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America at a Crossroads: Expert Perspectives on the US Midterm Elections

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CITY ST GEORGE'S UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

America at a Crossroads: Expert Perspectives on the 2026 U.S. Midterm Elections

Introduction

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The 2026 United States midterm elections take place at a moment of exceptional domestic and international significance. As Americans prepare to elect representatives to Congress, governors, and state officials, they do so amid intense debates over economic security, political power, national identity, and America's role in an increasingly turbulent world.

This collection brings together over twenty expert commentaries from a selection of members of the Centre for Journalism and Democracy's US Expert Group at City St George's, University of London. Written for students, scholars, policy professionals, journalists, and wider public audiences, the contributions explore many of the central issues shaping the electoral landscape and the 2026 midterm elections in the US. These range from persistent concerns over the cost of living, inflation, wages, and economic inequality to longstanding disputes over taxation, public spending, and government debt. Other essays examine immigration, border security, enforcement policies, and the contentious role of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in contemporary American politics.

The volume also addresses the cultural and social conflicts that have become defining features of US political life. Debates over race, gender, religion, rights, and national identity continue to shape political mobilisation, party competition, and public discourse across the country.

Beyond domestic politics, several contributors analyse how international crises and geopolitical tensions intersect with electoral dynamics. Ongoing wars, strategic competition among major powers, global economic uncertainty, and questions about American leadership abroad form much more than an important backdrop to the 2026 contest. Foreign policy is central to these elections.

Taken together, these essays offer concise, accessible, and analytically informed perspectives on an election whose consequences will extend far beyond the United States. They aim not to predict outcomes, but to illuminate the forces, interests, ideas, and conflicts that will shape one of the most consequential democratic exercises in the world. They are by no means exhaustive and only representative and represent the expertise of the US expert group at City St George's, University of London.

For any information about the US expert group or for interested scholars and students who would like to join, please email us @ us-experts@citystgeorges.ac.uk

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Why Britons Should Care About America's Midterm Elections: They Matter to UK Elites and Masses, But for Very Different Reasons

Inderjeet Parmar

The Anglo-American "special relationship" – promoted as serving the 'national' interest - remains both ideological narcotic and strategic linchpin of Britain's post-colonial *elites*, sustaining the illusion of equal partnership while embedding the United Kingdom within structures of American power. For Andy Burnham's Labour government the 2026 US midterms crystallise the stakes, principally the preservation of closed networks linking Whitehall, the intelligence services, the City and Washington's national-security establishment. NATO, AUKUS, the Five Eyes alliance and the broader Atlanticist architecture are the public faces of this hierarchy. Labour, historically as committed to Atlanticism as the Conservatives, faces and promotes the same structural imperatives of continuity.

Burnham's government, like Clement Attlee's (1945-51) or Tony Blair's (1997-2007), operates within a bipartisan consensus forged in the Second World War and Cold War and consolidated through successive American-led wars. The midterms, with Democratic gains in the House widely expected and the Senate appearing competitive, do not threaten a rupture of any kind, nor do they promise strategic autonomy. A Democratic-controlled Congress would likely constrain presidential unilateralism on tariffs, Ukraine appropriations or Middle East escalation, yet the deeper continuity of the US security state endures. For Britain's foreign policy establishment the real risk is any perceived British deviation that might jeopardise Five Eyes intelligence flows or preferential access to American nuclear and conventional technologies underwriting residual great-power pretensions.

Labour's Atlanticism offers reassurance to US and UK elites. Burnham has signalled firm support for NATO, Ukraine and the nuclear deterrent. Divergences have been limited to sanctions on Israeli settlements, closer European defence collaboration but they remain carefully calculated to avoid rupturing the core relationship. Specific midterm outcomes will shape the operational space for his priorities. Democratic House control, and especially a Senate flip, would likely ease pressure on European defence spending targets and sustain Ukraine military aid, aligning with Burnham's hard-power reindustrialisation and Euro-Atlantic focus. It could also temper Trump's transactional approach to NATO burden-sharing.

On the Middle East, a constrained White House may limit unilateral escalation, creating modest room for settlement sanctions and emphasis on a two-state solution. Climate policy faces sharper limits, however, because while Democratic majorities might revive some multilateral openings, Trump's executive dominance on energy would continue to undermine global ambition, forcing greater reliance on EU and middle-power coalitions. In all scenarios the asymmetries of power persist. British policy remains enmeshed within American priorities, managed by elites for whom the special relationship is both constraint and privilege.

Ordinary people are not invited into the closed circles of Five Eyes planning or think-tank discussions. Yet the midterms are highly consequential because the costs of that elite arrangement land on them. Defence decisions flow directly from the alliance's hierarchy: higher NATO spending targets compete with the NHS, housing and social care. Intelligence cooperation shapes domestic surveillance and policing priorities that affect civil liberties. Middle East alignment influences energy prices, refugee flows and communal tensions in British cities. Climate and economic interdependence transmit American political volatility into wages, mortgages and long-term risks for coastal communities and agriculture.

Elites design the special relationship; ordinary people underwrite it through taxes, service cuts, higher bills and the residual effects of wars fought under the alliance's banner. The midterms will not democratise Anglo-American relations. They will, however, calibrate the intensity of American pressure that Burnham must navigate and thereby determine how much fiscal room, diplomatic flexibility and domestic stability remain for the public.

The Midterms Won't Tame Trump, but They Still Matter

Geoffrey Swenson

America's founders feared excessive executive power. They sought to design a government predicated on checks and balances. Ironically, contemporary American politics reflects not vibrant checks and balances between three equal branches: the executive, legislature, and judiciary. Rather, it is defined by an extraordinarily powerful, ever less constrained executive branch.

Even against this backdrop of aggrandizement by presidents of both parties, President Trump pursued a very strong vision of executive power during his first term. He also attempted to undermine the peaceful transition of executive power after the 2020 election. If voters returned him to office, Trump vowed to use executive power even more expansively to pursue his goals and punish his opponents. President Trump fulfilled that pledge. He has gutted independent agencies, imposed vast cuts on federal agencies and shuttered others. He used emergency powers to impose broad-based tariffs and sought to use the Justice Department to prosecute opponents. Beyond that, the president sought greater control over independently run electoral processes and repeatedly used baseless charges of electoral malfeasance to sow mistrust. Some fear this could be used as a pretext for rejecting the results in November.

The judiciary, and especially the Supreme Court, has long been cast as the natural guardian against executive excess. Contemporary reality is rather different. The Court does not always back Trump. Yet, even after the Court struck down his use of emergency powers to impose sweeping tariffs, Trump quickly imposed new tariffs backed by other legislation. More broadly, the direction of travel clearly favors robust executive authority and limiting congressional authority and the independence of executive branch agencies. The Court sees presidential accountability as fundamentally political, not legal. *Trump v. United States* (2024), for instance, grants the president absolute immunity from criminal prosecution for exercising his core constitutional powers and presumptive immunity for all other official actions. The only remedy for abuse of presidential power deemed criminal is congressional removal as provided by the Constitution. Notably, presidents have been impeached, including Trump himself, twice, but none have ever been removed by the necessary two-thirds Senate vote. A Democratic House may impeach Trump yet again, but the prospect of him being removed from office remains distant.

This leaves Congress. So far this term, President Trump has enjoyed a very favorable environment with Republican control of both houses. The idea that even Democratic control of both chambers will fundamentally transform Trump's behavior or reshape the nature of executive authority is a fantasy. That said, the midterms still matter. Even if Democrats only win the House, Trump's legislative agenda is effectively derailed. Congressional scrutiny will dramatically increase. If Democrats gain control of the Senate, future controversial nominations, along the lines of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Attorney General Todd Blanche, would likely not be confirmed (though the president could still appoint acting officials). Most notably, a Democratic Senate would help shape the future of the federal

judiciary and, potentially, the Supreme Court. After Republicans' refusal to vote on President Obama's nominee to replace Justice Scalia in 2016, Democratic senators would be very unlikely to confirm any Trump Supreme Court pick.

Whatever the results, the midterm elections will not change the underlying realities of an American politics defined by an extraordinarily powerful president. But any meaningful prospect for checking further expansion of presidential powers and maintaining some level of presidential accountability depends on having a Congress that actually wants to do so.

What has congress actually achieved in the last 2 years?

Steve Buckley

One of the key things incumbent politicians rely on in a campaign is being able to speak about their legislative achievements. Passing bills shows that they are actually doing what they were elected to do. But Republicans who currently control all three branches of government, have very little to show for the last two years. Despite Speaker of the House Mike Johnson's claim that the 119th congress has been "the most productive congress in 80 years", this is simply not true.

