

CLASS #4

THE MOTHER OF ALL MIDTERMS: THE GAME-CHANGING AMERICAN ELECTIONS OF 2026

OLLI + POLS 484, Fall 2026

Sonoma State

27 October 2026



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Our Sessions & Schedule

• Week #1, 06 OCT 2026:

Overview of class, topics, & how Midterms “work;”
 Key ideas & measures in Midterms—the case of
 polling & assessment of what We “know;”

• Week #2, 13 OCT 2026:

The case of down ballot races and non-candidate
 campaigns;
 How ballot measure campaigns work—and the
 curious case of CA as “The Great Exception”

• Week #3, 20 OCT 2026:

The Battlefield of Elections: The VRA, VBM, & CF, CFR
 (Voting Rights Act; Vote-by-Mail; & Campaign Finance /
 Campaign Finance Reform

• Week #4, 27 OCT 2026:

Presidential Ads; How information works in Elections?
 Mis-, Dis-, and Mal-Information in Today’s Environment

• Week #5, 03 NOV 2026:

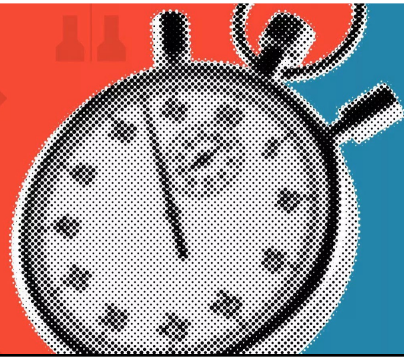
How information works in Elections? Mis-, Dis-, and Mal-
 Information in Today’s Environment
 Election Day – What to expect?
 What to watch for?
 Where to get information & have your own analysis?

• Week #6, 10 NOV 2026

Post-Midterm Elections analysis;
 What did We expect? What did We learn?
 What comes next – the “Lame Duck” & DEC 11th

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What to make of the **2026**
"Mother of All Midterm
Elections - set to be held on
Tuesday, November 3rd, 2026?



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Reading the Tea Leaves...



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The “Science of Elections:” What Do We Always Say... “*This Election is The Most...*”???

- The Science of Elections is not a “tastes great, less filling,” X versus Y proposition.
- ***How is 2026 different? Is the past really prologue for the future?***
- Why does that matter for your interests and your understanding of politics and for your Family, Friends, and Relations moving forward?
- Why we are in “new” territory? What to watch, how to “see over-the-horizon?”
- How to be Your own “Psephologist.” Where to find data & analysis:



 - <https://www.thegreenpapers.com/>
 - <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/key-dates-2024-us-presidential-race-2024-01-30/>

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Some General Midterm Election Ideas

- **First**: the President’s party almost always loses ground in midterm House elections, as has happened in 20 of the past 22 midterm elections stretching back to 1938, and both exceptions reflected unusual circumstances (1998; 2002).
- **Second**: the President’s SECOND MIDTERM election usually has the steepest losses, going back to the Civil War era;
- **Third**: Who votes in Midterm elections is really, really distinct from General Elections for President

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How Do We Explain U.S. Midterm Election Outcomes?

- Referendum on the president vs. “Backlash” on the president?
- Reversion to Party ID (PID) and/or ideology
- Response to economy & job approval
- Response to other issues (war/peace, etc.) / “October Surprise”
- Action of strategic politicians (such as “strategic retirements”)
- Money and / or turnout races
- Reliable pattern of the 19th AND 20th centuries save 4 elections
- *What is “average” midterm presidential seat loss?*
- What “variables” determine the depth of seat loss?

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The Big Picture – <8 Days Out (<200 HOURS OUT)

Why the Stakes Are High?

Today’s politics are marked by –

Extreme polarization – the political parties are far apart, at both the leadership and mass levels;

Extreme competitiveness—the parties are very closely matched, with power hanging on the balance with each election.

