

2026 Midterms Election Insight

Updated: October 7, 2026

What's New?



Trump Expands Midterm Travel Schedule as Republicans Defend Difficult Map

President Donald Trump has increased his campaign travel and public engagement efforts as Republicans work to defend a challenging midterm map and maintain control of Congress. The heightened campaign activity reflects growing concern within GOP circles about voter enthusiasm and message discipline, while underscoring the importance of turnout operations in the battleground states and districts most likely to determine control of the House and Senate.

Democrats Seize on Xi White House Visit



President Xi Jinping's September state visit to Washington has become an increasingly prominent topic on the campaign trail as candidates in both parties debate the Administration's approach to China. Democratic lawmakers and candidates have used the visit to raise concerns about trade policy, economic competitiveness, supply chain security, and U.S.-China relations, while Republicans have emphasized the Administration's broader efforts to protect American manufacturing and advance U.S. economic interests. The debate underscores how China policy continues to be one of the few issues shaping congressional campaigns across party lines and could influence legislative priorities for the 120th Congress.



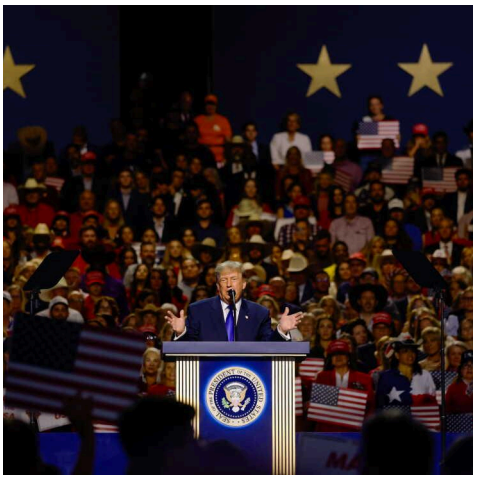
Republicans Work to Refine Midterm Message

Recent reporting suggests Republican leaders are increasingly focused on aligning congressional campaigns with the Administration's policy achievements, amid concerns that voters remain more focused on economic anxieties and cost-of-living challenges than broader legislative accomplishments. As a result, GOP candidates are placing renewed emphasis on tax relief, border security, manufacturing, and affordability issues while seeking to create a more consistent message across the competitive states and districts.

Obama Heads to Michigan as Senate Control Hangs in the Balance



Former President Barack Obama is set to campaign alongside Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan, underscoring the growing importance of the open-seat race in the battle for Senate control. The visit comes as recent polling continues to show a closely divided contest between El-Sayed and Republican Mike Rogers, while both campaigns and national party committees ramp up fundraising and outside spending in what has emerged as one of the nation's premier Senate battlegrounds.



Money Floods Into Key Battlegrounds

Outside spending continues to surge across the 2026 map as both parties concentrate resources on a relatively small number of races viewed as critical to congressional control. Senate battlegrounds such as Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, and Maine have attracted substantial outside spending, while President Donald Trump's political operation has become increasingly active through groups including No Going Back PAC and MAGA Inc., which have directed millions of dollars into key Senate and House contests. The influx of resources highlights where national Republicans and Democrats believe the fight for congressional control is most likely to be decided in the closing weeks of the campaign.

Hear From the Michael Best Strategies Team



"The GOP has the checkbook and reality that polls are likely to narrow as voters come home, but the cone of uncertainty keeps getting wider and moving left. We've gone from a coin-flip for a narrow majority in either chamber to anything from a comfortable Democratic majority to a slim Republican one. Divided government of some sort is the base case, but it’s impossible to count out almost any individual candidate with such narrow margins in key races."

