

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: NRCC

DATE: June 18, 2026

SUBJECT: The House Battleground Is In Focus. The Map Favors Republicans.



THE UPSHOT

With Louisiana, Alabama, Tennessee, and Florida completing their processes to redraw congressional lines by the end of May, redistricting is now complete for the 2026 cycle. The resulting battlefield paints a clear picture: **Republicans are on offense.**

For months, Democrats and the media have claimed 2026 would look like 2018. But now the battlefield tells a different story. According to an NRCC analysis, for Democrats to flip the House, they must win Republican-held seats where President Trump averaged **53.2% of the vote in 2024**, a dramatically tougher battlefield than the 2018 midterm cycle when Democrats flipped seats in districts where Trump averaged just **46.6% in 2016**.

With new maps in ten states, Republicans are targeting dozens of Democrat-held seats and charging through the cycle with stronger candidates, unprecedented fundraising advantages, and much more favorable terrain.

The maps are set. The structural dynamics favor Republicans. And **House Democrats are playing defense while facing an even steeper climb out of the minority.**

53.2%

**Avg. Trump '24 Margin
in Dem Targets**
*vs. 46.6% in 2018 flipped
seats*

+\$3M

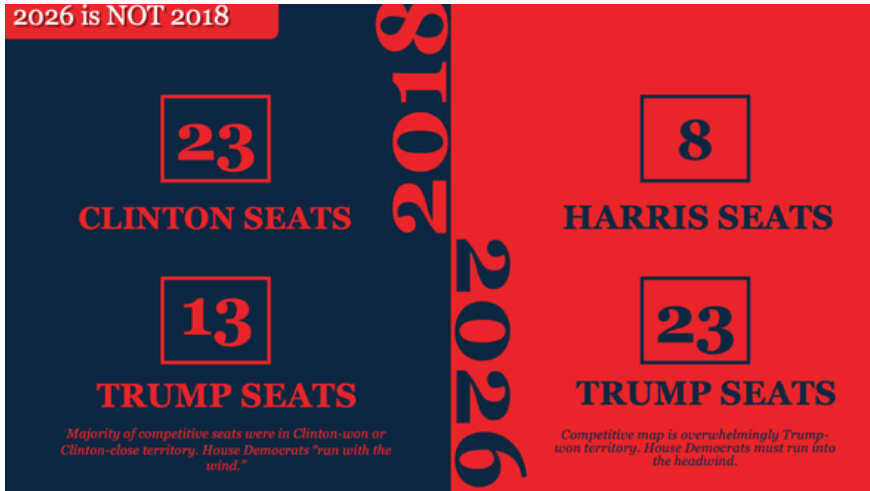
**NRCC Fundraising
Edge CTD**
*\$164M vs. \$161M (DCCC)
vs. \$90M outraise 2018*

21

**Democrats in Trump
50% Districts**
vs. just 4 in 2018

THE BATTLEFIELD: A New Reality

The single most important data point for understanding why Democrats start off in a much worse position compared to 2018: **the composition of the House battlefield has completely flipped** and looks nothing like the terrain in 2018.



In 2018, 23 Republican-held districts had been won by Hillary Clinton, **and** Republicans held 42 seats where Trump failed to crack 50% in 2016. Democrats successfully flipped 32 of those seats.

Meanwhile, just 13 Democrats were running in districts won by President Trump in 2016, and only four of the 13 Democrats were in districts where Trump won more than 50% of the vote. Republicans flipped two of those districts.

NOTE: These figures reflect the House map as of June 2026 following redistricting.

That map no longer exists. Today, there are only 14 Republicans in districts where Trump received less than 50% of the vote in 2024.

Axios recently reported that House Democrats need to “outperform their 2024 national results by nearly five percentage points if they want to retake the majority in the 2026 midterms,” underscoring just how much more difficult the current battlefield is for Democrats compared to the map in 2018.

Today, Democrats are the ones trapped on hostile terrain. There are **23 Democrats running in districts President Trump won in 2024**, with 21 of those Democrats in seats where the President received over 50% of the vote. Meanwhile, only **eight Republicans** are running in districts that Kamala Harris won. Democrats are spending time and money defending seats that already rejected them at the top of the ticket.

