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NOVEMBER 2026 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

A MIDTERM ELECTION LIKE NO OTHER- IV

AMERICAN VOTERS DEMANDED ACCOUNTABILITY. WILL POLITİCIANS GET THE MESSAGE?

American voters dealt Republicans a crushing defeat in the midterm elections, giving Democrats larger-than-expected majorities in both chambers of Congress. As of this writing, Democrats picked up a net eight[2] Senate seats, bringing their majority to 55, while in the House of Representatives they gained more than 40 seats, with a majority of 255 to date. The massive "blue wave" is not merely an endorsement of the Democratic platform. It represents a categorical rejection of the Republican Party under Donald Trump, and by staying home or venting their frustration by voting for Democratic candidates, Republican voters played an undeniable role. And how the political parties and Congress respond to the message voters sent will define the next two years and beyond.

Are Trump's Voters the Republican Party's Voters?

I spoke with an Italian American MAGA voter in Staten Island, N.Y., who said she felt no need to deny Trump's shortcomings to continue supporting him. America's problems did not begin with Trump, she said. She believes the government should interfere as little as possible in individuals' lives and regards access to healthcare primarily as a matter of personal responsibility. In her view, Iran had challenged America for years, and Trump was justified in his approach to the war.

Another Republican voter I met in Leesburg, Va., described himself as aligned with Ronald Reagan's Republican Party. He said he thought Republicans might need to lose in order to find their way back to the principles they once defended.

Trump's dominance fundamentally changed the Republican Party and its relationship both to voters and democracy. But

[1] https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/ekibimiz/s/1499
[2] Erin Covey, "2026 House Election Results by the Numbers," The Cook Political Report with Amy Walter, https://www.cookpolitical.com/analysis/house/house-overview/2026-house-election-results-numbers

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both conversations serve as a reminder that Republican voters' relationships with Trump and their party are far less uniform than they often appear.

The coalition that returned Trump to the White House in 2024 extended beyond the traditional Republican base, but post-election surveys show it didn't translate into equivalent support for Republican congressional candidates this year. In Kansas, 9 out of every 100 voters who said they voted for Trump in 2024 chose the Democratic Senate candidate. In South Carolina, the figure was approximately 10 percent.[3]

Before the election, Trump urged Republican voters to vote as though he were on the ballot.[4] After the defeat, he reminded them he hadn't been running.[5] This contradiction captures the Republican Party's dilemma: the more the party ties its political future to Trump, the more it must bear the consequences.

What Changed in Republican Strongholds?

Democrat James Talarico's defeat of Ken Paxton in Texas and Adam Hamilton's victory over Republican Sen. Roger Marshall in Kansas showed that external factors like the economy and domestic policy can override partisan loyalty even in traditionally Republican states.[6]

The Texas race illustrates how opposition to Trump's second-term policies overlapped with objections to a Republican candidate's record. Paxton's history of corruption as the state's attorney general, along with the scandals surrounding him, also shaped voters' decisions. AP's post-election survey found that 2 out of every 3 voters considered him unfit to serve as senator.[7] In a post-election interview on CBS's "60 Minutes," Trump acknowledged how difficult it was to persuade his voters to support Republican candidates they did not like—in Paxton's case, despite Trump's endorsement.[8] His confidence in his political influence failed to translate into victory, likely hampered by his historically low approval ratings. In fact, Texas voters so soundly rejected the Republican agenda that they ejected Republicans from seats at every level, leaving Sen. Ted Cruz as the only remaining statewide elected Republican.[9]

Kansas voters' objections focused more on the cost of living. Given agriculture's central role in the state's economy, the effects of rising diesel and fertilizer prices driven by the Iran war and the burden of Trump's tariffs on farmers were inescapable.[10] Democrat Adam Hamilton built his campaign around affordability as he faced incumbent Republican Sen. Roger Marshall, who Trump also endorsed.[11] A September New York Times story detailing how Marshall had

