

The GOP Establishment Versus America First Republicans: Part 1



The current conventional wisdom is that the Republicans will win control of the U.S. Congress in November. Many news and opinion pieces are focused on the declining favorability polls of President Joe Biden and the Democrat Party in general.

However, there is a major story-within-the-story: the struggle for control of the [Republican](#) Party between the establishment wing represented by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and former President Donald Trump's America First coalition.

Let us examine the topic in detail.

This part of the two-part series is focused on the [GOP](#) establishment, of which McConnell is the most prominent member. Part two will cover the America First faction of the Republican Party that support Trump.

The GOP Establishment

The establishment wing consists of corporate-backed Republicans who derive much of their support from the coffers of the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), the Republican National Committee (RNC), and well-funded Republican senators in leadership positions who dispense money to other incumbent Republican senators. Large businesses and related entities are their main donor sources.

The NRSC, in particular, has been used by McConnell over the years to help elect similarly-minded Republican senators and place them in leadership positions. That [list and their primary functions](#) are summarized below:

Senate Minority Leader: The Republican conference, many of whom are beholden to the McConnell-controlled NRSC and to McConnell himself for campaign contributions, elected McConnell to this position. McConnell sets the agenda, message, and strategy of the Republicans in the Senate. He runs the show.



Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) speaks to reporters in Washington on April 26, 2022. (Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Assistant Republican Floor Leader and Republican Whip: John Thune (R-S.D.) fills this second-ranking leadership position. His primary job is counting votes and persuading Republican senators to support the Republican Conference's position on all votes.

Senate Republican Conference Chairman: John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) occupies the third-ranking leadership position. His primary duty is to communicate Republican conference positions on legislation and issues to the media and American citizens. However, the Republican efforts to communicate positions to the country are few, uncoordinated, and ineffective.

Senate Republican Policy Committee Chairman: Roy Blunt (R-Mo.)

fills this billet and is responsible for coordinating the development and execution of policy for the Republican conference.

National Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman: Rick Scott (R-Fla.) is responsible for fund-raising in support of Republican candidates. McConnell decides who receives NRSC funds. During the 2020 election cycle, the NRSC collected from donors and disbursed to Republican Senate candidates [over \\$270 million](#).

What are the policy positions supported by the RNC and Senate leadership in 2022, and what is their political messaging? The Republican Policy Committee webpage provides a list of [policy papers](#) and [issues discussion](#) that amount to nothing more than pushback on Biden/Democrat-supported legislation without any specifics on what Republicans would do if they had the votes.

It should also be noted that the RNC carried forward the 2016 Republican Party platform to 2020 [without any changes](#). This is precisely what the GOP establishment wishes: to wipe away the Trump presidency as a four-year aberration in order to return to business as usual: free trade, corporate tax breaks, de facto open borders (especially support for H-1B visas), lip service to the U.S. Constitution, a continuation of foreign wars, and deal-making with the party of government (the Democrat Party).



President Donald Trump delivers his acceptance speech for the Republican presidential nomination on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington on Aug. 27, 2020. (Alex Wong/Getty Images)

Note that none of the GOP establishment senators supported investigations into credible allegations of election fraud during the 2020 election and were quick to certify Biden as the winner.

Similarly, the RNC collected millions in donations from Americans who expected the RNC to investigate the fraud. Still, RNC lawyers have been AWOL on election integrity from November 2020 to the present day. Republican Senate leaders such as McConnell and Thune flatly deny (without examining the evidence) that there was sufficient election fraud to have changed the outcome. Perhaps the documentary ["2000 Mules"](#) from True the Vote will change their minds.

McConnell gave away his political leverage when he agreed to the

Democrats' \$1.5 trillion continuing resolution and the infrastructure bill filled with funding for Democrat constituencies. Spending is a key factor in the rampant inflation from which Americans are now suffering.

Going into the midterm elections, there is no coherent Republican plan from the RNC and Senate Republican leaders except "vote for us, not the Democrats." What policies McConnell et al. will pursue in 2023 are unknown to the public at large but are almost certainly known by the GOP establishment's corporate donors. McConnell's strategy is to support and elect more like-minded Republican candidates, including protecting those like Thune who are up for reelection.

The other distinguishing characteristic is that the GOP establishment is anti-Trump, but not necessarily "Never Trump." They seek to keep their political options open like the amoral compromisers they truly are.

These are the considerable assets that the GOP establishment possesses going into the November elections:

Party Organization: The RNC and other national-level entities are all controlled by the GOP establishment, as are most of the state and county GOP organizations.

Large War Chest: The GOP establishment can count on large corporate donations.

Incumbency: Incumbents are extremely difficult to beat, especially in a Republican primary election. They enjoy name recognition, franking privileges, and fund-raising advantages over challengers. The majority of the Republican senators running for reelection this cycle are Republicans In Name Only (RINO).

The vacancies from the five retiring Republican senators in the list below, as well as Republican challengers to the 21 Democratic senators up for reelection, present the only real opportunities for non-GOPe candidates this year. A few sitting senators, such as Lisa Murkowski, face strong primary challengers this year. Still, most on the list below are running for reelection, either unopposed or against token Republican challengers.

- Alabama: Richard Shelby (Retiring)
- Alaska: Lisa Murkowski
- Arkansas: John Boozman
- Florida: Marco Rubio
- Idaho: Mike Crapo
- Indiana: Todd Young
- Iowa: Chuck Grassley
- Kansas: Jerry Moran
- Kentucky: Rand Paul
- Louisiana: John N. Kennedy
- Missouri: Roy Blunt (Retiring)
- North Carolina: Richard Burr (Retiring)
- North Dakota: John Hoeven
- Ohio: Rob Portman (Retiring)
- Oklahoma: James Lankford
- Pennsylvania: Pat Toomey (Retiring)
- South Carolina: Tim Scott
- South Dakota: John Thune
- Utah: Mike Lee
- Wisconsin: Ron Johnson

Part One Conclusion

The 2022 election cycle involves a struggle for control of the Republican Party. The GOP establishment faction is led by McConnell, while the America First faction is led by Trump. This part summarized the policy positions of the GOP, identified the Republican senators up for reelection in November (and the five retiring), and described the considerable assets that the GOPe would use to retain control of the party.

Part two will discuss the America First faction and analyze the competition between the two factions in the run-up to the midterm elections in November.