Elections & Representation

Figures current as of October 2026

How votes become power in the United States, as of October 22, 2026, written before the midterm elections of November 3: who votes, how a ballot is cast and counted, how districts are drawn and why 2025-26 redrew them, the arithmetic of the Senate and the Electoral College, primaries, money, polls, the midterm map, the systems other democracies use, and the arguments for changing any of it. The election and the other dates ahead are in Module 12.

MODULE 1 — Foundations

Goal: Set the numbers and the vocabulary.

What is decided on November 3 and by what rule; the electorate, the Congress, the states, and the democracy ratings in numbers; the vocabulary, from plurality and apportionment to the generic ballot.

MODULE 2 — Who Votes

Goal: Understand why the electorate that votes is not the one that exists.

Turnout by age, education, and race; the midterm drop-off; registration and what moves turnout; disenfranchisement.

MODULE 3 — The Machinery

Goal: Follow a vote from registration to certification, and the fights of 2025-26 over it.

A vote's path; what the evidence shows on fraud and on access; the executive orders, the citizenship bill, the voter-roll program, and the Supreme Court's orders of 2026; the integrity and access cases, argued both ways.

MODULE 4 — Districts

Goal: Understand the gerrymander and the redistricting war of 2025-26.

Lines into seats, and one 60-40 state drawn three ways, worked; Rucho and Callais; the war state by state and the questions on the November 3 ballot; whether mid-decade redistricting is legitimate, argued both ways.

MODULE 5 — The Senate, the House, and the Electoral College

Goal: Read the design and its arithmetic.

Wyoming against California; the filibuster; the 435 cap; the Electoral College and the 2022 reform; the census rule on who counts, argued both ways; the Electoral College of 2028 and the map after 2030, worked.

MODULE 6 — Primaries and Parties

Goal: Understand how candidates are chosen, and by whom.

Closed, open, top-two, and Louisiana's new primaries; whether primaries polarize Congress, argued both ways; incumbency and the members who lost renomination in 2026; weak parties and strong partisans; the 2028 calendar.

MODULE 7 — Money

Goal: Read what money buys.

The 2024 bill and 2026's record; the party committees and super PACs; the industry committees; the law, from Buckley to the 2026 ruling on party spending; what money does; a competitive seat's money, worked; whether the system corrupts, argued both ways.

MODULE 8 — Polls, Forecasts, and Information

Goal: Understand how the campaign is measured and mediated.

How a poll works and how the polls have missed; the generic ballot, approval, the models, and the markets in October 2026; whether the polls are reliable this year, argued both ways; the information environment.

MODULE 9 — The 2026 Midterms

Goal: Read the map as it stands.

The fundamentals; the House and the Senate races; the governors; the ballot measures; early voting and the count; what November 3 will and will not change.

MODULE 10 — Comparison Abroad

Goal: See what other democracies do instead.

Nine systems, from Britain to Japan; what majoritarian and proportional rules buy and cost; Britain's 2024 election under three systems, worked.

MODULE 11 — Reform, and the Arguments

Goal: Weigh the changes proposed and the cases for and against.

Ranked choice and its bans, open primaries, commissions, a proportional House, a larger House, the popular-vote compact, registration, identification, and term limits; the reformers' case and the design's defense.

MODULE 12 — Where Things Stand, and What to Watch

Goal: Assemble the picture and name the dates.

The argument in brief; five contradictions; the watch list, from November 3 and the count to the 2030 census; the last word.

A note on contested ground. Elections are the subject on which the two parties dispute the rules as well as the results. On every contested question the course gives each side's case as its own advocates make it, then the evidence, saying whose evidence it is, then its own reading, stated once and labeled. Disputed claims are marked as disputed.

Officeholders, as of October 22, 2026

The people who set, run, and contest the rules, with their ages on October 22, 2026 and their years in office

Federal Officers

Office	Officeholder	Age	In office since (years)	Role in this course
President	Donald Trump (R); also president 2017-21	80	Jan 20, 2025 (1)	The executive orders on elections (Module 3) and the push for mid-decade maps (Module 4)
Vice President	JD Vance (R)	42	Jan 20, 2025 (1)	Breaks ties in the Senate (Module 9)
Attorney General	Todd Blanche	52	Aug 10, 2026 (2 months); acting from Apr 2, 2026	The Justice Department's voter-roll program and election monitors (Module 3)
Secretary of Homeland Security	Markwayne Mullin	49	Mar 24, 2026 (nearly 7 months)	The citizenship screening of voter rolls (Module 3)
Chief Justice of the United States	John Roberts	71	Sep 29, 2005 (21)	Wrote *Rucho v. Common Cause* (Module 4)
Chair, Federal Election Commission (FEC)	Shana Broussard (D)	Not found	Chair in 2026	One of the commissioners left on a commission without a quorum (Module 7)
Election Assistance Commission (EAC)	No commissioners since July 9, 2026	—	—	The federal registration form and voting-system standards (Module 3)

The Leaders of Congress

Office	Officeholder	Age	In office since (years)
Speaker of the House	Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana)	54	Oct 25, 2023 (nearly 3)
House Majority Leader	Steve Scalise (R-Louisiana)	61	Jan 3, 2023 (3)
House Minority Leader	Hakeem Jeffries (D-New York)	56	Jan 3, 2023 (3)
Senate Majority Leader	John Thune (R-South Dakota)	65	Jan 3, 2025 (1)
Senate Minority Leader	Chuck Schumer (D-New York)	75 (76 on Nov 23)	Jan 3, 2017 (9), as Democratic leader

The Party Chairs

Committee	Chair	Age	Chair since (years)
Republican National Committee (RNC)	Joe Gruters	49	Aug 22, 2025 (1)
Democratic National Committee (DNC)	Ken Martin	53	Feb 1, 2025 (1)
National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC)	Sen. Tim Scott (R-South Carolina)	61	Jan 2025 (1)
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC)	Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-New York)	59	Jan 2025 (1)
National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC)	Rep. Richard Hudson (R-North Carolina)	54 (55 on Nov 4)	Jan 2023 (3)
Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC)	Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-Washington)	64	Jan 3, 2023 (3)

Governors of the Redistricting War

State	Governor	Age	In office since (years)	Role in 2025-26 (Module 4)
Texas	Greg Abbott (R)	68	Jan 20, 2015 (11)	Signed the first mid-decade map
California	Gavin Newsom (D)	59	Jan 7, 2019 (7)	Urged Proposition 50, the counter-map
Missouri	Mike Kehoe (R)	64	Jan 13, 2025 (1)	Signed the 2025 map, now on the ballot as Proposition A
Florida	Ron DeSantis (R)	48	Jan 8, 2019 (7)	Called the special session and signed the map
Louisiana	Jeff Landry (R)	55	Jan 8, 2024 (2)	Governor when the legislature redrew after *Callais*
Alabama	Kay Ivey (R)	82	Apr 10, 2017 (9)	Governor when the state returned to its 2023 map
Tennessee	Bill Lee (R)	67	Jan 19, 2019 (7)	Called the session that split Memphis's district
Ohio	Mike DeWine (R)	79	Jan 14, 2019 (7)	Sits on the commission that adopted the new map
North Carolina	Josh Stein (D)	60	Jan 1, 2025 (1)	Has no veto over the legislature's maps
Utah	Spencer Cox (R)	51	Jan 4, 2021 (5)	Governor when a state judge imposed a new map
Indiana	Mike Braun (R)	72	Jan 13, 2025 (1)	Called the special session; the Senate rejected the map
Virginia	Abigail Spanberger (D)	47	Jan 17, 2026 (9 months)	Governor when voters approved a redraw that the state's supreme court struck down
Maryland	Wes Moore (D)	48	Jan 18, 2023 (3)	Backs Question 3, for a 2028 map

Ages and years in office are as of October 22, 2026, from birth and appointment dates taken mostly from Wikipedia's lists of officeholders, with news reports for 2026 appointments and party chairs. Shana Broussard's birth date was not found.

Who's Who, as of October 22, 2026

The institutions, committees, groups, sources, and people the course names; the officeholders, party chairs, and governors are in the tables before this page, and the candidates in Module 9

Federal Institutions

Name	What it is
The Federal Election Commission (FEC)	The agency that enforces federal campaign-finance law (Module 7)
The Department of Homeland Security (DHS); U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)	The department, and its agency that runs the citizenship database used to screen voter rolls (Module 3)
The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)	The DHS agency responsible for the security of election systems (Module 3)
The Justice Department; the Postal Service	The department that sued the states for their voter rolls, and the service whose ballot-mail rule is blocked for 2026 (Module 3)
The Census Bureau	Counts the population, which sets the apportionment of House seats and electoral votes, and runs the survey behind the turnout figures (Modules 2 and 5)
The Congressional Research Service (CRS)	Congress's nonpartisan research arm (Modules 4 and 11)
The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC)	The regulator of futures and swaps, including the prediction markets (Module 8)

Party Committees and Political Action Committees

Name	What it is
Political action committees (PACs); super PACs	Committees that raise money and give it to candidates within limits; for super PACs, see Modules 1 and 7
The Senate Leadership Fund; the Congressional Leadership Fund	The main Republican super PACs for the Senate and the House (Module 7)
Senate Majority PAC; House Majority PAC and House Majority Forward	The main Democratic super PACs for the Senate and the House, and the House PAC's nonprofit partner (Module 7)
Fairshake	The cryptocurrency industry's super PAC (Module 7)
Leading the Future; Public First	The AI industry's super PAC, and the group backing candidates who favor AI safety rules (Module 7)
The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC); the United Democracy Project	The pro-Israel lobby and its super PAC (Module 7)
The National Republican Redistricting Trust	The Republican group that coordinates the party's redistricting work (Module 5)

Advocacy Groups and Litigants

Name	What it is
The Brennan Center for Justice; Democracy Docket	A progressive law and policy institute, and a news and litigation-tracking site founded by a Democratic election lawyer, that track the voting suits (Modules 3 and 7)
The Heritage Foundation; The Daily Signal	A conservative research institute that keeps a database of election-fraud cases, and the news site it publishes (Module 3)
Restoring Integrity and Trust in Elections; the Election Transparency Initiative	Conservative groups: the first backs proof-of-citizenship laws, the second opposes ranked-choice voting (Modules 3 and 11)
The League of Women Voters; Common Cause	Groups that sued over the 2026 executive order and the citizenship screening, and over the voter-roll program (Module 3)
The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); the Institute for Free Speech	Groups that defend political spending as speech (Module 7)
Public Citizen	A consumer group that counts the states' deepfake laws (Module 8)
FairVote; Unite America; National Popular Vote	Groups that campaign for ranked-choice voting, open primaries, and the popular-vote compact (Modules 6 and 11)
People Not Politicians; Advance Colorado	The campaign that forced Missouri's referendum on its map, and the conservative group behind Colorado's Amendment 86 (Module 4)
The Sentencing Project; the Movement Advancement Project	Research groups that count disenfranchisement and track election audits (Modules 2 and 3)

Raters, Forecasters, Pollsters, and Data

Name	What it is
The Cook Political Report; Sabato's Crystal Ball; Inside Elections	The three main race-rating services; the Crystal Ball is published by the University of Virginia's Center for Politics (Modules 4 and 9)
The Silver Bulletin; Decision Desk HQ; RealClearPolling; FiftyPlusOne	Forecasters and poll aggregators: Nate Silver's model and averages, an election-results and data firm, and two polling averages (Modules 5 and 8)
The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR)	The pollsters' professional association, whose task force reviews each election's polling (Module 8)
The Pew Research Center; Gallup; AP-NORC	Survey organizations; AP-NORC is the Associated Press's partnership with the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (Modules 6, 8, and 9)
The University of Florida Election Lab	Michael McDonald's turnout series, the source of the turnout figures (Modules 1 and 2)
The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL); Ballotpedia	The legislatures' association and an online encyclopedia of American elections, the sources for laws, measures, and offices (throughout)
OpenSecrets; AdImpact	A tracker of campaign money, and a firm that tracks political advertising (Module 7)
Votebeat; The Downballot; the Wesleyan Media Project	A news site on election administration, a newsletter on down-ballot races, and a university project that tracks political ads (Modules 4, 8, 9, and 11)
Freedom House; the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem); the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)	The publishers of the democracy ratings in Module 1

People Named in the Course

Name	Who they are
Samuel Alito; Clarence Thomas; Brett Kavanaugh; Amy Coney Barrett	Supreme Court justices: Alito wrote *Callais*, Barrett *Watson*, and Kavanaugh *NRSC v. FEC* (Modules 3, 4, and 7)
Elena Kagan; Ketanji Brown Jackson	Supreme Court justices who dissented in *Callais*, *NRSC v. FEC*, and the August and September orders on the citizenship lists and the screening, and joined the *Watson* majority (Modules 3, 4, and 7)
Sparkle Sooknanan; Carl Nichols; Kari Dooley	Federal district judges: Sooknanan ruled on the citizenship screening and the voter-roll program, Nichols on the Postal Service rule, and Dooley on the Justice Department's Connecticut voter-roll suit (Module 3)
Deidre Henderson; Brad Raffensperger; Phil McGrane; Stephen Richer	Republican election officials of Utah, Georgia, and Idaho, and Maricopa County's former recorder, whose checks of noncitizen registration and voting the course cites (Module 3)
Tom Emmer; Lisa McClain; James Comer; Chip Roy; Jamie Raskin; Don Beyer; Henry Cuellar; Zoe Lofgren; Alex Padilla	Members of Congress named on redistricting, the campaign, the census, reform, and the citizenship bill (Modules 3, 4, 5, 9, and 11)
Liz Brown; Greg Goode; Richard Cash; Blake Doriot; Bryan Simonaire	Republican state senators in Indiana, South Carolina, and Maryland quoted on redistricting and ranked-choice voting (Modules 4 and 11)
Justin Riemer; Ken Cuccinelli; Alyssa Cass; Patrick Valencia; Adam Kincaid; Michael Thorning	Advocates and lawyers quoted on citizenship checks, ranked choice, the popular-vote compact, and redistricting (Modules 3, 4, 5, and 11)
Elon Musk; Greg Brockman	A donor to Republican super PACs, and the OpenAI co-founder among the AI super PAC's backers (Module 7)
Kyle Kondik; Erin Covey; Nate Silver; G. Elliott Morris; Michael McDonald	Analysts of maps, races, forecasts, polls, and turnout (Modules 2, 4, 8, 9, and 11)
Lee Drutman; Nick Troiano; Anthony Fowler; Daniel Weiner	Scholars and advocates in the debates over primaries and money (Modules 6 and 7)
Pete Hegseth; Michael Selig	The defense secretary and the CFTC's chairman (Module 8)
Andy Burnham	Britain's prime minister since July 20, 2026 (Module 10)

Module 1 — Foundations

The Numbers and the Vocabulary

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (revised edition, 2009)

Reference: The Census Bureau's Voting and Registration supplement to the Current Population Survey; the University of Florida Election Lab's turnout series; the Federal Election Commission's official results; the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL); and Ballotpedia for offices and calendars

1a. What Is Decided, and How

Americans fill an unusual number of offices by election. The Census Bureau's count of 1992 found 511,039 elected officeholders, from the president to the members of special-district boards. Nearly all of them win by the same rule, plurality in single-member districts (1c).

The Constitution gives each state's legislature the power to set the 'times, places and manner' of congressional elections, subject to laws Congress passes. More than 10,000 county and municipal offices run them, by the Election Assistance Commission's count. The United States therefore holds no single national election, but fifty-one separate ones on the same day, counting the District of Columbia's.

On November 3, 2026, the ballot carries all 435 seats in the House of Representatives and 35 of the 100 seats in the Senate: 33 in the regular cycle, and special elections in Ohio and Florida. Republicans hold 22 of the 35 and Democrats 13. The ballot also carries 36 governorships, 6,139 of the 7,386 state legislative seats in 88 chambers, and, by NCSL's count in October, 145 statewide ballot measures in 39 states.

The first fact of the subject is who takes part. Many eligible citizens do not vote, and more stay home in midterms (1b). Who is missing, and why, is the subject of Module 2.

