

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

MARCH 24, 2023

VOLUME 7, NO. 6

This issue brought
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Ohio Senate: The Battle for the Buckeye State

By Erin Covey

Sherrod Brown is the last Democrat standing in Ohio, once a bellwether state that now has a clear conservative bent.

The senator has been involved in Democratic politics in Ohio since 1974, when the 21-year-old was first elected to the state House. Fifty years later, Brown has an established brand as a progressive populist, but the state has shifted away from his party, and the 2024 race is shaping up to be his toughest Senate campaign yet.

President Donald Trump won the state by 8 points in 2016 and 2020, and Brown's last victory in 2018 took place in a wave year for Democrats against an underfunded Republican opponent.

Among the three Democrats up for re-election who represent red states, Brown might be in the strongest position — Ohio's Republican lean isn't as pronounced as West Virginia's or Montana's. And several Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections* warned of the danger in underestimating Brown's strength.

"He talks to working people in the state like most Democrats don't," one Ohio Republican strategist said.

The Republican Field

Though the contours of the GOP primary are still being drawn, most are expecting a three-way race between 2022 candidates Matt Dolan and Bernie Moreno, and Secretary of State Frank LaRose.

At this early stage, Republicans in Ohio and D.C. view all three potential candidates as formidable challengers to Brown. But the 2024 primary is guaranteed to be a contentious battle that could leave the eventual nominee in a weakened position. Brutal Republican primaries hampered the party's ability to win several competitive Senate races last cycle, and though Republicans see these three candidates as viable general election candidates, that could change by next March, when GOP voters make a decision.

So far, Dolan is the only Republican who's announced that he's running. The Republican state senator was just on the ballot in the 2022 Senate GOP primary, and stood in stark contrast to his competitors who were auditioning for Trump's blessing. Dolan, whose family owns the Cleveland Guardians baseball team, injected \$10.6 million into his 2022 campaign (including an \$8 million campaign contribution and a \$2.6 million loan), and is prepared to tap into his personal wealth in his second bid.

Dolan, 58, has served in the state Legislature off and on since 2005, representing parts of Cuyahoga County on the outskirts of Cleveland. He was in the state House from 2005 until 2010, when he mounted

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2024 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (8)

MI Open (Stabenow, D)
Baldwin (D-Wis.)
Brown (D-Ohio)
Casey (D-Penn.)
Kaine (D-Va.)
Manchin (D-W.V.)
Rosen (D-Nev.)
Tester (D-Mont.)

Republican-Held (0)

Independent-Held (1)

Sinema (I-Ariz.)

Solid Democratic (14)

CA Open (Feinstein, D)
Cantwell (D-Wa.)
Cardin (D-Md.)
Carper (D-Del.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)
King (I-Maine)
Klobuchar (DFL-Minn.)
Menendez (D-N.J.)
Murphy (D-Ct.)
Sanders (I-Vt.)
Warren (D-Mass.)
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (11)

IN Open (Braun, R)
Barrasso (R-Wy.)
Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Cramer (R-N.D.)
Cruz (R-Texas)
Fischer (R-Neb.)
Hawley (R-Mo.)
Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Romney (R-Utah)
Scott (R-Fla.)
Wicker (R-Miss.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

CALENDAR

May 16	Kentucky Governor Primary
Aug. 8	Mississippi Governor Primary
Aug. 10	Louisiana Governor Filing Deadline
Aug. 29	Mississippi Governor Primary Runoff (if necessary)
Oct. 14	Louisiana Governor Primary

Colorado 3: Can Boebert Bounce Back?

By Jacob Rubashkin

One of the biggest surprises of the 2022 election wasn't actually an upset.

Colorado Republican Lauren Boebert won re-election as expected, but it ended up being the closest House race in the country. She won by just a few hundred votes, even though she was running in a district Donald Trump would have won in 2020, in a midterm with an unpopular Democratic president, and against a nondescript Democrat who didn't receive any support from the national party.

Now that Democrat, Adam Frisch, is back for a rematch, hoping to recreate the magic of the midterms in a presidential cycle.

The Lay of the Land

Colorado's 3rd District is a vast district that covers the state's Western Slope and extends east along the New Mexico border to include Pueblo in the Front Range.

The district is mostly rural, per the *FiveThirtyEight* urbanization index, and its economy relies heavily on ranching, resource extraction, and tourism. The district includes the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Mesa Verde national parks, as well as popular ski towns such as Vail, Telluride, and Aspen.

Demographically, the district is 70 percent non-Hispanic white, 23 percent

Hispanic, and 5 percent Native American — there are two Native American reservations within the district.

