

Voters to Washington in 2026:

Cost of Living Election - Again: Blue Wave

An Analysis Of The 2026 Midterm Election

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Overview and Key Points

1. **As of this writing, the current national House generic margin is +13.9D and Democrats have won 257 seats in the House of Representatives.** This margin exceeds the Democratic margins in 2006 (+8D) and 2018 (+8.6D). Additionally, 257 seats is the largest amount of seats won over the last five elections that resulted in a majority change in Congress.
2. **Independents determined the election outcome - again.** The margin among independents is +22D according to the exit polls. Not only was this margin among independents a crucial factor in Democrats' Blue Wave materializing, it was also the largest margin for a political party among independents in the history of exit polling. This is also the fifth consecutive election at the House level in which Republicans have lost Independents.
3. **In all the 13 competitive Senate states, Democrats won independents by double digits and won all 13.** In all of the competitive Senate races, Democrats were over 50% among independents. In eight of the Senate states, they were over 60%. Six states show the independent margin over 30 points. In the 13 states combined, 37% of the Democratic Senate candidate vote came from independents.
4. **Republicans lost women by the largest margin in the history of exit polling.** Democrats had a 21-point advantage among women (60-39 D-R), surpassing their 19-point advantage among women in the 2018 midterm elections.
5. **Party ID: Republicans were outnumbered by independents.** In 2024, Republicans had a +3 party ID advantage, with independents outnumbering Democrats. Party ID is now +3D, with independents (33%) outnumbering Republicans (32%) by 1 point. Democrats are at 35%.

   Republicans slipped as a percentage of the electorate, going from 35% in 2024 to 32% in 2026. Democrats increased from 32% of the 2024 electorate to 35% of the 2026 electorate. Independents held steady at 33%, sustaining their gains as a percentage of the electorate.
6. **President Trump's job approval in the exit polls was negative at 36-63.** It was a central factor in this election and was much worse compared to the three previous presidents who lost House majorities in their first midterms. Independents disapproved by a larger margin (29-71).
7. **The economy was the top issue with voter outlook being negative**. According to the exit polls, 76% of electorate said the economy was not so good or poor, compared to only 24% who said it was excellent or good. Another 79% said inflation was severe or moderate hardship. On tariffs, almost two-thirds (66%) said tariffs hurt the national economy rather than helped (21%).
8. **Democratic messaging clearly outperformed Republican messaging.** The electorate was positive about Democratic messaging, as 50% said it made them more favorable to Democratic candidates and 40% said less favorable. However, they were negative about Republican messaging as 37% said it made them more favorable to Republicans and 55% said less favorable. Additionally, 37% of the electorate heard a Democratic inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living message, while only 22% heard a Republican message about that.
9. **Democrats won independents by 22 despite having a very negative brand image with them.** The Democratic brand image was at 42% favorable and 58% unfavorable. However, Republicans were in a worse position with Independents at 32-68 (fav-unf).

Methodology

This report is based on the Winning the Issues Election survey of 1,200 respondents who voted in the 2026 election (November 1-3, 2026) and The Voter Poll of 79,668 voters by SSRS, who acquired Edison Research. The Voter Poll will be referred to as "exit poll" in this report.

Vote Margin in Context

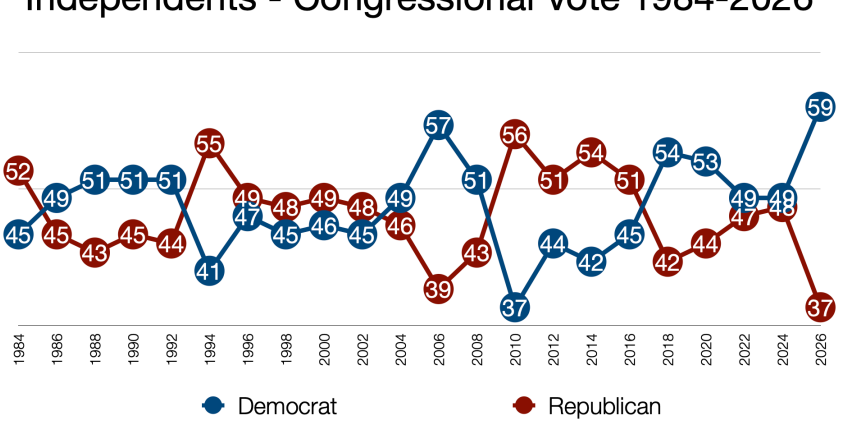
2026 vs. 2018 and 2006

The current national House margin is +13.9D and Democrats have won at least 257 seats in the House of Representatives. This margin (+13.9D) exceeds the Democratic margins in 2006 (+8D) and 2018 (+8.6D). Additionally, 257 seats is the largest amount of seats won over the last five elections that resulted in a majority change in Congress. This is also the largest number of seats held by a party since 2008 when Democrats won 257 seats. The vote margin in that race was +10.5D.

