

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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Virginia 2: A Rematch at the Beach

By Jacob Rubashkin

Republican Jen Kiggans' 2026 re-election was always going to be her hardest race yet. But after Democrats muscled through an aggressive redraw of Virginia's congressional map, the two-term representative is one of just a handful of GOP incumbents to begin the summer as a clear underdog.

Kiggans' experience as a helicopter pilot and nurse practitioner has made her a favorite among GOP strategists — and she has even extracted grudging notes of appreciation and respect from the national and Virginia Democrats who have spent two cycles trying unsuccessfully to paint her as an extremist.

But a midterm election with a deeply unpopular Republican president in the White House puts significant pressure on even the strongest GOP members. Now, her district has been redrawn to boost Democratic performance by a half-dozen points, and an old foe, former Rep. Elaine Luria, is out to avenge her 2022 loss.

If Democrats are going to take back the House, this is a district they should expect to win in their quest for a net gain of three seats. And it's one where the result should be apparent early on Election Night thanks to Virginia's early poll closing time.

The Lay of the Land

The 2nd District was largely unchanged by the redistricting referendum, and remains a Virginia Beach-based competitive seat that includes the tip of the Delmarva Peninsula (locally known as the Eastern Shore) as well as more rural areas along the North Carolina border. The 2nd wraps around but does not include Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Newport News.

However, the new district's few deviations from the district used in 2022 and 2024 are politically significant. Vice President Kamala Harris would have carried the redrawn district by 5 points, 52-47 percent. Under the old lines, the district would have voted for Trump by a fraction of a percent. In 2020, Joe Biden would have won the new district by 8 points but the old district by just 2 points.

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2026 House Ratings

Toss-Up (3D, 7R)

AZ 1 (Open; Schweikert, R) FL 25 (Wasserman Schultz, D)* NY 17 (Lawler, R) PA 7 (Mackenzie, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R) IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R) OH 1 (Landsman, D) TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
CO 8 (Evans, R) MI 7 (Barrett, R)

Tilt Democratic (6D, 3R)

CA 13 (Gray, D) VA 2 (Kiggans, R)
CA 45 (Tran, D) WA 3 (Perez, D)
CA 48 (Open; Issa, R)
NE 2 (Open; Bacon, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)
NY 4 (Gillen, D)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)

Tilt Republican (2D, 6R)

CA 22 (Valadao, R) WI 3 (Van Orden, R)
FL 22 (Open; Frankel, D)*
MI 10 (Open; James, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
PA 8 (Bresnahan, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)

Lean Democratic (8D, 1R)

IN 1 (Mrvan, D) NY 19 (Riley, D)
MI 8 (McDonald Rivet, D) NY 3 (Suozzi, D)
NH 1 (Open; Pappas, D) VA 6 (Cline, R)
NJ 9 (Pou, D)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)

Lean Republican (2D, 3R)

FL 14 (Castor, D)*
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 4 (Huizenga, R)
NC 1 (Davis, D)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)

Likely Democratic (7D)

CA 6 (Open; Bera, D) NV 4 (Horsford, D)
CA 21 (Costa, D) PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
NH 2 (Goodlander, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Open; Craig, DFL)

Likely Republican (3D, 13R)

AK AL (Begich, R) MT 1 (Open; Zinke, R)
AZ 2 (Crane, R) NC 11 (Edwards, R)
CO 3 (Hurd, R) TN 5 (Ogles, R)
CO 5 (Crank, R) TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)
FL 7 (Mills, R) TX 23 (Vacant; Gonzales, R)
FL 9 (Soto, D)* TX 35 (Open; Casar, D)
FL 13 (Luna, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)
IA 2 (Open; Hinson, R)
ME 2 (Open; Golden, D)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	183	187
Likely/Lean/Tilt	30	25
Total	213	212
Toss-up	10	
Needed for majority	218	

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

CALENDAR

May 12	Nebraska, West Virginia Primaries
May 16	Louisiana Primary
May 19	Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Oregon, Pennsylvania Primaries
May 26	Texas Primary Runoffs
June 2	California, Iowa, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota Primaries

Ohio & Indiana Primaries: Republicans Choose Challengers in Key House Races

The redistricting battle continued on Tuesday as voters in Ohio and Indiana went to the polls for a slate of primaries.

Early in the cycle, Republicans were determined to gain as many as three House seats in the Buckeye State. But with six months to go before the general election, Republicans might be fortunate to gain a single seat, if any at all.

In Ohio's 9th District, GOP primary voters selected state Rep. Derek Merrin (43 percent) over state Rep. Josh Williams (26 percent), former ICE deputy director Madison Sheahan (20 percent) and two others. Even though Merrin came within less than a point of defeating Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur in 2024 in the northwest Ohio seat, he underperformed President Trump and GOP strategists were interested in trying another challenger. The race is still very competitive considering Trump finished ahead of Kamala Harris with 55 percent in the most recent presidential race, but the primary result is a bit of a disappointment for Republicans. Tilt Republican.

In the 1st District, Republicans nominated former CIA officer/Air Force veteran Eric Conroy with a whopping 70 percent. Conroy broke away from the pack with a Trump endorsement and will now face Democratic Rep. Greg Landsman in a Cincinnati-area seat redrawn by Republicans to boost GOP chances. Trump would have won the district narrowly in 2024, but in this environment, Conroy still has his work cut out for him to defeat the incumbent. Toss-up.

And in the 13th District, radio show host Carey Coleman won the GOP primary with 47 percent, nearly 30 points ahead of the nearest opponent. But this Akron-area district actually got less favorable for Republicans in Ohio's latest congressional map. Harris finished ahead of Trump in a better political environment for Republicans and Sykes had a considerable \$1.7 million to \$64,000 cash advantage over Coleman on April 15. Solid Democratic.

In Democrats' two reach pickup targets, the 7th and 10th districts, ironworker Brian Poindexter and veteran/nurse practitioner Kristina Knickerbocker won their primaries. Neither contest is currently on the map but both are worth watching if the bottom falls out for Republicans this fall.

There was less suspense in the primaries for the two top statewide

races, for governor and Senate. Republican Vivek Ramaswamy and Democrat Amy Acton will face off in the surprisingly competitive gubernatorial race, while GOP Sen. Jon Husted and former Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown will compete in a race that could determine control of the Senate next year.

In Indiana, the big story was in the state legislature.

A handful of state senators rebuffed the White House effort to redraw the Hoosier State's congressional map and give Republicans a better chance at holding the House majority by giving them the advantage in a seat or two in Indiana. Trump and his allies didn't appreciate the lack of support for the effort and made it their mission to oust the Republicans in primaries.

