

MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS - US Daily Brief 25-10-22

By Adam Burrowes

The White House

14:05 ET 19:05 BST	President Biden receives his updated COVID-19 vaccine and delivers remarks
14:45 ET 19:45 BST	Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre

Elections Countdown:

- ❖ 2022 midterm elections: 14 days
- ❖ 2024 presidential election: 742 days

Ukraine War

US officials have continued to push back against Russian suggestions that Ukraine may be preparing to use a “dirty bomb” as part of their counteroffensive in the south of the country.

- Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Mark Milley on Monday spoke with his Russian counterpart Valery Gerasimov yesterday and agreed to keep lines of communication open but rejected Russia’s “transparently false allegations.”
- White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said: “We have seen in the past that the Russians have, on occasion, blamed others for things that they were planning to do.”
- US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said: “We have seen a pattern in this conflict, in this war, in the lead-up to this war, where the Russians have engaged in mirror imaging.”
- Price continued: “The broader point – and again, you heard this not only from us but from our European allies as well – is that the world would see through any Russian attempt to use this allegation as a pretext for escalation.”
- Price confirmed an assessment from the Pentagon that Russia has not activated its nuclear capabilities: “At this time, though, we haven’t seen any indications that Russia is preparing to use nuclear weapons. But we’ve heard these very concerning statements, and we wanted to send a very clear signal.”

Speaker Pelosi

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will represent the US at the First Parliamentary Summit on the International Crimea Platform in Zagreb, Croatia today.

- Pelosi said in a statement: “I look forward to discussing how we can further support Ukraine – because the fight for Ukraine is the fight for democracy itself.”

- The trip will be the third such high-profile diplomatically sensitive trip made by Pelosi this year after a surprise trip to Kyiv and a Congressional delegation to Taiwan which drew a rancorous reaction from Beijing and pushed relations with China to multi-decade lows.

Diplomacy

Thirty House Democrats have written a letter to President Biden urging the administration to consider pursuing a diplomatic resolution to the war.

- The letter, penned Progressive Caucus Chair Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) reads: “Given the destruction created by this war for Ukraine and the world, as well as the risk of catastrophic escalation, we also believe it is in the interests of Ukraine, the United States, and the world to avoid a prolonged conflict.”
 - “For this reason, we urge you to pair the military and economic support the United States has provided to Ukraine with a proactive diplomatic push, redoubling efforts to seek a realistic framework for a ceasefire.”
- Jayapal was forced to write a revised version of the letter clarifying that the Progressive caucus was not calling for concessions to Moscow, following backlash from both Republicans and Democrats.
 - Jayapal: “Let me be clear: we are united as Democrats in our unequivocal commitment to supporting Ukraine in their fight for their democracy and freedom in the face of the illegal and outrageous Russian invasion, and nothing in the letter advocates for a change in that support.”
- A member of the House Democratic leadership told Politico: “Vladimir Putin would have signed that letter if asked. That bone-headed letter just put Dems in the same league as Kevin McCarthy, who said in the same week that Ukraine funding could be in jeopardy.”
- Senator Chris Murphy (D-CN) said: “Sometimes, a bully must be shown the limits of his power before diplomacy can work.”
- Progressive caucus member Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) who declined to add his signature to the letter said: “It’s up to the Ukrainians to determine their destiny, and the best way to do that is to support Ukraine in their fight for freedom, their fight for democracy.”
- White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre confirmed to reporters that the Biden administration will not conduct diplomacy with Russia without Ukraine’s participation.

Midterms

Democrats are making a last-minute pivot to the economy and health care as the political environment shifts towards the GOP.

- Axios: “After spending the bulk of the fall attacking Republicans over abortion, Democrats now tout the cost-saving government benefits the White House secured for Americans.”
- The move may be too late for Democrats as a consensus of pollsters increasingly shows the GOP leading on all issues relating to the economy.

Polling

A CNN/SSRS polling report has shown that Democrats remain an outside chance of flipping the two most vulnerable Republican Senate seats.

- In Wisconsin, the poll shows incumbent Republican Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) with support of 50% of likely voters. Marginally ahead of Democratic challenger, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes (D-WI) with 49%.
 - Pundits tend to believe the race still leans Republican, with pollsters historically undervaluing Republican candidates in Wisconsin.
- In Pennsylvania, Democrat Lt. Gov. John Fetterman (D-PA) has 51% support compared to Republican candidate Mehmet Oz's 45% among likely voters. This is a wider advantage than most recent polls and comes ahead of the key debate between Fetterman and Oz this evening.
- Two polls have shown that the New Hampshire Senate race may also remain competitive despite Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) cutting funding to GOP challenger Don Bolduc this week.
 - An Emerson/WHDH-TV poll shows Democrat incumbent Senator Maggie Hassan (D-NH) with a 48% to 45% lead over Bolduc.
 - A poll from American Greatness/Insider Advantage shows the race even tighter, with a 47.6% to 47.1% advantage to Hassan.