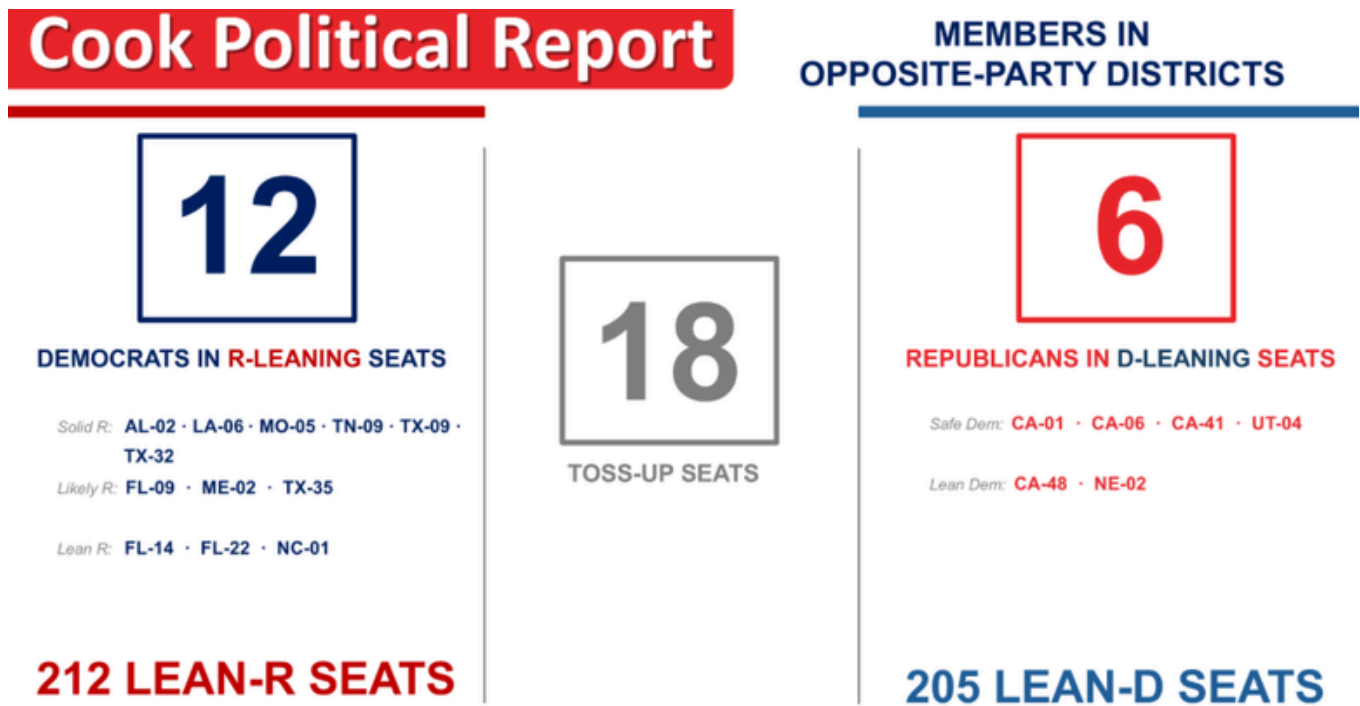
DISTRICT	DEMOCRAT MEMBER	TRUMP MARGIN
LA-06	Cleo Fields	+31.8%
TN-09	Steve Cohen (OPEN)	+21.0%
TX-09	Al Green (OPEN)	+19.7%
MO-05	Emanuel Cleaver	+18.4%
FL-09	Darren Soto	+17.8%
TX-32	Julie Johnson (OPEN)	+17.6%
AL-02	Shomari Figures	+14.3%
NC-01	Don Davis	+11.4%
FL-22	Debbie Wasserman Schultz (OPEN)	+10.7%
OH-09	Marcy Kaptur	+10.6%
TX-35	Greg Casar (OPEN)	+10.5%
FL-14	Kathy Castor	+10.4%
TX-28	Henry Cuellar	+10.4%
TX-34	Vicente Gonzalez	+10.1%
ME-02	Jared Golden (OPEN)	+9.4%
FL-25	Jared Moskowitz	+9.3%
NY-03	Tom Suozzi	+4.3%
WA-03	Marie Glusenkamp Perez	+3.3%
OH-01	Greg Landsman	+2.6%
MI-08	Kristen McDonald Rivet	+2.0%
NM-02	Gabe Vasquez	+1.1%
NJ-09	Nellie Pou	+0.7%
NV-03	Susie Lee	+0.7%

The challenge gets even steeper when looking at Democrats' actual targets. Across the 44 Republican-held seats Democrats claim to target, **Trump averaged 53.2% in 2024**. By comparison, across the 43 seats Democrats flipped in 2018, Trump averaged **just 46.6% in 2016** and never once won a majority.

