

Will The 2026 Midterms Be A 2018 Repeat? 3 Reasons It May Not

Republicans are hoping to defy history in the upcoming midterm election. From our historical tracking data, the political environment at this point in the year in 2018 looks similar to where things stand today.

Winning the Issues Survey Comparison of March 2026 Survey to March 2018 Survey	Overall		Margin	
	2026	2018	2026	2018
Republicans in Congress (Favorable-Unfavorable)	37-59	36-59	-22	-23
Democrats in Congress (Favorable-Unfavorable)	39-56	43-52	-17	-9
President Trump Job Approval (Approve-Disapprove)	37-58	40-51	-21	-11
Economy Issue Handling (Republican-Democrat)	43-44	43-40	-1	+3
Health Care Issue Handling (Republican-Democrat)	35-54	34-50	-19	-16

- The Republican brand was about the same in 2018 (36-59 favorable-unfavorable) as it is in the 2026 survey (37-59). The brand image of Democrats is worse now (39-56) than it was in 2018 (43-52).
- Both parties are in a difficult position with independents. The brand image of Congressional Republicans is 26-68 favorable-unfavorable with Democrats at 28-65. 27% of the electorate is unfavorable to both parties, with 45% of independents being unfavorable to both.
- President Trump's job approval has gone from -11 (40-51) in 2018 to -21 (37-58) in 2026.
- In 2018, Republicans led on economy issue handling (43-40) and this is now more competitive (43-44 R-D). Health care issue handling continues to be difficult for Republicans (35-54 R-D).

While these numbers indicate challenging headwinds for Republicans, here are three reasons why 2026 might not be like 2018:

- 1) Unlike 2018, Democrats do not have a brand image advantage over Republicans in the current environment.
- 2) In 2018, Democrats won independents by 12. Given their current brand image among independents (28-65 favorable-unfavorable), this means Democrats must decisively win a group with 65% being unfavorable to them. Unless Democrats can rebuild their standing with independents, a decisive win among independents will be difficult, especially if their strategy is based only on opposing President Trump.
- 3) Democrats had a +4 party ID advantage in the 2018 election. In the last two elections (2022 and 2024), Republicans had a party ID advantage of +3 at the Congressional level. It remains to be seen if the Republican party ID advantage will be sustained in 2026, but seems unlikely that Democrats will be able to regain a party ID advantage on par with what they had in 2018.

If Republicans do nothing to change the current trajectory, they may be headed for a 2018 scenario. But there is still significant time on the clock for Republicans to change the situation and to capitalize on Democratic vulnerabilities. Examples of what Republicans could do include having an effective strategy to appeal to independent voters and a communications plan to win on the economy, focused on the positive personal outcomes from the Big Beautiful Bill.

Have a good weekend.

David & Myra