Politically, the district leans Republican. In 2020, Trump would have carried the seat by 8 points, 53-45 percent. That's down from his 2016 margin of 14 points, 53-39 percent, against Hillary Clinton. In 2020's Senate race, GOP Sen. Cory Gardner would have won the district by 10 points, 54-44 percent, even though he lost statewide.

The district saw significantly closer contests in 2022, due to Democrats' strong performances statewide. In the gubernatorial

contest, incumbent Democrat Jared Polis actually carried the district, 49-47 percent, while winning statewide by 20 points, 59-39 percent. And Sen. Michael Bennet only lost the district by 1 point, 49-48 percent, to Republican Joe O'Dea, while winning statewide by 14 points. Republicans running in down ballot races performed slightly better; the secretary of state nominee carried the 3rd by 2.5 points, the attorney general nominee by 5 points, and the treasurer nominee by 6 points.

Boebert won by 546 votes, 50.08-49.02 percent.

The Incumbent

Boebert, 36, is only in her second term but is already one of the better-known members of the House GOP conference due to, among other things, past support for the QAnon conspiracy, attention-grabbing pro-gun stances and videos, support for overturning the 2020 election, Islamophobic comments about fellow Rep. Ilhan Omar, and her heckling of Biden during his State of the Union.

The Florida-born Boebert dropped out of high school (she later earned her GED) and worked as a natural gas pipeliner before opening Shooters Grill, a gun-themed restaurant in Rifle, Colorado where the servers openly carry firearms.

Her gun-rights activism brought her to politics, and in 2020 she challenged Rep. Scott Tipton in the GOP primary for the 3rd District. Tipton was endorsed by Trump but Boebert still won, 55-45 percent. In the general election, the 3rd District attracted significant spending from outside groups on both sides of the aisle, and while polls showed a close race, Boebert won by 5 points, 51-46 percent.

Following the 2020 Census, the district was redrawn by Colorado's independent redistricting commission to be slightly more Republican-leaning.

In 2022, Boebert faced Frisch and barely won despite the race receiving minimal outside attention.

In Congress, Boebert is a member of the House Freedom Caucus, and sits on the Natural Resources and Budget committees. She was one of the Republican holdouts who forced Kevin McCarthy to endure 15 ballots before being elected Speaker of the House.

Boebert's general consultant is Alex Chaffetz of Rock Chalk Media. There may still be appetite to challenge Boebert in the GOP primary,

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Lauren Boebert

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

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but no standard-bearer has emerged. One GOP source says that a wealthy self-funder is poking around the district. And state Sen. Cleave Simpson has publicly mused about running a primary campaign against Boebert focused on water issues, but he hasn't taken concrete steps in that direction.

The congresswoman faced a credible primary challenge in 2022 and defeated state Sen. Don Coram, 64-36 percent.

The Challenger(s)

Frisch, 55, made his first run for Congress last year, narrowly losing to Boebert. The North Dakota-born 1990 graduate of University of Colorado had a successful career in finance in New York before moving to Vail in 2002, and then Aspen the following year. After getting involved in community financial and housing issues, Frisch entered politics in 2009 with a run for Aspen City Council. He lost that bid, but won in 2011, and won re-election four years later.

In 2018, Frisch narrowly lost a bid for Aspen mayor, placing third in a top-two primary by a handful of votes.

In 2022, Frisch entered the 3rd District race late, after the district lines were redrawn. Several candidates had already entered and exited the race, and Frisch ended up in a primary against Pueblo community organizer Sol Sandoval, who was running a more progressive campaign. Frisch, who has called himself a moderate or "conservative Democrat," defeated Sandoval by just 289 votes, 42-42 percent, in a race that broke down on geographic lines, with Frisch dominating the Western Slope and Sandoval winning the Front Range. Frisch loaned his campaign \$1.5 million for the primary.

In the general election, Frisch continued to run as a moderate, with an eye on picking off some of the voters who cast ballots for Coram in the GOP primary. In several of his ads, he pitched himself as a "conservative businessman" who wants to cut government spending and regulations. Another ad listed out all the times Boebert voted against a majority of the Republican conference, to paint her as too extreme for even the district's Republican voters.

Ultimately, Frisch led the count on election night, and for days afterward. But late-counted ballots pushed Boebert ahead by 546 votes and a recount confirmed her victory.

Frisch announced in early February he would seek a rematch in 2024.

One other Democrat has announced her campaign: Alamosa veterinarian Debby Burnett, who intends to make a class-based appeal against the wealthier Frisch in the primary. But local and national Democrats don't see her as a threat to Frisch.

