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Democrats Lead Congressional Ballot by 8 Among Likely Voters; Nearly Two-Thirds Say Most of Congress Should Be Replaced

New national poll from Centerline Research & Strategy finds an electorate sour on Congress and on President Trump, with Democrats ahead on the strength of independents and voters who dislike both parties¹

WASHINGTON, DC — Democrats hold an 8-point lead over Republicans among likely voters in the race for Congress, 50% to 42%, according to a new national poll from Centerline Research & Strategy. Among all registered voters, Democrats expand their lead to 10 points, 49% to 39%.

Democrats benefit from being the party out of power amid widespread dissatisfaction with Washington. Nearly two-thirds of likely voters (65%) say most members of Congress should be replaced with someone new, and President Trump's job approval stands at 38% among likely voters, with 62% disapproving. Neither party is overwhelmingly popular, but Democrats have an edge here, too, with a net favorable rating of +1, compared with Republicans' -14. Voters who are unfavorable toward both parties (14% of likely voters) skew heavily Democratic on the congressional ballot test, 52% to 23% for Republicans.

"Democrats hold all the cards right now, but the numbers show it's more about Republicans' and Trump's unpopularity than their own policies," said Natalie Jackson, Ph.D., founder and principal of Centerline Research & Strategy. "Voters in the middle are especially looking for change, but that doesn't mean they suddenly love Democrats. Democrats will have to work hard to hold on to these voters beyond this year."

Democrats have the advantage in the middle

Independents and "double haters" who dislike both parties fuel Democrats' sizable lead in the race for Congress. Double haters favor Democrats by nearly 30 points, 52% to 23%, and independents 48% to 31%. Democrats are slightly more consistent in voting for the Democratic candidate (98%) than Republicans are in backing the Republican candidate (92%).

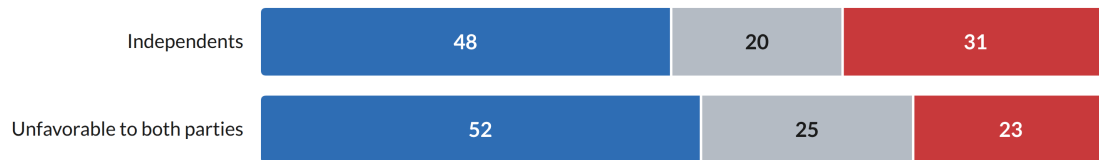
¹ This poll was not conducted on behalf of any client, party, or partisan group. Centerline Research & Strategy is an independent polling firm. For more information, go to centerliners.com.

FIGURE 1

Democrats are winning the middle

If the election for U.S. Congress were held today, would you vote for the Democratic or the Republican candidate in your district? (%)

■ Democratic candidate ■ Not sure ■ Republican candidate



Independents include those who lean toward a party, as well as those who answered other or not sure on party (n=265). Unfavorable to both parties, n=133.

Rows may not sum to 100 because of rounding. Among all likely voters: Democratic candidate 50%, Republican candidate 42%, not sure 8%.

Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Likely voters, n=930.

White likely voters and men are each closely divided (47% Republican – 45% Democrat, and 46%–45%, respectively), large shifts from big Republican advantages in 2024. Democrats run up the score among Black (83% to 12%), Hispanic (54% to 40%), urban (61% to 33%), and women (54% to 38%) voters.²

Democrats have not become overwhelmingly popular, however: asked if they have a favorable or unfavorable view of the party, likely voters are divided, 49% favorable to 48% unfavorable.

Republicans fare worse, though, with 42% of likely voters favorable and 56% unfavorable to their party. Republicans also have a higher very unfavorable figure at 42%, compared with Democrats' 32%. Independents view both parties negatively; 42% are favorable toward the Democratic Party, 33% are favorable toward the Republican Party, and a majority rates each unfavorably.

Democrats expect life to get better post-election

Among likely voters, 42% say the results of the November elections will improve their lives over the next two years, and 16% say they will make their lives worse. Another 43% say they will make no difference or are not sure. Optimism is concentrated among Democrats: 55% expect their lives to improve, compared with 31% of Republicans.

Voters undecided on their congressional vote lean pessimistic, with 34% expecting things to get worse and 20% better. Among likely voters unfavorable to both parties, 29% expect their lives to improve, and 23% expect them to get worse, which flips to 23% improve and 30% worse among registered voters in this group.

² Sample sizes for Black and Hispanic voters are fewer than 100 in the likely voter sample, so these results carry large margins of error.

