

The GOP Establishment Versus America First Republicans: Part 2



There is an ongoing struggle for control of the Republican Party that is being played out during the 2022 election cycle. The political battle pits the establishment wing represented by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) against former President Donald Trump's America First coalition. The outcome is just as important for America as to whether [Republicans](#) or Democrats control Congress in 2023.

Let us examine the topic in detail.

[Part one](#) of this series focused on the [GOP](#) establishment (GOPe), of which McConnell is the most prominent member. This part covers the

America First faction of the Republican Party, which supports Trump, and analyzes the competition between the two factions in 2022.

America First Republicans

The major Republican faction that is endangering the political hegemony of the GOP establishment consists of supporters of the conservative-populist Trump, including average Americans, small business owners, disaffected Democrats, independents, and others drawn to the America First populism that is at the core of Trump's political appeal.

The essence of America First nationalism involves Trump's successful pursuit of economic security policies during his presidency that were beneficial first and foremost to the American people: border security, energy independence, trade resets with multiple countries, tax cuts, reduced regulations, Middle East peace deal (no foreign wars), U.S. military superiority, and furtherance of American exceptionalism.

During the Trump presidency, other topics were added to those core principles: defending constitutionally-guaranteed rights and liberties (especially free speech and gun rights), reining in the federal bureaucracy, promoting election integrity, confronting cultural Marxism in America's schools and other institutions, restoring the principle of equal justice under the law, and delivering on promises made.

The latter is one of Trump's greatest strengths. His [list of accomplishments](#) brought him millions of new supporters since he declared for the presidency in 2015 and provided Americans with a

stark contrast between career politicians and himself in terms of keeping promises.

The GOP establishment has daunting advantages, as noted in [part one](#) of this series, including control of GOP national, state, and county organizations; large corporate donations; and the power of incumbency.

Here are some of the assets that America First Republicans are employing in their confrontation with the GOPe.



Then-U.S. President Donald Trump and U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell make their way to a Senate Republican policy lunch at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on May 15, 2018. (Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images)

Resonance on the Issues

America First issues are the bread-and-butter issues that average Americans support. Polls continuously reflect support for border security, election integrity, energy security, and traditional values. These issues are anathema to the GOP establishment.

Enthusiasm

After living through the ongoing debacle of the Biden presidency, Republicans have an enormous political enthusiasm advantage over the Democrat Party. There are dozens of grassroots organizations that sprang up during and after the Trump presidency to promote America First values and displace leftist Democrats and GOPe/RINOs at all levels of government. Some are focused on regaining control of school boards (for example, the [1776 Project Political Action Committee](#)), while others are focused on electing constitutional conservatives at all levels of government (for example, [Restore Liberty](#)).

Ground Game

Enthusiasm in the Republican rank-and-file translates to an improved ground game this year. The increasing evidence of election fraud in key states in 2020 has motivated local Republicans to volunteer as get-out-the-vote staffers, election officials, precinct committee members, and election monitors to improve election integrity going into the 2022 elections.

Trump Popularity

While GOP figures such as former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie

have claimed that Trump's grip on the GOP "[is diminishing](#)," there is no denying that average Republicans overwhelmingly support Trump, who continues to draw massive audiences at his rallies in 2022.

In contrast with the economic security Trump delivered, the stark reality of the failed Biden presidency is not lost on Americans in general, too, as [a recent poll reflected](#) that Trump would defeat Biden by six points and Vice President Kamala Harris by 11 points if the election were held in late March.

Contrast Trump's popularity with the fact that McConnell is the most unpopular senator among all voters, according to a [Morning Consult poll](#). But what is most important for the midterm primary and general elections is that Trump continues to poll well among Republicans in battleground states.

"Roughly four in five Republican voters in the early primary states of Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania hold favorable opinions" about Trump, Morning Consult [reported](#) on April 11.

Trump's War Chest

Trump's popularity translates to massive contributions to his political organization. According to Fox News, the first to report the latest fundraising figures on April 19, Trump's Save America PAC, Save America JFC, and MAGA PAC raised over \$19 million between January and March "with a massive [\\$124 million](#) in cash on hand."



Former President Donald Trump speaks during a Save America rally at the Banks County Dragway in Commerce, Georgia, on March 26, 2022. (Megan Varner/Getty Images)

And in a direct reflection of Trump's continuing grassroots support among rank-and-file Republicans, "his committees' average donation during the first quarter was \$28.04. Trump's team also reports a total of 679,445 contributions [over] the past three months, with 98.4% of those donations under \$200," Fox News reported.

Also in the Trump donor orbit are conservative-leaning billionaires such as Peter Thiel and Andy Beal, who selectively support Trump-endorsed candidates in 2022.