Brittan Specht
Senior Director

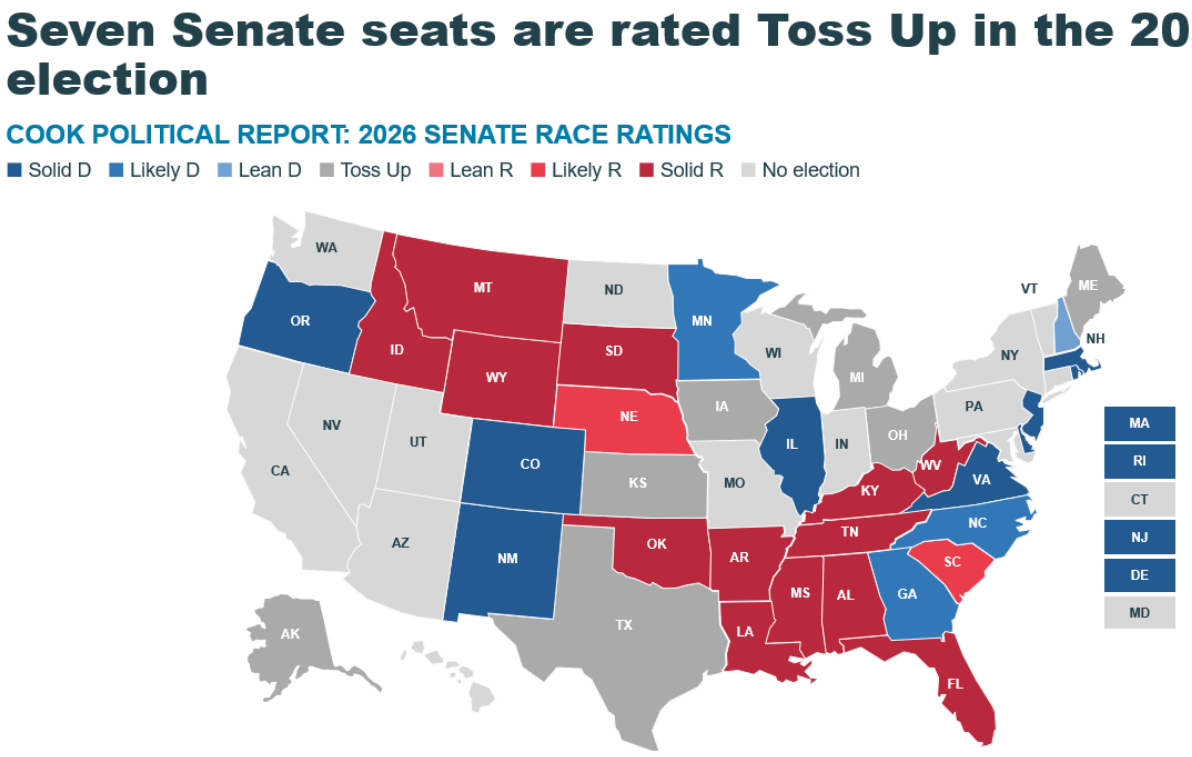
"We've entered October, a heady time when several states open early voting and campaigns drop their "October surprises." Democrats are feeling a rush this week as new polls show leads for candidates in areas once considered solidly GOP: Texas, Virginia, Iowa, and even Kansas. Democratic leaders here in DC, however, stress they are **cautiously** optimistic and planning for what may be narrow majorities in both the House and Senate. What we're watching: battles of the outside spending as these entities dump hundreds of millions into closing arguments ads. And: beware confirmation bias when reading your favorite pre-election opinion poll. A lot can happen in a month."

