

# Trust erodes in everything from church to schools to the presidency during Biden's first year

---

**SUBSCRIBER-ONLY**

By Seth McLaughlin - *The Washington Times* - Tuesday, January 18, 2022

Public schools? Americans are wary. Organized religion? Increasingly a big "No thanks." Banks, big businesses, organized labor, technology companies and news media? Not much confidence in the lot of them, according to

## Gallup polling.

As President Biden enters his second year in office, former President Donald Trump enters his second year of forced retirement and COVID-19 enters its third year of disrupting lives, Americans are questioning institutions in new ways. Meanwhile, academics are scurrying to understand what it all means.

Politicians are sounding the alarm about the deaths of institutions and blaming their political opponents.

---

Gallup regularly conducts polls on 16 institutions. As of last year, 13 of them had less than 50% of public confidence.

Small businesses and the military remain well-respected, and police squeaked back above 50% after slipping in 2020 — the only institution that saw an increase in confidence last year.

Still, just about every other institution required to keep society operating is struggling, particularly in the government.

Congress has been mired in the single digits or teens for years. The presidency and the Supreme Court don't crack 40%.

"I think we are at a low point," said Kevin R. Kosar, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. "I think the more the public sees anything in government and the longer it sees it, the gloomier it gets."

Public health officials worry that the lack of confidence is hurting efforts to control the pandemic. People on the political right have long tuned out the Biden administration's admonitions, and those on the left are starting to do the same.

Mr. Kosar said climbing out of the confidence gap will be tough because distrust has been on a steady downhill march.

President Kennedy's assassination, the Vietnam War, Watergate and President Nixon's resignation, 1970s economic troubles and changing politics all helped fuel the decline, he said.

Now, much of the problem can be traced to government nationalization and overpromising and underdelivering on solutions.

"For those people who were over the voting age in 1980 and still alive today, they have experienced the Charlie Brown and Lucy with the football experience," he said. "So it is no surprise that they are growing more cynical because they have been told that this beautiful thing is going to be around the corner if the right person is elected."

Changing party power in Washington doesn't seem to help.

The Pew Research Center says Americans tend to have more faith when their party controls the White House, but those in the party out of power lose confidence.

Black and Hispanic Americans express more trust in government on Mr. Biden's watch than do White adults. The phenomenon was similar under Presidents Obama and Clinton.

During the Reagan, Bush and Trump eras, "White Americans were substantially more likely than Black Americans to express trust in the federal government," Pew says.

Gallup's research also bears out the partisan and minority swings.

News institutions also perform poorly in Gallup's poll. Just 16% of Americans have confidence in television news; only Congress rates worse. Newspapers do slightly better with a 21% confidence rate.

John Maxwell Hamilton, author of "Manipulating the Masses: Woodrow Wilson and the Birth of American Propaganda," said the shrinking, fragmented press corps has created a vacuum for alternative narratives of the "truth" to take hold and opened the door for administrations to circumvent the news media.

"I don't think you have to be an expert in intelligence to recognize the value our enemies in several different countries see in just being disruptive," he said.

Mr. Hamilton, a journalism professor at the Louisiana State University Manship School of Mass Communication and a global scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, said a skeptical public can be healthy for democracy.

"But when you get to the point that you believe everything is made up and almost everything is a lie, then you are willing to believe the most prosperous lies," he said.

As bad as things are, polling numbers show they have been worse. The average confidence rating for all the institutions Gallup surveys was 33% last year. The number dipped to 31% during Mr. Obama's second term and reached 32% at one point in George W. Bush's second term.

Jon Grinspan, a curator of political history at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, is optimistic. He said America has bounced back from trials such as the Civil War and the corruption of the late 1800s.

"Living through a partisan American election, one critic wrote in 1894, was like watching two speeding locomotives race across an open plain," Mr. Grinspan writes in his book "The Age of Acrimony: How Americans Fought to Fix Their Democracy, 1865-1915." "Each bystander felt irresistibly compelled to cheer for one train, to be jubilant when it forges ahead, or mortified if it falls behind. It becomes for the time being his train, his locomotive, his railroad."

The public complained mightily about the politics but couldn't look away.

At that time, Americans witnessed some of the closest elections in history. Three presidents were assassinated. Voter turnout was high. The balance of power swung back and forth. The public was engaged and enraged.

Mr. Grinspan said temperaments simmered down toward the turn of the 20th century and politics became more restrained.

The seeds of Progressive Era reforms, including the national income tax, the direct election of senators and women's suffrage, had been sown.