In the end, challengers defeated at least six of the eight targeted incumbents. One state senator was victorious and the other was ahead by four votes at last count and was still too close to call.

The results don't have any general implications but demonstrate that Trump is still powerful and influential within the Republican Party. The eight state senators weren't afraid enough to bow to the pressure to redraw the map, but Trump's popularity among GOP primary voters was still enough to prevail in a majority of the primaries. Some GOP strategists must wish that Trump and friends would spend as much time and money on defeating Democrats in the House rather than focusing on Republicans in the state legislature.

On the congressional side, Rep. Victoria Spartz won the GOP primary with an underwhelming 60 percent against a challenger who didn't have a website nor filed with the Federal Election Commission (which is required if a candidate raises or spends more than \$5,000). Spartz limps into the general election with just \$56,000 in the bank on April 15. Democratic nominee/state Sen. JD Ford had \$72,000. Trump finished ahead of Harris by 17 points in 2024, but it's not out of the realm of possibility that this race gets more attention before November. Solid Republican.

In northwest Indiana's 1st District, Republicans nominated Porter County Commissioner Barb Regnitz against Democratic Rep. Frank Mrvan. Republicans believe the seat is moving in their direction and have targeted Mrvan before. But Harris finished ahead of Trump narrowly in 2024 in a worse political environment. Lean Democratic. **IE**

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Florida House: Redistricting boosts GOP prospects

By Bradley Wascher and Jacob Rubashkin

Florida’s new congressional map could net House Republicans as many as four additional seats this fall, though it could also result in much smaller gains for the GOP.

The plan, approved by the Florida state legislature and signed into law by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, comes in the wake of Democrats’ aggressive redraw in Virginia, in the latest battles of the redistricting war.

The new map eliminates one Democrat-held district south of Orlando. Tampa’s Democrats, once mostly concentrated in the 14th District, are now cracked across four districts that each voted for Trump by 10 to 20 points. And although Democrats carried five South Florida seats in 2024, that delegation might be reduced to three after 2026.

Kamala Harris would have finished ahead of Donald Trump in four seats under the new map, compared to eight under the previous map.

DeSantis argued that the previous map was drawn, by Republicans, using flawed census data on unconstitutional grounds. His team contended that Florida’s Fair Districts Amendment, which was approved by voters in 2010 and bars gerrymandering for partisan purposes, would run afoul of the anticipated — and ultimately delivered — *Callais* decision from the Supreme Court.

The old map contained four majority-Hispanic districts while the new map only contains three: one of the eliminated Democratic-held seats, Florida’s 9th District, is now 41 percent Hispanic.

The map is already facing legal challenges, but most of the justices on the Florida Supreme Court are DeSantis appointees and the court previously approved the 2022 map, which itself advantaged Republicans.

North Florida

There are no changes to Florida’s 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th districts in North Florida. There also weren’t any changes to the 7th District, currently represented by GOP Rep. Cory Mills, But the congressman is the subject of an ethics investigation and the race is competitive and rated Likely Republican.

Central Florida

The 8th District pulls more into Orange County toward Orlando, picking up University of Central Florida from the 10th District, in exchange for Indian River County. The district’s Baseline average would tighten from R+23 to R+17 — but cozy enough for Republican Rep. Mike Haridopolos to likely win re-election.

Florida’s 9th, represented by Democratic Rep. Darren Soto, is dramatically redrawn. Once contained around Kissimmee, the district is now sprawling — approximately three-fifths of the population in the old 9th District overlaps with the new version. The new lines include Indian River County (home to Vero Beach and Sebastian) and extends south into Highlands (Avon Park and Sebring), Glades, and Okeechobee counties.

In return, the district drops some of its reach into Orlando and Kissimmee — and Poinciana entirely. The Hispanic population decreases from 54 percent under the old lines to 41 percent under the new map, meaning it is no longer majority Hispanic. These changes would be enough to flip the 9th District’s Baseline from D+10 to R+15. And it’s

Rating Changes for Florida’s New Map

District	Incumbent	Old Rating	New Rating
Florida’s 9th	Darren Soto, D	Solid Democratic	Likely Republican
Florida’s 14th	Kathy Castor, D	Solid Democratic	Lean Republican
Florida’s 22nd	Lois Frankel, D	Solid Democratic	Tilt Republican
Florida’s 23rd	Jared Moskowitz, D	Lean Democratic	Solid Democratic
Florida’s 25th	Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D	Solid Democratic	Toss-up

trending toward Trump: he won by 2 points in 2016, 7 points in 2020, and 18 points in 2024.

But Soto appears willing to seek re-election to his reconfigured seat. According to Jacob Ogles of *Florida Politics*, possible Republican candidates in the 9th District could include Osceola County Commissioner Ricky Booth and former state Rep. Mike de la Rosa. Likely Republican.

Florida’s 10th District. The demographics are virtually unchanged — retains three-fourths of its current population. The district is still located completely within Orange County but exchanges UCF for reach into South Apopka. The new map increases Democrats’ Baseline advantage in the 10th District by one point to D+26. Democratic Rep. Maxwell Frost is in no real danger. Solid Democratic.

Florida’s 11th District retains 85 percent of the population. Already containing Walt Disney World, it now reaches past Doctor Phillips to take in Universal Orlando Resort. Baseline moves from R+20 under the old lines to R+18 under the new lines. After Republican Rep. Daniel Webster announced his retirement, six Republicans and four Democrats have filed to run, including Lake County Commissioner Anthony Sabatini, who briefly ran against Webster in the 2024 primary. Solid Republican.

Tampa Bay

Florida’s 12th District shifts south as the district and is still reliably red, but becomes much bluer — from R+34 to R+12. The new lines drop Citrus and Hernando counties and now reach toward Dade City with substantial reach into Hillsborough County toward Tampa. The district retains 41 percent of the current 12th District’s population, with the rest split between the old 14th and old 15th. The share of adults with a Bachelor’s degree jumps from 24 percent to 34 percent, close to the national average of 37 percent. The share of white population drops from 74 percent to 55 percent, while the Hispanic share rises from 15 percent to 28 percent.

While Trump would have carried the new 12th by 15 points, he would have secured a narrower 6-point victory in 2020. Republican Rep. Gus Bilirakis has said he will seek re-election to the 12th District. Democrat Kim Overman, the former Hillsborough County commissioner who had been running in the 15th District, said she will instead run against Bilirakis. Army veteran and former CIA officer Chris Irizarry is also running. Solid Republican, but worth keeping an eye on in a great Democratic year.