Lucia Alonzo
Principal



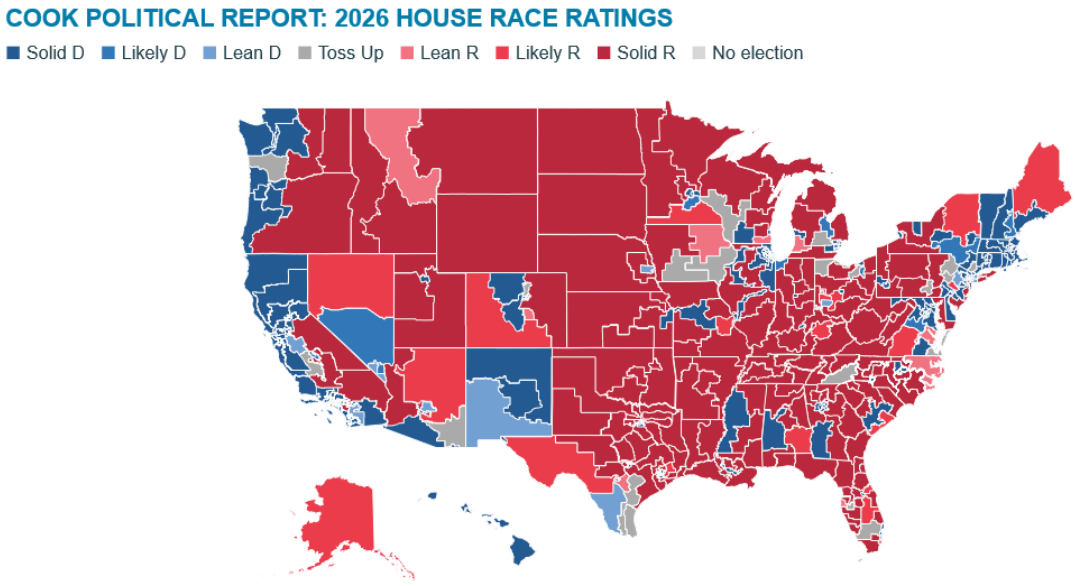
Current Landscape

2026 Senate Seats



2026 House Seats

22 House seats are rated Toss Up in the 2026 elections



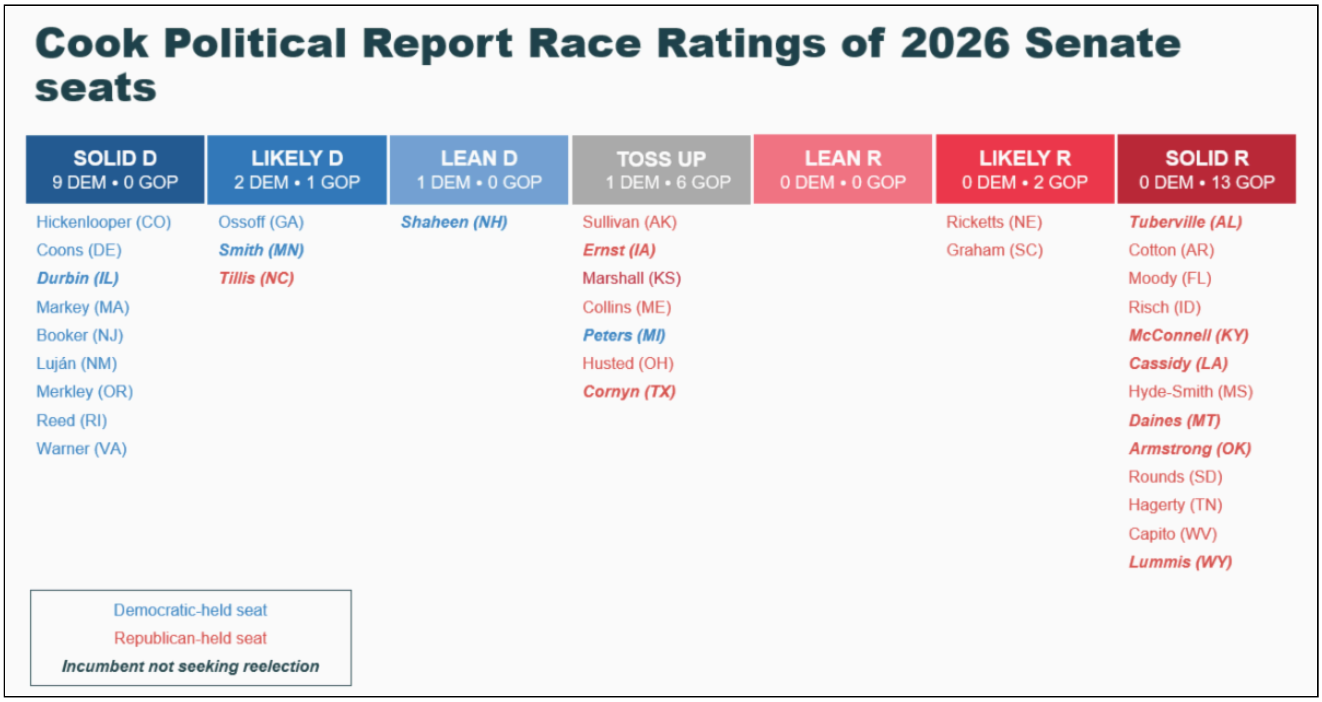
Senate Races Tracker

State	Rating*	Race Updates
Georgia Jon Ossoff (D) vs Mike Collins (R)	Likely D**	The race has shifted in Democrats' favor, with the Cook Political Report recently moving the contest from "Lean D" to "Likely D". Continued negative headlines surrounding Rep. Mike Collins, including ethics-related scrutiny and other campaign controversies, have provided additional openings for Sen. Jon Ossoff's campaign as Republicans work to stabilize the race heading into the final month of the election.
Michigan Mike Rodgers (R) vs Abdul El-Sayed (D)	Toss Up	The Michigan race continues to attract significant national attention as Democrats deploy high-profile surrogates, including former President Obama, to boost turnout and support for Abdul El-Sayed. Both parties view the seat as critical to determining Senate control.
North Carolina Roy Cooper (D) vs Michael Whatley (R)	Likely D**	Recent polling has shown former Gov. Roy Cooper opening a notable lead over Michael Whatley, including an AARP survey that found Cooper ahead by 11 points. The results have intensified Republican efforts to nationalize the race through support

