

Winning State Attorney General Races: Options for Democratic Donors

Among the lessons that Democrats should have learned from the 2020 elections and their tumultuous aftermath, one of the most vital is the importance of lesser-known statewide elected officials. While unified state legislatures or governors exercise the broadest power in most states, highly motivated statewide officials with low national profiles could suddenly become arbiters of who gets to vote, whose vote counts, and who is (or isn't) breaking the law to muddle an election. State attorneys general are among these extremely important but under-discussed offices, and in key states throughout the country, Democrats are running in tight races against opponents who could use these offices to swing future elections. In 2020, numerous states with Republican attorneys general even joined a [lawsuit](#) aimed at overturning election results from other states.

In addition to their influence over the election of other offices, state attorneys general are also powerful in their own right. AGs, for example, determine whether states will join other major lawsuits on hot-button issues that could reach the Supreme Court, and often directly oversee state law enforcement agencies. AGs are also elected independently, giving them [power and discretion](#) to act against the wishes of the state's governor, who could potentially be a member of a different party. Furthermore, with gridlock in Congress and a majority conservative Supreme Court, cases involving states as parties or authors of amicus briefs could be more impactful than ever. For these reasons, progressive donors should consider state attorney general races a major priority for the 2022 midterms. (Also see our [brief](#) on secretary of state races, another major priority this year.)

What's at Stake

There are 31 races for state attorney general in 2022. Of these races, Sabato Crystal Ball's Louis Jacobson [rates](#) six as highly competitive. Four of these seats are held by Democrats (Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada and Iowa) and two are held by Republicans (Georgia and Arizona). Jacobson rates another five races as potentially competitive – three held by Democrats (Minnesota, Delaware, and California) and two held by Republicans (Kansas and Texas). The attorney general in any one of these states could play a potentially decisive role in future elections, from properly enforcing protections for voters to filing lawsuits with the potential to throw out ballots. The races in potential presidential swing states are of particular importance in this respect, as the 2022 victors could play a decisive role in efforts to overturn election results in 2024.

The outcome of AG contests is likely to track closely with races for other federal and state-level offices in a midterm election that promises to be challenging for Democrats. Though top statewide officials are all elected separately, at present, **40 of 50 states** are “triplexes” – meaning that their governor, attorney general and secretary of state all come from the same party. This reflects how increased ideological sorting within the parties has cut the number of split-ticket voters to an all-time low, and the exact same constituency votes for every statewide office. As a result, AG races will be strongly affected by overall Democratic performance, which in turn will hinge heavily on the effectiveness of grassroots organizing and turnout efforts in key states.

But the resources available to individual AG candidates will also make a difference. The price tag for these races has steadily increased since the late 1990s, when a coalition of state attorneys general extracted a massive financial settlement from the tobacco industry. Former Colorado Attorney General John Suthers, a Republican, called the settlement a “wakeup call” for corporate America, with groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce subsequently making heavy investments in attorney general races.

From 2014 to 2018, the Republican Attorneys General Association racked up some **\$93 million** in expenditures. In the same time period, the Democratic Attorneys General Association spent only **\$46 million**, less than their Republican counterparts spent in 2018 alone. The cost of AG races is likely to climb even further this year.

Strategies for Impact

Progressive donors must ensure that Democratic AG candidates in key states have the resources they need to compete. But given that AG races will likely track closely with other statewide races, donors can also have an impact on AG races by giving for grassroots organizing and other electoral efforts.

- **Donate directly to candidates or intermediaries.** As of this writing, a number of key state AG races are still in the primary process. We will make recommendations and update this brief as primaries are decided. Meanwhile, see the list of candidates below to whom you can give now. To support a wide swath of candidates, we also recommend giving to the Democratic Attorneys General Association (see below).

- **Donate to grassroots organizing groups.** As we explain in our recent brief, [Giving to Elect Democrats and Build Progressive Power in 2022](#), such investments have a multiplier effect by supporting candidates up and down the ballot. This is especially worthwhile in the case of simultaneous statewide races, where broadly increased Democratic turnout will not only help candidates for attorney general, but for governor, secretary of state and the Senate.
- **Give to Democratic state parties.** State parties can provide valuable support up and down the ballot, and a strong state party, along with a strong statewide grassroots effort, can help propel Democrats to victory in multiple offices at once. But state parties vary widely in their effectiveness, and though people who work in Democratic politics generally know which are which, this information isn't public. Blue Tent will be offering recommendations of strong state parties to support in the coming months.

Options for Donors

- **Democratic Attorneys General Association:** DAGA focuses on both helping Democratic AGs get elected, as well as supporting them once in office. DAGA raises and spends money on campaign expenses, including media and contributions to campaigns and state parties where it's needed most. The group also helps connect state attorneys general nationally, and works to support future, diverse candidates for the office.
- **Candidates in competitive races:** Right now, progressives can donate money and volunteer for incumbent Democratic AGs running for re-election, with the most contested elections likely to be [Dana Nessel](#) in Michigan; [Josh Kaul](#) in Wisconsin; [Aaron Ford](#) in Nevada; [Tom Miller](#) in Iowa; and [Keith Ellison](#) in Minnesota (Blue Tent will be publishing candidate recommendation briefs for many of these races in coming weeks).
- **Grassroots groups in key states:** Some of Blue Tent's favorite groups working in states with important AG races include [LUCHA](#) in Arizona and [New Georgia Project](#). The Movement Voter Project's [funds](#) also offer an easy way for donors to support grassroots organizing groups in specific states.

Conclusion

While anyone who follows politics knows that there's a lot on the line in 2022, even many political junkies don't quite understand the high stakes of down-ticket races. State AGs might play a critical

role in the protection of American democracy in 2024. Giving to influence races for these offices is critically important, not only to block possible Republican election subversion, but to continue building the progressive legal movement and supporting future leaders of the party as state attorneys general often go on to higher offices. This is an excellent option for small donors looking to have an impact.

You may also want to check out:

- [Winning Secretary of State Races: Options for Democratic Donors](#)
- [Giving to Democratic Candidates in 2022: Advice for Donors](#)
- [Why Donors Should Think About Attorneys General and Secretaries of State](#)
- [Josh Kaul: Attorney General, Wisconsin](#)

