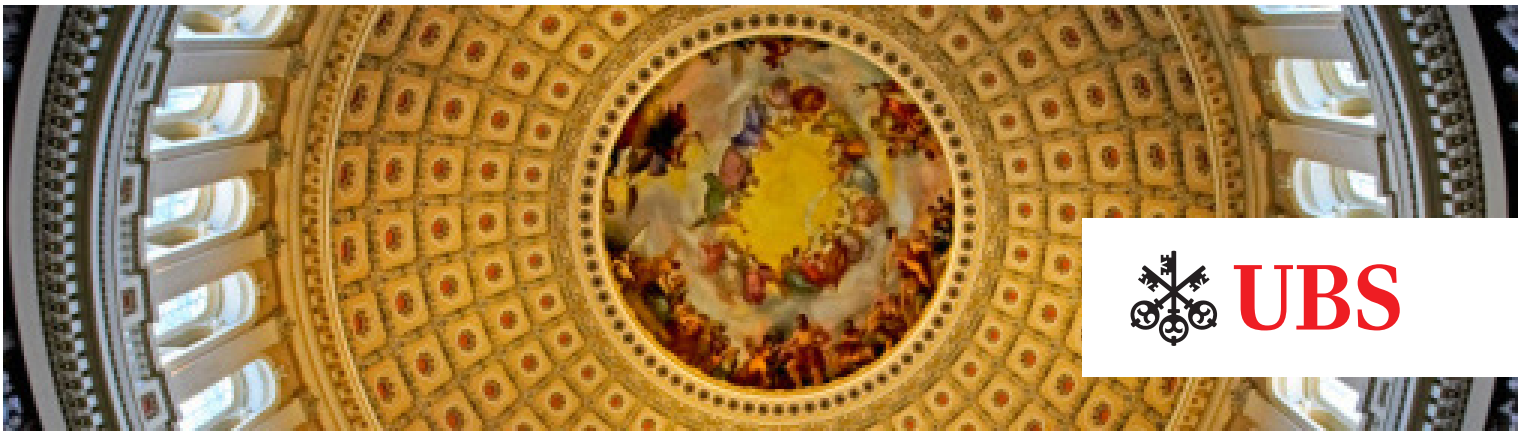
US Governmental Affairs

Special Washington Update

2026 Midterm Elections: Election Day Considerations

17 October 2026



Election day is just over two weeks away, millions of voters already have cast their ballot, whether in person or by mail. With $12.5 billion in projected expenditures on campaigns this cycle, the campaign season has felt like a lifetime for many voters. Polls generally show that Democratic voters are motivated while Republican voters are ambivalent. President Donald Trump's low approval levels along with voters' historical tendency to vote against the party in power over the midterm elections have put Republicans on the back foot. Particularly with narrow majorities in both the House and the Senate, Republicans worry that they could lose control of one, or both, chambers of Congress.

The House. The House is widely expected to flip from Republican to Democratic control given that Democrats only need a net gain of three seats. Still, there is a meaningful difference between a slim majority of a few seats and a more comfortable one of twenty or more seats as we have seen this Congress under the leadership of Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA). By emboldening and empowering a small group of lawmakers committed to pushing their own priorities, a narrow majority can make it difficult to govern and pass legislation. A more significant majority gives leadership more flexibility to operate and pursue an agenda in line with the interests of most of their caucus.

Republicans have sought to protect their House majority through unprecedented mid-decade redistricting efforts. On paper, there are currently 22 seats held by Democrats in districts that President Trump won in 2024 and only eight held by Republicans in a district that former Vice President Kamala Harris won. However, the operating environment (low approval ratings for President Trump and voter concerns about the economy and affordability) is not a good one for Republicans. With that, Republicans have begun to shift to damage-control mode. In recent days, national Republican groups have withdrawn financial support from many Democratic held districts (and even some Republican ones) in order to concentrate resources to defend more traditionally Republican held seats. *With only 10% of House races considered competitive in the general election, we shouldn't take it for granted that Democrats will flip the House, but it would be a significant upset if Republicans maintain control.*

The Senate. At the start of 2025, the idea that the Senate could turn to Democrat control seemed far-fetched. With Republicans' current 53-47 majority, Democrats need to net four seats to gain control of the Senate (factoring in Vice President JD Vance's tie-breaking vote in a 50-50 scenario). Republicans only have a single incumbent (Maine) in a state that former Vice President Harris won in 2024, while Democrats are defending two seats (Georgia and Michigan) in states that President Trump won. For Democrats to have a pathway to the majority, it would require them to win multiple states that Trump won by double digits just two years ago.