Whilst the term does not officially end until January 3rd, so far they have managed to pass just over 900 pieces of legislation. Given that the 118th congress passed 995 pieces and the 117th passed 1127, this current congress is not even the most productive in the last 5 years, let alone 80. When one considers legislation that has passed both the House and Senate and been enacted into law, this number drops to only 112.

One of the reasons for this lack of action has been Johnson's decision to cancel a total of 63 days of scheduled voting, largely to give members time to go back to their districts and campaign for the mid term elections. With little legislation being passed, one has to wonder what exactly Republican members can actually campaign on?

Another cause of inactivity has been the razor thin majority Republicans have had in both the House and the Senate. The size of this majority has fluctuated since 2024 due to members resigning, dying and changing parties. The effect of only being able to lose a handful of votes means that when faced with a largely united Democratic opposition, Speaker Johnson has had to struggle to keep all of his members in line to pass anything.

So if the congress hasn't passed much, what have they passed? Well there are minor things like amending the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to protect the cultural practices of producers of Alaska Native handicrafts and a bill to rename the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge located in the State of Texas as the "Jocelyn Nungaray National Wildlife Refuge". But aside from these niche things and several standard bills that continue the basic funding of government, there is not much congress can point to and say that it is going to have a material impact on most American families.

One of the few bills that got any sort of media attention was HB4405 which required the Attorney General to release all documents and records in possession of the Department of Justice relating to Jeffrey Epstein. This garnered attention due to it having all but one Republican member voting in favour of it, despite the ongoing narrative around Trump's relationship with Epstein being a source for embarrassment.

The other legislative achievement was H.R 1, also known as the 'One Big Beautiful Bill'. Among its many provisions were permanently extending the individual tax rates Trump signed into law in 2017, raising the debt ceiling by $5 trillion, making a significant 12% cut to Medicaid spending whilst increasing defence and border enforcement spending by $150 billion each. This will have catastrophic impacts on the national debt and cause millions of Americans to lose health insurance.

With congress being incapable of achieving much, let alone pass the type of legislation Trump wants, it is little wonder why he has taken to ruling by executive order so that it looks like his government is actually doing something. The problem this causes for Republicans in the midterms is that they are being forced to defend the wildly unpopular actions of Trump as they don't have much of a legislative agenda to talk about.

The Mid-Terms: Economic Woes Shatter Trump Coalition

Professor Steve Schifferes

The state of the US economy is proving the key issue in the upcoming mid-term elections - and it is hurting the Republicans. Three out of four Americans are 'dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country today', and 84% see the economy as the most important issue in the election. Only one in three citizens now believe that Trump 'can make good decisions about the economy', down from 59% when he was elected in 2004. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2026/07/23/as-the-2026-midterms-approach-economy-is-front-and-center/

Inflation and the cost-of-living are the key economic issues that have soured the mood. Americans have seen petrol prices rise by 46% since the beginning of the Iran war, driving up inflation.[https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/14/business/economy/inflation-cpi.html] This is damaging Republican prospects in normally safe mid-western seats such as Kansas and Iowa which are heavily dependent on agriculture. Trump's move to import Russian oil and diesel is unlikely to make much difference, as the initial shipment of 300,000 tons amounts to only 0.14% of yearly US consumption. https://www.eia.gov/energyexplained/diesel-fuel/where-our-diesel-comes-from.php]In another sign of desperation, the President has promised to give every American $5000 if the Republicans win the mid-terms (at the cost of $1.4 trillion).[https://edition.cnn.com/2026/10/05/politics/trump-taxpayer-money-midterms]

Nor have Trump's trade policies, sharply raising tariffs across the board, have not been successful, while adding to inflationary pressures. The US trade deficit is still growing [https://www.bea.gov/news/2026/us-international-trade-goods-and-services-august-2026]while China – despite reduced exports to the US – a larger trade surplus than ever. [https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/14/business/china-exports-trade-surplus.html

] Higher inflation has meant that real hourly earnings are **down 0.7%** in September 2026 compared to one year ago [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/realer.nr0.htm]Worries about inflation have led the US Federal Reserve to start raising interest rates, over Trump's strong objections. This will increase the cost of mortgages, auto loans and credit card debt, slowing the economy.

Bigger economic challenges lie ahead

The US economy faces even more serious long-term challenges. The huge stock market boom has benefitted the well-off who own most stocks, while very rich have gained the most. The boom has been driven by a small number of highly valued technology and AI stocks ['the magnificent seven'] which together make up 34% of the value of the entire stock market. https://www.schwab.com/learn/story/what-are-magnificent-7-stocks] If the AI boom does not yield the expected profits, a stock market crash could wipe out savings and severely damage economic confidence.

Investment in AI, such as huge data centres, is a key driver of US economic growth, which is currently higher than in most other **advanced economies.** [https://www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/weo/2026/october/english/text.pdf] But AI investment is very capital intensive and does not generate many jobs. This has led to a 'low-hire, low fire' labour market where there are fewer vacancies for young people.

An even bigger challenge is the rapid increase in government borrowing, now $**2 trillion per year**, double the total defence budget. [https://www.crfb.org/press-releases/cbo-estimates-20-trillion-deficit-fiscal-year-2026] Total US government debt has now reached **$40 trillion**, [https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/americas-finance-guide/national-debt/]123% of the size of the US economy (compared to 94% in the UK). Neither of the political parties seems willing to tackle this issue. The result has been a spike in long-term US Treasury bond yields, which are now **above 5%.** [https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/13/business/term-premium-bond-yields.html] The US Treasury bond market is the largest in the world and underpins the global financial system. Higher rates are already affecting government bond yields in other countries such as the UK. If global investors take fright, the consequences for the world economy could be severe.

The politics of inequality

The most striking difference between the US economy and many other rich nations is the **scale and persistence of inequality** since the1980s.[https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2026-09/62761-Household-Income-2023.pdf]

Over time, the share of national income going to capital compared to labour has risen, with **labour income** now making up just over half of the total [https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2026/labor-share-at-its-lowest-level-52-8-percent-in-second-quarter-2026.htm] – and the share of wealth **held by the super-rich** has soared. [https://wid.world/country/usa/] The steady decline of manufacturing has meant more workers have service sector jobs which are often less well paid and more insecure. This initially helped Trump, whose 'make America great again' rhetoric appealed to those left behind, reflecting the growing disparity between the well-off coastal cities and the declining hinterland. [https://www.visualcapitalist.com/mapped-household-income-varies-major-us-metros/]

But now his coalition is splintering. Support for the Republicans has dropped sharply among young people – facing a weak labour market – and Hispanics, who are the poorest ethnic group in the USA. [https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2026/10/PP_2026.10.8_midterms_report.pdf]This has put some seats in the Republican strongholds of Florida and Texas in play. The former industrial heartlands – states like Michigan and Ohio – are now trending Democratic. Polls suggest that Democratic voters are also more motivated to vote. If the Democrats win control of both houses of Congress, Trump's handling of the economy will be a major factor.

AI and the impending economic collapse

Steve Buckley

Governments around the world have been struggling to catch up with the rapid growth of the AI industry and have been trying to figure out what potential futures we as a society may be facing. Putting to one side the unfounded panics around large language models becoming sentient and killing us all (they cant and wont), an area where there has been much hype and attention is how AI is currently impacting the economy. It is estimated that AI has fuelled a $27 trillion growth of the stock market, or roughly 36% of the entire US market. Much of Trump and the GOP's messaging has been about how he has overseen this growth and the political future of many Republicans is dependent upon this continued growth.

But despite this supposed boost to the economy, there are clear signs that the bubble around the AI industry is due to pop, and when it does it will have political consequences for those who supported its expansion as well as financial consequences for everyday people. The financial issues facing the AI industry are as wide as they are complex. So without going into the minutiae of all the numbers, here are some of the main issues that should concern the economy.

Firstly, the two main AI companies of Anthropic and OpenAI are wildly unprofitable.The latter is expected to burn over $280bn by 2030. Acquiring more customers only makes things worse as on a subscription based model, for every $1 a user pays, they can burn over $13 worth of tokens. Most normal companies that provide users $13 worth of service for the cost of $1 won't stay in business for long. It is frankly wild that both of these companies are seeking IPO valuation of $2 trillion later this year or next.