Other potential candidates, including 2022 runner-up Sandoval and Kerry Donovan, the former state senator who briefly launched a campaign before she was redistricted out of the 3rd, look highly unlikely to run.

A National Spotlight

Strategists from both parties agree that one difference from last cycle will be the lack of any element of surprise.

Last cycle, neither party took this race particularly seriously. The partisanship of the district, and the overall national environment of a midterm election with an unpopular Democratic president led most observers to count Boebert as the heavy favorite.

None of the four major outside players — the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the House Majority PAC, the

National Republican Congressional Committee, and the Congressional Leadership Fund — spent any money.

The top spender in the race was the House Freedom Fund, the political wing of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, which shelled out \$508,000 to support Boebert, though \$354,000 of that was spent helping her to win the primary. On the Democratic side, two super PACs

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2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (4D, 8R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NY 3 (Santos, R)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NY 4 (D'Esposito, R)
CO 8 (Caraveo, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)
MI 7 (Open; Slotkin, D)	NY 22 (Williams, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

Tilt Democratic (3D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)

Tilt Republican (7R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 10 (James, R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

Lean Democratic (14D)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)
WA 8 (Schrier, D)

Lean Republican (6R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 1 (LaLota, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	172	168
Likely/Lean/Tilt	25	29
Total	197	197
Toss-up		12
Ohio/North Carolina		29
Needed for majority		218

Likely Democratic (12D)

CA 49 (Levin, D)
FL 9 (Soto, D)
FL 23 (Moskowitz, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)
MD 6 (Trone, D)
MI 8 (Kildee, D)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
NH 2 (Kuster, D)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
VA 10 (Wexton, D)

Likely Republican (12R)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)
CA 40 (Kim, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)
MT 1 (Zinke, R)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)
SC 1 (Mace, R)
WI 1 (Steil, R)
WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

Ohio and North Carolina ratings are being withheld pending new maps.

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with Colorado donors spent a combined \$514,000 against Boebert.

Now this district is getting the significant attention that follows a close and competitive election result.

For Frisch, that additional attention isn't necessarily a good thing, Democratic strategists caution. He can expect significantly more scrutiny than he faced last time, when there was a favorable information disparity between the controversial, ubiquitous Boebert, and the more unknown but inoffensive Frisch (one of his ads touted him as a workhorse to Boebert's "show pony").

In 2022, Frisch was able to define himself earlier on in the cycle, traveling the district discussing housing and water policy, while Boebert did not begin to attack him in earnest until the fall.

And Boebert struggled to find an effective message against him, closing the election with an accusation that Frisch had succumbed to blackmail over an alleged affair while on the city council.

Groups like the NRCC, which did not even publish an opposition research file on Frisch last cycle as they do with top-tier opponents, and CLF will likely be involved early on in this race to support Boebert. They'll also invest in research against Frisch, scrutinizing all of his votes on the city council as well as his business and finance career.

Increased attention isn't all bad for Frisch, though.

He will benefit from the closeness of his race last time, which gives him greater visibility among a national network of small dollar Democratic donors who dislike Boebert, and credibility among the larger donor class — and Colorado political establishment — that was previously skeptical of his viability.

In 2022, he raised \$4.4 million, not including a \$2.2 million personal loan he paid back in full. In 2024, observers on both sides of the aisle expect him to raise significantly more. In February, his campaign said it raised \$500,000 from 15,000 individual donors within three days of announcing.

Not only is he likely to avoid a serious primary challenge, but he has earned himself a spot alongside Colorado's 8th District, where first-term Democrat Yadira Caraveo faces a tough re-election, as the only consequential races for Centennial State Democrats in 2024.

How It Plays Out

Just because this was the closest race in the country in 2022 does not ensure that it will be a nailbiter again.

Frisch was boosted by Democrats' strong performances around the state and at the top of the ballot. Rather than being able to let the partisanship of the district carry her to victory, Boebert actually had to outperform or run even with the GOP standard-bearers at the top of the ticket. She ultimately won 3 percent more of the vote than GOP gubernatorial nominee Heidi Ganahl, and 1 percent more than O'Dea, the Senate nominee. She won more raw votes than Ganahl, O'Dea, and the GOP nominee for secretary of state.

The general struggles of Colorado Republicans may belie the notion



Adam Frisch

Courtesy Frisch Campaign

that Boebert paid a specific electoral price for her controversial comments and behavior. However, one GOP source notes that compared to the two other Republican incumbents, Boebert underperformed. In the 4th District, GOP Rep. Ken Buck won 61 percent of the vote compared to 55 percent for Ganahl and 57 percent for O'Dea. And in the 5th District, GOP Rep. Doug Lamborn won 56 percent, compared to Ganahl's 50 percent and O'Dea's 52 percent.

