

Inside Elections

With Nathan L. Gonzales

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2026 Election Overview: Are Republicans Bracing for a Blue Wave?

By Nathan L. Gonzales, Jacob Rubashkin
& Inshara Ali

Don't believe a blue wave is coming? Just watch Republicans.

On the outside, Republicans are optimistic. Emboldened by the 2024 election results, Democrats' unpopular brand and the ascendancy of the Democratic Socialists of America, the GOP is confident the party will prevail in the November battle between "common sense and crazy." Just listening to GOP leaders, the party is on the verge of expanding their majorities.

But Republicans' actions don't match their rhetoric. With six weeks to go, the GOP is decidedly on defense in places that should not be competitive in normal political conditions. Republican groups, including President Donald Trump's affiliated super PAC, have committed to spend north of \$50 million in the Texas Senate race in the final weeks in a state where a Democratic presidential candidate hasn't won since 1976. Republicans are also legitimately on defense in North Carolina, Ohio, Iowa, Alaska, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Carolina, where Trump won 21 out of 21 races over three presidential cycles.

It's a similar story in the House. Trump's super PACs reserved an average of \$1.8 million in TV ads in each of Colorado's 5th, Iowa's 2nd, North Carolina's 11th, Texas' 15th, and Texas' 35th districts, where the president finished ahead of Kamala Harris by at least 9 points in 2024.

And Republicans effectively admitted to having a turnout problem by assembling in Texas for a rare midterm convention to boost enthusiasm.

These are not the actions of a party on the ascent. The GOP's financial advantage is allowing them to spend some money on offense, but it's still in Republican or swing territory and the normally Democratic places where Republicans are competitive, such as Oregon and Minnesota, look like outliers for the cycle.

Dozens of individual House and Senate races are extremely close and there's a notable shortage of guaranteed Democratic pick-ups, creating the mirage that Republicans are well-positioned. But the vast majority of evidence is pointing toward a big Democratic year.

For now, our specific projections remain a Democratic gain of 2 to 4 seats in the Senate and 2 to 10 seats in the House. But if the initial wave of GOP spending doesn't boost Republican candidates, those projections will creep higher for Democrats.



Political
Action
Committees

2026 House Ratings

Toss-Up (4D, 13R)

AZ1 (Open; Schweikert, R)	IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)	PA 7 (Mackenzie, R)	WA 3 (Perez, D)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)	IA 3 (Nunn, R)	PA 8 (Bresnahan, R)	WI 3 (Van Orden, R)
CO 8 (Evans, R)	MI 7 (Barrett, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)	
FL 14 (Castor, D)#	NY 17 (Lawler, R)	TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)	
FL25 (Moskowitz, D)	OH 7 (Miller, R)	VA 2 (Kiggans, R)	

Tilt Democratic (5D, 3R)

CA 13 (Gray, D)	OH 1 (Landsman, D)
CA 48 (Open; Issa, R)	TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
NE 2 (Open; Bacon, R)	
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)	
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	
NY 4 (Gillen, D)	

Tilt Republican (3D, 5R)

CA 22 (Valadao, R)	OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
CO 5 (Crank, R)#	TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)
FL 22 (Open; Frankel, D)	
IA 2 (Open; Hinson, R)#	
MI 10 (Open; James, R)	
NC 1 (Davis, D)#	

Lean Democratic (6D, 1I)

CA 6 (Open; Bera, D/Kiley, I)
CA 45 (Tran, D)
NH 1 (Open; Pappas, D)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NY 3 (Suoizzi, D)

Lean Republican (1D, 5R)

FL 27 (Salazar, R)#
MI 4 (Huizenga, R)
NC 11 (Open; Edwards, R)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
TX 35 (Open; Casar, D)
VA 1 (Wittman, R)

Likely Democratic (8D)

IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
NH 2 (Goodlander, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
NJ 9 (Pou, D)
NY 19 (Riley, D)#
MN 2 (Open; Craig, DFL)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
VA 7 (Vindman, D)

Likely Republican (4D, 13R)

AK AL (Begich, R)	MN 1 (Finstad, R)
AL 2 (Figures, D)	MT 1 (Open; Zinke, R)
AZ 2 (Crane, R)	NV 2 (Open; Amodei, R)
CO 3 (Hurd, R)	SC 1 (Open; Mace, R)
FL 7 (Mills, R)	TX 9 (Open; Green, D)#
FL 9 (Soto, D)	TX 23 (Vacant; Gonzales, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)	WI 1 (Steil, R)#
FL 16 (Open; Buchanan, R)#	
KY 6 (Open; Barr, R)	
ME 2 (Open; Golden, D)	

	GOP	DEM
Solid	180	185
Likely/Lean/Tilt	31	22
Total	211	207
Toss-up		17
Needed for majority		218

Takeovers in *Italics*, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans

CALENDAR

Sept. 23	Congressional Women's Softball Game
Oct. 20	NBA Season Begins
Oct. 23	World Series begins
Nov. 3	Election Day
Nov. 21	National Women's Soccer League Championship Final

Senate Report Shorts

Iowa. Open; Joni Ernst (R), not seeking re-election. Republican Rep. Ashley Hinson's new ad emphasizes her willingness to work across the aisle with Democrats. That's not the type of language you'd expect from a Republican running in a state that Trump won by double-digits just two years ago, and it underscores the challenges facing the GOP in the Hawkeye State this year. Tilt Republican.

Cygnal (R) for Iowans for Tax Relief Foundation, Sept. 9-11 (500 LV)— General election ballot: Hinson and Turek tied at 43%.