Pennsylvania

The campaign of John Fetterman has attempted damage control ahead of his debate with Senate opponent Dr Mehmet Oz tonight.

- In a memo to reporters, Fetterman's campaign wrote: "We'll admit — this isn't John's format [...] Oz clearly comes into Tuesday night with a huge built-in advantage."
- The memo continues: "Let's be clear about this match-up: Dr Oz has been a professional TV personality for the last two decades."
 - "We are prepared for Oz's allies and right-wing media to circulate malicious viral videos after the debate that try to paint John in a negative light because of awkward pauses, missing some words, and mashing other words together."
- The memo concludes by saying that Fetterman will win the race, "even if he doesn't win the debate."
- Fetterman is currently experiencing auditory processing problems as a result of a stroke he suffered in May. The Pennsylvania race has been considered a lynchpin of Democrat chances of retaining control of the Senate but has tightened to a "tossup" in recent weeks with Oz having success in questioning Fetterman's cognitive ability and suitability for office.
- Democrat HQ, recognising the significance of the Pennsylvania race, is dispatching President Biden and former President Obama to attend campaign events in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh on November 5.

- The Hill notes: “While Biden has been forgoing large political rallies that became the signature midterm political move for his predecessors, he has made several trips this year to Pennsylvania, where Fetterman hasn’t shied away from appearing with him.”
- Biden has yet to make an appearance at a big political rally. For context, at the same point in their respective presidencies, Trump had fronted rallies in 26 cities, and Obama 14.

Florida

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL) squared off against Democrat challenger Charlie Crist in their only gubernatorial debate last night.

- Crist accused DeSantis of being too preoccupied by Presidential ambitions to effectively lead the state.
- DeSantis deflected questions on whether he will see out another term as governor: “I know that Charlie is interested in talking about 2024 and Joe Biden, but I just want to make things very, very clear: The only worn-out old donkey I’m looking to put out to pasture is Charlie Crist.”
- Crist said: “You won’t even say if you want to be the governor of Florida after this election.”
- The New York Times wrote: “The pressure was on Crist to try to sharply change the dynamics in the race. I don’t think he did, though he gave a polished performance. DeSantis did, too, though he will most likely face criticism ... of appearing a little uncomfortable at times.”
- Politico: “With two weeks left to go, it doesn’t look like the debate will create a significant change in DeSantis’ momentum.”

Congressional Business

The House is out

The Senate is out

Committee Schedule -

National Security

Attorney General Merrick Garland announced yesterday that two suspected Chinese intelligence officers have been charged by the Department of Justice with attempting to obstruct the US criminal investigation of Chinese firm Huawei.

- FBI Director Christopher Wray said that the charges show that China’s “economic assaults and their rights violations are part of the same problem.”

- Wray: “They try to silence anyone who fights back against their theft — companies, politicians, individuals — just as they try to silence anyone who fights back against their other aggressions.”
 - In a statement which is likely to draw a strong response from Beijing, Wray said: “If the Chinese government, the Chinese Communist Party, continues to violate our laws, they’re going to keep encountering the FBI,” he said.
- Separately, White House national security officials are tracking threats to the election security infrastructure ahead of the midterms and are expected to issue an internal intelligence bulletin this week laying out details of cyber threats posed by China and Russia.
- The bulletin is also expected to outline risks presented by other non-state actors and assess physical threats to election officials amid reports of intimidation at ballot drop boxes.

Treasury

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told MSNBC yesterday that she has no plans to leave her position after the midterm elections.

- Yellen: “I plan to stay. I’m very excited about the president’s economic program. There’s a lot to implement.”
- Yellen also said in the interview that she “can’t rule out the risk,” of a recession but she “[believes] there is a path toward bringing inflation down in the context of the strong labour market.”

EU

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, and Trade Rep Katherine Tai met with European Commission Executive Vice Presidents Valdis Dombrovskis and Margrethe Vestager yesterday amid a dispute over what the EU see as protectionist provisions within the Inflation Reduction Act.

