**Headline:** GOP Split: Far Right Gains Ground in East, While Losing Out West

**Teaser:** Still, fringe candidates are luring GOP voters and winning key races.

By Steven Rosenfeld

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**[Article Body:]**

The Republican Party’s radical right flank is making inroads among voters and winning key primaries east of the Mississippi. But out West, among the five states that held their 2022 primary elections on May 17, a string of GOP candidates for office who deny the 2020’s presidential election results and have embraced various conspiracies were rejected by Republicans who voted for more mainstream conservatives.

In Pennsylvania, [Douglas Mastriano](https://www.rawstory.com/another-extreme-wing-of-the-republican-party-is-emerging-and-it-s-not-all-trump/), an election denier and white nationalist, won the GOP’s nomination for governor. He received [587,772 votes](https://www.electionreturns.pa.gov/), which was 43.96 percent of the vote in a low turnout primary. One-quarter of Pennsylvania’s 9 million registered voters cast ballots.

In Idaho, by contrast, Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, who also claimed Joe Biden’s election was illegitimate and has campaigned at white supremacist rallies, according to the [Western States Center](https://www.westernstatescenter.org/pressreleasearchive/oregon-and-idaho-election-results-have-lessons-for-defending-democracy), an Oregon-based group that monitors the far right, lost her bid for the GOP gubernatorial nomination to incumbent Gov. Brad Little.

Idaho also saw two 2020 election-denying candidates vying for the GOP nomination for secretary of state lose to a career civil servant and election administrator who defended 2020’s results as accurate. On the other hand, an ex-congressman who is an election denier won the GOP primary for attorney general.

“In addition to Janice McGeachin, who was defeated in her bid for governor, a number of other anti-democracy candidates were rejected by voters, including Priscilla Giddings, who ran for [Idaho] Lieutenant Governor; Dorothy Moon, who ran for Secretary of State; and Chad Christensen, Todd Engel and Eric Parker, who mounted bids for the state legislature,” the Western States Center’s [analysis](https://www.westernstatescenter.org/pressreleasearchive/oregon-and-idaho-election-results-have-lessons-for-defending-democracy) said. “In Ada County, antisemitic sheriff candidate Doug Traubel was soundly defeated, alongside losses for Proud Boy and conspiratorial candidates in Oregon.”

Voters in Western states with histories of far-right organizing and militia violence have more experience sizing up extremist politics and candidates than voters out East, the center [suggested](https://www.westernstatescenter.org/pressreleasearchive/oregon-and-idaho-election-results-have-lessons-for-defending-democracy). However, as May 17’s five state primaries make clear, the GOP’s far-right flank is ascendant nationally.

Various stripes of GOP conspiracy theorists and uncompromising culture war-embracing candidates attracted a third or more of the May 17 primary electorate, a volume of votes sufficient to win some high-stakes races in crowded fields.

**Low Turnouts Boost GOP Radicals**

The highest-profile contests were in the presidential swing state of Pennsylvania, where Mastriano, a state legislator, won the gubernatorial primary with votes from less than 7 percent of Pennsylvania’s 9 million registered voters.

In its primary for an open U.S. Senate seat, [several thousand votes](https://www.electionreturns.pa.gov/) separated two [election-denier candidates](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/fact-sheet-election-conspiracy-theorists-and-trump-backed-maga-republicans-are-on-the-ballot-from-coast-to-coast/), a margin that will trigger a recount. As Pennsylvania’s mailed-out ballots are counted and added into totals, the lead keeps shifting between hedge-fund billionaire David McCormick and celebrity broadcaster Dr. Mehmet Oz.

Mastriano [campaigned](https://www.rawstory.com/another-extreme-wing-of-the-republican-party-is-emerging-and-it-s-not-all-trump/) on his rejection of President Joe Biden’s victory, chartered buses to transport Trump supporters to the U.S. Capitol for what became the January 6 insurrection, is stridently anti-abortion and often says his religion shapes his politics. On his primary victory night, he sounded like former President Trump, proclaiming that he and his base were aggrieved underdogs.

“We’re under siege now,” Mastriano told supporters, according to a Philadelphia Inquirer [report](https://www.inquirer.com/politics/election/live/pennsylvania-primary-election-day-2022-polls-results-candidates-20220517.html#card-316036343). “The media doesn’t like groups of us who believe certain things.”

That “siege” appears to include a cold shoulder from pro-corporate Republicans who campaigned against Mastriano as the primary crested, fearing that he would lose in the fall’s general election. A day after the May 17 primary, the Republican Governors Association downplayed his victory, a signal that it was unlikely to steer donors toward him, the Washington Post [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/18/6-takeaways-primaries-pennsylvania-north-carolina/).

