

The 2026 Midterms: Republican Outlook

In this issue we'll focus on the challenges and opportunities for the Republican Party as we approach the 2026 midterms. Remember, in an election season November is very far away, and many things can change that will determine the eventual outcome. With that in mind, let's look at the Republicans.

Advantages¹

- President Biden was just as unpopular in 2022 as Trump is today, and Democrats still managed to limit their seat loss to single digits. That may, of course, be cold comfort for Republicans; Democrats just need to pick up four seats to take control of the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Democrats are struggling in the polls.
- Fewer House seats are likely in play in 2026 compared to past elections. Demographic sorting and partisan gerrymandering have combined in recent years to diminish the number of truly competitive congressional districts.
- President Trump has been working hard to encourage red states to redraw district lines to create more Republican-leaning districts.
- In the U.S. Senate, twenty-one of the twenty-two Republican seats up for election are in states in which Trump won the popular vote in 2024; twenty of them are in states in which Trump won by ten percentage points or more.
- To keep control of the House, Trump must travel the campaign trail and convince those who elected him in 2024 to come out and vote in the midterms.²
- Unemployment and inflation are low, and real incomes are rising.
- Trump, along with Republican Party support in Congress, are close to accomplishing three initiatives that will resonate with those who voted for him in 2024 and may get them to the polls: Permanently tighten the border, root out fraud in our welfare programs, and restore faith in our elections, including a nationwide voter ID.

Disadvantages³

- History doesn't favor the White House. In 18 of the last 20 elections, the party in the White House has lost seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, averaging a loss of about 25 sets. The past is not always prologue, but it often lays the foundation.
- Expect the generic ballot polling to change from now until Election Day. However, the five-point advantage Democrats have on generic ballot polling right now points to a Democratic victory in November. A Real Clear Politics poll (as of early February) shows Democrats with a +4.8 average. A Fox News poll during this same timeframe found Democrats +6 on the generic ballot, the highest recorded support for either party ever.⁴
- Consolidate the historic midterm swing; off-year election results in New Jersey and Virginia; the recent flip of an historic Republican seat in Texas; and, generic ballot polling give Republicans less than a 40% chance of victory in the midterms.
- Mid-term redistricting may favor Republicans between three and eight seats, but the odds still don't tilt Republican. Redistricting raises the projected number of Republican seats, but the current environment still favors Democrats.

¹ Midterm Elections are Nine Months Away, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/midterm-elections-are-nine-months-away>

² Trump can keep his party strong into the midterms – here's how, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/5725236-trump-republican-voter-turnout/>

³ What midterm projections tell us about Trump's central struggle, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/what-midterm-projections-tell-us-about-trumps-central-struggle>

⁴ A Midterm Thumping in the Works?, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/what-midterm-projections-tell-us-about-trumps-central-struggle>

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- Top GOP strategists acknowledge that immigration and the economy – the two issues that drove Trump’s win in 2024 are now liabilities.⁵
- President Trump’s fading performance on the economy and the cost of living from the start of his presidency to now. Cost of living is poised to be the top issue in deciding Americans’ votes in the 2026 midterms. Perception is reality, and as long as American voters believe the cost of living has not improved, Republican Party chances to retain the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives will continue to fade, as will the President’s polling numbers.
- The President’s central struggle to build out a long-term vision has so far failed to win out Americans’ views of the present. If you aren’t winning the present, it becomes difficult to win the future.
- President Trump’s job approval is underwater in all major trackers and has trended steadily downward for the last six months, reaching new lows in recent weeks in part due to the furor over ICE actions in Minnesota.⁶

Conclusion

The data point to a national environment that is clearly favorable to Democrats, driven by an unpopular President, a Democratic edge on the generic ballot and voter anxiety around affordability and health-care costs. If those conditions persist, they create a real path for Democrats to reclaim the U.S. House of Representatives.

At the same time, the U.S. Senate map remains structurally biased toward Republicans, with relatively few true battlegrounds and several Democratic seats located in states that have trended right at the presidential level. Even a modest national Democratic wave may not be sufficient to translate into large Senate gains, particularly absent retirements or late-breaking candidate problems on the Republican side.

The most likely outcome, if current trends hold, is asymmetric: a House electorate that responds sharply to national conditions, alongside a Senate battlefield that remains narrower, more state-specific and harder for Democrats on which to fully capitalize.

But much of that depends on candidate recruitment. Notwithstanding demands for him to step down from his leadership role, Senator Schumer has done a good job recruiting Democratic candidates for U.S. Senate seats. Add the splinters within the Democratic Party between Socialist Democrats, Progressives, Liberals and Moderates, and it has the potential to upend any gains the Democrats may make in either chamber.

Play that against the fractures within the Republican Party – MAGA versus conservatives, moderates and those perceived to be RINO (Republican In Name Only).

What to watch:

- Surging voter registration is not enough for the Republican Party; the voters must turn out.
- Both Republicans and Democrats need unaffiliated voters. Neither party can win election with only their most loyal supporters;
- The Republican Party cannot continue to lose the mail-in ballot race to the Democrats;
- The November 2026 election is a referendum on the Trump presidency;
- President Trump becomes a lame duck unable to accomplish the agenda for which most Americans voted if Democrats gain control of even one chamber of Congress;
- Impeachment will be the order of the day if Democrats gain control of the U.S. House of Representatives; and,
- Democrat control of both chambers of Congress almost ensures that President Trump will be impeached.

⁵ GOP’s new fear: Losing the Senate in November, <https://www.axios.com/2026/02/06/gop-senate-midterms-2026>

⁶ Ibid.