1b. The Numbers

Measure	Figure	Note
Eligible voters	243.8 million in 2024	The voting-eligible population: citizens 18 and over, including about 3.3 million living abroad, less about 2.6 million people in prison or on probation or parole
Registered	174 million, 73.6% of citizens 18 and over (November 2024)	Self-reported in the Census Bureau's survey, so somewhat high
Turnout, 2024	64.3% of the eligible; 156.8 million ballots counted	A presidential year
Turnout, 2022	46.1% of the eligible; 112.0 million ballots counted	The last midterm
The House, October 2026	Republicans 218, Democrats 214, one independent, two vacancies	The independent, Kevin Kiley of California, left the Republican Party on March 9, 2026 and still caucuses with it. The vacancies are in Texas and Florida. The 2024 election returned 220 Republicans and 215 Democrats

Measure	Figure	Note
The Senate	Republicans 53, Democrats 45, two independents who caucus with the Democrats	Two Republicans were appointed in 2026: Alan Armstrong of Oklahoma and Darline Graham of South Carolina
The states	Governors: Republicans 26, Democrats 24. Legislative chambers: Republicans 58, Democrats 39	23 Republican trifectas, 16 Democratic, and 10 states with divided government; Minnesota's House is tied 67-67 and Nebraska's legislature is officially nonpartisan
Democracy ratings	Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026*: 81 of 100, 'Free'. The Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), *Democracy Report 2026* (March 18): an electoral democracy. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), index for 2025: 7.65 of 10, 34th, a 'flawed democracy'	Freedom House's score is its lowest for the United States, and the EIU's the lowest since its index began in 2006. V-Dem moved the country out of its top category, liberal democracy; its liberal democracy score for 2025, 0.57, was the lowest since 1965

The University of Florida Election Lab (Michael McDonald) for the eligible population, turnout, and ballots (March 2026 estimates); the Census Bureau (April 30, 2025) for registration; the House Press Gallery (September 2), with no change reported through October 8; NCSL for governors and legislatures; the raters' own reports, with Pew Research Center's summary (April 15, 2026) for the V-Dem and EIU scores.

1c. The Vocabulary

Term	Meaning	Why it matters
Plurality, or first past the post	The candidate with the most votes wins, majority or not	The rule for nearly every American office, so a third candidate can decide a race without winning it
Single-member district	One seat per district	A party with 45% of a state's vote can win none of its seats or all of them, depending on the lines (Module 4)
Apportionment	The division of the House's seats among the states by population after each census	It also sets each state's electoral votes (Module 5)
Redistricting; gerrymander	Drawing district lines within a state; lines drawn to favor a party or to protect incumbents	The fight of 2025-26 (Module 4)
Voting-eligible population	Citizens 18 and over, less those serving felony sentences that bar them from voting	The denominator scholars prefer for turnout: the voting-age population includes noncitizens and makes turnout look lower
Trifecta	One party holds the governorship and both legislative chambers	Most of the new maps of 2025-26 were drawn by trifectas
Incumbency	Already holding the seat, with the name, the money, and often a district drawn around it	Most members who run again win (Module 6)
Generic ballot	A poll asking which party's candidate a voter would choose for Congress, with no names	The best single gauge of a midterm House result (Module 8)
Partisan lean; the Cook Partisan Voting Index (PVI)	A district's presidential vote measured against the nation's, as the Cook Political Report calculates it	An R+5 district voted five points more Republican than the country
Provisional ballot; canvass; certification	A ballot cast while eligibility is checked; the official count and reconciliation; the formal declaration of the result	The machinery of Module 3
Electoral College	The electors, allocated by state, who choose the president	Module 5
Super PAC	A political action committee that may raise and spend unlimited sums if it does not coordinate with a candidate	Module 7

Term	Meaning	Why it matters
Ranked-choice voting	Voters rank candidates; the last-place candidate is eliminated and ballots transfer until someone has a majority	Module 11

Module 1 Key Points

Foundations

• Nearly every American office is won by plurality in a single-member district, under rules each state sets and local offices run.

• About 244 million citizens were eligible in 2024; two-thirds voted then, and fewer than half in the 2022 midterm.

• November 3 decides 435 House seats, 35 Senate seats, 36 governorships, 6,139 legislative seats, and 145 statewide measures.

• Republicans hold the House 218-214, with one independent and two vacancies, and the Senate 53-47.

• Freedom House and the EIU gave the United States their lowest scores in 2026, and V-Dem downgraded it to an electoral democracy.

Module 1 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Under the Constitution, who sets the 'times, places and manner' of congressional elections?

A) The Federal Election Commission
B) Each state's legislature, subject to laws Congress passes
C) The Election Assistance Commission, which certifies the results
D) The Supreme Court, through its rulings on each state's procedures

2. Why does the course measure turnout against the voting-eligible population rather than the voting-age population?

A) Because the Census Bureau stopped publishing the voting-age population
B) Because registration lists are more accurate than the census
C) Because the voting-age population includes noncitizens and others who may not vote, which makes turnout look lower
D) Because the eligible population is the larger of the two

3. What does 'plurality' mean in an American election?

A) The most votes wins
B) A candidate needs a majority, or else a runoff is held
C) Seats are shared in proportion to each party's votes
D) Voters rank the candidates, and the last is eliminated in turn

4. What share of eligible citizens voted in the 2022 midterm?

A) About 30%
B) About 50%, the highest since 1914
C) About 66%, the highest turnout since 1900
D) About 46%, below half of those eligible

5. Why does the course say the United States holds 'fifty-one separate' elections on November 3?

A) Because each state's governor certifies the national result
B) Because the Federal Election Commission delegates the counting
C) Because each state and the District sets its own rules, which more than 10,000 local offices carry out
D) Because the Senate seats are elected on separate calendars

Module 2 — Who Votes

Why the Electorate That Votes Is Not the One That Exists

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Jan Leighley and Jonathan Nagler, *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States* (2014)

Reference: The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) voting supplements for 2020, 2022, and 2024, as reweighted by the University of Florida Election Lab, and The Sentencing Project's *Locked Out 2024*

2a. The Gaps

Turnout is not random. In every election the people who vote are older, more educated, and more settled than the people who could, and the gaps are large and stable. The table gives the University of Florida Election Lab's estimates, which reweight the Census Bureau's survey to match the votes actually counted.

Age and education draw the sharpest lines. In 2024 citizens aged 60 and over voted at about one and a half times the rate of those aged 18 to 29. Citizens with a postgraduate degree voted at more than two and a half times the rate of those without a high-school diploma.

The gaps by race widened in 2024. Turnout among Black and Hispanic citizens fell more than three times as far from 2020 as it did among white citizens, as the political scientist Michael McDonald noted. Homeowners vote more than renters, married people more than single people, and people who have lived at one address for years more than people who moved last year.

The mechanism is habit and attachment. Voting is learned and repeated, registration follows an address, and campaigns spend their contact budgets on people who voted before. The people whose lives are stable are the people the system finds easiest to keep on the rolls, and the ones the campaigns find easiest to reach.

Group	2020	2022	2024
Age 18-29	52.5%	25.5%	48.5%
Age 30-44	64.4%	40.5%	60.0%
Age 45-59	72.9%	52.7%	70.2%
Age 60 and over	78.0%	63.5%	75.6%
White, non-Hispanic	72.6%	53.3%	71.0%
Black, non-Hispanic	65.6%	41.0%	59.8%
Hispanic	52.5%	30.7%	47.3%
Other, including Asian Americans	59.8%	34.5%	56.1%
No high-school diploma	36.3%	20.7%	32.8%
High-school diploma	54.2%	34.9%	50.2%
Some college, or a college degree	76.9%	53.0%	72.9%
Postgraduate degree	90.4%	70.6%	87.5%

Turnout as a share of eligible citizens in each group. University of Florida Election Lab, CPS demographic turnout rates reweighted to the official count (version 2.1, May 27, 2025). The series has no separate rate for Asian Americans.

2b. Presidential and Midterm

The subject's largest regularity is the midterm drop-off. Turnout fell by almost a third between 2020, when 66.4% of eligible citizens voted, the highest share since 1900, and the 2022 midterm. It fell by a sixth between 2016, when it was 60.1%, and 2018, when it was 50.05%, the highest of any midterm since 1914.

The drop is not even. In the table, turnout among citizens under 30 halved between 2020 and 2022, while among those 60 and over it fell by less than a fifth. The midterm electorate is therefore older and more partisan than the presidential one, and the change works against the president's party, whose less committed voters stay home while the opposition's turn out. Its record since the Civil War is the starting point of Module 9.

The other trend is a rise. American turnout, low by the standards of most rich democracies for half a century, jumped in 2018 and 2020 on polarization and the spread of mail and early voting. The 2022 midterm kept most of the gain: of the twelve midterms from 1974 to 2018, only 2018's turnout was higher.

2c. Registration, and What Moves Turnout

- **Registration.** The United States is one of the few democracies that leaves registration to the voter rather than the state, and many eligible citizens were not registered in 2024 (Module 1). Automatic registration through motor-vehicle and other agencies covers 24 states and the District of Columbia, 20 states and the District let voters register on Election Day, and 42 states and the District register voters online (Ballotpedia, 2026).
- **Convenience.** Universal vote-by-mail raised turnout by about two points in California, Utah, and Washington from 1996 to 2018, and did not change either party's share of turnout or of the vote, in a Stanford study by Daniel Thompson, Jennifer Wu, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew Hall (2020). Both parties' voters use mail ballots when they are offered.
- **Identification.** The largest national study, by the economists Enrico Cantoni and Vincent Pons (data from 2008 to 2018, published in 2021), found that strict identification laws had no measurable effect on registration or turnout. It found no significant difference for non-white voters, and 'no effect on fraud – actual or perceived'.
- **Competition and mobilization.** Turnout runs higher where races are close and campaigns spend. The parties' field operations work at the margin, which is where close elections are decided.
- **Felony disenfranchisement.** The Sentencing Project counted 4,049,978 people barred from voting by felony convictions in 2024, 1.7% of the voting-eligible population, down 31% from 5.9 million in 2016 as states restored rights. One in 22 Black Americans of voting age is barred, more than three times the rate for others. Ten states bar some people after their sentences end, and Florida and Tennessee bar more than 6% of adults. Virginia's Question 3 on November 3 would restore rights automatically when a sentence ends.

Module 2 Key Points

Who Votes

• Voters are older and more educated than eligible citizens; in 2024 postgraduates voted at over twice the rate of those without diplomas.

• Turnout falls between a sixth and a third from a presidential year to the next midterm, most among the young.

• Turnout jumped in 2018 and 2020 and mostly held; among midterms since 1974, only 2018's beat 2022's.

• Strict identification laws showed no measurable effect on turnout, and universal mail voting raised it about two points without helping either party.

• About four million people were barred by felony laws in 2024, including one in 22 Black adults.

Module 2 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. In the University of Florida's series, how did turnout among citizens aged 18 to 29 change from 2020 to 2022?

A) It fell by about half
B) It rose slightly
C) It fell by about a tenth, like other groups
D) It held steady, because mail voting kept young voters in

2. What did the largest national study of strict voter-identification laws, by Cantoni and Pons, find?

A) A drop of about five points in turnout, concentrated among non-white voters
B) A large fall in fraud, at a small cost in turnout among the young
C) A rise in turnout, as voters gained confidence in the count
D) No measurable effect on turnout or fraud

3. Why is the midterm electorate older and more partisan than the presidential one?

A) Registration rules are stricter in midterm years
B) The voters who skip midterms are disproportionately young and less partisan
C) Older citizens are automatically mailed midterm ballots
D) Turnout among older citizens rises in midterms while it falls among the young

4. What did the Stanford study of universal vote-by-mail in California, Utah, and Washington find?

A) It raised Democratic turnout by about five points
B) It lowered turnout among older voters
C) It had no effect on turnout but helped Republicans
D) It raised turnout by about two points and did not change either party's share of the vote

5. How many people were barred from voting by felony laws in 2024, by The Sentencing Project's count?

A) About 400,000
B) About 6 million, up from 2016
C) About 4 million
D) About 12 million, one in twenty adults

Module 3 — The Machinery

From Registration to Certification, and the Fights of 2025-26

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Richard L. Hasen, *Election Meltdown: Dirty Tricks, Distrust, and the Threat to American Democracy* (2020)

Reference: The Election Assistance Commission's *Election Administration and Voting Survey* for 2024; Ballotpedia's and NCSL's summaries of state voting laws; the Brennan Center's and Democracy Docket's litigation trackers; Executive Order 14399 (91 Fed. Reg. 17125) and the Postal Service's rule 'Ballot Mail for Federal Elections' (91 Fed. Reg. 54966); and the Supreme Court's orders of August 24, September 14, and September 25, 2026

3a. A Vote's Path

• **Registration.** The voter joins a state's list online, by mail, at a motor-vehicle office, or automatically, and attests to citizenship under penalty of perjury. The state checks the application against its own records, and twelve states have laws requiring documentary proof of citizenship in at least some cases, though not all are in force. Under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), the 'motor voter' law, states must clean their lists of the dead and the moved. They may not make systematic removals in the 90 days before a federal election, a quiet period that began on August 5, 2026.

• **The ballot.** In 2024, 39.6% of voters voted in person on Election Day, 30.7% in person before it, and 29.0% by mail, by the Census Bureau's survey. Eight states conduct their elections mainly by mail, every state but Alabama offers early voting in person, and 36 states require identification (ID) at the polls, 24 of them photo identification (Ballotpedia, October 2026). Mail ballots are verified by signature, an identification number, or a witness, depending on the state.

• **The count.** About 98% of the votes in 2024 were cast on paper ballots or on machines that print a paper record, by the Brennan Center's pre-election estimate; only some counties in Louisiana and Texas were expected still to use paperless machines. The machines are tested before the election and checked after it. Seven states require risk-limiting audits by law, which sample paper ballots until the result is confirmed to a set confidence, and sixteen conduct them in some form (Movement Advancement Project, June 2026).

• **The canvass and certification.** Local officials reconcile the counts and decide the provisional ballots. Each state then certifies its results by a deadline set in its law. For president, the Electoral Count Reform Act of 2022 governs what follows (Module 5).

• **The contest.** Recounts follow automatically when margins are narrow in some states, and on petition in others. Losing candidates may sue in state and federal courts; after 2020 the losing side's suits changed no result.

3b. What the Evidence Shows

Two claims sit under every fight over the rules, and on both the evidence is unusually strong. The first is fraud. The checks of recent years, most of them run by Republican officials, find noncitizens on the rolls in the tens or hundreds per state, and noncitizen votes from a handful to the low hundreds per state, over several elections (table).

The Heritage Foundation's database, which it calls a sampling of proven cases, held 1,357 cases of all kinds at its last verified total, in May 2022. By Reuters's reading of it, 24 involved noncitizen voting from 2003 to 2023. The federal screening of 2026 points the same way. By April, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) had run more than 60 million voter records through its overhauled Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) database, and flagged 21,000, about 0.035%, as potential noncitizens.

A flag is not a finding. In Travis County, Texas, at least a tenth of the 97 voters flagged, and possibly a fifth, proved to be citizens. No national count of confirmed noncitizens from the screening has been published.

The second claim is that the rules keep lawful voters away. Here, too, the measured effects are small (Module 2). What the evidence does not settle is the argument's real content: how many lawful voters a rule may burden in order to stop how many unlawful ones. That is a question of values, and 3d sets out both answers.

State	Who checked	Finding
Utah	Lieutenant Governor Deidre Henderson (R), May 2026	27 confirmed noncitizens among more than 2 million registrants; 13 had voted since 2018, out of about 5.16 million votes in four general elections
Georgia	Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger (R), 2024	20 noncitizens among 8.2 million registrations
Idaho	Secretary of State Phil McGrane (R), 2024	36 'very likely' noncitizens among about 1 million registered voters
Louisiana	The state, 2025	About 390 noncitizen registrants among 2.9 million, 79 of whom had voted at least once over several decades
Maricopa County, Arizona	Recorder Stephen Richer (R)	2 possible noncitizen votes in four years, among about 2.5 million registered voters
Ohio	The state, 2025	167 noncitizens voted between 2018 and 2024, by The Daily Signal's count

Democracy Docket (May 28, 2026) for Utah; Stephen Richer's essay in the *New York Times* (February 5, 2026) for Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, and Maricopa; The Daily Signal (August 11, 2026) for Ohio and Louisiana.