Other election-denying candidates sailed to victory across Pennsylvania, including five GOP congressmen [who voted against](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/fact-sheet-election-conspiracy-theorists-and-trump-backed-maga-republicans-are-on-the-ballot-from-coast-to-coast/) certifying their state’s 2020 Electoral College slate: [Scott Perry](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-pennsylvania-us-house-district-10.html), [John Joyce](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-pennsylvania-us-house-district-13.html), [Mike Kelly](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-pennsylvania-us-house-district-16.html), [Guy Reschenthaler](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-pennsylvania-us-house-district-14.html) and [Lloyd Smucker](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-pennsylvania-us-house-district-11.html). Their primaries, while not garnering national attention, underscore Trump’s enduring impact on wide swaths of the Republican Party.

It remains to be seen if any of the primary winners will prevail in the fall’s general election. It may be that candidates who can win in crowded primary fields when a quarter to a third of voters turn out will not win in the fall, when turnout is likely to double. But a closer look at some primary results shows that large numbers of Republican voters are embracing extremists—even if individual candidates lose.

That trend can be seen in Pennsylvania’s [lieutenant governor’s race](https://www.electionreturns.pa.gov/). The combined votes of three election-denying candidates (Rick Saccone, 15.69 percent; Teddy Daniels, 12.18 percent; Russ Diamond, 5.93 percent) was about 34 percent. That share of the party’s electorate, had it voted for one candidate, would have defeated the primary winner, Carrie DelRosso, a more moderate Republican who received 25.65 percent of the vote and will have to defend conspiracies as Mastriano’s running mate.

**Fissures Inside the GOP**

While Trump-appeasing candidates won primaries in May 17’s four other primary states—Idaho, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Oregon—some outspoken and badly behaved GOP radicals, such as North Carolina’s Rep. Madison Cawthorn, lost to a more traditional conservative Republican.

Cawthorn was defeated by Chuck Edwards, a pro-business Republican and state senator [described](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/18/who-is-chuck-edwards-republican-who-ousted-madison-cawthorn/) by theWashington Post as “a McDonald’s franchise owner [who] was head of the local chamber of commerce.”

Edwards campaigned on returning the House to a GOP majority and backed a predictable obstructionist agenda to block the Biden White House, as opposed to Cawthorn’s embrace of 2020 election conspiracies and incendiary antics—which included taking loaded guns on planes and accusing other GOP congressmen of lurid and illegal behavior.

Edwards’ focus, the Washington Post reported, “will be on ‘removing the gavel out of Nancy Pelosi’s hand, and then taking the teleprompter from Joe Biden and restoring the policies that we enjoyed under the Trump administration, to help get this country back on track.’”

Cawthorn’s defeat came as North Carolina Republicans chose a Trump-praising candidate, Ted Budd, for its U.S. Senate nomination over an ex-governor, Pat McCrory.

As Tim Miller [noted](https://morningshots.thebulwark.com/p/the-new-maga-establishment-prevails) in the May 18 morning newsletter from the [Bulwark](https://www.thebulwark.com/), a pro-Republican but anti-Trump news and opinion website, McCrory had “criticized Trump over his Putinphilia and insurrectionist incitement… he lost bigly to Ted Budd, a milquetoast Trump stooge who will do what he’s told.”

As in Pennsylvania, a handful of incumbent members of congress in North Carolina who voted to reject their 2020 Electoral College slate easily won their primaries.

“Virginia Foxx and Greg Murphy [voted](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/07/us/elections/electoral-college-biden-objectors.html) to overturn the results of the 2020 election after the events of January 6 and have been [endorsed](https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2022/trump-endorsements-republican-primaries/) by Trump in their 2022 campaigns,” said a May 16 [fact sheet](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/fact-sheet-election-conspiracy-theorists-and-trump-backed-maga-republicans-are-on-the-ballot-from-coast-to-coast/%27) from the [Defend Democracy Project](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/), which tracks the GOP’s election-denying candidates. “Foxx was later [fined](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/05/18/virginia-foxx-fined-5000-failure-complete-security-screening/5151104001/) $5,000 for failing to comply with security measures put in place in the House after the January 6 attack and Murphy has [claimed](https://www.witn.com/2022/01/06/murphy-criticizes-security-failures-democrats-first-anniversary-january-6th-insurrection/) that antifa may have been responsible for the violence at the Capitol.”

Foxx [won](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-north-carolina-us-house-district-5.html) her primary with 77 percent of the vote. Murphy [won](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-north-carolina-us-house-district-3.html) his primary with 76 percent of the vote.