Trump Endorsements

Trump's political endorsement is arguably the gold standard in the

Republican Party. As of March 30, Trump has endorsed 130 candidates. One example of his strength was that [33 of his Texas endorsements](#) either won or are strongly positioned to win runoff elections.

Trump's [endorsement of Glenn Youngkin and Winsome Earle Sears](#) for Virginia governor and lieutenant governor, respectively, last year is already paying off since Virginia is on the way to turning red in 2022.

Meanwhile, McConnell warns Republicans about selecting “unelectable candidates”—a dig aimed at some of Trump's more controversial endorsements. Who will Republican primary voters listen to? McConnell or Trump? It's an easy answer.

Bellwether Campaigns in 2022

The following are a few of the races to watch that will help determine whether or not the America First faction can displace some of the GOP establishment candidates this year.

Alaska

Trump has endorsed [Kelly Tshibaka, who is challenging Sen. Lisa Murkowski](#). Murkowski's latest exhibition of her RINO fealty was her vote to confirm Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court. What does that say about McConnell directing his leadership PAC to spend [\\$7 million in advertising](#) on behalf of Murkowski?

Can Tshibaka's grassroots campaign overcome McConnell's (and other out-of-state GOPe) funding and the Murkowski machine that has dominated Alaska Republican politics for decades?

Trump has also [endorsed Sarah Palin](#) to fill the remainder of recently-

deceased Rep. Don Young's seat in Congress.

Arizona

It is unlikely that Trump will endorse Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich in the Republican primary race for U.S. senator. Trump continues "[to bash](#)" Brnovich for not aggressively prosecuting election fraud associated with the 2020 election. Has Brnovich signed his own death warrant by dragging his feet on Arizona election fraud?

One of these candidates will likely receive Trump's endorsement: businessman Jim Lamon, venture capitalist Blake Masters, former Arizona National Guard adjutant general Michael McGuire, and former state representative Justin Olson.

[Trump also endorsed Kari Lake](#) for governor in the primary over state Treasurer Kimberly Yee, developer Karrin Taylor Robson, former Congressman Matt Salmon, and businessman Steve Gaynor.

Georgia

Trump has [endorsed Herschel Walker](#) in Georgia's U.S. Senate race against three lesser-known Republicans: Georgia agriculture commissioner Gary Black, construction firm owner Kelvin King, and banking executive and Navy veteran Latham Saddler. The winner will face Democrat Sen. Raphael Warnock, who won a runoff election in 2021 under questionable circumstances.

Trump's Save America PAC has also [contributed \\$500,000](#) in support of former Sen. David Perdue's primary challenge of incumbent Gov. Brian Kemp, who has been dragging his feet in investigating massive

2020 election fraud that has been uncovered by True the Vote and other organizations. Will the use of Georgia drop boxes once again carry the day for Democrats in Georgia?

Michigan

Two Trump-endorsed candidates were selected at the recent Michigan Republican Party convention to challenge incumbent Democrats this year. As previously reported [by The Epoch Times](#), Matt DePerno faces Democrat Attorney General Dana Nessel, while Kristina Karamo will challenge Democrat Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson. Both Nessel and Benson have refused to investigate allegations of election fraud in Michigan in 2020, while DePerno and Karamo have expressed considerable doubts about the election results.

North Carolina

Trump has endorsed Rep. Ted Budd in the primary race for U.S. Senator against former GOP Gov. Pat McCrory. Will Trump's endorsement overcome McCrory's greater name recognition? That looks probable as Budd has been [surging ahead](#), according to a survey by the Raleigh News & Observer on April 24.

Ohio

Trump's endorsement of J.D. Vance in the Republican primary for U.S. Senate, as well as the other candidates across the state, has paid off handsomely as [all Trump-endorsed candidates won in Ohio](#). It would appear that Trump retains considerable influence among Republican primary voters in Ohio despite GOP establishment wishes and hopes! Note: Trump ally Peter Thiel had [donated \\$3.5 million](#) to Vance, which

certainly helped Vance's campaign.



J.D. Vance, a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate in Ohio, and his wife Usha Vance wave to supporters after winning the Ohio Republican Senate primary election at an election night event at Duke Energy Convention Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, on May 3, 2022. (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Some Final Thoughts

"All politics is local" is an old American adage. The GOP establishment and America First factions of the Republican Party are trying to shake up the Republican primary and midterm elections with out-of-state endorsements, money, and other support. Which faction has more money, who is more popular, who wins on the issues that matter, who is the better endorsement, who has better name recognition, and who has the better grassroots organization? These are the questions that will ultimately decide each race—and the direction of the Republican

Party in 2023.

A final thought: McConnell has already said that he will ["absolutely" support Trump](#) if he is the party's presidential nominee in 2024. In the meantime, the battle between the two continues this year.