3c. The Fights of 2025-26

Fight	What it does	Status, October 22, 2026
Executive Order 14248 (March 25, 2025)	Required documentary proof of citizenship on the federal registration form, pressed states to reject mail ballots arriving after Election Day, and threatened their funding	Key provisions permanently blocked by federal judges in Washington, D.C. (October 2025 and January 30, 2026) and, for Washington and Oregon, in Seattle (January 9, 2026); the government's appeal is paused
Watson v. Republican National Committee (June 29, 2026)	Asked whether federal law requires mail ballots to arrive by Election Day	5-4, Justice Amy Coney Barrett for the majority: ballots postmarked by Election Day may be counted when they arrive later. Fourteen states and the District count such ballots
Executive Order 14399 (March 31, 2026)	Directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to compile 'State Citizenship Lists', the attorney general to prioritize prosecuting officials who issue ballots to ineligible voters, and the Postal Service to write rules for ballot mail	The Supreme Court stayed the states' injunction 6-3 on August 24, calling their challenge premature, so the list and prosecution provisions stand. The Postal Service rule, published August 26, is enjoined by two judges, and on September 14 the Court refused to let it apply to the midterms

Fight	What it does	Status, October 22, 2026
The SAVE America Act	Documentary proof of citizenship to register, photo identification to vote, including by mail, and the removal of noncitizens from the rolls	Passed the House on February 11, 2026, 218-213, with one Democrat, Henry Cuellar, voting yes. Failed in the Senate on June 4, 48-50 and 50-49, short of the 60 votes needed
DHS's SAVE screening	States and DHS run voter rolls through the citizenship database	Held unlawful by Judge Sparkle Sooknanan on June 22; the Supreme Court stayed her ruling 6-3 on September 25. At least 67 million registrations had been run
The Justice Department's voter-roll program	Demanded complete voter lists from at least 48 states and the District; sued 30 states and the District	Courts dismissed 26 of the suits, and at least 16 states handed over full lists. On October 9 Judge Sooknanan vacated the program nationwide and barred the department from using the files it holds
Federal presence at the polls	Justice Department monitors 'going to every state', in the attorney general's words; questions over immigration officers	DHS said in early October that it plans no operations targeting polling places. A Civil War-era law bars 'troops or armed men' at the polls
Election security	The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) cut its election-security staff and programs in 2025	A September 24 plan names its ten regional directors as election-security advisers; the 2027 budget request would end the program
The Election Assistance Commission (EAC)	Sets voluntary standards for voting systems and maintains the federal mail registration form	No commissioners since the White House dismissed two and let a third resign; a fourth had resigned in April. Only commissioners can change the form or the standards
State laws	Five states enacted proof-of-citizenship laws in 2025-26: Ohio, Wyoming, South Dakota, Florida, and Utah. Kentucky, Iowa, and Louisiana tightened their identification rules	Ohio's law was reinstated on appeal on September 23; Florida's takes effect January 1, 2027. The Supreme Court hears Arizona's proof-of-citizenship case on December 8

Court dockets and the Federal Register; the Brennan Center's tracker (October 16, 2026); reporting by National Public Radio (NPR), the Associated Press (AP), and Democracy Docket; Ballotpedia.

The record in the courts is mixed. The Supreme Court sided with the administration on the citizenship lists and on the SAVE screening (table). It ruled against it on the Postal Service rule, where only Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas would have let the rule apply, and in *Watson*. Justice Brett Kavanaugh's concurrence found 'at least a fair prospect' that the rule is lawful, but wrote that 'applying the rule in the 2026 elections would be arbitrary and capricious'. Two of the judges who ruled against the administration, Carl Nichols and Kari Dooley, are the president's own appointees.

3d. The Cases, Made as Their Advocates Make Them

The integrity case. Citizenship is a qualification for voting, and a qualification that is never checked is a formality. Justin Riemer of Restoring Integrity and Trust in Elections said: 'If states are going to enforce that requirement, they have to be able to verify it.' A system that registers voters on a signed statement, mails ballots to lists it does not verify, and resists sharing those lists with the government that holds citizenship records asks for a trust it has not earned. Staying the ruling against DHS's screening (3c), the Supreme Court's majority wrote that it 'prevents the Federal Government from using the program it believes is best suited to the task'.

Speaker Mike Johnson argued that 'Americans need an ID to drive, to open a bank account, to buy cold medicine, to file government assistance', and voting should be no different. The Daily Signal, the Heritage Foundation's news site, cites the cases the checks do find, among them those in Ohio (table) and 35 noncitizen voters in Iowa, and DHS's claim that the first ten states to finish screening found about 28,000

noncitizens on their rolls. In the integrity case's arithmetic, any ineligible vote cancels a lawful one, and an election the losers do not accept is the larger danger.

The access case. Noncitizen voting is already a federal crime, and the checks in 3b find few cases. The new rules fall on lawful voters instead. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said the SAVE America Act 'is not about voter identification, it is about voter suppression'. Judge Sooknanan found that the Justice Department's program 'has removed United States citizens from the voter rolls in their home states and risks disenfranchising many more'.

Republican state election officials, including Utah's, told the Supreme Court that the Postal Service plan 'will almost certainly lead to mistakes, delays, and confusion for both voters and election officials'. Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, dissenting in September, wrote that 'the harm caused by burdening or disenfranchising even a few lawful voters outweighs the nonexistent harm' on the other side. The access side's deeper fear is federal control of state rolls.

The evidence. The audits in 3b, most of them by Republican officials, put noncitizen voting at a few votes per million cast where it was measured. The federal flags are not findings (3b). The studies of identification and mail voting find small effects in both directions (Module 2). The courts have split along lines that are not simply partisan (3c).

The course's reading: the evidence settles the size of both problems, and both are small. Noncitizen voting exists at a scale that changes no statewide result, and the burdens of the new rules, though also small in the studies, fall on lawful voters. The fight of 2026 is therefore less about fraud than about who controls the rolls, the states or Washington, and part of that question, whether federal law limits a state's own citizenship checks, is now before the Supreme Court (3c).

Module 3 Key Points

The Machinery

• A vote passes through registration, a ballot, a count on paper, a canvass, and certification, run by more than 10,000 local offices.

• Checks by mostly Republican officials find few noncitizen votes: a handful to the low hundreds per state, over several elections.

• Federal flags are not findings: DHS flagged about 0.035% of 60 million records, and some flagged voters proved to be citizens.

• The Supreme Court let the citizenship lists and SAVE screening proceed, kept the Postal Service rule blocked for 2026, and allowed late-arriving postmarked ballots.

• The fight is less about fraud than about who controls the rolls, which the Court takes up on December 8.

Module 3 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Which part of Executive Order 14399 is blocked for the November 3 elections?

A) The Postal Service rule on ballot mail, published August 26
B) The State Citizenship Lists that DHS compiles
C) The attorney general's priority on prosecuting officials
D) The whole order, which the Supreme Court struck down in August

2. What did the Supreme Court decide in *Watson v. Republican National Committee*?

A) That ballots must arrive by Election Day to be counted anywhere
B) That mail ballots postmarked by Election Day may arrive later
C) That mail voting requires photo identification in all fifty states
D) That the Postal Service, not the states, controls ballot delivery

3. By April 2026, what share of the voter records run through the SAVE database had been flagged as potential noncitizens?

A) About 3.5%
B) About 1%, nearly all confirmed
C) About 10%, mostly in large states
D) About 0.035%

4. What happened to the Justice Department's program of collecting states' voter lists on October 9, 2026?

A) The Supreme Court upheld it 6-3
B) A federal judge vacated it nationwide
C) Congress funded it for the midterms
D) Every state agreed to hand over its list

5. What does the course conclude the 2026 fight over the rules is mainly about?

A) Whether paper ballots should replace machines
B) Whether fraud changed the 2024 result
C) Who controls the voter rolls
D) Whether to abolish mail voting

Module 4 — Districts

The Gerrymander and the Redistricting War of 2025-26

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Nick Seabrook, *One Person, One Vote: A Surprising History of Gerrymandering in America* (2022)

Reference: NCSL's tracker of mid-decade redistricting (updated July 14, 2026), the Associated Press's state-by-state tally (June 3, 2026), and the Supreme Court's opinions in *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019) and *Louisiana v. Callais* (2026)

4a. Lines Into Seats

Every ten years the census counts the population and the House's seats are apportioned among the states. After the 2020 count Texas gained two seats and California lost one. Each state with more than one seat then draws its districts, which must hold equal populations under the Supreme Court's rulings of the 1960s. A law of 1967 requires single-member districts for the House.

Who draws the lines is the whole question. In most states the legislature draws the congressional map, subject to the governor's veto in some. Ten states give the job to commissions, by NCSL's count, independent ones in Arizona, California, Colorado, and Michigan and bipartisan ones elsewhere, and courts step in when the others deadlock or break the law. Because each district elects one member by plurality, the lines can decide the result before a vote is cast.

The techniques are as old as the republic. 'Packing' concentrates the other party's voters in a few districts it wins overwhelmingly. 'Cracking' spreads the rest across many districts it loses narrowly. Political scientists measure the result by counting each party's wasted votes, the efficiency gap, or by tracing how seats respond to votes.

Worked example — One 60-40 State, Five Seats, Three Maps

Take a state of five million voters with five House seats of a million voters each. (Real districts are drawn by population, but voters keep the arithmetic simple.) Party A wins 60% statewide, or 3.0 million votes, and Party B 40%, or 2.0 million.

Map 1: the parties spread evenly. Every district votes 60-40 for A, and A wins all five seats. That is 100% of the seats on 60% of the vote, and no one has gerrymandered anything; it is what plurality districts do to an evenly spread minority. Each seat has a 20-point margin, so a uniform swing of more than ten points against A flips all five at once.

Map 2: B's voters clustered in one city. Suppose a city of a million voters votes 80-20 for B. A compact map gives B the city's seat. The other four districts hold 2.8 million A voters and 1.2 million B voters, so each votes 70-30 for A. The result is 4-1, close to proportional, and every seat is safe: B's by 60 points and A's by 40.

Map 3: B draws the lines. B's mapmakers pack A's voters into two districts that vote 90-10 for A, which uses 1.8 million of A's 3.0 million votes. The other three districts hold 1.2 million A voters and 1.8 million B voters, so each votes 60-40 for B. B wins three seats of five on 40% of the vote, if the geography allows such lines, which it rarely does.

A's choice. If A draws the lines and B's voters live in the city, A can crack the city into all five districts and win 5-0 at 60-40, or pack it and win 4-1 with every A seat at 70-30. The extra seat costs safety: the 5-0 map is lost entirely in a swing of just over ten points, while the 4-1 map survives a swing of almost twenty. That trade between seats and safety is the gerrymanderer's dilemma.

Three lessons. The same ballots produce 5-0, 4-1, or 2-3, so the lines decide the result independently of the votes. Fairness has no single definition: 5-0 is what plurality districts produce on their own, 4-1 is roughly proportional, and 2-3 is a minority's gerrymander. And a map's risk is its margin, the test that a national swing puts to every map drawn for the most seats.

4b. The Courts

Two decisions frame the map. In *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019) the Supreme Court held, 5-4, that claims of partisan gerrymandering, however extreme, are political questions the federal courts will not decide. That left the field to state constitutions, state courts, and Congress. State courts filled part of the gap: Pennsylvania's supreme court struck the state's congressional map in 2018, and North Carolina's struck maps in 2022 and then reversed itself in 2023 after its majority changed.

The one federal limit left was race, and *Louisiana v. Callais* narrowed it on April 29, 2026. Louisiana's legislature had drawn a second majority-Black district in 2024 after a federal court ruled that Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act required one. Justice Samuel Alito, for a 6-3 majority, held that the district was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander, and that complying with Section 2 could not justify it.

The Court did not strike down Section 2. It 'updated' the test for applying it, requiring challengers to show that a map denies minority voters an equal opportunity because of their race, after separating race from the state's partisan and other aims. Justice Elena Kagan, for the three dissenters, wrote that the decision 'renders Section 2 all but a dead letter'.

Two days earlier the Court had restored Texas's new map, which a lower court had found to be a likely racial gerrymander. Together the decisions mean that in 2026 a legislature may draw lines for partisan advantage without federal limit and with a narrower duty to minority voters than at any time since the Voting Rights Act was strengthened in 1982.

4c. The War of 2025-26

Texas broke the convention that maps are drawn once a decade, as it had in 2003 in a redraw the Supreme Court largely upheld in 2006. In July 2025 the president asked its legislature to redraw mid-decade for more Republican seats (table). Democratic legislators left the state to deny a quorum and returned, and Governor Greg Abbott signed the map on August 29. California answered: its legislature, at Governor Gavin Newsom's urging, put a counter-map on the November 2025 ballot as Proposition 50, setting aside the state's independent commission's map, and voters approved it (table).

The cascade followed. Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio redrew next, and a Utah court imposed a new map. After *Callais*, Louisiana, Alabama, and Tennessee redrew to remove districts drawn for Black voters, and Florida's new map, passed days before the ruling, took effect. Virginia's Democrats won voters' approval for a redraw, which the state's supreme court struck down.

Other attempts failed. Indiana's Senate rejected a new map 19-31 on December 11, 2025, with 21 of its Republicans voting no after weeks of pressure from the White House. Kansas's Republicans fell short of the

votes to override their governor's veto, South Carolina's Senate refused, and Georgia's legislature declined a special session's call for maps for 2028.

Missouri's map became the war's longest fight. Opponents filed more than 300,000 signatures to force a referendum, and on September 3, 2026 the state's supreme court ruled unanimously that the petition was valid. The 2022 districts therefore govern the November vote. The US Supreme Court refused three times in September to let the 2025 map be used; its last order, on September 25, warned that a switch in mid-election would cause 'electoral chaos'.

State	What was done	Seats targeted	Status for November 3
Texas	Legislature, August 2025, at the president's request	+5 Republican	In use; the Supreme Court reversed the lower court's block on April 27, 2026
California	Proposition 50, approved November 4, 2025, 64.4% to 35.6%	+5 Democratic	In use until the commission's maps of 2031; challenges rejected
North Carolina	Legislature, October 22, 2025	+1 Republican	In use
Ohio	Redistricting commission, unanimously, October 31, 2025	+2 Republican	In use
Utah	A state judge imposed a new map, November 10, 2025, under a voter-approved anti-gerrymandering law	+1 Democratic	In use; appeals rejected
Florida	Legislature, signed May 4, 2026	+4 Republican	In use; a state-court challenge pending
Tennessee	Legislature, May 7, 2026, splitting Memphis's majority-Black district	+1 Republican	In use
Louisiana	Legislature, May 29, 2026, after *Callais*	+1 Republican	In use (Module 6)
Alabama	Returned to its 2023 map after the Supreme Court lifted an injunction, June 2, 2026	+1 Republican	In use
Missouri	Legislature, September 2025; referendum petition	+1 Republican if approved	2022 map in use; Proposition A on the ballot
Virginia	Constitutional amendment approved by voters April 21, 2026, 51.6%	Up to +4 Democratic	Struck by the state supreme court May 8, 2026; 2021 map in use
Maryland	Map passed the House in February 2026; a constitutional amendment followed	A 2028 redraw	Question 3 on the ballot
Indiana, Kansas, South Carolina, Georgia, New York	Rejected, stalled, or put off	None for 2026	Current maps in use

AP's tally of June 3, 2026, NCSL (July 14, 2026), and court records; targets are seats the new lines were drawn to gain, not forecasts.

Three states vote on the war itself on November 3. Missouri's Proposition A would adopt the 2025 map for 2028, and Votebeat reported in October that polls show voters evenly split. Maryland's Question 3 would clear the way for a 2028 map aimed at the state's one Republican seat; a University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) poll of 776 likely voters, September 22-27, found 25% for it, 53% against, and 19% undecided.

Colorado's Amendment 86, an initiative backed by the conservative group Advance Colorado, would require any mid-decade congressional map to win the approval of the state's independent commission and its supreme court; it needs 55% to pass. New York's legislature gave first passage on June 17, 2026 to an amendment allowing a redraw before 2028, which needs a second passage and a referendum.

Counted as drawn, the new maps target about 15 Republican seats against about 6 Democratic ones, a net of about nine, by the AP's state figures with Missouri's map removed. The raters expect less. The Cook Political Report puts the Republicans' likely net gain from redistricting at about four seats, and Sabato's Crystal Ball at 'a handful'. Tom Emmer, the House majority whip, put his party's target at 13 seats and said in October, 'We're not gonna win all 13 of those redistricted seats.'

The reason is the lesson of 4a: maps drawn for the most seats are drawn at thinner margins. The Crystal Ball's Kyle Kondik found that the median district moved about two points toward Republicans, leaving a map 'no more favorable to Republicans than the 2018 map was', the map on which Democrats won the House.

4d. Is Mid-Decade Redistricting Legitimate?

The case that it is. Nothing forbids it: the Congressional Research Service concluded in March 2026 that mid-decade redistricting is 'prohibited by neither the U.S. Constitution nor federal law'. Michael Thorning of the Bipartisan Policy Center calls it contentious but 'a normal part of our political process', since parties have drawn for advantage since the nineteenth century. Indiana State Senator Liz Brown, a Republican who backed her state's map, said the maps are 'about trying to predetermine political outcomes — absolutely. It's a privilege policy-makers have.'

Democrats who joined the war made the answering case: one side's redraw had to be met in kind or conceded. Newsom presented Proposition 50 as a reply to Texas, and Maryland's governor, Wes Moore, said of his state's amendment that 'the final decision on how we draw our maps belongs in the hands of Marylanders, not politicians'.