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The Polarization / Competitiveness Effect

- Historically, when the parties have been polarized and closely matched, elections have been:
 - **Perceived as existential** –the future of the country is viewed by many to be at stake
 - **Consuming**—the parties have concentrated as much or more on winning the next election as on governing.
- NOTE: Of the nation's 60 midterm elections, 10 were / are **polarized + competitive + existential**
 - Five are recent: 2006; 2010; 2018; 2022; + 2026?

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What Does Our UPDATED "Time for Change" (TfC) Model Predict?:

Republican generic ballot margin	Predicted number of GOP seats	Predicted change in GOP seats
0	213	-7
-2	208	-12
-4	202	-18
-6	197	-23
-8	192	-28
-10	187	-33

THIS TRANSLATES TO:

Conservative, Lower Limit **DEM SEATS: +28** (99% Confidence Interval; and Upper Limit **DEM SEATS: +38** (95% Confidence Interval) – IF the GENERIC BALLOT GOES to -9 (-10)? NUMBERS JUMP!!

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What Our Model Predicted in 2022...

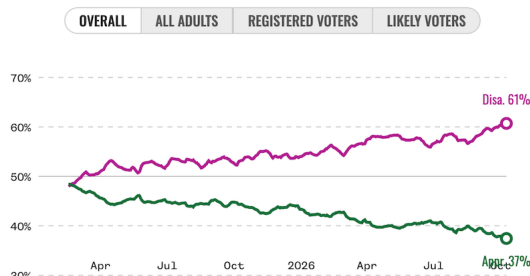
Generic Ballot (D% - R%)	Predicted change in Democratic:	
	House Seats	Senate Seats
10	2	3
5	-7	2
0	-15	1
-5	-24	0
-10	-32	-1

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Poll, NBC News, This Past Weekend

How Americans rate Trump's job performance as president

Tracking the president's average approval rating throughout his second term in the White House.



Notes: For the overall result, the polling average adjusts for the consistent differences across sample populations (adults, RV, LV) groups before combining them, allowing us to compare polls on a common scale.

Source: NBC News polling average ①

President Donald Trump's approval rating: Latest Polls

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MORE POLLS: [Congressional](#) > [Senate Battlegrounds](#) >

This is the NBC News average of polls measuring presidential job approval. In a midterm election year, a president's job approval rating is one indicator of how well the political party that controls the White...

