



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on February 21, 2022

Anti-establishment Challengers Poised to Take Over GOP

A wave of pro-Trump, outsider candidates running in the 2022 Republican primaries could result in a major shift of the party to the right.

The direction the GOP is soon to take [should become visible](#) next week following the Texas primaries on March 1. A number of officers in the nation's second-most populous state — including the governor, attorney general, and agriculture commissioner — face heated primary challenges, as do various GOP House incumbents.



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The battle between establishment incumbents and insurgent challengers will expand from there into other states, the expectation being that a new generation of officeholders will make the Republican Party more constitutionalist and populist.

Several factors make 2022 a prime opportunity for newcomers to defeat entrenched incumbents. In some cases, President Donald Trump is directly recruiting and endorsing challengers at every level — from the U.S. Senate and Congress to state legislatures — as part of an effort to cement his hold over the party.

Also, a slew of retirements has created open seats that can be more viably be won by outsider candidates. And even where there are incumbents, redistricting has made seats competitive by taking away many of those incumbents' support bases.

Additionally, there is the raw energy of the base, much of it in the form of anger, that makes Republicans likely to vote against the status quo.

"Primaries are always f-d up to some degree, but it's different now," said John Thomas, a Republican strategist who works on House campaigns across the country. "There's more self-hate than there was before. Ten years ago, we'd argue about who was more pro-gun, who was more pro-life. Now, my clients are going RINO hunting, which is a level of disdain that was not there before in our party."

One of the main emotional drivers behind the widespread rejection of the establishment is fallout from 2020. President Trump has continued to claim that the 2020 election was stolen, and a [majority of Republican voters agree with him](#). There's also frustration with the many government restrictions and mandates imposed in response to COVID-19.

The GOP electorate is eager to take out its anger on the Republicans they feel have betrayed the party and betrayed Trump by dismissing claims of a stolen election and not taking a strong enough stance against the mainstream COVID narrative.

"The confluence of the pandemic, the manner in which Trump practiced his politics — just pure, in your face — you throw in a healthy dose around what is being taught in our schools, it's just a cocktail of people being really just mad, beyond the pale of what I would say is traditional political discourse," said John Watson, a former chair of the Georgia Republican Party. "There's not another moment in my life



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that you just feel viscerally that the country is in many ways at its own throat.”

Politico notes of the primary battles playing out:

Evidence of the party’s unrest is everywhere. Nearly a half-dozen GOP governors are facing competitive primary challenges, ranging from Ohio, where Gov. Mike DeWine is facing a primary challenge from former Rep. Jim Renacci, to Idaho, where conservative Gov. Brad Little is being challenged by his lieutenant governor, Janice McGeachin, who is trying to outflank him on the right.

In the South, Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey has eight Republicans running against her, including at least two with significant resources. Next door in Georgia, former Sen. David Perdue, with Trump’s support, is running to unseat Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp. In Texas, Trump’s endorsed candidate, Gov. Greg Abbott, faces multiple challengers from his right, including Allen West, the former Florida congressman and former chair of the Texas Republican Party.

In Alaska, party leaders have endorsed a primary challenger to incumbent Senator Lisa Murkowski, while GOP officials in Wyoming have disowned their incumbent congresswoman, Rep. Liz Cheney, for her vote to impeach Trump.

In Oklahoma, the state Republican Party chair is endorsing a primary challenge to GOP Sen. James Lankford, who voted to certify the results of the November election, and in Arkansas, Dick Uihlein, one of the GOP’s top donors, has put \$1 million into a campaign to defeat incumbent Sen. John Boozman.

Not only is the ground ripe for Trumpian candidates to win GOP nominating contests, but they’re likely to get elected given that midterms are typically bad for the president’s party and Biden is especially unpopular.



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