Secondly, Anthropic and OpenAI have a bunch of deals with large tech companies like Amazon, Microsoft and Meta. In order to fulfil these deals, they need data centres to be built so all the GPUs can be installed. Currently, data centres aren't being built fast enough. AI is projected to need 121GW of U.S data center compute power by 2030. To put that in context, one of the larger data centres in America, Stargate Abilene in Texas, promised to bring 1.2GW online but 2 years on, it is only delivering just over half that. The slow buildout of infrastructure is not just an American phenomenon either. The Vantage Data Center Campus in Newport, Wales, was announced in 2022 and is still not fully operational. The continued growth of the AI industry is dependent upon this infrastructure being built and it's simply not happening.

There's a multitude of other financial issues facing the industry such as the circular financing between all the companies involved, that there is currently no return on AI investment for companies like Microsoft, or the depreciation of all the GPUs, many of which are currently gathering dust in warehouses waiting for the data centres to be built. But regardless of what will be the first thing to cause the bubble to pop, which it will, why should normal people care?

The simple explanation is that many of these data centres are being financed by private credit. That means people's pension and retirement funds. Additionally lots of people's investments are tied up in the stock market. So when the AI bubble pops and the stock market crashes this

is going to have a huge impact on people's savings. The economic fallout will also hit governments and will force them to cut back in many areas and likely usher in a new era of austerity.

With all this in mind, it helps explain why Trump is so keen to keep promoting American AI companies. He knows that when they collapse, the economy collapses with it and so does his legacy.

The Rise of Socialism, Reformed Capitalism and a Growing Challenge to the Old Order in the United States

Inderjeet Parmar

As the United States approaches the 2026 midterms, democratic socialism is no longer a fringe idea. It is gaining clear support, especially among younger voters and working-class communities, while demands grow for a fairer form of capitalism. These trends point to a deeper challenge to the long-dominant political and economic system.

Recent polls show the shift. A Washington Post-Ipsos survey found nearly 40 per cent of registered voters open to a socialist presidential candidate, rising to 46 per cent among under-30s and 64 per cent among Democrats. CNN/SSRS data indicated that about one-third of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents now call themselves democratic socialists. These voters tend to be younger, more working-class and highly engaged. The Democratic Socialists of America recorded a strong primary performance, winning more than half of the races it tracked.

Several high-profile House victories stand out. In New York, Claire Valdez won the nomination in the open 7th district and Darializa Avila Chevalier defeated long-time incumbent Adriano Espaillat in the 13th. Both were backed by Mayor Zohran Mamdani and are strong favourites in solidly Democratic seats. In Colorado's 1st district, Melat Kiros unseated 15-term incumbent Diana DeGette. In Pennsylvania, Chris Rabb advanced in the open 3rd district. Together with the re-nominations of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, these results are likely to more than triple the number of DSA-aligned members in the House—all in safe Democratic areas where November victory is highly probable.

This electoral progress is taking place against a wider loss of public trust in the free-market establishment that has shaped American politics for decades. Calls for reformed capitalism—stronger regulation, greater accountability for large corporations and a fairer deal for ordinary people—have grown louder. Yet limited reforms often serve mainly to stabilise the existing system rather than transfer real power to working people.

The "No Kings" movement, active around America's 250th anniversary, adds an important cultural dimension. It draws on the founding rejection of monarchy while rejecting the exclusions and hierarchies of that era. By opposing authoritarian tendencies and seeking a broader vision of liberty, it helps build alternative ideas and public support outside traditional party structures.

Taken together, the socialist gains at the ballot box, pressure for economic change and movements such as No Kings suggest a growing challenge to the old order. Success is not guaranteed. Established interests remain powerful and divisions persist. The midterms will show whether these forces can come together into a lasting shift or whether they will be contained. Public faith in the current system continues to weaken. The possibility of a genuine alternative must be taken seriously.

Trump May Be Finished, but MAGA May Be Here to Stay

Francesco Rigoli

The pattern seems familiar. A president in his second term suffers a midterm electoral defeat, entering two years of political gridlock before the next presidential election. George W. Bush and Barack Obama both experienced versions of this pattern. Donald Trump may be no exception.

The increasingly unpopular war in Iran, alongside rising prices and mounting concerns about the cost of living, has alienated many Americans, including some of Trump's supporters. According to Pew Research Center (October 2026), only 30% of Americans approve of Trump's presidency, while 31% of those who voted for him in 2024 now disapprove of his performance. Recent polls indicate a substantial Democratic advantage ahead of November's elections, raising the possibility that Republicans will lose control of the House of Representatives.

Will this mark the beginning of the end for Trump and his political movement? Possibly. Yet an alternative scenario deserves consideration: Trump may emerge weakened from the elections while MAGA politics becomes reinvigorated.

Two arguments make this scenario plausible.

First, American public opinion is highly polarised, arguably more deeply than during the Clinton, Bush or Obama presidencies. Americans are divided into two distinct ideological and partisan camps, with relatively little movement between them. Consequently, electoral dissatisfaction does not necessarily translate into support for the opposing party.

Consider the upcoming midterms. According to Pew Research Center (October 2026), only 5% of those who voted for Trump in 2024 now intend to vote Democratic, while just 3% of Harris voters intend to vote Republican. These figures suggest that switching between the two parties remains relatively uncommon. However, substantial differences emerge in electoral mobilisation. Only 46% of Republican supporters report being extremely motivated to vote, compared with 63% of Democratic supporters. These findings suggest that Republican electoral losses could arise partly from the demobilisation of disaffected supporters rather than a substantial shift in political allegiance towards the Democrats.

This distinction matters. In a highly polarised environment, politicians may conclude that electoral success depends more on mobilising their own supporters than on appealing to the political centre. Consequently, potential Republican successors such as JD Vance and Marco Rubio might respond to an electoral defeat by doubling down on MAGA politics rather than pursuing a more moderate course.

Second, Trump himself will face fewer electoral constraints after the midterms. Constitutionally barred from seeking another presidential term, he may become less concerned about the electoral consequences of his decisions. His confrontational, risk-taking approach to politics could become even more pronounced, encouraging him to pursue the MAGA agenda with renewed determination.

Admittedly, a Democratic-controlled Congress would create substantial obstacles. Legislative initiatives could be blocked, investigations intensified, and presidential authority challenged. Nevertheless, the American presidency retains considerable executive powers, particularly in foreign affairs and administrative policy. Trump could continue exercising these powers aggressively, potentially generating further institutional confrontation.

None of this is inevitable. Electoral defeat might instead encourage Republicans to reconsider their political strategy, while institutional constraints could limit Trump's room for manoeuvre. Moreover, MAGA itself contains competing ideological tendencies, making its future direction uncertain.

Yet the broader lesson is that electoral defeat does not necessarily imply ideological defeat. In a deeply polarised society, political movements can retain considerable strength even when they lose elections. Indeed, electoral setbacks may sometimes reinforce ideological commitment rather than encourage moderation. Trump may eventually leave the political stage, but the forces that brought him to power could remain influential for years.

Trump may be finished, but MAGA may be here to stay.

American Jews: Loyal Democrats Face a Stark Choice this November

Michael Ben-Gad

One result of November's midterms is likely to be the establishment of a large anti-Zionist caucus in Congress, deepening the rift between a Democratic Party increasingly influenced by politicians who are also members of or aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the country's Jewish community. As opposition to Israel has become a dominant issue for the left in congressional and senatorial races from New Jersey to Colorado and has shaded into explicit denunciations of Jewish political and economic influence, many American Jews are being forced to choose between their lifelong associations with progressive causes and support for the Democratic Party and their connection to Israel or Jewish communal institutions.

Jewish life in America dates to the seventeenth century, but most American Jews are descended from immigrants who fled waves of pogroms in Eastern Europe between 1881 and 1924. Bitter memories of Tsarist reaction prompted an affinity for trade unions, socialist movements and eventually the Democratic Party. Other working-class immigrants often took an active role in radical politics, but those commitments were rarely shared by their upwardly mobile American-born children. Jews were different: they retained a strong allegiance to the left despite their rapid educational and economic advancement.