"Lack of trust is kind of a natural state," he said. "It is the trust that is unusual, and so they built that and we've seen that erode. But that means we can build it again. We've seen it in the past. You can build it up over time.

“So, kind of good news for our own era is you can have beneficial reform beginning to take place even as things seem to be getting worse, and it is just a matter of time before they start to kick in,” he said.

- *Seth McLaughlin can be reached at [smclaughlin@washingtontimes.com](mailto:smclaughlin@washingtontimes.com).*

# Undaunted: Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene rages against the Washington machine in reelection push



Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene prepares to cast her vote on the first day of early voting in Rome, Georgia. (Seth McLaughlin/The Washington Times) more >

**SUBSCRIBER-ONLY**

By Seth McLaughlin - *The Washington Times* - Monday, May 2, 2022



ROME, Ga. — Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene on Monday barnstormed around her congressional district on the first day of early voting in Georgia, telling voters that woke Democrats and weak-kneed Republicans are presiding over a “broken” federal government that has left Americans like them in the lurch.

The polarizing Mrs. Greene, bidding for a second term in the 14th Congressional District, said voters are suffering because of Congress’ failure to address the rising costs of food and gasoline and the unprecedented migration mess at the southern border. She said those issues will be her top priorities if she is reelected.

“This is how people feel all over America, and unfortunately, rural Americans and most Americans haven’t had a voice for a very long time,” the 47-year-old married mother of three said after casting her vote. “Our government is very broken.”

“It is hard to have fun when inflation is out of control, gas prices are insane and then we have a wide-open border and we’ve got President Butter Beans in office,” she told voters at a separate stop.

Mrs. Greene insists things will improve — for the country and for her — if Republicans flip control of the House in the midterm elections. The current Democratic majority has tied her hands, she said, but dramatic changes will come after significant Republican victories in November, as many polls suggest.

Mrs. Greene said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has promised her “great” committee assignments, suggesting judiciary and oversight could be a good fit. She is also vowing to push for investigations into the “Biden crime family” and into whether taxpayer money had a role in the origins of COVID-19, which she called a “bioweapon.”

---

“The federal government is failing the American people so badly,” she said. “They’re ruining a perfectly good country.”

Mrs. Greene won her seat in 2020 but was stripped of her committee assignments less than a month after the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol. Majority Democrats made the move citing what they said were her past incendiary comments and apparent support of violence against lawmakers.

Her no-holds-barred style, penchant for controversial comments and willingness to take on members of both parties have made her a hyperpolarizing figure. She is even facing a legal battle from a group that says her “pro-insurrection” comments regarding the Capitol riot disqualify her from the ballot.

Mrs. Greene embraces former President Donald Trump and promotes his claim that the 2020 election was stolen, including in Georgia. Joseph R. Biden was the first Democrat since Bill Clinton to carry the state in a presidential election. Mrs. Greene said Republicans need a civil war to weed out more moderate members and give conservatives a more prominent voice in the party.

As far as accomplishments, Mrs. Greene told voters she pulled \$6 million in federal funds into the district and brought transparency to the House by forcing roll-call votes on hundreds of pieces of legislation that otherwise would have flown under the radar.

Her high profile and confrontational style have not given her a clear path to a nomination in the state’s May 24 primary, however.

Five other Republicans running in the primary say Mrs. Greene has become too partisan and too controversial to legislate effectively, even in a Republican-run House.

Jennifer Strahan, a health care executive who has gained support from the likes of Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, said the interest in her candidacy is a direct result of Republican misgivings about Mrs. Greene.

“The individuals who are supporting me aren’t supporting me because they know me,” Mrs. Strahan said. “They are supporting me because they know Rep. Greene.”

The behind-the-scenes hope among the anti-Greene crowd is that Republicans who silently don’t like her will come out of the woodwork if she fails to win more than 50% of the vote and is pushed into a runoff.

### **A fit for the district**

On Monday, Mrs. Greene said her style fits her district. Tucked into the far northwestern corner of the state bordering Tennessee and Alabama, the 14th District went for Mr. Trump over Mr. Biden in the 2020 election by a 73% to 25% margin. The district is 77% White, and the largest cities have populations of less than 50,000.

“I am not willing to cross lines,” Mrs. Greene said. “When I’m saying, ‘Lines have been drawn in the sand,’ I seriously mean it, and I think my constituents and supporters really support that because they are not used to seeing that from politicians in Washington.”

Trump-inspired conservatives adore Mrs. Greene, a critical factor in a deep-red district.