Emerson College, Aug. 31-Sept. 1 (750 LV) — General election ballot: Hinson over Turek, 50% - 45%.

Global Strategy Group (D) for Turek, Aug. 27-31 (800 LV)(phone/text-to-web) — General election ballot: Turek over Hinson, 46% - 42%.

Kansas. Roger Marshall (R), elected 2020 (53%). A *New York Times* report on Marshall's lawsuits against his former patients put the OBGYN on defense. Republican Senate strategists continue to believe the hype is overblown about this race, but the White House dispatched Vice President J.D. Vance on a campaign trip to shore up support for the first-term Republican. Marshall is also airing negative ads against his Democratic opponent, pastor Adam Hamilton. Former Gov. Bill Graves, a Republican, recently endorsed Hamilton, though Graves has endorsed other Democrats such as Gov. Laura Kelly in the past. Hamilton probably needs Libertarian David Graham to soak up 4 or 5 percent of the vote to make a plurality win more feasible. Likely Republican.

co/efficient (R), Sept. 8-10 (915 LV)(text/landline)— General election ballot: Marshall over Hamilton, 49% - 44%, Graham (L) 2%.

Kentucky. Open; Mitch McConnell (R), not seeking re-election. Democrat Charles Booker, a former state legislator and the 2022 nominee for the state's other Senate seat, released a poll showing him trailing Republican Andy Barr by 9 points. Booker won 38 percent of the vote in 2022, so he should be able to crack 40 percent in a better environment. An overperformance beyond that could set him up for a run for statewide office next year. Solid Republican.

Global Strategy Group (D) for Booker, Aug. 24-27 (600 LV)— General election ballot: Barr over Booker, 49% - 40%.

Maine. Susan Collins (R), elected 1996 (49%), 2002 (58%), 2008 (61%) 2014 (69%), and 2020 (51%). Many political strategists — and

2026 Senate Ratings

Toss-up (4)

MI Open (Peters, D)
NH Open (Shaheen, D)

Collins (R-Maine)#
Husted (R-Ohio)

Tilt Democratic (2)

NC Open (Tillis, R)
Ossoff (D-Ga.)

Tilt Republican (2)

IA Open (Ernst, R)
Sullivan (R-Ak.)

Lean Democratic

Lean Republican (1)

Likely Democratic (1)

MN Open (Smith, DFL)

Likely Republican (3)

Graham (R-S.C.)
Marshall (R-Kan.)
Ricketts (R-Neb.)

Solid Democratic (9)

IL Open (Durbin, D)
Booker (D-N.J.)
Coons (D-Del.)
Hickenlooper (D-Colo.)
Lujan (D-N.M.)
Markey (D-Mass.)
Merkley (D-Ore.)
Reed (D-R.I.)
Warner (D-Va.)

Solid Republican (13)

OK Open (Armstrong, R)
LA Open (Cassidy, R)
MT Open (Daines, R)
WY Open (Lummis, R)
KY Open (McConnell, R)
AL Open (Tuberville, R)
Capito (R-W.V.)
Cotton (R-Ark.)
Hagerty (R-Tenn.)
Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)
Moody (R-Fl.)
Risch (R-Idaho)
Rounds (R-S.D.)

Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans

analysts — won't believe Collins is beatable until they see her lose. And it's true that the Republican is polling better in the ballot test than she was in 2020, when she won an upset victory over Democrat Sara Gideon despite Biden winning the state handily. But it's impossible to ignore the challenges facing Collins this cycle. Trump is deeply unpopular in Maine, and Collins' own image rating is consistently underwater this cycle, a change from in 2020 when her image rating was roughly breakeven. Democrat Troy Jackson has had to stand up a Senate campaign in just a matter of weeks after he took over from Graham Platner, and has established a small but consistent lead in statewide polling. He's also hitting his benchmarks in the 2nd District,

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which he doesn't need to win but can't lose by 24 points like Gideon. Move from Tilt Republican to Toss-up.

YouGov, Sept. 2-8 (1,335 LV) (text-to-web) — General election ballot: Jackson over Collins, 48% - 44%.

CNN/SSRS, Aug. 31-Sept. 6 (880 LV)(mixed mode)— General election ballot: Jackson over Collins, 48% - 45%.

Michigan. Open; Gary Peters (D), not seeking re-election. Republicans aren't leaving any stone unturned against Abdul El-Sayed, but the Democratic nominee continues to lead former GOP Rep. Mike Rogers in most surveys. It's possible that more GOP spending could ultimately tank El-Sayed, but their attacks haven't been subtle up to this point and Rogers hasn't been able to garner a significant lead. Toss-up.

Emerson College for Nexstar, Sept. 12-14 (1,000 LV)— General election ballot: El-Sayed over Rogers, 48% - 46%.

Washington Post/George Mason Univ., Sept. 10-14 (803 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: El-Sayed over Rogers, 48% - 45%.

CNN/SSRS, Aug 31-Sept. 6 (843 LV)(mixed mode)— General election ballot: El-Sayed over Rogers, 47% - 44%.

Montana. Open; Steve Daines (R), not seeking re-election. A new poll from Rutgers and the Montana Free Press provided independent Seth Bodnar with some optimism after it showed Republican Kurt Alme leading with just 38 percent of the vote. Bodnar clocked in at 30 percent, double what Democratic nominee Alani Bankhead captured. If Bankhead continues to fade as voters tune in, Bodnar might be able to resuscitate his campaign, which faltered after his allies were unable to pressure Bankhead out of the race. Time will tell if his recent campaign video, in which he shoots a Flock surveillance camera with a shotgun, will spark a comeback. For now, the Rutgers poll is an outlier. But if Bankhead falls into single digits along with Libertarian Kyle Austin, this race could get interesting again. Solid Republican.