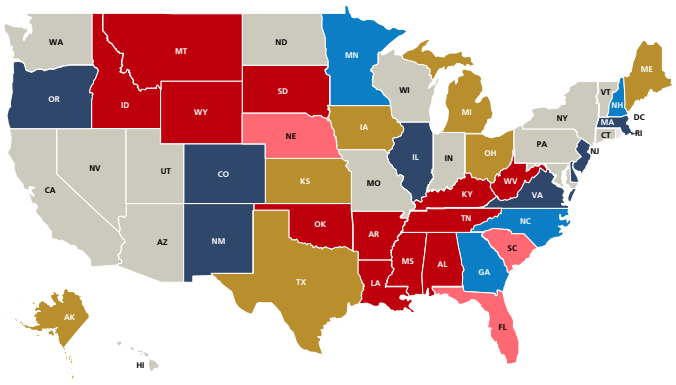
Given the political environment today, Democrats have a good chance (perhaps slightly better than even odds) to take the Senate. Their pathway to doing so begins with defending all the seats they currently hold, which isn't a slam dunk given the competitiveness of Michigan. They then need to flip North Carolina, which they are strongly favored to do. After that, Democrats need to win at least three seats from Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Ohio, and Texas. *Current polling has the Democratic candidate ahead on average in all the above-mentioned Senate races, though almost all of them are within the margin of error.*

The Known Unknowns. The factors that will influence the election largely have been determined, though there always are some unknown factors that could play a key role in determining which party has the better night. Here are some that we'll be watching.

- **Polling.** The accuracy of polling has been under scrutiny since the 2016 presidential election, though polls have performed well in recent midterm elections. They are the best tool for handicapping races, but they remain an imperfect one. The accuracy of polls, and their ability to capture media-skeptical Trump voters in the Midwest, will be important in the battle for the Senate.
- **Political Spending.** Republicans hold a significant advantage when it comes to outside spending, and that gap is not expected to close between now and Election Day. Democratic candidates have remained competitive in fundraising, but the impact of Republicans' additional spending is uncertain.
- **Voter Turnout.** The 2025 gubernatorial elections, and 2026 primaries, had strong voter turnout, especially among Democrats. However, that's no guarantee that Democrats will have an edge in turnout when all is said and done, especially in some of the more traditionally Republican leaning states. Reports on early voting show an increase compared to past years. However, it won't be clear until election day if this is a sign of increased voter turnout, or merely a change in how, and when, people are casting their ballots.
- **The Price of Gas.** There's an old adage in Washington, "tell me the price of gas on election day and I'll tell you the election results." We've seen in recent approval polls for President Trump that the fluctuations in gas prices have had a direct impact on voters' approval of his performance. Increasing prices are likely to motivate voters to turn out and vote against the president's party (or stay home if they won't vote for a Democrat). Conversely, a steep decrease in prices could bring some traditional Republican voters home in November.
- **2024 Trends.** The 2024 presidential election saw Republicans make significant inroads with Hispanic voters and young voters, especially young men. These gains are part of what fueled Trump's victory, especially in the battleground states. Republicans factored in these dynamics when they redrew their maps in several states, most notably Florida and Texas. If Republicans' gains with those groups were temporary it will significantly expand the map for Democrats on election night.

There is one certainty for this election: which party has a good night will be determined by the results in a handful of states. So, as we watch the returns come in, we want to pay the most attention to those states and races that will decide who controls Congress next year. Below we outline key milestones on election night. For those who want to follow along as we do, we've included some key races to watch in the House and Senate and a guide for when their polls will close.

2026 Senate Election Map



Note: We expect the states colored blue to be won by Democrats and the states colored red to be won by Republicans. The strength of that confidence is reflected in how deeply the state is shaded. More competitive "battleground" states are colored tan.

