

OUR TOP ATHLETES
OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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SHOPPING
SAVINGS
INSIDE

The book on JD Vance
In this blue Appalachian county
in Ohio, opinions vary greatly on
Trump's VP pick. **Local, C-1**

Sunday

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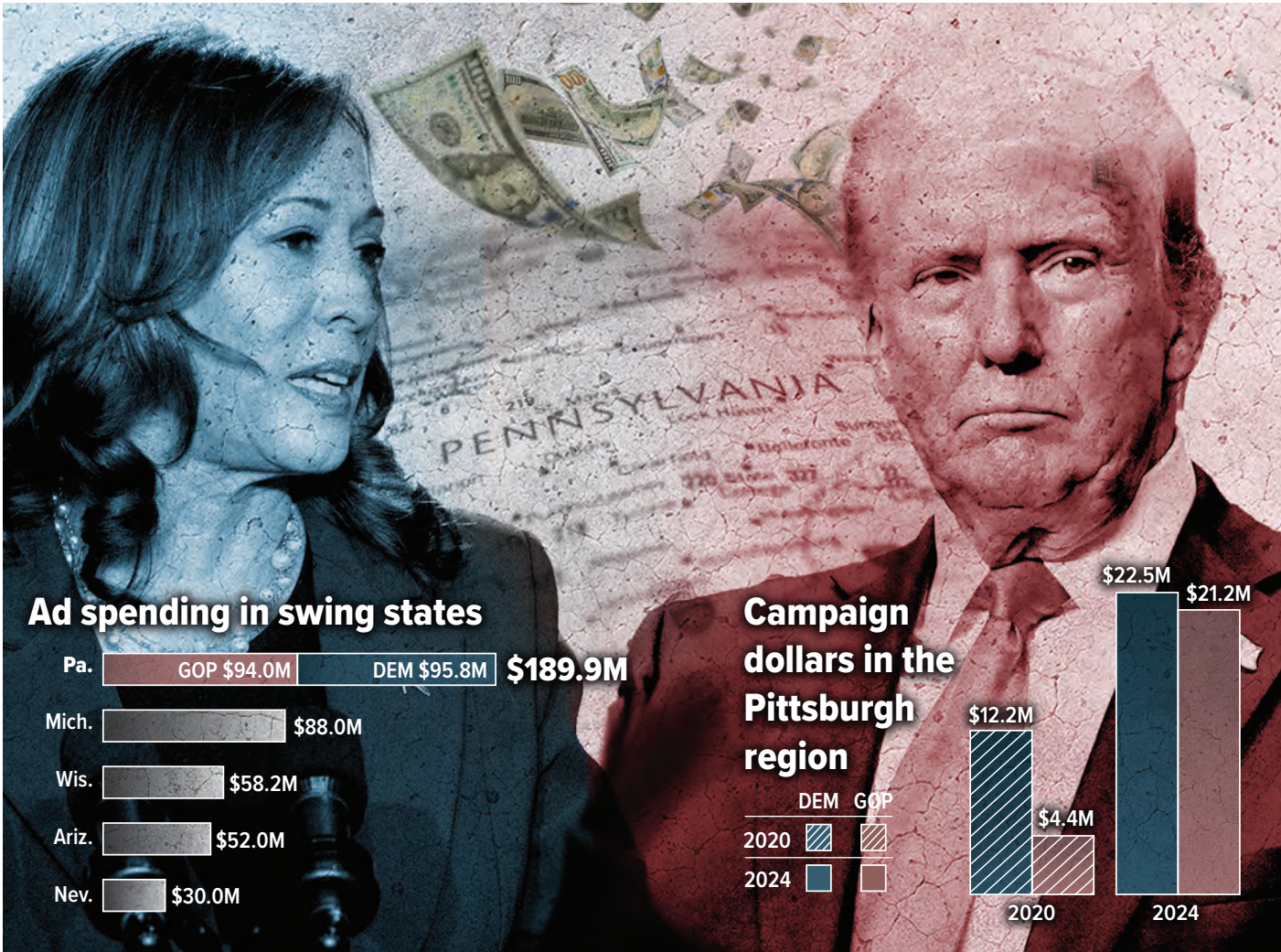
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POST-GAZETTE SPECIAL REPORT: A RECORD PA. AD BLITZ



Data source: AdImpact; image sources: Associated Press, Shutterstock; research: Michael Korsh, Michael Wereschagin/Post-Gazette; graphic, photo-illustration: James Hilston/Post-Gazette

BATTLEGROUND SPENDING SPREE

With still 100 days before the election, ad spending in Pa. is on a record pace as Harris and Trump battle for every vote

By Mike Wereschagin, Michael D. Sallah and Michael Korsh
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Election 2024

As former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris converge on Pennsylvania in their battle for the presidency, the amount of money

pouring into the state from supporters on both sides is reaching levels never before seen, a Post-Gazette analysis has found.

