**09/30/24 / How to win Pennsylvania**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

NOEL: Pennsylvania and its 19 electoral votes could easily decide the 2024 election and both campaigns know it.

SCORING IN—NEUTRAL MORDECAI

NOEL: So Donald Trump got weird in Erie on Sunday

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-trump-escalates-attacks-on-harris-at-campaign-rally-in-erie-pennsylvania)*> Donald Trump: “Her whole life like: you will never frack, never frack. There will be no petroleum products. We’re going to go to wind! Everything’s going to be wind!*

NOEL: And Kamala Harris and Tim Walz will take a bus tour through central P-A this week. The campaigns aren’t taking a single vote for granted. That means chasing votes in places that no one ASSUMES they can win.

NOEL: Harris is investing in rural areas:

*<CLIP> STELLA: “It’s a whole county goal: it’s not just the city, it's not just the suburbs, it's not just the retirement communities—the goal is to talk to every voter we feel we need to talk to.”:*

NOEL: And Trump is courting Black and Hispanic voters in Pennsylvania’ cities

*<CLIP> BLACK PHILLY VOTER He survived all of those attacks that we we get all the time as a black man the system against us criminal justice unfair and then you got the what the prosecutors running for president. No, I'm going for Trump.*

NOEL: Coming up on Today, Explained.

**[THEME]**

NOEL: I’m Noel King. There are 35 days until the 2024 election. Once a week until then, we will be looking at one of the seven swing states. They could go either way. They will decide the election. Last week, we were in Georgia. Today, we’re in Pennsylvania where Philly Bureau Chief Miles Bryan and Vox Senior Politics Reporter Christian Paz have been reporting. Christian, tell me about the last month.

CHRISTIAN:Yeah. So I think it's always great to go out to what's arguably the most important state in this election. And we went out to Pennsylvania because it's a place where the Harris and Trump campaign have really pulled out all the stops. They've been flooding it with spending. They've been sending surrogates there. I think it's a place that they've campaigned in the most this year? And you also see one of the central themes of the election, that's about the margins. It's about winning votes on the margins just because of how entrenched polarization and partisanship are, within each party space. And it's a kind of place, I think, that Democrats are trying to shave off some of the margins that Republicans really, really win by in the rural regions.

NOEL: huh

CHRISTIAN: And Republicans are trying to pick off a few votes from the big advantages that Democrats get from the big cities.

NOEL: Okay, so these campaigns are fighting on territory that is not considered their own. Pennsylvania’s a big state. Where did you go first?

**CHRISTIAN:** Yeah. So we went out to join the Democrats and the Kamala Harris operation out in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

**NOEL:** Lancaster is Amish country.

**CHRISTIAN:** It is Amish country. It's historically a Republican stronghold, right? Trump beat Biden there by about ten points. But Democrats have been making a really big investment in the county this time, it's not just Lancaster, it's across rural parts of Pennsylvania. But we wanted to see this in action.

CHRISTIAN ON TAPE We're looking for stella?

MAN: You’re actually at the right building!

CHRISTIAN ON TAPE: We are!

**CHRISTIAN:** So we Drove out to Lancaster City, where the Democrats have their headquarters to meet with Stella Sexton.

STELLA: So I'm a volunteer. I'm the vice chair of the Lancaster County Democrats.

**CHRISTIAN:** Stella told us that Lancaster is so much more than Amish country these days. The economy's booming…

STELLA: Health care, my neighborhood, a bunch of doctors are moving in.

**CHRISTIAN:** The county has been adding a lot of young, educated people. It's also been a destination for a lot of college educated retirees.

STELLA: My grandparents, for example, moved here. They're in their 90s. They were lifelong Republicans. They are now Democrats since 2016.

CHRISTIAN: And it's the kind of place that Democrats have gotten really close to flipping in the past, specifically in 2022, the Democrat who was running for governor there lost Lancaster by only 4000 votes out of more than 200,000 that were cast.

**STELLA:** The bottom line is the the reason the Harris campaign, Biden and now Harris campaign made this investment here is not necessarily because we're going to flip it this cycle. It may take one more cycle to outright flip the county, but because the pickup in margin that they can get here is very important, to winning the state.

NOEL: What did you see there?

**CHRISTIAN:** Yeah, totally they actually opened up the office for us. This Democrat's office wasn't supposed to be open that day, but even so, people kept coming in throughout the day to pick up yard signs, to pick u p campaign literature, to sign up to phone bank, to sign up to volunteer.