Florida’s 13th retains four-fifths of its population, anchored around Clearwater and the rest of central Pinellas County. The lines pick up

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northern portions of St. Petersburg in exchange for southern portions reaching toward St. Pete Beach. In the north, it also reaches into Pasco County. Retired Army Brigadier General Leela Grey is a compelling challenger to Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, if she can make it through a crowded Democratic primary field. Likely Republican.

Florida's 14th District is one of the Democratic-held districts targeted in the redraw. Currently held by Democratic Rep. Kathy Castor, the new 14th keeps less than one third of its old population, with around half of the new district's residents coming from the old 16th District, and the rest from the former 15th. The 14th District previously included Tampa and St. Petersburg, but now only it takes a sliver of Tampa and none of St. Petersburg. The lines also extend away from the coast to take in mostly Republican precincts — plus some more evenly-divided areas near Brandon and Riverview, as well as majority-Hispanic Town 'n' Country.

In both versions of the 14th District, Hispanics made up 28 percent of the population. The average margin according to Baseline was D+12 on the old map and R+11 on the new map; Trump also would have carried the new version of the 14th by 11 points in 2024. The new 14th District looked better for Democrats last decade: it would have backed Republican candidates by 5 points on average in 2018 statewide and federal races, and Trump would have won it by just 3 points in 2020. Castor has said she will continue campaigning in this seat even with the less favorable lines. Lean Republican.

Florida's 15th District used to be split between Polk, Pasco, and Hillsborough. But it now no longer reaches into Polk, and goes up into Hernando and Citrus. The new 15th shares only 36 percent of its population with the old version, with half of it coming from the old 12th District. But in return it becomes more solidly Republican, moving from R+10 to R+17 in Baseline. The seat used to connect Lakeland to Tampa, bringing in a range of communities including Pebble Creek, Plant City, and Zephyrhills — not to mention the University of South Florida. The new version drops Plant City, instead reaching toward Dade City in Pasco County and Brooksville and Spring Hill in Hernando County. GOP Rep. Laurel Lee would technically live in the new 14th District but has said she will run again in her current 15th — although she faces a primary challenge from Hernando County Commissioner Steve Champion. Solid Republican.

Florida's 16th District contains around half of its old population, with another 20 percent coming from the old 13th District. The demographics don't change much. Formerly confined to Hillsborough and Manatee counties, it drops Hillsborough in exchange for all of DeSoto County (Arcadia) and Hardee County (Wauchula), plus portions of Polk and Sarasota counties. The district no longer includes Riverview or Apollo Beach, and its baseline moves from R+17 to R+12. Republican Rep. Vern Buchanan is retiring, and Sydney Gruters, the wife of RNC chairman

Joe Gruters, is the favorite to succeed him. Former Sarasota Mayor Kelly Kirschner, who comes from a prominent political family, is a credible candidate for Democrats and this district could be one to watch if the bottom falls out for Republicans. Solid Republican.

Florida's 17th District retains 85 percent of its population, keeping all of Charlotte County. It sheds a slice of Sarasota County, while in Lee County it trades most of Lehigh Acres in exchange for Fort Myers. There's not much difference demographically and the partisanship moves slightly, from R+22 to R+20. Republican Rep. Greg Steube should be fine. Solid Republican.

Florida's 18th District is much smaller area-wise — dropping a half-dozen less-populous counties — but the new lines retain nearly two-thirds of the original population, still situated in Polk County. Now geographically centered around Winter Haven, the district keeps Haines City and Lake Wales while picking up Poinciana and the rest of Lakeland. Demographics between both district versions are mostly the same, but the Baseline margin tightens from R+30 to R+17 — which is probably not a problem for GOP Rep. Scott Franklin. Solid Republican.

Florida's 19th District retains 80 percent of its population. It still combines Cape Coral and Fort Myers with Naples. But the new version trades Fort Myers to the 17th District for Lehigh Acres, and drops Marco Island in exchange for residential communities east of Naples. Baseline partisanship stays at R+32 in this open seat, with GOP Rep. Byron Donalds running for governor. According to Florida Politics, "most of the Republicans running say they will stay" in the 19th District, but former New York Rep. Chris Collins, one of several former members making a comeback bid in the GOP primary, might also switch to running in the 19th District. Solid Republican.

Florida's 20th District retains two-thirds of its old population. But it is much tinier geographically, trading in distant cities in Palm Beach County for closer precincts in Coral Springs and Fort Lauderdale — dropping the share of Black residents from 49 percent to 42 percent. The average Democratic advantage shrinks from 49 points to 46 points under the new map, making it safe for whichever Democrat replaces former Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, who resigned following an ethics inquiry into a misuse of government funds reported upon first by *Inside Elections*. Cherfilus-McCormick is running for her old seat but faces a number of primary opponents, and there are rumblings that Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz may also run here. Solid Democratic.

Florida's 21st District keeps 95 percent of its old population, trading communities from its southern tip in Palm Beach County to make way for the new 20th District. The 21st District's Baseline partisanship is one point less Republican-leaning than before — it is now R+15, which creates some wiggle room for GOP Rep. Brian Mast. Solid Republican.

South Florida

The previous map produced five Democratic-leaning seats in South Florida. But the new map packs Democrats into three districts: in West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami.

Florida's 22nd District. Both demolished Democratic-held seats are virtually unrecognizable after the makeover. The primary overlap between both versions of the 22nd District is Wellington in Palm Beach County — approximately 13 percent of the district's population. (Meanwhile, 24 percent comes from the old 25th District, 22 percent from the old 23rd, 17 percent from the old 26th, and 12 percent from the old 20th, with the remainder spread across three additional districts.)

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Inside Elections Podcast

Episode 70: Nathan, Jacob and Henry J. Gomez of NBC News take a fresh look at the hottest primaries and races in Ohio.

Episode 69: Nathan, Jacob and Randi B. Hagi of WMRA Public Radio focused on the new congressional map in Virginia.

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The previous version of the 22nd hugged the coast from Palm Beach to Delray Beach. But now Wellington, a half-hour drive from the beach, is the easternmost point — with the lines stretching down into the top half of Broward County and west to cover all of Hendry County and non-Naples Collier County. These changes transform the district from D+12 to R+5, and while Trump would have won the seat by 10 points in 2024, he would have lost it by 3 points in 2020. Demographically the district didn't change much: 44 percent of the population is white and 34 percent is Hispanic, while 42 percent of adults have a college degree. Wasserman-Schultz might run here given the overlap with her old district. Tilt Republican.