Republican strategists do not anticipate Colorado to be as much of a bloodbath in 2024 as it was last year, when their statewide candidates were losing by landslides uncommon in the once-swingy state. But the GOP view of the state may lag the reality on the ground.

In 2020, many Republicans felt like Gardner was a uniquely talented candidate who was positioned to claw back the ground the party had lost during the Trump years. He lost by 10 points — better than Trump, but nowhere near victory. In 2022, Republican strategists argued that Gardner's performance in 2020 was a more accurate reflection of the state's underlying partisanship than Trump's 14-point loss, and that a strong candidate such as O'Dea could put the state in play during a good midterm cycle. Instead, he lost by as much as Trump had, while Ganahl lost by even more.

The operative question for this race, then, may be just how far the Republican Party brand has fallen in recent years.

If the top of the GOP ticket performs as poorly as it did in 2022, that is bad news for Boebert because she'll need to overperform again. But if the GOP presidential nominee (there are no other statewide races in Colorado next year) can turn in a moderately better performance statewide, that would be a substantial boost to the incumbent. Several GOP strategists would rather have Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as their standard-bearer in Colorado, rather than Trump, who's standing in the state remains poor.

The new state party leadership is not helping the GOP cause. The state party is now helmed by former state Rep. Dave Williams, who falsely asserts that the 2020 presidential election was stolen and who introduced a measure in the state House thanking the Jan. 6 protesters.

Williams also ran against Lamborn in 2022 (which state parties normally don't encourage) and tried to appear on the ballot as "Let's Go Brandon," making some Colorado Republican sources skeptical of his seriousness and ability to turn around a party in decline. In the wake of his ascension as state party chairman, several prominent Republicans in the state publicly announced they were leaving the party.

The Bottom Line

One big question for Boebert will be how, if at all, she adjusts her bombastic persona after such a close call, especially with Frisch making lack of seriousness a major campaign issue.

In some regards, she's already begun that pivot. In recent months, she's distanced herself from fellow firebrand Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, getting into a high-profile fight with her over McCarthy's speakership and chiding Greene on Fox News for her belief in conspiracies like the Rothschild-controlled space laser.

But she also continues to embrace hot-button issues, cheering on Tucker Carlson's TV specials in which he aims to whitewash the Jan. 6 riot, aligning herself with Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz on the high-profile speaker vote, and supporting a bill to name the AR-15 the "national gun of America." And she has shown little interest in moderating on her policy stances.

While much is still uncertain about next year, starting with the presidential matchup, one thing is clear: nobody will be ignoring Colorado's 3rd District this time.

Texas Senate: Always on Democrats' Mind

By Erin Covey

Democrats believed Texas was on the verge of turning blue after 2018, when Beto O'Rourke came just two and a half points away from unseating Republican Sen. Ted Cruz. Half a decade later, the polarizing senator is preparing for his third Senate campaign — and Democrats in the Lone Star State have suffered a series of disappointing election cycles.

In 2020, the party came 11,000 votes short of flipping the state House, while Republican Sen. John Cornyn won by nearly 10 points and Democrats failed to flip a tranche of competitive U.S. House seats. In 2021, Republicans who controlled the redistricting process drew new legislative and congressional maps that severely limited the number of competitive districts across the state. And last November, O'Rourke lost to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott by 11 points as Republicans picked up a battleground U.S. House district in South Texas.

Texas Democrats acknowledge that a steep climb awaits whoever challenges Cruz in 2024. But though they have limited options, they believe at least one potential candidate could make the race competitive.

"The real challenge is not to make [Cruz] unacceptable, which he is," one Democratic strategist based in Texas told *Inside Elections*. "The real challenge is for our candidate to be acceptable."

The Potential Democratic Field

Rep. Colin Allred, who represents the suburbs of Dallas, and Julián Castro, the former San Antonio mayor and HUD secretary, are seen as the two strongest potential contenders.

Aside from O'Rourke, Castro is probably the best known Democratic figure in the state. The 48-year-old former mayor and his twin brother, Rep. Joaquin Castro, have been involved in Texas Democratic politics since the early 2000s, when Julián Castro served on the San Antonio city council and Joaquin Castro served in the Texas state House.

As mayor of one of Texas' largest cities, he was seen as a rising progressive star and delivered a keynote speech at the 2012 Democratic National Convention that elevated his national profile. Two years later, President Barack Obama nominated Castro to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and he became the youngest member of the president's Cabinet.

