

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS - US Daily Brief 03-10-22

By Adam Burrowes

The White House

10:30 ET 15:30 BST	Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre
14:45 ET 19:45 BST	The President delivers remarks from Port of Ponce, Puerto Rico

Elections Countdown:

- ❖ 2022 midterm elections: 36 days
- ❖ 2024 presidential election: 764 days

Hurricane Ian

President Joe Biden will visit two areas severely damaged by storms this week. Today, Biden will be in Puerto Rico where he will deliver remarks from Port of Ponce.

- According to the White House, Biden “will announce more than \$60 million in funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to shore up levees, strengthen flood walls, and create a new flood warning system to help Puerto Rico become better prepared for future storms.”
- On Wednesday, Biden will head to Florida for a likely meeting with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL), a man widely tipped as his 2024 presidential rival.

Congressional Business

The House is out

The Senate is out

Committee Schedule -

Midterms

Some pollsters are warning that key Senate races are tightening, and a shift back to the GOP may be underway, after a summer of steady gains for Democrats.

- Politico has reported that, in Pennsylvania, an increase in campaign advertising has tighten the margin to Democrat frontrunner Lt Gov John Fetterman. The Philly Enquirer: “Democrats are taking solace in the idea that a lot more voters like their

candidate. ... Republicans argue momentum favours Oz, and that the more voters hear about Fetterman, the closer the race is getting."

- Conservative strategist Sarah Longwell says that "Fetterman losing ground due to onslaught of crime-focused ads."

Republican News

Former President Donald Trump has been criticised for comments on Truth Social which appeared to suggest that Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell may be subject to violence should he continue to support Democrat legislation.

- Trump wrote: "He has a DEATH WISH. Must immediately seek help and advise from his China loving wife, Coco Chow!"
- A Trump spokesperson downplayed the comments, clarifying that Trump referred to political death and the comments should not be interpreted literally: "Mitch McConnell is killing the Republican Party through weakness and cowardice. He obviously has a political death wish for himself and [the] Republican Party."

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' (R-FL) political stunt to transport South American migrants to left-leaning parts of the country may risk alienating Latino voters ahead of an increasingly tight re-election battle with former Florida governor Charlie Crist.

- Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D-NY): "These folks primarily coming from Venezuela are fleeing the Maduro regime. There's a significant number of Venezuelans as well as the Cubans in Florida that fled similar dictatorships. And yet he's turning his back on the victims of that regime. I think that will bite him. I believe that the Latino community there will recognize that he's turning his back on people that are refugees or seeking political asylum, and they will not be happy about that."
- If DeSantis fails to win re-election by a convincing margin, then it may affect his standing as Republican presidential nominee in waiting.

Democrat News

House Democrats are increasingly gambling on abortion as their primary campaign message as the midterms draw closer.

- Politico reports: "Democratic candidates, their party's campaign arm and allied super PACs have spent nearly \$18 million to air more than 100 abortion-centered broadcast TV ads in some four dozen battleground seats as of the end of September, according to a Politico analysis of data from AdImpact. That sum is already three times more than what Democrats spent on abortion ads during the entire 2018 general election."

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court will begin a new term today. Observers are predicting that this term may be as politically divisive as the previous term, where the Conservative majority court made a ruling reversing the constitutional right to an abortion.

- The new term will see rulings on affirmative action, minority representation, federal election processes, immigration, the Clean Water Act, and various LGBTQ issues.

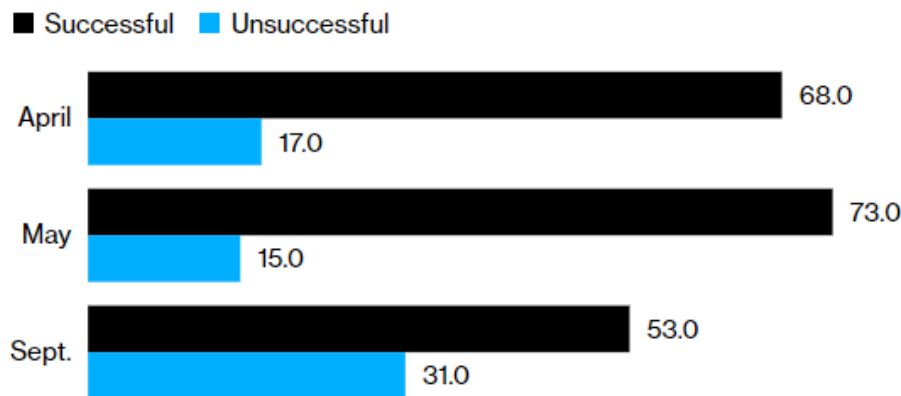
- Punchbowl News provides analysis of the political complexities facing the court's next term: "To say this is a difficult time for the Supreme Court is, well, a big understatement. There still hasn't been any report released publicly on who leaked the internal draft opinion in the Dobbs case.
- "Justices are openly bickering over the court's direction and public standing following the Dobbs decision, which overturned 50 years of precedent. Ginni Thomas, wife of Justice Clarence Thomas, was interviewed by the Jan. 6 select committee last week over what role she may have had in trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election.
- Lawmakers and government watchdog groups want to impose tougher ethical requirements on the justices, including disclosure of spousal income. Not surprisingly, approval ratings for the Supreme Court are at historic lows."