"I love Marjorie because she is a doer," said Lyndon Smith, a retired Marine. "She is shaking things up, up there. I'm sick and tired of business as usual and our country being destroyed."

Mr. Smith said Mrs. Greene deserves credit for helping to block the "communist, socialist" agenda being pushed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, whom he described as "the devil."

Mrs. Greene is "willing to take a hit, and she's willing to be confrontational, whereas almost all the men run for cover," he said.

Mrs. Greene's race is playing out under voting rules Gov. Brian Kemp and the Republican-controlled legislature passed last year. The rules shrank the time window for requesting an absentee ballot, established ID requirements for absentee ballots and curbed the number of ballot drop boxes and the times they are available. Democrats say the law seeks to suppress the vote in minority communities. Republicans say that's not the case.

Mrs. Greene's take-no-prisoners approach helped her win Mr. Trump's endorsement.

Angered at the failure of senior Georgia Republicans to back his election fraud claims, Mr. Trump also has thrown his weight behind former Sen. David Perdue's primary challenge to Mr. Kemp and Rep. Jody Hice's challenge to Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. Mrs. Greene declined Monday to say how she voted in those primary contests.

Mrs. Greene also clashed with a television reporter when asked whether she is concerned that her recent comments about Nazis in Ukraine and a 2018 social media post about the Rothschild family have stoked antisemitism in

Georgia.

“You’re lying. Stop right now. You’re lying,” she said. “I have one of the most pro-Israel records in Congress. I have never in my life been antisemitic.”

Mrs. Greene also faced blowback last week when she said Satan is controlling the Catholic Church because of its strong support for illegal immigrants.

Her swing Monday around the district included stops at a mom-and-pop diner that has struggled to hire servers and a construction company whose fuel costs have doubled over the course of two years and has passed those costs on to customers.

Mrs. Greene was met at her polling place by a small group of loyal supporters holding signs that read “NW Georgia [Loves] MTG” and “Flood the Polls” and sporting T-shirts emblazoned with “1776” and “Well Behaved Women Rarely Make History.”

“She fights for us and for what we all believe in, and she is a Trump supporter and so am I,” said one of her female supporters. “It doesn’t matter what it is; she is there for us.”

• *Seth McLaughlin can be reached at [smclaughlin@washingtontimes.com](mailto:smclaughlin@washingtontimes.com).*

# **GOP candidates weather Trump's attacks with the power of incumbency**

---

By Seth McLaughlin - *The Washington Times* - Friday, May 20, 2022

Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia leaned into the power of incumbency to take the sting out of former Sen. David Perdue's primary challenge and former President Donald Trump's unrelenting attacks.

Mr. Kemp is closing out his campaign with a bill-signing bonanza that has brandished his conservative bona fides while awarding millions of dollars in federal grants and extolling the virtues of economic development projects on the horizon.

It is a luxury that many Republicans lack in their campaigns against Trump-backed candidates in races across the country.

---

---

---

“It is about the power of incumbency,” said David Johnson, a Georgia-based Republican strategist. “Kemp was able with this last legislative session to get passed items that conservatives loved, and he was proven right about reopening the economy during COVID, and a lot of the business community see him as a safe choice.”

He said Mr. Trump underestimated Mr. Kemp.

---

---

“Kemp has a strong base he built running as secretary of state and governor,” he said.



Mr. Kemp took another victory lap Friday by signing a deal with Hyundai. The South Korean automaker will spend \$5.54 billion to build an electric car and battery manufacturing plant that promises to add thousands of jobs in southeastern Georgia.

“My commitment to hardworking Georgians to make our state the best place to live, work and raise our families remains steadfast, and with this announcement, which is now the largest economic development project in our state’s history, we will continue working to make Georgia the premier destination for quality companies who are creating the jobs of today, tomorrow and beyond,” Mr. Kemp said.

On the eve of the election Tuesday, he plans to join forces with former Vice President Mike Pence at a get-out-the-vote rally.

It all follows a series of high-profile bill-signing ceremonies on taxes, guns and parental rights that gave Mr. Kemp lots of news coverage, thrusting him into living rooms across the state and helping solidify his support among Republicans and conservative activists.

“Gov. Kemp is proud to have fulfilled his promises to the people of Georgia,” said Kemp campaign spokesperson Tate Mitchell. “Under his leadership, unemployment is at its lowest point in state history, job creation has hit record highs, parents are in charge of their kids’ health and education, and Georgians have a leader that will fight for their values.”

Mr. Perdue, who lost his Senate seat to Democrat Jon Ossoff in 2020, has struggled to find an opening in the race.

