

# THE 2026 U.S. MIDTERM ELECTIONS



# The 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections

State of play and challenges – analysis (June 2026)

**Executive summary.** The U.S. midterm elections take place on November 3, 2026, when all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 35 of the 100 Senate seats are contested, alongside two Senate special elections. The campaign is shaped by two opposing forces: first, the traditional midterm headwind against the governing party, intensified by higher fuel prices following the Iran war and a deteriorating economic mood; second, the mid-decade redistricting encouraged by the Trump administration, which may give the Republican Party a structural advantage in the House. Because these effects pull in opposite directions, the outcome is more uncertain than usual.

## 1. What is at stake and the seat math

As a result of the 2024 elections, the Republican Party holds a 220–215 majority in the House and a 53–47 advantage in the Senate. **The Democratic Party needs a net gain of three districts to win a House majority; Republicans can afford to lose no more than two.** In the Senate, Republicans are primarily on the defensive, while they have two realistic opportunities to flip seats from the Democrats.

The historical pattern is clear: of the forty-two midterm elections held since the two-party system took hold in the late 1850s, the president's party has lost seats thirty-eight times. In the midterm of Trump's first term, in 2018, Democrats gained a net of forty House seats to win the majority.

### I. OFFICES ON THE BALLOT

Body / office	Details
House	All 435 seats; Democrats need +3 for the majority
Senate	35 of 100 seats, with two special elections (Florida, Ohio)
Governors	39 state and territorial governorships
Other	Attorney general and numerous state and local offices

## 2. The Republicans' central challenge: the economy and the Iran war

The political environment of 2026 is decisively shaped by the worsening economic mood. As a direct consequence of the Iran war that broke out on February 28, 2026, fuel prices rose, channeling the costs of the war into voters' experience in the most direct way possible.

**Fuel prices.** The price of gasoline rose above four dollars per gallon, a level not seen since 2022; before the war, the average price was below three dollars. In a June survey, more than

eight in ten Americans indicated that prices strain their household budget, and by a 63–37 margin they blame Trump for the increase — including a third of Republicans.

## II. THE COURSE OF THE IRAN WAR AND ITS POLITICAL WEIGHT

The Iran war, launched by the United States and Israel on February 28, 2026, fundamentally reshaped the backdrop of the election campaign. The Strait of Hormuz — through which roughly a fifth of the world’s oil passed before the war — quickly became the focal point of the conflict. Iranian attacks and mine-laying effectively closed the strait, to which the United States responded with a naval blockade of Iranian ports. The closure of the strait, attacks on Gulf energy infrastructure, and the blockade together drove fuel prices sharply higher, with knock-on effects rippling across the world economy.

**The road to a ceasefire.** After more than five weeks of fighting, the United States and Iran agreed on April 7–8, mediated by Pakistan, to a ceasefire that also covered Israel. Both sides repeatedly violated it, and in the following weeks the conflict turned into a risky game of brinkmanship over the Strait of Hormuz. On June 11, Trump announced that a sixty-day ceasefire had been reached, enabling negotiation of all contested issues.

**The memorandum and the reopening of the strait.** On June 17 — following a G7 summit in France, at the Palace of Versailles — the U.S. and Iranian presidents signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at ending the war, establishing a sixty-day extension of the ceasefire to work out the final terms. The United States lifted its naval blockade of Iranian ports, and Iran reopened the Strait of Hormuz; commercial shipping traffic visibly picked up following the agreement. According to Vice President Vance, the sixty-day negotiating window began on June 18.

**Open questions.** The framework deal deferred several key issues to the next round of talks, above all the fate of Iran’s nuclear program and the question of sanctions; the Treasury temporarily lifted sanctions on the sale of Iranian oil through a sixty-day general license. Clashes between Hezbollah and Israel in Lebanon leave the ceasefire fragile and have repeatedly threatened the negotiations. Public sentiment about the cost of the war carries risk for Republicans: Congress has already begun to ask whether the conflict was worth it.

**Electoral dimension.** The war is a political trap for Trump, since he campaigned on a promise not to start new wars. His approval on handling the Iran war fell from roughly 39 percent in March to near 30 percent over the spring, and also dropped significantly among Republican voters. The ceasefire and the reopening of the strait may ease the pressure from fuel prices in the months before the election, but price relief takes time to filter through, and the normalization of the global energy market may, according to experts, take months. A key question for Republicans’ midterm prospects is whether the economic mood stabilizes following the ceasefire, or whether the costs of the war become a lasting burden fixed in voters’ memory.

**Presidential approval.** Trump’s approval is near the low point of his second term. Various surveys measure approval between 33 and 39 percent, and on economic questions only about a third of respondents support his performance — in some measures falling below the weakest marks recorded during the Biden administration. According to the CFR’s review, net approval stands at roughly minus eighteen points, the low of his term.

