Focus

The U.S. midterm elections explained



Les midterms sont des élections organisées aux États-Unis à mi-parcours du mandat présidentiel, où l'ensemble de la Chambre des représentants et environ un tiers du Sénat sont renouvelés, ainsi que de nombreux postes de gouverneurs. Explications.

The U.S. midterm elections — so called because they fall halfway through a president's four-year term — will be held on **November 3, 2026**. They take place every four years.

midterm elections élections de mi-mandat / **halfway** à mi-parcours / **term** ici, mandat / **to be held** avoir lieu, se tenir.

Gerrymandering and redistricting

Gerrymandering is the practice of drawing electoral districts in a way that gives one political party an advantage. Congressional maps are normally redrawn once a decade after the census, but several states have redrawn their maps ahead of the 2026 midterms, setting off a partisan fight over who stands to benefit. Republicans have pursued new maps in states including Texas, while Democrats have responded with efforts of their own in states such as California and Utah. Critics say aggressive redistricting can reduce competition and weaken minority representation, while supporters argue that both parties are simply responding to the other side's tactics. Several of the new maps are being challenged in court.

redistricting redécoupage des circonscriptions électorales / **gerrymandering** «charcutage» électoral (découpage de circonscriptions de manière à faire élire tel ou tel parti) / **to draw, drew, drawn** tracer / **map** carte / **once a decade** une fois tous les 10 ans / **census** recensement / **ahead of** avant / **to set, set, set off** déclencher / **to stand, stood, stood to** risquer de, être susceptible de / **to pursue** chercher (à obtenir) / **to weaken** affaiblir, fragiliser / **supporter** partisan, défenseur / **to challenge** (re)mettre en question, contester / **court** tribunal.

Who is being elected?

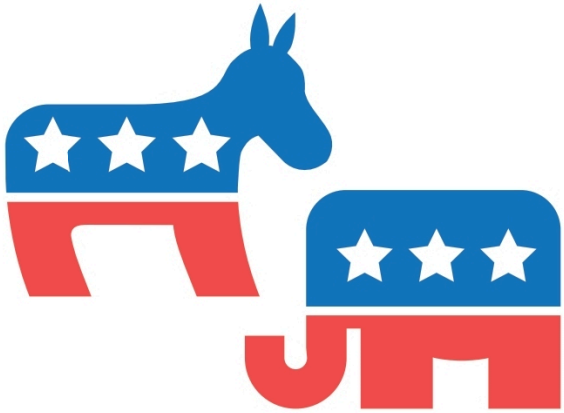
Americans are represented in Congress by **535 voting lawmakers**, known as members of Congress. Congress is made up of two chambers — **the Senate and the House of Representatives**. The two chambers work together to make federal laws.

- The Senate is the upper chamber, with **100 seats**. Each U.S. state, regardless of size, sends two senators. Senators serve six-year terms, and roughly one-third of the Senate is elected every two years.
- The House of Representatives, often referred to as "the House", has **435 voting members**. Each represents a congressional district in their state and serves a two-year term.



As well as elections for Congress, **state governors** and thousands of **state legislative and local officials** are also elected.

lawmaker législateur, ici membre du Congrès américain (représentant ou sénateur) / **House of Representatives** Chambre des représentants / **upper chamber** chambre haute / **seat** siège / **regardless** indépendamment de / **to serve** exercer ses fonctions / **roughly** approximativement / **to refer to as** appeler, désigner / **congressional district** circonscription électorale / **official** ici, élu.



Primaries

Before the general election, most states hold **primaries** (spring through late summer 2026) in which each party selects its nominees. Rules vary widely by state since U.S. elections are administered locally rather than through a single national system.

to hold, held, held ici, organiser / **nominee** candidat désigné, officiel / **rules** règles / **widely** fortement, beaucoup / **to administer** gérer, assurer la gestion / **single** seul (et unique).