BOBBI: I'm, part time cashier. I was a teacher for 32 years, so I'm a retired teacher, ….

CHRISTIAN: That included Bobby and Ron Hamilton. They were wearing matching grocery store uniforms from Giant.

MILES ON TAPE: did you meet at Giant?

BOBBI: Oh, no. We're together.

MILES ON TAPE: Oh, and your marriage is still strong.

BOBBI: We used to DJ together as a part time job.

MILES ON TAPE: DJ?

BOBBI: Oh yeah!

SCORING IN—DUST OFF THE HOVERBOARD

**CHRISTIAN:** They were just so cute.

NOEL: <laughs>

CHRISTIAN: They're longtime Democrats, and that was interesting to us because they said they lived in Mount Joy, which is a conservative suburb. So they're Democrats living in a sea of red. But they told us that this year feels different. They don't feel as lonely. And Ron actually put up a Kamala Harris sign in front of his house the other day.

RON: I'm out in front of my house yesterday just walking around. Car pulls up. Where'd you get them signs? I said, don't worry about where I got them. You want one? And there's a little says Our Lady. She says, oh, by all means, I want to make a special trip all the way down Lancaster just for you, just to get these. So I'm going to need them. A lot of people are asking for them.

STELLA: I think a change is happening that I noticed knocking doors is that there were always Democrats around. But I don't know that in our suburban or rural areas that the Democrats realized there were other Democrats as their neighbors. Yes. And I think something that has changed this year, in in what I'm noticing is that folks aren't embarrassed or, or hiding it, people are proud to be Democrats, and they're proud to represent that to their neighbors.

BOBBI: Exactly.

MUSIC BUMP

**CHRISTIAN:** We asked Stella,right? What is it that’s causing this change? She said it was a few reasons andthe main reason is like an overarching thing about the Harris and Biden campaign before that. And that's what they said early on. We're going to be competing in these rural areas. We're going to be finding these Democrats that might have felt lonely in the past, might have felt like they weren't being talked to before. And we're going to remind them, hey, we're here, we're coming for you. We're going to knock on your door. And that creates a little bit of a. Snowball effect, right? One person is suddenly enthusiastic, put up a sign. Another person realizes, hey, I'm not alone. And that builds.

SCORING OUT

**NOEL:** All right, so the Democrats are coming out of the closet in Lancaster. But the point is, the Harris campaign has to win over people who did not plan to vote Democrat. Whose job is that?

**CHRISTIAN:** Totally. That's where we got to see the door knockers and canvassers that are running this operation on the ground. We met Laura Mazurkiewicz. She's a nurse. Early 40s, nice white lady. And looked like she just shown up after work. She was wearing some turquoise scrubs. And the energy she has is really gentle, but it's persistent. She's always working the angle. And she told us winning over voters like trying to convince a person to stop smoking.

LAURA: You know, you're not trying to get, like, the patch on their arm that day. You're just like, hey, you know, you do like, they're they're like a pre contemplation state, you know? So you're just like, hey, I wonder if, you know, I'm just going to mention this, but we're not. You know what? I see you in three months. So we'll talk about it then. But I wonder if this could be a thing for you. You know.

**NOEL:** Ha! Alright, so she knows how to convince people. What does she look like when she's trying to convince people to vote for a candidate?

CHRISTIAN:So we followed her around.

SOUND OF CAR DOOR SHUTTING

MILES ON TAPE: “This is so pretty!

STELLA: Yeah it a pretty neighborhood, right?

SCORING IN—Locked in the Pantry song

CHRISTIAN: Definitely got a lot of steps and We were keeping a respectable distance.

STELLA: I think what we are going to do is just like for the sake, like let her go first and say ‘well there are some journalists following us today…:

LAURA: maybe if I just say ‘they’re just with the podcast…

CHRISTIAN: She knocked on a bunch of doors.

LAURA: She’s not home, so…

CHRISTIAN: And we got some no’s for sure.

LAURA: She declined to answer questions, umm…

CHRISTIAN:And we also talked to some folks who said they're voting Democrat.

LUZ: I am a spanish interpreter, so if the campaign needs anything spanish…

CHRISTIAN: And then toward the end of the evening, we finally ran into….

LAURA: Just wanna kind of hear how you are feeling about the election?

ZIGGY: you wont’ like it because I think they’re both garbage…

NOEL: He thinks they're both garbage. He's an undecided voter.

CHRISTIAN:An undecided Voter!