Rutgers Univ., for the Montana Free Press, Aug. 27-Sept. 7 (845 RV) —General election ballot: Alme 38%, Bodnar 30%, Bankhead 16%, Austin 5%.

Nebraska. Pete Ricketts (R), appointed 2023, elected 2024 special (63%). Two super PACs are getting involved on Ricketts' behalf. The Club for Growth's Win It Back PAC dropped \$2 million to oppose independent Dan Osborn, while a super PAC linked to the Senate Leadership Fund, called Cornhusker Majority, laid down a \$1.4 million buy. Osborn is getting some air cover as well. A new super PAC called Nebraska Values has spent \$1.1 million against Ricketts so far. The group hasn't disclosed its donors yet but shares vendors with another pro-Osborn super PAC backed by Democratic groups and a super PAC supporting Montana independent Seth Bodnar. Likely Republican.



Kurt Alme

Courtesy Alme Campaign

SurveyUSA for Grant Forbes LLC (D), Sept. 8-13 (503 LV)(mixed mode)—General election ballot: Osborn over Ricketts, 46% to 42%.

New Hampshire. Open; Jeanne Shaheen (D), not seeking re-election. Democratic Rep. Chris Pappas and Republican former Sen. John E. Sununu won their respective party nominations and will face off in the general election. Pappas defeated a challenger to his left, biochemist Karishma Manzur, 65 to 33 percent, while Sununu won the GOP primary at 68 percent of the vote, followed by former Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown at 26 percent.

New Hampshire doesn't get much attention as a swing state and is often overshadowed by Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Pennsylvania. But it is competitive. Sununu has been enjoying some name confusion with his brother, popular former Gov. Chris Sununu, while Pappas is still working on his statewide name identification. In this political environment, Pappas should have the advantage and he nearly received more primary votes than all of the GOP primary candidates combined. But this race is going to still look close for a while. Toss-up.

co/efficient (R), Sept. 9-11 (958 LV) (SMS/live caller) — General election ballot: Sununu and Pappas tied at 46%.

South Dakota. Mike Rounds (R), elected 2014 (50%) and 2020 (66%). Independent Brian Bengs released another poll showing him in a close race against Rounds. While a GOP poll from two months ago showed Rounds with a healthy lead, there's been no public Republican polling since then. A pro-Rounds super PAC is running ads highlighting Bengs' past run for Senate as a Democrat. The group, South Dakota Conservative PAC, is funded by two dark money groups and the late billionaire Denny Sanford, and has spent \$414,000 attacking Bengs so far. Solid Republican.

Public Policy Polling (D) for Bengs (I), Sept. 8-9 (629 RV)— General election ballot: Rounds over Bengs, 45% - 42%.

Texas. Open; John Cornyn (R), lost primary runoff. The Republican cavalry has finally arrived for beleaguered GOP nominee Ken Paxton, who trails state Rep. James Talarico in public and private polling. Texas PAC, an affiliate of the Senate Leadership Fund, is set to spend \$54 million over the next three weeks, and the Trump-aligned MAGA Inc. is chipping in another \$10 million. The financial infusion is a lifeline to Paxton, who trails Talarico significantly fundraising. Republicans hope the spending push finally takes the shine off of Talarico, who remains popular across the state, and brings the race in line with the state's partisanship. This is make-or-break time for Texas Republicans, who have been waiting for this outside spending for months. And while Trump's cash is welcome, the president publicly ridicules Paxton's appearance and style, which can't help party enthusiasm. If the Democrat still leads by the end of the month, this race will probably move categories. Lean Republican.

Emerson College for Nexstar, Sept. 12-14 (1,000 LV)(text-to-web) — General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 47% - 46%.

Siena Univ./ReconMR, Sept. 8-11 (614 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 49% - 43%.

Mason-Dixon, Sept. 8-10 (625 LV)— General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 46% - 43%.

InsiderAdvantage (R), Sept. 8-9 (1200 LV)— General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 47% - 46%.

Fabrizio Lee (R)/Impact Research (D) for AARP, Aug. 30 - Sept. 1 (895 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 48% - 44%.

House Report Shorts

California's 34th District. (Downtown Los Angeles and nearby neighborhoods) Jimmy Gomez, D. Harris 73%. A poll from the Guardrails Alliance, an anti-AI group, found Gomez trailing progressive challenger Angela Gonzales-Torres by 3 points. The result is a warning sign for Gomez, who's no stranger to close elections against other Democrats but is under increased pressure due to an open House Ethics Committee investigation into sexual misconduct. Gonzales finished ahead of Gonzales-Torres, 46-31 percent, in the all-party primary. Solid Democratic.

Upswing Research (D) for Guardrails Alliance, Sept. 1-5 (403 LV)— General election ballot: Gonzales-Torres over Gomez, 41% - 38%.

Colorado's 5th District. (Colorado Springs area) Jeff Crank, R. Trump 53%. Democrats have believed for months that Jessica Killin is a serious challenger to the congressman. Republicans seemed to confirm the competitiveness of the race when one of Trump's allied super PACs reserved more than \$600,000 in TV ads for the race. Move from Lean Republican to Tilt Republican.