The case that it is not. Some of its critics came from inside the parties that tried it. Indiana State Senator Greg Goode, a Republican who voted no, described 'over-the-top pressure from inside the Statehouse and outside' and 'threats of violence, acts of violence'. South Carolina State Senator Richard Cash, also a Republican, said that 'neither my conscience nor common sense will allow me to stop an election that has already begun'. In Maryland, the Republican State Senator Bryan Simonaire called the amendment behind Question 3 'a blank check for this legislature to have partisan gerrymandering'. Missouri's referendum campaign, People Not Politicians, argued that voters, not legislators, should have the last word.

The evidence. The practice is lawful, and the federal courts have said they will not police it. Its net effect is smaller than its gross: because both parties redrew, the raters expect a Republican gain far below the seats targeted (4c). Its costs are harder to count: districts that now change with the majority's needs, a referendum fought through state and federal courts, and legislators who said they were threatened.

The course's reading: the war turned the decennial map into a weapon to be used whenever a party controls a state, and neither the courts nor federal law will stop it. Its yield in 2026 is modest. Its lasting effect is the precedent, which Maryland's and Missouri's ballot questions and the redraws discussed for 2028 will test before the next census.

Module 4 Key Points

Districts

• A district elects one member by plurality, so the lines can decide a result before anyone votes.

• *Rucho* (2019) put partisan gerrymanders beyond the federal courts; *Callais* (2026) narrowed the Voting Rights Act's protection for minority districts.

• Texas began the mid-decade war in 2025; California answered, and nine states hold this year's House elections on new maps.

• The new maps target a net of about nine Republican seats; Cook expects about four in this year's environment.

• A gerrymander trades safety for seats: a map drawn for every seat at thin margins can be lost in one wave.

Module 4 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Why does the course say the net effect of the 2025-26 redistricting war is smaller than its gross?

A) Because both parties redrew, and maps drawn for more seats carry thinner margins
B) Because the Supreme Court struck down most of the new maps
C) Because turnout is lower in redrawn districts
D) Because the 2030 census will reverse them

2. What did the Supreme Court hold in *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019)?

A) That mid-decade redistricting is unconstitutional
B) That every state must hand its congressional maps to an independent commission
C) That federal courts will not decide partisan-gerrymandering claims
D) That race may never be considered when legislatures draw district lines

3. What did *Louisiana v. Callais* (2026) decide?

A) That Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act is unconstitutional
B) That Louisiana must draw a third majority-Black district
C) That partisan gerrymanders violate the Equal Protection Clause
D) That Louisiana's second majority-Black district was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander, while leaving Section 2 standing

4. Which map does Missouri use for its House elections on November 3, 2026?

A) Its 2025 map, after the Supreme Court cleared it
B) Its 2022 map, while voters decide the 2025 map as Proposition A
C) A map drawn by a federal court
D) A map drawn by a state commission after the referendum petition succeeded

5. In the worked example, why is the 5-0 map risky for the party that draws it?

A) A swing above ten points flips all five seats
B) Courts must strike down any map that wins every seat
C) It violates the Voting Rights Act by cracking the city
D) Voters in the packed city may force a referendum on the map

Module 5 — The Senate, the House, and the Electoral College

The Design and Its Arithmetic

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Sanford Levinson, *Our Undemocratic Constitution: Where the Constitution Goes Wrong (and How We the People Can Correct It)* (2006), the critique; read it with *The Federalist* Nos. 10, 39, 62, and 68, the design's own defense

Reference: The Census Bureau's population estimates for July 1, 2025 (Vintage 2025); the Federal Election Commission's official 2024 presidential results; Decision Desk HQ's median of three projections of the 2030 apportionment (February 2, 2026); and the Census Bureau's proposed residence rule (Federal Register document 2026-18481, September 10, 2026)

5a. The Senate

The Senate gives every state two seats whatever its population. In 1790 that gave Virginia's 748,000 people the same voice as Delaware's 59,000, a ratio of about 13 to 1. On the Census Bureau's estimates for July 2025 it gives California's 39.4 million the same voice as Wyoming's 589,000, a ratio of about 67 to 1.

The arithmetic follows. The 26 least populous states, with 17.5% of the population, elect a majority of the Senate. Because the small states are, in today's alignment, more rural and more Republican, the chamber leans Republican relative to the national vote. A Democratic majority therefore requires winning states that vote Republican for president (Module 9).

The filibuster compounds the design. Ending debate on most bills takes 60 votes, so 41 senators can block them, and the 41 from the smallest states represent 10.7% of the population. Nominations have needed only a simple majority since 2013 and 2017, and budget reconciliation lets a majority change taxes and spending. The president posted 'Kill the Filibuster' on March 22, 2026, and Majority Leader John Thune said in April, 'We don't have the votes for it.'

The design's defense is *The Federalist*'s, that the Senate is a brake on the House, and its critique is the arithmetic (both are weighed in Module 11). It is also the one feature of the Constitution that Article V shields from ordinary amendment: no state may be deprived of its equal vote in the Senate without its consent.

5b. The House and the 435 Cap

The House was meant to grow with the population, and it did, from 65 members in 1789 to 435 after the census of 1910. Then it stopped. The Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929 fixed the number, and every census since has divided the same seats among a population that has more than tripled since 1910. The average district held about 761,000 people at the 2020 census and about 784,000 on the 2025 estimates. Britain's House of Commons, by comparison, has half again as many members (Module 10) for a population a fifth the size.

The cap has effects beyond size. Every state gets at least one seat, so the smallest are over-represented: Wyoming's single member represents all of its people (5a), Montana's two about 572,000 each, and Delaware's one about 1.06 million. The rounding in the apportionment formula moves the last seats among

states by a few thousand people. And because each state's electoral votes equal its House seats plus two, the cap also sets the presidency's arithmetic.

The reform most often proposed, the 'Wyoming rule', would size the House so that the smallest state's population makes one district, which on the 2025 estimates means about 579 seats. It is the reform least likely to pass, since a larger House dilutes every sitting member's vote.

5c. The Electoral College

The president is chosen by 538 electors, one for each member of the House and Senate plus three for the District of Columbia, and 270 wins. The states appoint them as their legislatures direct. In 48 states and the District the statewide winner takes all of them; Maine and Nebraska award one elector to the winner of each congressional district and two to the statewide winner. Nebraska's legislature kept that system in April 2025, when a winner-take-all bill fell two votes short of ending a filibuster.

The design was a compromise of 1787 among direct election, selection by Congress, and the states' claims. Its modern character, winner-take-all, was adopted state by state in the early nineteenth century to maximize each state's weight, and no one designed it. It turns the election into a contest in the handful of states where the margin is close. It can also elect a candidate who loses the national vote, as it did in 1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016.

The machinery that was tested in 2020 was rewritten in 2022. Under the Electoral Count Reform Act, the governor's certificate of a state's electors is conclusive in Congress, an objection to a state's votes needs the support of a fifth of each chamber, and the vice president's role in the count is ministerial. Faithless electors, who vote against their pledge, have been rare, and in 2020 the Supreme Court held in *Chiafalo v. Washington* that states may bind them.

5d. Who Counts? The Census Rule

On September 10, 2026 the Commerce Department and the Census Bureau proposed rules for the 2030 count. Only citizens and lawful permanent residents would be counted toward the apportionment of House seats, leaving out people in the country unlawfully and those on temporary status, such as foreign students and temporary workers. Status would be determined from administrative records, a legal-status question, or both, and questions on race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation would be dropped. Comments are due November 2, and no date for a final rule has been announced.

The case for the rule. The administration argues that 'usual residence', the census's test, can turn on lawful ties to the country, which people here unlawfully lack. Representative James Comer argued that 'non-citizens are not evenly distributed among the states', so counting them dilutes the votes of citizens elsewhere. Representative Chip Roy estimated that excluding all noncitizens would move 12 seats toward predominantly Republican states. A bill to require a citizen-only apportionment cleared the House Oversight Committee 20-19 in December 2025.

The case against it. The Fourteenth Amendment apportions seats by 'the whole number of persons in each State', and Representative Jamie Raskin argued that the bill 'clearly violates' it. Opponents add that a question on legal status depresses response: the Census Bureau's own 2019 test found significantly lower response rates in some areas and groups with a citizenship question. The Council on Foundations warned that dropping the race and ethnicity questions would erode the local data that governments and charities use.

The evidence. On the law, the Supreme Court has not ruled on leaving noncitizens out of the apportionment count. In *Evenwel v. Abbott* (2016) it wrote that the Fourteenth Amendment 'retained total population as the congressional apportionment base'. In December 2020 it dismissed as premature a challenge to the first Trump administration's plan to leave out people here unlawfully. The seat effects depend on who is left out. The Pew Research Center estimated in 2020 that excluding unauthorized immigrants alone would have cost California, Texas, and Florida a seat each, and given one each to Alabama, Ohio, and Minnesota. No official count of the people the rule would exclude has been published.

The course's reading: the constitutional text is the strongest single argument in the dispute, since it says 'persons', not citizens. The rule is therefore likely to be decided by the Supreme Court before the 2030 count, and its stakes are a few seats, which in a closely divided House and Electoral College can be decisive.

5e. The Electoral College of 2028, and the Map After 2030

Worked example — The Electoral College of 2028, and the Map After 2030

The 2028 election runs on the 2020 census, so its arithmetic is 2024's. Trump won 312 electoral votes to 226. Seven swing states were worth 93: Pennsylvania 19, Georgia and North Carolina 16 each, Michigan 15, Arizona 11, Wisconsin 10, and Nevada 6. Six were decided by 3.2 points or less, and Arizona by 5.5. The rest of the map split 219 for Trump and 226 for Harris.

2028. A Democrat needs 44 of the 93, and Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin give exactly that, counting the elector Harris won in Nebraska's 2nd District. A Republican needs 51, for example Pennsylvania, Georgia, and North Carolina. The decisive state in 2024 was Pennsylvania, which Trump won by 1.70 points while winning the nation by 1.47. That tilt of about a quarter point is the College's bias in 2024: small, and against the Democrats.

After 2030. Apply the median projection in the table. The states Trump won gain a net of ten electoral votes, and the states Harris won lose ten, to 216. Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin together fall to 42, so the northern route gives a Democrat 258, short of 270. The Democrat then also needs Arizona, Georgia, or North Carolina, each of which gains a seat.

The Republican route. The Republican base rises to 228. The three northern states give exactly 270, and the three Sun Belt states, Arizona, Georgia, and North Carolina, give 274. Two of them are not enough: Georgia and North Carolina reach 262, and adding Nevada makes 268. Adam Kincaid of the National Republican Redistricting Trust said: 'Republicans will be able to win the White House without a single Rust Belt state.'

The lesson. The decisive state moves from Pennsylvania to Georgia, which Trump won by 2.19 points, and the tilt on 2024's votes roughly triples, to about 0.7 points. The design's arithmetic moves with population, and the population is moving toward states that vote Republican. The caveat is that people moving to Texas and Florida bring their politics with them, and a Sun Belt that becomes competitive undoes the arithmetic the reapportionment writes.

State	Projected change in House seats and electoral votes after the 2030 census
Texas	+4
Florida	+3 (the projections range from +2 to +4)
Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, North Carolina, Utah	+1 each

State	Projected change in House seats and electoral votes after the 2030 census
California	-4
New York	-2 (the projections range from -1 to -2)
Illinois, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Wisconsin	-1 each

Decision Desk HQ's median of the projections by Jonathan Cervas of Carnegie Mellon University, the Brennan Center, and the American Redistricting Project, on the Census Bureau's 2025 estimates (February 2, 2026). The 2024 results are the Federal Election Commission's.

Module 5 Key Points

The Senate, the House, and the Electoral College

• California has about 67 times Wyoming's population, and the 26 smallest states, with 17.5% of Americans, elect a Senate majority.

• The House stopped growing at 435 after the 1910 census; districts now average about 784,000 people.

• Pennsylvania decided 2024 at Trump +1.70 against +1.47 nationally, a tilt of about a quarter point.

• After 2030 the northern route gives a Democrat only 258 electoral votes, and Georgia becomes the tipping point.

• The proposed census rule would count only citizens and permanent residents for House seats; the Fourteenth Amendment counts 'persons'.

Module 5 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What is the ratio of California's population to Wyoming's, on the Census Bureau's 2025 estimates?

A) 13 to 1
B) About 24 to 1, counting only citizens
C) About 670 to 1, by the 2030 projections
D) About 67 to 1

2. Why has the House stayed at 435 members?

A) The Constitution fixes the number at 435
B) The Supreme Court capped it in the redistricting cases of the 1960s
C) A 1929 law fixed it
D) Each state's legislature must consent to a larger House

3. In the worked example, why does the northern route fail for a Democrat after the 2030 census?

A) Because the three states shrink to 42 electoral votes and the Democratic base to 216, which together reach only 258
B) Because the popular-vote compact takes effect in 2032
C) Because Michigan begins awarding its electors by district
D) Because Pennsylvania loses its swing-state status

4. What would the census rule proposed on September 10, 2026 change?

A) It would move Census Day to January
B) It would count only citizens and lawful permanent residents toward House seats
C) It would add a question on party registration
D) It would assign each state's House seats by its number of registered voters rather than its residents

5. In 2024, how far apart were the national margin and the margin in the tipping-point state?

A) About a quarter point
B) About one and a half points
C) About three points, in the Democrats' favor
D) About five points, the largest gap on record

Module 6 — Primaries and Parties

How Candidates Are Chosen, and by Whom

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Marty Cohen, David Karol, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (2008), and the debate over whether it still does

Reference: NCSL's summaries of primary types; Ballotpedia's lists of the 2026 primary defeats and departures; the Brookings Institution's *Vital Statistics on Congress*; and Gallup's party-identification series

6a. The Primary

The United States is unusual among democracies in letting voters, rather than party officials, choose the parties' candidates, through primaries the states run. The rules vary by state (table).

Louisiana changed its system in 2026. For Congress it now holds party primaries that each party may open to unaffiliated voters, in place of the all-candidate primary it keeps for governor and the legislature. Senator Bill Cassidy lost the first such Republican primary, in May (6c). Its House primaries fall on November 3, under the map it redrew after *Callais*, and its general election on December 12.

Who votes in primaries decides who runs in November. Primary voters are older and more partisan than general-election voters. Unite America, a group that campaigns for open primaries, counts 399 House seats as rated safe by the Cook Political Report in January 2026.

Primary type	States	Who votes
Closed	About eight, including Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee	Registered party members only
Partially closed	About nine, including Connecticut, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah	Members, plus unaffiliated voters if the party allows
Open to unaffiliated voters	About eight, including Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and North Carolina	Members and unaffiliated voters
Partially open	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Nevada, and Ohio	Any voter, who may have to declare or record a party
Open	About fifteen, including Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin	Any voter, on one party's ballot
Top-two; top-four	California and Washington; Alaska	All voters and all candidates on one ballot; the top finishers advance regardless of party
Louisiana	Party primaries for Congress from 2026; an all-candidate primary for state offices	Members, plus unaffiliated voters if the party allows

MultiState's state-by-state table built on NCSL's categories (2026). Sources disagree on a few states, hence 'about'. Recent changes: Kansas, Tennessee, and Wyoming closed their primaries further in 2023, and North Carolina (2024) and New Mexico (2025) opened theirs to unaffiliated voters.

6b. Do Primaries Polarize Congress?

The case that they do. The median primary voter is far from the median general-election voter, and in a safe seat the general election cannot correct the primary's choice. The threat that moves a member's votes, on this view, is a challenge from the party's activist wing. Lee Drutman of New America, an adviser to Unite America, finds 'strong evidence' that primaries are a problem, mainly because incumbents fear primary challengers more than donors or general electorates. In 2020, by his count, '83% of Congressional districts were decided in partisan primaries, by just 10% of voters nationwide'.

Nick Troiano, Unite America's executive director, calls primaries 'the biggest solvable problem fueling division and dysfunction today'. In a poll the group sponsored, run by RealClear Opinion Research with Emerson College Polling (January 9-11, 2026; 1,500 active registered voters), 59% said primaries add to division and 71% supported requiring open primaries.

The case that they do so only at the margin. Political scientists who measured it found smaller effects. Shigeo Hirano, James Snyder, Stephen Ansolabehere, and John Mark Hansen found little evidence that primaries drove the rise of polarization in Congress (2010). Eric McGhee, Seth Masket, Boris Shor, Steven Rogers, and Nolan McCarty found that more open primaries did not produce more moderate state legislators (2014). Anthony Fowler and Shu Fu studied about eight million roll-call votes cast from 1995 to 2022, in a paper forthcoming in the *Journal of Politics*.

Members voted slightly more extremely before their primaries and somewhat more moderately after, an effect that explains about 1% of the gap between the parties. In Fowler's words: 'Primaries matter, and do drive candidates to be more partisan, but most of the partisanship we see comes from elsewhere.'

The evidence. Christian Grose found California's top-two system associated with more moderate legislators (2020), and Fowler and Fu found weaker primary effects in top-two and top-four states. Most of the studies agree on the direction, then, and disagree on the size, which is small in the largest of them. The 2026 primaries show the threat is real in some years (6c), though in most cycles it touches few members.