	1994	2006	2010	2018	2022	2026
Seats Won	230	233	242	235	222	257 (not final)
Vote Margin	6.8	8.0	6.7	8.6	2.7	13.9 (not final)
Ind/Oth	+14R	+18D	+19R	+12D	+2D	+22D
Party ID	0	+2D	0	+4D	+3R	+3D

Independents

The margin among independents is +22D according to the exit polls. Not only was this margin among independents a crucial factor in Democrats' Blue Wave materializing, it was also the largest margin for a political party among independents in the history of exit polling. This is also the fifth consecutive election at the House level in which Republicans have lost Independents.



A majority of independents of all races, all age groups, and all incomes voted for Democratic House candidates.

This happened despite independents having a negative view of Democrats, with 42% being favorable and 58% being unfavorable to them. However, in contrast Republicans were viewed more negatively 32-68, and President Trump's job approval among was 29% approve and 71% disapprove.

The economy was their top issue and 20% said it was excellent/good and 80% said not so good/poor, and 82% said inflation was a severe/moderate hardship. 72% of them said that President Trump's policies had worsened economic conditions in the U.S.

Independents in the Senate States

As we saw in 2022, the anticipated Republican Red Wave was short circuited by underperformance among independents. Despite a historic party ID advantage (+3R), Congressional Republicans lost independents by two points. Making this a base turnout election of 2024 Trump voters simply would not be enough. Last year's gubernatorial elections in VA and NJ were obvious signs that the 2020 Biden coalition could be re-emerging. The chart below shows the current margins in the Senate races:

Independent Margins	D-R	Margin			Margin
House National	**59-37**	**22D**	Minnesota	**54-41**	**13D**
Alaska	**64-31**	**33D**	Mississippi	**62-34**	**28D**
Georgia	**66-32**	**34D**	New Hampshire	**60-36**	**24D**
Iowa	**59-36**	**23D**	North Carolina	**63-32**	**31D**
Kansas	**64-31**	**33D**	Ohio	**57-32**	**25D**
Maine	**56-43**	**13D**	South Carolina	**63-32**	**31D**
Michigan	**58-39**	**19D**	Texas	**64-33**	**31D**

In all the 13 competitive Senate states, Democrats were over 50% among independents, and won all 13. In eight of the states, they were over 60%, and six states show the independent margin over 30 points. These margins provided Democrats the votes to overcome significant Republican party ID advantages in states such as Kansas (+17R) and South Carolina (+14R).

In just these 13 states, 37% of the Democratic Senate candidates' vote came from independents, 6% from Republicans, and 57% from Democrats. For Republican Senate candidates, 28% came from independents, 71% from Republicans, and 1% from Democrats.

Other Key Independent Voter Groups

While there were some key demographic groups that shifted toward Democratic House candidates, a critical amount of the of this movement came from voters in these groups who identified as independents.

For example, white independents without a college degree voted for Republicans by a 19-point margin (38D-57R) in 2022. In 2024, this group favored Republicans by an 18-point margin (39D-58R). In 2026 they favored Democrats by 2 (49D-47R).

Independents in small towns and rural areas favored Republicans by 13 points (41D-54R) in 2022. That lead increased to 25 points (36D-61R) in 2024. However, 2026 saw a significant reversal as rural and small town independents favored Democrats by 4 (50D-46R).