Florida's 14th District. (South Tampa and eastern suburbs) Kathy Castor, D. Trump 55%. Castor's years out of the partisan spotlight may be an asset now that she faces a competitive re-election in a district drawn to defeat her. The environment seems better for Democrats in Florida than any cycle since 2018 as well. Move from Tilt Republican to Toss-up.

Florida's 16th District. (South St. Petersburg and southeastern Tampa Bay) Open; Vern Buchanan, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 56%. Former Sarasota Mayor Kelly Kirschner released a poll showing him ahead of Sydney Gruters, the former executive director of the New College Foundation and the wife of Republican National Committee chairman Joe Gruters. This is a district Democratic gubernatorial candidate David Jolly probably needs to carry if he's going to win statewide, and polling suggests that race is tight. On paper, this seat is only slightly more Republican than the 13th and 22nd districts, where Democrats also have opportunities. But Kirschner began the general election at a significant financial disadvantage, with just \$81,000 to Gruters' \$622,000. Move from Solid Republican to Likely Republican.

SEA Polling & Research (D) for Kirschner, Aug. 25-29 (400 LV)— General election ballot: Kirschner over Gruters, 40% - 39%.

Florida's 22nd District. (Inland Palm Beach and western suburbs to the Marco Island area across the Everglades) Lois Frankel, D, running in the 23rd District. Trump 55%. Democrats are optimistic that educator and former Apple employee Pia Dandiya can keep this race in the Democratic column. But she has work to do to introduce herself to a district that spans from the Gulf Coast to the Atlantic. Tilt Republican.

Impact Research (D) for House Majority PAC, Aug. 24-31 (500 LV)— General election ballot: Askar and Dandiya tied at 46%.

Florida's 27th District. (Miami and southern suburbs) Maria Elvira Salazar, R. Trump 57%. Longtime newscaster Elliot Rodriguez looks like he's giving Salazar a run for her money as many voters who cast a ballot for Trump in 2024 sour on the president. Rodriguez released a poll showing the race neck-and-neck; other private polling has shown a simi-

lar situation. Move from Likely Republican to Lean Republican.

Bendixen & Amandi International (D) for Rodriguez, Aug. 25-30 (600 LV)— General election ballot: Rodriguez and Salazar tied at 45%.

Iowa's 2nd District. (Northeastern Iowa) Open; Ashley Hinson, R, running for Senate. Trump 57%. The Hawkeye State continues to be a headache for Republicans up and down the ballot and open seats are looking like a problem for the GOP all around the country. The 2nd District combines both factors where Republican Joe Mitchell hasn't been able to put away Democrat Lindsay James, even with Hinson running at the top of the ticket. Move from Lean Republican to Tilt Republican.

Montana's 1st District. (Western Montana) Open; Ryan Zinke, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 54%. Trump's super PAC reserved more than \$2.6 million in advertising time here, the sixth-most of any



Courtesy Forstag Campaign

Sam Forstag

individual district so far. It's a sign that Republican Aaron Flint is in a tough race against smokejumper Sam Forstag despite the partisan lean of the district. While Democratic strategists have been skeptical that this seat will finally come around after

two disappointing cycles, it's worth watching, especially if Libertarian Nick Sheedy pulls a significant share of the vote. Likely Republican.

Public Policy Polling (D) for The Bench, Sept. 9-10 (536 RV)(IVR/text)— General election ballot: Forstag over Flint, 45% - 43%.

Rutgers Univ. for the Montana Free Press, Aug. 27-Sept. 7 (375 RV)— General election ballot: Flint over Forstag, 42% - 41%, Sheedy (L) 5%.

Missouri's 2nd District. (Western St. Louis suburbs and exurbs) Ann Wagner, R, re-elected 55%. Trump 53%. Wagner's district will revert to its slightly more competitive boundaries. Army veteran Fred Wellman is the Democratic nominee and hopes that frustration with Washington, DC will help him pull off an upset. Given the bleak political environment for Republicans and a potentially well-funded referendum campaign surrounding the contested congressional map, this race could be one to watch. But it's just getting started now that the map has been finalized. Solid Republican.

Missouri's 5th District. (Kansas City area) Emanuel Cleaver, D, re-elected 60%. Harris 61%. No candidate's fortunes have swung as wildly as Cleaver's over the past 18 months. Even after Missouri Republicans dissolved his Kansas City seat into three surrounding rural districts, the 81-year-old Methodist minister carried on his longshot bid for the redrawn 5th District. That seat would have voted for Trump by nearly 20 points and was almost certain to vote for state Sen. Rick Brattin, the GOP nominee. But Cleaver's persistence was rewarded when the Missouri Supreme Court ruled earlier this month that the redrawn map was not valid law and ordered the state to use its old map this fall instead.

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Now it's Brattin who's running the longshot race in a district that doesn't include any of his home territory. Solid Democratic.

Nebraska's 1st District. (Lincoln and rural eastern Nebraska) Mike Flood, R, re-elected 60%. Trump 55%. A poll from a Democratic super PAC found Democrat Chris Backemeyer running ahead of Flood. That's a surprising result given the district's partisanship, but Democrats have argued that Trump's tariff policy is putting agriculture country in play. For now the poll is an outlier, but Flood may have a real race on his hands if a wave develops. Solid Republican.

Global Strategy Group (D) for Retire Career Politicians, Aug. 31 - Sept. 1 (600 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Backemeyer over Flood, 49% - 45%; Backemeyer 43%, Flood 42%, Libertarian & America First Party candidates combined 7%.