The course's reading: primaries amplify a polarization whose main causes lie elsewhere. Changing the primary therefore changes the margin rather than the trend, and the case for reform rests more on giving the excluded voters a say than on any promise of moderation.

6c. Incumbency, and the Primaries of 2026

Incumbents who run usually win. From 2010 to 2022, House members seeking re-election won between 85% and 97% of the time, above 90% in most years, and senators between 79% and 100%, by the Brookings Institution's count. The advantage has parts: name recognition; staff, travel, and mail paid for by the office; money, since donors give to likely winners; districts drawn around members by friendly legislatures; and the retirement of members who expect to lose.

The year 2026 broke the pattern in the primaries. Ten House members and two senators lost renomination. Two senators losing primaries is the most since 2010, and ten House losses is more than in any year since 2010 except the redistricting years of 2012 and 2022. The losses ran both ways. Challengers backed by the president beat Thomas Massie in Kentucky and Dan Crenshaw in Texas, and in Texas's Senate runoff Ken Paxton beat John Cornyn by about 64 to 36. Five Democrats lost to challengers from their own party, and two lost runoffs in redrawn Texas districts.

Member	Seat	Lost to
Sen. Bill Cassidy (R)	Louisiana	Finished third in the closed primary; Rep. Julia Letlow, backed by the president, won the runoff
Sen. John Cornyn (R)	Texas	Ken Paxton, the state attorney general, in the runoff
Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R)	Texas 2nd	State Rep. Steve Toth, endorsed by the president
Rep. Thomas Massie (R)	Kentucky 4th	Ed Gallrein, backed by the president, on May 19
Rep. Andy Ogles (R)	Tennessee 5th	Charlie Hatcher, a former state agriculture commissioner
Rep. Shri Thanedar (D)	Michigan 13th	State Rep. Donavan McKinney
Rep. Dan Goldman (D)	New York 10th	Brad Lander, on June 23
Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D)	New York 13th	Darializa Avila Chevalier, on June 23
Rep. Diana DeGette (D)	Colorado 1st	Melat Kiros
Rep. John Larson (D)	Connecticut 1st	Luke Bronin, a former mayor of Hartford, on August 11
Rep. Al Green (D)	Texas 18th	Rep. Christian Menefee, in a runoff between two sitting members
Rep. Julie Johnson (D)	Texas 33rd	Former Rep. Colin Allred, in a runoff

Fox News (August 13, 2026), Newsweek (July 1, 2026), and Ballotpedia. Primaries held after mid-August were not checked for further House losses; Louisiana's House primaries are on November 3.

Departures set a record of their own. As of October 2, 60 House members (23 Democrats, 37 Republicans) and 11 senators (4 Democrats, 7 Republicans) were not seeking re-election, 71 in all and the most in Ballotpedia's count back to 2012. Of the 71, 42 are retiring from public office and 29 are running for something else. It is not an all-time high: 65 House members retired in 1992 alone.

6d. The Parties

• **Weak as organizations, strong as identities.** The parties cannot choose their candidates or discipline their members, and a candidate who wins a primary owns the label. Yet partisanship is the strongest single predictor of the vote. Only 16 House districts split their presidential and House results in 2024, the same historically low total as in 2020, by Kyle Kondik's count. Senate races split more often: four states that voted for Trump elected Democratic senators.

• **Independents.** In Gallup's 2025 average, 45% of Americans called themselves independents, a record, against 27% Republicans and 27% Democrats. Counting those who lean toward a party, Democrats had 47% and Republicans 42%, so about three-quarters of independents lean one way or the other.

• **The two-party system.** Plurality voting in single-member districts tends to produce two parties, because votes for a third party are wasted, a regularity known as Duverger's law. The year's most serious challenge from outside the two parties is Dan Osborn's independent campaign for the Senate in Nebraska (Module 9).

• **The presidential nomination.** Delegates are won in state primaries and caucuses from January to June of the election year, and the 'invisible primary' of endorsements, money, and staff runs for the two years before. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) approved its 2028 calendar on August 15, 2026: South Carolina on January 22, 2028, then Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Michigan, and Virginia through February 29. Iowa is not among the early states. The DNC's chair, Ken Martin, said the nominee 'will have to earn the support across the full breadth of America ... No coronation'.

• **The state parties.** The state and county organizations recruit candidates for the legislatures, run local turnout, and decided in 2025-26 whether their legislatures would redraw the maps (Module 4).

Module 6 Key Points

Primaries and Parties

• Voters, not party officials, choose the candidates, under rules ranging from closed primaries in about eight states to top-two in California and Washington.

• In Fowler and Fu's study of eight million roll calls, primaries explain about 1% of the gap between the parties.

• Ten House members and two senators lost renomination in 2026, and 71 members are leaving, the most since at least 2012.

• Independents are a record 45% of Americans, but most lean toward a party, and few districts split their tickets.

• The Democrats' 2028 nomination opens in South Carolina on January 22, 2028; Iowa is not among the early states.

Module 6 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What did Fowler and Fu's study of roll-call votes from 1995 to 2022 find about primaries?

A) That they explain most of the polarization in Congress

B) That they push members slightly toward the extremes, explaining about 1% of the gap between the parties

C) That open primaries doubled the number of moderates

D) That they have no measurable effect on members' votes

2. Which states send the top two primary finishers to November regardless of party?

A) Louisiana

B) Alaska and Maine, which also use ranked ballots

C) California and Washington

D) New York and Pennsylvania, the largest closed-primary states

3. How many members of Congress lost renomination in 2026?

A) Two House members

B) Thirty House members

C) Twenty House members and five senators, all Republicans

D) Ten House members and two senators

4. What share of Americans called themselves independents in Gallup's 2025 average?

A) 27%

B) About a third, as since the 1990s

C) Over half, for the first time since 1945

D) 45%, a record

5. Which state's primary opens the Democrats' 2028 calendar, and on what date?

A) South Carolina, on January 22, 2028

B) Iowa, in January

C) New Hampshire, February 8

D) Nevada, on February 1, 2028, with Iowa second

Module 7 — Money

What Money Buys

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Gary C. Jacobson and Jamie L. Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections* (tenth edition, 2019)

Reference: OpenSecrets; the Federal Election Commission's statistical summaries of the 2023-24 and 2025-26 cycles; AdImpact's projections; the Brennan Center's work on dark money; and the Supreme Court's opinion in *NRSC v. FEC* (June 30, 2026)

7a. The Numbers

OpenSecrets put the cost of the 2024 federal elections at a minimum of $15.9 billion, $5.5 billion of it for the presidential race. The 2026 midterm is on course to set a record for advertising. AdImpact projected $11.6 billion in June, above the 2024 cycle's $11.2 billion, including $3.4 billion in Senate races, $2.4 billion for governors, and $2.0 billion in House races. By October 14, spending and reservations had passed $10 billion.

The money takes three legal forms. Contributions to candidates are limited, to $3,500 per election from an individual in 2025-26, and disclosed. Contributions to parties and political action committees are limited too, at $44,300 a year to a national party's main account and $5,000 to a PAC, and disclosed. Independent expenditures, by groups that do not coordinate with a candidate, have been unlimited since 2010, and super PACs made $2.7 billion of the $4.4 billion spent that way in 2024.

Around them sits 'dark money', spent by nonprofit groups that need not disclose their donors. The Brennan Center counted almost $2 billion of it in 2024, counting only what could be traced, roughly double 2020's. It also found that billionaires gave about $3 billion in 2024, nearly a fifth of all federal political money, against under 1% in 2008.

The 2026 cycle's money is concentrated in a few hands. Elon Musk had given $366 million by October 12, by Reuters's count, including $158 million to the Senate Leadership Fund in September alone. Through June 30, super PACs had raised $2.49 billion and congressional candidates $2.80 billion, by the Federal Election Commission's (FEC's) count.

Committee	Latest figures	Source and date
Republican National Committee (RNC)	Raised $278.6 million through June 30, 2026; $128.5 million in cash, and a record $130 million at the end of July	FEC, October 1; *Washington Post*
Democratic National Committee (DNC)	Raised $207.4 million; $16.3 million in cash and $18.5 million in debt on June 30	FEC, October 1
Senate committees	National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) raised $154.7 million ($55.9 million cash); Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) $140.0 million ($41.0 million)	FEC, to June 30
House committees	National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) raised $200.0 million ($92.7 million cash); Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) $198.1 million ($79.0 million)	FEC, to June 30

Committee	Latest figures	Source and date
Senate Leadership Fund (R)	Raised $273 million from July to September, much of it from Musk (7a)	Bloomberg Government, October 16
Congressional Leadership Fund (R)	Raised $94.4 million from July to September; $155.2 million in cash on October 1	*Denver Gazette*, October 16
Senate Majority PAC (D)	Raised $151 million from July to September, a record; about $112 million in cash entering October	*New York Times*, October 6
House Majority PAC and House Majority Forward (D)	Raised $230 million from July to September, their best quarter	Punchbowl News, October 1

Party committees' figures are from the FEC's summary of January 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026, released October 1, 2026. The super PACs are each party's main committees for the Senate and the House.

7b. The Industry Committees

The innovation of 2024-26 is the industry super PAC, which backs candidates of either party on a single issue and spends against those who oppose it. Fairshake, the cryptocurrency industry's committee, is funded chiefly by Coinbase, Andreessen Horowitz, and Ripple, which gave or pledged more than $240 million across the last two cycles. Fairshake and its affiliates had spent $123 million on the 2024 elections by early October of that year, by OpenSecrets' count. It ended August 2026 with more than $120 million in the bank, and in October announced spending in 32 House races, 19 for Republicans and 13 for Democrats.

The artificial-intelligence (AI) industry copied the model, and drew an opponent. Leading the Future, whose donors include Greg Brockman of OpenAI and the venture investors Marc Andreessen and Ben Horowitz, had raised $125 million by September. Brockman rejects the label of a deregulation lobby: 'Being pro-AI does not mean being anti-regulation. It means being thoughtful.' Public First, led by two former members of Congress, Brad Carson (D) and Chris Stewart (R), backs candidates who favor AI safety rules; it had raised $80 million, half of it from Anthropic.

The two sides met in the Democratic primary for New York's 12th District. AI-linked groups spent more than $27 million there, making it the second most expensive House primary on record, by AdImpact's count. Alex Bores, backed by about $19 million of pro-safety money, lost to Micah Lasher, who won with 39%.

The United Democracy Project, the super PAC of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), raised about $104 million through June 30, against $87.1 million in the whole 2024 cycle. By late August it had spent $54 million on congressional races, the most of any single outside group, by OpenSecrets' count. It spent $30.6 million in Michigan's Democratic Senate primary for Haley Stevens and against Abdul El-Sayed, the most AIPAC has spent on one race, and El-Sayed won. It spent more than $3 million against Massie, who lost.

7c. The Law

Four decisions built the system. *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) upheld limits on contributions as a guard against corruption but struck limits on spending as limits on speech. *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010) held that corporations and unions may spend without limit on independent political speech. Two months later a federal appeals court held in *SpeechNow.org v. FEC* that limits on contributions to groups that only spend independently were unconstitutional, which created the super PAC.

The fourth came this year. In *National Republican Senatorial Committee v. FEC*, decided June 30, 2026, Justice Kavanaugh wrote for a 6-3 majority that the limits on what parties may spend in coordination with

their candidates violate the First Amendment. He called them 'prophylaxis upon prophylaxis'. Until then a party could spend $65,300 in coordination with a House candidate in most states; now there is no cap. Coordinated advertising also buys airtime at the lowest rates broadcasters charge candidates, which independent groups cannot get.

Justice Kagan, for the three dissenters, wrote that the ruling lets 'a party ... serve as an alternative checking account for a campaign'. The FEC, which enforces the law, has lacked a quorum since April 30, 2025: two of its six seats are filled, both by Democrats, and two Republicans nominated in February 2026 await the Senate. On September 15 a federal court dismissed Senate Majority PAC's suit over the FEC's failure to act on its complaint against the NRSC, because ordering a vote by 'the two sitting commissioners' 'would be doomed to fail'; enforcement needs four votes.

7d. What the Evidence Says Money Does

The academic findings are more modest than the totals, and they have three parts. For incumbents, spending has small effects: money follows the likely winner more than it makes one, so much of the link between spending and winning runs backward. Gary Jacobson's work on congressional elections is the standard account. For challengers, money matters more, because a challenger must buy the recognition an incumbent already has.

Steven Levitt's study of congressional rematches found that each additional $100,000 a challenger spent bought roughly 0.3 percentage points, with no detectable effect for incumbents (1994). Kenneth Benoit and Michael Marsh found a challenger's spending 30% to 200% more effective than an incumbent's (2008). The effect of advertising also fades fast: John Sides and Lynn Vavreck found that doubling a candidate's ads in 2012 raised his poll standing about a point, an effect that disappeared after about a day.

For persuasion late in a general election, the measured effect is close to zero. Joshua Kalla and David Broockman's review of 49 field experiments found that the best estimate of the effect of campaign contact and advertising in general elections was zero, with effects only in rare cases, such as a candidate taking an unusually unpopular position (2018).

For policy, the evidence of bought votes is thin and the evidence of access is strong. In a field experiment, Kalla and Broockman found that congressional offices were three to four times as likely to grant a meeting with a senior official when the requesters were identified as donors (2016). The 2026 primaries fit the pattern: the money lost in New York and Michigan, while Leading the Future's candidates won 20 of the 21 primaries it backed by June, a record consistent with money following likely winners.

7e. A Competitive House Seat's Money

Worked example — A Competitive House Seat's Money

Take an imaginary suburban district of average size, 784,000 people (Module 5), that voted 52-48 for president, with a first-term incumbent and a well-funded challenger. The incumbent raises $6.0 million: $2.5 million in gifts within the individual limit (7a), $1.5 million from small donors online, $1.0 million from PACs, and $1.0 million in transfers from colleagues and party leaders. The challenger raises $4.0 million, most of it from small donors across the country once the race is rated a toss-up.

The outside money. The two parties' House super PACs put $5 million and $4 million into the district, mostly in attack advertising. An industry committee spends $2 million for the incumbent, who sits on the committee that regulates it, in ads that never mention the industry. A dark-money group spends $1.5 million

against the challenger. And since *NRSC v. FEC* (7c) each party's House committee can spend without limit in coordination with its candidate; say $1.5 million each, which buys airtime at the candidates' lower rates.

The total. That is $25.5 million. At 2022's national turnout rate (Module 1), about 260,000 of the district's roughly 560,000 eligible citizens vote, so the race costs about $100 a voter. About half of it, the $12.5 million from super PACs, the industry committee, and the dark-money group, is spent by groups that may not coordinate with either candidate.

What it buys. By the evidence of 7d, the challenger's $4 million buys recognition, without which the race is not competitive at all. Most of the rest buys a point or two in a race that the national environment, the president's approval, and the district's lean will decide by more. The industry committee's $2 million buys something the vote count does not show: the access that 7d measured. The lesson is not that money does not matter, but where it matters: in the recognition that lets a challenger compete, and in access.

7f. Is the System Corrupting, or Is It Speech?

The critics' case. Daniel Weiner of the Brennan Center argues that 'the justices got many things wrong in *Citizens United*', which assumed that independent money would be disclosed and kept independent. Regulators, he says, 'have done virtually nothing to enforce the requirement' that super PACs keep apart from campaigns, and dark money has reached at least $4.3 billion since 2010. Justice Kagan's dissent warned that unlimited party coordination revives 'the same opportunities for quid pro quo corruption that the contribution limits were meant to check'. At least 24 states support a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United*, by the Brennan Center's count.

The defenders' case. Political spending is political speech, and limits on it fall on the speech the First Amendment most protects. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said in its 2012 policy statement that it 'will firmly oppose any constitutional amendment that would limit the free speech clause of the First Amendment'. In its view 'money always finds an outlet', and 'the answer to that problem is to expand, not limit, the resources available for political advocacy'. It supports public financing, disclosure, and contribution limits instead. The Institute for Free Speech, which brought *SpeechNow*, defends unlimited independent spending on the same ground. Justice Kavanaugh's majority held that disclosure and 'vigilant enforcement' of the rules against earmarking are the more 'precise response' than limits.

The evidence. Money's measured effect on votes is modest and largest for challengers (7d). Its measured effect on access is large. The 2026 cycle's distinctive facts are concentration in a few donors (7a) and the absence of an enforcer with a quorum (7c).

The course's reading: the critics are right that the system now runs on a few very large donors and has no working referee, though the money buys fewer votes than its totals suggest (7d). The strongest case for change is therefore about access and disclosure rather than about votes, and the reforms with the best evidence, disclosure and a functioning FEC, need no constitutional amendment.

