

# [***Democrats May Keep the Senate—With a Little GOP Help | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BN6-09X1-DY68-153C-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

March 27, 2024 Wednesday 7:21 AM EST

Copyright © 2024 Newsweek Inc. All Rights Reserved



**Length:** 912 words

**Byline:** David Faris

**Highlight:** The inexplicable determination of the party's voters to pick unstable provocateurs might be the only path Democrats have to hanging onto their narrow and very much endangered Senate majority.

**Body**

The [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) primary voters of Ohio, in their infinite wisdom, selected a businessman named Bernie Moreno as their nominee to challenge incumbent Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown. Moreno, who [*was endorsed*](https://apnews.com/article/republicans-ohio-moreno-trump-sherrod-senate-da843cbb08b9233a180081cde6676a5f) (of course) by former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), appears to have [*done a 180*](https://glaad.org/bernie_moreno_lgbtq_record/) on LGBTQ+ issues when he started to run for office, and is[*now linked*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/03/15/trump-stands-by-moreno-despite-link-to-adult-friend-finder-account-00147282)to a scandal involving the website Adult Friend Finder. Moreno was widely considered to be the weakest possible general election candidate for [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), so naturally the state's primary voters gave him a 17-point victory over the two comparatively sane people running against him.

Moreno is not alone, and the inexplicable determination of the party's voters to pick unstable provocateurs in race after race might be the only path Democrats have to hanging onto their narrow and very much endangered [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) majority. This is nothing new—GOP voters have blown [*countless races*](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/11/16/23458896/republicans-senate-candidate-quality-trump) over the [*past two decades*](https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2012/10/gops-problems-exposed-in-struggle-for-senate-015160) by picking weird, extremist candidates who either exude unmistakable creepy vibes or whose over-the-top MAGA sycophancy alienated just enough voters to blow winnable races.

Who can forget, for example, Delaware Republican Christine O'Donnell and the [*closing pitch*](https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2010/10/05/130353168/-i-m-not-a-witch-republican-senate-candidate-christine-o-donnell-says-in-new-ad) of her 2010 Senate race: "I'm not a witch!" The difference between then and now is that 14 years ago the party leadership was horrified by these goofballs, whereas today they are fully backed by the Republican supreme leader, Donald Trump. The cranks used to have to sneak in the back door and now they are giving the staff orders. Unsurprisingly, these weirdos have multiplied. Hence Arizona Republicans have chosen [*Kari Lake*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kari-lake?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), who *The Bulwark's* Tim Miller once [*memorably dubbed*](https://plus.thebulwark.com/p/the-empress-of-magastan-kari-lake)"The Empress of Trollistan," as their Senate nominee fresh off her embarrassing 2022 loss in the gubernatorial contest to Democrat [*Katie Hobbs*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/katie-hobbs?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). Reader, you will be unsurprised to learn that [*she is down in the polls*](https://www.realclearpolling.com/polls/senate/general/2024/arizona/lake-vs-gallego).

Retaking the Senate should be a layup for Republicans. They have been gifted an extraordinarily friendly Senate map by virtue of the exact third of the chamber that is up for election this year. Democrats are defending seats in three states that Donald Trump won twice—Ohio, Montana and West Virginia—not to mention seats in the battlegrounds of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Nevada and Michigan. Republicans have zero seats in Biden states that are up for grabs this year, and Democrats' exceedingly slim hopes for a pickup of any kind rest on beating either [*Ted Cruz*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/ted-cruz?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in Texas or [*Rick Scott*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/rick-scott?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in Florida, both of which would be heavy lifts even under favorable conditions.

And these are not ideal circumstances for Democrats to begin with. President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) continues to suffer from brutal disapproval numbers and consistently trails Trump in polling averages. Party elites and strategists are gripped with cold-sweat panic about losing to Trump, and Biden is the subject of open speculation about how he could still step aside and have the party's nominee chosen at an open convention in Chicago this August.

Democrats have [*all but conceded*](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/23464862/senate-elections-2024-map-joe-manchin)the race in deep red West Virginia, where incumbent [*Joe Manchin*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-manchin?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)—the only Democrat in the whole state who could possibly win that seat—decided not to seek re-election. If Republicans successfully defend their own turf, they would need to flip just one of the remaining competitive contests to secure a 51-seat majority. And if Trump wins, West Virginia alone would suffice, because whoever our illustrious 45th president picks as his running mate would break ties in a 50-50 Senate. If things break the GOP's way—a moderate red wave that gives them Arizona, Montana, Nevada, and Ohio too, they would be looking at a decisive 54-46 edge in the Senate that would be quite difficult for Democrats to claw back in 2026.

And that is where Republican primary voters look poised to come to Senate Majority Leader [*Chuck Schumer*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/chuck-schumer?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s (D-NY) rescue. In addition to Moreno, Republican primary voters look set to pick nightmare candidates in [*Arizona*](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/kari-lake-zeroes-senate-race-ruben-gallego-insisting/story?id=108316143) (Lake), and Wisconsin (carpetbagging California bank owner [*Eric Hovde*](https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/eric-hovde-wisconsin-senate-republican/), who also owns a Laguna Beach mansion). Their best recruit in a battleground is probably [*Dave McCormick*](https://whyy.org/articles/2024-election-pennsylvania-senate-david-mccormick-israel-hamas-war/) in Pennsylvania, who will be a massive underdog against longtime incumbent Democrat [*Bob Casey*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/bob-casey?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Could Democrats actually hold the Senate? The odds are still against them, without question. But with the addition of Moreno to this motley crew, the outlook just got a little bit better. Much will depend on who Trump decides to endorse in states yet to hold their primaries, where plausible candidates are trying to fend off challenges from far-right figures like Nevada Big Lie enthusiast [*Jim Marchant*](https://ballotpedia.org/Jim_Marchant).

If recent history is any guide, Trump could care less who is "sane" or "polling better" or "sounds like a human" and will go with whoever issues the most obsequious pledge of allegiance to him personally. And if Senate control comes down to one or two critical races, Republicans are almost certainly going to regret the baggage that their own primary voters—at the behest of Donald Trump—have saddled them with.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2368516/bernie-moreno.jpg)

**Graphic**

Bernie Moreno

KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI/AFP via Getty Images

US Senate candidate Bernie Moreno, Republican of Ohio, speaks before former President Donald Trump takes the stage during a Buckeye Values PAC Rally in Vandalia, Ohio, on March 16.

**Load-Date:** March 27, 2024

**End of Document**