



The Republican Party ahead of the 2026 midterms

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Most Americans currently view Donald Trump's presidency negatively, primarily as a consequence of the rising cost of living. Nevertheless, the Republican Party remains firmly dominated by Trump. He continues to enjoy the support of the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) base despite tensions over the war with Iran, which some within the movement regard as a departure from the isolationist tenets of the 'America First' agenda. Although openly distancing themselves from the president remains politically risky for Republican politicians, losing the House of Representatives in the midterms would increase the political cost of loyalty to Trump and could shift the balance of power within the Republican camp away from him.

Delivering on the 2024 mandate. In their campaign messaging, Republicans emphasise that the administration has delivered on the promises made in 2024, particularly on issues important to the MAGA movement. These include tougher immigration enforcement and deportation policies, economic deregulation, cuts to federally funded diversity, equity and inclusion programmes and the adoption of a tax package to make Trump's 2017 reforms permanent. For MAGA voters, these measures demonstrate the president's ability to deliver on the policy programme he campaigned on.

However, this record has not improved the administration's standing among the wider electorate. Dissatisfaction with the rising cost of living and criticism of Trump's economic policies remain widespread. In a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted in May 2026, 67% of respondents said that the US economy was heading in the wrong direction, 74% were dissatisfied with their own cost of living and 73% disapproved of Trump's handling of the issue. Among independent voters, disapproval rose to 79%. The weakness of the Republicans' message is also reflected in public perceptions of the party itself. In an Economist/YouGov poll conducted on 5–8 June 2026, 36% of respondents had a favourable view of the Republican Party and 55% an unfavourable one. Among Republicans and MAGA supporters, however, support for the party stood at 87%.

Further Economist/YouGov data illustrate the scale of public dissatisfaction. In June 2026, only 29% of Americans

approved of Trump's handling of the economy, while 63% disapproved, giving him a net approval rating of minus 34 points. At the same stage of his first term, his net approval rating on the economy stood at plus eight points. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, annual CPI inflation stood at 4.2% in May 2026. Energy and petrol prices have respectively risen by 23.5% and 40.5% year on year. Higher oil prices following the outbreak of the war with Iran and disruptions to supplies through the Strait of Hormuz drove up fuel costs.

Republican Party cohesion under pressure from Trump. Congressional Republicans are now more firmly aligned with the president than during his first term. Trump exerts decisive influence over Republican primaries, backing candidates who support his agenda and targeting politicians he considers disloyal. The primary defeat of Representative Thomas Massie in Kentucky, together with Trump's backing of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in his successful challenge to Senator John Cornyn, has reinforced this belief among Republicans. As a result, despite visible tensions between the White House and Republican leaders in both chambers, Congress's oversight of the administration remains weak.

These tensions are particularly apparent in the Senate. Trump's pressure to abolish the filibuster has left Senate Majority Leader John Thune caught between the president's demands and resistance from Republican senators concerned about weakening the minority party's procedural

rights. The filibuster allows a Senate minority to delay or block many bills because ending debate normally requires 60 votes. The conflict with Iran has also exposed the limits of party discipline and divisions within Trump's political base. Some Republican politicians and voters see the war as a departure from the 'America First' agenda and a breach of Trump's promise to keep the United States out of new foreign conflicts. Criticism from parts of the MAGA movement, including the influential commentator Tucker Carlson, further sharpened the dispute by portraying US action against Iran as serving Israeli rather than American interests.

Republican strategy for the November midterms. Trump's low approval rating is likely to turn the congressional elections into an informal referendum on his second term. In an Economist/YouGov poll conducted on 13–15 June 2026, 39% of respondents approved of his performance, and 56% disapproved. Many independent voters are therefore likely to support Democratic candidates to express opposition to Trump's policies. The Republican strategy, however, will not centre on creating distance between the party and the president. Instead, Republicans will seek to mobilise the conservative base and contrast Trump's programme with the Democratic alternative. The party will highlight tax cuts, tighter border controls and national security, while blaming the Biden administration for high prices. It will warn that losing control of Congress would prevent Republicans from taking further action to reduce the cost of living.

Republicans also hope that redistricting will limit their losses in the House. As elections to the House are conducted in single-member districts, how district boundaries are drawn can strengthen one party's position regardless of the nationwide vote. In Republican-controlled states, courts have allowed new congressional maps to take effect despite allegations of partisan gerrymandering. According to some estimates, these maps could boost the Republican seat tally by as many as 12 seats and shore up the party's position in several vulnerable districts. Redistricting does not, however, guarantee that Republicans will retain their House majority. The results of special elections and state and local contests in 2025 and 2026 suggest that Democrats are rebuilding their voter-mobilisation ability and consequently performing more strongly than in previous electoral cycles.

Losing the House would end Republican control of both chambers of Congress and continue the historical pattern of US midterm elections. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the party holding the White House has lost seats in the lower chamber in 38 out of 42 midterm elections. The picture in the Senate is different. Because senators are elected statewide, redistricting has no direct bearing on the contest for control of the chamber. The result will instead depend on

the political climate in individual states and the quality of the candidates. These factors may make it more difficult for Republicans to defend their majority, although the number of Republican-held seats that Democrats could realistically capture remains limited.

Conclusions. The Republican Party remains disciplined and firmly aligned with Donald Trump. However, polling on the president's approval rating, his handling of the economy and the party's public image shows that, eighteen months into Trump's second term, Republicans are paying a political price for being in power. The partial fulfilment of the promises made in 2024 reinforces the administration's message that it is delivering results for MAGA voters, but has done little to persuade the wider electorate, with the rising cost of living and the president's unpredictability remaining their main concerns. Disputes over the war with Iran and isolated criticism from politicians and MAGA-associated commentators reveal limited divisions within Trump's coalition, though they do not yet amount to an organised political counterweight to the president within the Republican Party.

A more serious split within the GOP would probably require the convergence of several distinct developments. These could include losing the House despite favourable congressional maps, substantial Republican losses in suburban districts, a weakening of the party's position in the Senate, further economic deterioration, renewed conflict with Iran, or a collapse in Trump's support within the MAGA movement itself. There is no Republican politician who currently appears capable of challenging Trump's dominance. Any meaningful opposition is more likely to emerge not from the president's marginalised critics but from within the MAGA movement itself, and such a challenge would most likely be framed around allegations that Trump had abandoned the 'America First' agenda or failed to deliver on his anti-establishment promises.

Losing the House would weaken Trump during the second half of his term, curtail his control over the congressional agenda and increase the political cost of loyalty to him among Republicans. It would not spell the end of MAGA, which continues to dominate Republican primaries, but it could accelerate the debate over Trump's succession and the party's direction ahead of 2028. The central decision would be whether the Trumpist model continues under a new leader, or if there will be a partial return to the more traditional form of Republicanism centred on free markets, national security and alliances. For Poland and Europe, the outcome of this contest would be particularly important, shaping the long-term predictability of Republican security policy and the party's approach to US allies.