2026 Midterm elections
States where all polls close before 8:00 p.m. Eastern



November 3, 2026 | 9 states | 9 competitive House seats
Current control: **Democratic**, **Republican**

State	All polls closed (ET)	Competitive House seats
Georgia	7:00 p.m.	None
Indiana	7:00 p.m.	None
Kentucky	7:00 p.m.	**KY-06**
South Carolina	7:00 p.m.	None
Vermont	7:00 p.m.	None
Virginia	7:00 p.m.	**VA-01**, **VA-02**, **VA-05**
North Carolina	7:30 p.m.	**NC-01**, **NC-11**
Ohio	7:30 p.m.	**OH-01**, **OH-07**, **OH-09**
West Virginia	7:30 p.m.	None

6:00 – 8:00 p.m. ET: The first reported results in the country will be portions of Indiana and Kentucky where parts of the state have their polls close at 6:00 p.m. ET. While these results will be heavily reported by the news, the truth is that these results and exit polls won't be representative of the country at large. More meaningful will be results in several states that have polls that close at 7:00 p.m. ET. Notably, Virginia has several House races that may be indicative of how the night will go. VA-01 and VA-02 are two top targets for Democrats. Winning one, or both, of them would put Democrats in a solid position for retaking the House. If a Republican-held seat (VA-05) ends up

being close, or flipping to Democrats, this could be the first sign of a very good night for Democrats. In North Carolina, former Governor Roy Cooper is expected to flip the Senate seat, but the question is by what margin and how might it impact the House races. A decisive victory could help Democrats keep NC-01 and flip NC-11.

Elsewhere, it will be critical for Democrats to hold the Senate seat in Georgia. An early defeat in that state would put them at a disadvantage for the remainder of the night. Flipping the Ohio Senate seat is another key for Democrats, but results in Ohio traditionally take longer to tally, and the competitiveness of the race means it may take a while for the reported results to provide a clear indication of who's favored on election night. *Other early races that could indicate a big night for Democrats are KY-06, OH-07, OH-10, and OH-15, while Republicans will be hoping to flip battleground seats in NC-01 and OH-09.*

2026 Midterm elections
States where all polls close at 8:00 p.m. Eastern



November 3, 2026 | 16 states | 14 competitive House seats
Current control: **Democratic**, **Republican**

State	All polls closed (ET)	Competitive House seats
Alabama	8:00 p.m.	**AL-02**
Connecticut	8:00 p.m.	None
Delaware	8:00 p.m.	None
Florida	8:00 p.m.	**FL-13**, **FL-14**, **FL-22**, **FL-25**, **FL-27**
Illinois	8:00 p.m.	None
Maine	8:00 p.m.	**ME-02**
Maryland	8:00 p.m.	None
Massachusetts	8:00 p.m.	None
Mississippi	8:00 p.m.	None
Missouri	8:00 p.m.	**MO-02**
New Hampshire	8:00 p.m.	**NH-01**
New Jersey	8:00 p.m.	**NJ-07**
Oklahoma	8:00 p.m.	None
Pennsylvania	8:00 p.m.	**PA-01**, **PA-07**, **PA-08**, **PA-10**
Rhode Island	8:00 p.m.	None
Tennessee	8:00 p.m.	None

8:00 p.m. ET: Most polls on the east coast, as well as portions of the Midwest, will close at 8:00 p.m. ET. Maine is the only battleground Senate race that will close its polls during this period, though New Hampshire could be competitive and crucial for Democrats to keep control of if they wish to flip the Senate. It may take several hours for a picture on that race to emerge.

The House will have a number of competitive elections that close their polls and begin to report their results during this hour.

Florida will be among the first to do so. It will be an early indicator for two important election night factors; whether Republican redistricting is having its intended effect and whether the trends among Hispanic voters in 2024 are continuing or reverting to previous elections.

Republicans redrew the Congressional map in Florida with the intent of gaining four seats: FL-09, FL-14, FL-22 and FL-25. Three of those seats are considered toss-ups at this point. The fourth, FL-09, is much more competitive than expected but still likely to flip to Republican hands.

The other target-rich environment, this time for Democrats, is Pennsylvania. With four (PA-01, PA-07, PA-08, and PA-10) Republican held seats in play, Democrats are hoping that Governor Josh Shaprio's coattails, along with the national environment, will allow them to make inroads in Pennsylvania. A good night for either party would be winning three of the four competitive seats in both Florida and Pennsylvania. A great night for Democrats would see them holding AL-02, FL-09, and ME-02 while flipping PA-01. *Republicans will be riding high if they hold onto NJ-07, PA-07, and PA-10 while flipping FL-14, FL-22, and FL-25.*

2026 Midterm elections
States with final closings at 9:00 p.m. Eastern



November 3, 2026 | 15 states | 20 competitive House seats
Current control: **Democratic**, **Republican**