Instead of running in friendly districts, **Democrats are now trying to claw their way through deep Trump country while Republicans sit on the high political ground.**

Cook Political Report in 2026: Members in Opposite-Party Districts

The lopsided exposure is confirmed by the Cook Political Report's current ratings of incumbent members sitting in opposite-party districts:



The Cook Political Report's CPR House ratings as of June, 2026.

12 Democrats are sitting in red seats. Only **six Republicans** are in blue seats.

Of the 18 toss-up districts currently rated by Cook Political Report, President Trump carried 17 in 2024, underscoring just how much more favorable the 2026 battlefield is for Republicans.

Open Seats & Retirements: Night and Day

In 2018, Cook Political Report rated **24 open GOP seats as competitive**, which was a massive gift to Democrats given that incumbency advantages disappeared.



Contrast that to 2026: there are **only seven competitive open GOP seats**; all other Republican retirements are in safe GOP territory. House Republicans' strongest, most seasoned members are here to stay and running for reelection.

House Battleground Voter Registration Trends Shift Sharply Toward GOP

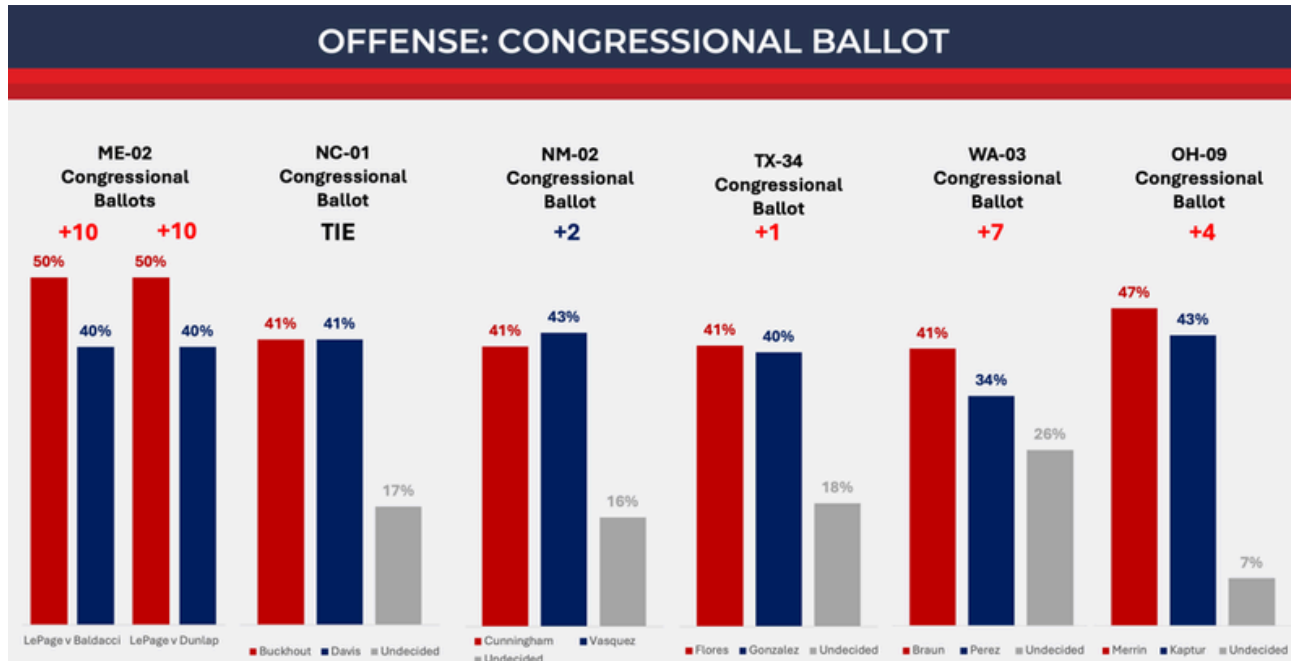
Compounding Democrats' severe structural disadvantage: district-by-district voter registration analysis across 28 battleground congressional districts shows **Republicans rapidly gaining ground while House Democrats continue losing support in the districts that will decide the majority in 2026.**

