

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## 2022 Senate Ratings

### BATTLEGROUND

#### Democratic-Held (4)

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.)  
Hassan (D-N.H.)  
Kelly (D-Ariz.)  
Warnock (D-Ga.)

#### Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)  
PA Open (Toomey, R)  
Johnson (R-Wisc.)  
Rubio (R-Fl.)

#### Solid Democratic (10)

Bennet (D-Colo.)  
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)  
Duckworth (D-Ill.)  
Leahy (D-Vt.)  
Murray (D-Wash.)  
Padilla (D-Calif.)  
Schatz (D-Hawaii)  
Schumer (D-N.Y.)  
Van Hollen (D-Md.)  
Wyden (D-Ore.)

#### Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)  
MO Open (Blunt, R)  
OH Open (Portman, R)  
Boozman (R-Ark.)  
Crapo (R-Idaho)  
Grassley (R-Iowa)  
Hoeven (R-N.D.)  
Kennedy (R-La.)  
Lankford (R-Okla.)  
Lee (R-Utah)  
Moran (R-Kan.)  
Murkowski (R-Alaska)  
Paul (R-Ky.)  
Scott (R-S.C.)  
Thune (R-S.D.)  
Young (R-Ind.)

## CALENDAR

<b>June 1</b>	New Mexico's 1st District Special Election
<b>June 8</b>	Virginia Democratic Gubernatorial Primary
<b>June 8</b>	New Jersey Gubernatorial Primary
<b>July 27</b>	Texas' 6th District Special Election
<b>Aug. 3</b>	Ohio's 11th & 15th District Special Election Primaries
<b>Nov. 2</b>	Florida's 20th District Special Election Primary
<b>Nov. 2</b>	Virginia & New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections

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## Ohio Senate: Grand Re-Opening

By Jacob Rubashkin

GOP Sen. Rob Portman's surprise decision not to seek a third term in Ohio in 2022 has set off a raucous primary among Republicans, and finally pushed a long-hesitant Democrat into his first statewide race.

The Buckeye State has drifted rightward over the past decade — Democrats have won just one statewide race since 2012 — but Portman's exit adds some intrigue to what would have otherwise been a straightforward hold. The Republican Party cannot afford to lose any seats in its quest to reclaim the majority.

### The Lay of the Land

Long considered the quintessential swing state, Ohio has not been kind to Democrats in recent years. The last Democratic presidential nominee to carry the state was President Barack Obama in 2012, when he won Ohio by 3 points, 51-48 percent, over Mitt Romney.

Since then, Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump in 2016, 51-43 percent, and in 2020, despite polling showing the race effectively tied, Joe Biden lost to Trump by a nearly identical margin, 53-45 percent.

The only Democrat to win a statewide election since 2012 is Sen. Sherrod Brown, who defeated an underfunded Rep. Jim Renacci by 7 points in 2018, 53-46 percent.

That same year, Democrat Richard Cordray lost the gubernatorial contest by 4 points to Republican Mike DeWine, and Democratic candidates for attorney general, secretary of state, treasurer, and auditor lost by similar margins.

Democratic strength in Ohio is highly concentrated in three urban areas (Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus), known as "the three Cs." Biden won just seven of Ohio's 88 counties in 2020 (compared to 8 for Clinton and 17 for Obama in 2012). In 2018, Brown won 16, overperforming Biden and Clinton in every single county.

Brown showed particular strength in the eastern part of the state. Once a Democratic stronghold, those predominantly white working class and industrial areas have swung toward Republicans.

An Ohio Senate seat hasn't been open in more than a decade, when Portman replaced Republican George Voinovich in 2010. And this opportunity has attracted a raft of well-funded Republicans.

### The Republicans

Josh Mandel, 43, was most recently state Treasurer from 2011-2019. Prior to that, he represented parts of Cuyahoga County in the state House, and was a Lyndhurst city councilman from 2003-2007. A lawyer by trade, he is also a Marine veteran who served two tours in Iraq as an

*Continued on page 5*

# New Mexico 1 Special: Tale of Two Races

By Jacob Rubashkin

After a net loss of 11 seats in 2020, House Democrats left themselves very little room for error in 2022. And with such a narrow majority, Democrats have to win special elections to maintain control of their own seats even before the midterm elections in order to maintain a working majority on the Hill and pass critical legislation.

The next test is June 1, when voters in New Mexico's 1st District head to the polls to pick their next member of Congress.

Four candidates are running to succeed Deb Haaland, who represented this Albuquerque district for just over two years before taking a post as President Joe Biden's Secretary of the Interior this spring.

The 1st District is heavily Democratic, and all signs point to the Democratic nominee, state Rep. Melanie Stansbury, as the clear favorite to win. *Inside Elections* rates the special election Solid Democratic. But Republicans believe that state Sen. Mark Moors is setting the agenda in the race and doing everything he needs to put himself into contention.