		from President Trump and outside groups, while Democrats increasingly view North Carolina as their strongest Senate pickup opportunity.
Maine Susan Collins (R) vs Troy Jackson (D)	Toss Up	Recent polling from Marist Poll shows Democrat Troy Jackson has opened a narrow lead over Sen. Susan Collins, underscoring the competitiveness of one of Democrats' top pickup opportunities. Despite the survey results, Collins continues to benefit from strong statewide name recognition and a history of outperforming the Republican brand in Maine.
Texas James Talarico (D) vs Ken Paxton (R)	Toss Up	Republicans are increasingly monitoring Libertarian candidate Ted Brown's impact on the race, with some strategists warning that even a small third-party vote share could prove consequential in a closely contested election. At the same time, Democrats continue to highlight Ken Paxton's unfavorable ratings and ethics controversies as they seek to expand the map in a traditionally Republican state.
Iowa Ashley Hinson (R) vs Josh Turek (D)	Toss Up	Recent polling has shown Democrat Josh Turek holding a narrow lead in several surveys, including a Fox News poll that found him ahead by two points and a Rasmussen Reports survey showing a four-point advantage. The unexpectedly competitive race has elevated Iowa from a likely Republican hold to a top-tier battleground that could factor into the broader fight for Senate control.
New Hampshire Chris Pappas (D) vs John Sununu (R)	Lean D**	A series of recent polls have given Democrat Chris Pappas a measurable advantage over Republican John Sununu, shifting attention toward whether Republicans can regain momentum in one of their top pickup opportunities. Even with Pappas leading in most public surveys, both parties continue to heavily invest in the race given its potential impact on Senate control.
Ohio Jon Husted (R) vs Sherrod Brown (D)	Toss Up	Former Sen. Sherrod Brown's comeback bid continues to exceed many early expectations, with recent

		polling showing him holding a narrow but consistent lead over appointed Sen. Jon Husted despite Ohio's Republican lean at the presidential level. The race has increasingly centered on economic issues, including manufacturing, trade, and data center development, while both parties continue to view Ohio as one of the most consequential contests in the fight for Senate control.

*Rating is generated by Cook Political Report
**Changed since last election update



Source: National Journal Presentation Center

Michael Best Strategies Analysis



The 2026 Senate battlefield has begun to narrow as a handful of races increasingly emerge as the most likely determinants of chamber control. Democrats have gained momentum in several key contests, including Georgia and North Carolina, where the Cook Political Report recently shifted the race from Lean D to Likely D, while national Democrats continue to deploy high-profile surrogates and resources into Michigan as the open-seat contest remains one of the nation's premier battlegrounds. At the same time, Republicans are devoting increasing attention to defensive races in states such as Texas and Maine, where polling, candidate dynamics, and outside spending have elevated uncertainty heading into the campaign's final month. As both parties refine their closing arguments, Senate control is likely to be decided by a narrow set of races that will also shape committee leadership, oversight priorities, and the policy agenda of the 120th Congress.

House Races Tracker

District	Rating*	Race Updates
MI-07 Tom Barrett (R) vs William Lawrence (D)	Toss Up	Michigan's competitive Senate race is increasing the national profile of MI-07, with both parties viewing the district as an opportunity to benefit from coordinated turnout efforts in a key battleground state. Recent campaign messaging has increasingly focused on manufacturing, trade, and cost-of-living concerns as candidates compete for working-class and independent voters.
PA-07 Ryan Mackenzie (R) vs Robert Brooks (D)	Toss Up	Recent fundraising reports and outside spending continue to reinforce PA-07's status as one of the nation's premier suburban battlegrounds. Both campaigns are targeting swing voters in the Lehigh Valley with messages focused on affordability, healthcare costs, and economic competitiveness, issues expected to shape broader voter sentiment across Pennsylvania.
CA-13 Adam Gray (D) vs Kevin Lincoln (R)	Lean D	The Central Valley district continues to be one of Democrats' most important defensive races, with national Republicans targeting the seat as part of their strategy to maintain House control. The campaign has increasingly centered on economic issues, water policy, and agriculture, reflecting the priorities of a district that remains highly competitive despite California's broader Democratic lean.
AZ-01 Amish Shah (D) vs Thomas Feely (R)	Lean D**	The race has become increasingly nationalized as both parties tie their campaigns to broader debates surrounding border security, immigration, and affordability. Outside groups continue to invest heavily in the district, viewing AZ-01 as one of the most realistic pickup opportunities in the Southwest.
NC-01 Don Davis (D) vs Laurie Buckhout (R)	Lean R	Recent developments in North Carolina's statewide races have brought additional attention to NC-01, where both parties see an opportunity to build momentum