- Since the 2024 election alone, Republicans have **gained more than 229,000 voters** relative to Democrats across these battleground districts, amounting to a **1.5-point shift toward the GOP** in just over a year.
- Republicans are actively growing registration share in 19 of the 28 districts analyzed.
- Democrats have lost registration share in **27 of the 28 districts.**
- Every single district analyzed has seen **net Republican growth** relative to Democrats since 2020, totaling nearly 737,000 voters.
- Republicans have **gained roughly five points in registration margin** across the battleground since the last midterm cycle.
- The largest shifts are taking place across key battleground seats in Iowa, Florida, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Maine.

THE ENVIRONMENT: Opportunities for Offense

Battleground Polling: Democrats Already on Defense

The NRCC publicly released internal battleground polling across six highly competitive Trump-won districts (ME-02, NC-01, NM-02, OH-09, TX-34, and WA-03).



Already, Republican challengers are in strong positions across these offensive targets. Across these seats, the **Democrat brand is deeply underwater, averaging -22%**, a liability that will continue to drag them down.

The upshot: Republicans are playing offense and able to flip Trump-won seats across the House battlefield. While several of these seats (OH-09, NC-01, TX-34) will be fought under new lines for 2026, several (ME-02, NM-02, WA-03) were not subject to redistricting. **Democrats' exposure entering the 2026 cycle already provided opportunities for Republicans to flip seats - after redistricting, the GOP's target list has gotten deeper.**

Democrat Party's Approval is in the Gutter

The Democrat Party's approval rating remains stuck at rock bottom. The latest polling shows **just 20% of voters approve of the job Democrats in Congress are doing**, the latest in a string of historically record-low approval numbers that have plagued the party throughout the 2026 campaign cycle.

The collapse is striking compared to 2018, when Democrats held a 44% favorability rating. In just eight years, Democrats' support has cratered, leaving them significantly weaker and less popular than at any point during their last wave election.

Who Cares More About People Like You?

There is a deeper trend reshaping American politics that works decisively in Republicans' favor: **the partisan empathy gap is closing.** For decades, Democrats held a dominant advantage on the question of which party "cares more about people like you," which is the single most powerful emotional driver of partisan identification and vote choice. **That advantage has effectively evaporated.**

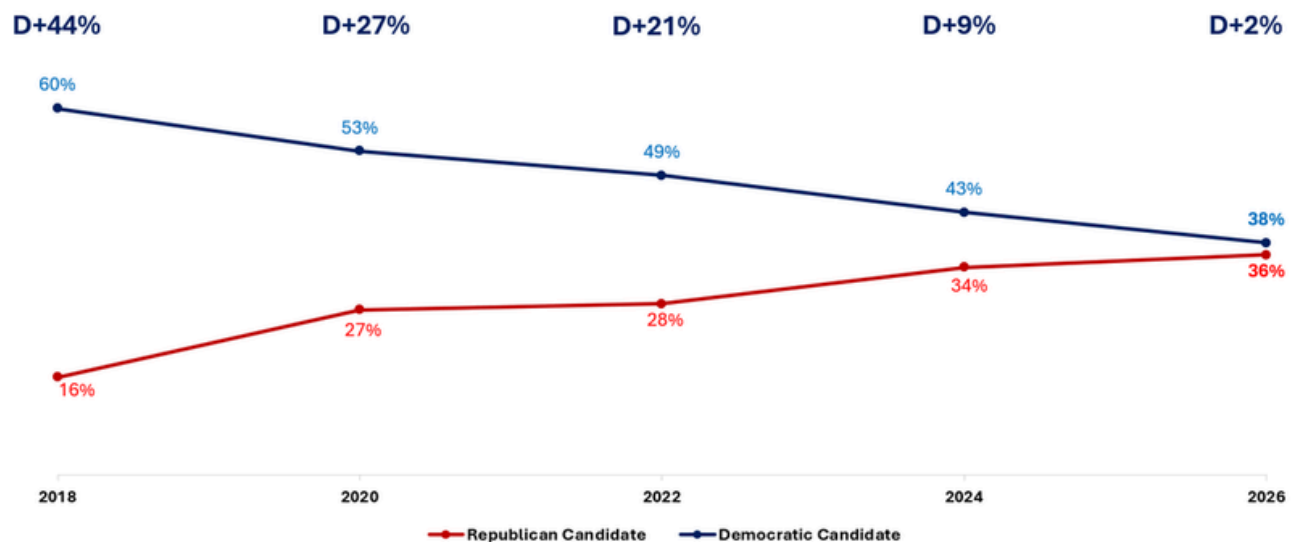
In 2005, Democrats held a **23-point advantage** on this question. By 2017, even after Trump's election, they still led by 13 points. **Now, it is tied.**