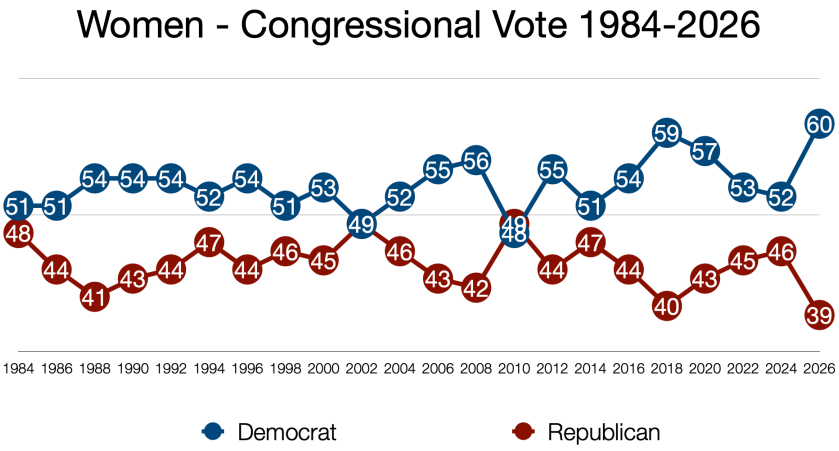
Independents ages 18 to 44 voted significantly more for Democrats. In 2022 they favored Democrats by 15 points (55D-40R), and in 2024, they favored them by 10 (53D-43R). In 2026 however, that margin increased to 39 (67D-28R), with two-thirds of this group favoring Democrats.

Finally, Hispanic independents who had favored Democrats in 2022 by 18 (57D-39R) but in 2024, that margin was reduced to 1 (49D-48R). But in 2026, they favored Democrats by an increased margin of 30 (62D-32R).

Women

Democrats had a 21-point advantage among women (60-39 D-R), surpassing their 19 point advantage among women in the 2018 midterm elections. This is the largest margin for a political party among women in the history of exit polling.

Independent women shifted significantly from prior elections. In 2022 they favored Democrats by 12 points (54D-42R) and in 2024 they favored them again by 9 (53D-43R). That continued in the 2026 election, but the margin was much larger at 30 (63D-33R).

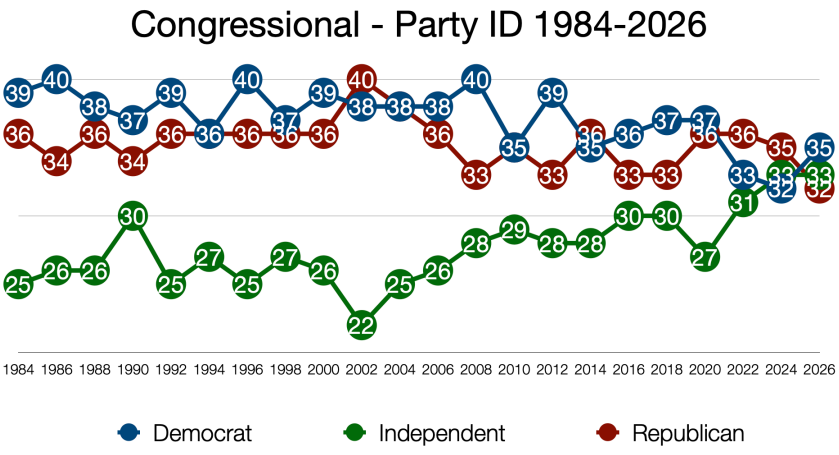


A majority of women of all races, all age groups, and all incomes voted for Democratic House candidates. They had a favorable view of Democrats 54-46 (fav-unf) but a very unfavorable view of Republicans (37-63). President Trump's job approval with them was 33% approve and 67% disapprove.

The economy was the top issue for women at 40%. 18% said the economy was excellent or good, while 82% said it was not so good/poor, and 83% said inflation was a severe/moderate hardship. 70% of them said that President Trump's policies had worsened economic conditions in the U.S.

Composition of the Electorate - Party ID

In 2024, Republicans had a three-point party ID advantage, with independents outnumbering Democrats. Party ID is now +3D, with independents (33%) outnumbering Republicans (32%) by 1 point. Democrats are 35% of the electorate. This is the same dynamic that happened to Democrats in 2024 when they were outnumbered by independents. In the past two elections independents have made up larger portion of the electorate than one of the two major parties.



Republicans slipped as a percentage of the electorate, going from 35% in 2024 to 32% in 2026. Democrats increased from 32% of the 2024 electorate to 35% of the 2026 electorate. Independents held steady at 33% from 2024 to 2026, sustaining their gains as a percentage of the electorate since 2020.

While Democrats had a +3 party ID advantage, that historically has not been an insurmountable advantage. Republicans won House majorities in 1996, 2000, 2012, and 2016 when Democrats had +3 or greater party ID advantages.