Module 7 Key Points

Money

• The 2024 federal elections cost at least $15.9 billion; 2026's advertising is projected at a record $11.6 billion.

• Contributions are limited and disclosed, super PACs unlimited and disclosed, and dark money, almost $2 billion in 2024, undisclosed.

• Since June 30, 2026 parties may coordinate unlimited spending with candidates, and the FEC has lacked a quorum since April 2025.

• Industry committees for crypto, AI, and Israel back either party on one issue, though their money lost several 2026 primaries.

• Money matters most for challengers; its persuasive effect late in general elections is close to zero.

Module 7 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What did the Supreme Court decide in *NRSC v. FEC* on June 30, 2026?

A) Corporations may give directly to candidates, up to $3,500 per election
B) Parties may coordinate unlimited spending with candidates
C) Super PACs must disclose every donor within 48 hours of a gift
D) Individual contribution limits rise with inflation every year

2. Why does the course say money's measured effect is larger for challengers than for incumbents?

A) Because incumbents may spend no more than $3,500 per election
B) Because challengers' donors are wealthier
C) Because a challenger must buy the recognition an incumbent already has, so each dollar moves more votes
D) Because incumbents' ads are regulated by the FEC

3. What is AdImpact's projection for 2026 political advertising?

A) $5.5 billion
B) $15.9 billion
C) About $2.7 billion, all from super PACs
D) $11.6 billion, a record above the 2024 cycle's $11.2 billion

4. What happened to the $30.6 million AIPAC's super PAC spent in Michigan's Democratic Senate primary?

A) Its candidate won easily
B) The FEC blocked it
C) Its target, Abdul El-Sayed, won anyway
D) It was matched dollar for dollar by the crypto industry's committee

5. Why did a federal court dismiss Senate Majority PAC's suit against the FEC on September 15, 2026?

A) The FEC lacks a quorum
B) The NRSC is exempt from federal campaign law
C) The Supreme Court abolished the FEC's enforcement powers
D) Party committees report only to the states

Module 8 — Polls, Forecasts, and Information

How the Campaign Is Measured and Mediated

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: G. Elliott Morris, *Strength in Numbers: How Polls Work and Why We Need Them* (2022)

Reference: The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), *Task Force on 2024 Pre-Election Polling* (October 29, 2025); the polling averages of RealClearPolling and the Silver Bulletin; the Pew Research Center's fact sheet on social media and news (October 19, 2026)

8a. How a Poll Works

A poll asks about a thousand people and infers what the country's eligible voters think (Module 1). The inference works if the sample is random: a random sample of a thousand has a margin of error of about three points either way at 95% confidence on a question split near 50-50. The margin on the difference between two candidates is nearly twice that, a point the coverage of 'leads' usually skips.

No pollster has had a random sample for years. In the Pew Research Center's telephone surveys, the response rate fell from 36% in 1997 to 9% in 2016 and 6% in 2018, and Pew moved its work to an online panel. Pollsters now build samples from online panels, text messages, and mixed modes, then weight the answers to match the population by age, sex, race, education, region, and often party or past vote.

The weighting is where the errors come from. The polls have underestimated Republicans in three presidential elections running. In the states, they overstated the Democratic margin by an average of 3.3 points in 2016, 4.0 in 2020, and 2.6 in 2024, by the count of AAPOR's task force. Yet 2024 was also 'the most accurate cycle for presidential polling at the state level since 1944', with an average miss of 3.0 points in the states and 2.6 nationally. AAPOR found that 'no single methodological approach guaranteed higher accuracy'.

Midterms have been kinder. The polls' average bias was close to zero in 2018 and 2022, and in the off-year elections of November 2025 they missed the other way: Virginia's final polling average had the Democrat ahead by about 10 points, about five short of her winning margin (Module 9).

The second variable is the likely-voter screen. Registered voters and likely voters can differ by several points in a midterm, because the people who say they will vote and then do not lean toward one party. Pollsters move from registered-voter to likely-voter samples in the fall, so part of a poll's movement can come from the screen rather than from any voter changing his mind; this October the Silver Bulletin's likely-voter adjustment adds about half a point to the Democrats' lead.

8b. The Generic Ballot, Approval, and the Forecasts

The generic ballot (Module 1) captures the national mood that individual House races ride on. The opposition party has won the House popular vote by an average of 4.4 points in the midterms since 1994, by the Silver Bulletin's count. On October 22, 2026 the Silver Bulletin's average put the Democrats ahead by 9.2 points, their largest lead of the cycle, and RealClearPolling's by 8.3, at 50.5% to 42.2%. In mid-September the averages had stood near 7 points.

The president's approval is the other fundamental. RealClearPolling's average stood at 38.3% approving and 60.5% disapproving (polls of September 28 to October 20), and the Silver Bulletin's net rating reached minus 24.3 on October 21, a new low in its records. The table gives the latest national polls.

Pollster	Field dates	Sample	Generic ballot, D-R	Approve and disapprove of Trump
New York Times/Siena	Oct 12-19	3,494 likely voters	52-41	36-59
CNN/SSRS	Oct 15-18	1,206 registered voters	49-39	34-66
Reuters/Ipsos	Oct 16-19	1,269 registered voters	47-35	34-65
Echelon Insights	Oct 15-19	1,010 likely voters	50-45	39-60
ABC/Washington Post/Ipsos	Oct 9-13	2,032 likely voters	52-44	38-62
Fox News	Oct 9-12	1,202 registered voters	54-45	36-64
AP-NORC	Oct 8-12	925 registered voters	47-38	36-64
Economist/YouGov	Oct 10-12	1,184 likely voters	49-41	—
NBC News Decision Desk	Sept 28-Oct 12	18,061 registered voters	55-45	—
Pew Research Center	Sept 28-Oct 4	Registered voters within 5,062 adults; approval of all adults	44-36	30-68

RealClearPolling's tables (fetched October 22, 2026), with samples from the same surveys' approval questions; Fox, AP-NORC, and Pew samples confirmed in news reports on those polls. The generic-ballot question may be asked of part of the sample.

The forecasting models turn these inputs into probabilities. The Silver Bulletin's model, which runs 40,000 simulations, gave the Democrats a 93.1% chance of winning the House and 74.8% of winning the Senate on data through October 8, up from 82.7% and 50.6% a month before. The prediction markets, legal for federal elections since a court ruling in 2024, priced the same questions on October 22 at about 92% for the House and 68% for the Senate.

A forecast is a probability, not a call. The best-known 2016 forecast gave Trump about a 30% chance, and he won, which is what 30% means. The models' limit is the polls' shared error: when every poll misses in the same direction, every model built on them does too, and so do the markets that trade on the same polls.

8c. Are the Polls Reliable This Year?

The case for caution. Fabricated and secretly sponsored polls entered the 2026 cycle. In August Median Strategies admitted that its polls of three races were fake, and FiftyPlusOne, an aggregator, banned two firms for taking undisclosed payments from a Florida campaign. On October 22 the Silver Bulletin 'permanently banned' Wedgewood Polls, which admitted fabricating most of the polls it had released, after they had entered several Senate averages.

Chris Wilson, a Republican pollster, warned that 'this is much bigger than one fake poll'. G. Elliott Morris said that 'AI tools make it trivial for enterprising young coders to fabricate release paperwork'. And the polls' directional record in presidential years is the skeptics' strongest point.

The case for confidence. AAPOR called 2024 'a good year for public polling'. Across 611 polls of all offices in its final two weeks, the average miss on the margin was 3.3 points, against 5.3 in 2020 and 5.2 in 2016. Midterm polls have shown almost no bias (8a), and the aggregators screened out the fakes: the *New York Times*, RealClearPolling, and FiftyPlusOne had excluded Median's polls because they lacked a disclosed method.

The evidence. In AAPOR's counts, presidential polls have erred toward the Democrats and midterm polls have barely erred; the most recent off-year polls erred toward the Republicans (8a). The direction of any error this year is therefore not knowable in advance.

The course's reading: the averages of disclosed, established pollsters are about as reliable as they have been in two decades. The new danger is contamination by fake and paid polls, which the better aggregators screen and the cruder ones do not. A reader should trust an average's trend, check who is in it, and expect a miss of about three points in either direction.

8d. The Information Environment

• **The fragmented audience.** In August 2026, 59% of American adults got news from social media at least sometimes, by Pew's count; 40% regularly got news on Facebook, 34% on YouTube, 23% on Instagram, 20% on TikTok, and 10% on X. Among adults under 30, the share regularly getting news on TikTok rose from 9% in 2020 to 43% in 2025.

• **Artificial intelligence.** The 2026 cycle is the first with synthetic media at scale. The Wesleyan Media Project counted more than $80 million spent on more than 164 AI-based ads, about 80% of them Republican. Thirty states regulate election deepfakes, by Public Citizen's count, though courts struck down California's law in 2025 and Hawaii's in January 2026, and no federal rule governs AI in campaigns. No effect on any result has been measured.

• **Prediction markets.** On October 9 the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) proposed treating contracts on politics, sports, culture, and weather as swaps, with comments due November 18; its chairman, Michael Selig, called them 'commodity derivatives squarely within the CFTC's regulatory remit'. Trading is thin, at about $650,000 in a day on Senate control across the two largest markets on October 22, which leaves prices open to manipulation.

• **Foreign interference.** The administration eliminated the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Foreign Influence Task Force, folded the intelligence community's Foreign Malign Influence Center into a reorganization, and closed the State Department's office for countering foreign disinformation. On September 22 the defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, ordered Cyber Command and three intelligence agencies to treat foreign threats to the election as a 'no-fail mission'. Classified assessments reported in September found Russian covert operations aimed at confidence in the vote, but no evidence of attempts to compromise voting machines.

Module 8 Key Points

Polls, Forecasts, and Information

• Pollsters weight samples because few people answer; the weighting is where the errors come from.

• Presidential polls underestimated Republicans three times running, though 2024's state polls were the most accurate since 1944.

• On October 22 the generic-ballot averages put Democrats ahead by 8.3 to 9.2 points, and Trump's net approval hit a record low.

• The Silver Bulletin gave Democrats a 93% chance at the House and 75% at the Senate; markets about 92% and 68%.

• Fake and paid polls are the new danger; AI ads cost more than $80 million, with no measured effect on any result.

Module 8 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Why do pollsters weight their samples?

A) Because the law requires it
B) Because few people answer, so no sample is random
C) Because weighting removes the margin of error from the published result
D) Because online panels are larger than the population they describe

2. What did AAPOR's task force find about the 2024 polls?

A) They overestimated Republicans by about five points
B) They were the least accurate since 1948
C) State polls were the most accurate since 1944, though for the third straight presidential cycle they underestimated Republicans
D) National polls missed by more than ten points

3. Where did the Silver Bulletin's generic-ballot average stand on October 22, 2026?

A) Democrats ahead by 9.2 points
B) Republicans ahead by 2
C) A tie
D) Democrats ahead by 20 points, a record for any midterm

4. What did the Wedgewood Polls episode of October 2026 involve?

A) A poll leaked before release
B) Fabricated polls
C) A pollster paid by a foreign government
D) A poll whose sample was too small to report

5. What has been measured about AI-generated ads' effect on any 2026 result?

A) A large effect
B) A swing of about two points in close races
C) A decisive effect in several primaries, by the FEC's count
D) No effect has been measured

Module 9 — The 2026 Midterms

The Map as It Stands on October 22

Recommended Reading / Reference

Reference: The Cook Political Report, Sabato's Crystal Ball, and Inside Elections for race ratings; 270toWin's logs of their changes; the published polls, with Wedgewood Polls' excluded; Ballotpedia and NCSL for ballot measures; and Votebeat's survey of the election-rule measures (October 19, 2026)

9a. The Fundamentals

Every midterm begins with the same base rate. Since 1866 the president's party has lost House seats in 35 of the 40 midterms through 2022, gaining only in 1866, 1902, 1934, 1998, and 2002. Its average loss since the Second World War is about 26 seats. The loss grows with the president's unpopularity and the economy's discontents, and both point the same way this October (Module 8).

The economy is the voters' first concern. Consumer prices rose 3.7% in the year to September and unemployment stood at 4.2%, and the Federal Reserve raised its rate to 3.75-4.00% on September 16. In AP-NORC's October poll (Module 8), about 8 in 10 voters named the economy or the cost of living as among the most important issues, and about two-thirds each named health care and the war with Iran, which began on February 28, 2026.

The Republican case, in a House Republican memo reported by Fox News on October 2, is the border, public safety, the economy, and the misuse of taxpayers' money. Lisa McClain, who chairs the House Republican Conference, said that 'every single Democrat voted to raise your taxes'. The president added a promise at the party's 'midterm convention' in September: a $5,000 'dividend' to every American if Republicans keep Congress. The Democratic case is the cost of living, health care, and the war. In AP-NORC's poll of September 24-28 (2,140 adults), the parties were level on immigration, Republicans 33% and Democrats 34%, and Democrats led on the cost of living, 35% to 24%.

The elections already held point the same way. In the special elections of 2026, Democrats ran an average of 11 points ahead of their 2024 presidential margins, by The Downballot's count in April. In November 2025, Abigail Spanberger won Virginia's governorship by 57.6% to 42.2%, Mikie Sherrill won New Jersey's by about 57% to 43%, and Zohran Mamdani won New York City's mayoralty with 50.8%.

9b. The House

Democrats need a net gain of three seats over their 2024 result to reach a majority of 218, or four above the seats they hold now (Module 1). The redistricting of 2025-26 made the climb steeper (Module 4), and the national environment has more than made up for it in the raters' eyes. On October 9 the Cook Political Report rated 213 seats at least leaning Democratic, 201 at least leaning Republican, and 21 toss-ups, 15 of them held by Republicans.

Republicans held 23 seats rated toss-up or worse for them, against 11 for Democrats; at the same point in 2018 the Republicans had 45 such seats, and in 2022 the Democrats had 30. Cook's Erin Covey wrote that Democrats 'only need to win 20 percent of the Toss Ups to get to a majority'. The Crystal Ball counted 20 toss-ups on October 8 and Inside Elections 16 on October 1.

Cook's toss-ups on October 16 ran through the suburbs and the redrawn states: Arizona's 6th, California's 22nd, Colorado's 8th, three seats in Michigan, two each in North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia, Florida's 14th and 22nd, Iowa's 2nd, Montana's 1st, New York's 17th, Pennsylvania's 8th, and Wisconsin's 3rd.

9c. The Senate

The Senate is the harder climb. Republicans hold the majority and defend most of the seats on the ballot (Module 1). Democrats need a net gain of four seats, to 51, because a 50-50 Senate stays Republican with Vice President Vance's tie-breaking vote. The map runs through Republican-held seats in states Trump won, and through Maine, where Susan Collins is the only Republican senator from a state Harris carried. The Republicans' targets are the Democratic seats in Michigan, Georgia, New Hampshire, and Minnesota.