[3] Will Bishop, Laura Silver, Elizabeth Schreier, Nicky Bell, and Emily Guskin, "How Democrats Flipped the Senate Blue: The ABC News Voter Poll Tells the Story," ABC News, November 4, 2026. https://abcnews.com/Politics/democrats-flipped-senate-blue-abc-news-voter-poll/story?id=137840395
[4] Donald Trump, "Donald Trump Vlog: GOP Get Out and Vote – October 3, 2026," Roll Call, October 3, 2026. https://rollcall.com/factbase/trump/transcript/donald-trump-vlog-gop-get-out-and-vote-october-3-2026/
[5] Ross Douthat, Graham Messick, and Andy Court, "60 Minutes Transcript: Donald Trump, the 2026 Post-Midterm Elections Interview," CBS News, November 8, 2026. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-2026-post-midterm-elections-interview-60-minutes-transcript/
[6] U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC), 2026 Election Analysis (Washington, DC: USGLC, November 2026), 8–9. https://www.usglc.org/media/2026/11/USGLC_2026_Election_Analysis.pdf
[7] Josh Boak, Hyojin Yoo, and Humera Lodhi, "How Trump and Republicans Lost the 2026 Midterm Elections, According to the AP Voter Poll," Associated Press, November 4, 2026. https://apnews.com/article/trump-2026-midterms-voters-young-voters-hispanic-voters-democrats-congress-ba1689d8402415d26ad32f4fa80ab2f9
[8] Douthat, Messick, and Court, "60 Minutes Transcript."
[9] Connor Greene, "All at Once, Ted Cruz is the Last Statewide Republican Lawmaker Standing in Texas," TIME; Nov. 6, 2026 https://time.com/article/2026/11/06/ted-cruz-republican-texas-midterm-elections/
[10] Renee Hickman, "Could Disillusioned Kansas Voters Send Their First Democrat to the US Senate in 94 Years?," Reuters, October 20, 2026. https://www.marketscreener.com/news/could-disillusioned-kansas-voters-send-their-first-democrat-to-the-us-senate-in-94-years-ce785cd8d988f225
[11] USGLC, 2026 Election Analysis, 3.

sued 700 patients of his medical practice over debts ranging from $100 to several thousand dollars and had 81 of them arrested further cast him as a public servant uninterested in the struggles of working-class voters.[12] All in all, Hamilton's victory in traditionally Republican Kansas suggested not only that some voters had had enough of party loyalty, but also that they could elect a Democrat to the Senate seat for the first time since 1932.[13] In Texas, it was no different. James Talarico's victory marks the first time a Democrat has won a Senate election in Texas since 1988.[14]

All this unfolded in what is expected to be the most expensive midterm election in American history.

According to OpenSecrets, which tracks political campaign financing, this is expected to be the most expensive midterm election in American history, with total spending projected to reach $11.9 billion — approximately 34 percent more than in 2022.[15] Yet the scale of campaign spending did not guarantee success. Talarico won in Texas despite hundreds of millions of dollars spent by groups supporting Paxton.[16] In a political system where candidates can use enormous financial resources to reach voters, this election exposed the limits of financial power in persuasion.

But voters in Republican states swinging their support toward Democrats does not necessarily indicate a permanent change. And, of course, the verdict delivered could change in two years, depending on how voters feel Democrats respond to their concerns. The 2026 election, while a massive restructuring, is not necessarily a permanent ideological realignment.

The Iran War or the Cost of Living?

Voters cited the Iran war as among their biggest concerns. In a post-election assessment on X, Vice President JD Vance[17] argued that Republicans had lost because some of their supporters had chosen Democrats. He cited a poll stating that the main issues for those voters were the Iran war and the cost-of-living hike related to it, the need to return to an America First agenda, and the need to change the U.S. relationship with Israel.

Yet it remains debatable whether, had the war not taken place, Republicans might have stood a better chance of retaining control of the Senate and suffered a narrower defeat in the House. According to surveys cited in an election analysis by the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition (USGLC), a Washington-based nonprofit that advocates for American global engagement and international leadership, only 4 percent of voters considered foreign policy their top priority. By contrast, 34 percent said the Iran war decisively influenced their vote, and another 40 percent considered it important. Sixty-three percent said they believed the United States had been wrong to go to war with Iran.[18]