In 2000, nearly six in ten American Jewish adults were university graduates, twice the US average, and 28% had earned a postgraduate degree, nearly thrice the proportion among the general public. Nearly a quarter of American Jews reported family incomes of $200,000 or higher, compared to just 4% of the general population. Between 1992 and 2024, Democratic presidential candidates captured an average of 74% of their votes, against only 49% among the general public and 41% among white voters.[1]

Since 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war, mainstream Jewish politicians, old-fashioned liberal Democrats such as Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York and Rep. Adam Schiff of California, have sought to minimise the hostility they face within their own party. Meanwhile, younger Democratic Party candidates now regularly solicit endorsements from and campaign alongside influencers such as Hasan Piker, who refers to Orthodox Jews as "inbred", compares people with "Zionist tendencies" to neo-Nazis who should be denied employment and, last August, threatened that "eventually someone's going to come around and take action, not against the state of Israel, mind you, but against American Jews".[2]

The biggest test will be in Michigan, where the Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed has made his opposition to Israel and its American Jewish supporters the centrepiece of his campaign. Will Jews vote for someone whose initial response to an attempted bombing of a synagogue, filled at the time with 140 preschool children, was "hurt people hurt people"?[3] Some will stay home; others will vote for the Republican candidate Mike Rogers. Others will prioritise universal medical care and climate change, following Michigan Attorney General

Dana Nessel, who urged her fellow Jews to sacrifice "the comfort, safety, and security, and even the very future of our own people in exchange for the opportunity to save the rest of humanity".[4]

Trump, ICE and the Midterms: Will the increasing visuality of Immigration Enforcement cost the Republicans votes?

Conor Wilson

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has become one of the most visible institutions in US politics in President Trump's second term. Since January 2025, images of ICE raids and arrest footage, controversial mass recruitment campaign, the killing of two US citizens, and the powerful images of mass protests in areas such as Los Angeles or Minneapolis have occupied much of US political discourse. At the centre of these developments is the growing visuality of ICE in both state communications, as well as by-stander footage and in the news media.

It is well documented that President Trump's 2024 election campaign relied on anti-immigration messaging and promises of mass deportations. As academics have noted, harsh rhetoric and the enforcement of 'crimmigration' laws (the blurring of criminal and immigration law) converge as politicians seek to bolster their political appeal. Yet, this is not without risk for both Republicans and President Trump. Indeed, one surprising outcome from the 2024 election was President Trump's gains with Latino voters – a group for whom immigration is a potentially controversial issue.

In contrast to the 2024 Presidential election, ICE may present an electoral risk for Republican candidates during the midterms. Indeed, recent developments from the campaign trail have seen some Republicans attempt to distance themselves from President Trump and ICE. For example, Rep Maria Salazar from Florida recently filmed a campaign advertisement claiming that President Trump had gone "too far" on immigration, and that the rise in ICE enforcement represents a betrayal of the "Hispanics who helped you get to the White House". Similarly, Republican Senator and Trump ally Jim Justice has also been critical of ICE operations.

Despite fierce criticism from political opponents, and signs of growing unease in Republican quarters, ICE operations show little sign of slowing down or changing tack. President Trump has both defended ICE tactics and continued to rhetorically link migrants and crime – including the claim that migrants were eating pets in the 2024 election and launching the "Arrested: Worst of the Worst" website featuring 'mugshots' of arrested migrants, along with details of their 'crimes'.

The role ICE has played in the midterm electoral race speaks to the increasing visuality of immigration enforcement, particularly as images and visuals become central to debates about migration. Indeed, in my own research, I have explored the visual politics of state communications of immigration enforcement and border policing. Here, images such as 'mugshots 'or footage of enforcement operations play an important role in political debates about migration – making immigration and the 'criminal migrant' *visible* to the public and showcasing the state's control of the border.

Returning to the US midterms, it is unclear whether the visuality of ICE will cost the Republicans votes. Certainly, some evidence indicates there remains a degree of popular support for immigration enforcement, particularly among Republicans. What is clear, however, is the growing importance of *visuality* in both contemporary immigration enforcement and political debates about migration.

Hispanic Voters And The 2026 Midterms: A Swing Back

Fernando Pizarro & Lea Hellmueller

Days before the 2026 midterm elections, there are increasing signs the overall Latino vote is reverting to support Democratic candidates, two years after the surprising surge in support for Donald Trump in the 2024 election, including in electoral districts where Hispanics historically favoured Democrats.

Widespread disappointment with former President Biden's handling of immigration drove many Hispanics, particularly along border areas like South Texas, to support Trump in 2024. But the Trump administration's harsh enforcement and deportation policies starting in early 2025 represent some of the reasons why Latino voters are turning away from Republicans in the coming midterms, even among those who voted for the GOP two years ago.

According to a mid-October 2026 poll by Equis Research, a Democratic-leaning organisation that surveys Latinos, support for Republican candidates in the midterms among Hispanics who voted for Trump in 2024 has fallen to 76%, compared to 86% a year ago. Thirteen percent of 2024 Trump voters would defect to support Democratic candidates in the upcoming congressional, gubernatorial, and local elections. An October 16 report by Pew Research, a Washington D.C.-based fact tank, places support for Republicans among Latino Trump voters even lower, at 65 percent.

There may be other factors revving up support for Democratic candidates among Hispanics in the upcoming midterms. Latino voters overall are showing higher levels of engagement this year than they did in the 2022 midterm elections, according to Pew's October survey. The report also cites Latino voters who support Democrats being more engaged than those favouring Republicans this year.

Motivation to vote may play a larger role this year as well. More than three out of four Latino registered voters who support Democratic candidates this year think that it really matters who wins control of Congress, compared to 58% four years ago, according to the Pew survey. The report says 53% of Latino Democratic registered voters are extremely motivated to go to the polls, compared to 41% in 2022. The reverse trend is happening among Republican registered voters, with only 43% motivated to cast a ballot, compared to 51% four years ago.

However, the margin of Hispanic support for Democrats or Republicans has narrowed considerably in recent years, according to previous Pew data, particularly since Trump's first election victory in 2016. In the end, voter turnout is the biggest factor in determining Latino support for either party, concludes the Pew report.

The erosion in Hispanic support for the GOP is perhaps better explained by the perceived discontent with Trump or his policies. Only 29% of Latino likely voters and 36% of overall likely voters approve of Trump's job as president, according to an October 21 New York Times/Siena poll. Disapproval ratings of Trump are even higher among Hispanic likely voters at 67%, compared to 59% for overall likely voters.

A majority of Latino registered voters, or 55%, say their vote this November is a vote against Trump, while only 14% support him, according to the Pew Research survey from October 16. The poll states 84% of Hispanic registered voters backing Democrats also see their vote as opposition to the current occupant of the White House.

Latino likely voters overwhelmingly disapprove of Trump's handling of major national issues. The New York Times/Siena October 16 poll states that 74% of Hispanics disapprove of Trump's economic policies, 68% his trade tariffs, 79% his policies affecting the cost of living and fuel prices, and 74% the war with Iran. All Latino disapproval ratings of Trump are higher than those of overall likely voters.

Over the last two decades, pro-immigration advocacy groups have tirelessly sought to make immigration a top priority among U.S. voters, but it has tended to be more important to the Latino community as a whole than to Hispanic registered voters, who have routinely aligned themselves with overall voters preferring other priorities such as the economy as more relevant when picking a candidate.

It wasn't until Trump's first presidential campaign in 2015 that immigration became a higher-profile electoral issue. Trump's immigration policies in his second term have certainly put this divisive issue again in the spotlight, and that is reflected in that 67% of Latino likely voters disapprove of his policies, according to the New York Times/Siena survey. But even the stark rejection of Trump's immigration record by Latino voters does not give Democrats a strong advantage on the issue among general voters. The same poll shows only 50% of overall voters trust the Democratic party on immigration, and that 46% still trust Republicans.

Latinos have become the fastest-growing electoral force and each year one million Hispanics turn 18. Immigration could be a defining factor for many of these young Hispanic voters who will cast their votes for the first time in November. According to the New York Times, much of the Democrats' recent gains among Latinos have been concentrated among younger voters and people without a college degree, two groups that favoured Trump just two years ago. If these trends materialise, young Latino voters could be one of the decisive swing votes of the midterms.

The GOP's Epstein Problem

Lindsey Blumell

Donald Trump's accused and adjudicated sexual crimes have been publicly documented since the 1980s. At least, 26 women have accused him of sexual misconduct. In 2023, Trump was found liable for sexual abuse and defamatory statements against E. Jean Carroll. He paid Carroll $5.62m in July 2026 and currently owes her another $84m.

Despite this track record, Trump was able to convince his supporters during the 2024 US presidential campaign that he would be the candidate to bring justice to the thousands of women victimised by Jeffery Epstein. As promised, Trump signed the bill to release the Epstein files after declaring it a "hoax" on Truth Social.