So far, the state leads all others for the amount spent on

television and radio, as well as digital ads in what is unfolding as highly contentious advertising blitzes to fuel the campaigns.

With nearly \$190 million already spent in Pennsylvania on ads leading up to the Nov. 5 election, the candidates and their deep-pocketed supporters have funneled more than twice as much money into the state

as they had at this time four years ago.

The spending is expected to increase even more in the coming weeks as the Harris campaign racks up one of the most remarkable fundraising feats in presidential campaign history, and the Trump campaign reaps massive pledges from

SEE **SPENDING**, PAGE A-4

MORE FACTS EMERGE IN TRUMP RALLY AFTERMATH

Week of hearings yields clues on how it unfolded

By Megan Guza, Benjamin Kail and Jonathan D. Salant
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

After days of scant facts about the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump, a torrent of information rushed out in a mix of congressional testimony and statements from officials last week, finally shedding some light on how the deadly debacle unfolded.

Thomas Matthew Crooks fired eight shots at the former president July 13. On the same day that the 20-year-old from Bethel Park had registered to attend the rally at the Butler Farm Show grounds, he queried a search engine: How far was presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald from President John F. Kennedy?

The occasionally contradictory revelations came amid growing demands for concrete information about what the former Secret Service director herself called "the most significant operational failure ... in decades." The shooting that injured Trump and two spectators also killed Corey Comperatore, 50, who was in the stands with his family.

Facts that came out during three days of congressional testimony last week are

SEE **RALLY**, PAGE A-6

Mt. Washington small businesses bemoan bevy of incline closings

By Mark Belko
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

DiFiore's Ice Cream Delite on Shiloh Street is a can't miss Mount Washington destination. With its happy pink and white awnings, it would be nearly impossible to overlook.

Few do. From Memorial Day to Labor Day, the shop and DiFiore's Grand Brew Coffee in the same building are a huge draw for tourists who venture to Mount Washington to take in the view from the observation decks on nearby Grandview Avenue.

Owner Howard Todd estimates that those tourists constitute 95% of his business. And he insists the shop's success rides not on the pink and white awnings — or even his incredible work ethic, having once toiled 2,012 days straight — but on his "silent partner": the Monongahela Incline.

SEE **INCLINE**, PAGE A-8



Associated Press

CHICAGO, 1968

The parallels between 1968 and 2024 are uncanny: Protests over an unpopular war; a presidential candidate shot; an incumbent president deciding not to run.

ECHOES OF '68

History may be repeating itself in '24 — and that's a threat to law and order

By Jonathan D. Salant
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

WASHINGTON — A presidential candidate is shot. A sitting president decides not to run for re-election. The Democrats gather in Chicago to nominate a candidate amid fear that antiwar demonstrators will disrupt the proceedings. And, yes, a Robert F. Kennedy is running for the White House.

Welcome to 2024. Or is it just a repeat of 1968?

"The more things change, the more they stay the same," said U.S. Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., a former political science professor.

"There's no doubt that history does repeat itself, the past is prologue, and sometimes that's not a good thing," said the longest-serving member of

SEE **ECHOES**, PAGE A-7



Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C., 2024

Historians hope the coincidences are not harbingers of the rest of the year leading up to the Nov. 5 election between Donald Trump and, presumably, Kamala Harris.

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PG Special Report



Chris Kleponis/AFP via Getty Images

Vice President Kamala Harris already has benefited from tens of millions of dollars poured into Pennsylvania to cover the costs of heavy television and radio advertising campaigns to take on former President Donald Trump.



Evan Vucci/Associated Press

Spending in Pennsylvania to help former President Donald Trump recapture the White House has so far reached \$94 million — money that will pay for television and radio advertising blitzes from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia.

Ad spending on record pace in Pennsylvania

SPENDING, FROM A-1

wealthy supporters.

“It’s record-breaking right now,” said Matthew Foster, who teaches elections and voting behavior at American University in Washington, D.C. “Pennsylvania is so important. It’s a true purple state.”

While Democrats outspent Republicans by more than two to one in Pennsylvania four years ago, the parties are neck-and-neck this year in a jurisdiction that will deliver more Electoral College votes than any other swing state: 19.

Democrats have spent \$95.8 million on ads — well above what both parties combined doled out four years ago — while Republicans aren’t far behind at more than \$94 million.

The top spenders aren’t the candidates’ campaigns but well-funded Super PACs that operate outside the donation limits those campaigns have to follow.