State	Candidates	Ratings: Cook / Crystal Ball / Inside Elections	Latest polls
Texas	Ken Paxton (R) v. James Talarico (D); open (Module 6)	Toss-up / Toss-up / Tilt R	InsiderAdvantage, Oct 13-14, 1,200 likely voters (LV): Paxton 49, Talarico 48. ReconMR/Siena, Oct 5-8, 617 LV: Talarico 48, Paxton 44
Ohio (special)	Sen. Jon Husted (R, appointed) v. Sherrod Brown (D)	Toss-up / Toss-up / Toss-up	Marist, Oct 15-18, 1,176 LV: Brown 48, Husted 44. Bowling Green State/YouGov, Sept 29-Oct 9, 1,000 LV: Brown 48, Husted 42
North Carolina	Roy Cooper (D) v. Michael Whatley (R); open	Likely D / Lean D / Lean D	SurveyUSA, Oct 7-11, 643 LV: Cooper 54, Whatley 40
Maine	Sen. Susan Collins (R) v. Troy Jackson (D); ranked-choice voting	Toss-up / Toss-up / Tilt R	InsiderAdvantage, Oct 13-14, 1,200 LV: Jackson 49, Collins 47. Washington Post/George Mason, Sept 30-Oct 5, 800 LV: Jackson 50, Collins 45
Michigan	Abdul El-Sayed (D) v. Mike Rogers (R); open	Toss-up / Leans D / Tilt D	Marist, Oct 15-18, LV: El-Sayed 50, Rogers 48. Tyson Group, Oct 6-8, 600 LV: Rogers 46, El-Sayed 44
Georgia	Sen. Jon Ossoff (D) v. Mike Collins (R); a runoff on December 1 if no one wins a majority	Likely D / Likely D / Lean D	Quantus, Oct 15-17, 755 LV: Ossoff 51.8, Collins 44.9
New Hampshire	Chris Pappas (D) v. John E. Sununu (R); open	Lean D / Lean D / Toss-up	New York Times/Siena, Sept 15-22, 613 LV: Pappas 50, Sununu 45
Iowa	Ashley Hinson (R) v. Josh Turek (D); open	Toss-up / Toss-up / Tilt R	co/efficient, Oct 15-19, 863 LV: Hinson 48, Turek 45. YouGov, Oct 6-12, 2,245 LV: Turek 47, Hinson 46
Alaska	Sen. Dan Sullivan (R) v. Mary Peltola (D); top-four primary, then ranked choice	Toss-up / Leans D / Toss-up	Public Policy Polling (D), Oct 14-15, 578 registered voters: Peltola 48, Sullivan 47. Alaska Survey Research, Oct 1-3, 1,512 LV: Peltola 51, Sullivan 49 in the final round
Kansas	Sen. Roger Marshall (R) v. Adam Hamilton (D)	Toss-up / Leans R / Likely R	YouGov, Sept 24-Oct 4, 2,255 LV: Hamilton 48, Marshall 45. New York Times/Siena, Sept 22-30, 605 LV: 45-45
Nebraska	Sen. Pete Ricketts (R) v. Dan Osborn (independent); no Democrat on the ballot	Likely R / Leans R / Lean R	YouGov, Sept 24-Oct 3, 1,809 LV: Osborn 48, Ricketts 47. co/efficient, Sept 28-30, 1,113 LV: Ricketts 48, Osborn 43

State	Candidates	Ratings: Cook / Crystal Ball / Inside Elections	Latest polls
Minnesota	Peggy Flanagan (D) v. Michele Tafoya (R); open	Likely D / Likely D / Lean D	SurveyUSA, Oct 8-12, 718 LV: Flanagan 45, Tafoya 42
South Carolina	Sen. Darline Graham (R, appointed) v. Annie Andrews (D)	Likely R / Likely R / Likely R	InsiderAdvantage, Sept 28-29, 1,200 LV: Graham 46, Andrews 45
Florida (special)	Sen. Ashley Moody (R, appointed) v. Angie Nixon (D)	Solid R / Safe R / Solid R	University of North Florida, Oct 12-19, 1,414 LV: Moody 49, Nixon 45

The latest rating found for each rater, from August to October 14; the Crystal Ball's other October 14 changes could not be read. Polls from the race pages of Wikipedia and from uspollingdata.com, with every Wedgewood Polls survey excluded. (D) marks a pollster working for Democrats.

Two races were rewritten during the year. Senator Lindsey Graham died on July 11, 2026; Governor Henry McMaster appointed his sister, Darline Graham, who then won the Republican runoff on August 25 by 52.4% to 47.6% over Representative Ralph Norman. In Maine, Graham Platner won the Democratic primary in June and withdrew in July after two former partners made allegations against him; a party convention nominated Troy Jackson, 566 to 5.

In Nebraska, six outside groups had spent $12.8 million for the independent Dan Osborn by October 13, the Senate Leadership Fund planned $15 million for Ricketts, and the president campaigned for Ricketts in Grand Island on October 5.

9d. Governors and Legislatures

Fifteen of the governors whose seats are on the ballot (Module 1) are term-limited. In several states the winners will decide whether to redraw the maps again before the 2030 census (Module 4).

State	Candidates	Ratings	Polls
Georgia	Keisha Lance Bottoms (D) v. Rick Jackson (R); open	Crystal Ball: Toss-up	GBAO, Oct 7-15, 2,000 registered voters: Jackson 46, Bottoms 45. Quantus, Oct 15-17, 755 LV: Jackson 48.2, Bottoms 46.6
Nevada	Gov. Joe Lombardo (R) v. Aaron Ford (D)	Crystal Ball: Toss-up	Noble Predictive Insights, Sept 22-26, 800 registered voters: Lombardo 38, Ford 37
Ohio	Amy Acton (D) v. Vivek Ramaswamy (R); open	Crystal Ball and Inside Elections: Toss-up	Marist, Oct 15-18, 1,176 LV: Acton 50, Ramaswamy 43
Wisconsin	David Crowley (D) v. Tom Tiffany (R); open	Cook: Toss-up; Crystal Ball: Lean D	Marquette Law School, Sept 16-23, 692 LV: Crowley 49, Tiffany 46
Alaska	Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (D) v. Bernadette Wilson (R); open	Crystal Ball: Leans D; Inside Elections: Toss-up	—
Arizona	Gov. Katie Hobbs (D) v. Andy Biggs (R)	Cook and Crystal Ball: Lean D	—
Michigan	Jocelyn Benson (D) v. John James (R); open, after the independent Mike Duggan withdrew	Cook and Crystal Ball: Lean D	—
Iowa	Rob Sand (D) v. Zach Lahn (R); open	Crystal Ball: Leans D	—
Texas	Gov. Greg Abbott (R) v. Gina Hinojosa (D)	Cook: Lean R (October 1)	—

State	Candidates	Ratings	Polls
Florida	Byron Donalds (R) v. David Jolly (D); open	Cook: Lean R (October 1)	—

The raters' latest published ratings found, from July to October 6; polls as in the Senate table. Pennsylvania's governor, Josh Shapiro, has been rated Safe D by the Crystal Ball since September 3.

The legislative races matter as much: the chambers that change hands decide who controls the bodies that drew the maps of 2025-26 and would draw any more of them.

9e. The Ballot Measures

Of the year's statewide measures, 39 concern how elections are run, a record by NCSL's count. Votebeat reported in October that California's identification measure 'faces an uphill battle' while Arizona's has 'much stronger support in polls'. Constitutional amendments limiting voting to citizens have a long winning streak: all 15 decided from 2018 through 2025 passed, with an average of about 73%, by Ballotpedia's count.

Subject	Measures on November 3
Voter identification	Arizona Proposition 144; California Proposition 39; Colorado Amendment 84; Nevada Question 7, its second required approval; North Carolina's amendment; Ohio Issue 3
Voting limited to citizens	Alaska Measure 3; Arkansas Issue 1; Kansas's amendment; South Dakota Amendment J; West Virginia Amendment 1; and a clause of Arizona Proposition 144
Primaries and registration	Alaska Measure 2, which would repeal the top-four primary and ranked-choice voting; a Massachusetts initiative for top-two primaries for state offices; Massachusetts Question 4, for same-day registration
Redistricting	Missouri Proposition A; Maryland Question 3; Colorado Amendment 86 (Module 4)
Voting rights	Virginia Question 3, a right to vote and automatic restoration of rights after a felony sentence (Module 2)
The initiative itself	North Dakota Measure 1 and South Dakota Amendment L would require 60% to amend the constitution by initiative, and Utah Amendment B 60% for initiatives that raise taxes; Missouri Amendment 6 and Montana CI-133 would protect the process

Votebeat (October 19, 2026), NPR (September 15), HeadCount (September 11), Ballotpedia, and Democracy Docket's list (October 16).

9f. Early Voting and the Count

The early vote is running ahead of 2022's in the states that report comparisons. The Associated Press counted about 6 million ballots cast in 39 states by October 15. In Georgia, 188,667 people voted on the first day of early voting, October 13, against 134,962 in 2022, and Ohio's early in-person vote was running at nearly four times its 2022 pace.

The count will be slow in places. California, where some counties receive up to half their mail ballots on Election Day, set aside $40 million to speed the count, and Alaska was the last state to count 95% of its vote in 2024. Ranked-choice tabulations in Alaska and Maine, Georgia's possible runoff (9c), and Louisiana's House general election (Module 6) extend the calendar. Congressional results are certified by each state under its own law (Module 3).

9g. What November 3 Will and Will Not Change

• **Can change: control of the House.** A Democratic House ends unified government, gains the power to investigate the administration, and gains leverage over every spending bill. A Republican House held on the new maps would confirm that mid-decade redistricting works and invite more of it before 2028.

• **Could change: control of the Senate.** A Democratic Senate would stop the confirmation of judges and officials the majority opposes. A Republican Senate keeps the confirmations going whatever happens in the House.

• **Will not change: the presidency.** The executive orders, the tariffs, and the appointments continue until January 20, 2029, whoever wins. A Congress can investigate, condition, and refuse, but it cannot govern.

• **Will change: the officials who run 2028.** The governors and secretaries of state elected now will administer the next presidential election, and the legislatures will decide whether to adopt the rules fought over in 2025-26.

• **Will be tested: acceptance.** This is the first federal election after the fights over the rolls, the mail, and the federal role (Module 3). Whether both parties accept the count is a result of its own.

Module 9 Key Points

The 2026 Midterms

• Since 1866 the president's party has lost House seats in 35 of 40 midterms, about 26 on average since World War II.

• Democrats need three House seats; on October 9 Cook rated 213 seats at least leaning Democratic, 201 Republican, and 21 toss-ups.

• Democrats need four Senate seats, running through Republican seats in Texas, Ohio, North Carolina, Maine, Iowa, Alaska, Kansas, and Nebraska.

• A record 39 statewide measures concern election rules, including six on voter identification and six limiting voting to citizens.

• November 3 can change control of Congress and who runs the 2028 election, but not the presidency before January 2029.

Module 9 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. Since 1866, in how many midterms has the president's party lost House seats?

A) 35 of 40
B) All 40
C) About half, 21 of 40
D) 38 of 41, by an average of 27 seats

2. Why would a 50-50 Senate after November 3 stay Republican?

A) Because of seniority
B) Because Vice President Vance breaks ties
C) Because of the filibuster
D) Because the Senate majority leader is chosen by the outgoing majority

3. On the Cook Political Report's October 9 ratings, how many House races were toss-ups?

A) About 50
B) Four, all in Texas
C) 21
D) Over 100, a modern record

4. What would Alaska's Ballot Measure 2 do?

A) Adopt ranked-choice voting statewide
B) Require photo identification at the polls
C) Create an independent redistricting commission
D) Repeal the top-four primary and ranked-choice general election, restoring party primaries

5. Who certifies the results of congressional elections?

A) The states, under their own laws
B) The FEC
C) Congress's clerk
D) The vice president, under the Electoral Count Reform Act

Module 10 — Comparison Abroad

What Other Democracies Do Instead

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (second edition, 2012)

Reference: The official results of Britain's, France's, and India's elections of 2024, Germany's, Canada's, and Australia's of 2025, and Japan's of 2026, and the database of electoral systems of International IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance)

10a. Nine Systems

Country	System	Latest national result	What it buys, and what it costs
Britain	Plurality in 650 single-member districts: the American rule, without primaries	July 4, 2024: a Labour landslide on a minority of the vote (10c). Labour replaced its leader and prime minister between elections, choosing Andy Burnham	Single-party majorities from minority votes; a House of Commons that does not resemble the electorate
Germany	Mixed-member proportional: 299 district seats plus party lists that make the whole proportional, with a 5% threshold. Since 2023 the chamber is fixed at 630 seats, so a district winner is seated only if the party's vote covers the seat	February 23, 2025: the Christian Democrats and their Bavarian allies (CDU/CSU) 28.5% and 208 seats; the Alternative for Germany (AfD) 20.8% and 152; turnout 82.5%. Twenty-three district winners got no seat. Friedrich Merz was elected chancellor on May 6, 72 days after the vote	A proportional result with a local member; coalitions that take weeks; a threshold that shut out the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) at 4.98%, about 9,500 votes short
France	Two rounds in 577 single-member districts: a first-round majority wins; otherwise candidates above 12.5% of registered voters go to a runoff	June 30 and July 7, 2024: the National Rally and its allies led the first round with 33.2% and finished third in seats with 142, behind the left's New Popular Front (180) and the center's Ensemble (159), after 216 candidates withdrew between the rounds. No majority; turnout 66.7%	A majority winner in every seat, and alliances between rounds that can reverse the first round's order. Three prime ministers appointed since the election, Michel Barnier, François Bayrou, and Sébastien Lecornu, and a 2026 budget passed without a final vote under Article 49.3
Australia	Compulsory voting; ranked ballots in 150 single-member districts; a proportional Senate	May 3, 2025: Labor 94 seats on 55.2% of the two-party vote; turnout 90.7% by the Australian Electoral Commission's estimate	A majority winner in every seat and near-universal turnout; a fine of A$20 for not voting, and up to A$330 for those who end up in court
Israel	Nationwide proportional representation in one district: 120 seats, a 3.25% threshold	Five elections from April 2019 to November 2022, with 70.6% turnout in the last; the sixth on October 27, 2026	Every vote counts equally; no party has ever won a majority, so small parties decide who governs
India	Plurality in 543 single-member districts	April 19 to June 1, 2024: 978 million registered, turnout 66.1%. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 240 seats, short of the 272 needed, and governs with allies, whose alliance holds 293	The American rule at four times the scale, run by an independent commission

Country	System	Latest national result	What it buys, and what it costs
Canada	Plurality in 343 single-member districts, with parties that choose their candidates	April 28, 2025: the Liberals 43.8% and 169 seats, a minority. By April 13, 2026, after five floor-crossings and three by-election wins, they held 174, a majority	The American rule with party discipline and no primaries
Japan	Parallel: 289 district seats and 176 list seats, added together without correction	February 8, 2026: the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won 316 of 465 seats, two-thirds on its own, on 36.7% of the list vote; turnout about 56%	Clear majorities for the largest party, which the list tier does little to temper
United States	Plurality in single-member districts, with primaries, a Senate of two per state, the Electoral College, and state-run elections	Modules 1 to 9	No other democracy combines all five

The House of Commons Library, Germany's Federal Returning Officer, France's Interior Ministry, the Australian Electoral Commission, the Election Commission of India, Elections Canada, and Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs, as compiled by Wikipedia and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) ElectionGuide (accessed October 22, 2026); Canada's 2026 count from CTV News (April 14, 2026).

10b. What Each Buys

The systems sort along one line, from majoritarian to proportional, and Lijphart's comparison of thirty-six democracies is the standard reading of the trade. Majoritarian systems, such as Britain's, France's, India's, Canada's, and America's, produce single-party governments, clear accountability, and a member for every place. The price is results that do not resemble the vote, as Britain's 2024 election shows (10c).

Proportional systems, such as Germany's, Israel's, the Netherlands', and Scandinavia's, produce legislatures that mirror the vote, more parties, and higher turnout. In Lijphart's measures they also match the majoritarian democracies on economic performance and beat them on the representation of women and minorities. Their price is coalitions that take weeks or months to form, small parties with vetoes, and accountability spread across partners.

The American system is majoritarian with three additions. The primary hands the choice of candidates from the parties to a fraction of their voters (Module 6). The Senate gives every state two seats whatever its size, and the Electoral College turns the presidential election into a contest among states (Module 5). Compulsory voting is a separate axis: Australia has required its citizens to vote in federal elections since 1924.

10c. Britain's 2024 Election Under Three Systems

Worked example — Britain's 2024 Election Under Three Systems

Take the July 2024 election as it was counted: 28.8 million ballots, a turnout of 59.7%. Labour won 33.7% of the vote, the Conservatives 23.7%, Reform UK 14.3%, the Liberal Democrats 12.2%, the Greens 6.7% counting the Scottish Greens, and the Scottish National Party (SNP) 2.5%, across 650 seats.

Plurality, as it happened. Labour won 411 seats, the Conservatives 121, the Liberal Democrats 72, the SNP 9, Reform 5, and the Greens 4. No gerrymander produced the gap; the rule did. Reform's 4.1 million votes were spread across seats it lost, the Liberal Democrats' 3.5 million were concentrated where they won, and Labour's third was enough for a plurality across most of the country. It has been called the least proportional general election in British history.

Proportional representation. Allocate the 650 seats in proportion to the vote among the five parties above a 5% national threshold, by either of the standard formulas. Labour gets 242 seats, the Conservatives 170, Reform 102, the Liberal Democrats 88, and the Greens 48. No party reaches the 326 needed for a majority. Labour and the Liberal Democrats together reach 330, a bare majority, while the Conservatives and Reform together reach 272, and Reform becomes the third party in Parliament rather than a footnote.

Two rounds, as France would run it. Here only the direction can be traced, because voters and parties would behave differently under different rules. Most of Labour's seats would go to runoffs, which Labour would usually win with Liberal Democrat and Green transfers. Reform would gain seats where it faced a Conservative in the runoff and lose where the others united against it, as France's left and center did against the National Rally in 2024.

The lesson. The same ballots produce a Labour landslide, a Labour-led coalition, or a Labour majority facing a larger opposition, depending on a rule the voters never voted on. For the United States the counts preview Module 11's argument. A proportional House would blunt the gerrymander and, in most years, leave no party a majority of its own, and a two-round House would have no spoilers.

Module 10 Key Points

Comparison Abroad

• Majoritarian systems give clear winners and a member for every place; proportional systems mirror the vote at the cost of coalitions.

• Britain's Labour won 63% of the seats on 33.7% of the vote in 2024, under the American rule.