When some of the files were released in January 2026, it was shown that Trump appeared in the files over 38,000 times. This wasn't too surprising since Trump had a close relationship with Jeffery Epstein for over 30 years. When Todd Blanche replaced Pam Bondi as Attorney General in August 2026, he made it clear he would quash any further action on the Epstein case.

But the Epstein files haven't gone away and have become a litmus test for some Republicans leading up to the 2026 US midterms. Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY) has pressured his party to investigate possible charges, even naming 14 Epstein associates on the House floor in September 2026. Massie was ousted to Trump loyalist Ed Gallrein in the most costly primary in U.S. history, which was labelled as punishment for his dissent. Kentucky is a deeply red state and Gallrein is predicted to win.

In other closer and more publicised races, the Epstein files have been used against Republicans. Long time U.S. senator Susan Collins (R-ME) has had to dodge several attack ads that claim she supported an Epstein cover-up. After being in the seat for nearly thirty years, polls show a tight race. In Michigan, Republican nominee Mike Rogers and Democratic nominee Abdul El-Sayed have consistently made national headlines in their senate race. Recent leaked audio revealed Mike Rogers worried about the innocent businessmen associated with Epstein who may face consequences if the Epstein files were further interrogated. Polls have El-Sayed narrowly ahead.

In a heated debate between Alaskan senator incumbent Republican Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and challenger Democrat Mary Peltola, Sullivan had to defend his record on releasing the Epstein files. Sullivan voted against releasing the files several times until Trump gave the green light and then voted to release the files. Peltola has a slight lead in the latest polls.

Other attack ads that include Epstein survivors Marina Lacerda and Jena-Lisa Jones have targeted Republican senators Roger Marshall, Cindy Hyde-Smith, and Ashley Moody. Notably, brother of Virginia Roberts Giuffre, Sky Roberts appeared in an ad against Colorado Republican Representative Jeff Crank. The ad recalls how Crank refused to meet with Giuffre's family. Polls show Crank with a slight lead.

The Epstein files have become a political weapon against Republicans in the midterms. Whether that will sway voters to Democrats in contested races is uncertain. Trump continues to harass women journalists by calling them "piggy" and "stupid." Those who are leaving the

Trump administration are almost exclusively women while Trump and several men in his administration have been accused of sexual misconduct. Conservative pundits have defended the accused in the Cornell 7 rape case. Yet, the public attention on violence against women has been a factor in the midterms that will play out on election day.

The Media and Trump: 10 Years On

Mel Bunce and Ayala Panivesky

How has political reporting changed since Trump set foot in the White House for the first time, 10 years ago? Are journalists today prepared for another January 6th-scenario, if officials deny the results of the Mid-term-election?

The elections pose an important test for American institutions and guardrails –from the courts to public servants. American journalists, who have come under growing political pressure under Trump and MAGA, will have an opportunity to demonstrate what they have – and have not – learned from this challenging decade of journalism under populist attack.

Escalating attacks

During Donald Trump's first term as President, he consistently, vocally and forcibly attacked the media, calling it the "enemy of the people" and a range of other slurs, from "fake" and "phony" to "crazy" "dishonest" and "disgraced".

Tump also oversaw deep cuts to public media, and appointed a new leadership team to The Voice of America, the US's oldest and largest international public service broadcaster. This led to mounting politicisation at the news organisation, and a chilling effect that shaped how journalists reported on crucial issues, from Black Lives Matters to the 2020 election.

In his second Presidential term, Trump's attacks on the media have only escalated. Like other authoritarian leaders around the world, Trump has followed a 'populist playbook' outlined in the book *The New Censorship: How the War on the Media Is Taking Us Down*. This includes attacking the media on multiple fronts beyond the hostile rhetoric: in the online war, the legal war, the legislative war, the physical war, the access war, and the financial war.

The US is, today, at the very lowest ranking in its history on the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, coming in at 64 out of 180 countries. According to the organisation, journalists in the United States today routinely experience harassment, intimidation and assault when reporting, particularly when covering demonstrations.

Trump's restrictions of journalists escalated even further in the lead up to the mid-term elections. In September 2026, the President took the unprecedented step of banning three entire news organisations from the White House – preventing any journalist form CNN, Politico or MS Now fron entering the grounds. The ban was all the more remarkable, because CNN is a key member of the TV "pool system": a group of only five outlets that take turns filming the President.

The Power of Solidarity

While Trump's most recent media restrictions were unprecedented – so too was the response from journalists. Rival news outlets that are famously competitive with one another, banded together, and demonstrated that solidarity is a powerful and profound tool of resistance.

The news organisations in the Press Pool - CNN, ABC, CBS, Fox News and NBC – span incredibly wide ideological positions. But they came together to boycott Trump, and stop reporting until the ban was lifted. A number of other outlets joined in, from the New York Times to Washington Post, reinforcing the impact. The silence that followed, and a group lawsuit, pushed the President to stand down.

This organised action, professional collaboration, and public demonstration of solidarity is exactly the approach advocated by a recently published, evidence-based guide for newsrooms reporting under pressure - titled **Newsroom CPR (Covering Populism Right)**, by Dr Ayala Panievsky (City St George's) and Michael Hauser-Tov (*Haaretz*).

The guide sets out 10 principles of best practice for reporting on autocratic leaders, from avoiding 'false equivalence', to exposing censorship, and engaging with audiences. If ever such a guide was needed – it is in the week of the mid terms election.

Silencing Women Journalist during the Midterms: The Impact of Misogyny on Press Freedom

Lea Hellmueller and Julie Posetti

President Trump's attacks on women journalists have intensified during the 2026 midterm elections. He has increasingly targeted reporters who challenge him – with the women among them predominantly in his sights. This reflects the continuation of a pattern of gendered attacks on women journalists which began during Trump's first term.

When misogyny is weaponised against women journalists by powerful political actors, it represents a dual threat – undercutting both media freedom and gender equality. It's part of a continuum of violence against women journalists which exposes them to both increased online violence and an escalating risk of physical attack. It also threatens the democratic function of the media and women's right to participate in the public sphere.

The International Women's Media Foundation has documented President's Trump's attacks on women journalists since the 2016 presidential election campaign. At the time of writing, their "On the Record" project, sometimes referred to as the "Trump Tracker" had documented 40 attacks by the president or senior members of his administration over the past decade. Twenty-six of these incidents were recorded in 2026, demonstrating the escalation of this pattern of abuse.

Attacks during the midterms range from Trump calling ABC News correspondent Karen Travers "not a particularly attractive person" to berating Bloomberg's Catherine Lucey with "Quiet, piggy!" on Air Force One, and his repeated attacks on CNN's Kaitlin Collins, whom he has described as a dummy, "You're a low-IQ person. You're a dummy, and you work for CNN".

In each of these cases, the presidential attacks were accompanied by surges in online violence experienced by the journalists. This is part of a vicious and self-perpetuating circle which we have previously documented. Online harassment and threats beget offline attacks, and offline abuse, such as political actors targeting female journalists during public appearances, can trigger an escalation of online violence that, in turn, can exacerbate offline risks. Our research for UN Women established that 42 per cent of the women journalists we surveyed in late 2025 had experienced offline attacks, abuse and harassment triggered by online violence. That figure has more than doubled since 2020.

And research for UNESCO which underpins our UN Women study found that government officials and political actors were among the most frequently identified perpetrators of these attacks.

Gendered slurs and disinformation directed at women candidates and journalists became particularly visible during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign when Donald Trump called his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton "such a nasty woman". The phrase quickly gained

momentum, went viral online, and turned into a nightly feature of the 2016 Republication convention in Cleveland for his supporters to chant "lock her up!".

A decade later, although the World Economic Forum reports that the world is moving closer to gender parity, this progress remains fragile. At the same time, growing evidence points to the consequences of gender backsliding for democratic institutions, including the press.

Within the context of the midterm elections, attempts to silence and erase women journalists' voices reflect broader efforts to shrink women's role in the public sphere. Such attacks can serve as an early warning sign of democratic backsliding, a process that goes hand in hand with gender backsliding.

One of the most significant impacts of this process is the chilling effect on women journalists and women political actors. They are more likely to adopt avoidance strategies than resistance strategies when confronted with misogynistic attacks. Our research commissioned by UN Women shows that 45 per cent of women journalists surveyed self-censor on social media with 22 per cent reporting self-censoring in the workplace in response to online violence. Many women journalists choose to self-censor, leave reporting beats or exit the profession altogether to protect themselves from further harm. By contrast, relatively few women journalists report online and offline violence to the police, seek legal help or challenge their perpetrators. Almost a fifth of women journalists considered leaving the industry due to online harms according to other studies.

