TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

OCTOBER 23, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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THE FRACTURING OF POLITICAL NORMS AMID GLOBAL CONFLICT AND INSTITUTIONAL REALIGNMENT HEADING INTO THE 2026 MIDTERMS

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

Eleven days ahead of the 2026 midterm elections, the United States is witnessing a convergence of severe domestic instability and aggressive institutional realignment. A **darkening public mood** is characterized by pervasive distrust, particularly among young adults, and a widening "empathy gap" regarding foundational moral values American Values Survey. Economic anxiety remains the primary driver of voter sentiment, with "affordability" serving as a catch-all for crises in housing, groceries, and energy. This anxiety is being weaponized on the campaign trail, most notably through **unprecedented populist promises** such as President Trump's proposal for a $5,000 cash dividend for adult citizens if Republicans retain control of Congress dividend promise.

Simultaneously, the Executive Branch is increasingly asserting its presence in state-level electoral processes. The Department of Justice (DOJ) has moved to **block the certification** of the Alaska Senate race and is suing California over voter roll integrity, actions that critics characterize as political interference DOJ litigation. High-profile indictments, such as the RICO drug trafficking charges against Virginia State Senator Louise Lucas, further highlight a "lawfare" environment where legal actions against elected officials are becoming standard features of the campaign cycle Senator Lucas indictment.

On the global stage, the "El NiÃ±o of War" continues to disrupt international shipping and financial systems, with the conflict in Iran directly impacting domestic fuel prices UN Secretary-General. Strategic disagreements over support for Ukraine have reached a fever pitch, with reports of **throttling satellite communications** and easing sanctions on Russian diesel creating deep rifts within the Republican coalition and between the U.S. and its allies journalist panel. Domestically, the administration is attempting to counteract this by promoting a "New Golden Age" of science and technology, seeking to overhaul NASA's Artemis program and federal R&D to focus on **extreme ownership and speed** over bureaucratic process Artemis III briefing.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Judicial and Electoral Interventionism:** The Department of Justice is weighing more election-related litigation, signaling a potential move to block certification in states with close results DOJ post-election action. This includes a proactive lawsuit regarding the Alaska Senate seat due to confusion over **duplicate candidate names** Alaska litigation.

- **The 2026 Polling Crisis:** Professional pollsters warn of a "mirage machine" where partisan-funded polls and bad-faith aggregators are distorting the electoral landscape polling crisis. Early voting data from 21 million ballots shows a trajectory comparable to 2022, contradicting some "blue wave" narratives early voting data.
- **Escalating Cultural Extremism in Campaigning:** In Ohio, the gubernatorial race has descended into unprecedented vitriol with a $4 million ad buy from Vivek Ramaswamy using a candidate's estranged mother to **target her childhood sexual abuse history** Ramaswamy ad. This move has triggered a backlash from traditional state Republicans Republican backlash.
- **Defense Budget and Acquisition Reform:** The U.S. Army is seeking a **$350 billion reconciliation package** for mandatory spending on munitions and maintenance, alongside the "Forge Act" to bypass bureaucratic red tape in acquisition Army briefing.
- **NASA Institutional Reinvigoration:** The Artemis program is undergoing a cultural shift toward "extreme ownership," with NASA engineers bringing critical fabrication in-house to **cut schedules and costs** for the 2027 Artemis III mission NASA culture shift.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The Iran war has reached an eight-month mark with successful degradation of missile sites but **failed to restore freedom of navigation** in the Strait of Hormuz Iran war assessment.
- U.S. Navy blockades have restored 80% of oil exports to pre-war levels, though Iran continues to **threaten civilian targets** in neighboring gulf countries naval blockade.

Information Warfare & Disinformation

- Controversy surrounds the **real identity of Representative Ilhan Omar**, with the White House and conservative commentators alleging name fraud and immigration violations Omar identity claims.
- Journalists report the "end of the Trump rally" as a cultural phenomenon, noting **dwindling attendance and desultory crowds** in red strongholds rally energy decline.

Tech Sovereignty & AI

- The administration released a "New Golden Age" report advocating for "Golden Ticket" funding to **bypass peer review** and accelerate AI and fusion research science policy reform.
- Local backlashes against AI data centers are intensifying in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota due to concerns over **utility rates and environmental impact** data center controversy.