The former senator has tried to make gains by pledging to abolish the state income tax and knocking Mr. Kemp for ignoring the will of the people by supporting a proposed electric truck plant east of Atlanta.

Mr. Perdue also is boasting about Mr. Trump's support and embracing the stolen election claims that Mr. Kemp dismissed.

In a last-ditch effort to boost his bid, Mr. Perdue is scheduled to campaign Monday with former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, the one-time Republican vice presidential nominee who is seeking an open congressional seat in her home state. Ms. Palin, like Mr. Perdue, is running as a full-fledged supporter of Mr. Trump and his fraudulent election claims.

Mr. Perdue's prospects look grim. A recent Fox News poll showed him trailing Mr. Kemp by a more than 30-point margin, 60% to 28%, in the primary.

The other Republicans in the race, Kandiss Taylor and Catherine Davis, are polling in the single digits.

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said Sunday that Mr. Perdue made his own choice to challenge Mr. Kemp.

"David Perdue is perfectly capable of making his own choices. And [former] President [Donald] Trump, obviously, has gotten involved," Mrs. McDaniel said on "Fox News Sunday."

Although Mr. Perdue trails Mr. Kemp by a wide margin in the polls, Mrs. McDaniel noted that a runoff election is possible.

“The votes haven’t been counted. Kemp needs to pass a 50% threshold to win the nomination outright, and we’ll see what happens then,” she said.

On the Democratic side, voting rights activist and former Georgia state Rep. Stacey Abrams is running unopposed for her party’s gubernatorial nomination.

It’s her second run for governor. Mr. Kemp defeated Ms. Abrams in the 2018 election. She never conceded the election, although she recognized Mr. Kemp as the “legal” governor.

In the state’s other primary races, football legend Herschel Walker is expected to cruise to victory in the Republican Senate nominating race with Mr. Trump’s support.

Mr. Walker would face incumbent Sen. Raphael Warnock, a Democrat, in what is shaping up to be a marquee 2022 race that could decide which party controls the upper chamber of Congress.

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican who has felt the brunt of Mr. Trump’s stolen election attacks, is running in a competitive race against Rep. Jody Hice, who has Mr. Trump’s support.

Reps. Carolyn Bourdeaux and Lucy McBath, meanwhile, are competing for the Democratic nomination in the newly drawn 7th Congressional District.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a firebrand Republican who has been a magnet for news coverage and Democratic attacks, is looking to avoid a runoff race in Georgia’s 14th Congressional District. Some Republicans are hoping Jennifer Strahan can unseat the controversial lawmaker.

Voters on Tuesday will also head to the polls in Alabama, Arkansas and Texas, where George P. Bush is running an underdog bid to unseat Trump-backed Ken Paxton in the attorney general's race.

In Texas' 28th Congressional District, Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar is fighting for his political life in a tight runoff race against liberal favorite Jessica Cisneros.

Mr. Trump's influence on the 2022 Republican primary election cycle has been evident in races across the country.

He boosted J.D. Vance in the Ohio Senate primary and Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania's Republican Senate primary, where the celebrity doctor holds a slim lead over former hedge fund manager David McCormick.

Mrs. McDaniel said "the power of [Mr. Trump's] endorsement is astounding."

"You know, President Trump has endorsed in 84 races, he's won 81. That's like an A+. Just a note, Joe Biden is not being asked to endorse in any race because no Democrat wants to be seen with him, including Stacey Abrams, who is running [for governor] in Georgia," she said.

Gov. Brad Little of Idaho was one of the candidates who survived a challenge from a Trump-backed challenger, underscoring the difficulty Mr. Trump has had dislodging sitting Republican governors.

Jeffrey Lazarus, a political science professor at Georgia State University, said a case could be made that governors benefit from incumbency more than candidates holding other public offices.

“Governors have their hands directly on the machinery of government in ways that members of Congress don’t,” Mr. Lazarus said. “So it is really easy for a governor to time these things to coincide with an election in ways that are not as easy for a member of Congress to do.”

Mr. Lazarus pointed to Mr. Kemp’s recent announcement of \$415 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds from the American Rescue Plan, which ironically passed out of Congress without any Republican support. Plus, he noted Mr. Kemp’s decision to sign off on raises for teachers and school workers.

“It is even a bit of a joke down here that teachers can always count on a big salary raise during an election year,” Mr. Lazarus said. “You can set your clock to it.”

• *Seth McLaughlin can be reached at [smclaughlin@washingtontimes.com](mailto:smclaughlin@washingtontimes.com).*