Florida's 23rd District is effectively a renumbered version of the 22nd District currently held by Democratic Rep. Lois Frankel, who has filed to run here. The new 23rd contains 80 percent of the old 22nd, with the remainder coming from the old 20th. The 23rd District previously resembled the number 7, connecting to Fort Lauderdale via Coral Springs and Parkland. But now the district moves north, bridging Delray Beach to Riviera Beach, with Boynton Beach, Palm Springs, and West Palm Beach in between. This packs Democrats, bumping the Baseline average from D+8 to D+21. The population is 39 percent white, 30 percent Hispanic, and 25 percent Black, and one-third of adults have a college degree. Florida Politics reports that Democratic Rep. Jared Moskowitz, who represents the current 23rd District, "has his eyes" on running in the new 25th. Solid Democratic.

Florida's 24th District retains 70 percent of its old population, shedding its eastern reach into Miami Beach and North Miami Beach in return for northern reach into Hollywood. But both versions remain anchored in Miami Gardens and North Miami. The district is 43 percent Hispanic, 43 percent Black, and 10 percent white; 24 percent of adults have a bachelor's degree, compared to 32 percent under the previous map). The Democratic Baseline advantage grew from D+48 to D+56 — a safe bet for Democratic Rep. Frederica Wilson to win her ninth term. Solid Democratic.

Florida's 25th is another district with no true predecessor — formed by leftover pieces not used to pack the three remaining Democratic-leaning districts. Forty-six percent of its population comes from the old 23rd District, while 30 percent is from the outgoing 24th District and just 16 percent comes from the original 25th District.

The 25th previously stretched from Hollywood and Davie to Weston, Pembroke Pines, and Miramar. But now it only keeps the communities on the coast — one section of a long, thin district binding Boca Raton to Miami Beach. The result is a population that is whiter (54 percent, compared to 31 percent under the old map) and more likely to have a college degree (49 percent, up from 42 percent). But with many red precincts picked up along the beaches, the Democratic Baseline shrinks from D+15 to even. At least two credible Republicans, former state Rep. George Moraitis and Boca Raton Mayor Scott Singer, have already swapped over to the new 25th. Moskowitz could run here and would be a credible Democrat in a district that voted for Biden by 9 points in 2020 and for Trump by 5 points in 2024. Toss-up.

In Florida's 26th District, Republican Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart made the biggest sacrifices, befitting for one of the top GOP overperformers in the country. The GOP Baseline advantage in the district tightened considerably from R+27 to R+6. The district used to cover the top slice of Miami-Dade County and the outskirts of Naples in Collier County. The district retains 60 percent of its population, mostly in Miami-Dade County — including the heavily Hispanic communities of Hialeah and Doral — but also picks up many blue-leaning precincts from Broward County.

2026 Senate Ratings

Toss-up (3)

MI Open (Peters, D)
NC Open (Tillis, R)

Ossoff (D-Ga.)

Tilt Democratic (1)

NH Open (Shaheen, D)

Tilt Republican (2)

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

Lean Democratic

Lean Republican (1)

Sullivan (R-Ak.)

Likely Democratic (1)

MN Open (Smith, DFL)

Likely Republican (5)

IA Open (Ernst, R)
MT Open (Daines, R)
Cornyn (R-Texas)
Graham (R-S.C.)
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)

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

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

Based on past presidential results, the 26th District would have swung nearly 40 points in eight years: Hillary Clinton would have carried the new 26th by 20 points in 2016, while Trump would have won by 2 points in 2020 and 18 points in 2024. Demographically, 36 percent of adults have a bachelor's degree — a 5-point increase compared to the previous map — while Hispanic voters still make up three-fourths of the district's population. Solid Republican, but could get more interesting.

The **27th and 28th districts** are identical to the old map except for a few precincts.

Like the 26th District, the 27th and 28th voted for Clinton in 2016 before swinging hard for Trump in 2020 and 2024. Approximately 70 percent of the populations in both districts are Hispanic. But 44 percent of adults in the 27th District have a college degree, compared to 30 percent of the 28th. This seat could be in danger for Republicans if the conditions are right for Democrats, and a newscaster vs. newscaster battle between GOP Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar and Democratic Elliot Rodriguez could be interesting. Likely Republican.

The **28th District** remains a reach for Democrats, but a sizable enough swing among Hispanic voters could put Rep. Carlos Gimenez in some danger. Hector Mujica, the former director of American philanthropy at Google, is running. So is Phil Ehr, a Navy veteran and perennial candidate who lost to Gimenez by 19 points in 2024. Solid Republican.

Texas 34: New District, New Flores, Same Gonzalez

By Jacob Rubashkin

President Donald Trump's gains among Hispanic voters in 2020 and 2024 helped him keep Texas red and return to the White House. But despite significant swings at the presidential level, that newfound strength has been slower to translate down ballot, where the GOP holds just two of South Texas' four congressional districts.

Republicans hope to change that this cycle, boosted by a set of fresh-faced recruits and a new congressional map that ratchets up the pressure on several Democratic incumbents. One of those pressured Democrats is Vicente Gonzalez, whose 34th District swung hard toward Trump in 2024 and got even redder after the Republican redistricting last summer.

House Republicans are clinging to a three-seat majority and need to pick off as many Democratic-held seats as possible to offset likely losses elsewhere — and Gonzalez is close to the top of the list of competitive seats where that looks possible.

The Lay of the Land

The 34th District occupies the eastern third of South Texas, running along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from the border north to Corpus Christi.

It includes all of Cameron, Willacy, Kenedy and Kleberg counties, and most of Nueces County. The previous version of the district, which Gonzalez won in 2024, included part of Hidalgo County near the border, and did not include any of Nueces.

Cameron and Nueces each cast slightly less than half of the district's votes, with the balance going to the three sparsely populated counties in between. By media market, the district is evenly divided between Harlingen, in Cameron, and Corpus Christi in Nueces.

The 34th is predominantly Hispanic, with a citizen voting age population that's 72 percent Hispanic and 24 percent white. Three-quarters of the white voters live in Nueces County, and the district gets more Hispanic as it approaches the border. While Nueces is also majority Hispanic, those voters are more likely to have longer family histories in the United States, in contrast to more recent arrivals in the southern part of the district. Roughly 20 percent of the district has a bachelor's degree or higher.

Trump's massive gains among Hispanic voters in 2024 make the district look redder than history might suggest. In 2024, the new 34th would have voted for Trump by 10 points, 55-45 percent. Downballot Democrats largely outperformed the top of the ticket, and Rep. Colin Allred lost to GOP Sen. Ted Cruz by just 2 points.

But in 2022, all 12 statewide races were within 4 points in the 34th, including some contests in which the district voted for the Democratic candidate. And in 2020, the 34th would have voted narrowly for Joe Biden, 51-48 percent.

Much of the movement has come from Cameron, which voted for Biden by 13 points in 2020 and for Trump by 6 points in 2024, a 19-point shift. The swing in Nueces was just 8 points.