The June 1 special election could tell us about the current national political environment. A comfortable Stansbury win might indicate the environment has not shifted significantly since the 2020 elections, when Democrats held the House and won the Senate and the presidency. A narrower-than-expected victory for Stansbury could signal a drop in enthusiasm for Democrats and serve as a warning sign at the outset of the midterm cycle. A Moors win would be a political thunderclap on the scale of Democrats' March 2018 special election victory in Pennsylvania's 18th District, which portended serious Democratic gains in traditionally Republican areas that fall. Any Republican overperformance will be plumbed by GOP operatives for lessons on how to win back suburban voters and appeal to Hispanic voters.

Democrats had a disappointing finish in the Texas 6th special election when they were locked out of the runoff. So the party could use a big win in New Mexico to further its argument that it can buck history in November 2022.



Melanie Stansbury

Courtesy Stansbury Campaign

## The Lay of the Land

The 1st District is located in the center of New Mexico and is anchored by Bernalillo County (Albuquerque), which cast 91 percent of the district's ballots in 2020. The 1st also includes pieces of several, more rural, surrounding counties.

Like New Mexico as a whole, the 1st District has gone from being a Republican-leaning swing seat to a consistent Democratic vote. From 1982, the first time Albuquerque had its own district, until 2008, the 1st was represented by a Republican. Since then, it has only sent Democrats to Congress.

In 2020, Joe Biden carried the 1st by 23 points, 60-37 percent, over President Donald Trump. In 2016, Hillary Clinton carried it by 17 points, 52-35 percent, with Libertarian nominee/former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson winning 11 percent. President Barack Obama won the district by 15 points, 55-40 percent, in 2012, and 21 points, 60-39 percent, in 2008 (all according to data from *Daily Kos Elections*).

The last time the district was seriously contested at the congressional level was 2010, when the National Republican Congressional Committee spent \$300,000 against freshman Democratic Rep. Martin Heinrich, who narrowly beat Republican Jon Barea, 52-48 percent. Since then, no Republican candidate has come within 17 points of winning the district. Haaland won her two races by 23 (2018) and 17 (2020) points.

As of April 2021, Democrats had a sizable voter registration advantage, 48-27 percent.

According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline metric, Democrats have a 17-point advantage in the 1st; that means a typical Democrat would be expected to carry the district, 58-41 percent.

## The Democrat

New Mexico state law requires parties to select their nominees for special elections via convention, rather than traditional primary.

Stansbury, 42, was selected by members of the state Democratic Party's central committee at a virtual meeting in late March. Her victory was something of an upset. In the initial round of voting, Stansbury came in a distant second to state Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, a 2018 candidate for the seat who was a favorite of the party's progressive wing; she received 43 votes to Sedillo Lopez's 74 (out of 199).

With no candidate securing a majority, the two progressed to a runoff the following day, which Stansbury won with 103 votes to Sedillo Lopez's 97.

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Nathan L. Gonzales

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Nathan L. Gonzales  
Editor & Publisher  
nathan@insideelections.com  
@nathanlgonzales



Jacob Rubashkin  
Reporter & Analyst  
jacob@insideelections.com  
@jacobrubashkin

Ryan Matsumoto  
Contributing Analyst  
ryan@insideelections.com

Bradley Wascher  
Contributing Analyst  
bradley@insideelections.com

Robert Yoon  
Contributing Reporter & Analyst  
robert@insideelections.com

@InsideElections  
facebook.com/InsideElections

Will Taylor  
Production Artist  
will@insideelections.com

Stuart Rothenberg  
Senior Editor  
stu@insideelections.com

1140 3rd Street, N.E., Washington, 20002 • 202-546-2822

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Stansbury has represented a historically GOP-leaning Albuquerque district in the state House since 2018. Born in Farmington (in the northwest corner of the state in the 3rd District) and raised in Albuquerque, Stansbury graduated with a bachelor's degree in human ecology from St. Mary's College of California in 2002 and a masters in development sociology from Cornell University in 2007, where she was working toward a PhD but left early in 2010 to take a White House fellowship.



Mark Moores

Courtesy Moores Campaign

She later worked in the White House Office of Management and Budget as a program examiner, and then as Democratic staff to the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee under Washington Sen. Maria Cantwell, then the panel's ranking member.

After moving back to New Mexico in 2017, she ran for a state House seat in 2018, defeating the incumbent by 7 points, and won re-election by 10 points last November.