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- A RICO indictment against a state senator over marijuana distribution proceeds suggests a **broader federal crackdown** on state-legalized cannabis enterprises Lucas RICO case.
- The "Take It Down Act" now imposes a **48-hour shot clock** for big tech to remove non-consensual AI-generated explicit images Take It Down Act.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Collapse of Institutional Separation

- Current Attorney General Todd Blanche has explicitly rejected the historical "misperception" of independence between the DOJ and the White House, stating **"I work for President Trump"** Blanche statement. This shift signals a fundamental move toward a unitary executive model where law enforcement is an **instrument of presidential policy** DOJ alignment.
- The federalization of election oversight, once the sole province of the states, is being tested via **preemptive lawsuits** intended to influence certification timelines preemptive litigation.

Economic Populism vs. Traditional Conservatism

- The Republican platform has shifted from fiscal restraint to **industrial policy and direct subsidies**. Proactive government intervention now includes banning diesel exports, imposing tariffs, and **limiting institutional home ownership** to 350 units per entity to protect family buyers home ownership initiative.
- President Trump's $5,000 "Trump Dividend" represents a radical departure from traditional GOP tax policy, effectively **embracing a form of universal basic income** contingent on domestic spending dividend caveat.

The Distrust Generation (Gen Z 2.0)

- Societal trends indicate a **30-point gap in trust** between Gen Z and seniors when meeting someone for the first time trust gap. This generation, defined as having only known politics under the Trump/MAGA era, reports **extreme skepticism of authority** and media Gen Z skepticism.
- Young men are reportedly abandoning large-scale manosphere influencers (Rogan, Carlson) as **economic anxiety replaces ideological fervor** Gen Z 2.0 shift.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

The U.S. is facing a **crisis of social cohesion** characterized by an "empathy gap" where 54% of white evangelical Protestants now view empathy as "dangerous" if it leads away from "God's truth" empathy survey. This ideological hardening is occurring alongside a **breakdown in state-federal relations**, with states like Maine and Georgia aggressively resisting federal attempts to access voter rolls state resistance. Domestic instability is exacerbated by **localized gang violence**, specifically reported in Minnesota, where more than 40 agencies have formed a framework to address exploding group violence gang task force. The "Magalene" or Republican internal crackup over controversial campaign tactics in Ohio indicates that even the most loyal factions are struggling with **internal dissent over moral boundaries** Republican dissent.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The U.S. global posture is shifting toward **transactional hemispheric dominance**.

Under the "Donroe Doctrine," the U.S. is prioritizing the removal of Chinese and Russian influence from the Americas, often through **direct military or economic coercion** Donroe Doctrine. The capture of Nicolas Maduro and the subsequent U.S. control of Veneuzelan oil production are framed as a "perfect scenario" for future interventions Maduro raid. However, this "might is right" approach is straining traditional alliances; **relations with Canada have deteriorated** to the point where Canadian citizens report anxiety over a potential U.S. invasion Canada tension. Globally, the U.S. is increasingly seen as a "pariah" in certain international circles due to its **continued support for intensified warfare** in the Middle East and the unilateral suspension of Russia sanctions Russia sanctions waiver.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic environment is defined by **structural inflation** and a "mixed economy" reality that belies free-market rhetoric. While unemployment is at a historical low, the **cost of living has outpaced wage growth** by 15% for working families over the last cycle purchasing power loss. Markets are pricing in significant geopolitical risk, with the DOW dropping 600 points as Iran threatens civilian infrastructure market volatility.

Key Economic Vectors

- **Energy Prices:** Gas averages $4.23/gallon; diesel remains over $6.00/gallon fuel prices.
- **Direct Subsidies:** $1.3 billion invested in domestic fertilizer manufacturing in Nebraska Nebraska investment; $8 billion in fuel relief for farmers harvest fuel program.
- **Healthcare Costs:** Average family health plan crossed **$28,000**, a 5% increase; employee contributions shot up 9% KFF survey data.
- **Investment Commitments:** $22.2 trillion in new investment commitments into the U.S. over the last 15 months investment record.
- **Inflation:** Reported at **3.7%** inflation rate.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Institutional leadership is being purged of non-aligned actors, replaced by figures committed to "extreme ownership" of the executive agenda.