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[12] Sarah Kliff, "A Doctor Sued 700 Patients for Debts; 81 Were Arrested. Now He's a Senator," The New York Times, Sept. 8, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/08/us/politics/roger-marshall-obgyn-doctor-debts.html
[13] Sheila Flynn, "The last time a Kansas Democrat was in the Senate, Judy Garland was filming the Wizard of Oz," BBC, Nov. 4, 2026 https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqx29rxkld84o
[14] Neil Mehta, "When Was the Last Time Texas Had a Democratic Senator?" The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 3, 2026 https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/midterm-election-results-2026-latest-updates/card/when-was-the-last-time-texas-had-a-democratic-senator--N67gv1xXuMnTMi7PJWL1
[15] OpenSecrets, "OpenSecrets Predicts Record $12 Billion in Midterm Election Spending," October 31, 2026. https://ncijnetwork.com/opensecrets-predicts-record-12-billion-in-midterm-election-spending-opensecrets/
[16] Reuters, "How Much Does It Cost to Lose the Senate? More Than $1 Billion," November 6, 2026. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/donald-trump/how-much-does-it-cost-lose-senate-more-than-1-billion-2026-11-06/
[17] JD Vance (@JDVance), X, November 4, 2026. https://x.com/JDVance/status/2118004988433641835
[18] USGLC, 2026 Election Analysis, 2.

These figures may seem contradictory, but higher oil prices due to the war affect transportation, food, and production costs. Farmers face higher energy and fertilizer expenses, combined with higher costs for imported equipment due to tariffs. Obstacles in export markets reduce their income, and the Trump administration's tough immigration policies and deportation operations carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have squeezed agriculture by targeting migrant workers. Republican farmers who supported border security and tougher action against unauthorized immigration thus faced the economic consequences of their political preferences — and protested the policy at the polls.

In surveys cited by USGLC, 89 percent of American voters considered the cost of living a decisive or important issue.[19] Roughly two-thirds said they believed tariffs were harming the economy, while only 14 percent said they benefited their local economy. Tariffs on imported agricultural machinery, spare parts, and materials, which Trump said he imposed to protect domestic production, raise farmers' costs either directly or through higher prices charged by suppliers.[20] Although some products are exempt, those exemptions do not cover every machine or component a farmer needs.

In addition, more than half of voters said corruption was a decisive factor in their vote, according to the AP. Nearly 70 percent said Congress had failed to exercise sufficient oversight of the president, while 60 percent said they believed Trump prioritized his own interests over the country's.[21] They questioned not only the administration's economic performance but also the way power has been exercised.

That is to say, the Iran war may have deepened the Republican defeat, but voters' grievances went well beyond the war itself. In 2024, Trump promised prosperity and no new wars. However, the gap between those promises and the consequences of his administration's policies was increasingly difficult to ignore. Ultimately, Republicans paid the political price.

What Does a Vote for the Democrats Mean?

Although the rise of the socialist wing of the Democratic Party has attracted considerable attention, the election results tell a broader story. Gains by centrist Democratic candidates in Republican-leaning states and competitive districts played an important role, and progressive candidates achieved notable victories. But the debate over the direction of the Democratic Party remains a subject of vociferous debate.

Centrist Democrats' electoral success does not mean the growing influence of the party's left wing can be ignored. New York's new Democratic Socialist mayor, Zohran Mamdani, and the organizing abilities of the Democratic Socialists of American (DSA) are key to understanding younger voters' political expectations. Housing costs, healthcare, income inequality, immigrant rights, and Gaza are prominent concerns, particularly among younger voters. But the DSA program[22] goes further, advocating for overhauling police and prison systems, redirecting police funding toward social services, and eliminating both the Electoral College and the Senate. It also proposes changing the existing structure of the presidency and Supreme Court, making the executive and judiciary accountable to Congress, and bringing major corporations

[19] USGLC, 2026 Election Analysis, 2.
[20] Jiyeon Kim and Andrew Muhammad, "How 2025 IEEPA Tariffs Affected Agricultural Inputs and Production Costs," Southern Ag Today, February 12, 2026. https://sat.afpc.tamu.edu/2026/02/12/how-2025-ieepa-tariffs-affected-agricultural-inputs-and-production-costs/
[21] Boak, Yoo, and Lodhi, "How Trump and Republicans Lost the 2026 Midterm Elections."
[22] Democratic Socialists of America, Workers Deserve More, 2026, "End Mass Incarceration and Police Immunity," "A Real Democracy," "A Democratic Congress," and "Economic Democracy." https://program.dsausa.org/

into public ownership. These proposals seek to transform the country's constitutional order, and it's unclear whether voters who supported DSA-backed candidates knew about — or endorsed — the entire program, or whether expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo was their main goal.