**Idaho Republicans Clash**

The election-denial and conspiracy-embracing candidates fared less well in May 17’s primaries out West, the Western States Center’s analysis [noted](https://www.westernstatescenter.org/pressreleasearchive/oregon-and-idaho-election-results-have-lessons-for-defending-democracy).

“Yesterday in elections in Oregon and Idaho, anti-democracy candidates were defeated in several marquee races,” it said on May 18. “Most notably Idaho gubernatorial hopeful Janice McGeachin, whose embrace of white nationalism and militias was soundly rejected by voters.”

In the GOP primary for secretary of state, which oversees Idaho’s elections, Ada County Clerk Phil McGrane [narrowly beat](https://idahocapitalsun.com/2022/05/18/ada-county-clerk-wins-republican-nomination-for-idaho-secretary-of-state/) two 2020 election deniers, state Rep. Dorothy Moon (R-Stanley) and state Sen. Mary Souza (R-Coeur d’Alene). McGrane had [43.1 percent](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-idaho-secretary-of-state.html) or 114,348 votes. Moon had 41.4 percent, or 109,898 votes. Souza had 15.5 percent or 41,201 votes.

“Donald Trump carried Idaho by 30 points in 2020, but… State Rep. Dorothy Moon has [alleged](https://boltsmag.org/idaho-secretary-of-state-primary/) without evidence that people are ‘coming over and voting’ in Idaho from Canada and called for the [decertification](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/democracy-is-on-the-ballot-in-these-11-secretary-of-state-and-attorney-general-elections/) of the 2020 election,” said the Defend Democracy Project’s [fact sheet](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/fact-sheet-election-conspiracy-theorists-and-trump-backed-maga-republicans-are-on-the-ballot-from-coast-to-coast/%27). “State Sen. Mary Souza is [part of](https://dailyfly.com/learn-more-about-why-mary-souza-is-running-for-secretary-of-state/) the voter suppression group the Honest Elections Project and has blamed ‘ballot harvesting’ for Biden’s victory. Only Ada County Clerk Phil McGrane has stated that he believes that Idaho’s elections are legitimate and that Joe Biden was the winner of the 2020 election.”

Another way of looking at the contest’s results is that an election-denying candidate might have won, had Idaho’s Republican Party more forcefully controlled how many candidates were running for this office. Together, Moon and Souza won nearly 57 percent of the vote, compared to McGrane’s 43 percent.

McGrane will be part of a GOP ticket that includes an election denier who [won](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-idaho-attorney-general.html) the primary for attorney general. Former congressman Raul Labrador received 51.5 percent of the vote, compared to the five-term incumbent, Lawrence Wasden, who received 37.9 percent. Labrador accused Wasden of “being insufficiently committed to overturning the 2020 election,” the Defend Democracy Project [said](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/fact-sheet-election-conspiracy-theorists-and-trump-backed-maga-republicans-are-on-the-ballot-from-coast-to-coast/).

On the other hand, another 2020 election defender won his GOP primary. Rep. Mike Simpson [won](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/05/17/us/elections/results-idaho-us-house-district-2.html) 54.6 percent of the vote in Idaho’s 2nd U.S. House district in a field with several challengers who attacked him for being one of [35](https://projectdefenddemocracy.com/fact-sheet-election-conspiracy-theorists-and-trump-backed-maga-republicans-are-on-the-ballot-from-coast-to-coast/) House Republicans who voted in favor of creating the January 6 committee.

**What Do GOP Voters Want?**

But Mastriano’s victory in Pennsylvania’s GOP gubernatorial primary, more so than any other outcome from May 17’s primaries, is “giving the GOP fits,” as Blake Hounshell, the New York Times’ “On Politics” editor, [wrote](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/us/politics/mastriano-pa-republicans.html) on May 18.

“Conversations with Republican strategists, donors and lobbyists in and outside of Pennsylvania in recent days reveal a party seething with anxiety, dissension and score-settling over Mastriano’s nomination,” Hounshell said.

That assessment may be accurate. But one key voice—or GOP sector—is missing from the New York Times’ analysis: the GOP primary voters, a third or more of them on May 17, who embraced conspiratorial candidates—though more widely in the East than in the West.

“For decades we’ve seen that our [Western] region has been a bellwether for white nationalist and paramilitary attacks on democratic institutions and communities, but also home to the broad, moral coalitions that have risen up to defeat them,” [said](https://www.westernstatescenter.org/pressreleasearchive/oregon-and-idaho-election-results-have-lessons-for-defending-democracy) Eric K. Ward, the Western States Center’s executive director. “The defeat of anti-democracy candidates with white nationalist and paramilitary ties up and down the ballot is evidence that those of us committed to inclusive democracy, even if we have vastly different political views, do indeed have the power to come together to defeat movements that traffic in bigotry, white nationalism and political violence.”