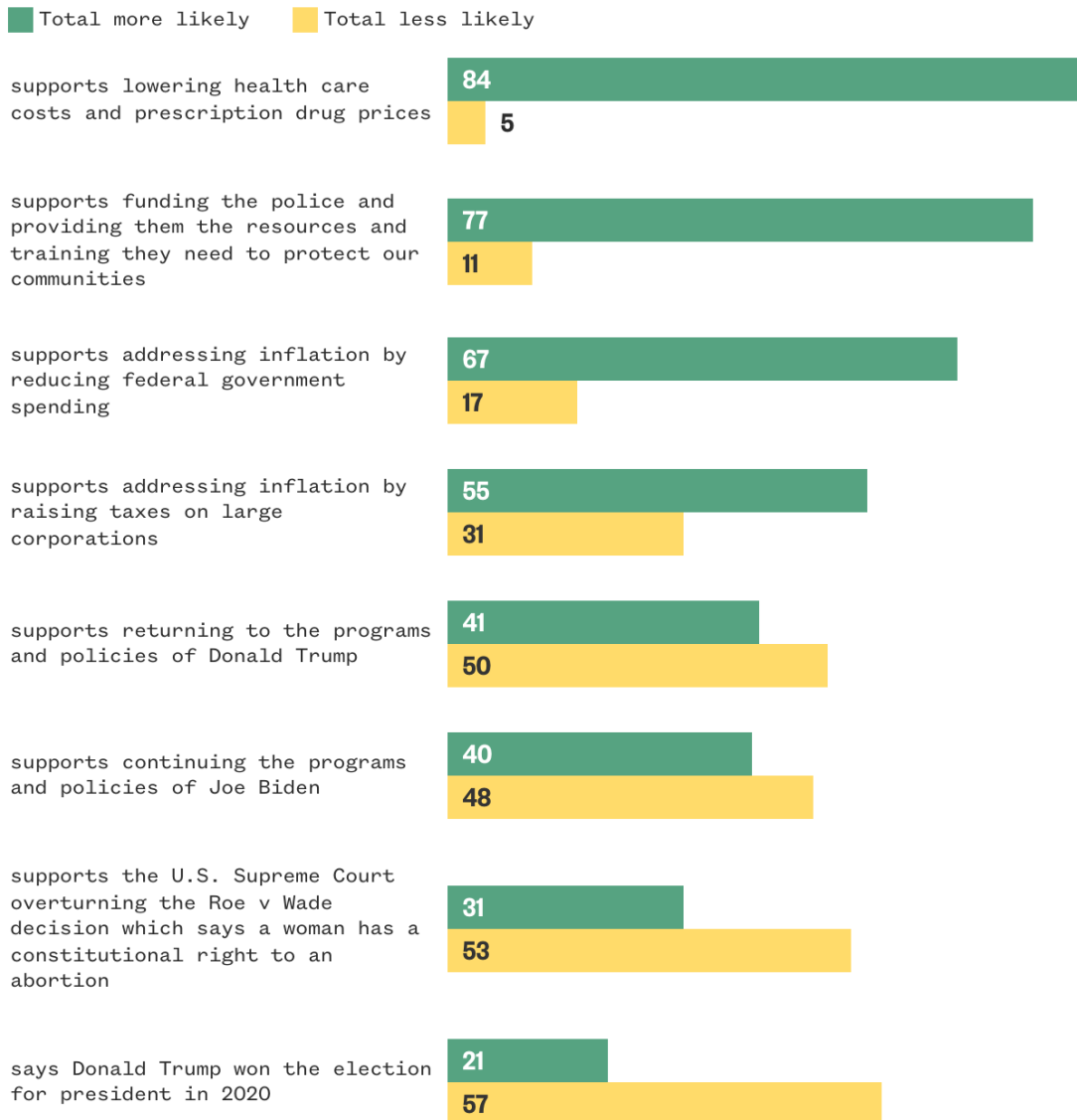
- According to the State Department, Biden administration officials “...emphasized the importance of the transatlantic relationship and worked to advance meaningful outcomes for the third ministerial meeting of the Trade and Technology Council. They also discussed the electric vehicle provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and the need to continue engagement on this important issue.”
- The next US-EU Trade and Technology Council ministerial is scheduled for December 5 in Washington, DC.

Poll of the Day

An NBC report has shown that lowering the cost of health care and prescription drug cost is a vote winner that Democrats are seemingly failing to capitalise on.

- According to the NBC poll, 84% of respondents are more likely to vote for a Congressional candidate who supports lowering health care costs.

Chart 1: Are You More or Less Likely to Vote for a Candidate Who...



Source: NBC News

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