Meanwhile, women journalists' self-censorship on social media or at work is detrimental to press freedom and women's participation in democratic deliberation. While often adopted as a protective measure, self-censorship can undermine newsroom diversity, reduce information equality and limit the visibility and representation of women politicians and other marginalized voices.

These concerns are especially relevant during the current midterm election cycle, which has seen a record number of women that are running for US House seats. Democrats, in particular, are increasingly confident they will have a record number of women serving in the House in the next Congress.

Our research suggests that women journalists often function as proxies for women in public life more broadly. Hence, attacks on women journalists are also attacks on women's participation in the public sphere. These threats are further amplified by the mainstreaming of generative-AI tools. Our UN Women research found that over 19% of women journalists had experienced what they believed to be AI-assisted online violence targeting them.

These abuses intensify during heavily critical voting cycles such as the midterms according to IWMF. Such attacks form part of a broader spectrum of hostility and intimidation that threatens both gender equality and gender representation during election periods and beyond.

From “Talafreakos" to “Orphaned Voters”: Latinos, Media and the Elections

Celeste González de Bustamante

From California to Texas, along the southern United States, Latino voters and candidates will influence the outcome of the 2026 midterm elections. In California, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Xavier Becerra, the son of Mexican immigrants leads the race for governor, and if he wins voters will have elected the first Latino governor in the state since 1875.

In Texas, Gina Hinojosa, a Democrat running for governor, is closing in on Governor Greg Abbott’s lead with polls showing her trailing him by three points. James Talarico, a Texan of Italian heritage, who is polling well among Latino voters, could win the race against Republican Ken Paxton, to become the first Democrat in Texas to be elected to the U.S. Senate in almost four decades. Austin-based singer-songwriters Gina Chavez and Carrie Rodriguez teamed up on social media with research and storyteller Brené Brown to stump for Talarico. Donning cowboy hats, the three joyfully described themselves as “Talafreakos,” and encouraged Texans to vote early for the eighth-generation Texan.

In Arizona, JoAnna Mendoza, a Democrat and Latinx candidate for Congressional District 6, has outpaced her opponent in spending, and she has a slight edge over Republican incumbent, Juan Ciscomani.

In Arizona, where just over 30 percent of its residents identifies as Latino, voting advocacy groups and news media outlets are working in innovative ways to inform voters in a challenging landscape. At a recent public forum at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication in downtown Phoenix, four well-known Latino journalists gathered to discuss the upcoming midterms. The panel entitled, “Ahora qué (Now what): Latinos, Media and the Elections,” was moderated by Valeria Fernández, executive director of AltaVoz, a non-profit organization that supports, trains and mentors journalists who cover underrepresented communities.

Panelist Maritza Felix, who founded Conecta Arizona, talked about how voters in the state’s rural communities feel “orphaned” by politicians, where people sense that neither party has attempted to connect with them. Felix stressed that for her non-profit Spanish language news outlet, informing people about the elections and political issues has meant “meeting people face-to-face” and “that has been the most important thing.” Conecta Arizona also hosts a weekly “Hora de Cafecito” (Coffee Hour) on WhatsApp to discuss local and cross-border issues. “We connect with first time voters, and we build bridges,” she added.

Long-time KJZZ journalist, Al Macias said every time there is a big election, the public discourse returns to the old phrase the “Sleeping Giant,” a metaphor that gained currency in the 1980s to refer to the growing number of Latino eligible voters who would someday awaken and go to the polls in larger numbers. Macias said he might be more cynical than others at the panel, “They don’t invest (politicians) because Latinos don’t vote. There’s no penalty.”

“It’s a Catch-22,” said Elvia Díaz, founder of Notas and former columnist for the Arizona Republic. Díaz added, “politicians wait until the last minute. They talk about it, but they don’t

invest in the communities beyond the elections." On her podcast, Díaz interviewed Juan Proaño, LULAC president (League of United Latin American Citizens). She asked him if Latinos were going to make a difference this election cycle? "I think that we are going to make a difference," Proaño said. He added that this is one of the most important elections for Latinos because they will have a chance to change the balance of power in the U.S. Congress, which controls the purse strings of the budget, including funding for the Department of Homeland Security.

The DHS is the second largest government agency and is the agency and includes Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which manages more than 200 detention centers across the United States. If Latinos don't help to flip the Congress, "there's nothing that's going to stop these detentions and deportations," said Proaño.

Yet above immigration, the border, health and education, Latinos rank the economy as the issue that most concerns them. The Arizona Latino journalists on the panel confirmed what recent polls show. They also discussed their trepidation about what might happen at the polls and after, once ballots are in. "I'm hopeful, but we all remember what happened on January 6th. But I don't think people will put up with it," said Macias. Díaz commented, "Elections challenges are bound to happen."

Immigration Enforcement in the United States during the second Trump Administration

Hallam Tuck

For decades, the United States has led the globe in terms of the number of deportations, the scale of immigration detention, and spending on immigration enforcement. Since taking office, however, the second Trump administration has put enforcement into overdrive, overseeing an unprecedented transformation of US immigration and border control. Data collected by the Deportation Data Project based at UC Berkeley and UCLA show that the US government increased deportations five-fold during the first year of the second Trump administration. Roughly 394,000 people were removed from the US in 2025, nearly three times the number of people returned by the European Union's border agency during the same period. The approaching midterm congressional elections offer us an opportunity to reflect on the scale, cost, and consequences of this unprecedented enforcement policy.

This increase in deportations has been driven by three factors: a dramatic rise in the number of immigration arrests, a significant expansion of detention capacity, and a huge increase in funding for federal enforcement agencies. In July, 49,000 people were taken into immigration custody, up from 8,500 in December, 2024. This increase in arrests is the product of sustained pressure from White House staff, who publicly imposed a daily quota of 3,000 arrests on Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) – the agency responsible for interior enforcement – last year. Pressure to increase arrests has led to significant changes in who is arrested, and how those arrests take place. Before the start of 2025, most people arrested by immigration authorities were taken into custody while attempting to enter the country without authorization. At the peak of immigration enforcement under the first Trump Administration in 2019, 79% of people in immigration custody were arrested at border crossings or ports of entry. By contrast, over the past six months, roughly 90% of arrests were conducted by ICE within the United States.

ICE's methods of apprehension have also changed significantly. Previously, most arrests occurred as a result of transfers from local, state, or federal jails or prisons into ICE custody. Since 2025, however, ICE has increased the numbers of arrests carried out in public by a factor of eleven. These tactics have led to confrontational public displays of force, and to the killings of Johan Guerrero in Maine, Lorenzo Araujo in Texas, and Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minnesota. Images of masked immigration officers using military equipment to carry out arrests have become ubiquitous across the country. Federal immigration authorities have sought to justify this public violence by suggesting that ICE arrests focus on the 'worst of the worst', targeting, as Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin put it 'rapists, violent assailants, drug dealers, and other criminal aliens.' Yet there is no evidence to suggest that ICE arrests are targeted based on public safety. In fact, only a fifth of people arrested by ICE in August, 2026 had been convicted of a criminal offense.

Alongside increasing arrests, the Trump administration has overseen a major expansion of immigration detention. Since January 2025, nearly 600,000 people have been booked into detention, 87% of whom were arrested within the US by ICE. Federal officials have nearly doubled detention capacity, part of an unprecedented expansion called the 'detention reengineering initiative.' This expansion has come at a premium. ICE plans to spend $35

billion on detention by the end of 2026, part of the $71 billion allocated to the agency in last year's One Big Beautiful bill. Beyond detention, the Trump administration has poured funding into immigration enforcement, such that ICE's annual budget is now larger than all of the other federal law enforcement agencies combined. Alongside record spending, 62 people have died in ICE custody since January 2025, representing a marked increase in lethality.

Since January, 2025, people across the United States have found out what it means to live in a society in which there are few meaningful limits on the resources afforded to detention deportation, and immigration control. Predictably, the effects of this authoritarian expansion of immigration enforcement have been hugely uneven. One in three Latino voters know someone who has been deported, versus only 15% of white voters. In the immediate term, evidence from recent polls suggests that immigration is not a priority for most voters, and that this administration's immigration policy has cost them votes. A poll conducted in July found that half of Americans supported abolishing ICE. Yet, despite the untold harm to communities across the country caused by this immigration policy, the Democratic party has largely failed to offer a coherent or meaningful alternative. As voters go to the polls, the path away from an authoritarian approach to immigration enforcement towards a different future has yet to come into view.