Though Stansbury was not the initial choice of national progressives, she is no moderate. She supports Medicare for All and the Green New

Deal, voted to legalize recreational marijuana in New Mexico, and supports abolishing private prisons. She has said that her primary issue in the campaign is the economic recovery of the district in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Stansbury's campaign team includes general consultant Scott Forrester (previously Haaland's district director) of Bosque Strategies, pollster Mike Bocian of GBAO, Moxie Media for direct mail, and media consultant Martha McKenna.

## The Republican

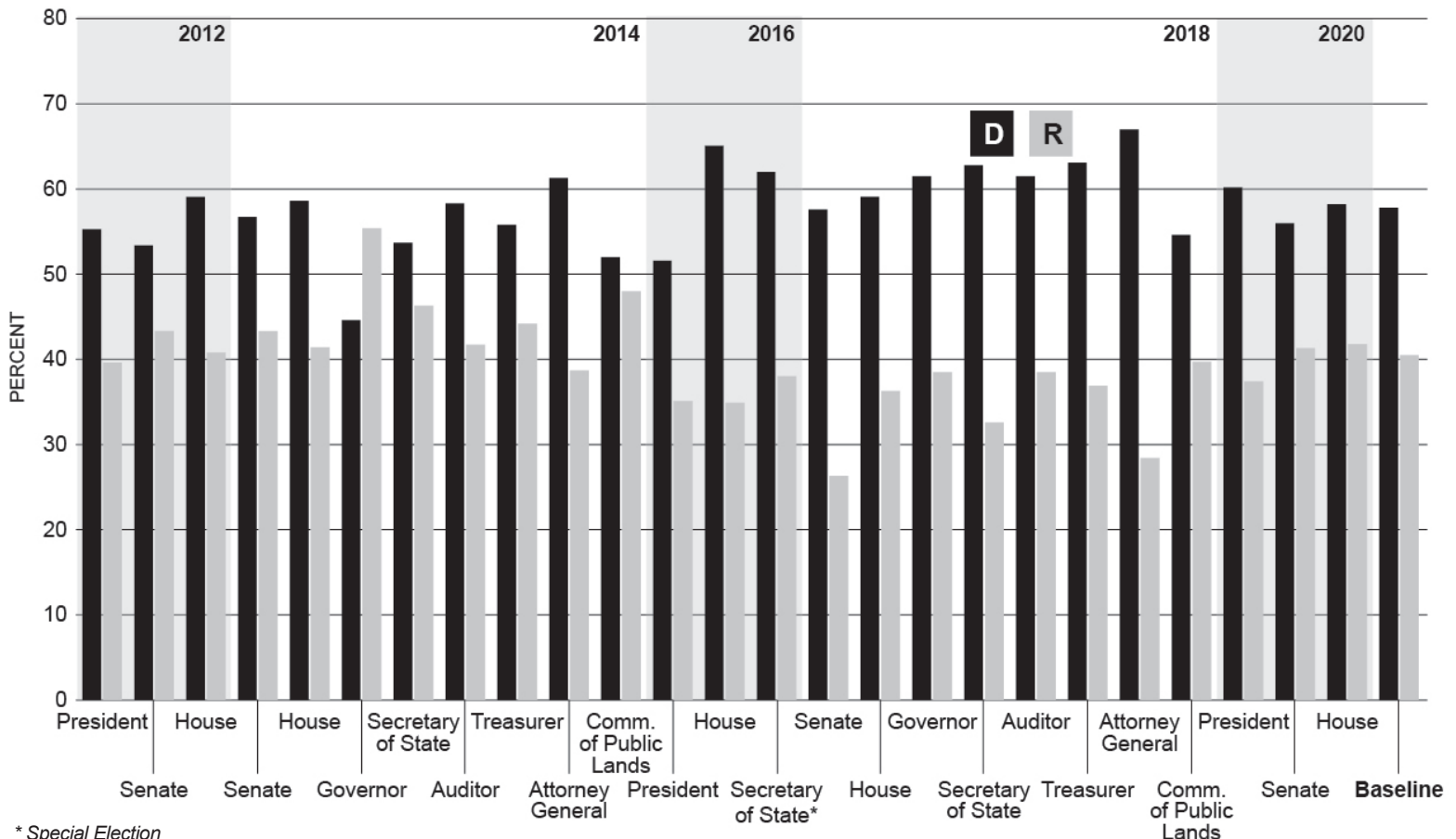
Moores, 51, was a late entrant into the race, announcing his candidacy just 12 days before the GOP nominating convention (by contrast, Stansbury announced her campaign on December 21, 2020, four days after Biden said he would nominate Haaland to his cabinet).

Under the Republican state party rules, only plurality support from the 121 committee members was necessary to pick a nominee. Moores won 49 votes, 15 votes ahead of second-place finisher, talk radio host/former candidate for state party chairman Eddy Aragon.