State	All polls closed (ET)	Competitive House seats
Arkansas	8:30 p.m.	None
Arizona	9:00 p.m.	**AZ-01**, **AZ-06**
Colorado	9:00 p.m.	**CO-05**, **CO-08**
Iowa	9:00 p.m.	**IA-01**, **IA-02**, **IA-03**
Kansas	9:00 p.m.	None
Louisiana	9:00 p.m.	None
Michigan	9:00 p.m.	**MI-04**, **MI-07**, **MI-10**
Minnesota	9:00 p.m.	None
Nebraska	9:00 p.m.	None
New Mexico	9:00 p.m.	**NM-02**
New York	9:00 p.m.	**NY-03**, **NY-04**, **NY-17**
South Dakota	9:00 p.m.	None
Texas	9:00 p.m.	**TX-15**, **TX-28**, **TX-34**, **TX-35**
Wisconsin	9:00 p.m.	**WI-01**, **WI-03**
Wyoming	9:00 p.m.	None

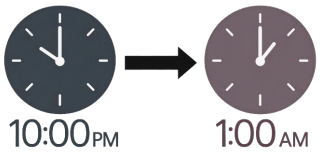
9:00 p.m. ET: Polls will close in an additional 15 states. In total, 80% of states will have closed their polls by this time. This is the period where the battle for the Senate will heat up. Democrats look to defend their Senate seat in Michigan. Republicans are playing defense in Iowa, Kansas, and Texas.

Polls also will close in competitive House races that could end up being the tipping point in control of the House.

Republicans currently control all four seats in Iowa, but three of them are highly competitive. Democrats need to flip at least one but are hoping to flip all three. Michigan has four competitive seats (three held by Republicans and one by Democrats). Meanwhile, Texas was the state to kick off mid-decade redistricting. While there were early prognostications that the new maps might allow Republicans to flip five seats away from Democrats, polling trends among young voters and Hispanic voters have made Republicans nervous that they may have gone too far. One seat is an easy flip for Republicans, but the other four are still competitive while two Republican held seats are being contested.

Other states with polls closing during this window that feature multiple battleground seats are Arizona, Colorado, New York, and Wisconsin. In total, nearly 50% of the competitive House races have their polls close at 9:00 p.m. A very good night for either party in the states that have already closed means that the results from these races could determine control of the House without having to wait for the West Coast polls to close. *A great night for Democrats during the 9:00 p.m. ET closures would include flipping districts like CO-05, IA-02, and WI-01 while holding TX-09 and TX-35. Republicans meanwhile will feel confident if they can keep control of most of the following districts: AZ-1, IA-01, IA-02, IA-03, MI-04, MI-07, MI-10, NY-17, and TX-15.*

2026 Midterm elections
States with final closings at 10:00 p.m. Eastern or later



November 3, 2026 | 10 states | 8 competitive House seats
Current control: **Democratic**, **Republican**

State	All polls closed (ET)	Competitive House seats
Montana	10:00 p.m.	**MT-01**
Nevada	10:00 p.m.	**NV-01**, **NV-03**
Utah	10:00 p.m.	None
California	11:00 p.m.	**CA-06**, **CA-13**, **CA-22**, **CA-48**
Idaho	11:00 p.m.	None
Oregon	11:00 p.m.	None
Washington	11:00 p.m.	**WA-03**
North Dakota	11:00 p.m.	None
Hawaii	12:00 a.m. (Nov. 4)	None
Alaska	1:00 a.m. (Nov. 4)	None

10:00 p.m. ET: By this time, vote counts in many other states where the polls closed earlier will be adding up and we'll have seen most of the safer races called for their respective candidates. We also should have a good idea as to which way the House is going and how competitive the Senate will be. The incumbent party is expected to hold their respective seats in Montana, Nevada, and Utah barring a wave in either direction.

11:00 p.m. ET: At 11:00 p.m. ET, we'll see polls close in five more states, California, Idaho, North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington. The odds are that we will have a solid grasp of who has won the House around this time. If that is not the case, and many races are still too close to call, then control of the House could come down to California which has several Democratic pickup opportunities following their redistricting. It also means that we are unlikely to know who has won the House on election night as California's results can take a while to tally given the heavy prevalence of voting by mail.