SCORING OUT

CHRISTIAN: His name's Ziggy. Looked like we had caught him just after work. He was an early, middle aged white guy. He told us he was a union electrician, and he had, you know, his work clothes on him. He was having a drink. He was smoking some cigarettes and said, okay, I'll listen.

NOEL:God bless. So what's his deal?

CHRISTIAN: So told us not a fan of Trump. Also wasn't a fan of Biden.

ZIGGY: You know, companies won't hire somebody that's over the retirement age to work in an office. Where the hell are we hiring people to run a country that are that age?

LAURA: Number one, I absolutely think that Trump shows signs of being uninviting.

ZIGGY: Biden, oh, he was slipping before he even got into it….

**CHRISTIAN:** And he also didn't necessarily have strong feelings about Kamala Harris either. So we got to watch Laura make her soft pitch. That started with talking about Kamala Harris's support for an expanded child tax credit.

LAURA: I want the kid to have food for the next couple of years. I think there's enough money in our country to do that. I believe in kindness...

ZIGGY: …Oh yeah…

LAURA: …You know that.

CHRISTIAN: that didn’t land either.

ZIGGY: Don't get me wrong, I'm not some miser that thinks that kid shouldn't eat by any means. But at the same time, a child tax only incentivizes people to have children, and we have more than enough people going on right now.

LAURA: And Vance thinks that the only thing women should be doing is having kids…

ZIGGY: …Is breeding and putting them in the kitchen…

LAURA: …or else there's no point to them…

ZIGGY: …I know, it’s a bit ridiculous…

CHRISTIAN: And then Laura moved on to January 6th. But that wasn't necessarily a slam dunk either.

ZIGGY:I hate to say it. Like Malcolm X said, at least the enemies that are your enemies to your face, you know who they are now. Yeah. And granted. But that's not that's not something.

LAURA: That we're talking about. Democracy I'm not talking about…..

ZIGGY: Democracy is not necessarily what we're founded on. We're founded on a Republic.

CHRISTIAN: And then Laura tried her strongest pitch, which was about abortion rights.

LAURA: I don't know, I'm a nurse like I, you know I work at LGH.

ZIGGY: Oh ok cool!

LAURA: You know I, I, you know I'm just….

ZIGGY: I worked on the stafford building by the way. We did the electrical for that…

CHRISTIAN:She was talking specifically about the drugs that are used in abortions that that some Republicans want to ban.

LAURA: We use those drugs when people have babies. We use those drugs when people have hemorrhages, when they have a hysterectomy.

ZIGGY: Oh, yeah, because they have cancer. I have pretty good medical knowledge. I do know a lot of coagulants are used for a lot of things. I mean, my mom had bone cancer. They had to use all kinds of shit on him that they would normally use for abortion, especially stem cells as well.

**NOEL:** All right. So she ran through every talking point. All right. So she ran through every talking. All right. So she ran through every talking point. And by the end seemed like the door was cracking a little bit. Did you all walk away thinking this gentleman is going to vote for Kamala Harris?

**CHRISTIAN:** So the vibe we got was that he might be leaning toward a third party still. But Laura said, that's okay. You know, they're going to circle back. This is just the first step.

LAURA: When we will circle back to him. So he will be circled back to I, you know, you put it in the app is undecided…

SCORING IN—TOOTH BRUSH DRONE

**CHRISTIAN:** Now, Ziggy's the kind of voter that the Kamala Harris campaign's theory of this ground game, may end up really mattering. The kinds of folks that you circle back to, and slowly convince at the margins to vote at all and to vote for the Democrat, that's going to matter because it's cliche to say, but every vote counts.

SCORING BUMP

CHRISTIAN: But its not just Democrats who know this. Republicans know every vote counts too. And they are working their own ground game here. They are coming after votes they might not normally get, or might not expect to get. And so they are going into the cities.

**NOEL:** And we’re going to the city, coming up next. Pennsylvania will be circled back to with Christian Paz.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: It's Today, Explained. We're back with Vox Senior Politics Reporter Christian Paz. Christian, earlier in the show we were in rural Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Amish country. Where are we this time?

CHRISTIAN: Yeah. So now we have to move 75 miles east and we're in North Philly. A couple of weeks ago, Miles and I went out there to meet up with a group called the Black Conservative Federation.