The 21st state Senate district, which Moores has represented since 2012, is a Republican-leaning seat in northern Albuquerque; he won re-election by 6 points in 2020. Raised in Bethesda, Maryland, Moores' family is originally from New Mexico and spent summers there; the six-foot-seven Moores returned to the state to play offensive line for the University of New Mexico football team, and graduated in 1993 with a degree in political science.

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## Statewide Election Results in New Mexico's 1st District





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Moore worked for 1st District Rep. Steve Schiff (whose 1998 death precipitated the last congressional special election in the state) in the 1990s before joining the staff of Lt. Gov. Walter Dwight Bradley. After Bradley left office, Moore returned to UNM for an MBA, graduated in 2005, and was the executive director of the New Mexico Dental Association, a professional association for dentists, until 2017.

The co-owner of a medical diagnostic testing company, Moore touted his work building up testing capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic. But Democrats have attacked him for personally benefiting by taking federal loan money through the Paycheck Protection Program while simultaneously opposing broader relief (an attack local news called “misleading”). He also loaned his campaign \$200,000, saying he knew he was playing catchup by entering the race so late.

Moore’s campaign team includes general consultant Aaron Whitehead, whose firm Majority Strategies is also handling direct mail. Randy Gutermuth of American Viewpoint is doing polling and Nick Everhart from Content Creative Media is doing the ads.

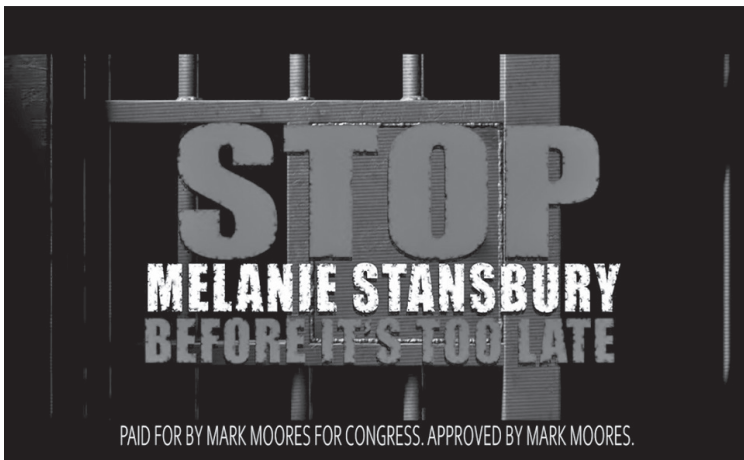
## How It Plays Out

The election is on June 1, but strategists on both sides expect most of the vote to be cast early, especially since June 1 comes on the heels of Memorial Day weekend.

While neither campaign is sure what turnout will look like, the overall expectation is that it will be low. Several operatives watching the race said 100,000 or fewer people could cast ballots, a turnout rate of around 20 percent, compared to the 69 percent turnout rate the district saw in 2020. That’s a drastic change from House special elections in the early days of the Trump presidency, and more in line with the recent special election in Texas’ 6th District, where turnout dropped from 68 percent of registered voters in November 2020 to just 16 percent in 2021.

Moore is largely running a single-issue campaign centered on crime and public safety. The Republican has trained his fire on Stansbury’s support of the “Breathe Act” — an aspirational legislative proposal put forth by the Movement for Black Lives, an activist group, that would radically alter the criminal justice system by reducing federal funding for police, closing all federal prisons, disband ICE, the DEA, and several other federal law enforcement programs, among other changes.

Stansbury, who tweeted and spoke in support of the Breathe Act, has since added conditions to her stance; her campaign now says “The BREATHE Act is just a proposal, not a piece of legislation. If the final



Moore campaign ad



Stansbury campaign ad

legislation includes sections that she cannot support because they are wrong for New Mexicans, then she’ll look to other solutions.”

Stansbury’s team is taking the attack seriously. After Moore spent three debates focusing on crime and went after Stansbury on the airwaves, the Democrat went up with a TV ad featuring a retired police sergeant vouching for Stansbury’s law enforcement bona fides; her campaign has spent \$80,000 on the spot so far. Stansbury also released a web video with a public-safety-centered endorsement from Bernalillo County District Attorney Raul Torrez.

National and local Republicans see Stansbury’s response as a sign that their messaging is working and that Moore is defining the race’s policy conversation; Democrats maintain that it’s simply the Stansbury campaign covering its bases.

For her part, Stansbury is going after Moore for not supporting Biden’s coronavirus rescue package but still taking several million dollars in Paycheck Protection Program loans from the federal government. In her positive advertising, she’s highlighted her work on water rights and energy grid modernization.

Overall, Stansbury has significantly outspent Moore on the airwaves, \$320,000 to \$182,000 through May 19. But that advantage has not always been consistent.