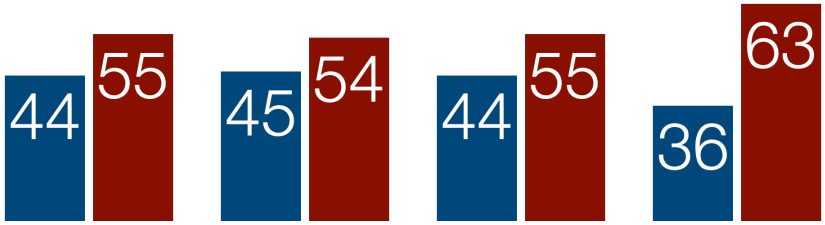
In the 13 competitive Senate states combined, Republicans had a +4 party advantage. Republicans were at 35%, independents were at 34%, and Democrats came in third at 31%.

Contributing Factors

Presidential Job Approval

President Trump's approval was negative at 36-63, according to the exit polls. This job approval is much worse compared to the three previous presidents in their first midterms: Biden's job approval was 44-55 in his 2022 midterm; Trump's was 45-54 in his 2018 midterm; and Obama's was 44-55 in his 2010 midterm. This strong disapproval was a critical factor in the election. Independents disapproved by a larger margin (29-71).

Job Approval of Previous Three Presidents at First Midterm



Our Winston Group post-election survey analyzed different elements of his job approval, including how he was handling the economy and inflation. In our survey, his economic job approval was 32-64 approve-disapprove; his job approval on inflation was more negative (27-69). Among independents, 73% disapproved of the job he was doing handling the economy (21-73), and 77% disapproved of the job he was doing handling inflation (19-77).

In the Senate states, presidential job approval was a significant headwind for Republican candidates, as shown in the chart below.

Trump Job Approval	Approve-disapprove		Approve-disapprove
House National	**36-63**	Minnesota	**37-62**
Alaska	**43-55**	Mississippi	**45-55**
Georgia	**38-61**	New Hampshire	**36-60**
Iowa	**41-57**	North Carolina	**37-62**
Kansas	**43-57**	Ohio	**41-57**
Maine	**34-63**	South Carolina	**44-55**
Michigan	**37-61**	Texas	**40-59**

Voters in all of the Senate states disapproved of the job Trump was doing as President, according to the exit polls. In six of these states, disapproval was at 60% or greater.

Economy

As in 2024, the economy proved to be the central factor. In the exit polls, voters were asked to select the most important issue facing the country from a list of six. The economy was the top issue, selected by 39% of the electorate, followed by the state of democracy (33%). Of the remaining issues, only immigration was also in double digits (13%).

Which one of these six issues is the most important facing the country?	
The economy	**39**
The state of democracy	**33**
Immigration	**13**
Health care	**8**
Foreign policy	**4**
Crime	**3**

Other numbers from the exit polls reflect the extreme concern voters had about the economy. According to the exit polls, 76% of electorate said the economy was not so good or poor, compared to only 24% who said it was excellent or good. Another 79% said inflation was severe or moderate hardship. On tariffs, almost two-thirds (66%) said tariffs hurt the national economy rather than helped (21%) or made no difference (12%). As to which party is better able to handle the economy, Democrats led 45-36, with 19% of the electorate saying neither party.

Data from our Winston Group post-election survey also indicate voter concern about the economy. In our survey, 64% of voters overall said inflation was getting worse rather than better (15%) or not changing (19%), roughly on par with their outlook in the months leading up to the election.

Do you think inflation is getting…?	
Better	**15**
Worse	**64**
It is not changing	**19**

Similarly, 61% said the economy is not getting better at all, on par with the outlook in the months leading up to the election. Twenty-four percent said it was getting better but the rate of progress is unacceptable, while 12% said it was getting better.

In thinking more specifically about how the economy is doing, which one comes closer to your view?	
The economy is getting better, and the rate of progress is acceptable.	**12**
The economy is getting better, but the rate of progress is still unacceptable.	**24**
The economy is not getting better at all.	**61**

Trump Owned The Economy

As for who they see as more responsible for the current state of the economy, 63% say President Trump's policies have contributed more than President Biden's (26%), according to data from the Winston Group post-election survey. Among independents, two in three (67%) say Trump's policies have contributed more than Biden's (16%).