Big money surge

In the case of both camps, more than half the money has been spent after two critical events changed the course of the race.

For Trump, almost \$75 million worth of ads were purchased in Pennsylvania after he was convicted of 34 felonies in the New York fraud case involving hush money payments to a porn star.

The conviction infuriated his supporters and drove a surge in donations nationally. In just 48 hours,

supporters turned over more than \$27 million to a campaign that had been trailing his then-Democratic rival, Joe Biden, in money raised.

At the same time, ultrawealthy donors inked large checks to a Super PAC supporting the former president, led by Timothy Mellon, the banking heir who alone gave \$50 million just a day after the verdict on May 30.

In Mr. Biden’s case, more than \$49 million was spent on mostly television and radio ads in the wake of his disastrous debate performance last month — a setback that led to calls for him to drop out and his eventual withdrawal last Sunday.

That move and the ascension of his vice president, Ms. Harris, to the top of the party ticket led to a stunning outpouring of donations to her campaign, more than \$100 million in less than 48 hours last week.

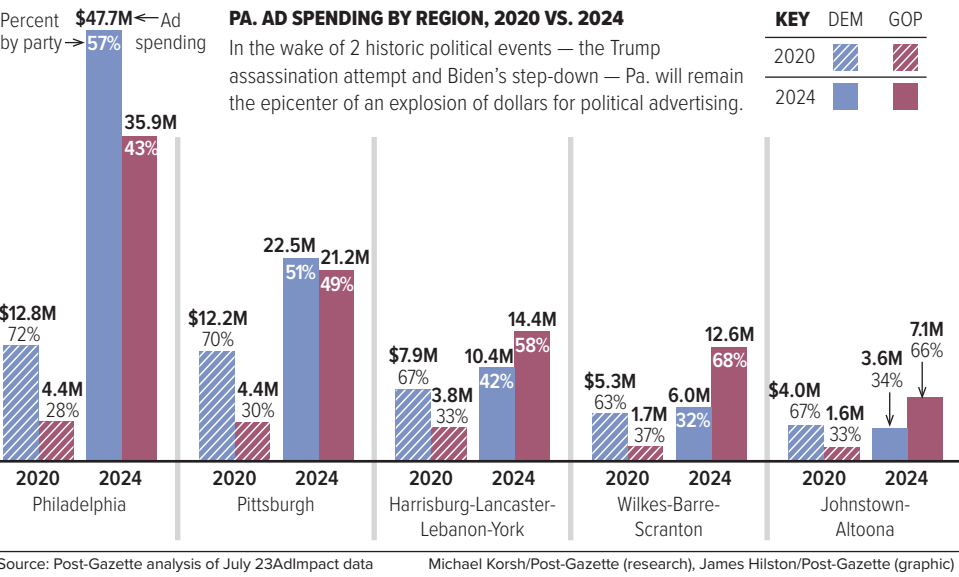
Unlike presidential races of the past, the enormous sums being spent in states like Pennsylvania are far more targeted and represent a new game in national politics.

No longer are races fought in broad swaths of the country with massive amounts of money spread across a dozen or more states. Rather, as political allegiances have hardened, the battlegrounds have shrunk to just a few pockets of the country where there are still enough persuadable voters to swing the outcome.

“It’s going to boil down to

Advertising dollars across Pa.

Percent by party → \$47.7M ← Ad spending



the battleground states, and Pennsylvania is the crown jewel, the biggest prize,” said Sam DeMarco, chairman of the Allegheny County GOP. “I believe whoever wins Pennsylvania is going to win the presidency.”

For both campaigns, most of the money spent in Pennsylvania so far has gone to the state’s two largest media markets: \$83.6 million in Philadelphia and \$43.6 million in Pittsburgh, in what has already turned into vicious blitzes that will play out into November.

One ad features a dark warning of a revenge-fueled Trump returning to the White House, with the narrator delivering an ominous message: “He’s running again, this time threatening to be a dictator to terminate the Constitution.”

Another, which began airing the very day Mr. Biden dropped out, accused Ms. Harris of covering up his “obvious mental decline.” The ad includes her own message defending Mr. Biden’s fitness for the job: “Our president is in good shape, in good health, tireless, vibrant and I have no

doubt about the strength of the work that we have done.”

One election scholar said he expected many more dark, hard-hitting ads to inundate the airwaves in both markets in the coming months.

“You’re going to get a lot of negative campaigning in Pennsylvania,” said Eugene Mazo, a nationally recognized expert of U.S. election laws who teaches at Duquesne University.

“There are six — maybe seven — states that are up for grabs. Pennsylvania is an epicenter.”

Another key state is Michigan, which has already seen \$88 million in spending — \$100 million less than what has been spent in the commonwealth, according to AdImpact, a firm that tracks political advertising.