But his 2020 presidential campaign failed to pick up steam, and Castro, the only Latino candidate in the Democratic primary, dropped out of the race at the beginning of 2020 and endorsed Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

Democrats who spoke with *Inside Elections* were skeptical that Castro would make the jump — and some expressed concerns that the former presidential contender would be too progressive to win statewide.

Allred, however, appears to be seriously considering a campaign, though he's yet to comment publicly on his intentions.

The 39-year-old Dallas native was a linebacker for the Baylor Bears and the Tennessee Titans before graduating from the UC Berkeley School of Law and becoming a civil rights attorney. Allred also served at the HUD under Castro's leadership for a brief period.

In the 2018 "blue wave," Allred flipped a suburban Dallas district, defeating longtime Republican Rep. Pete Sessions by 7 points, and he won a competitive re-election campaign in 2020 by 6 points.

Allred is now part of House Democratic leadership as a chief deputy whip (he previously served as the Caucus Representative to House

leadership), and he could have a long tenure in what is now a safe Democratic seat after the latest round of redistricting. But Democrats are eager for a statewide candidate with the ability to win competitive races and could appeal to more moderate voters.

"He sees the world from the middle out. He's not a knee-jerk ideologue," a Texas-based Democratic strategist said.

Democrats agree that if Allred decided to run, he'd clear the primary field. At the end of 2022, the congressman reported having nearly \$2 million in cash on hand.

"I do think that he has the best shot, and quite frankly, I haven't really heard of anyone else that would be credible that's thinking about running," Democratic Rep. Marc Veasey, who represents a neighboring district in the Metroplex, told *Inside Elections*.

But if neither Allred nor Castro decide to run, the Democratic primary field is wide open.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Colin Allred

Democrats point to state Sen. Roland Gutierrez, who represents a sprawling district that stretches from San Antonio into West Texas, as a potential option.

Gutierrez's profile has risen since the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde reignited the debate over gun laws. Throughout this year's legislative session, the 52-year-old state senator has introduced several sets of bills to tighten the state's gun laws and better prepare law enforcement to respond to shootings.

Other names mentioned include outgoing Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, 33-year-old state Rep. James Talarico, and even Scott Kelly, the retired astronaut and brother of Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly. Two years ago, Kelly, a Houston resident originally from New Jersey, responded to a tweet asking him to run against Cruz, saying "Hmm...maybe."

If You're Gonna Play in Texas

Even if Democrats do end up with a strong challenger to Cruz, they have a daunting task ahead of them.

The eventual nominee has to "energize an electorate that's just beat," as one Democratic consultant put it, after the party has seen little progress over the past several years despite insisting that demographic shifts across Texas could turn the state into a battleground.

For the past five years, O'Rourke has been the face of the Texas Democratic Party — and has effectively been running for office throughout that entire period. While the former El Paso congressman remains popular among the Democratic base in Texas, his presidential run in 2020 damaged his image as he veered to the left on issues including gun control, famously saying during one debate that he'd "take your AR-15."

O'Rourke's favorability rating remained underwater through his 2022 campaign, and Abbott's campaign was laser-focused on immigration and

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economic issues even as O'Rourke tried to focus the race on abortion, guns, and the governor's handling of the state's electrical grid crisis in 2021.

"It became the Beto show," a Texas-based Democratic consultant told *Inside Elections*, arguing that Republicans successfully made O'Rourke "toxic," damaging the rest of the Democratic ticket.

In his 2022 gubernatorial bid, he won only 19 of 254 counties, compared to the 32 he won in 2018. He came up short in key places like Tarrant County, a historically Republican-leaning



Ted Cruz

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

county that O'Rourke narrowly won in 2018 and Biden won in 2020. And Abbott's margin of victory shrunk by only 2 points from 2022 to 2018, when he defeated a lesser-known Democratic opponent.

Still, Democrats are hopeful that 2024 could play out differently — largely because their opponent is such a polarizing figure.

The latest survey from the University of Texas at Austin, conducted in February, showed 40 percent of Texas voters approved of the job Cruz is doing, while 46 percent disapproved. Among independents,

the senator's job rating was at 29 percent approval and 55 percent disapproval. For comparison, Abbott's overall job rating in the same poll was at 46 percent approval and 43 percent disapproval, and 38 percent approval and 46 percent disapproval among independents.

Cruz is not quite as unpopular as he was during his failed 2016 presidential campaign, when his approval rating dropped to the mid-30s (according to an earlier UT Austin survey). But it's not clear if the senator has won back support from the Texans who supported Cornyn and Abbott but voted against Cruz in 2018.

The Republican presidential nominee could also have a significant impact on how competitive the state is at both the presidential level and down ballot.