Whose policies have contributed more to the current state of the economy?	Overall	Indep
President Trump's policies	**63**	**67**
President Biden's policies	**26**	**16**

The exit polls also showed that voters thought Trump's policies were responsible for the current state of the economy. Almost two-thirds of voters (66%) said that Trump's policies worsened economic conditions in the US (26% improved, 7% no impact). Similarly, 63% of voters said higher-than-usual prices are more because of Trump's policies than because of factors outside of Trump's control (37%).

The Economy vs. The SAVE America Act

In the months leading up to the election, the SAVE America Act emerged as a potential legislative priority, with some arguing its passage would be crucial for Republicans in the midterms.

In a direct choice on the Winston Group post-election survey, the economic issues of *affordability, cost of living and inflation* were overwhelmingly more important in voting decisions (78%) compared to the SAVE Act (18%).

Which mattered more in how you voted?	Overall	GOP	Indep	Cons GOP	MAGA GOP	Voted for GOP Candidate
Affordability, cost of living, and inflation	78	57	81	55	49	59
Passing the SAVE America Act to require ID in order to vote	18	39	13	41	47	36

Looking at specific key voter groups, economic issues were the priorities to Republicans (57-39) and independents (81-13). Voters who voted for Republican candidates also preferred economic issues (59-36).

Within the Republican Party, there were larger levels that said the SAVE Act played a role in voting decisions as compared to voters overall. However, economic issues were still more important. Conservative Republicans said economic issues were more important (55-41). MAGA Republicans were split (49-47), with MAGA Republicans representing about half the Republican Party.

What Voters Heard From Candidates

In the Winston Group post-election survey, we asked voters to rate a series of 16 issues and news stories on a 1-9 scale based on the importance of that issue/news story to their vote. One was that the it was not important at all, and nine was that it was extremely important. The top priority for voters overall and across all parties was inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living (7.67 overall).

Rank	News Stories (1-9 scale where 1= not important at all and 9=extremely important)	Overall	Rep	Indep	Dem
1	Inflation/gas prices/Affordability/cost of living	7.67	7.37	7.60	8.03
2	Corruption	7.21	6.84	7.41	7.37
3	Health care/Medicaid	6.81	6.38	6.52	7.49
4	Immigration/ICE	6.72	6.76	6.71	6.70
5	Conflict with Iran	6.67	6.35	7.05	6.59
6	Tariffs/trade disputes	6.47	5.92	6.61	6.83
7	President Trump and statements he has made	6.14	5.47	6.39	6.51
8	Medicare for All	6.09	5.16	5.89	7.12
9	US policy towards Israel	5.96	6.07	5.97	5.85
9	The proposed SAVE America Act that would require ID in order to vote	5.96	7.12	5.60	5.23
11	The tax bill passed last year by Congress that some call the “One Big Beautiful Bill”	5.89	5.94	5.91	5.84
12	Data centers	5.76	5.30	5.88	6.08
13	Antisemitism/controversy over social media influencers making antisemitic statements	5.29	5.52	5.08	5.27
14	Jeffrey Epstein investigation/release of the Epstein files	5.25	3.78	5.55	6.32
15	Cultural issues such as transgender individuals participating in women’s sports	4.96	5.35	4.49	5.06
16	Socialism/Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)	4.63	4.76	4.20	4.91

Color defines relative issue/news story importance within a group: Green means importance for that issue/news story was one standard deviation above the mean of all the issues, and Red means one standard deviation below the mean.

There was agreement across all parties that issues/news stories about corruption were more important than most to their vote. Republicans added the SAVE Act as a most important issue/news story, while independents added the conflict with Iran and Democrats added health care/Medicaid.

Interestingly, across all parties the issues/news stories about Socialism/DSA were seen as less important than other issues/new stories in terms of their vote.

Message Topics Heard From Republican and Democratic Candidates

In terms of messaging, we asked what top 2 issues/news stories (first choice then second choice) voters heard the most from the respective party candidates. While both had some focus on the economy, the difference was one of degree as almost twice many said they heard a Democratic message on inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living than from Republicans. Additionally, Democratic messaging (50% favorable - 40% unfavorable) clearly outperformed Republican messaging (37% favorable - 55% unfavorable). Among independents, Democratic messaging performed better at 49-35 (fav-unf) compared to Republicans at 26-61 (fav-unf).

Republican Candidate Messaging

The Republican campaign message topics were diffuse. The top messages heard from GOP candidates were immigration/ICE (heard by 24% of voters) and inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living (22%). These were also the top two messages heard among independents. Other message topics included the tax bill (16%), and Trump statements (15%). The conflict with Iran, the SAVE Act, and corruption came in at 12%.