		heading into November. Republicans believe the district could be part of a broader effort to strengthen their position in the state, while Democrats continue to emphasize healthcare and economic issues as they work to hold the seat.
NE-02 Denise Powell (D) vs Brinker Harding (R)	Lean D	Nebraska's 2nd District has become a key test of suburban voter attitudes in the Midwest, drawing sustained attention from national party committees. The race is increasingly focused on turnout among independents and college-educated voters, two constituencies that have played an outsized role in determining recent federal elections in the district.

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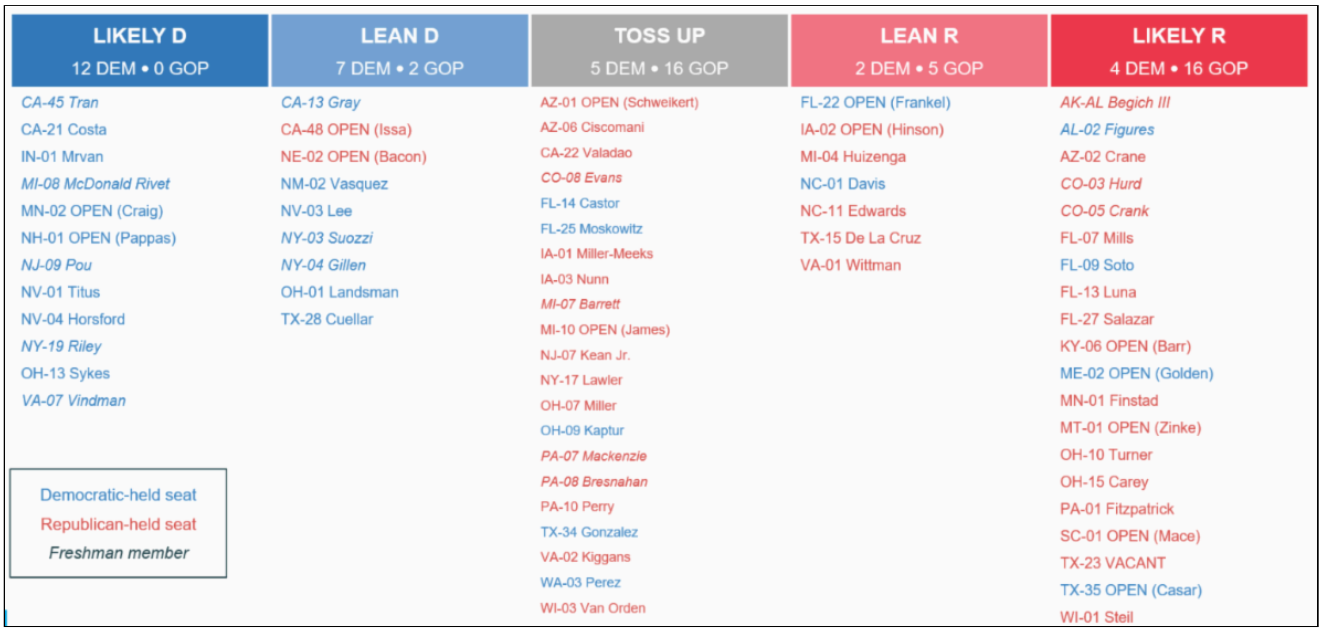

Source: National Journal Presentation Center

Michael Best Strategies Analysis



As campaigns enter the final month before Election Day, the House battlefield is becoming increasingly defined by competing strategies to win over key voter blocs rather than broad national trends. In districts such as MI-07, PA-07, and NE-02, candidates are tailoring their messages to suburban, independent, and working-class voters, while races in AZ-01 and CA-13 continue to test the political salience of issues such as border security, affordability, healthcare, and economic competitiveness.

At the same time, national party committees and outside groups are making increasingly targeted investments in a limited number of districts viewed as essential to securing a majority. With campaign resources becoming more concentrated and voter turnout operations beginning to intensify, the final weeks of the election are likely to provide the clearest indication yet of which party has built the stronger coalition heading into the 120th Congress.



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