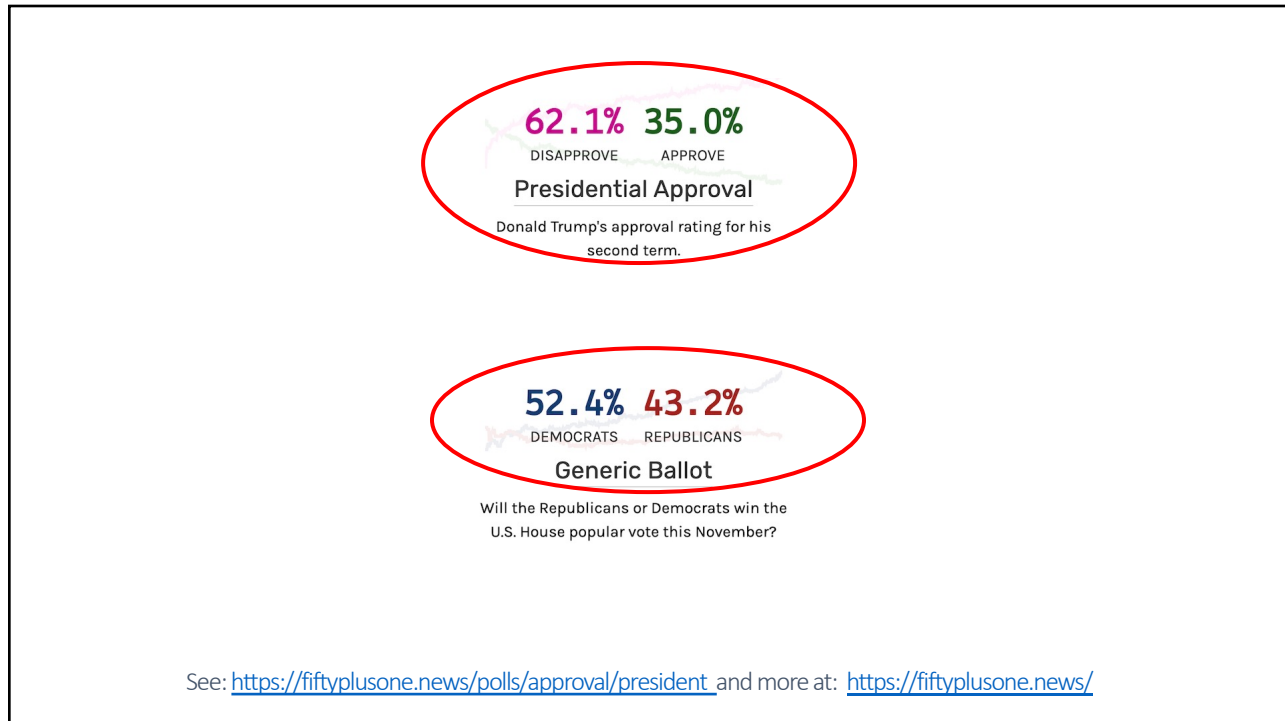
[+ read all](#) ▼



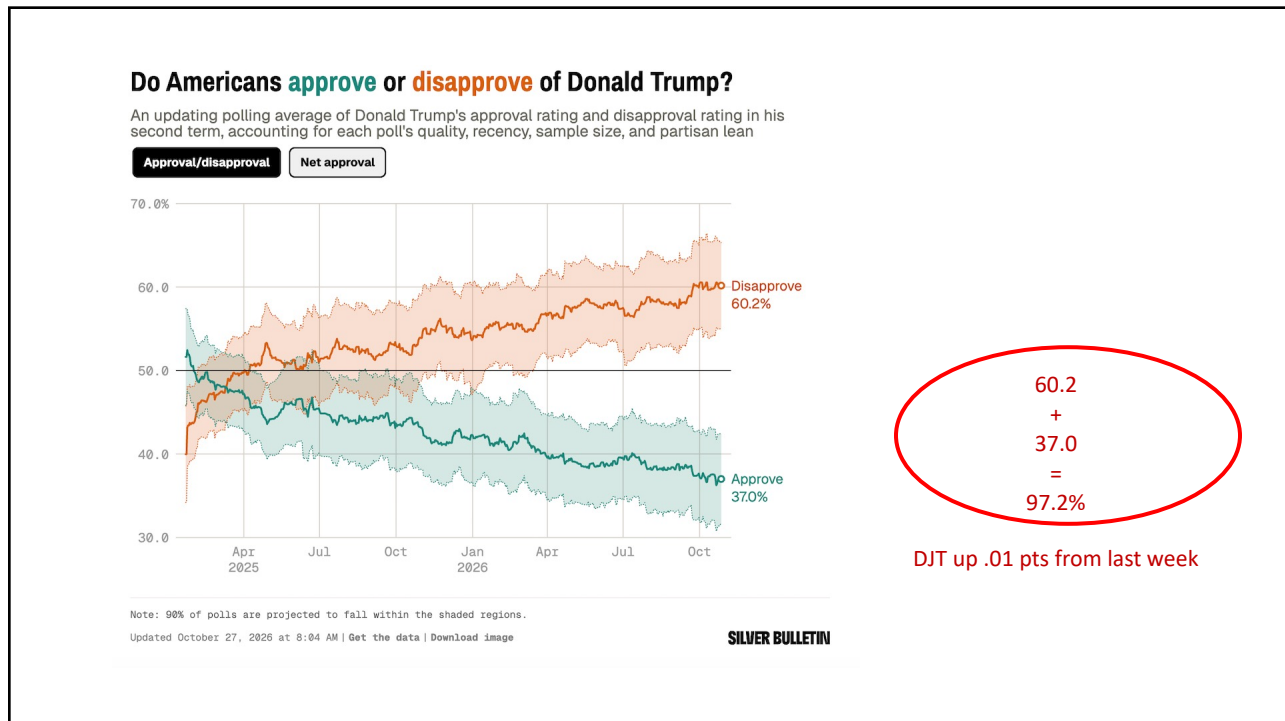
Notes: The polling average adjusts for the consistent differences across sample populations (adults, RV, LV) groups before combining them.