Russia

The Levada Center has released polling data suggesting that Russians are increasingly likely to believe that the invasion of Ukraine is 'unsuccessful'.

- The report follows an address on Friday from Russian President Vladimir Putin which formally recognised the annexation of four Ukrainian territories and attacked the US for meddling in domestic Russian affairs and attempting to impose a liberal culture on Russian people.
- Sergey Radchenko, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced and International Studies, said the speech was, "full of bile and hatred towards the West that was more hostile to the U.S. than any diatribe by even Soviet-era leaders. The point is to deflect and distract from domestic difficulties, the military failures, the mounting economic problems."
- Bloomberg: "The share of Russians saying the conflict isn't going well increased to 31% from 17% in April. More respondents - 48% - now back peace talks, versus 44% a month earlier. Those who were pessimistic about the outcome pointed to the length of the conflict, the need to call up more troops and recent territorial reverses. Still, just over half of people remain confident in the war's success."

Chart 1: Share of Russians Who Say Invasion is Successful/Unsuccessful, Over Time %



Source: Levada Center/Bloomberg

South America

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will embark on a week-long South America trip today. On the agenda is meetings with new leftist Colombian President Gustavo Petro and Chilean President Gabriel Boric before Blinken leads the US delegation to Lima for the Organisation of American States summit.

- The meeting in Colombia with Petro will be the key engagement of the trip. Petro has broad reformist agenda which includes normalising relations with Venezuela and transforming Colombia's role in combatting the narcotics trade. Both of these policy positions are at odds with the US and may undermine Colombia's standing as Washington's most reliable regional partner.
- The US will also be looking to head off a potential shift in allegiance to China amongst left-leaning South American government. Blinken will attempt to convince Boric, Petro, and Peru President Pedro Castillo that the US is a more reliable partner than Beijing.

China

Three US senators have introduced legislation to create a "China Grand Strategy Commission" tasked with devising a plan to deal with Beijing.

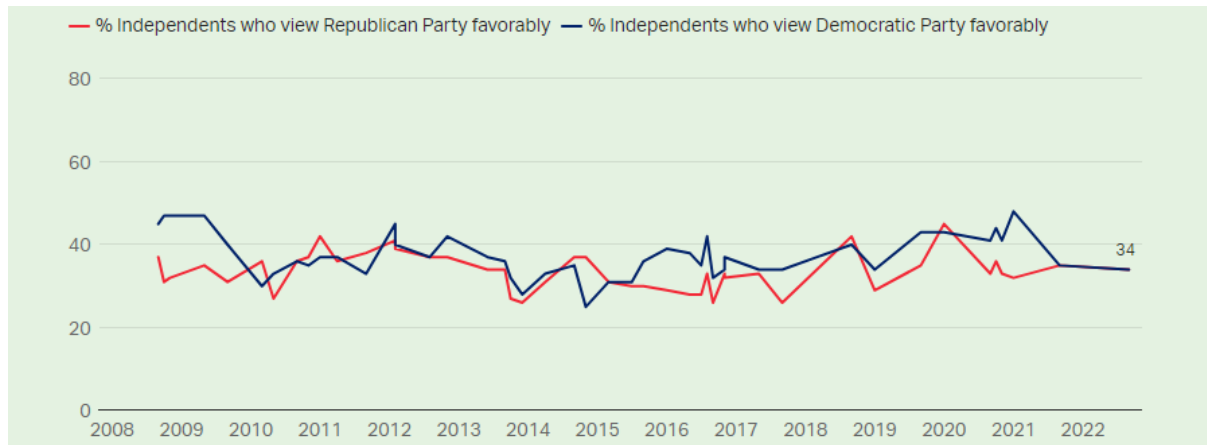
- Senators Angus King (I-ME), John Cornyn (R-TX) And Tim Kaine (D-VA) said the commission would be asked to define steps to build a "stable international order" that includes China. The senators intend to have their bill added as an amendment to the 2023 NDAA.
- King said in a statement: "There is too much at stake to face this threat short-sightedly — we simply cannot afford an ad hoc China policy that lacks a long-term strategy without accounting for all the instruments of power."

Poll of the Day

A Gallup report has shown that independent voters are equally concerned about Democrats and Republicans. The report comes as election analysts struggle to forecast how the independent vote will affect outcomes in the general election on November 8.

- Gallup: "...independents hold equally low opinions of both major parties, as 34% view each favorably. While the Democratic Party has held an edge over the Republican Party among independents since 2008, this is the second consecutive year that both parties are at parity among this group.

Chart 2: Independents' Favourability Ratings of Republican and Democrat Parties, 2008-2022



Source: Gallup

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