(Visuels : iStock)



Voter turnout

In general, fewer Americans vote in the midterms than in presidential elections. Whereas about 60 percent of eligible voters typically cast ballots in presidential election years, that percentage falls to about **40 percent for midterms**. Turnout for the **2022 midterms was estimated at 47%**.

turnout participation (électorale) / **to cast, cast, cast a ballot** déposer un bulletin de vote, voter.



This year

- **35 Senate seats** are up for election
- **All 435 House seats** are up for election
- **36 of the 50 state governorships** are up for election

to be up for ici, être en lice / **governorship** poste de gouverneur.



A ÉCOUTER SUR LE COMPLÉMENT SONORE-SÉQUENCE CONVERSATION
Notre invitée la réalisatrice et comédienne **Pascaline Bellegarde** livre son point de vue sur les actions (ou l'inaction) des Américains mécontents du gouvernement actuel..
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THE NEW YORK TIMES | TIM BALK

Can Democrats win back the Senate? Why their chances are improving

Les démocrates peuvent-ils reconquérir le Sénat ? Pourquoi leurs chances s'améliorent

Les élections de mi-mandat auront lieu le 3 novembre aux États-Unis. Si les Républicains conservent certains avantages structurels sur la carte électorale, l'impopularité du président Donald Trump ouvre la voie à un scénario longtemps jugé improbable : une reprise du Sénat par les Démocrates.

As a tumultuous primary season draws to a close, Democrats have opened up more than one path to winning control of the Senate, according to strategists in both parties and independent analysts, reshaping the battle on a map where Republicans still hold significant advantages.

2. Voters are uneasy about President Donald Trump's handling of the economy, and his unpopular war with Iran has driven increases in the costs of fuel, food and health services, putting Republicans on the defensive in states they once saw as much safer terrain.

3. The basic contours of the map remain challenging for Democrats. Holding 47 seats in the Senate, they must flip at least four to win a majority. At the same time, they are trying to defend seats in two states Trump won in 2024. And four of the six most competitive races are in states Trump won by double digits.

Trump's impact on the vote

4. Republicans are also hoping that Democratic divisions in two important battlegrounds, Maine and Michigan, could help offset some of the political headwinds. Trump himself has expressed concern about a pattern of Republicans not performing as well in cycles when he is not on the ballot. "Pretend, please, that I'm on the ballot," he said at a rally in South Carolina, aiming to motivate his base.

5. But Trump's approval rating is below 40%, unnerving Republicans, who worry that voters in the center will break for Democrats. And rank-and-file Democratic voters are plainly energized: They have been turning out in huge numbers for primaries. Now the battle for the Senate, once seen as tilting heavily toward the GOP, is increasingly up for grabs.

6. The latest show of Democratic strength came in conservative-leaning Alaska. Former

1. primary primaire (élection) / **to draw, drew, drawn to a close** toucher à sa fin / **path** voie / **according to** selon, d'après / **to reshape** refaçonner, redessiner / **to hold, held, held** ici, disposer.

2. uneasy inquiet / **handling** gestion / **to drive, drove, driven** entraîner / **increase** augmentation / **health** santé /

once auparavant, avant.

3. to remain rester, demeurer / **challenging** difficile, délicat / **to flip** obtenir, gagner, faire basculer (du camp adverse) / **race** course (élection), scrutin / **digit** chiffre; ici, ... avec plus de dix points d'avance/une avance à deux chiffres.

4. battleground champ de bataille; ici, État clé/très disputé / **to offset, set, set** compenser, contrebalancer / **headwind** vent contraire; ici, contexte défavorable / **concern** inquiétude, crainte / **pattern** schéma, tendance / **to be on the ballot** avoir son nom sur le bulletin de vote, être candidat / **to aim to** chercher à, avoir pour but.

5. approval rating cote de popularité / **to unnerve** déstabiliser, déconcerter / **rank-and-file** de base / **plainly** manifestement / **to turn out** ici, se rendre aux urnes, (aller) voter / **huge** très grand / **to tilt** pencher (vers) / **GOP = Grand Old Party**, parti républicain / **up for grabs** indécis, à la portée des deux camps.