Source: NBC News polling average ①

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Polling Bias Ahead?

Nate Silver 
@NateSilver538

Boost  ...

The direction of polling error in recent years:

- * 2008: Unbiased
- * 2010: Unbiased
- * 2012: R bias
- * 2014: D bias
- * 2016: D bias
- * 2018: Unbiased
- * 2020: Even bigger D bias
- * 2022: Unbiased
- * 2024: D bias, less than 2016/2020
- * 2025 (e.g. NJ/VA): Big R bias

11:30 AM · Oct 1, 2026 · 978.6K Views

167 271 3.6K 387 

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One Reason for This Bias? The Midterm Electorate!

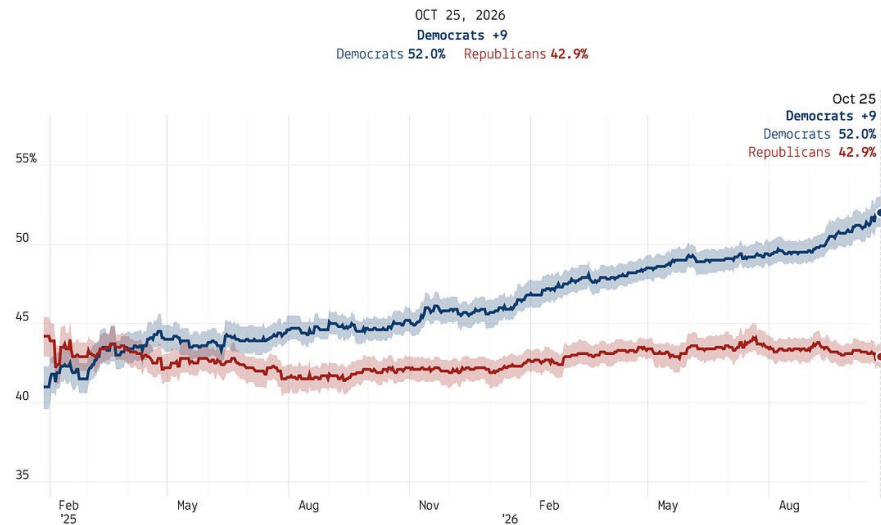
	MIDTERM ELECTORATE					PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORATE					MIDTERM - PREZ AVG.
White	2010	2014	2018	2022	Avg.	2008	2012	2016	2020	Avg.	Avg. diff.
	79%	79%	75%	76%	77%	77%	75%	74%	72%	75%	3%

Age	2010	2014	2018	2022	Avg.	2008	2012	2016	2020	Avg.	Avg. diff.
18-29	9%	8%	12%	10%	10%	16%	15%	15%	16%	16%	-6%
30-44	20%	18%	21%	20%	20%	24%	23%	22%	23%	23%	-3%
45-64	45%	43%	38%	36%	41%	39%	40%	38%	35%	38%	3%
65+	26%	31%	29%	33%	30%	20%	23%	25%	26%	24%	6%

College grad	2010	2014	2018	2022	Avg.	2008	2012	2016	2020	Avg.	Avg. diff.
	36%	39%	40%	41%	39%	32%	34%	37%	38%	35%	4%

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The Early Vote: While Elections are Decided in November, They Are Won in October!



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The Early Vote: While Elections are Decided in November, They Are Won in October!