NOEL mmm

So naturally, one of the big stories of this election has been that Trump has been doing better in the polls with black and Latino voters this cycle. Specifically black voters. He's winning like 10 to 15% of support across polling averages. And that's a pretty big step up from 2016 and 2020. And Trump was doing better before Biden dropped out and Harris became the nominee. But they're still banking on being able to win over more support from black and other voters of color. So earlier this month, a black voters for Trump tour swung through a few key states. And we decided to meet up with them in Philly.

MILES ON TAPE Hi.

GUY: How are you doing?

CHRISTIAN: Good, good.

MILES: We are with Vox News….

CHRISTIAN: This tour started at a cheesesteak spot called Max's. And the biggest name there was Congressman Byron Donalds.

REPORTER: Did you get a chance to get a cheesesteak?

BYRON DONALDS: Oh, yeah. I'm about to eat it right now with onions, provolone. Because I don't do that whiz…. With mayo.

CHRISTIAN: Donalds is from Florida and he's become one of Trump's main surrogates to black communities.

BYRON DONALDS: If you're a black man, Hispanic man, white man, you're working hard every day and the money you earn doesn't go as far. That hurts your family. That hurts your kids. So they're looking at this situation, say a wait a minute, Kamala, you're in charge. You made this inflation happen. Why should I support you? That's number one. Number two, this immigration problem, which is a serious problem, especially in inner cities. People are saying, wait a minute, why are illegal aliens? Getting food, getting shelter, getting an education while my family and my child is struggling. It's not right and it's not fair. They're looking at that now.

CHRISTIAN: Trump won only about 7% of the black vote in Pennsylvania in 2020, but Donalds told us that he thinks Trump can double that this year.

BYRON DONALDS: I think that the floor is 12 to 15%. I think that's the floor today. Why? Yeah, because Black people are sick and tired of being sick and tired, man.

NOEL: Christian, we've been hearing this on Today, Explained in our reporting all year long. People in poor communities of color honestly feel they were doing better under Donald Trump. Whether or not there's a congressman making the case to them. But here we have Donalds making that case. And how does this go over to the people he's talking to?

CHRISTIAN: Right. It's a pretty compelling case. But at first it didn't really go over at all because there wasn't anyone around to make that case to

NOEL ha!

SCORING IN—WARNING SIGNS

CHRISTIAN: Like the event wasn't announced until late afternoon the day before, and there really didn't seem like there was an attempt to gather a big crowd or anything.

[BUS HONKING]

MILES: There it is, there is the bus!

CHRISTIAN: Eventually the main attractor showed up—a tour bus.

MILES: What are we seeing?

CHRISTIAN IN SCENE: We're seeing this blue bus that says in red: “I'm not with her.” Under it in bigger white letter says black voters for Trump, register to vote today…

CHRISTIAN: So we had a lot of people stopping to check the scene, because it kind of felt like maybe they hadn't seen a Trump bus or a Trump campaign event, like they show up in the neighborhood before. But it wasn't enough to convince these folks to vote for him…

MILES ON TAPE: Are you gonna vote?

B: Yeah, I'm going to vote. But not for this guy.

CHRISTIAN: Miles actually talked to one of these people, a carpenter who went by B.

MILES: Is there anything that can convince you to vote for Trump?

B: Huh? No. Not really.. You know, he's a criminal. He is under investigation. You know… been indicted just like most of my homies around here. You've been indicted. So why did you run for president?

MILES ON TAPE: So you wouldn't vote for your buddies for president?

B: No, hell no. They criminals. Why would I do that?

SCORING OUT

NOEL: [Laughs] Entirely relatable. All right, so this event is very chaotic. I guess the question was, but was it a success?

CHRISTIAN: We did eventually see some Trump curious folks walk by that included a woman from the neighborhood named Sheila. She lives in the neighborhood around Max's. And this is one of those neighborhoods that saw a spike in gun violence during the pandemic. She told us she wasn't sure who she was going to vote for.

SHEILA: I just want us to be safe, and I don't want to go through those struggles. No war.

CHRISTIAN: And now this time, we got to see Byron Donalds make the Republican pitch to her.

BYRON DONALDS: I've been on a plane with them. I've been in the car with them. I've been on a road with him. You sound like Trump sounds.

OTHER GUY: Yeah.

BYRON DONALDS: I don't want any wars. I just want things to make sense.

SHEILA: yes.

BYRON DONALDS: When you get away from all of this, the news and the cameras and all of that. And you talk to him, man to man, one on one, that's what he says she voted for. The thing that's caused inflation has driven up the cost of everything in our country, whether it's Philly, Detroit, Florida, New York, Chicago, L.A. doesn't matter. She did that. Now. So I look at policies first. What you’re talking about: leadership. I’ve seen Kamala. I know, Trump. That dude's in charge.