In April, the first month either candidate was on the air, Moore outspent Stansbury, \$164,000 to \$126,000. But the Republican went off the air entirely for over a week at the beginning of May, at the same time Stansbury ramped up her spending; she has considerably outpaced him since. The difference is even more stark when measuring by spot count, or the total number of times an ad has appeared on air. Since the beginning of April, Stansbury’s ads have aired a combined 2124 times in the Albuquerque market, while Moore’s ads have aired a combined 659 times.

Outside polling indicates that, if anything, Stansbury’s standing has improved slightly since she began flexing her financial advantage. Stansbury raised \$1.4 million through May 12, compared to Moore’s \$595,000 haul (which includes \$200,000 of his own money).

National groups have largely stayed away from the race. Neither of the major party committees, nor the parties’ main Super PACs, have spent in the district — a sign that Democrats and Republicans in DC don’t see the race as particularly competitive.

According to a review of FEC documents, the only two independent expenditures in the race are \$16,000 in pro-Stansbury emails from progressive group People for the American Way, and \$35,000 in anti-

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*New Mexico, Continued from page 4*

Stansbury digital advertising from a pro-police Super PAC called Freedom Forward Fund, which was created just this month and has not yet disclosed its donors, but has paid Majority Strategies, the same firm used by the Moores campaign.

Early voting has — thus far — favored Democrats, though only a fraction of the expected votes have been cast. Of the roughly 26,000 ballots cast through May 18, 67 percent were cast by Democrats and just 21 percent by Republicans, according to *New Mexico Politics with Joe Monahan*. In 2020, Democrats were far more likely to vote early or absentee than Republicans, so it's not shocking Democrats have jumped out to an early lead, but it underscores the large distance Moores has to make up in the race's closing weeks.

## The Bottom Line

This special election is best thought of as two related but distinct contests.

The first contest is for the seat itself: who gets to go to Congress? This contest is the main focus of the candidates. We rate this race as Solid

Democratic because the data, the historical trends, and intelligence from sources in DC and New Mexico points to Stansbury as the favorite.

But to win the second contest, Stansbury doesn't just have to win. She has to win by a convincing enough margin to prevent the narrative about the political environment from spiraling out of control. If Moores loses by significantly less than Trump did six months ago, there will be a series of stories signaling Democratic trouble ahead in the midterms. That isn't necessarily the case, but could embolden Republicans and discourage potential Democratic voters and donors around the country.

In 2017 and 2018, Democratic overperformances in special elections were not just a harbinger of the party's eventual gains in the 2018 midterm. They were also powerful tools for fundraising, list-building, and recruiting prospective candidates in tougher races across the country (a pitch best summed up by one senior Democratic operative as: "Get in, loser. We're flipping Trump +20 districts").

Democratic strategists are divided on what the threshold is between a convincing victory and a worrisome one, with answers ranging from a 4-point margin to a 14-point win. If Stansbury can't win by at least 10 points in a district this blue, Democrats have some soul-searching to do. **IE**

*Continued from page 1*  
intelligence analyst.

Mandel won his first statewide race, in 2010, by 14 points, defeating incumbent Treasurer Kevin Boyce, 54-40 percent. In 2012, he was the GOP nominee for Senate against Brown, losing by 6 points, 50-44 percent. Two years later, he was re-elected Treasurer over Democratic state Rep. Connie Pillich, 57-43 percent.

In 2018, Mandel launched another campaign against Brown, and was considered the frontrunner for the



Josh Mandel

Courtesy Mandel Campaign

GOP nomination until he abruptly dropped out of the race, citing a family health issue (he and his wife divorced soon thereafter).

Mandel begins this race with a financial head start: he still had \$4.2 million in his federal campaign account from his aborted 2018 run.

Mandel's campaign team includes general consultants Ethan Zorfas and Kristin Davison of Axiom Strategies.

Jane Timken, 54, served as state party chairwoman from 2017 to 2021. She won that job by ousting incumbent Matt Borges, who she viewed as insufficiently loyal to Trump. Borges was a John Kasich acolyte, and Trump reportedly personally lobbied members of the state party central committee to choose Timken, the vice chairwoman of the Stark County GOP and a Trump donor.

Timken, a Harvard (1989, B.A.) and American University (1994, J.D.) graduate, has never held elected office before, but was one of Ohio's 18 electors pledged to Trump in the 2020 election, and served nine years on the board of trustees for Kent State University, including two as chairwoman.

Her campaign team includes general consultant Corry Bliss (who previously managed Portman's 2016 campaign), pollster Erik Iverson of

Moore Information, and FP1 Strategies (Bliss's firm) for paid media.