I visited Bread for the City, a nonprofit in Anacostia, Washington, DC, that provides food, healthcare, housing, and legal assistance to people in need; a woman I spoke with there brought this debate into focus. She had lost her home because of domestic violence and firmly opposed proposals to reduce police funding. For her, the issue was not just access to social assistance; it was also knowing that the state would protect her when she needed it. Of course, no general conclusion can be drawn from a single voter's experience — but her perspective illustrates why the Democrats' ideological divide will be difficult to bridge.

Equally striking is the AP's post-election finding that roughly 1 in 5 voters who supported Democratic candidates held an unfavorable view of the Democratic Party[23], further illustrating that a vote against Republicans is not necessarily a vote of confidence in Democrats. The party's challenge is to gather the various factions and their differing expectations on healthcare, security, immigration, the economy, and foreign policy and turn them into a workable political program.

Who Pays the Price of Growth in Virginia?

The data centers I visited in Virginia's Loudoun County offer a concrete example of another debate gaining ground across America.

Data centers are strategically important to the development of artificial intelligence and to preserving America's technological advantage over China, and they can generate substantial tax revenue for local governments. Yet communities are increasingly contesting these facilities as they multiply across the country and impact communities with their high energy and water demands, their burden on the electricity grid, and the noise they generate in residential areas. While Washington treats technological competition with China as a national security priority, it does not have a coherent approach that considers local impact and expectations when deciding where and how data centers should proceed.

The people we spoke with in Loudoun County were careful to stress they did not oppose data centers themselves. They objected to inadequate planning for the infrastructure the facilities require. They did not want enormous electricity transmission towers in their backyards or near their children's schools. They told us how exhausting it was to wonder whether their children might one day develop cancer or other health problems because they lived in proximity to high-voltage power lines.

Democrats must also confront the data center issue. Voters do not want to halt technological progress; they want better planning, a fairer distribution of costs, and a say in decisions affecting their communities. The challenge is to develop policies that no longer pit technological advancement and profits against the responsibility to protect citizens' quality of life.

I also learned during this visit how Hispanic communities around Sterling, Va., are organizing and sharing information through WhatsApp groups. These networks show how the relationships and communication people build among themselves shape politics as critically

[23] Boak, Yoo, and Lodhi, "How Trump and Republicans Lost the 2026 Midterm Elections."

as national campaigns. Immigration policies, family security, local services, and the future of their neighborhoods are not separate issues for these populations.

Voters do not need to undergo a major ideological transformation to change their political choices. Seeing responses to problems in their communities as inadequate or recognizing the gap between their needs and political promises is sometimes enough.

But as voters feel the consequences of Washington's decisions in their daily lives, how are institutions fulfilling their responsibility to check one another and demand accountability?

Does Congress Recognize Its Own Power?

In the American political system, the legislative branch of government is independent from the executive, deriving its power from the people and the Constitution. Yet members of Congress have increasingly behaved as though they operated in a parliamentary system, with their political positions shaped by whether they belong to the president's party and their loyalty to him.

When the president belongs to their own party, members of Congress may neglect their oversight responsibilities; when he belongs to the opposing party, political confrontation can overshadow legislative work. This tendency to behave as though Congress were divided into governing and opposition blocs, as in a parliamentary system, contradicts the fundamental logic of the American constitutional system envisioned by the Founding Fathers. Unlike in parliamentary systems, the U.S. president's authority comes from the voters, not a congressional majority. Congress does not form a government or opposition depending on the president's party. One of the legislative branch's constitutional duties is to oversee the executive and, when necessary, constrain its powers, regardless of who occupies the White House.

This problem did not begin with Trump, but over the past two years, Republicans have failed to use Congress's oversight powers — and voters' anger toward those in power contributed to the Republicans' historic defeat. AP's post-election survey found that nearly 70 percent of voters believed Congress had not provided sufficient oversight of the president. Around 40 percent of Republicans shared that view.[24]

Controlling Congress will allow Democrats to investigate and hold the Trump administration accountable for its policies and decisions. But if the next Congress focuses solely on investigations and not the concerns of the American people, voters could vote them out in 2028.

American voters have been expressing their dissatisfaction with politics at the polls for some time, and the growing number of people who identify as independents is a sign of discontent that deserves attention. Voters want solutions to their problems. Congress must exercise its oversight powers, but it must fulfill its legislative responsibilities while holding the executive accountable.