SHEILA: : Do you think he's going win?

BYRON DONALDS: I believe so.

OTHER GUY: But especially because you're thinking, like you're thinking, when Russia comes who do you want to negotiate?

SHEILA: A man!

CHRISTIAN: We also got a little bit of some of the gender dynamics of this election, and the way that Trump is talking to women now, he's kind of assuming this protective role, and leaning into a little bit of the gender gap that we have in our politics.

NOEL: Yes. And Miss Sheila is a good old fashioned sexist, but she also sounds persuadable. She sounds like she could vote for Donald Trump. Was anyone there completely persuaded?

CHRISTIAN: Actually yeah

SHARITA: Can I share something with y'all?

CHRISTIAN: So this is Sheila's daughter, SHARITA White.

SHARITA: I just wanted to say, when Trump was in a chair, Black people was up. And I want Trump back in the chair because I've been struggling ever since he's been out of the chair.

SCORING IN—RAINBOWTIZED

CHRISTIAN: Sharita is is exactly the kind of Black voters that the Trump campaign is hoping to win. She was really eager to talk to the media. She was going around sharing her story about how much things have changed since Trump was president. She said that back when Trump was president, she had a good job in health care. She was living in a middle class neighborhood. And she had some money because of stimulus checks. But things have gotten really hard since then. She lost her job. She lost her housing. Her husband died. Her kid has Crohn's disease,

NOEL: mmm

CHRISTIAN and she's living in a neighborhood of Philly. Kensington, best known for being an open air fentanyl market.

SHARITA WHITE: I'm in a neighborhood that I don't want to be in, but if Trump gets in his chair that can change,. I'm might can move and everything. But people was not supporting him. They talk so much trash and say ‘this man is ignorant.’ no we need somebody like that! How do you think we are going to reach the people. We aint gonna reach them talking like yall! Let’s keep it real. We need somebody tough and ratchet with their mouth. Trump is that man. I need to survive. And these streets of Philadelphia, it seemed like they turning it into New York now. Everything is high here. You know, people can’t even afford a water. I don't know too much about politics, but only thing I know, my income change. And if I need that man to get into the chair to fix my income, I’m all down.

SCORING BUMPS AND FADES

NOEL: Donald Trump listens to this episode, and it's like get me Sharita’s number. Is Sharita definitely going to vote?

CHRISTIAN: Well, that's the thing. We notice that the black voters for Trump team didn't follow up and get her information.

NOEL: huh!

CHRISTIAN: They didn't log it in an app.

NOEL: guys!

CHRISTIAN: They didn't even check to see if she was registered to vote to begin with. And that brings me to a kinda important point: which is this operation, black voters or Trump isn't being formally run by the Trump campaign. It's a black conservative Federation operation.

NOEL: aaaah

CHRISTIAN: And there were a lot of these kinds of operations trying to engage, voters. But many of the operations aren't being led by the Trump campaign. They're being led by Trump aligned PACs or outside groups. They're just now registering voters at Trump rallies, hiring canvassers. And it's not like a formal operation in the way that we saw in Lancaster.

NOEL: mmm

CHRISTIAN: There's this reliance on these outside groups to handle the ground game for them. I mean, the Trump campaign didn't even open their first formal campaign office in Pennsylvania until June.

NOEL: Christian, your reporting from Pennsylvania suggests that the Trump team has a very strong message, but a very disorganized ground game. And the Harris team has a very organized ground game. And yet in the tape you brought back, it's just not clear to me that that message is landing.

CHRISTIAN: And that's what we saw in our reporting. The Trump team's message we saw was clean and simple. Life was better. Five years ago, you had more money in your pocket. And Harris's team has a more complicated message to sell. It's more about policy than feelings, and they've had less time to do it. And that's why they're relying on this ground game.

SCORING IN—RAINBOWTIZED DRUMS

This gamble that both Trump and Harris are making Trump on vibes and Harris on organizing it. It might decide the race. This is Pennsylvania, after all.

SCORING IN— FULL RAINBOWTIZED

NOEL: That was Vox Senior Politics Reporter Christian Paz along with Producer Miles Bryan. Amina al-Sadi edited today’s show and Andrea Kristinsdottir and Rob Byers engineered. Laura Bullard and Victoria Chamberlin fact-checked. We’ll have five more swing states before election day. Next week, Arizona. I’m Noel King. It’s Today, Explained.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**