Of all the Republican messages, only *inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living* significantly made voters who heard that message more favorable to Republican candidates (55-36 more-less favorable). The only other message that had more favorables than unfavorables was *corruption* (49-43 more-less favorable). The remainder of the message topics elicited negative reactions. The message heard the most — *immigration/ICE* — garnered a reaction of 40% more favorable and 54% more unfavorable. The reaction to messages dealing with the Big Beautiful Bill, was a negative 34-58 (fav-unf). The two most difficult messages were those dealing with cultural issues (20-76) and what voters heard about statements Trump made (20-73).

GOP Issue/ Story % Heard	Issue/Story (Heard by 10% or more from the electorate)	News Stories (Rank out of 16)	More-less fav to Rep candidates
24%	Immigration/ICE	**4**	**40-54**
22%	Inflation/gas prices/Affordability/cost of living	**1**	**55-36**
16%	The tax bill passed last year by Congress that some call the “One Big Beautiful Bill”	**11**	**34-58**
15%	President Trump and statements he has made	**7**	**20-73**
14%	Socialism/Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)	**16**	**37-57**
13%	Cultural issues such as transgender individuals participating in women’s sports	**15**	**20-76**
12%	Conflict with Iran	**5**	**44-48**
12%	The proposed SAVE America Act that would require ID in order to vote	**9**	**42-49**
12%	Corruption	**2**	**49-43**
11%	Tariffs/trade disputes	**6**	**41-52**

Democratic Candidate Messaging

Democrats had a more widely heard inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living message than Republicans. Thirty-seven percent of voters overall and 40% of independents heard this message,

which made it their top message, matching what voters said was their top issue/news story. Next were Immigration/ICE (22%) and Trump statements (20%).

Democratic Issue/Story % Heard	Issue/Story (Heard by 10% or more from the electorate)	News Stories (Rank out of 16)	More-less fav to Dem candidates
37%	Inflation/gas prices/Affordability/cost of living	**1**	**66-25**
22%	Immigration/ICE	**4**	**43-49**
20%	President Trump and statements he has made	**7**	**52-41**
14%	Corruption	**2**	**73-21**
13%	Conflict with Iran	**5**	**51-38**
12%	Health care/Medicaid	**3**	**65-26**
11%	Medicare for All	**8**	**40-47**
10%	Socialism/Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)	**16**	**12-82**
10%	Tariffs/trade disputes	**6**	**63-27**

The electorate's reaction to their top message, *inflation/gas prices/affordability/cost of living,* was 66% more favorable - 25% less favorable. Additionally their messaging on *corruption* (73% favorable - 21% unfavorable), *health care/Medicaid* (65% favorable - 26% unfavorable), and *tariffs/ trade disputes* (63% favorable - 27% unfavorable) were all well received. However when the health care message was perceived to be about Medicare for All as the primary focus it was received slightly negatively with 40% being more favorable and 47% less favorable. Messages about *immigration/ICE* were received in a similar manner with 43% being more favorable and 49% less favorable. By far the worst message heard from Democratic candidates was about *socialism/DSA*, with only 12% more favorable and 82% saying less favorable.

Party Brands

Looking at the brand images of the two parties, Democrats won despite having a brand image that was slightly negative. Forty-eight percent of the electorate had a favorable view of the Democratic Party, while 52% had an unfavorable view. However, Republicans had a worse brand image as 40% had a favorable view, while 60% had an unfavorable view.

Among independents, the brand image for both parties was more challenging. Forty-two percent of independents had a favorable view of the Democratic Party, compared to 58% with an unfavorable view. For the Republicans, 32% of independents had a favorable view of the Republican Party, compared to 68% with an unfavorable view.

The Competitive Playing Field

Assessing the Competitive House Districts and Early Warning Signs in 2025

On the Republican side, the baseline standards that campaigns were using to define what districts might be competitive was whether Trump or Harris had carried the district and by what margin. There was a significant problem with the 2024 race being used as the baseline, given how favorable the 2024 environment was for Republicans.

That concern was seen in the 2025 gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia, where Democrats won. **That was not surprising given they were blue states, but the developing**

problem for Republicans was that the 2020 Biden coalition was re-emerging, meaning the 2026 environment for Republicans could be closer to 2020 than 2024.