11:00 p.m. ET will also signal the end of voting in the continental United States, with Hawaii and Alaska polls closing at midnight and 1:00 a.m. (both ET) respectively. While neither state is traditionally a battleground in presidential years, Alaska has a competitive Senate race that could be important. Due to the vastness of the state, and how spread out the populace is, Alaska also primarily votes by mail. It takes a while to receive and count all the votes. On top of that, Alaska uses Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) which means if no candidate reaches 50% after all the ballots have been counted, voters' second choices will be implemented for the lowest vote-getting candidate until one candidate has reached 50%. With only one Democrat, two Dan Sullivans (one the sitting Senator, the other another Republican named Dan Sullivan), and three total Republicans on the ballot, how RCV plays out could be the key to the Senate. We may not know the results for several weeks.

Enough results in Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Maine, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, and Texas likely will have been reported to determine the direction of control in the Senate. If Democrats look to be on track to net 3 seats in the Senate from those races, then the odds are good we'll be waiting on Alaska to know who controls the Senate next Congress. If Republicans have limited the damage and appear on track to lose two or fewer seats from mentioned Senate contests, then they are likely to keep control of the Senate. *If this election is going to produce a decisive referendum for either party, we will likely know at this point, although the result won't be final.*

The Other Races

Leadership. A flip in power always changes who the Speaker of the House or Senate Leader is. It also is often a time of reflection for the soon-to-be minority party (do they want to continue with the same leadership or promote someone else?). In the House, Democrats will keep the same hierarchy with the expectation that House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) will become Speaker next year if they flip the House. A narrow majority could mean that he has to cut some deals to secure the gavel, similar to Speaker Johnson, but there are no other viable alternatives currently. On the Republican side, it is an open question if Johnson will want to continue as the top Republican in the House if they lose power. If he does, then he will likely be challenged by other ambitious Republicans such as Congressman Jim Jordan (R-OH) or House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA).

In the Senate, Majority Leader John Thune (R-ND) appears in good standing with his members and will remain at the top of the Republican leadership regardless of who is in power. Democrats will have a trickier path to navigate as Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) appears to be the only viable candidate to lead Democrats in the Senate, but he also has a number of detractors from within his own party. *Schumer likely will have to cut a deal in order to secure the votes for next Congress, and it wouldn't be surprising to see him commit to these being his final two years at the helm of Senate Democrats*.

Governor's Mansions. Republicans currently hold 26 governorships compared to 24 for Democrats. For the first time in 15 years Democrats may end up flipping the advantage. Republicans have seven competitive states that they are defending (AK, FL, GA, IA, NV, OH, and TX) while Democrats are defending five (AZ, KS, MI, OR, and WI). Given the headwinds that Republicans face, Democrats likely will end up with a net gain of a few governor's mansions. Who controls the executive office in a state is important for that state's policies and politics, but it will also be important at the federal level given 2028 is a presidential year. *The governors elected next month will be responsible for the administration of their state's primary and general elections and helping to shape the policies around them*.

State Legislative Races. State legislative races will never receive the same attention that federal races do, but in many ways they can be even more impactful. As we've seen this cycle, mid-decade redistricting has been on the rise and states that have single party control have been able to effectively increase their advantage at the national level. With over 7,000 state legislative seats it would be impossible to cover them with any level of depth, however there are a few key states to keep an eye on. The key states to watch are Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. All of these states currently have a Democratic governor and Republican control of at least one chamber of the legislative branch. *Any party gaining unifying control could have significant ramifications for 2028's elections*.

2028 Impact. Even though we're still 18 days from election day, the 2028 presidential primaries have already begun behind the scenes. The races will begin in earnest shortly after the results have been tallied. On the Democratic side it might be easier to ask; who isn't running, rather than who is. 2028 will be the first Democratic primary with no strong frontrunners in a long time. Virtually every governor, senator, and even some House members will look in the mirror and think "why not me?" Democrats' new primary calendar (South Carlina, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Michigan, and Virginia, in that order) will provide the roadmap for prospective candidates and it quickly will become apparent who has their eye on the White House based on where they campaign over the next few weeks.

On the Republican side, Vice President Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio are viewed as the two likely frontrunners. Vance will start in strong position given his position. No sitting VP has run for their party's nomination and failed to receive it in modern politics. However, that success has not translated to the general election as President George H. W. Bush is the only sitting VP to immediately win the presidency in the past six decades. Particularly with President Trump's underwater approval ratings and voters' desire for change, Vance may have a tough road ahead of him. Rubio has stated multiple times that he won't run if Vance does, but it remains to be seen if that was a strategic statement that could change or a sign of Rubio's calculus that his best odds of winning are down the road. Perhaps the biggest X factor on both sides of the aisle is President Trump. Who he endorses (if anyone)? *Are voters looking for the Democratic version of him, or a return to more traditional candidates*.

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