Why the Iran war will cost Donald Trump the midterms

Bamo Nouri

Donald Trump promised Americans prosperity, strength and an end to costly foreign wars. Instead, his war with Iran has delivered economic pain, strategic frustration and another open-ended conflict. As the November 2026 midterms approach, the president faces a reckoning over a war that has exposed the limits of American military power and contradicted the promises that returned him to the White House.

A catastrophic miscalculation

The warning signs were unmistakable. During June 2025's twelve-day war, Iranian missiles penetrated Israel's sophisticated air defences, while American and Israeli bombardment failed to conclusively eliminate Iran's nuclear capabilities. The world's most advanced military technology had demonstrated its destructive power, but not its ability to secure decisive political outcomes.

I warned before the 2026 conflict began, that attacking Iran would be a strategic mistake. Iran has spent decades preparing to withstand sanctions, isolation and military threats. Its strategy prioritises endurance over conventional victory, exploiting geography, asymmetric capabilities and its adversaries' vulnerabilities.

Nevertheless, Washington escalated against a state structurally prepared to resist. The fundamental miscalculation was assuming overwhelming military superiority could produce political submission.

Winning battles, losing the war

Seven months later, Iran remains battered but defiant. Its capacity to threaten shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, disrupt global energy markets and impose sustained economic costs demonstrates that Tehran need not defeat America militarily to frustrate its objectives.

Indeed, despite considerable destruction, Iran has arguably strengthened its strategic leverage. Washington can destroy targets, but cannot easily eliminate Iran's capacity to retaliate or compel its surrender. Trump now confronts the very predicament he condemned; an expensive, forever-war style conflict without a clearly achievable political victory.

The lessons of Iraq

History offers a warning. In 2006, public disillusionment with George W. Bush's Iraq war contributed to Republicans losing both chambers of Congress, in what was dubbed a 'thumping' by the then president Bush.

However, despite that invasion's disastrous consequences, Washington could still point to institutional transformations that were packaged as successes in war; Iraq's new constitution, competitive elections and a reconstructed political order, however fragile and contested.

What comparable political achievement can Trump demonstrate in Iran? Military destruction alone is not strategic victory. Unlike Iraq, the Iran conflict has produced no comparable institutional transformation, while imposing immediate economic consequences on Americans.

The price of broken promises

Rising energy prices, transport costs and inflationary pressures have forced the Iran war into American households. October polling has demonstrated widespread disapproval of Trump's handling of Iran, raising questions about the political consequences for Republicans.

For a president whose electoral appeal rested partly on affordability and rejecting foreign entanglements, these contradictions are particularly significant. The midterms will test whether voters consider the war's military achievements sufficient justification for its economic and strategic costs.

Trump promised to end America's forever wars. Instead, he has become entangled in another conflict whose political objectives remain elusive. The war's consequences are being measured not only on Middle Eastern battlefields, but in American households and, increasingly, at the ballot box.

The Stalemate in the Persian Gulf Emphasises the Strategic Danger of US Fiscal Incontinence

Michael Ben-Gad

During these midterms, discussions about fuel prices have dominated arguments about the continuing conflict between the US and Iran. In a way, this is quite odd: thanks to fracking and other technological improvements, the US is not only energy self-sufficient but a net exporter of fossil fuels. In 2025, US exports of crude oil and petroleum products averaged 10.8 million barrels a day, compared with imports of 7.9 million. Liquefied natural gas exports averaged 17.4 billion cubic feet a day in the first half of 2026, up 23% on the same period in 2025. Higher prices, reflecting trends in global markets, may be bad for individual consumers when they purchase petrol, but this improvement in the terms of trade benefits the US economy overall. Meanwhile, far more important questions about the ability of the US to project power and defend its interests, or those of its allies, against aggression from far stronger adversaries are hardly mentioned.

In the course of seven months of fighting, the US, with a population of 349 million and a $30.8 trillion economy, has so far failed to impose its will on Iran, a country of 93 million people whose economy, adjusted for purchasing power, amounted to only $1.8 trillion in 2025—all while exhausting an enormous fraction of its munitions. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that as of 1 August 2026, the direct cost of the war had already reached $38 billion and was likely growing by an additional two to three billion per month.

What are political candidates not talking about? Three things that are seemingly unrelated but closely intertwined.

First, given the results so far against Iran, should the US need to intervene to fend off an attack by Russia on a Nato ally in Europe or by China against Taiwan, how well would the US military, as currently configured, fare?

Second, how much money will it take to modernise the US military for the new era of AI and drone warfare that is emerging on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine?

Third, given the rapidly expanding debt, projected by the CBO to grow from 101% of GDP this year to 175% over the next thirty years, does the US have the fiscal capacity to deter conflict or easily raise the necessary revenue to fund a large-scale war effort should deterrence fail? Fiscal incontinence is becoming a strategic threat.

This election, a conspiracy of silence will prevail. Democrats are increasingly hostile to military spending and want it shifted to their domestic priorities and Republicans only take an interest in the country's climbing debt burden when the other party is in charge.

Tariffs are on the ballot in the US midterms. Protectionism is not

Filipe Mendonca

For the first time since Donald Trump made tariffs the centrepiece of US economic policy, voters will judge them as a record rather than a promise. The record is awkward for the White

House. New York Fed research estimates that tariffs added 2.9 percentage points to inflation across 67 categories of everyday goods. The trade deficit they were meant to close widened to US$105.6 billion in August, as imports hit an all-time high. And three in four voters told a September Cato/Morning Consult survey that tariffs had raised the prices they pay.

Yet my research on US trade politics suggests a Democratic victory on 3 November should not be read as a verdict against protectionism. Democrats who oppose the tariffs have mostly done so on cost grounds – higher prices for consumers, losses for farmers – rather than in defence of free trade. Republicans have turned the issue around, with House Republican campaign ads accusing those Democrats of siding with "Communist China". Neither party champions open markets. That consensus is a decade old: in 2016, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump competed to denounce Nafta and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. In 2026, the argument is only about the bill.

Protectionism by procedure

Nor will the election change the legal architecture. In February, the Supreme Court ruled that the emergency statute behind the "Liberation Day" tariffs did not authorise them. The administration did not retreat; it rebuilt. A temporary global tariff under Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act bridged the gap. Since July, Section 301 tariffs on 60 economies, justified by forced labour, have replaced it, alongside a growing list of Section 232 "national security" duties.

These are powers Congress delegated to the president – an arrangement that, as political scientist I.M. Destler showed, was built to shield trade policy from protectionist pressure. Today it shields protectionism – slower, more legalistic and harder to undo.

What a new Congress could do

A Democratic House would bring hearings, subpoenas and pressure over tariff refunds. Senator Ron Wyden's Congressional Trade Powers Reform Act would go further, requiring congressional approval for tariffs under Sections 232 and 301. But such a law faces a presidential veto, and overriding it requires two-thirds of both chambers, a margin no analyst expects.

If Republicans keep the House, the pipeline stays full: US trade officials are still weighing Section 301 cases on industrial "overcapacity" against 16 economies. Either way, courts, not voters, remain the sharpest check. The Court of International Trade ruled the Section 122 tariffs unlawful in May and is now hearing challenges to the forced-labour duties.

The view from the global south

For the global south, little relief is in sight. Brazil faces tariffs of up to 37.5% even though the US runs a trade surplus with it – evidence that tariffs now serve political coercion as much as commercial bargaining.

Voters can make tariffs costly for Republicans. Only judges, or a Congress able to override a veto, can make them costly for the presidency.

Could the Midterms rescue America's relations with the Global South?

Ahmed Waheed

The entire world holds its breath. As Americans vote in midterm elections, most forecasters expect power to shift in Washington. Decision desk HQ's model gives Democrats a 78% chance of winning the Congress and 56% chance of taking the Senate. Most commentators will read the result as a verdict on living costs and on President Trump, whose approval has fallen steadily since his inauguration. Polling averages now put it at around 37%.

Yet the stakes reach well beyond America's borders. For much of the Global South, the real question is whether Congress will rein in a foreign policy that has traded partnership for transaction.

From Parternship to Transaction

In March 2025 the administration cancelled about 83% of USAID's programmes; a Lancet study estimated the cuts could cause around 14 million preventable deaths by 2030. In January 2026 the US left the World Health Organization and the Paris climate agreement.