The Democratic Incumbent

Gonzalez, 58, is in his fifth term in Congress, and second representing the 34th District. In his first three terms, he held the neighboring 15th District, which runs north to south through the center of the Rio Grande Valley.

The Corpus Christi native was a high school dropout but later earned an associate degree from Del Mar College in 1990 and a bachelor's from Embry-

Riddle Aeronautical University in 1992. He graduated from Texas Wesleyan law school in 1996 and practiced as a plaintiff's lawyer in insurance cases.

In 2016, Gonzalez jumped into the political fray, running to succeed longtime Democratic Rep. Ruben Hinojosa in the 15th District. Initially unknown, Gonzalez spent heavily in the primary after loaning himself \$1.8 million, blitzing the district with TV ads and billboards. He placed first in the primary with 42 percent, and defeated well-connected school board member Sonny Palacios, 66-34, in the runoff. He easily beat pastor Tim Westley, 57-37 percent in the general election, and won a rematch by a similar margin in 2018.

But two years later, Gonzalez narrowly escaped a surprising upset at the hands of insurance agent Monica De La Cruz, winning just 51-48



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Vicente Gonzalez

percent as Biden's support among Hispanic voters fell at the top of the ticket. A few months into the next Congress, after neighboring 34th District Rep. Filemon Vela announced he would not run for re-election, Gonzalez said he would run

there rather than in the more competitive 15th District (which De La Cruz easily flipped in 2022).

Vela left Congress early and his seat was flipped in a special election by Mayra Flores, who sought a full term in the 34th that fall. Gonzalez, who was new to much of the district, won a 9-point victory, 53-44 percent. Two years later, he faced a rematch with Flores, this time emerging victorious by just 3 points as Trump won at the top of the ticket.

In Congress, Gonzalez sits on the Financial Services committee and is a co-chair of the moderate Blue Dog Coalition. He breaks from party ranks more often than most of his colleagues, voting for the Laken Riley Act and the anti-transgender Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act in 2025.

Gonzalez's campaign team includes media consultant Isaac Baker of Thematic Campaigns, pollster Rosa Mendoza of Global Strategy Group, and direct mail consultant Alex Zwerdling of Bergman Zwerdling.

The Republican Challenger

Flores, 34, is making his first run for office but comes from a well-connected political family. An attorney and Army veteran, Flores is a favorite of national Republican strategists who see him as offering a clear contrast with Gonzalez.

The Palmview native is the son of former Democratic state Rep. Kino Flores, a once-prominent South Texas lawmaker who was convicted in 2010 of charges stemming from allegations he sold access in the legislature. Both of the younger Flores' grandfathers were local mayors.

A 2014 graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and 2017 graduate of Texas Southern University's law school, Eric Flores also

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serves as a captain in the Texas Army National Guard. He deployed to the US-Mexico border during the first Trump administration as part of Operation Guardian Support.

After operating a law firm with his wife in Mission, Texas, Flores joined the Department of Justice in 2021 and spent three years as an assistant US Attorney in McAllen. He left in 2024 to join prominent South Texas firm O’Hanlon, Demerath & Castillo.

Flores faced the unrelated Mayra Flores in the GOP primary earlier this year, and loaned his campaign half a million dollars to keep pace with the former congresswoman, who is a prolific fundraiser. Armed with an endorsement from Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson, Eric Flores won 57 percent of the vote, avoiding a runoff against Mayra Flores, who finished with 24 percent.

Flores’ campaign team includes general consultant Matt Brownfield, who is also doing direct mail. Poolhouse is doing the paid media and Ragnar Research is the pollster.

How It Plays Out

Following Texas’ mid-decade redistricting, Gonzalez became one of the most vulnerable Democratic members of Congress.

Democrats had been hopeful that Mayra Flores would emerge as the nominee for a third time, and were excited at the prospect of running against a known and beatable commodity.

Instead, Eric Flores presents a more dynamic and difficult target: young, telegenic, with a military background and no voting record to pick over. He also has some access to personal resources and well-heeled networks from his time in private practice and through his wife’s wealthy family. Flores’ TV ads in the primary introduced him as a hard-charging prosecutor and Army officer who took on drug cartels and secured the border.

Already, Flores and his allies have targeted Gonzalez’ past opposition to a border wall and are working to tie him back to the surge in border crossings under the Biden administration, including seizing on comments he made suggesting Trump should “allow people to cross freely” if they’ve been vetted. Republicans are also gearing up to once again target Gonzalez

over ethics issues surrounding his campaign finances and STOCK Act violations, as well as Gonzalez’s previous comments comparing “Latinos for Trump” to “Jews for Hitler,” and his needling of Flores for not serving in combat. GOP ads have also hit Gonzalez for voting against the reconciliation bill last summer.

Gonzalez has some tricks up his sleeve as well, relying on high-profile votes and interviews to distance himself from the more socially liberal positions his party has taken on transgender issues and abortion. He reamed out national Democrats following his 2024 race for running ads talking about abortion in his “80 percent Catholic” district (national strategists say that was a result of a miscommunication and that Gonzalez’s own campaign had signaled they wanted ads run on



Eric Flores

Courtesy Flores Campaign

2026 Governor Ratings

Toss-up (4D)	
KS Open (Kelly, D)	WI Open (Evers, D)
MI Open (Whitmer, D)	Hobbs (D-Ariz.)
Tilt Democratic	Tilt Republican (2R)
	GA Open (Kemp, R)
	Lombardo (R-Nev.)
Lean Democratic	Lean Republican (1R)
	IA Open (Reynolds, R)
Likely Democratic (5D)	Likely Republican (1R)
ME Open (Mills, D)	OH Open (DeWine, R)
NM Open (Lujan-Grisham, D)	
MN Open (Walz, DFL)	
Hochul (D-N.Y.)	
Shapiro (D-Penn.)	
Solid Democratic (9D)	Solid Republican (14R)
CA Open (Newsom, D)	AK Open (Dunleavy, R)
CO Open (Polis, D)	AL Open (Ivey, R)
Green (D-Hawaii)	FL Open (DeSantis, R)
Healey (D-Mass.)	OK Open (Stitt, R)
Kotek (D-Ore.)	SC Open (McMaster, R)
Lamont (D-Ct.)	TN Open (Lee, R)
McKee (D-R.I.)	WY Open (Gordon, R)
Moore (D-Md.)	Abbott (R-Texas)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)	Ayotte (R-N.H.)
	Huckabee Sanders (R-Ark.)
	Little (R-Idaho)
	Pillen (R-Neb.)
	Rhoden (R-S.D.)
	Scott (R-Vt.)
Takeovers in <i>Italics</i> , # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans	

abortion). His own campaign ads are filmed in front of walls adorned with crucifixes to drive home the point.