6. show démonstration, signe / **strength** force / **conservative-leaning** de tendance conservatrice, de droite / **former** ancien, ex- /

SUR LE BOUT DE LA LANGUE

digit
double digits *numéro à deux chiffres*
digital *numérique*
to digitize, to digitalize *numériser*
digitization *digitalisation, numérisation*
digitally remastered *mixé en numérique*



Supporters of Iowa state Rep. Josh Turek, a Democratic candidate for U.S. Senate, hold signs during a primary election night watch party. (AP Photo/Bryon Houlgrave)



Troy Jackson is the Democratic nominee for Maine Senate. (Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call)



Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Texas state Rep. James Talarico speaks at a food drive. (AP Photo/Julia Demaree Nikhinson)

Rep. Mary Peltola, a Democrat who had recently fired a top aide and changed campaign managers, led Sen. Dan S. Sullivan, the Republican incumbent, by more than 5 percentage points in the state's nonpartisan primary, according to incomplete results.

Change is in the air

7. "I haven't seen that kind of energy for a Democrat in Alaska in decades," said Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, a former chair of Senate Democrats' campaign arm. "Democrats are energized. You see it across the country."

8. A few days later, the Cook Political Report, a nonpartisan election forecaster, moved races in Texas and Iowa from "Lean Republican" to "Toss Up," citing polling and the economic environment. The shift grew the core Senate battlefield from four states — Alaska, Maine, Michigan and Ohio — to six, widening Democrats' margin for error. "It's a 50-50 toss-up," said Douglas Heye, a Republican strategist. "Republicans are nervous. They've watched Trump's numbers be a constant limbo contest of 'How low can they go?'"

9. While Republican groups have a vast cash advantage over Democratic ones, individual Democratic Senate candidates are handily outraising their Republican opponents in most of the key Senate races.

10. By May, when the average gas price rose as high as $4.56 a gallon, Trump had dismissed the economic costs of the war with Iran, saying they were outweighed by national security interests. "I don't think about Americans' financial situation," he told reporters in mid-May. In a Cabinet meeting later that month he declared, "I don't care about the midterms."

11. Gas prices have since dropped somewhat from their spring peaks, but they remain elevated, and the fallout from the fighting has spilled across the economy, driving infla- >>>

to fire renvoyer / **aide** collaborateur / **to lead, led, led** mener, devancer / **incumbent** en titre.

7. kind genre / **decade** décennie / **chair** président(e) / **arm** ici, branche.

8. forecaster ici, spécialiste des prévisions électorales / **to move** ici, reclasser / **toss up** indécis / **polling** sondage(s) / **shift** virage, revirement / **to grow, grew, grown** ici, élargir / **core** cœur / **battlefield** ici, terrain de bataille électoral / **to widen** élargir, augmenter / **limbo contest** allusion au jeu où l'on passe sous une barre placée toujours plus bas.

9. cash ici, financier / **handily** habilement / **to outraise** lever plus de fonds que.

10. average moyen / **gas = gasoline** essence / **to rise, rose, risen** augmenter, passer à / **gallon** 3,785 litres / **to dismiss** minimiser / **to outweigh** compenser / **to care about** accorder de l'importance à, s'intéresser à / **midterms** = midterm elections élections de mi-mandat.

11. to drop baisser / **somewhat** quelque peu, légèrement / **fallout** retombées, conséquences / **to spill, spilled or spilt** se propager / **to drive, drove, driven** entraîner /



Minnesota street artist Brandon Litman produces hundreds of hand-sprayed posters of Sen. Jon Ossoff. (© Robin Rayne/ZUMA Press Wire)



Democrats are heavily criticizing President Trump and Republicans over persistent high grocery and living costs. (AP Photo/Julia Demaree Nikhinson)

>>> tion that has outpaced wage growth. Voters say they feel gloomy about the economy. Some states at the center of the Senate battle have been hit hard. In Alaska, the cost of a gallon of gas Sunday was $4.82, roughly 70 cents above the national average, according to AAA motor club.