In Africa, diplomacy now centres on minerals: a December 2025 deal with the Democratic Republic of Congo gives US investors first offer on designated mining assets.

Trade followed the same logic: access to the US market became a bargaining chip, traded for concessions. Indian exporters faced a 50% US duty from August 2025. A February 2026 deal cut it, and the Supreme Court then ruled the emergency law behind such tariffs unlawful. Yet Indian goods still face an extra 10% under a new forced-labour tariff.

In January 2026, US forces seized Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, in Caracas. In late February, the US and Israel went to war with Iran, a day after Oman's mediator said a nuclear deal was within reach. Washington has embraced Pakistan's army chief, Asim Munir, as military rule deepened, while decertifying Colombia, a long-standing ally, as a drug-control partner.

Not everyone accepts that this is a break. Scholars such as Inderjeet Parmar argue that US foreign policy, whether liberal, realist or "America first", has always aimed at sustaining American dominance, with "partnership" as its language. There is something to this, but for governments in the South the form of American power matters as much as its aims. Aid, predictable trade rules and multilateral bodies gave them something to bargain within, and these have gone.

What Can a Democratic Congress do?

Congress controls spending, its strongest lever. A Democratic majority could build limits on unauthorised military action into defence spending, scrutinise the Congo minerals deal, and legislate to narrow the trade laws presidents use to impose tariffs. The Supreme Court's ruling, which treated tariffs as part of Congress's taxing power, gives it firmer footing.

The Iran war shows the limits: a war powers resolution cleared both chambers in June, and the White House carried on regardless. A majority is not a veto-proof majority either, and Democrats' own agenda puts healthcare, not foreign policy, first.

The power of the purse has also proved weaker in practice than on paper. In September 2025 the Supreme Court let the administration withhold more than US$4 billion in aid Congress had approved, and a dismantled agency cannot be rebuilt by a budget line. Supporters argue that much aid was poorly targeted and that hard bargaining serves US interests better.

For governments from Caracas to Kinshasa, a Democratic Congress would mean more friction for the White House and more predictability for them, not a return to 2024. The midterms could slow America's drift away from the Global South. They are unlikely to reverse it.

From Howdy Modi to Hostility: What the Rift Means for the US Mid-Term Elections

Atul Bhardwaj

In September 2019, Trump and Modi stood together before 50,000 people at Houston's NRG Stadium. Six years later, the friendship is in ruins and the two countries are locked in a trade war.

How it unraveled

Trump's first term brought real cooperation: a revitalised Quad, an Indo-Pacific strategy, expanded defence ties and top-tier technology-sharing status for India.

After Trump's return in January 2025, the reset did not last. Tariffs on Indian goods reached 50 percent by August, half of it a penalty for Russian oil purchases, hitting about 70 percent of Indian exports. Exports fell 37.5 percent between May and September 2025. Diplomatic insults followed: Trump's claim to have brokered the India-Pakistan ceasefire, which New Delhi denies, and demeaning rhetoric about Indian immigrants. Major IT firms were also cut off from the PERM green-card pipeline.

Why it matters strategically

India no longer fits America's calculus. Washington treats it as a transactional counterweight to China, courted when useful and discarded when it pursues Beijing directly, as in the 1970s. With Trump welcoming Xi Jinping and the Pentagon reportedly dropping the "Indo-Pacific" label, India looks expendable. Modi has hedged by visiting China and deepening BRICS engagement, though Indian elites still trust the US more than China. For the US, the risk is losing a key partner against China.

What endures

Two threads survive. The military relationship has held. The joint excercises are being held regularly. For example the bilateral excerice -Yudh Abhyas in Alaska in 2025, and its - involving the two Armies is goung on uniterrupted. The second important link is that both Trump and Modi remain tethered to Benjamin Netanyahu, united by concerns over Islamist extremism. The partnership is likely to survive, as it did after the 1970s lull, because India's elite remains committed to the West.

Impact on the 2026 midterms

Midterms turn on inflation, energy prices, jobs, healthcare and immigration, so the Modi-Trump relationship is a niche issue. Bipartisan support for India ties persists in Congress but carries less weight than China, Iran or Russia. If Democrats win the House, expect more oversight of tariffs and visas, but not automatic reversals of "America First" measures.

In India, however, anti-Trump sentiment runs deep. Many Indians, stung by the tariffs and the insults, are looking forward to Trump's party being trounced at the hustings, a kind of vicarious revenge. Whatever the satisfaction in New Delhi, it would change little in policy.

Will Indian Americans be affected?

Largely not at the ballot box. Ever since Trump began his run of humiliating moves against India, Indian Americans have generally remained reticent, protecting their own interests in America rather than championing Modi's cause. Deteriorating ties are therefore unlikely to change how they vote.

The Israel factor reinforces this. Indian Americans inclined to support Israel are likely to side with Trump, whatever his treatment of India.

The community's roughly 2.6 million eligible voters are concentrated in suburban districts that can decide close races, so any shift matters at the margins. If some do move, the drivers will be domestic concerns such as trade, energy costs and immigration, not loyalty to India's leadership. The more direct impact is on livelihoods: visa and green-card restrictions hit hardest, since Indians make up most H-1B workers.

Alistair Cooke and the Midterms: America at a Crossroads

Glenda Cooper and Howard Tumber

One of the key drivers around this year's midterms are the persistently negative public perceptions of Donald Trump's job performance – on average 37.5 percent approval/59.8 percent disapproval according to pollster Nate Silver. Only two presidents since the Second World War have had comparably dismal numbers. They were Harry S Truman in 1946 (33 percent) and George W. Bush in 2006 (37 percent).

Truman's midterms were right at the beginning of Alistair Cooke's record-breaking BBC programme *Letter from America* - only the 34th episode out of a total of 2,869 broadcasts.

So what does Cooke's report on the Truman midterms show? In fact, very little about Truman himself. The president himself barely features; for much of the broadcast, Cooke explains the American political system unfamiliar to British audiences at the time. For example he points out that midterms are set for the first Tuesday in November, so politicians can't exploit a time to best suit them, unlike in the UK.

Yet because Senate elections are held every six years to the House's two, there is never a revolutionary start to any Congress. And that for most senators, while they may be classed as a Republican or a Democrat it was local issues that bound them most, or as Cooke put it 'The Congress does not represent levels of economic interest; it represents American geography':

> All Senators complain about what is in fact their secret pride: that they are local men [sic]…It's a simple proposition but not so naïve as it seems to foreigners who have been used to elections forced on single issues.(LFA0034 3 Nov 1946)

What's different in 1946 (and even when Cooke reports on the Reagan midterms in 1986) is the lack of polarisation between the parties then. Cooke says that the names Democrat and Republican are more about labelling who's in power and who's out of power, and that they each have representatives 'identical in…political color' (LFA0034).

He also stops short of making any prediction of who will win (Truman's Democrats lost 56 House seats and twelve Senate seats in 1946). This was a pattern that he stuck to for his six decades reporting on elections. In 1990 post the George H.W. Bush midterms he pointed out that

> The Republican fortune tellers said that the people were so enraged at the performance over the budget talks of the Democrats, and they've been a large majority there for over 40 years, that they would finally throw out these incumbents in wholesale lots. Result: 96% of all the House incumbents were re-elected…So, if you want the truth about the American elections, I don't know where you should go to find it. There is no truth, or rather, there are many truths, most of them contradictory (LFA 2178, 9 Nov 1990)

Perhaps however Trump should take biggest note of another second-term Republican president who faced Democratic control of Congress: Reagan in 1986. Cooke points out that raw numbers shouldn't be seen as the real way a president has his lock on power loosened:

> The one power that does change hands when a party takes over control of the Senate is the great power of the committee chairmen. The standing committees of Congress are the trenches where most, if not all, political battles are fought. (LFA1968 7 Nov 1986)

The other conclusion that may be taken away from these midterms is who it benefits for a Democratic presidential run in 2028. In the 1990 midterms, Cooke pointed out that two of the Dem likeliest frontrunners at the time – Mario Cuomo and Bill Bradley either just squeaked in or saw an erosion of their vote and didn't run. 'The Democrats,' said Cooke, 'will spend their spare time in the next two years looking for a Moses. Neither Governor Cuomo, nor Senator Bill Bradley seems to be he, him, it' (LFA 2178). In fact it wasn't until more than a year later a senator called Bill Clinton would formally announce his presidential candidacy. The Republicans may be wondering which Democratic equivalent of Clinton may emerge from 3 November 2026.

US Midterm Elections Commentaries

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