And Democrats are eager to make hay of Flores’ past legal clients, especially those he represented in criminal trials for graphic offenses.

Both candidates will have to introduce themselves to voters in Nueces County, which is new to the district. Gonzalez is significantly stronger in the Harlingen media market than he is in Corpus Christi, but he may lean into his upbringing in the city to tell a more personal story. Gonzalez will need to keep his loss in Nueces to mid-single digits while winning Cameron County by mid-single digits or greater.

That makes Nueces critical for Flores as well, and he may begin with an advantage because he advertised heavily there in the primary. If he can boost turnout among the more reliably Republican Nueces voters, he can afford a greater reversion to the mean in Cameron County. That may explain why Flores has continued to hug Trump tightly even after securing his endorsement and winning the GOP primary. On Flores’ website, the first priority listed is “Stand up for South Texas” and the second is “Support President Trump’s Agenda.”

Ultimately, the race may come down to how durable Republican gains among South Texas Hispanics are two years after Trump ran roughshod over Harris. Anything approaching a reversion to 2020’s patterns, let alone 2018 or 2016, should be enough to buoy Gonzalez to a win.

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Trump’s rating among Hispanics nationally was a dismal 33 percent approve/64 percent disapprove in the *Cook Political Report* average. More worrisome for the president is perhaps an April 20-26 Pew Research national poll showing that his approval rating among Hispanics *who voted for him* in 2024, the crucial voting bloc in Texas’ 34th District, has declined 27 points since last January, a decrease twice as large as the decline among his white supporters.

Trump appears to be faring moderately better among Texas Hispanics, with recent polling showing his approval rating at 41 percent approve/55 percent disapprove (YouGov for Univ. of Texas) and 37 percent favorable/60 percent unfavorable (Slingshot Strategies). But even smaller drops than nationwide don’t augur well for the GOP in South Texas, and private polling from last year — when Trump’s approval was several points higher — showed the president underwater by double digits in the district.

Economic concerns and the high cost of living are the main issues for Hispanic and white voters alike, say both Democratic and GOP sources. “We all overthink the Hispanic vote thing,” said one Flores ally. “The reason they’re there is economic opportunity,” they said, so Flores has to say “how he’s going to be creating opportunity and bringing down costs.”

But immigration also looms large. While both Democratic and Republican strategists say voters in the district support a stronger border, there’s serious concern among GOP operatives that the Trump administration’s heavy-handed immigration enforcement is causing backlash.

“Hispanic voters are pro-border security, locking down the border, they’re pro CPB but also don’t want to see their neighbors rounded up,” said one GOP source.

“We need to be talking about a secure border thanks to House Republicans, and for enforcing our immigration laws in a common-sense

way that highlights violent criminals,” said another GOP source involved in the race, “but candidates are going to have to say ‘I don’t agree with going out of your way to deport people who are not violating any other laws.’”

The race has already attracted significant outside attention. The GOP-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund reserved \$10.3 million for fall ads in the Harlingen media market, which touches this district and the neighboring 15th District, and \$1.6 million in the much cheaper Corpus Christi market. The Democratic-aligned House Majority PAC booked \$13 million in Harlingen and \$2.3 million in Corpus Christi.

Texas’ blockbuster Senate race could cast a shadow over the 34th District, as the well-funded campaign of Democrat James Talarico makes South Texas a priority. In 2024, Allred ran ahead of Harris in the new 34th by 9 points, compared to 6 points statewide. If Talarico continues to poll ahead of his two potential opponents, Sen. John Cornyn and state Attorney General Ken Paxton, it is likely due to his strength in districts such as this one, and his ability to outspend Paxton in a general election.

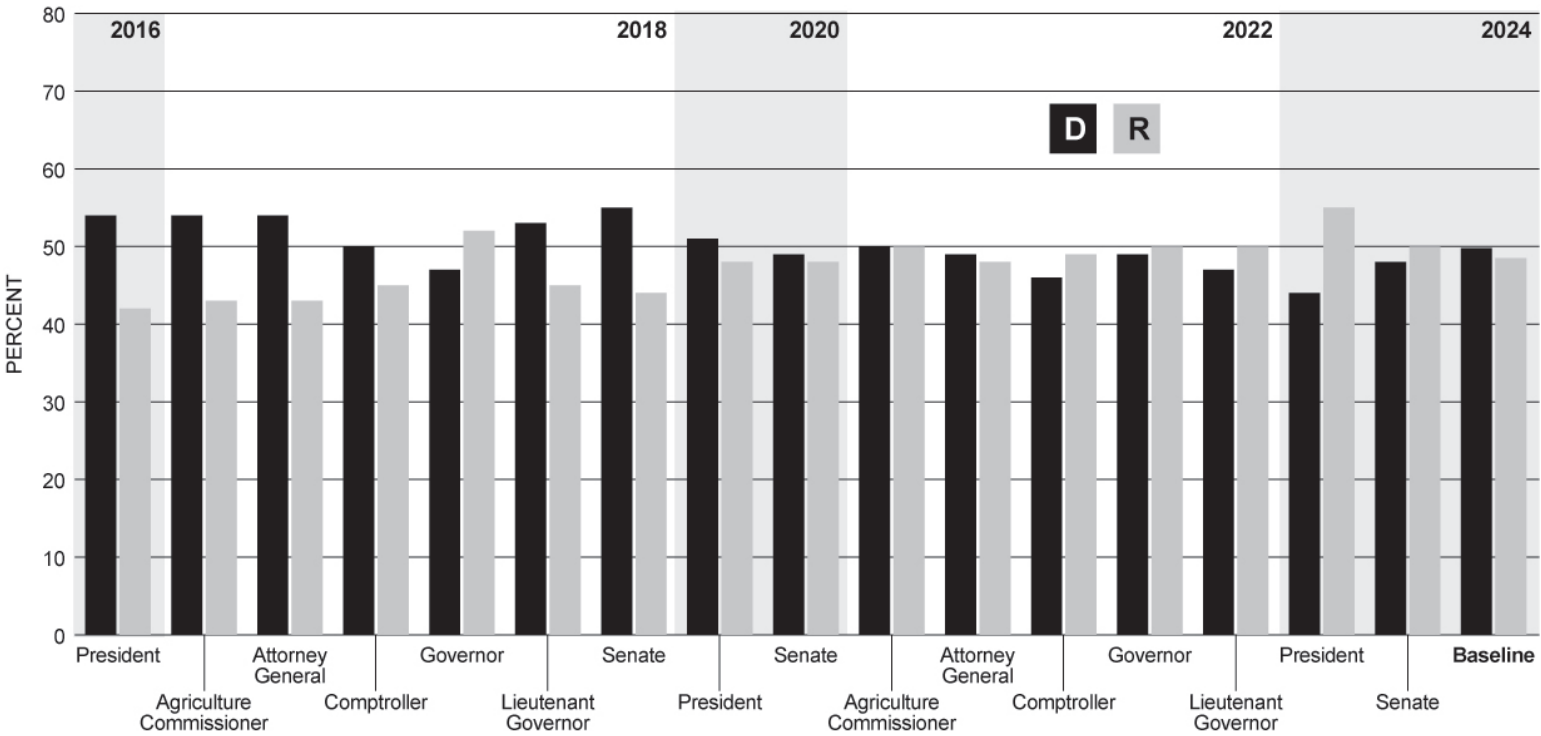
One Republican operative cautioned that Paxton’s effect on downballot races might be more nuanced in the 34th. Voters in the Rio Grande Valley might actually prefer a candidate with a “personality that’s more rough around the edges and authentic” the Republican said, but they also cautioned that Paxton could be a drag in Nueces County, which he lost to Cornyn by 11 points in the first round of the primary.