2026 Early Vote by Group in the US

	2022 Count (Share)	2024 Count (Share)	2026 Count (Share)	2026 share vs 2022
Black	2,166,888 (10.01%)	4,328,578 (10.77%)	2,773,908 (11.08%)	+10.7%
18-29	966,991 (4.46%)	2,601,224 (6.47%)	1,400,478 (5.59%)	+25.3%
Hispanic/Latino	1,828,936 (8.44%)	3,495,134 (8.7%)	3,003,555 (12%)	+42.2%
White	16,452,219 (75.96%)	29,879,817 (74.36%)	17,631,791 (70.42%)	-7.3%
Total Vote	21,657,931	40,180,102	25,038,963	+15.6%

Source: TargetEarly, 10/25/26 midnight report. Compares this day to the same day in the early vote in 2022 and 2024.

Change is the percent change in each group's share of the early vote, 2026 against 2022: (2026 share - 2022 share) ÷ 2022 share. The Total Vote row shows growth in total early votes.

Hopium Chronicles

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Decided on presidential vote:

22,966 total respondents

	In last few days 3%	In last week 3%	In October 5%	In September 6%	Before September 80%
● Harris	42%	42%	49%	52%	49%
● Trump	47%	56%	42%	46%	51%

Updated 5:07 p.m. ET, Dec. 13

State	Trump margin, 2024
Kansas	+16.1
Mississippi	+22.9
Nebraska (statewide)	+20.5
South Carolina	+17.9

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Let's Examine Turnout (T.O.) so far...

CN Politics

POLITICS • 5 MIN READ

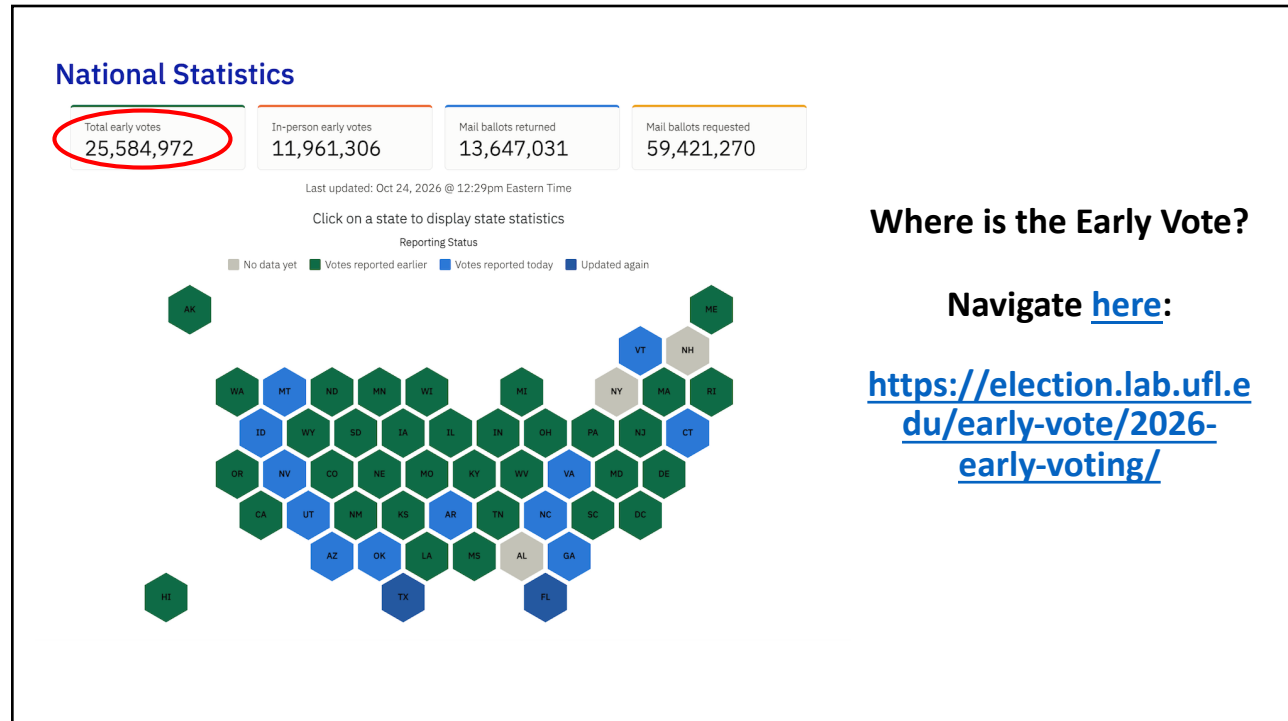
Early voting data shows emerging signs of a Democratic advantage in the midtermsUPDATED OCT 1, 2024
By [Shawn Collins](#) and [Edward Wu](#)