In 2020, Joe Biden garnered 46 percent of the presidential vote — the highest vote share for a Democratic presidential candidate in Texas since Jimmy Carter won the state with 51 percent in 1976.

Trump's popularity among Texas Republicans is waning, and if he becomes the nominee, Democrats and Republicans expect Texas will be at least as close as it was in 2020, when Trump won by 6 points. Trump's presence on the ballot would be a boon to the rest of the Democratic ticket as well.

And unlike in Florida — the one other Republican-leaning state where the Democratic Party could have an opportunity to pick up a Senate seat — the political trajectory of Texas appears to be moving in Democrats' favor.

But it's a slow drift, and in the meantime, Texas Democrats' prospects in the 2024 Senate are still faint. **IE**

Report Shorts

Arizona

Senate. Kyrsten Sinema's campaign website has stopped sending donors to Democratic platform ActBlue. Instead, the independent now directs donors to rival payment processor Anedot, which is used primarily by Republican candidates and independents. Sinema hasn't been kicked off ActBlue (yet), and her page on that platform is still live. But her move to Anedot is an indicator she's preparing for a 2024 run without the powerful tool.

Kentucky

Governor. An outside group backing Kelly Craft in the GOP primary has begun airing \$1 million in TV advertisements attacking state Attorney General Daniel Cameron as insufficiently conservative. Craft and her allies are still the only major players on TV in the May 16 primary. The winner will face incumbent Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear in 2023's top contest.

Louisiana

Governor. Democrats have their standard-bearer in former state Secretary of Transportation Shawn Wilson, who has a clear lane now that state party chairwoman Katie Bernhardt is not running. Republicans have a number of options. The frontrunner is state Attorney General Jeff Landry, but state Sen. Sharon Hewitt, state Rep. Richard Nelson, and state Treasurer John Schroder are all running as well. Stephen Waguespack, a former chief of staff to then-Gov. Bobby Jindal and more recently the CEO of Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, is the latest entrant into the all-party primary. Rep. Garret Graves will not run.

Rhode Island

1st District. There's more clarity about the Democratic field vying to replace Rep. David Cicilline after he resigns in May. Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos and state Sen. Sandra Cano are both running, while wealthy former CVS executive / 2022 gubernatorial candidate Helena Foulkes and state Attorney General Peter Neronha ruled out bids. Former state government official Nick Autiello and state Rep. Nathan Biah are also running. The seat is Solid Democratic. **IE**

2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (1)	Republican-Held (1)
NC Open (Cooper, D)	Sununu (R-N.H.)
Solid Democratic (2)	Solid Republican (7)
DE Open (Carney, D)	IN Open (Holcomb, R)
Inslee (D-Wash.)	MO Open (Parson, R)
	WV Open (Justice, R)
	Burgum (R-N.D.)
	Cox (R-Utah)
	Gianforte (R-Mont.)
	Scott (R-Vt.)

Takeovers in italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans

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an unsuccessful bid for the Cuyahoga County executive office. After working in the family business for a stint, he was elected to a competitive state Senate seat in 2016.

As the only Republican candidate to acknowledge the results of the 2020 presidential election, Dolan faced Trump's ire (though the former president's initial tweet about Dolan was solely focused on his family's role in changing the name of Cleveland's major league baseball team from the Indians). But he didn't position himself as an anti-Trump Republican on the trail, and he voted for the former president in 2016 and 2020.

Dolan ultimately came in third place with 23.3 percent of the GOP vote, just 0.7 points behind former state Treasurer Josh Mandel and 9 points behind J.D. Vance. He won Cuyahoga and Franklin counties, the state's largest urban centers, and Geauga County, his home base.

But in what is likely to be a smaller Republican field, Dolan's path to victory in the primary is murky.

Dolan's campaign is banking on a larger, less conservative GOP primary electorate in a presidential cycle, and more interest from Republicans in supporting a candidate who can compete in a general election — though GOP primary voters remain less likely than Democratic primary voters to prioritize "electability" in their nominees. In conversations with *Inside Elections*, several Republican strategists were skeptical of the state senator's chances, particularly if Trump becomes involved in the primary.

Republicans hope that the former president takes a more hands off approach in 2024 as he has his own race to run. But Trump's involvement in the Senate primary will likely depend on his own prospects at that point in the presidential race. Ohio's presidential and state primary elections will both take place March 19 — meaning that there's a fair chance the Republican presidential primary will not be settled by the time the Senate primary is held.

Dolan's path to victory in the Senate primary may be easier if Trump isn't the frontrunner in the presidential primary by next March; the former president could still cause problems for Dolan, but would have less influence among Republican voters.