The Bottom Line

The combination of Flores’ central-casting candidacy and Trump’s inroads with Hispanic voters should be enough to defeat Gonzalez and boost Republican chances of holding the House. But the president’s slumping approval rating and the potential for a midterm backlash against the party in power at a time when voters are dissatisfied with the status quo gives Democrats a window of opportunity to hold the seat and continue their quest for a majority.



Statewide Election Results for Texas’ 34th District



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Over the past decade, the new 2nd District would have voted for the Democratic candidate in 12 of 15 statewide races — compared to 7 of 15 under the old map. The only Republicans who would have carried the new 2nd are Glenn Youngkin, Winsome Earle-Sears, and Jason Miyares in 2021, with an unpopular Democratic president in the White House. More recently, Earle-Sears would have lost the district to Democrat Abigail Spanberger by 13 points, 56-43 percent, in the 2025 race for governor.

The 2nd is racially diverse, with a citizen voting age population that's roughly 60 percent white and 27 percent Black, with Black voters more concentrated in South Norfolk and the western part of the district.

The Hampton Roads region makes the 2nd a major hub for military servicemembers and veterans. The old 2nd District was home to the second-most veterans of any district in America, and had the sixth-highest proportion of active duty servicemembers. It also ranked among the top 10 districts for federal employees.

The GOP Incumbent

Kiggans, 54, is in her second term and previously served in the state Senate from 2020 to 2022.

A Tampa native, Kiggans graduated from Boston University in 1993; she served 10 years in the Navy and flew helicopters in the Persian Gulf. After a few years as a stay-at-home mom, Kiggans earned nursing degrees from Old Dominion University (BSN, 2011) and Vanderbilt (MSN, 2012), and worked as a geriatric nurse practitioner.



Jen Kiggans

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Kiggans ran for state Senate in 2019, winning hotly contested primary and general elections despite being significantly outspent. Three years later, she was recruited to run against Luria in a race Republicans made a top priority from the beginning of the cycle. A brutally competitive campaign ensued. Kiggans was outspent by Luria three times over, but a \$4.5 million campaign by the Congressional Leadership Fund helped her push past the Democrat, 52-48 percent.

In 2024, Kiggans was a top Democratic target but dispatched opponent Missy Cotter Smasal, herself a Navy veteran and small business owner, 51-47 percent.

In Congress, Kiggans sits on the Armed Services, Veterans' Affairs, and Natural Resources committees, and is a member of the Republican Main Street Partnership.

Her campaign team includes general consultant Danny Laub of Poolhouse, which is also doing the TV ads. Chris Grant of Big Dog Strategies is doing the direct mail. Kiggans previously worked with pollster Amanda Iovino, formerly at WPAi and now at Pantheon Insight.

The Democratic Challenger

Luria, 50, held the 2nd District for two terms, ousting Republican Scott Taylor in 2018 and defeating him in a rematch two years later.

The Alabama native graduated from the Naval Academy in 1997 and served as a nuclear engineer, earning a masters in engineering management from Old Dominion University (2004) and rising to

the rank of commander before retiring in 2017. She also founded the Mermaid Factory, a paint-your-own-plaster-mermaid shop in Norfolk.

Taylor, a former Navy SEAL, had won his 2016 race by 23 points. But in 2018, some of his former campaign staff came under investigation for petition signature fraud, and he ultimately lost to Luria, 51-49 percent, in Trump's first midterm election.

Luria was one of several Democratic women with national security backgrounds elected in 2018, along with two CIA alumna — future Virginia Gov. Spanberger and future Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin — and fellow Navy veteran (and future Gov.) Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey.

In 2020, Taylor sought a rematch against Luria but lost by a wider, 52-46 percent margin as Biden carried the 2nd District by 5 points.

In 2021, Luria was appointed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to serve on the January 6 Committee. She also sat on the Armed Services, Veterans Affairs, and Homeland Security committees, and was a member of the moderate Problem Solvers Caucus and the New Democrat Coalition.

In 2022, Luria faced off against Kiggans, and in a show of fundraising dominance outspent her \$10.6 million to \$3.5 million. But even that disparity wasn't enough to save her, as Republicans hit her for her votes on Biden's signature Build Back Better bill and the high cost of living. While Democrats ran ads calling Kiggans an extremist, she leaned into her biography as a veteran, nurse and mom, and worked hard to cultivate a more moderate image.

Kiggans prevailed, 52-48 percent, in one of a handful of flips for the GOP on Election Day. In the post-election analysis, some Democratic strategists groused that Luria had spent too much financial and political capital emphasizing her role on the January 6 committee and not on economic issues.

Luria's campaign team includes media consultants Cayce McCabe and Kevin McKeon of Adwell, pollster Fred Yang of Hart Research, and direct mail consultant Ed Peavy of Mission Control. All worked on Luria's previous runs.

How It Plays Out

The rematch between Kiggans and Luria was always expected to be highly competitive. While the themes and messages of the race won't change, the new congressional map approved by voters last month puts Luria in the driver's seat with less than six months before Election Day. In the event the map is thrown out in court, as is still possible, the race would once again resemble a pure toss-up.

No House Republican won a district Harris carried by more than 4 points in 2024, which is what Kiggans will have to accomplish if she wants a third term this fall.

Kiggans did overperform the top of the ticket last cycle, winning by 3.8 points as Trump won by 0.25 points, but that gap was more due to Smasal running behind Harris than it was Kiggans outperforming Trump. Democratic strategists blame Smasal's loss on poor fundraising and her reported difficulty managing staff. She raised half of what Kiggans did, \$6.4 million to \$3.2 million, and was sued by a former staffer after the campaign.