New Hampshire's 1st District. (Eastern New Hampshire) Open; Chris Pappas, D, running for Senate. Harris 50%. Auto dealer Anthony DiLorenzo won the GOP primary with 52 percent, 26 points ahead of ironworks owner Hollie Noveletsky and state Rep. Brian Cole (14 percent). On the Democratic side, former Portsmouth city councilor Stefany Shaheen, daughter of the senator, beat Marine veteran Maura Sullivan 37-35 percent. Hampton Select Board member and Harvard instructor Carleigh Beriont was running a more progressive campaign and received 23 percent. Shaheen starts the general election sprint with the advantage. Lean Democratic.

New Hampshire's 2nd District. (Western and northern New Hampshire) Maggie Goodlander, D. Elected 53%. Harris 50%. The congresswoman won her primary easily and will face Republican Lily Tang Williams in a rematch from last cycle. In 2024, Goodlander defeated Williams by 6 points, 53-47 percent. This cycle, the political winds are blowing in Democrats' favor and the race isn't likely to be as close. The vast majority of the congressional attention is on the 1st District. Likely Democratic.

New Jersey's 7th District. (Southwestern New York City suburbs and exurbs) Tom Kean Jr., R, re-elected 52%. Trump 50%. Former helicopter pilot Rebecca Bennett continues to enjoy a narrow lead over Kean. Voters' patience with Kean may be waning after his extended absence from Congress due to treatment for depression. His father, former Gov. Tom Kean Sr., features in a new ad, but could remind voters about political legacy when there's growing skepticism about government officials. Tilt Democratic.

StimSight Research for InsiderNJ, Sept. 8-12 (498 LV)(text-to-web/live caller)— General election ballot: Bennett over Kean, 47% - 42%. Image ratings: Bennett 40% favorable / 30% unfavorable. Kean 37% favorable / 55% unfavorable.

New York's 19th District. (Southeastern upstate New York) Josh Riley, D, elected 51%. Harris 50%. The National Republican Congressional Committee dropped state Sen. Peter Oberacker from their MAGA Majority program, indicating a loss in confidence in his chances against Riley. The move came after reporting that Oberacker had "saluted" his grandfather who served in the Nazi army during World War II. And needing to advertise in five media markets makes it a heavy lift for Republicans at a time when they need money for defense. Move from Lean Democratic to Likely Democratic.

North Carolina's 1st District. (Inland northeastern North Carolina) Don Davis, D. Trump 55%. A poll from the Democratic House Majority PAC found Davis leading opponent Laurie Buckhout by 7 points, 50-43 percent. That's a noticeable improvement for Davis over previous polling in the district and comes after Buckhout endured embarrassing headlines about how she placed bets on her own campaign. The next few weeks will tell if that result is an outlier or if Davis has clawed back a lead over Buckhout in the face of a newly-drawn district meant to defeat him. Move from Lean Republican to Tilt Republican.

GBAO (D) for House Majority PAC, Sep. 8-11 (500 LV)— General election ballot: Davis over Buckhout, 50% - 43%.

Texas' 9th District. (Houston suburbs) Open; Al Green, D, not running in this district. Trump 59%. This district was redrawn last year to be an easy pickup for Republicans, and GOP nominee Alex Mealer is, on paper, a perfect recruit: a decorated West Point graduate and Army veteran with a JD/MBA from Harvard University. But



Alex Mealer

Republican woes in Texas have put the 9th back on the map. Under the new lines, the 9th would have actually voted for Beto O'Rourke in the 2018 Senate race, so it's not out of the question that 2026 Senate nominee James Talarico could

carry it if he is anywhere close to winning a statewide race. Perhaps sensing some danger, Trump's super PAC has dipped its toes into this race with a direct mail buy. Democrat Leticia Gutierrez had a meager \$18,000 in campaign funds on June 30 but in this environment, even underfunded candidates can make races interesting. Move from Solid Republican to Likely Republican.

Texas' 23rd District. (San Antonio suburbs to El Paso suburbs) Vacant; Tony Gonzales, R, resigned. Trump 57%. Some Democratic strategists are concerned that much of the opposition research against GOP nominee Brandon Herrera is so outrageous that voters don't believe it's true. Democratic nominee Katie Padilla Stout doesn't have the financial resources to win the race on her own, so she'll need outside groups to help her introduce herself to voters. But a strong Democratic performance at the top of the ticket could help boost her chances. Likely Republican.

Wisconsin's 1st District. (Southeastern Wisconsin) Bryan Steil, R. Trump 51%. Democratic nominee Mitchell Berman, an ER nurse and political newcomer, is not well-known in the district and lags Steil financially. But even with those handicaps, he's polling just a few points behind Steil in public and private surveys. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee added Berman to its Red-to-Blue list, which should help him fundraise, but he'll need outside help. House Majority PAC has \$2.7 million earmarked for this district, and Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley could generate some coattails if he carries the district in the race for governor. Move from Solid Republican to Likely Republican.

Governor Report Shorts

Alaska. Open; Mike Dunleavy (R), term-limited. A month after the Alaska primary, the field is finally set for the open gubernatorial race. Democrat Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins will face Republicans Bernadette Wilson, Dave Bronson, and Treg Taylor, after Taylor was allowed back on the ballot by Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom, the state's top election official. There's danger for Republicans here; the GOP will have to ensure its voters all rank multiple candidates. Otherwise, ballot exhaustion could help Kreiss-Tomkins cross 50 percent of remaining votes in later rounds of the state's instant runoff system — even if he's not picking up many second-choice votes from the eliminated Republicans. Lean Republican.