Mike Gibbons, 69, is an investment banker from Cleveland and a longtime Republican donor who served as Trump's Ohio finance co-chairman in 2016. Gibbons' first foray into electoral politics was in 2018, when he ran for the GOP nomination to take on Sherrod Brown. Initially running against Mandel, Gibbons eventually found himself facing Rep. Jim Renacci, who switched from running for governor to Senate at Trump's behest when Mandel dropped out.

The personally wealthy Gibbons self-funded most of that campaign with \$2.6 million of his own money, and placed second to Renacci, 47-32 percent, while carrying 38 counties.

His campaign team includes general consultants Andrew Boucher and Mike Biundo of Ascent Strategic (also handling direct mail), Strategy Group for paid media, and pollster Brock McCleary of Cygnal.

Bernie Moreno, 54, is a Cleveland-area businessman who found success in luxury car dealerships, at one point becoming the largest luxury car dealer in the Midwest, according to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. He now works as a tech investor and runs a blockchain company.

Moreno was born in Colombia and emigrated to the U.S. with his family when he was five. He has cited his immigration story and his home country's experience with socialism when discussing why he is running for Senate — he says he wants to stop socialism in the U.S. Though he has never held office before, Moreno comes from a political family. His father, a physician, was Colombia's health minister, and his brother was Colombia's economic minister in the 1990s and Colombia's ambassador to the United States from 1998 to 2005.

Moreno's campaign team includes general consultants Chip Englander and Chris Hansen (a former executive director of the National Republican Senatorial Committee), Jamestown Associates for paid media, and Forthright Strategy for direct mail. Englander's firm 1892 Polling is conducting polling, and the campaign counts former Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway as an adviser.

JD Vance, 36, first came to prominence a few years ago as the author of the bestselling *Hillbilly Elegy*, a memoir about growing up poor in Middletown, Ohio before attending Ohio State, joining the Marines, and

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graduating from Yale Law School. In the wake of Trump’s upset win in 2016, commentators turned to the book (which was made into a movie) to help explain Trump’s success, and Vance became an in-demand speaker, writer, and pundit. He considered running for Senate against Brown in 2018 but passed, and has formed an exploratory committee to run in this year’s race.

Vance, now a venture capitalist, is a longtime business associate of Peter Thiel, the billionaire Paypal founder and conservative donor. Thiel has seeded a pro-Vance Super PAC with \$10 million in anticipation of Vance’s run. Republican mega-donor Robert Mercer has also reportedly contributed.

Several other candidates could throw their hat in the ring. State Sen. Matt Dolan, 56, is a part owner of the Cleveland Indians and a member of the billionaire Dolan family that also controls basketball’s New York Knicks and hockey’s New York Rangers. He represents a swingy, Democratic-leaning district in Cuyahoga County and just launched an exploratory committee.

And Rep. Mike Turner, 61, who has represented Dayton in Congress since 2003, could also run.

## 2022 Governor Ratings

### Battleground

#### Democratic-held (6)

Kelly (D-Kan.)  
Mills (D-Maine)  
Whitmer (D-Mich.)  
Sisolak (D-Nev.)  
PA Open (Wolf, D)  
Evers (D-Wisc.)

#### Republican-held (5)

AZ Open (Ducey, R)  
DeSantis (R-Fl.)  
Kemp (R-Ga.)  
MD Open (Hogan, R)  
Sununu (R-N.H.)

#### Solid Democratic (10)

Newsom (D-Calif.)  
Polis (D-Colo.)  
Lamont (D-Conn.)  
HI Open (Ige, D)  
Pritzker (D-Ill.)  
Walz (D-Minn.)  
Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)  
Cuomo (D-N.Y.)  
OR Open (Brown, D)  
McKee (D-R.I.)

#### Solid Republican (15)

Ivey (R-Ala.)  
Dunleavy (R-Alaska)  
AR Open (Hutchinson, R)  
Little (R-Idaho)  
Reynolds (R-Iowa)  
Baker (R-Mass.)  
NE Open (Ricketts, R)  
Noem (R-S.D.)  
DeWine (R-Ohio)  
Stitt (R-Okla.)  
McMaster (R-S.C.)  
Lee (R-Tenn.)

### 2021 RACES

#### Likely Democratic

CA Recall (Newsom, D)  
VA Open (Northam, D)

#### Solid Democratic

Murphy (D-N.J.)

Abbott (R-Texas)  
Scott (R-Vt.)  
Gordon (R-Wyo.)

## The GOP Primary

The Republican primary has the potential to play out on a larger than normal scale. That is because the field could include a half-dozen candidates, all with the financial resources to run 8-figure statewide campaigns.