While Ms. Harris is expected to direct a significant portion of her money to Pennsylvania in the coming weeks, the Trump campaign has challenged her ability to tap into the tens of millions of dollars that had been donated when Mr. Biden still led the ticket.

Just days after her endorsement by the president, Trump’s lawyers filed a complaint to the Federal Election Commission on Wednesday arguing that the transfer of funds violated campaign finance law. Legal analysts say it’s a longshot fight that’s likely to stretch well past the election.

Pennsylvania is ‘crown jewel’

Many political experts believe Democrats have no path to the White House without winning Pennsylvania.

Republicans are clear favorites in a larger number of states, leaving Democrats with fewer options to make up ground in the Electoral College.

Consider: The electoral votes of two other swing states, Arizona and Nevada, add up to less than Pennsylvania’s.

As far as the money, \$51.2 million has gone to Arizona and \$30 million so far to Nevada.

“It’s simply electoral college numbers,” said Kevin Hayes, a Pittsburgh architect and co-founder of Catholics Vote Common Good. “If they win Pennsylvania, they

might be able to lose one of the other [swing] states. If they lose Pennsylvania, it’s almost a done deal. If you lose Pennsylvania, it’s about over.”

While the money funneled into Pennsylvania is expected to break statewide records for a presidential election, the campaigns will need it.

The only swing state with two large metro media markets is Pennsylvania, with ads running on TV and radio in both cities. A statewide campaign in the commonwealth can cost tens of millions more than in a state like Michigan.

“For media buying purposes, it is [one] of the more expensive locations,” said Peter Miller, an associate professor emeritus of communications at Northwestern University.

He added that ads running in Philadelphia can drain campaign dollars because buyers are paying for views in New Jersey and Delaware — voters they’re not targeting.

The massive fundraising has also opened the door to what’s known as dark money in sums that have rarely been tracked at this level.

Month after month, money has poured into the state from nonprofits directly as well as through Super PACs — pathways that allow donors to conceal their identities while giving money to causes that benefit the candidate of their choice.

Though the money is difficult to track, the Post-Gazette has identified at least \$17.5 million in the dark money category of political donations, with most of it benefiting the Trump camp.

And that’s just what can be readily identified: tens of millions more flows through Super PACs, where it’s mixed with traditional donations.

The spending of dark money stems from a 2010 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court’s conservative majority in the case known as Citizens United. Since then, billions in untraceable cash has been directed toward political races across the country.

Mr. Mazo said that while those donations are legal, they can raise ethical issues. “The problem is, we don’t really know where the dark

money is coming from. We could be getting foreign money,” Mr. Mazo said.

It’s illegal for foreign nationals to spend money to influence U.S. elections, but nonprofits can easily hide the identities of their funders from the public, he said.

“Disclosure is important because it keeps the system honest,” Mr. Mazo said.

Another contested state, Georgia, could be pivotal considering its surprising swing to Mr. Biden in 2020 after decades of being reliably Republican. So far, the amount spent on ads there: \$73 million.

Of all the other swing states, only Michigan is in the top five in campaign spending, according to AdImpact.

While the money spent in Pennsylvania on the presidential race is on pace to break records, the dollars pouring into campaigns for the House and the Senate in the state may also be on the same track.

So far, political spending in those federal races — \$239 million — is more than double what it was at this point in 2022.

In the Senate race between incumbent Democrat Bob Casey and Republican challenger Dave McCormick alone, nearly \$197 million has been spent, over \$100 million more than two years ago, when Sen. John Fetterman beat Republican Mehmet Oz.

Street-level punch

Most of that money has been spent on broadcast ads, an expense that Mr. Hayes said is often overemphasized. More money should be directed toward street-level political outreach, he said, especially in a state like Pennsylvania.

“That targeted get-out-the-vote campaign” is crucial, said Mr. Hayes.

“One of the secret weapons that the Democrats have this year is its ground game,” he said. “It’s very much bang-for-your buck. Entire neighborhoods get mapped out. The Trump people don’t have this apparatus.”

On the day after Ms. Harris became her party’s lead candidate, 28,000 people signed up to volunteer, 100 times what the campaign gets in a normal day, her campaign said.

To Mr. DeMarco, that raises the stakes and means he’ll have to ramp up the local party in the coming months to drive as many Republican voters as possible to the polls.

“We’re going to have to be at the top of our game if we want to win in November,” he said.

The ad war is only going to increase in volume — and nastiness — as the two sides continue to dump unheard-of sums of money into the state. Said Mr. DeMarco: “It’s going to reach a level of crazy that I don’t know that we’ve ever seen.”

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Swing states and the electoral college