• Germany's 2025 rules left 23 district winners without seats, and a party with 4.98% won none.

• France's left and center withdrew 216 candidates between rounds and pushed the first-round leader to third place in seats.

• No other democracy combines primaries, plurality districts, an equal Senate, the Electoral College, and state-run elections.

Module 10 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. In the worked example, how many seats would Reform UK win under proportional representation?

A) 5
B) About 200
C) 102
D) Zero, under a 5% threshold

2. Which German party fell short of the 5% threshold in 2025 by about 9,500 votes?

A) The Left, which won 64 seats instead
B) The Christian Social Union, Bavaria's party
C) The Free Democrats, the liberals of the last coalition
D) The Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance

3. Why did France's National Rally finish third in seats in 2024 after leading the first round?

A) Because it boycotted the second round
B) Because 216 candidates of the left and center withdrew between the rounds so as not to split the vote against it
C) Because the threshold excluded it
D) Because the courts annulled several of its seats

4. What is the fine for not voting in an Australian federal election?

A) A$200, raised in 2025
B) A$20
C) Voting is voluntary there
D) A day in jail for repeat offenders

5. What lesson does the course draw from Britain's 2024 election under three systems?

A) That proportional representation always helps the largest party
B) That runoffs favor the far right
C) The same ballots produce a landslide, a coalition, or a different majority depending on a rule the voters never chose
D) That plurality voting is fairer to small parties

Module 11 — Reform, and the Arguments

The Changes Proposed, and the Cases For and Against

Recommended Reading / Reference

Book: Lee Drutman, *Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America* (2020), the case for proportional reform; read it against *The Federalist*'s defense of the design

Reference: The Congressional Research Service's legal sidebar on ranked-choice voting (October 8, 2026); the National Popular Vote compact's own count; FairVote's and Ballotpedia's trackers of ranked-choice voting and election-law measures

11a. The Menu

Reform	What it does	Where it stands, October 2026	The evidence
Ranked-choice voting	Ranked ballots, counted in rounds (Module 1)	Used statewide in Maine and Alaska, for special federal elections in Hawaii, and in the District of Columbia from 2026; about 50 jurisdictions in all. Banned in 19 states, Indiana and Ohio among them in 2026. Alaska's repeal failed by 743 votes in 2024, and a second repeal is on its ballot	Meant to end the spoiler problem (11b)
Top-two and open primaries	A single ballot for all candidates (Module 6)	Top-two in California and Washington, top-four in Alaska; a top-two initiative in Massachusetts on November 3. The 2024 votes are in 11b	Modestly more moderate legislators in California; primaries explain little of polarization overall (Module 6)
Independent redistricting commissions	A commission, not the legislature, draws the lines	A minority of states (Module 4). A bill by Representative Zoe Lofgren and Senator Alex Padilla would require commissions nationally and ban mid-decade redraws	Fairer maps where they exist, their backers say; a one-sided disarmament problem when other states draw for advantage
A proportional House	Multi-member districts of three to five seats elected by ranked ballot, under the Fair Representation Act	H.R. 4632, introduced July 23, 2025 by Representative Don Beyer and four Democratic co-sponsors; no hearing. It would apply from the House elected in 2032, and needs only a statute, since the single-member rule is an act of Congress (Module 4)	Would blunt the gerrymander; more parties and coalition majorities
A larger House	The 'Wyoming rule' (Module 5)	Unchanged since 1913, apart from a temporary 437 in 1959-63; a statute would suffice	Smaller districts
The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact	States pledge their electors to the national popular-vote winner once states with 270 electoral votes have joined	18 states and the District, with 222 electoral votes since Virginia joined on April 13, 2026; it needs 48 more. Its campaign targets Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, Nevada, Wisconsin, and New Hampshire	Would end the College's effect without an amendment. Whether it needs Congress's consent is unresolved
Abolishing the Electoral College	A constitutional amendment	Needs two-thirds of each house of Congress and 38 states	An amendment for direct election passed the House in 1969 and died in the Senate

Reform	What it does	Where it stands, October 2026	The evidence
Registration	Automatic registration by state agencies; registration on Election Day	The states that use each are in Module 2; Massachusetts votes on same-day registration on November 3	Adds eligible citizens to the rolls; its effect on turnout is debated
Identification and proof of citizenship	Photo identification at the polls; documents at registration	The SAVE America Act failed in the Senate (Module 3); several states vote on identification measures on November 3 (Module 9)	No measurable turnout effect in the largest study (Module 2); noncitizen voting is rare (Module 3)
Term limits for Congress	Caps on congressional service	The Supreme Court barred state-imposed limits in 1995. Thirteen of the 34 states needed have applied for a convention under Article V, Arizona most recently in April 2026	Congress has never deemed the Article V threshold met

CRS (October 8, 2026) for ranked-choice use and bans; Ballotpedia and Votebeat for the 2024 and 2026 measures; National Popular Vote (June 2026) and NPR (April 14, 2026) for the compact; GovInfo for H.R. 4632; the Arizona legislature for the Article V count.

11b. The Cases, Made as Their Advocates Make Them

The reformers' case. The system was designed for a republic of four million people and now runs one of 342 million on rules no one would choose today. The Senate's arithmetic and the Electoral College's (Module 5) let minorities of the people decide, House districts are drawn by the people who run in them (Module 4), and primaries hand the choice of candidates to a small and partisan fraction of voters (Module 6). Plurality voting enforces two parties by turning every third choice into a wasted vote.

The result, on this view, is a politics that rewards the extremes, and a majority of voters living where their votes cannot change the outcome. Alyssa Cass, a strategist for National Popular Vote, says: 'The votes of 4 out of 5 Americans who live in safely blue or safely red states are essentially irrelevant.' FairVote argues that ranked ballots give 'voters the freedom to vote their conscience', without fear of playing spoiler. Representative Don Beyer presented the bill's 2024 version as 'vital solutions to the hyper-partisan gerrymandering and lack of electoral competition'. Most of the fixes need only a statute, and each exists somewhere in the democratic world; what stops them, the reformers argue, is the incumbents the current rules elected.

The design's defenders' case. The system's features are not accidents but the terms of the compact that made the union possible and keeps it whole. The Senate protects the states as states; *The Federalist* No. 62 calls each state's equal vote 'a constitutional recognition of the portion of sovereignty remaining in the individual States'. The Electoral College forces a president to win a coalition across regions rather than run up the score in a few. Single-member districts give every citizen one representative answerable for a place, and two parties force coalitions to be built before the election, in public, rather than after it, in a deal no voter saw.

The multiparty systems the reformers admire, the defenders say, produced France's rotating prime ministers, Germany's long coalition talks, and the leverage of Israel's smallest parties. Ken Cuccinelli of the Election Transparency Initiative argues that ranked choice 'manufactures a majority winner by routinely throwing out thousands of duly cast ballots', and Indiana State Senator Blake Doriot defended his state's ban on the ground that 'we have always been one vote, one person'. Patrick Valencia, now Iowa's deputy solicitor general, has written that the popular-vote compact seeks to 'usurp the constitutionally required electoral procedures'. And voters, the defenders add, have rejected ranked choice and open primaries in state after state.

The evidence. On proportional systems, Lijphart's comparisons (Module 10) and later ones find them about as stable as majoritarian ones. France's instability arose under a two-round majoritarian system, not a proportional one. On ranked choice, federal courts have upheld it, and a 2023 study by the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School, which Cuccinelli cited, found 'no difference in turnout' in cities that use it.

The voters' verdicts are mixed. In 2024 measures on ranked choice or open primaries failed in seven states, and where ranked choice itself was rejected the 'no' side averaged 58.5%. The District of Columbia adopted both with 72.9%, and Missouri banned ranked choice with 68.4%. On the College, majorities have told pollsters they prefer a national popular vote: 61% in Gallup's poll of September 2020 and 63% in Pew's of August 2022. And Nate Silver has found almost no correlation from one election to the next in which party the College favors.

The course's reading: most of the reformers' menu has been tried elsewhere and works roughly as claimed, and most of it needs only statutes. None of it, though, is likely to pass a legislature elected under the rules it would change. The changes that happen to those rules therefore come where voters decide directly, and the 2024 and 2026 ballots show those voters are as ready to keep the old rules as to replace them.

Module 11 Key Points

Reform, and the Arguments

• Most reforms need only a statute: ranked ballots, multi-member districts, a larger House, automatic registration.

• Ranked choice is used in Maine, Alaska, and about 50 places, but 19 states ban it, and Alaska votes on repeal again.

• The popular-vote compact reached 222 electoral votes when Virginia joined in April 2026, and needs 48 more.

• Reformers say the rules serve the incumbents they elected; defenders say the features hold a union of states together.

• Voters rejected ranked choice or open primaries in seven states in 2024; direct democracy cuts both ways.

Module 11 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. How many electoral votes does the National Popular Vote compact hold as of October 2026?

A) 222
B) 61
C) 270, so it is in effect
D) 209, as before Virginia joined

2. How many states ban ranked-choice voting, by the Congressional Research Service's count of October 2026?

A) Five
B) Two, both in New England
C) Thirty-one, after a wave of bans in 2026
D) 19, Indiana and Ohio most recently

3. What would the Fair Representation Act do?

A) Elect House members from multi-member districts of three to five seats by ranked ballot, from the House elected in 2032
B) Abolish the Electoral College
C) Require photo identification nationwide
D) Give every state four senators

4. Why does the course say most reforms will not come from Congress?

A) Because every reform needs a constitutional amendment
B) Incumbents won under the rules
C) Because the Supreme Court has struck down every reform statute
D) Because the states have no power over federal elections

5. What did the 2024 ballot measures on ranked choice and open primaries show?

A) Universal adoption
B) Voters adopted them in every state that voted
C) Voters rejected them in seven states
D) Courts struck them down before the vote in most states

Module 12 — Where Things Stand, and What to Watch

The Argument, the Contradictions, and the Dates Ahead

Recommended Reading / Reference

Reference: The state election offices' results pages and the Associated Press's race calls on November 3 and after; the Supreme Court's docket for *RNC v. Mi Familia Vota*; the Federal Register for the Census Bureau's residence rule; and the trackers of Modules 3, 4, and 11

12a. The Argument

The course has made one argument. A vote is a number that becomes power only through rules: who may cast it, how it is counted, which district it falls in, how many electors its state has, who chose the names on the ballot, and who paid to put them there. The rules are set by the people the rules put in office.

In 2025-26 those rules changed between elections. Maps were redrawn at the president's request in the states that could and answered in the states that could not (Module 4). Federal orders reached into the states' voter rolls and the mail (Module 3), and the Supreme Court loosened the limits on race in districting and on party money (Modules 4 and 7).

12b. Five Contradictions

- **Sound machinery, contested trust.** The evidence finds the count sound and noncitizen voting rare, yet the federal government is screening the states' rolls and has sued for them (Module 3).
- **Lines that decide, and lines that cancel.** The redistricting war targeted more Republican seats than the raters expect it to yield, because each side answered the other (Module 4).
- **Record money, modest effects.** The cycle's advertising is on course for a record and its money is concentrated in fewer hands, yet money's measured effect on votes is modest (Module 7).
- **Record independence, partisan votes.** More Americans than ever call themselves independents, yet almost no House districts split their tickets, and most independents lean toward a party (Module 6).
- **Reforms within reach, and voters who refuse them.** Most of the reform menu needs only a statute, yet in 2024 voters rejected most of the reform measures put to them (Module 11).

12c. The Watch List

When	What	Why it matters
November 2, 2026	Comments close on the Census Bureau's proposed residence rule	Whether the rule is made final before the 2030 count, and the suit over the Fourteenth Amendment's 'persons' that would follow (Module 5)
November 3	Election Day: the offices and ballot measures of Module 1, among them Missouri's Proposition A, Maryland's Question 3, Colorado's Amendment 86, and Alaska's Measure 2	Control of Congress, and the voters' verdict on the redistricting war and on ranked choice (Modules 4, 9, and 11)

When	What	Why it matters
November 3 into December	The count, slow in California and Alaska, with ranked-choice tabulations in Alaska and Maine and certification under each state's law	Whether both parties accept the result (Module 9)
November 18	Comments close on the Commodity Futures Trading Commission's proposal to treat election contracts as swaps	Whether betting on elections comes under federal swap rules (Module 8)
December 1	Georgia's runoff, if no Senate candidate wins a majority	A runoff could decide control of the Senate (Module 9)
December 3	The parties' and committees' post-election reports to the FEC	The cycle's final money totals, and what the industry committees spent (Module 7)
December 8	The Supreme Court hears *RNC v. Mi Familia Vota*	Whether a state may demand documentary proof of citizenship and remove suspected noncitizens inside the quiet period before a federal election; a decision would normally come by the end of the Court's term, in mid-2027 (Module 3)
December 12	Louisiana's House general election	The last House seats of the cycle, and Louisiana's first House seats chosen under its new party primaries (Module 6)
January 1, 2027	Florida's proof-of-citizenship law takes effect	The largest state yet to require documents at registration (Module 3)
January 3, 2027	The new Congress convenes	Bills the old one did not pass, such as the Fair Representation Act, must start again (Module 11)
2027	New York's redistricting amendment needs a second passage and a referendum; other states weigh maps for 2028	Whether mid-decade redistricting becomes routine (Module 4)
January 22, 2028	South Carolina's Democratic primary opens the 2028 nomination	The first test of the calendar the DNC set without Iowa (Module 6)
November 7, 2028	The presidential election, on the 2020 census's electoral votes	The last election in which the northern route still reaches a majority for a Democrat, on current projections (Module 5)
April 1, 2030, to 2031	The census; the apportionment by December 31, 2030; the data for new maps by April 1, 2031	The shift of electoral votes toward states that voted Republican, and the maps for the 2032 election (Module 5)

12d. The Last Word

The course ends where the evidence stands, which leaves the reader a method rather than a forecast.

What a reader can now do is read November 3 as what it is: an election under the rules of 2026, decided by turnout in the districts drawn for it, and counted by a machinery facing its first test since the rules were fought over. Every rule fight that follows can be read the same way, by asking who the rule would let vote, how it would count them, and who wrote it.

Module 12 Key Points

Where Things Stand, and What to Watch

• Votes become power through rules, and 2025-26 showed that the rules can be reset between elections by whoever holds a state.

• The machinery counts accurately; the fight is over who controls the rolls, which the Supreme Court hears on December 8.

• The redistricting war targeted more seats than the raters expect it to yield, because each side answered the other.

• Most reforms need only a statute, yet in 2024 voters rejected most of the reform measures put to them.

• The watch list runs from the count after November 3 to the census rule, the 2028 calendar, and the 2030 census.

Module 12 Quiz

Check Your Understanding

1. What does the course give as its answer to how votes become power?

A) Through the popular vote alone
B) Through the parties' conventions
C) Through the Federal Election Commission, which apportions seats after each election
D) Through rules set by those they benefit, which can be reset between elections

2. Which case does the Supreme Court hear on December 8, 2026?

A) Arizona's proof-of-citizenship law, in *RNC v. Mi Familia Vota*
B) Missouri's map
C) Texas's 2025 map
D) A challenge to California's Proposition 50 brought by the Justice Department

3. When do comments close on the Census Bureau's proposed residence rule?

A) April 1
B) October 13, 2026, as first set
C) November 2, 2026
D) December 31, 2030, with the count

4. Which contradiction does the course find in the money of 2026?

A) Little money, large effects on votes
B) Record sums, modest effects
C) Every dollar disclosed, yet none of it spent
D) Most of it from small donors, none from billionaires

5. What is the course's last word on how to read November 3?

A) As a referendum on the president alone
B) As a vote that changes nothing
C) As the last election under the Electoral College
D) As an election under the rules of 2026, decided by turnout in the districts drawn for it and counted by a machinery facing its first test since the rule fights

Answer Sheet

Answers to every module's Check Your Understanding quiz.

Module	Answers
Module 1 Quiz	1. B 2. C 3. A 4. D 5. C
Module 2 Quiz	1. A 2. D 3. B 4. D 5. C
Module 3 Quiz	1. A 2. B 3. D 4. B 5. C
Module 4 Quiz	1. A 2. C 3. D 4. B 5. A
Module 5 Quiz	1. D 2. C 3. A 4. B 5. A
Module 6 Quiz	1. B 2. C 3. D 4. D 5. A
Module 7 Quiz	1. B 2. C 3. D 4. C 5. A
Module 8 Quiz	1. B 2. C 3. A 4. B 5. D
Module 9 Quiz	1. A 2. B 3. C 4. D 5. A
Module 10 Quiz	1. C 2. D 3. B 4. B 5. C
Module 11 Quiz	1. A 2. D 3. A 4. B 5. C
Module 12 Quiz	1. D 2. A 3. C 4. B 5. D