

# Strategists divided over Trump's reelection prospects, say Wisconsin will play a pivotal role

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Top strategists on opposite sides of the aisle are divided over President Trump's reelection prospects this cycle, though they agree Wisconsin is a key stop on the road to the White House.

While GOP operative Keith Gilkes argued at a Madison WisPolitics.com luncheon this week that Trump's incumbency advantage and other factors mean he will see a "slightly wider" pathway to victory than in 2016, Dem strategist Tanya Bjork countered "Trump fatigue" is instead working against the president and will contribute to a narrower path forward.

Gilkes, a Scott Walker adviser and head of Platform Communications, also noted time is on Trump's side heading into 2020. While he said the field of 20-plus Dem candidates would need to fight it out for the nomination, Trump could use the time to build rapport with voters ahead of Election Day.

"He's got time, incumbency on his side. And he can spend some time courting those voters from different states that he might have lost by narrow margins," he said, pointing to Minnesota, which Trump lost to Hillary Clinton by 1.5 percentage points.

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But Bjork, a senior adviser to both the Obama and Clinton presidential bids, countered there'd be more attention paid to key states like Wisconsin this cycle, in addition to the likelihood of further "erosion" as voters tire of Trump.

Still, she said Dems need to improve their messaging and appeal to voters who didn't turn out in the last cycle.

“There are a lot of people, too, that would say that lack of turnout in some key areas for us is part of the problem,” she said. “That’s not going to happen again; that’s not going to happen this year.”

The pair, as well as fellow luncheon guest Marquette University Law School Poll Director Charles Franklin, agreed Wisconsin is crucial to any candidate’s chances at the presidency.

Franklin noted in addition to the state being “extremely competitive” — in terms of the latest state Supreme Court race and the recent gov and presidential elections — Wisconsin is “also uniquely at the pivot point of the Electoral College.”

In 2016, Franklin noted Wisconsin was enough to push Trump over the edge — and he didn’t need to win either Pennsylvania or Michigan to ascend to the presidency. Trump was the first Republican to win Wisconsin’s electoral votes since Ronald Reagan in 1984.

As of now, he added, in order for Dems to win without changing other states, they’d need to pick up Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. Still, he added other areas of the country — such as North Carolina, Minnesota or New Hampshire — could be more competitive come next year.

“But I think there’s no way you look at this lineup and not think we remain at the pivot point or very close to the pivot point as of today,” he said.

Gilkes argued the pathway to the presidency runs through the Big 10 states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio, Iowa and Minnesota — states he described as competitive and tight.

“Those are the states that are going to decide the president of the United States next go-around,” he said.

But he echoed Franklin in saying Wisconsin is unique among them, as it’s “pivotal to the 270 mark for either candidate.”

Bjork, meanwhile, said Wisconsin is “always a key state” for Democrats. She added that now, Dem presidential candidates don’t need to win Florida or Ohio necessarily as long as they “do what we need to do” in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

She also noted Milwaukee hosting the Democratic National Convention is “huge”

from an organizing standpoint, as up to 20,000 volunteers would be mobilized four months ahead of the November election.

“If you were to tell me that we would have an organized and trained and energized group of 20,000 volunteers in July suited up and ready to go, I’ll tell you that’s a big deal and especially in a key place where we need enthusiasm and energy in a city like Milwaukee in terms of turnout,” she said.

Hear the audio:

<https://soundcloud.com/wispolitics/wispoliticscom-luncheon-wis-role-in-the-presidential-race>