

Trump tightens grip on Republican Party as his poll numbers plunge

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Primary elections Saturday and Tuesday confirmed the dominance of Donald Trump over the Republican Party, even as opinion polls show that the US president and his policies are increasingly despised by the American people.

Trump's approval rating overall fell to 35 percent in some polls, and below 30 percent on the economy and the war in Iran, even as his chosen candidates won Republican primary contests with ease.

The two processes are interrelated, as Trump seeks to eliminate any check on his actions from within the Republican Party, cementing its transformation into an instrument of authoritarian, personalist rule, as a necessary stage in his preparations for a presidential dictatorship in the United States.

On Saturday, Republican Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana placed a dismal third in the primary to choose his party's nominee for another six-year term. Representative Julia Letlow, hand-picked by Trump only a few months ago to challenge Cassidy, placed first with nearly 45 percent of the vote, while state treasurer John Fleming, a former congressman, ran second with 28 percent. The two will meet in a runoff June 27.

Cassidy, who voted to convict Trump after he was impeached for the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol, finished with under 25 percent of the vote. A medical doctor before entering politics, Cassidy chaired the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committee in the Senate, and played the decisive role in pushing through the nomination of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. to be secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. He balked, however, at some of Trump's nominees for lower-ranking positions in HHS, including surgeon general.

While Cassidy was a reliable vote for Trump's

policies, his support for impeachment and his acceptance of the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election made him a marked man for the White House. Trump recruited Letlow to challenge Cassidy for the nomination. She had succeeded her husband Luke in the northeast Louisiana House seat after he died of COVID-19 in 2020.

On Tuesday, Trump's most vocal critic among Republican House members, Thomas Massie, was defeated in the Republican primary for the 4th Congressional District of Kentucky. Ed Gallrein, a farmer and former Navy SEAL, again hand-picked by Trump, won 55 percent of the vote compared to 45 percent for Massie. The district includes the Kentucky suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as a sizeable rural area to the south and some distant suburbs of Louisville. Trump carried the district in 2024 with 67 percent of the vote.

Gallrein had massive financial backing both from political action committees linked to Trump and from pro-Zionist groups. The result was the most expensive House primary campaign in US history, with more than \$33 million pumped into advertising in a contest in which barely 100,000 people cast ballots.

Massie became a well-publicized critic of the White House over the past year, although he had previously clashed with Trump in 2021, voting to certify the 2020 presidential election. Nevertheless, he voted against impeaching Trump for the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

In the course of 2025, Massie voted against Trump's tax cut for the wealthy, citing the rising federal deficit. He opposed his tariffs, and joined with Democrats to push through legislation to compel the Department of Justice to release the Epstein files.

As an isolationist libertarian, Massie opposed

Trump's going to war with Iran. This drew a direct response from Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, who spoke at a rally for Gallrein, Massie's challenger, the day before the primary, denouncing Massie for his opposition to the war. It is extremely rare for a sitting Pentagon chief to involve himself in election campaigns, even in a general election, let alone a party primary.

The defeats of Cassidy and Massie follow the primary election in Indiana, in which six Republican state senators who had opposed Trump's demand to gerrymander the state's congressional district lines were defeated by pro-Trump challengers. The gerrymander would have eliminated the seat of the state's lone black Democrat, Andre Carson, carving up his Indianapolis-based district.

Trump-backed candidates also prevailed in Georgia and Alabama, which held primaries May 19. In Georgia, Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones, an election denier, finished first in the primary for governor, and will face wealthy self-funded billionaire Rick Jackson, also an election denier, who poured \$83 million into the race. Trump backed Jones, who has called for a return to paper ballots and served on the bogus slate of Trump "electors" the Trump campaign had hoped to submit to Congress.

Trailing in third place and eliminated from the runoff was Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger, who had resisted pressure from Trump in 2020 to "find" the votes necessary to tip the state from Democrat Joe Biden, who won in Georgia by 13,779 votes.

The winner of the runoff will face former Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, who won the Democratic nomination easily.

In Alabama, Trump-backed representative Barry Moore placed first in the primary to succeed Senator Tommy Tuberville, although there will be a runoff. Tuberville is running for governor and won the Republican nomination easily, also with Trump's support.

Perhaps the most politically revealing event of Tuesday was Trump's announcement that he was endorsing Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton against incumbent senator John Cornyn in the state's Republican primary set for next Tuesday. Cornyn is the epitome of the right-wing Republican establishment, a four-term senator who was long a part of the Senate

Republican leadership.

Paxton, by contrast, was impeached by his own party for corruption, although the state Senate failed to convict him. He is a fascist opponent of democratic rights, and has spearheaded the state's viciously punitive attacks on abortion providers and women seeking abortions. Paxton played a central role in the efforts of Republican state attorneys general to challenge the outcome of the 2020 elections, although the Supreme Court voted by 9-0 against his claim that Texas should have jurisdiction to interfere in the elections of battleground states like Pennsylvania and Michigan.

Trump did not endorse a candidate in the first round of the Texas Republican primary, then declared that he would make an endorsement for the runoff, and that the unendorsed candidate should then immediately withdraw. Both Cornyn and Paxton continued to compete for his favor, however, and Trump put off a final announcement until the week before the May 26 runoff.

In a Truth Social post, Trump called Paxton "someone who has always been extremely loyal to me and our AMAZING MAGA MOVEMENT." He said Cornyn was "very late in backing" him in his 2024 run for president.

Trump's fascist former White House adviser Steve Bannon called the endorsement of Paxton a "miracle," while the *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial bemoaning the decision and arguing that Trump had endangered the grip of the Republican Party on the Texas Senate seat in the face of a well-funded Democratic opponent, James Talarico, in order to reward a political crony.



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