Fabrizio Ward (R)/Impact (D) for AARP, Sept. 8-11 (800 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— First round general election ballot: Kreiss-Tomkins 40%, Wilson 20%, Bronson 14%, Taylor 7%, Undecided 18%. Final round ballot: Kreiss-Tomkins over Wilson, 55% - 45%.

Florida. Open; Ron DeSantis (R), term-limited. Even though Florida Democrats have taken their lumps in recent years, they are making things interesting this cycle. A combination of President Donald Trump's frayed coalition and reluctance to elect the state's first Black governor, is making things more challenging than expected for GOP Rep. Byron Donalds. Democratic nominee David Jolly isn't the flashiest candidate, but his profile as a former Republican congressman is compelling enough to make this race competitive. Move from Likely Republican to Lean Republican.

Change Research (D) for Freedom Project USA, Sept. 7-9 (1,107 LV) (text-to-web/online panel)— General election ballot: Jolly over Donalds, 47% - 44%.

Maine. Open; Janet Mills (D), term-limited. GOP Sen. Susan Collins is having trouble winning re-election in a Democratic state in a Democratic year. There's no evidence that Republican Bobby Charles will be able to do it in the race for governor. Hannah Pingree is on track to win in November. Move from Likely Democratic to Solid Democratic. *CNN/SSRS, Aug. 31-Sept. 6 (880 LV)(mixed mode)— General election ballot: Pingree over Charles, 52% - 39%.*

YouGov, Sept. 2-8 (1,334 LV) (text-to-web) — General election ballot: Pingree over Charles, 44% - 35%, Bennett (I) 3%.

Michigan. Open; Gretchen Whitmer (D), term-limited. While the Senate race grabs most of the attention in the state, Democratic Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson has maintained a consistent advantage over GOP Rep. John James in the race to succeed Whitmer. Michigan is still a swing state, but Benson has the political environment on her side and doesn't have the ideological baggage of Democratic Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed. Tilt Democratic.

CNN/SSRS, Aug 31-Sept. 6 (843 LV)(mixed mode)— General election ballot: Benson over James, 50% - 41%.

Minnesota. Open; Tim Walz (DFL), not seeking re-election. Sen. Amy Klobuchar leads in all available polling but it doesn't look like she's headed for a smackdown that resembles her typical landslide victories as a senator. The long shadow of the state's fraud crisis may be making things more difficult for DFL candidates up and down the ballot than the environment would suggest. Likely Democratic.

SurveyUSA for KSTP-TV, Sept. 9-14 (654 LV)— General election bal-

2026 Governor Ratings

Toss-up (1D, 1R)

GA Open (Kemp, R)

WI Open (Evers, D)

Tilt Democratic (2D, 1R)

IA Open (Reynolds, R)

MI Open (Whitmer, D)

Hobbs (D-Ariz.)

Tilt Republican (1D, 2R)

KS Open (Kelly, D)

OH Open (DeWine, R)

Lombardo (R-Nev.)

Lean Democratic (1D)

OR (Kotek, D)

Lean Republican (2R)

FL Open (DeSantis, R)#

AK Open (Dunleavy, R)

Likely Democratic (3D)

NM Open (Lujan-Grisham, D)

MN Open (Walz, DFL)

Hochul (D-N.Y.)

Likely Republican (1R)

Abbott (R-Texas)

Solid Democratic (10D)

CA Open (Newsom, D)

CO Open (Polis, D)

ME Open (Mills, D)#

RI Open (McKee, D)

Green (D-Hawaii)

Healey (D-Mass.)

Lamont (D-Ct.)

Moore (D-Md.)

Pritzker (D-Ill.)

Shapiro (D-Penn.)

Solid Republican (11R)

AL Open (Ivey, R)

OK Open (Stitt, R)

SC Open (McMaster, R)

TN Open (Lee, R)

WY Open (Gordon, R)

Ayotte (R-N.H.)

Huckabee Sanders (R-Ark.)

Little (R-Idaho)

Pillen (R-Neb.)

Rhoden (R-S.D.)

Scott (R-Vt.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

lot: Klobuchar over Demuth, 47% - 40%.

co/efficient (R), Sept. 14-15 (833 LV)(SMS/live caller) — General election ballot: Klobuchar over Demuth, 47% - 45%.

TIPP for League of American Workers (R), Aug. 31-Sept. 2 (1,494 RV) — General election ballot: Klobuchar over Demuth, 47% - 37%, Steven Young (Green Party) 4%.

Nebraska. Jim Pillen (R), elected 2022 (59%). Pillen's approval rating is deeply underwater statewide and in congressional district polling. That could create opportunity for Democratic nominee Lynne Walz, a former state senator. But the presence of multiple minor party candidates on the ballot complicates the picture. Former GOP state Sen. Brett Lindstrom is running on the America First Party line, while Rick Beard will appear on the Legal Marijuana Now line. Solid Republican.

Public Policy Polling (D) for Democratic Governors Association, Sept. 1-2 (559 RV)— General election ballot: Pillen 32%, Walz 31%, Lindstrom 10%, Beard 7%.

Nevada. Joe Lombardo (R), elected 2022 (49%). Even though Republicans are struggling to win swing states in a poor political environment, the governor has maintained an advantage over Democratic Attorney General Aaron Ford. While public statewide polls show an even race, private House surveys show Ford still has work to do. Tilt Republican.

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Emerson College for KLAS-TV, Sept. 5-8 (680 LV) (text-to-web/online panel) —General election ballot: Ford over Lombardo, 44% - 42%.