Courtesy Ohio GOP  
Jane Timken

Timken, Gibbons, and Moreno all have significant personal funds from which to draw (Dolan, should he run, would as well). Mandel begins the race with \$4 million in the bank and an established network of donors,

and as a former state party chairwoman Timken has fundraising chops too. Vance would have the backing of Thiel, the tech billionaire who has already committed \$10 million in Super PAC support. Operatives on several top campaigns said their candidate would have to raise upwards of \$10-15 million to be successful.

The primary is not likely to fall on ideological lines, but more so on personality and proximity to Trump, several Republican strategists involved in the race said. Each candidate has or will strive to articulate why they are the “Trump candidate in the race.”

Timken’s angle is her political ties to Trump; she was endorsed by Trump in 2017 in her campaign for state party chair (and again in 2021), was a delegate for him at the 2020 RNC and an elector for him in the 2020 Electoral College vote. She is also the only woman in the race, which some Republican sources see as an inherent advantage, and the only current Republican candidate not from Cleveland. Timken is from Stark County, which includes Canton.

Mandel’s angle is his pugnacity, demonstrated by his vocal insistence that the election was stolen, and his newfound zeal for attacking reporters and making inflammatory statements on Twitter that got him suspended from the platform (just like Trump).

Moreno and Gibbons will aim to introduce themselves as straight-talking, highly successful businessmen who know how to get the economy back on track and aren’t afraid of calling out cancel culture and socialism. Moreno in particular will focus on his immigration story.

Vance has also focused on issues such as big tech censorship and cancel culture, but the Trump-like quality he will try to accentuate is his ability to connect with the “forgotten men and women of America,” which fueled his initial rise to prominence.

Dolan, should he run, will take a slightly different tactic. The state senator has a more moderate reputation, and has signalled that he would run a less bombastic, more policy-centered and business-friendly campaign, in the mold of the outgoing Sen. Portman. It is not clear how wide a lane exists in the GOP primary electorate for that kind of candidacy; Dolan’s path lies in the crowded nature of the field, which will lower the number of votes needed to win. But one Republican affiliated with another campaign argued that as long as Dolan’s family is moving forward with changing the name of the Cleveland Indians baseball team, Dolan won’t be able to find any purchase in a culture-war oriented electorate.

The only public polling of the race so far comes from the anti-tax Club

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for Growth, which has endorsed Mandel. In the Club's Feb. 1-3 survey conducted by WPAi, Mandel (38 percent) led a field of Rep. Steve Stivers (11), Timken (6), Gibbons (3), and Moreno (2). Stivers subsequently resigned Congress altogether for a job with the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

Republican sources agree that is where the race likely begins, with several saying that if the primary were held today, Mandel would win (benefitting from the name recognition from his two decades in politics and his four statewide runs over the last decade). Mandel is also the only candidate who has started advertising on broadcast TV, along with a pro-Mandel Super PAC that ran ads during the Kentucky Derby.

But the former state treasurer will come under fire as an inauthentic career politician who lost one Senate race and bungled another, and is now reinventing himself for the umpteenth time.

Mandel will also come under fire for not being as vociferous a Trump supporter as he claims he is (he supported Marco Rubio in the 2016 presidential primary), but he will have company in that lane.

Timken was a Kasich supporter in 2016 (though she has since disavowed him), and also landed in hot water after defending Ohio Rep. Anthony Gonzalez after he voted to impeach Trump — she later changed tune and called for him to resign. Moreno is on record calling Trump a “lunatic” and a “maniac” in 2016, and expressing coolness toward Trump as late as 2019. Vance once called Trump “noxious” and “an idiot.”

All of them now profess complete support for the former president. Trump called Timken, Mandel, Moreno, and Gibbons to Mar-a-Lago in March and made them each state their case for receiving his endorsement, according to *Politico*.

*Axios* had previously reported Trump was ready to endorse Timken at the beginning of the year but was convinced to hold off by his advisers. Republican operatives on several of the campaigns said they don't expect Trump to weigh in anytime soon. The former president has been risk averse, avoiding endorsements in most crowded primaries to avoid tarnishing his win-loss record.

A Trump endorsement would be a massive boon to whichever candidate receives it. The former president is still extremely popular among Republicans and particularly the engaged Republicans who vote in primaries. But not all Republicans agree that would be the be-all-end-all of the race. In 2018, Gibbons held Renacci to under 50 percent despite Trump endorsing and campaigning for Renacci.

## The Democrat(s?)

The only announced Democratic candidate in the race is Rep. Tim Ryan, the 47-year-old congressman who has represented the Youngstown area (the 13th District) in northeast Ohio since 2003.

Ryan has been mentioned as a potential candidate for Senate or governor for almost as long as he has been in office, but until this year had resisted going for it, even (briefly) running for president in 2020, before finally deciding to run statewide.

