

## The 2026 Midterms: Democrat Outlook

In this issue we'll focus on the challenges and opportunities for the Democratic 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 Democrats.

### Advantages

- A slew of wins in November 2025 has the Democrats feeling hopeful and ready to take back the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Historical trends, increasing frustration with the Trump Administration and encouragement from the gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia all point to a Democratic majority in the lower chamber.
- Recent polling from Quinnipiac University shows that 47 percent of voters say they want the Democratic Party to win control of the House, while only 43 percent say the same for the Republican Party.<sup>1</sup>
- AtlasIntel found that 54 percent of Americans say they are more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate in their district than the Republican (38 percent).
- The overall public mood at the start of 2026 remains generally bleak with most calling the economy poor.
- Focus on affordability in 2026 may help to lay the groundwork for a competitive bid for the Oval Office in 2028.
- Opportunity to capitalize on public dissatisfaction with President Trump and the Republican-controlled government in Washington, D.C. CNN's poll found a majority of Americans consider the first year of Trump's second term to be a failure, with just 29 percent of Independents approving of his job performance.<sup>2</sup>
- I.C.E. in blue cities and states, and the resulting protests appears to motivate Democrats across the nation.
- While many aren't convinced that Democratic control of Congress won't make a difference, they appear willing to gamble on a change regardless.
- Absence of a blue wave doesn't equate to the absence of a Democratic victory. Recent polling from Quinnipiac University shows that 47 percent of voters say they want the Democratic Party to win control of the House, whereas only 43 percent say the same for the Republican Party.
- If Democrats want a real shot at reclaiming legislative power it is crucial they don't lose their momentum while they're still ahead. They must continue to address the day-to-day issues that plague so many Americans: housing affordability, the job market and rising healthcare costs.

### Disadvantages

- Approval for Congressional Democratic leaders stands at just 28 percent, below the 35 percent figure for their Republican counterparts.
- Seventy-one percent say Democrats in Congress have been ineffective, up 20 points from the 51 percent who expected a less than effective effort last January when the current Congress convened.

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<sup>1</sup> Democrats are posed to take the House, but don't expect a blue wave, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/5670071-blue-wave-slimmed-2026/>

<sup>2</sup> CNN Poll: Democrats are deeply motivated for the midterms despite having dismal views of party leaders, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/01/18/politics>

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- Democrats in Congress aren't doing enough to oppose Trump and aren't effectively opposing Republican policies.
- It is essentially impossible for Democrats to flip 40 seats as they did with the 2018 blue wave.
- Discontent with the Party's effectiveness could affect how primary challenges to sitting members of Congress play out in the coming months.
- A 61 percent majority of Americans say Republicans in Congress have been at least somewhat effective in passing new laws.
- Accusations of policies that enable or encourage fraud and provide benefits to undocumented immigrants, after taxpayer money, though disputed, continue to have a detrimental impact on Democrats across the nation. Specific allegations have focused on healthcare subsidies, child-care programs, and tax credits, with some arguing that Democrats want to restore or maintain funding that could go to those without legal status.
- Even if Democrats win enough seats to flip the House, they will likely end up with a slimmer majority than they had in 2018, and the anticipated blue wave will seem to have fallen short.
- Redistricting wars in Texas and California just about ensured that Democrats would not enjoy a landslide similar to 2018.
- With fewer swing districts come fewer opportunities for big gains. Wave elections require wave maps. Unfortunately for Democrats, today's map simply isn't built for one.

2026 is going to be a chance to answer a pretty strange question: What if one of the most powerful and theoretically coveted jobs in the world was actually one that very few wanted to keep?<sup>3</sup>

The job is that of a member of Congress – a U.S. Senator or a U.S. Representative. NPR is tracking the number of lawmakers who have decided to throw in the towel this year. It's a *record*: By last count, 11 Senators are headed for the exit and 47 Representatives are doing the same. Some are running for a different office. Others have experienced health conditions and concerns. Still others, like Georgia's Marjorie Taylor Greene, have just decided to leave without even finishing out their terms.

"There's a sense that you can't achieve anything in the American Congress right now," Political Scientist David Faris says. "It's too broken. You have standard retirements compounded by a greater sense of the institution's dysfunction and weakness vis-à-vis the executive branch."

What will November bring? We'll have to wait and see.

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<sup>3</sup> Is a Blue Wave on the Horizon?, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2026/01/2026-election-midterms-democrats-blue-wave-analysis.html>