New Hampshire. Kelly Ayotte (R), elected 2024 (54%).

Despite New Hampshire's swing-state status and a political environment that favors Democrats, Ayotte is in a strong position for a second two-year term. She won the GOP primary easily with 91 percent and will face former executive councilor Cinde Warmington, who was uncontested on the Democratic side. The general election race isn't generating any buzz. But some Democratic strategists are concerned that a strong Ayotte performance could put her in a good position to challenge Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan in a race for Ayotte's former seat in 2028. Solid Republican.

co/efficient (R), Sept. 9-11 (958 LV) (SMS/live caller)— General election ballot: Ayotte over Warmington, 55% - 34%.

Oregon. Tina Kotek (D), elected 2022 (47%).

Once again, the governor appears locked in a competitive race with Republican state Sen. Christine Drazan. Kotek won their 2022 matchup, 47-44 percent; independent Betsy Johnson received 9 percent. Drazan probably needs the Pacific Green Party candidate to syphon off votes from the governor in order to win with a plurality, but it's still going to take a lot for a Republican to get elected governor of Oregon for the first time in 40 years in this political environment. Lean Democratic.

DHM Research (R) for Grow Progress, Sept. 11 (600 LV)— General election ballot: Drazan 45%, Kotek 43%, Brett Smith (Pacific Green Party) 4%. Kotek job rating: 37% approve/59% disapprove.

Rhode Island. Open; Dan McKee (D), lost renomination.

Former CVS executive Helena Foulkes decisively beat McKee in a rematch of the 2022 Democratic primary, winning 62.5 percent of the vote to the incumbent's 37.5 percent. McKee's showing was only slightly better than the 33 percent he managed in 2022. But that year, he faced four other opponents. This year, Foulkes had a clear

shot and took advantage of McKee's controversial handling of the



Helena Foulkes

Washington Bridge. Foulkes is the favorite in the general election against Aaron Guckian, who won the GOP primary by 0.8 percent. Independent Ken Block could also be a factor — he won 7 percent as an independent in the 2010 gubernatorial

election and nearly won the GOP nomination for governor in 2014. Solid Democratic.

Texas. Greg Abbott (R), elected 2014 (59%), 2018 (56%), 2022 (55%).

Even though the Senate race gets more attention, Democratic state Rep. Gina Hinojosa is polling close to the governor. It's not clear she can sustain that position as Abbott unleashes his financial advantage. But it's clear that Texas in 2026 is not acting like Texas of 2024, and Democrats have an opportunity to notch big statewide and congressional victories. This race could get even more competitive before Election Day. Likely Republican.

Emerson College for Nexstar, Sept. 12-14 (1,000 LV)(text-to-web) — General election ballot: Abbott over Hinojosa, 49% - 46%.

Siena Univ./ReconMR, Sept. 8-11 (614 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Hinojosa over Abbott, 49% - 45%.

Mason-Dixon, Sept. 8-10 (625 LV)— General Election ballot: Abbott over Hinojosa, 48% - 41%.

YouGov for Univision, Aug. 27-Sept. 4 (1,000 RV)— General election ballot: Abbott and Hinojosa tied at 47%.

Fabrizio Lee (R)/Impact Research (D), Aug. 30 - Sept. 1 (895 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Abbott over Hinojosa, 49% - 46%.

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Choosing Texas: House Candidates at the Midterm Convention

By Jacob Rubashkin

DALLAS — As President Donald Trump assembled Republicans for an unprecedented midterm convention, many of the GOP's top congressional candidates faced a delicate decision. Attend, and risk being tied even more closely to an unpopular president just weeks before the midterm elections? Or stay away, forgoing the national platform and chance to fire up an unmotivated base, as well as a major fundraising opportunity?

The answer: a mixed decision. Plenty of incumbents on the House battleground stayed away, though at least a few seized the spotlight.

But the calculus seemed slightly different for many challengers, for whom the attention and financial incentives outweighed the downsides. More than a dozen contenders from some of the most critical races made their way to Dallas

“Newsflash: I’m a Republican”

Michigan Rep. Tom Barrett and Iowa Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, both running in toss-up races, chose to stay in their districts, with Barrett telling Politico “I’d be more useful in my district.” So did

Arizona Rep. Juan Ciscomani, who had a decent excuse: he faced a high-stakes debate against Democrat JoAnna Mendoza in his toss-up race the night of Sept. 10.

Others were more blunt about their absence. “I’m not a party guy,” said Pennsylvania Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, whose Philadelphia suburbs district voted for Vice President Kamala Harris by a larger margin than any other held by a Republican running for re-election.

Still, a handful of Republican candidates in competitive districts chose to attend the two-day “Trump-a-palooza” at the American Airlines Center. Several even accepted high-profile speaking slots. Across two days, six incumbents facing tough re-elections took the stage to highlight their races: Reps. Monica De La Cruz, Anna Paulina Luna, Derrick Van Orden, Rob Bresnahan, Ryan Mackenzie, and Mike Lawler.

Mackenzie, a first-term congressman from Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley who won one of the closest races of 2024, addressed the crowd early on Thursday afternoon. Shortly afterward, he told *Inside*

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Elections he had no qualms about appearing in Dallas. “Any time you have an opportunity to get your message out to a larger audience, you want to take that opportunity,” he said, pointing to the national platform afforded to him. “People are going to be evaluating the two candidates, and so giving full clarity to voters about the two choices they have on the election, I feel is really important.”

Mackenzie’s race against firefighter Bob Brooks in Pennsylvania’s 7th District is rated a Toss-up.