In both races, economic issues were at the forefront of voters's minds, and Republicans lost independents by double digits. In New Jersey, Mikie Sherrill carried independents by 13 points. In Virginia, Abigail Spanberger carried them by 19 points, matching Biden's 2020 margin among independents and reversing Glenn Youngkin's 9-point margin among this group in his 2021 election. Likewise, women shifted towards Democrats in these gubernatorial elections. Spanberger won Virginia women by 30 (outdoing Biden's margin of +23) and Sherrill won New Jersey women by 25 points.

However, the focus on 2024 presidential race as the means to a key part of targeting districts continued, and the assumption that came along with that was that there were going to be fewer competitive seats. This became even more locked into place as both sides engaged in mid-cycle redistricting.

In looking at the 2024 presidential results through the lens of the 2026 Congressional district lines, in this scenario, Trump carried 234 districts — 32 of these by less than 10 points — while Harris won 201. However, this analysis assumed the 2026 political campaigns would not be too far off from 2024 campaign results, which was ultimately incorrect. The Real Clear Politics generic average this year has had Republicans trailing consistently by mid to high single digits, well below the 2.6% Republican House win in 2024.

CDs Carried by Candidate

Using 2026 Lines	Harris 2024	Biden 2020
CDs Won	201	220
Trump <10%	32	45
Total Won & <10%	233	265

In fact, the 2020 presidential results have proven to be a more useful context for determining the number of competitive House races. Using the lens of the 2026 district lines, Biden won 220 districts — 19 more than Harris in 2024. Additionally, the number of districts Trump won by less than 10 points in this scenario increases to 45. The end result between the two was that by using the Harris 2024 lens, there were 233 districts that she won or President Trump won by less than 10%. In contrast, looking at the 2020 Biden race. there were 265 seats that Biden won or where Trump won with less than 10%.

Currently, Democrats have won all 201 districts Harris carried in 2024. Additionally, they won 30 of 32 districts that Trump won by less than 10%. Beyond that, they won 26 seats where Trump won by more than 10% bringing the total number of 2024 Trump districts won to 56. Democrats won all 220 districts Biden carried in 2020, and 37 districts Trump won. There may be a few more Democratic wins as there are still more races to be called.

CDs Won by Democrats in 2026

Using 2026 Lines	Harris 2024	Biden 2020
CDs Won	201	220
Trump <10%	30	25
Trump >10%	26	12

Conclusion

This election should serve as a wakeup call to Republicans, as Democrats regained the House and Senate, flipping large numbers of seats in both bodies. Additionally, Democrats now have a majority of governors as well. The economy was again the top issue and the president's job approval posed a significant headwind, particularly for Republican candidates in the competitive

Senate states. **At the Congressional level, independents voted for Democrats by a margin of 22 points, the largest margin for a political party among independents in the history of exit polling**. In terms of the composition of the electorate, two years after Democrats became the de facto third party, Republicans now find themselves in the same position, coming in behind Democrats and independents as a percentage of the electorate. Clearly, a new strategy is needed for engaging with this critical center group.

Where does this leave the two parties? Republicans were elected in 2024 to fix the Biden economy. They came nowhere near the electorate's expectations of what needed to be achieved, and the electorate was frustrated by the focus on other preferred issues or projects rather than the economy. While voters were unhappy about the economy, they were being told they didn't understand how well the economy was doing. For voters, this made President Trump and the Republican Party out of touch with what was going on in their every day lives. This disconnect left 76% of the electorate dissatisfied or angry about how things were going in the country. That included 82% of independents. Given what was happening with the electorate, Republicans should not have been surprised by the election result. Republicans need to understand why they were surprised and take clear steps to creating situational awareness for elected Republicans and candidates. That starts with prioritizing how to listen to the electorate and paying attention to their concerns.

Democrats have an equally difficult challenge. Parties are most blind right after winning because they believe everything they did was right and proceed based on that outlook. In this election, Democrats weren't the solution, they were the alternative to the President and his party. This was not a mandate for a policy direction. This was clearly seen among independents. Independents gave Democrats the largest margin in the history of exit polling, yet they had a very negative image of the Democratic Party with 42% being favorable and 58% being unfavorable. They simply took away the governing responsibility from the Republicans. Independents also provided 35% of the vote House Democrats received. The question for Democrats is how do they manage a much broader and ideologically diverse coalition, understanding there is no policy mandate.

The party that can figure out their challenges first will have the advantage for 2028.

Note: A revised version of this analysis will be released once the results of all Congressional races have been finalized.