**The generic ballot.** On the so-called generic ballot, which measures party preference, Democrats hold a durable, modest lead; in some surveys the margin reaches ten points. Democrats also lead on enthusiasm to vote, a particularly important factor in midterm elections, which traditionally see lower turnout.

### 3. The Republicans' structural counterweight: redistricting

The Republicans' most important tool for offsetting the unfavorable mood is mid-decade redistricting, which Trump personally encouraged in Republican-led states. The practice is legal at the federal level but has rarely been used for more than a century. Over the past year, ten states have adopted new district boundaries.

**The balance.** Under the new maps, Republicans could gain as many as sixteen House seats this fall, compared with six for Democrats. This difference has fundamentally reshaped the contest for the narrowly divided House.

## III. KEY STATE DEVELOPMENTS

---

- **Texas:** the Republican-led legislature redrew the map at Trump's request, potentially yielding up to five additional Republican seats. The Supreme Court, by a six-to-three vote, permitted the map's use in the 2026 election while the underlying case continues.
- **California:** as the Democrats' most forceful response, voters approved a map that could bring the party up to five additional seats. Republicans are challenging the map in court.
- **Louisiana v. Callais:** a six-to-three Supreme Court decision narrowed the scope of the Voting Rights Act, opening the way for the elimination of majority-Black districts in several southern states.
- **Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee:** new maps were adopted following the Supreme Court ruling; Alabama may use a map drawn in 2023 that had previously been found discriminatory, potentially reducing Democratic-held seats from two to one.
- **Virginia:** Democrats prepared a map plan aimed at gaining four seats, but the effort is hindered by legal and constitutional obstacles.

### 4. Electoral integrity and federal action

One distinguishing feature of this cycle is a series of federal actions concerning election administration, which election experts and Democratic officials characterize as attempts to intimidate election officials and voters.

- The Justice Department demanded unredacted voter rolls from states and sued twenty-three states and the District of Columbia that declined; all the affected states are led by Democrats or were won by Biden in 2020.
- In June 2026, the FBI searched the offices of an Ohio voter registration organization, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, seizing computers.
- Trump on several occasions floated changing the rules of the elections, and — in his own framing, jokingly — even postponing them.

### 5. Key Senate battles

The Senate map is largely defensive for Republicans, with a few genuine opportunities on each side:

State	Character	Situation
Georgia	Democratic defense	Incumbent Senator Jon Ossoff faces a close race; the Republican nominee is Trump-backed Mike Collins
Michigan	Democratic defense	Open race due to Gary Peters' retirement, a prime Republican target
Maine	Republican defense	In a state Harris won in 2024; Republican Susan Collins is challenged by Democrat Graham Platner
North Carolina	Republican defense	A contest viewed as competitive
Ohio	Special (Republican)	Sherrod Brown challenges appointed Senator Jon Husted

The primary results so far present a mixed picture of Trump's influence. In Georgia, Trump-backed Mike Collins won the Republican Senate nomination to challenge Jon Ossoff, but the gubernatorial nomination did not go to Trump's preferred candidate. In Maine, Democrat Graham Platner is running against long-serving Republican Susan Collins. Several contests showed that defeating an anti-Trump candidate can require substantial resources, in some cases as much as one hundred million dollars.

## 6. Conclusion and outlook

The outcome of the 2026 midterm is decided by the balance between two opposing forces. Favoring the Democrats are the historical headwind against the governing party, the president's weak approval, economic discontent, rising fuel prices, and a durable lead on the generic ballot. Favoring the Republicans is the structural advantage stemming from redistricting, which may dampen the expected Democratic gains particularly in the House.

**The key question in the House:** whether the structural Republican advantage from redistricting — potentially as much as ten seats — will be enough to withstand the midterm headwind against the governing party. In the Senate, retaining the Republican majority is more likely, since the map is largely defensive for the party, though Georgia and Michigan represent genuine vulnerabilities.

**Factors to watch until election day:** the implementation and durability of the Iran framework agreement signed on June 17, in particular the outcome of the talks on the nuclear question and sanctions, and the resulting trajectory of fuel prices; the outcome of pending voting-rights litigation, especially the merits review of the Texas and California maps; the effect of federal election actions on turnout and trust; and whether Trump's approval stabilizes following the wartime ceasefire.

---

Prepared from publicly available sources, current as of June 24, 2026. Sources include, among others, Ballotpedia, the Texas Tribune, NBC News, CNN, NPR/PBS/Marist, Economist/YouGov and AP-NORC surveys, the Brennan Center, the Council on Foreign Relations, and Wikipedia summaries. Survey

figures should be read with a margin of error, and the legal situation may change as pending litigation proceeds.