Economic conditions challenge Republicans

12. Josh Turek, a centrist Democrat, is trying to flip a Senate seat in Iowa, which has a farming-heavy economy that has struggled under Trump's tariff policies in his second term. Those troubles have been exacerbated by fertilizer prices that have soared since the war began. The economic pressures have been enough to give Democrats hope in a state where Republicans feel their nominee, Rep. Ashley Hinson, a skilled fundraiser, is a particularly strong candidate.

13. The same economic forces are at play in Ohio, another agriculture-heavy state. There, former Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, is trying to stage a comeback and has outraised Sen. Jon Husted, the Republican incumbent, by an overwhelming margin.

14. In other areas of the country, Republicans see more encouraging signs. In Maine and Michigan, Republicans say that primary season handed them relatively weak Senate opponents who they believe could lose in more Democratic-leaning terrain. In Texas, on the other hand, Democrats believe Republicans offered them an opening by nominating Ken Paxton, the state's scandal-plagued attorney general.

15. Paxton has been indicted on securities fraud charges (he reached a deal with prosecutors to avoid a criminal trial), has escaped an impeachment trial, has been accused of adultery by his estranged wife and was even caught on video years ago pilfering a prize pen. Democrats have nominated James Talarico, a Presbyterian seminarian who has made his Christian faith a centerpiece of his campaign. Popular podcaster Joe Rogan once told him to run for president.

NOWHERE IS THE SENATE PICTURE BRIGHTER FOR DEMOCRATS THAN IN THE SOUTH.

16. Nowhere is the Senate picture brighter for Democrats than in the South, where two popular and well-known Democrats have raced out to leads in states Trump carried two years ago. In Georgia, Sen. Jon Ossoff, a Democrat and the youngest sitting senator, has a huge war chest and consistently leads his Republican rival, Rep. Mike Collins, in the polls. His advantage, which Georgia Republicans attribute in part to his focus on constituent services, has led some Republicans to write off the race and some Democrats to encourage him to run for president in 2028.

17. In neighboring North Carolina, the Democratic nominee, former Gov. Roy Cooper, is trying to flip a seat and is running as a tough-on-crime moderate. He has never lost an election. Cooper consistently leads his Republican opponent, Michael Whatley, in the polls, with some showing him ahead by double digits. ●

to outpace dépasser / **wage** salaire / **growth** croissance, augmentation / **gloomy** pessimiste / **to hit, hit, hit** toucher / **roughly** environ.

12. heavy important; ici, ...fortement axée sur l'agriculture / **to struggle** rencontrer des difficultés / **tariff** droit de douane / **policy** politique / **term** mandat / **troubles** difficultés, problèmes / **fertilizer** engrais / **to soar** grimper en flèche / **skilled** doué, compétent / **fundraiser** collecteur de fonds.

13. to stage organiser, mettre en place / **overwhelming** considérable.

14. area région / **to hand** donner, offrir / **weak** faible / **to plague** entacher / **attorney** procureur.

15. to indict inculper / **to reach a deal** conclure un accord / **prosecutor** ici, le parquet / **to avoid** éviter, échapper à / **trial** procès / **impeachment** (procédure de) destitution / **estranged** dont il est séparé / **to catch, caught, caught on video** être pris en flagrant délit (par vidéo) / **to pilfer** voler / **prize** ici, de luxe / **to run, ran, run for president** se présenter aux élections présidentielles.

16. bright brillant; ici, favorable / **to race out to a lead** rapidement prendre la tête / **to carry** ici remporter / **sitting** en exercice / **war chest** trésor de guerre; ici, fonds de campagne / **focus** attention particulière / **constituent service** service apporté aux électeurs / **to write, wrote, written off** considérer comme perdu.

17. neighboring voisin(e) / **nominee** candidat / **tough** strict, exigeant (ici, pour lutter contre la ciminalité) / **ahead** en tête.