Voters want Congress replaced, but few are crossing party lines

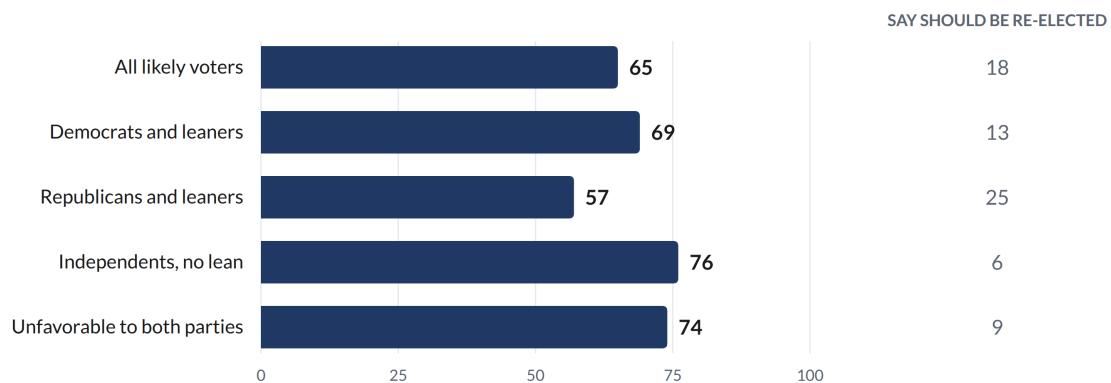
Only 18% of likely voters say most members of Congress should be re-elected; 65% say they should be replaced. The view is bipartisan, but stronger among Democrats (69%) than Republicans (57%), 25% of whom would keep most representatives in place.

Anti-incumbent sentiment is strongest among likely voters who are independents (76%) and those unfavorable toward both parties (74%), with single-digit proportions saying most representatives should be re-elected.

FIGURE 2

Majorities in both parties want most of Congress replaced

Share who say most representatives in the U.S. Congress should be replaced with someone new (%)



Question: "Do you think most representatives in the U.S. Congress should be re-elected or replaced with someone new?" The remaining 17% to 19% in each group are not sure.

Democrats and leaners, n=430; Republicans and leaners, n=410; independents with no lean, n=90; unfavorable to both parties, n=133.

Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Likely voters, n=930.

Half say they know who represents them in Congress; most of them are right

A total of 43% of likely voters and 39% of registered voters correctly name someone who represents them in Congress. Half of likely voters (50%) say they know who represents them in Congress, and 86% of those provide the name of a current representative or senator in their state in the open-ended follow-up.³

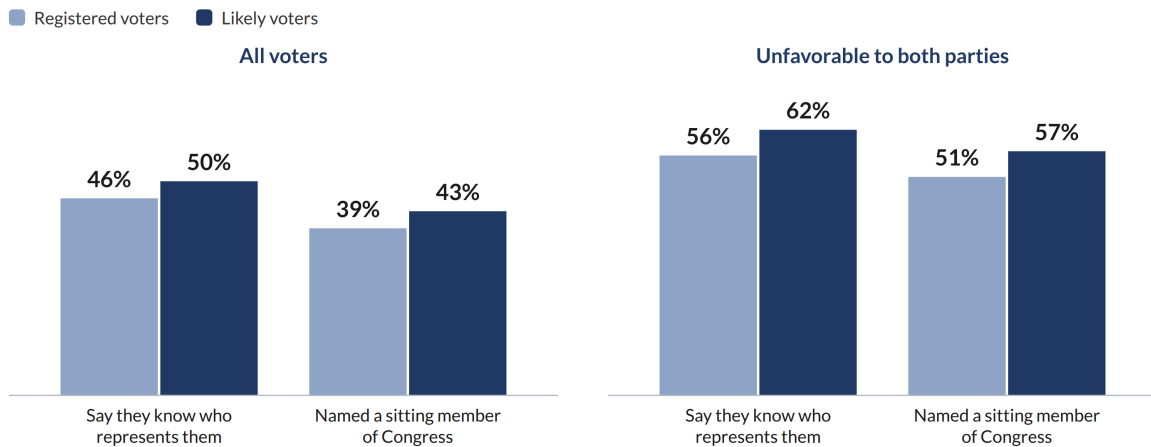
Knowledge does not differ by party, but it does increase among voters with higher levels of education and among older voters: 68% of likely voters with postgraduate degrees say they know their representative, compared with 30% of those with a high school education or less, and 61% of those 65 and older compared with 36% of those under 30.

³ Responses were not mapped to congressional district; to be considered correct, the response had to match the name of a representative or senator in the respondent's state. Senators' names were accepted since the question wording asked who represented them in the U.S. Congress without specifically naming the House of Representatives.

FIGURE 3

About half say they know their representative, and most can name one

Share of voters who say they know who their U.S. representative is, and share who then gave the name of a sitting member of Congress (%)



Percentages are of everyone in each group. Names were checked against the current membership of the U.S. House and Senate.

All voters: registered voters, n=1,239; likely voters, n=930. Unfavorable to both parties: registered voters, n=198; likely voters, n=133.

Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026.

Importantly, likely voters who are unfavorable to both parties are more likely than average to say they know their representative (62%). They are dissatisfied, not disengaged.

Trump approval: 38% among likely voters, with intense opposition

President Trump's job approval is 38% approve to 62% disapprove among likely voters, and 35% to 64% among registered voters. Opposition is more intense than support: 53% strongly disapprove, while 21% of likely voters strongly approve.

One in five Republican likely voters (20%) disapprove of the president's performance.

Independents who do not lean toward a party disapprove by about two to one (32% approve, 68% disapprove), and those unfavorable to both parties disapprove by a massive 83% to 17%.