Lawler, who hopes to hold onto a district that voted for Harris in 2024, went out of his way to argue that his speech was a chance to highlight his own work for New York’s 17th District and his points of disagreement with Trump. “This is an opportunity for me to show how I’ve delivered results, including by standing up to the president and standing with my constituents,” he told reporters just steps off the arena floor, pointing to the SALT deduction and federal collective bargaining rights. He also recalled appearing with then-President Biden ahead of the 2024 election.

But the two-term Republican running against Democrat Cait Conley didn’t express any doubts about his appearance despite the president’s unpopularity. “Newsflash: I’m a Republican,” he said, “so I’m at a Republican convention.”

“I don’t even know what people are fearful of”

At least sixteen non-incumbent Republicans running in competitive races made the trip to Dallas, representing roughly half of the competitive offensive or open seats on the House battleground. Ten of them spoke from the stage, highlighting their own races even further.

Their districts ranged from farm country to urban centers. Their races vary from Likely Democratic to Lean Republican. Some, like Iowa’s Joe Mitchell and North Carolina’s Laurie Buckhout, hope to win districts that voted for Trump by double-digits in 2024. Others, like Nebraska’s Brinker Harding, Indiana’s Barb Regnitz, and New York’s Jeanine Driscoll, are paddling against the tide in districts that voted for Harris.

That didn’t seem to bother Driscoll, who told *Inside Elections* she didn’t know “one person that would consider it a Harris district.”

“Whatever the numbers were, were the numbers, but nobody talks about Harris at all,” she said, adding that “the values of the district really do reflect what the Republican message is and what the Republican goals are.”

Driscoll didn’t get a speaking slot — she says she wasn’t asked — but stayed busy in Dallas with fundraisers and meetings. The local Hempstead official was thrust into the national spotlight earlier this year when she was anointed the GOP nominee in the 4th District, and faced a \$3.6 million cash-in-hand deficit on June 30 against her opponent, Democratic Rep. Laura Gillen. For her, Dallas could be too good a chance to make inroads with donors.

Arizona’s Jay Feely told *Inside Elections* he saw a convention speech as “an opportunity to speak to the country and to advocate for Arizona. But the former NFL kicker, who quipped that he never played for Dallas but had “hit some game-winners” there, also couched his convention appearance in terms of his willingness to go anywhere and talk to anyone. “If somebody who completely disagrees with me wants me to come on their show and talk, I’m going to do that,” he told *Inside Elections* a few hours before his Wednesday address.

Feely is the GOP nominee for Arizona’s 1st District, which voted for Joe Biden in 2020 but Trump in 2024, but he didn’t seem too interested in campaigning with the party’s gubernatorial nominee, Rep. Andy Biggs. “We are focused on running our race and trying to do it

the right way,” he said when asked if he’d appear with Biggs, a former Freedom Caucus chairman who trails Gov. Katie Hobbs.

Some candidates professed ignorance to the potential downside of appearing at Trump’s convention.

“I haven’t been in politics, so I don’t even know what people are fearful of,” Nevada’s Marty O’Donnell told *Inside Elections* in the stuffy media tent just outside the American Airlines Center. “The president invites me to come and speak on a national stage, I’m going to go,” he said, “well, yeah, of course.”

O’Donnell, a composer who made a fortune by writing the theme song to the video game *Halo*, is challenging Democratic Rep. Susie Lee in Nevada’s 3rd District, a Las Vegas-area seat that swung from Biden to Trump between 2020 and 2024. He said one of his main goals at the convention was to keep Trump’s coalition intact for the midterms: “I want them to know that this is vitally important to the Republican Party

and to the future of America.”

At 71, O’Donnell is also the second-oldest challenger in any competitive House race, after Maine’s Paul LePage, 77. He told *Inside Elections* that age hasn’t come up in the race, and said that it might

even be an asset with voters who don’t want members of Congress who serve for decades. “I personally am self-limiting,” he quipped.

New Mexico’s Greg Cunningham, a favorite of national Republican strategists, acknowledged that making the trip to Dallas could open him up to attacks from Democrats.

That’s why the Marine veteran and former undercover narcotics officer said he limited his time at the convention to the day of his speech, instead of arriving at the beginning of the week for all of the other events taking place. “Had I just wanted to soak up attention, I could have been here and done that for days already,” Cunningham told *Inside Elections*, “I chose to be home in my district in a battleground city.”

Cunningham, who is running against Democratic Rep. Gabe Vasquez in the 2nd District in a race rated Tilt Democratic, said he viewed Trump’s desire to change the name of his state to “New America” as a distraction. “I don’t think that that’s possible,” he told *Inside Elections*.

Iowa’s Joe Mitchell didn’t speak from the stage but was happy to be in Dallas. He remained upbeat even when discussing polling in Iowa that shows Democrats leading several statewide races and has alarmed many of the state’s Republicans. “I don’t think they’re wrong, I know they’re wrong,” he declared, predicting that Republican gubernatorial nominee Zach Lahn would win by a point or two.

Maybe it was because he’s running in the most Trump-friendly district of any of the candidates, or maybe it was because Trump hired him as the regional administrator for the Department of Housing and Urban Development after he lost re-election to his state House seat. But Mitchell was more than happy to praise the president for putting the week together.

“If we weren’t doing this midterm convention, you wouldn’t have wall-to-wall coverage for the next 72 hours about what we’re doing,” Mitchell said, “so I think it was brilliant that the president thought of the idea.”



Courtesy Driscoll Campaign

Jeanine Driscoll