

# [***Donald Trump and Lindsey Graham are again at odds, now over abortion. The strife could help both men***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BT1-93C1-DYMD-624X-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** MEG KINNARD, Associated Press

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**Body**

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The long and occasionally quixotic relationship between [*Donald Trump*](https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump) and Lindsey Graham [*has again turned negative*](https://apnews.com/article/abortion-trump-republican-presidential-election-2024-585faf025a1416d13d2fbc23da8d8637) after the South Carolina senator criticized the former president for [*refusing to support a federal abortion ban.*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-abortion-2024-ban-7bf06e0856b88a710c79a6eb85cffa6a)

Trump repeatedly disparaged Graham on his social media site and said he regretted endorsing the senator during his last reelection campaign. Graham, a staunch abortion opponent who has pushed for a national ban, did not back down from his criticism, saying Trump's view was an “error.”

But some observers of the Trump-Graham dynamic think both Republicans benefit from their public strife.

For Trump, they say, creating public distance from anti-abortion advocates might help him blunt President Joe Biden's attacks on an issue that Democrats have long credited for electoral victories since the U.S. Supreme Court, with three justices Trump nominated, overturned Roe v. Wade. Graham, meanwhile, gets to burnish his conservative bona fides against years of home-state criticism that he is too liberal.

State Rep. John McCravy, a Republican who sponsored South Carolina’s new law that bans most abortions at six weeks, said he could not see how the back-and-forth really harmed either Trump or Graham with voters.

Trump "wants to get elected, and I think that appearing to be moderate helps him to get elected,” McCravy said. “Regardless of what they say, I think he’s taking the practical side of this. He’s pointing out something that’s true and using that to show that he’s not an extremist.”

Spokespeople for Trump's campaign and Graham's Senate office did not immediately comment when asked Friday about the squabble.

**A smashed cellphone; a vow to ‘count me out’**

The two have been at odds before.

They started off that way in the 2016 campaign when both sought the presidential nomination. Shortly after Trump launched his bid, Graham questioned Trump's mental fitness for office, calling him a “jackass” who “shouldn’t be commander in chief” for making disparaging remarks about then-Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., one of Graham’s closest allies.

Campaigning in Graham’s home state a day later, Trump opened a rally by calling Graham a “lightweight” and “idiot” before reading out the senator’s private cellphone number to the crowd's delight and disbelief. That move led Graham to [*poke fun at destroying the device*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXSFRMJhlgY) after being deluged with angry messages.

Graham ultimately abandoned his own presidential effort and did not attend the 2016 convention, saying he would back neither Trump nor Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton and that the Republican Party had been “conned.”

But after Trump’s election, Graham was all in. He became one of the president’s top Senate confidants and a frequent [*golf partner.*](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-florida-coronavirus-pandemic-lindsey-graham-mar-a-lago-96bd53cbc44ea72cb36556c118d14fac) Saying there was “an obligation” to help a president, especially a fellow Republican, Graham [*told The Associated Press in a 2018 interview*](https://apnews.com/article/4c986ce4236f4bb5944dd94608a38f67) that he had warmed to Trump and suggested he had used that relationship to shape decisions. Graham did not cite specifics.

“I’ve tried to be helpful where I could because I think he needs all the help he can get,” Graham said. “You can be a better critic when people understand that you’re trying to help them be successful.”

Graham helped shepherd the three Supreme Court nominees who were in the conservative majority that overturned Roe in 2022. That included Brett Kavanaugh, whom Graham defended against allegations of sexual assault. Graham called the [*Senate Judiciary Committee proceedings in which they unfolded*](https://apnews.com/article/b3f450eef0274026abadd48fc52b266e) “the most unethical sham since I’ve been in ***politics***.”

That pivot toward Trump paid off when Graham ran for reelection in 2020. The senator’s popularity among Republicans in his home state grew as he developed a relationship with Trump.

In the days after that election, when Trump lost to Biden, Graham would be drawn into Trump’s legal woes. Graham was [*ordered to testify*](https://apnews.com/article/congress-donald-trump-lindsey-graham-south-carolina-georgia-0206a66e9b6ba700ca2840b88f8a784c) before a special grand jury investigating whether Trump and others illegally tried to influence the vote in Georgia. Trump and others eventually faced charges of [*trying to interfere in the outcome*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-georgia-election-investigation-grand-jury-willis-d39562cedfc60d64948708de1b011ed3).

Not long after, Graham would take to the Senate floor to deliver an emotional farewell to Trump’s term, saying he felt the then-president must accept his own role in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol and that the whole matter had been a disappointing “self-inflicted wound” [*in the administration’s closing days*](https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-donald-trump-elections-lindsey-graham-electoral-college-4b438f15d8b106d174bfb4c12380121a).

“Trump and I, we’ve had a hell of a journey. I hate it to end this way. Oh my God, I hate it,” he said. “From my point of view, he’s been a consequential president, but today, first thing you’ll see. All I can say is count me out, enough is enough.”

**A union of mutual convenience**

Just weeks later, Graham visited Trump at his Florida home. And Graham stood by Trump as the former president launched latest White House campaign and faced [*a succession of criminal indictments*](https://projects.apnews.com/features/2023/trump-investigations-civil-criminal-tracker/index.html).

Dating back more than a decade, Graham has been criticized by South Carolina conservatives who have accused him of kowtowing to Democrats on issues from immigration and bank bailouts to gun restrictions and climate change. But he also hews to Republican priorities on national security and a strong defense of allies against Russia and China, defending Trump when he is criticized for suggesting he would encourage Russia to attack NATO allies he considers delinquent.

Trump's backing helped blunt some conservative backlash in 2020, when Graham vanquished both primary challenges from the right and the best-funded Democratic opponent in history — Jaime Harrison, now the Democratic National Committee chairman — sailing to victory by double digits, even as Trump lost.

Graham joined Trump's leadership team in South Carolina for the 2024 campaign, and Trump easily won the first-in-the-South primary.

But the anti-Graham voices among Trump's supporters have grown louder.

Campaigning for Trump across the early-voting states, Graham drew boos at rallies in New Hampshire and South Carolina, where [*Trump supporters jeered Graham*](https://x.com/MegKinnardAP/status/1675185926669058049) for more than five minutes during his remarks in July. After Trump's South Carolina victory in February, Trump introduced his ally as someone who “happens to be a little bit further left" than his other backers, adding, "I always say, when I’m in trouble on the left, I call up Lindsey Graham.”

With his seat up in 2026, Graham may be thinking of the discontented conservative voices he will likely face while campaigning, conservative strategist Dave Wilson said.

“You know when you have two people who have never danced before, but they both know how to do the salsa, and the music starts playing, and they just know how to do the dance?" Wilson asked. "It’s like that. Trump and Graham know how to do the dance of Washington, and they’re doing it effectively. They know what they’re doing, and they’re doing it on purpose.”

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Associated Press writer Farnoush Amiri in Washington contributed to this report.

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Kinnard can be reached at [*http://twitter.com/MegKinnardAP*](http://twitter.com/MegKinnardAP)

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