Few groups are even closely divided. Likely voters who are small-town and rural residents are evenly split (49% approve, 51% disapprove), while every other demographic group in the poll reports significantly higher disapproval than approval, including white likely voters (43% approve, 57% disapprove).

The economy is the top issue for both parties

Asked in their own words to name the most important issue facing the country, 30% of likely voters cite inflation, prices, or the cost of living, and 27% cite the economy and jobs. Cost of living is named by nearly identical shares of Democrats (28%) and Republicans (29%).

Below the economy, the parties diverge. Democrats next name President Trump and his administration (17%) and corruption and threats to democracy (15%) as the biggest problems. About four in ten responses in the Trump and his administration category cite abuse of power or Trump making money for himself and his family. Republicans next name immigration and the border (18%), an issue only 2% of Democrats raise.

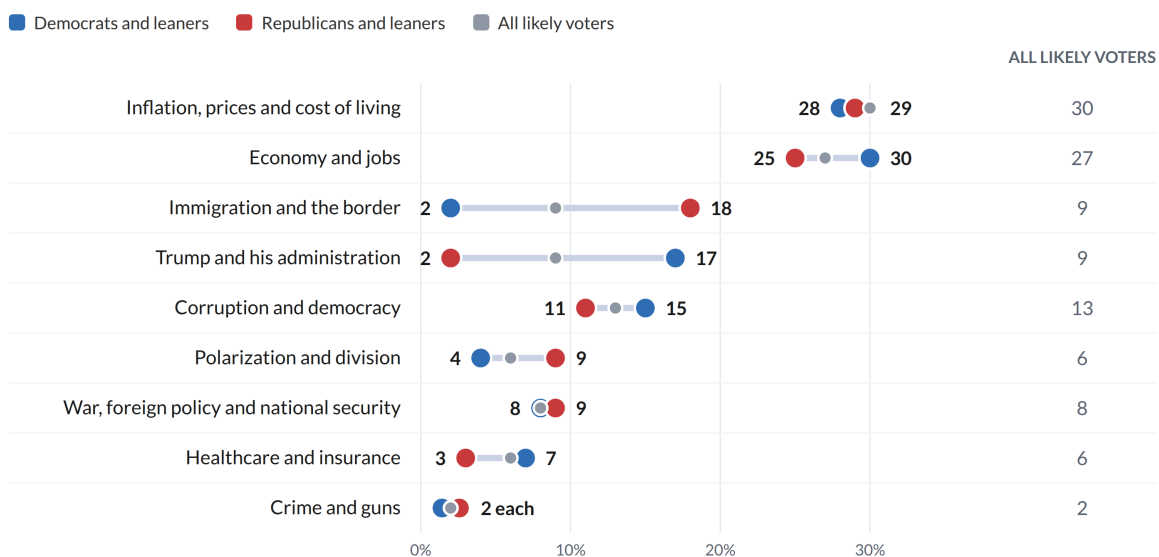
Some of Trump's specific policies make the list, but not in huge numbers. Within the inflation, prices, and cost of living category, 4% of likely voters specifically name gas prices, while 1% name tariffs within the economy and jobs category. Another 2% in the economy category cite the rising national debt. Within the war, foreign policy, and national security category, 3% name the Iran war.

Other issues mentioned include housing, homelessness, and hunger (4%); election security and accuracy concerns (2%); religious freedom (1%); AI (1%); and abortion (less than 1%).

FIGURE 4

The parties agree on the economy and split on everything after it

Most important issue facing the United States: share of likely voters naming the issue, by party and overall (%)



Open-ended responses coded into categories; up to two categories per response, so shares sum to more than 100%. "Other issues" (13% of all likely voters) not shown.

Democrats and leaners, n=430; Republicans and leaners, n=410.

Source: Centerline Research & Strategy national poll, September 26–October 1, 2026. Likely voters, n=930.

About the poll

The Centerline National Poll surveyed 1,570 U.S. adults from September 26 to October 1, 2026, using a hybrid design: 1,145 respondents from a nonprobability online panel and 425 probability-based text-to-web respondents sampled from the voter file. After fielding, 107 cases were removed for data-quality reasons. Results are reported for 1,239 registered voters and 930 likely voters. Data are weighted to population benchmarks for demographics, region, area type, and religious affiliation. Because the survey combines probability and nonprobability samples, a margin of sampling error cannot be calculated. For a fully probability-based sample of the same size, the margin of error would be plus or minus 3.2 percentage points for registered voters and 3.8 points for likely voters, including design effects. Margins are larger for subgroups.

Full topline results and methodology are available on [the Centerline Research and Strategy website](#).

About Centerline Research & Strategy

Centerline Research & Strategy is an independent public opinion research and advisory firm founded and led by Natalie Jackson, Ph.D., a nationally recognized expert with two decades of public opinion experience. Centerline specializes in quantitative and qualitative opinion research and strategic counsel for select private clients and nonprofits. This survey was not conducted for any client or entity. For more information, go to centerliners.com.

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