"His ability to carve out a place is going to be defined by what goes on in [the presidential] race," one Ohio Republican strategist not involved in the Senate race told *Inside Elections*.

Dolan is likely to face at least two other serious candidates: Moreno and LaRose, who are actively exploring campaigns. Sources expect both to announce their plans in the coming months.

Moreno, a luxury car dealer from Cleveland who later made a foray into the blockchain industry, also ran in the 2022 Republican primary and drew on his considerable personal wealth. Like Dolan, Moreno could contribute millions to a 2024 campaign, considering he loaned himself \$3.8 million in 2022.

The 56-year-old was a prominent Republican donor before making his first run for office in last year's Senate race. Touting his business experience and his family's immigration story from Colombia, Moreno positioned himself solidly in the conservative lane of the primary.

Though Moreno had lambasted Trump in 2015, he embraced the former president in his Senate campaign, hiring Trump allies including Kellyanne Conway and former Trump official Richard Grenell. Moreno's daughter Emily is also married to freshman Ohio Rep. Max Miller, a former Trump aide.

Despite spending millions on advertising across the state, Moreno was unable to break through the crowded field, and he dropped out

in February, citing concerns that the number of Trump-supporting candidates "could cost the MAGA movement a conservative seat."

LaRose, Ohio's secretary of state, doesn't have the financial resources of his two potential rivals. But he would likely benefit from higher name ID, as the only statewide elected official in the mix.

The 43-year-old was first elected to the state Senate in 2010, winning a competitive seat based in Akron. The retired Green Beret and Akron native developed a relatively moderate profile in the state Legislature, working on bipartisan efforts to reduce gerrymandering and modernize



Courtesy Dolan Campaign

Matt Dolan

Ohio's outdated election technology while supporting Republican efforts to limit early and absentee voting.

In 2018, the state senator ran for the open secretary of state seat and defeated his Democratic opponent by 4 points, a margin

of victory in line with the majority of other Republican statewide candidates that year (the major exception being Republican Senate nominee Jim Renacci, who lost to Brown by 7 points).

As secretary of state, LaRose has toed a very fine line. He became the only incumbent secretary of state in the country to win Trump's endorsement in 2022 — despite acknowledging Biden's 2020 victory and initially criticizing those who claimed widespread fraud without evidence.

But facing a primary challenge from an election-denying former state legislator, LaRose began questioning the integrity of election systems across the country, telling NPR in May of 2022 that he believed there were "shenanigans" in 2020. The incumbent cruised to victory, winning his primary by 30 points and then defeating his Democratic opponent by 19 points in the general election.

Republican strategists in Ohio believe LaRose could have the potential to draw support from more pragmatic voters while retaining support from the Trump-loving GOP base. But that strategy could have pitfalls — former Ohio GOP Chairwoman Jane Timken tried to carve a similar path in the 2022 primary and came in fifth place.

The potential wildcard candidate is Rep. Warren Davidson, who has represented a U.S House seat in southwestern Ohio since 2016. The Club for Growth, an anti-tax group with a record of backing anti-establishment candidates, is reportedly urging Davidson to get in.

Most Republicans see Davidson as weaker than the three other candidates, largely because he's not well-known outside of his district and lacks fundraising chops. Davidson, who succeeded former Speaker John Boehner in the special election for his House seat, is also staunchly aligned with the Freedom Caucus-wing of the GOP and was recruited to run by Rep. Jim Jordan.

Even with the support from the Club, he might still be at a financial disadvantage running against multiple self-funders.

Other Republicans floated, including Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost and wealthy businessman Mike Gibbons, are less likely to run. Gibbons ran in both 2018 and 2022, spending millions to rise to the top of the primary field before landing in fourth place. "[Gibbons] just likes to have his name out there," one Republican source told *Inside Elections*, echoing other

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Republicans who doubted the businessman would run for a third time.

Sources estimate that the Republican candidate will need at least \$10 million to compete in the GOP primary — which shouldn't be an issue for wealthy candidates like Dolan and Moreno.

The Democratic Incumbent

The 2024 battle is almost certain to be Brown's toughest Senate campaign to date. But Democrats believe that the veteran campaigner can defy the political trend of the state, pointing to his record of consistently running ahead of other Democrats in Ohio.

The 70-year-old senator has spent the vast majority of his adult life involved in politics, launching his first campaign as a senior at Yale University in 1974 when he ran for the Ohio state House.

Brown spent eight years in the state legislature before running for secretary of state in 1982. He suffered his first and only election loss in 1990, when Republican Bob Taft defeated him in his run for a third term.