<https://election.lab.ufl.edu/early-vote/2026-early-voting/>

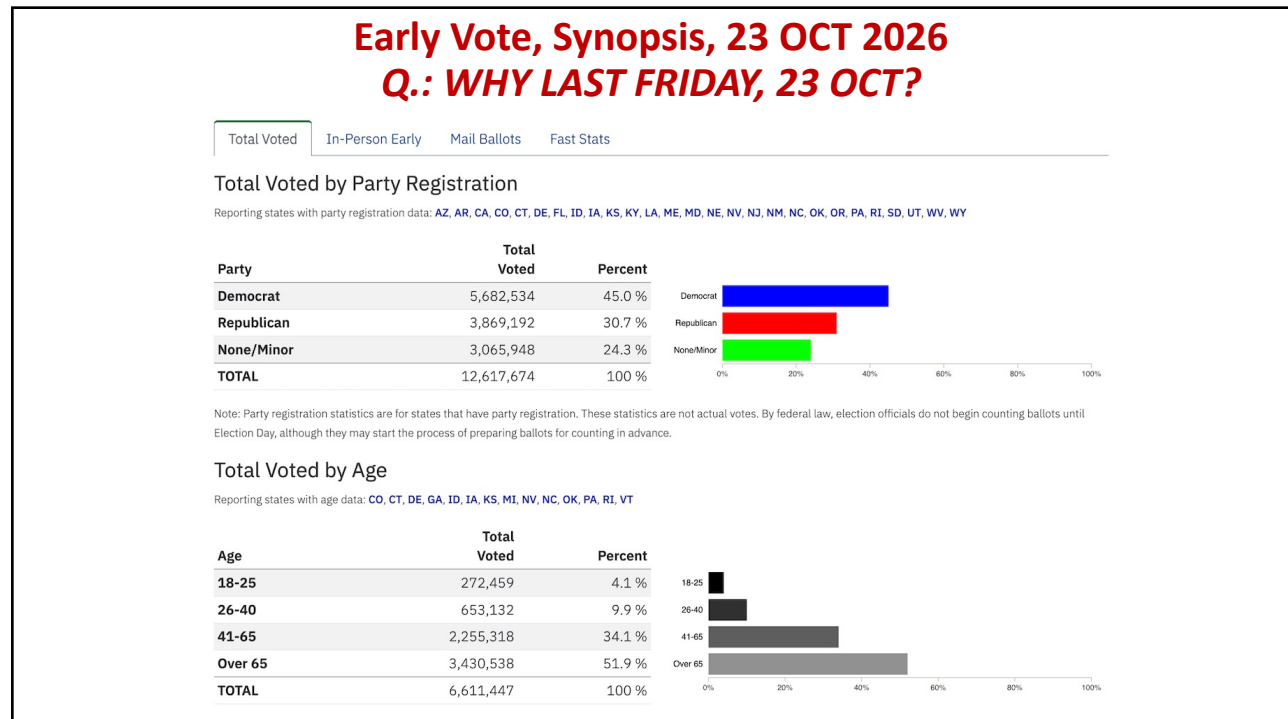
- NEW EARLY VOTE WEBSITE:

<https://electindex.com/early-vote/>

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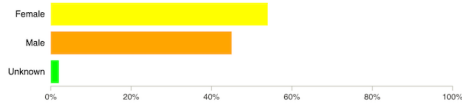
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Early Vote, Synopsis, 23 OCT 2026

Total Voted by Gender

Reporting states with gender data: [CO](#), [GA](#), [ID](#), [KS](#), [LA](#), [MI](#), [NC](#), [WA](#)

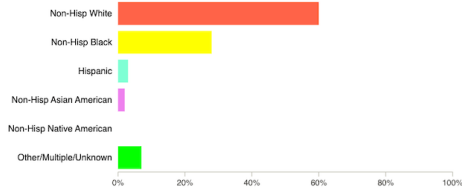
Gender	Total Voted	Percent
Female	3,271,784	53.8 %
Male	2,706,374	44.5 %
Unknown	102,155	1.7 %
TOTAL	6,080,313	100 %



Total Voted by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity

Reporting states with race and Hispanic ethnicity data: [GA](#), [LA](#), [NC](#), [SC](#)

Race	Total Voted	Percent
Non-Hisp White	2,010,400	60.1 %
Non-Hisp Black	932,876	27.9 %
Hispanic	90,741	2.7 %
Non-Hisp Asian American	62,069	1.9 %
Non-Hisp Native American	15,491	0.5 %
Other/Multiple/Unknown	233,615	7.0 %
TOTAL	3,345,192	100 %



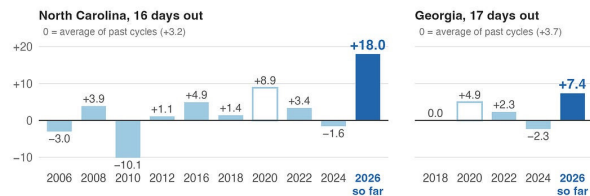
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Early Vote Synopsis, Cont'd 23 OCT 2026

- [Republicans are skipping early voting. Question is: Will they show up on Election Day?](#)
- In North Carolina, Democrats have cast **70%** of the two parties' early ballots, the most lopsided split at this point since at least 2006.

This year's early vote is far more Democratic than usual

How much more Democratic the early vote is than its baseline electorate, compared with the average past cycle at the same point before Election Day, in points



Bars show each cycle's early-vote edge minus the average edge across past cycles (NC: +3.2; GA: +3.7). 2020 (outlined) is left out of the average because of COVID-era voting. North Carolina: early in-person and mail ballots 16 days out vs. active registered voters. Georgia: early in-person and mail ballots 17 days out vs. people who voted in either of the two previous general elections, by last partisan primary ballot; 2018, 2020 and 2022 leave out counties with incomplete ballot files. Shares count only Democrats and Republicans. NC 2014 not available this early (early voting opened 12 days out). Source: NC State Board of Elections; Georgia Secretary of State.

Strength In Numbers

gelliottmorris.com

PUNCHLINE: Registered Republicans are voting at lower levels even as turnout goes up for everyone else.

NOTE: This *is* leveling off as We've moved from 3 weeks out to 2 weeks to 1 week out.

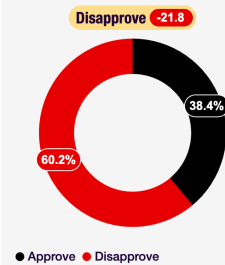
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Dem Leads Narrow in TX, MI, ME & NE Moves to Even / Toss-Up

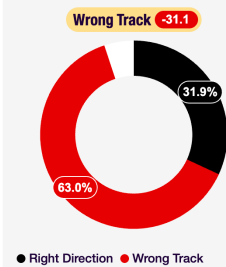


State Of Union

President Trump Job Approval



Direction of Country



Where to find CA Early Vote tracking? Here:

<https://tracker.politicaldata.com/?type=statewide>

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Ok....Are YOU Ready??

What to Consider This Last Week or so?

How have ads in the past affected races?

Let's take a look...



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