Why run now? He may be feeling some redistricting pressure. Though the 13th District was drawn by Republicans as a Democratic vote sink in 2011, it has swung heavily toward Republicans since then. And with Ohio losing a seat in this year's congressional reapportionment, his district could be on the chopping block when Republicans in Columbus draw new maps later this year.

Ryan has a history of overperforming the top of the ticket in his district, though he has seen his overperformance diminish as the area has grown more competitive at the presidential level. In 2016, for instance,



Tim Ryan

Ryan won by 36 points, 68-32 percent, while Clinton won by 7 points, 51-44 percent. But in 2018, Ryan won by just 22 points, 61-39 percent, just slightly better than Cordray (56-40 percent) and worse than Brown (61-37 percent). In 2020, Ryan

defeated Christina Hagan, a credible GOP challenger who benefited from some outside spending, by just 8 points, 53-45 percent, a tad better than Biden (51-48 percent).

Throughout his time in office, Ryan has sought to cultivate a somewhat idiosyncratic image. On one hand, he presents himself as a hardscrabble son of the Mahoning Valley, a former quarterback recruit at Youngstown State who cut his teeth in politics as a staffer to colorfully controversial Rep. Jim Traficant, and who has deep ties with organized labor. In the wake of the 2016 election, Ryan attempted to topple then-Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi from her perch atop the Democratic caucus, arguing the party needed to do more to appeal to the Rust Belt (he lost that leadership vote 143-63).

On the other hand, Ryan is an avid promoter of hot yoga and meditation, has published books on mindfulness and healthy eating, and made appeals to the “yoga moms” of America central to his presidential run. Democrats hope that blended profile will allow him to staunch the bleeding in the working class eastern part of the state, while also boosting support in the historically Republican Columbus and Cincinnati suburbs.

Ryan has also modulated some of his political positions as the Democratic Party has shifted leftward. In 2012, in the wake of the Sandy Hook school shooting, he disavowed the National Rifle Association — the organization had previously given him an “A” rating and contributed tens of thousands of dollars to his campaigns. And in 2015, Ryan announced that his thinking on abortion had “evolved” and that he was no longer pro-life.

In Congress, Ryan sits on the House Appropriations Committee and is the chairman of the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch; in that role, he oversees Congress's investigation into the Capitol Police's response to the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Ryan's campaign team includes media consultant/Ohio native Justin Barasky of Left Hook Strategies (who managed Brown's 2018 campaign), pollsters John Anzalone and Brian Stryker of ALG Polling, and senior adviser Michael Morley, who managed Ryan's presidential campaign.

Former state health director Amy Acton publicly considered entering the race, but ultimately decided to pass on a run. State House Minority

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Mike Gibbons

Caroline Brehman/CQ Roll Call

Courtesy Gibbons Campaign

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Leader Emilia Sykes has also signalled interest in running, but local Democratic sources are skeptical that she will throw her hat in the ring.

## How It Plays Out

The danger for Republicans is that whichever candidate makes it to the general election will have taken on tens of millions of dollars in negative attention.

That may not matter if the national political environment is in Republicans' favor.

And history says it will be, since midterms are usually a negative reaction against the party in power — in this case the Democrats.

Republicans also have a demographic advantage in Ohio; one Democratic source quipped that when Democrats traded white working class voters for suburbanites, Ohio was the price of business. For a Republican to win, they have to maintain the party's newfound strength in the eastern part of the state, and prevent the suburbs from slipping to the degree they have in other states. In both areas the GOP nominee will have margin for error.



Bernie Moreno

Courtesy Moreno Campaign

Democrats acknowledge that this race is not in the top tier of pickup opportunities such as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and North Carolina, but several strategists argue that it has the ingredients to become highly competitive: a messy and expensive GOP primary with the potential to produce a battered nominee; a seasoned Democratic candidate with a profile that appeals to white working class voters; and a likely uncontested Democratic primary that will allow their candidate both to be in general election mode and to stockpile cash over the next year while avoiding hits from his GOP opponents.

But the reality is that Ohio has moved enough away from Democrats that all of those things might still not be enough to put the race in Team Blue's column. If the national political environment is too unfavorable toward Democrats, everything could go right and their candidate could still lose. That's what happened in the 2018 gubernatorial race (though privately Democrats working in Ohio grouse about Cordray's weaknesses as a candidate).

## The Bottom Line

The first step in the GOP's path back to the majority is to hold their own seats. Even though they need to gain just one to make Mitch McConnell the majority leader again, Republicans can't afford to spend too much time and energy on Ohio when they'll need to knock off an incumbent or two in New Hampshire, Nevada, Georgia, or Arizona.

Back in Ohio, Ryan is a credible candidate, but the burden of proof is on Democrats to show that this is a winnable race in a midterm, when there's a Democrat in the White House, with someone other than Sherrod Brown.

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## Statewide Election Results in Ohio