Two years later, voters in Ohio's 13th District, which then encompassed the western suburbs of Cleveland, sent Brown to Congress. He served in the U.S. House for seven terms, establishing his populist reputation through advocating for protectionist trade policies.

The senator has benefited from running in three years — 2006, 2012, and 2018 — when the national political environment favored Democrats. In the 2006 blue wave, Brown unseated then-Sen. Mike DeWine by 12 points.

His latest re-election campaign also took place in a midterm environment that benefited Democrats. In 2018, Brown defeated Republican Rep. Renacci by 7 points — and he ran far ahead of Democrats running for other statewide positions, all of whom lost by at least 3 points. Just two years earlier, Trump had won the state by 8 points as historically Democratic regions, including the Mahoning Valley and northwestern Ohio, swung dramatically toward Republicans.

But Brown had some advantages that cycle that he'll lack in 2024 — namely, a weak Republican challenger who received barely any support from national Republican groups. Renacci won the primary after Mandel, the 2012 nominee and presumed frontrunner, dropped out of the race.

The better comparison to 2024 may be the 2012 election, when Mandel was a fresher face and well-funded. But, Ohio was still a battleground state 10 years ago, and Brown didn't need to outrun President Barack Obama to win re-election.

The senator defeated Mandel, 50-45 percent, improving slightly on Obama's 50-48 percent victory in the Buckeye State. Brown's coalition of voters looked different from the president's in some parts of the state; he won several counties that Obama lost, including Lake County, outside of Cleveland, and Monroe, Belmont, and Jefferson, all counties along the Ohio River.

According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline metric, after the 2022 elections, a typical Republican will defeat a typical Democrat in Ohio by 11.2 points, 54.9-43.7 percent. *Inside Elections'* other metric, Vote Above Replacement, shows that Brown outperformed a typical Democrat by 9.4 points in 2018.

If he's able to repeat that 2018 overperformance, then he should be on track to win another term.

How It Plays Out

One of Republicans' greatest concerns — and Democrats' hope — is that the race for the GOP nomination could devolve into the kind of battle that left Republicans more vulnerable than they should have been in the 2022 Senate race.

But the stakes are higher in 2024, and a guaranteed competitive race against a formidable incumbent should keep the primary from becoming as crowded as it was last year. One national Republican strategist pointed out that the three potential frontrunners are all seen as fairly "mild-mannered," at least relative to 2022 candidates like Mandel and Gibbons, who nearly came to blows during one primary debate.

Republicans in Ohio and D.C. believe that Dolan, LaRose, and Moreno are all viable general election candidates. And unlike in Montana, West Virginia, and Indiana, the National Republican Senatorial Committee appears to be staying out of the primary.

At this point in the cycle, Democrats say there isn't a clear candidate they'd prefer to run against.

"The problem for Republicans is not the candidate, it's the primary voter," one national Democratic strategist told *Inside Elections*. "You have



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Sherrod Brown

to take such vitriolic stances."

"This is the Republican Party today," another Democratic strategist said. "We're not going to be running against Rob Portman."

Unlike in 2018, Republican outside groups are prepared

to spend millions in 2024. And the fundraising gap between the two nominees shouldn't be as steep as it was five years ago, when Brown was able to outspend Renacci, \$28 million to \$5 million.

But after Republican groups spent \$30 million last November to make sure Vance got across the finish line, the party is motivated to make sure their candidate can compete with Brown's fundraising prowess and won't be dependent on outside groups.

At the same time, Brown will have the full force of the national Democratic party's investment behind him, which Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan lacked in 2022 as the party prioritized more competitive Senate races. The senator had \$3.4 million in the bank on December 31.

The Bottom Line

In a state that isn't likely to be competitive at the presidential level, Brown will need to create enough distance between himself and the national Democratic Party to persuade Ohians to split their tickets for him.

"[Biden's] not going to compete in the state, which is probably the best thing Sherrod has going for him," one Democrat told *Inside Elections*, predicting that Biden's ceiling in 2024 would be around 45 percent.

Brown, though, still is open to campaigning with Biden. "I run my own race, and my own brand. So, I'm not going to run from Biden," he told *Politico*.

Republicans aren't particularly concerned about how the top of the Republican ticket might impact the Senate race, since the party is favored to win on the presidential level regardless.

Unlike in swing states, Trump isn't a liability in Ohio, and some strategists speculated that the former president may be better at turning out the white, working-class Ohians who flocked to him in 2016 and 2020.

Republicans' path to the Senate majority runs right through the Buckeye State, and regardless of who they nominate, they're not going to allow a repeat of 2018.