Moreover, the new Congress will take office with substantial turnover. According to USGLC's analysis, at least 17 new senators and 95 new House members have been elected. The

[24] Boak, Yoo, and Lodhi, "How Trump and Republicans Lost the 2026 Midterm Elections."

departure of lawmakers with years of experience in foreign policy and budgetary matters could mark a critical turning point for Congress's institutional memory.[25]

The political energy brought by newly elected members matters. But that energy needs the support of experience and expertise accumulated in congressional committees over years. When making committee assignments in both the Senate and House, majority leaders must consider not only internal party power balances but also members' expertise and ability to work together. Ultimately, the question is not only who sits on which committee, but how effectively Congress can respond to voters' priorities.

Congress's power of the purse is one of the clearest expressions of its institutional authority. The Trump administration proposed $35.1 billion for international affairs in fiscal year 2027, while the House bill provides $48.1 billion.[26] This difference illustrates how Congress can reshape the executive's spending priorities.

The new Congress, will not take office until Jan. 3, 2027. Until then, the current Congress remains in session and has the authority to finalize the fiscal year 2027 budget. If no agreement is reached, the new Congress will take up unresolved disputes. The Democratic majority's first major test could therefore be whether it can work with Republicans to secure funding for federal agencies or confront a political deadlock.

Nor does a change in the majority eliminate the president's veto power, procedural obstacles in the Senate, or the need for agreement between the two chambers. This is where the difference between winning an election and governing a country becomes clear.

Does America Want to Withdraw from the World?

Opposition to the war in Iran does not mean American voters want their country to abandon its role in the world. The USGLC cites an October 2026 Chicago Council survey that found 58 percent of Americans support an active U.S. role in world affairs, with 60 percent among Democrats and 63 percent among Republicans. A YouGov survey cited in the same report found that 75 percent believed international alliances benefit the United States.[27]

These findings reveal an important distinction in voters' attitudes toward foreign policy. Opposing military interventions does not necessarily mean opposing diplomacy, alliances, or an influential American role internationally. The central debate focuses on how the U.S. should use its power—and the means through which it should do so.

The war in Iran has also brought renewed attention to the limits of American presidents' authority to use military force. As Peter Bergen emphasizes in his book *All the Presidents' Wars*, successive presidents since Sept. 11, 2001 have established a pattern of governance that has progressively constrained Congress's influence over the circumstances of war.[28]

George W. Bush's doctrine of preventive war in Iraq, Barack Obama's drone operations in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, and his intervention in Libya without obtaining congressional authorization were different stages of this process. Therefore, Trump's decision to launch the Iran war without seeking Congress's approval should be viewed in the same historical context.

[25] USGLC, 2026 Election Analysis, 4.
[26] USGLC, 2026 Election Analysis, 15.
[27] USGLC, 2026 Election Analysis, 3.
[28] Peter Bergen and David Sterman, "Looking Back at 9/11: Peter Bergen and David Sterman on 25 Years of the War on Terror," New America, September 9, 2026. https://www.newamerica.org/insights/september-11-anniversary-peter-bergen/

Bergen's central warning goes beyond the expansion of presidential authority: As Congress loses its role over decisions involving armed conflict, the American people also lose their voice in those decisions.[29] The new Congress, therefore, must not only question the financing and legal basis of the Iran war, but also try to claw back the war powers that presidents have expanded over the years. The extent to which the president can be held accountable to Congress for decisions involving military force will be crucial to the functioning of America's system of checks and balances.

The foreign policy implications of the election cannot be assessed solely by how Washington will deal with individual countries. The more fundamental question is how the decisions shaping American foreign policy will be subject to institutional oversight. How Congress responds to voters will also help determine the answer.

After the Election

Preparations for the 2028 presidential election are already beginning. Republicans will debate the future of Trump’s coalition, and Democrats will try to determine how to keep together the various constituencies that voted for them.

But Congress must make budget decisions, debate war powers, and allocate funding for social programs. Keeping the federal government functioning will require the parties to negotiate with one another. And that is where the real challenge begins: the political battles that help parties win elections can make it much harder for them to work together and govern.

American voters evidently held those in power accountable in the mid-term elections. What Republicans learn from their defeat, how Democrats interpret their victory—and the support they received from voters who do not necessarily share their political agenda—and whether Congress fully exercises its constitutional authority will become clear over the next two years. The voters have delivered their message. Now we will see what politicians do with it.

[29] Ibid.