Abdul El-Sayed

Abdul El-Sayed is the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate in Michigan after narrowly winning a competitive primary. His progressive campaign has energised younger and left-leaning voters, but he now faces Republican Mike Rogers in a closely watched race. His positions — such as Medicare for All, abolishing ICE, and ending unconditional U.S. military aid to Israel — put him well to the left of the Democratic establishment and have made him the centre of several political controversies. The election could be important for control of the Senate and will test whether El-Sayed can unite Democrats and appeal to moderate voters.

nominee candidat désigné, investi, officiel / **narrowly** de justesse / **to energise** revigorer / **left-leaning** de gauche / **to face** (devoir) faire face à, affronter / **to watch closely** suivre de près / **race** course, élection / **medicare** programme fédéral d'assistance médicale aux personnes âgées / **ICE** = **Immigration and Customs Enforcement** / **establishment** classes dirigeantes, autorités, pouvoir (en place) / **to appeal to** plaire à, séduire (fig.).

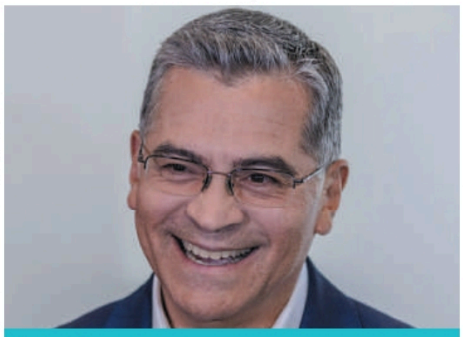

(AP Photo/Julia Demaree Nikhinson)


(Nathan Posner/Shutterstock)

Mitch McConnell

Mitch McConnell has represented the state of Kentucky in the U.S. Senate for 40 years and has been one of the most senior Republican leaders in that time. He has announced he will not run again, ending his career in Congress. His retirement means his seat has no incumbent for the first time in decades, which has drawn a large number of candidates hoping to replace him. Kentucky generally supports the Republican Party, so the seat is expected to remain in Republican hands, though the contest is being watched as an indicator of the party's direction after McConnell leaves.

senior principal / **leader** dirigeant(e) / **to run, ran, run** ici, être candidat, se présenter / **retirement** retraite / **seat** siège / **incumbent** titulaire (d'une charge publique) / **to draw, drew, drawn** attirer / **to hope** espérer / **to replace** remplacer / **to support** soutenir / **to be expected to** devoir (selon les prévisions) / **contest** concours; ici, élection.


(AP Photo/Annie Barker)

Xavier Becerra

Xavier Becerra previously served as California's attorney general and later as U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services under President Biden. He is now the Democratic candidate for governor of California, a position roughly equivalent to a regional head of government with authority over the state's budget and administration. He is running against Republican candidate Steve Hilton to replace Gavin Newsom, who cannot run again due to term limits. California is a large and heavily Democratic-leaning state, so the outcome is seen as likely to favour Becerra, though the race is still being closely followed.

to serve as exercer les fonctions de / **attorney general** procureur général (dirige le département de la Justice) / **secretary** ici, ministre / **Department of Health and Human Services** département de la Santé et des Services sociaux / **position** poste / **roughly** ici, plus ou moins / **term** mandat / **Democratic-leaning** de tendance démocrate / **outcome** issue, résultat / **likely** ici, susceptible (de) / **to favour** être en faveur de.


(AP Photo/Meg Kinnard)

Darline Graham

Darline Graham was appointed to the U.S. Senate in July to fill the seat left by her brother, Sen. Lindsey Graham, after his death, becoming the first woman to represent South Carolina in the Senate. With President Trump's backing, she went on to win the Republican primary runoff against Rep. Ralph Norman in August, despite having no prior elected experience. She's now the heavy favourite to win a full term in November against Democrat Annie Andrews, in a state Democrats haven't carried in a Senate race since 1998.

to appoint nommer, désigner / **to fill** occuper / **backing** soutien / **to go, went, gone on to** évoluer de sorte à, finir par / **runoff** ici, second tour / **heavy** ici, grande / **to carry** ici, remporter.