly presidential candidates who are in the crosshairs. It's Haitians in Springfield, Ohio. It's poll workers in places like Georgia. It's judges and jurors and activists for democracy who are right now, in the fear of their life. In the history of North Carolina, I'm reminded that this democracy of ours has cost lives and required courage. And if you were to put a marker in every place where there was a lynching or a church bombing, or where somebody was murdered, a Black person usually, for trying to vote or register someone to vote or help someone pay the poll tax to vote, well, you'd have markers in just about every place. So think about it this way, if the goal of political violence is to get people to stay away, to intimidate and disincline people from participating, then how about doing the opposite? Participate more, with more vigor, with more courage and with more consciousness that others have done the same and helped bring us thus far. And we have further to go yet. For "Laura Flanders & Friends" with thanks to everybody in North Carolina and beyond, I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us.

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