The working-class coalition realignment that delivered Trump's 2024 margin reflects a durable re-sorting of which party voters believe fights for them. Democrats are trying to win back the House as the party that no longer holds a monopoly on economic empathy.

Democrats Have Lost Hispanic Voters While Republicans Are Capitalizing

In less than a decade, Democrats have **squandered a 44-point advantage with Hispanic voters**, collapsing to a **razor-thin D+2 margin** on the generic ballot according to a May Economist/YouGov poll. Rather than reckoning with that collapse, the party is now actively compounding it.



The DCCC recently bypassed Hispanic-preferred candidates in competitive districts with substantial Latino populations, triggering an immediate backlash from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus' own PAC: "*Latino voters and candidates are not a small factor in the fight for the House majority; they are central to it,*" said BOLD PAC Chair Rep. Linda Sánchez. One of the snubbed Hispanic candidates put it more bluntly, saying it was "undemocratic to see DC elites putting their thumb on the scale."

Republicans, meanwhile, are capitalizing on this dramatic realignment over the past eight years with candidates in competitive, heavily Hispanic districts across the country, such as Kevin Lincoln (CA-13), Greg Cunningham (NM-02), Tano Tijerina (TX-28), Eric Flores (TX-34), and Carlos De La Cruz (TX-35).

CANDIDATE QUALITY: Perfect Fits for the District to Win

One of the Republicans' greatest advantages in 2026 is the quality of candidates. The first 17 members of the NRCC's MAGA Majority candidates are tailor-made for their districts and endorsed by President Trump and Speaker Mike Johnson.



These unique and interesting biographies will allow these candidates to overperform given their deep connection to their districts. In South Texas, Hispanic Republicans *Tano Tijerina* and *Eric Flores* have amazing life stories – Tijerina as a county judge, Flores as a prosecutor – to connect with their voters. *Paul LePage's* stature as the former Governor of Maine makes him a juggernaut to flip Jared Golden's seat. Veterans *Laurie Buckhout* and *Jim Desmond* have a unique story to identify with their military-heavy districts. And 'Halo' composer *Marty O'Donnell*, food scientist *Peter Oberacker*, and former NFL kicker *Jay Feely* have distinct backgrounds that will help them stand out as more than just a generic Republican. The list goes on, but the point remains: **these candidates are unique, battle-tested, and ready to flip seats.**

This stands in sharp contrast to Democrats, who have been drawn into bloody intraparty fights in must-win districts across the country.

Now, the DCCC has meddled in contentious primaries while their own members and key coalitions are clashing in a display of progressives vs the Democrat establishment. Far-left progressives like Randy Villegas in CA-22 are securing the nominations, leaving national Democrats with fractured coalitions and weak nominees.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Democrats are trying to recreate a 2018 wave on a map that bears little resemblance to 2018. In 2026, **Democrats need to win seats where President Trump averaged 53.2% in 2024.** They couldn't flip this kind of Trump-country territory even in the most favorable political environment in a generation.

Now, they're trying to do it in a cycle where Republicans lead on fundraising at every level, face a fraction of 2018's open-seat exposure, recruited stronger candidates, and have a new weapon – a debilitating Democratic brand problem weighing down their candidates and fueling bitter and divisive primaries.

With the battlefield fully in focus, Republicans are well-positioned to go on offense and hold our House majority.