

MAY 29, 2022

# Primary Movers

This is *The Weekly Letter* for May 29, 2022. [About this newsletter](#)

Although this week's newsletter is on elections, my thoughts are with the families of those who lost their lives in the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Of course, we need more than thoughts from our elected officials—we need action.

## Big Story

The season of primary elections to select the Democratic and Republican nominees for seats ahead of the 2022 midterms is well underway. These primaries take place against the backdrop of significant contestation within the two major parties about their political identities. This is an oversimplification, but broadly speaking on the Democratic side the divide is between moderates who tack to the center and progressives who favor sweeping political changes. For Republicans, the primaries are about former President Donald Trump. However, there are really two Trump-related questions in play. First, can establishment Republicans do anything about the far-right wing of the party which became ascendant along with Trump in 2016? Second, how much control does Trump still have over this far-right tendency?

These are the results of a few closely watched races that tell us something about how the competing camps within the parties are faring in the primaries so far:

**Democratic primaries:** In Oregon's 5th congressional district, progressive challenger Jamie McLeod-Skinner defeated moderate incumbent Kurt Schrader. In the 6th district, Andrea Salinas, a progressive, won the Democratic nomination despite being significantly [outspent](#) during the campaign. In Pennsylvania's 12th congressional district, progressive Summer Lee was victorious.

However, in Ohio's 11th congressional district, incumbent Shontel Brown decisively held off a challenge from progressive Nina Turner. In North Carolina's 4th congressional district, Valerie Foushee beat Nida Allam—who was backed by Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—in a [race](#) where the candidates' positions on Israel-Palestine came to the forefront.

In Texas' 28th congressional district, incumbent Henry Cuellar narrowly leads progressive challenger Jessica Cisneros, but the race has not yet been called.

**Republican primaries:** Trump notched an early win in Ohio with the nomination of J.D. Vance as the Republican Senate candidate on May 3. In West Virginia, Trump-backed Alex Mooney defeated David McKinley in the state's 2nd congressional district (both candidates were incumbent House members competing in a redrawn district). In North Carolina, Trump-endorsed Ted Budd won the nomination for Senate. In Georgia, Herschel Walker also became the Senate nominee with Trump's support. And in Texas, Trump-supported incumbent Attorney General Ken Paxton comfortably won a runoff primary election against challenger George P. Bush.

But in Idaho, incumbent Governor Brad Little defeated Trump-supported challenger Janice McGeachin. In Nebraska, Trump-endorsed candidate Charles Herbster, who is accused of sexual assault, lost the primary for Governor to Jim Pillen. Although Georgia Governor Brian Kemp and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger drew Trump's wrath for refusing to override the will of the voters in the 2020 presidential election, and although Trump endorsed challengers to both of them, Kemp and Raffensperger won their primaries. In North Carolina's 11th congressional district, incumbent Madison Cawthorn was defeated by challenger Chuck Edwards despite Trump's endorsement of Cawthorn.

Yet to be called is the Senate primary in Pennsylvania, which is going to a recount between Mehmet Oz, who is backed by Trump, and Dave McCormick.

So, what have we learned about the direction of the two parties? There's no simple answer; indeed, the intraparty battles so far seem to have resulted in a split decision.

The moderate-progressive fight in the Democratic Party is ongoing, with neither side clearly prevailing yet. The primary results also send mixed signals about whether outside PAC money dooms the chances of progressive candidates.

On the Republican side, Trump's influence in the primaries has been powerful but not all-powerful. For the most part, Republican voters do not seem to be moderating, although the results for Georgia Governor and Secretary of State will provide hope for the Republican establishment. In Ohio, the solid third place finish for moderate Matt Dolan in the Senate primary suggests that there remains a centrist contingent of Republican voters, but they were not able to push their candidate to the win.

Perhaps the most significant sign of independence from Trump on the far-right was the popularity of Kathy Barnette in the Pennsylvania GOP Senate primary. Although Trump endorsed Mehmet Oz, Barnette remained popular with the far-right and won around 25% of the vote. *Politico* [notes](#) an interesting claim made by Barnette:

"One example of her purist approach: in an April debate, Barnette said 'MAGA does not belong to President Trump.'

'Our values never, never shifted to President Trump's values,' she said. 'It was President Trump who shifted and aligned with our values.'"

By claiming that there were MAGA values before Trump, Barnette suggests a future for the far-right independent of Trump. However, we don't seem to be there yet. For now, the main division within the GOP continues to be the Trump wing vs. the establishment, although numerous sub-factions are emerging. One sub-faction is J.D. Vance's version of far-right politics, which is nationalist with a strong focus on cultural issues. The combination of Vance's appeal on his own and an endorsement from Trump proved successful in the Ohio Senate primary.

The New York Times *has a* [primary election calendar and full election results](#). And, if you're a political campaign nerd like me, you can subscribe to [The Trailer](#) newsletter by David Weigel for The Washington Post.

## Opinion

**Bill McKibben:** "If Big Tech pushes Big Money to [cut off Big Oil](#), we could see the shifts that have eluded us in the climate fight thus far, and that scientists insist we need to make." (New Yorker, 5/20)

**Bohdan Kukharsky, Anastassia Fedyk, Yuriy Gorodnichenko, and Ilona Sologoub:** The [many problems](#) with Noam Chomsky's narrative about the Russia-Ukraine war. (Berkeley Blog, 5/19)

**Jamelle Bouie:** Those who take an extreme position on guns have exploited the [counter-majoritarian features](#) of U.S. government to impose their preferred policies. (NY Times, 5/27)

**Ashley Pratte Oates:** Texas Governor Greg Abbott said the mass shooting in Uvalde shouldn't be a [political issue](#). But "How could we not *politicize* this issue when it needs a political solution?" (NBC News, 5/26)

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