Luria won't be outspent. She reported \$2.2 million in the bank on March 31 compared to Kiggans' \$3 million but has outraised her handily over the past two quarters, \$2.9 million to \$1.9 million.

And unlike in 2022 or 2024, Kiggans will have to respond to voter frustrations about the Republican majority in Washington, DC. Trump's national job approval rating sits at a second-term low of 39 percent and is nearly 19 points underwater, and may be slightly worse in this

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Democratic-leaning district. That’s a deep hole for any Republican to dig themselves out of, especially when inflation remains high and gas prices in the region have crept past \$4 a gallon.

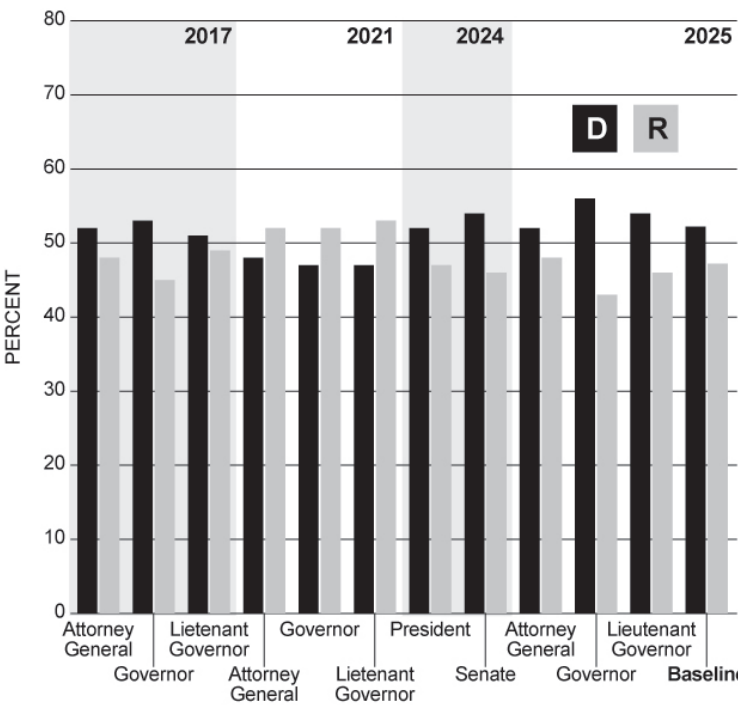
Democrats are already working to tie Kiggans to voter concerns over the cost of living, and in particular will look to tie the issue closely to veterans. Already, a Democratic dark money group, “Affordability Virginia” has run \$1.1 million in TV ads this year hitting Kiggans for her vote to cut Medicaid as part of last year’s GOP-led reconciliation package, with most of the advertisements featuring veterans.

The district’s large veteran and active duty population could also make foreign policy issues more salient, especially the ongoing war with Iran, which Democratic strategists see as a burden for Republicans in the district. “While Iran is impacting the global market, it’s also impacting families here, since we have two carrier strike groups out here that are the tip of the spear,” said one Luria ally, who pointed to her past as an Iran hawk and pro-Israel Democrat as reasons why Republican attacks against her as soft on the Iranian regime wouldn’t stick.

On affordability, Kiggans has hewed to the GOP playbook, pointing to popular tax cut provisions in the reconciliation bill such as deductions for tips and for Social Security.

Kiggans has also been one of the most vocal and visible opponents of the redistricting plan. “She’s running really hard on politicians trying to pick their elected officials,” said one Democratic strategist watching the race, and “there’s something to be said for running right at the problem.” She’s emerged as a pointed critic of Gov. Abigail Spanberger and Richmond politicians more broadly, and there’s some concern among Democrats that Virginia Republicans may be more fired up after the gerrymander than Republicans in other states. The referendum passed in the new 2nd District, by a 2-point margin. Heartening for Republicans, “No” narrowly won Virginia Beach, but

Statewide Election Results for Virginia’s 2nd District



“Yes” overperformed in the heavily Black parts of the district.

But barring a change in the national environment, Kiggans won’t win an upset because of how well she sells the various provisions in the “One Big Beautiful Bill” or how riled up Virginia Republicans remain in November. It will be because of who she is in voters’ minds, the image that she has crafted since her 2022 run and exemplified by her ad “A lot



Elaine Luria

of things” that aired that year. “It hasn’t been about achievements as much as it’s been about, ‘I’m a nurse and helicopter pilot and I’m one of you and working hard about the things you care about,’” said one Kiggans ally. “Her

personal story, that’s why people gravitate toward her.” Republicans also have a few attacks to lob at Luria that weren’t front-and-center in 2022. Mainly: her large quantity of stock trades as a member of Congress and her insistence that the idea of banning members from trading individual stocks was “bulls—t.” The issue has only grown in salience since then. Luria, perhaps sensing the vulnerability, told CNN this year she’s done a 180 and now supports a ban on members trading stocks.

A Day at the Beach

Virginia Beach remains the most critical piece of the district. It casts roughly 50 percent of the total votes and is the most evenly divided part of the district.

Any path Kiggans has to re-election begins with winning Virginia Beach, a traditionally Republican locale that has trended toward Democrats since 2016. She narrowly did so in 2024, by 1 point, but lost it in 2022 against Luria, by 0.25 points. In a rare and notable break from Trump this cycle, Kiggans pushed back against the president’s late 2025 suspension of a wind farm project 23 miles off the Virginia Beach coast, which was expected to bring over \$1 billion and 1,000 jobs to the region.

Even if Kiggans can win Virginia Beach, she’ll still need to boost Republican turnout in the other parts of the district: Isle of Wight, and the southern part of Chesapeake along the North Carolina border. In 2024, Harris would have carried the 2nd overall by 20,000 votes, and netted just 6,000 votes in Virginia Beach, indicating that Kiggans will have to make up ground elsewhere around the district too. And she’s at a disadvantage now that the most Republican area of her old district, Southampton, is not part of the 2nd anymore.

For her part, Luria will also have to focus on the parts of the district with larger proportions of Black voters: Franklin, Suffolk and Northampton. In 2024, Smasal underperformed the top of the ticket the most in Franklin and Northampton, and undervoting (where voters cast ballots for president but left the congressional race blank) was highest in Franklin and Suffolk.

The Bottom Line

Democrats are favored to flip this seat back, continuing a long trend of the 2nd District switching hands every few cycles that dates back to the 1990s. If Kiggans finds a way to hold on under difficult circumstances, Republicans have a shot at defying midterm history.