- **Louise Lucas:** Virginia State Senator and President Pro Tempore; arrested on **federal RICO charges** Lucas arrest.
- **Ilhan Omar:** Under federal investigation for **alleged identity fraud and financial crimes**; White House calls for immediate resignation Omar resignation call.
- **NASA Leadership:** Jared Isaacman has instituted a shift where **engineers are embedded in production** to solve problems in hours rather than weeks Isaacman leadership.
- **Mitch McConnell:** Retiring after 42 years; candidates Andy Barr and Charles Booker are **vying to replace him** McConnell retirement.
- **National Science Board:** Members removed following a Supreme Court decision limiting the authority of **non-Senate-confirmed officials** NSB removal.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

Editorial coverage is dominated by **campaign-driven sensationalism** and the normalization of extreme rhetoric. The "Lead Story" is the tightening midterm race, with specific focus on "shocker" candidates in deep-red states (Texas, Kansas) and the "lawfare" against Democratic officials. A "Buried Story" is the **actual humanitarian cost of the interior mass deportations**, which is mostly discussed through political polling rather than direct impact interior enforcement impact. The tone is highly **combative and defensive**, particularly from the White House, which uses press gaggles to attack specific news networks as "the worst" Trump press attack. Conspicuous omissions include detailed reporting on the **environmental degradation caused by rapid-launch satellite programs** and the long-term fiscal viability of the promised $1 trillion defense/infrastructure outlays Army outlays.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The world is increasingly viewed through a lens of **civilizational conflict**, with the U.S. positioning itself as the defender of Western values against "jihadi" and "socialist" encroachment both at home and abroad.

COUNTRIES

- **Iran:** Portrayed as a "failing nation" but a deadly asymmetric threat; framed as the **sole obstacle to lower gas prices** gas price link.
- **China:** A peer competitor seen as "waiting out" the U.S.; framed as **building two coal plants a week** while U.S. energy is constrained China energy.
- **Ukraine:** An ally being increasingly squeezed by the U.S. administration; framed as a **drain on stocks** and an impediment to a "humanitarian" deal with Putin Ukraine/Russia deal.
- **Israel:** A "talented" but increasingly isolated partner; framed as **unwilling to defeat Iran** without absolute U.S. support Israel framing.

LEADERS

- **Vladimir Putin:** Ironically framed by U.S. envoys as a **"humanitarian"** during hostage talks Putin humanitarian claim.
- **Volodymyr Zelenskyy:** Framed by the U.S. President as someone who **"has to go"** Zelenskyy criticism.
- **Beniamin Netanyahu:** Framed as a "master politician" but a potential **strategic liability** for regional integration Netanyahu liability.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **Elon Musk:** Framed as a "trillionaire" trying to buy the Texas Senate seat; accused of **throttling Starlink** to influence the Ukraine war Musk/Starlink controversy.
- **The Vatican (Pope Leo XIV):** Framed as a moral voice against "digital colonization" and **automation's threat to human dignity** Papal encyclical.
- **Democratic Socialists of America (DSA):** Framed by Republicans as an "internal enemy" seeking to **abolish the Constitution** DSA framing.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The current information environment is defined by **"hostage diplomacy" and narrative seeding**. The Russian state is using fabricated espionage charges to "replenish its exchange fund," treating foreign citizens as currency hostage diplomacy. Domestically, the White House is weaponizing the "Epstein Files" and "illegal alien fraud" to discredit opponents, while **disinformation about health metrics** (e.g., claiming 95% efficacy for vaccines was a lie) is being used to fuel populist anger against "Big Pharma" anti-vax rhetoric. The delta between "media spin" and truth is widest on the economy, where the "mirage machine" presents a manufacturing boom while families **ration prescriptions** due to a $28,000 family health plan average cost healthcare rationing.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **The Post-Election Legitimacy Crisis:** If Republicans lose key Senate races, the DOJ will likely file lawsuits to **impede certification**, potentially leading to civil unrest and a Supreme Court intervention that tests the limits of state sovereignty certification risk.
- **The End of the "First Island Chain":** Strategic focus on the "Donroe Doctrine" suggests a **de facto abandonment of Taiwan** and East Asian security in favor of hemispheric consolidation and oil security Taiwan abandonment hypothesis.
- **The Institutionalization of Unitary Power:** The removal of the "barrier of separation" at the DOJ and the overhaul of NASA/NSF indicate a future where **merit review is replaced by ideological loyalty** and speed of execution merit review shift.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks):

- Potential **indictment of Representative Ilhan Omar** resulting in a call for her resignation and possible deportation proceedings Omar indictment prediction.
- Increased ICE activity at polling sites to "protect election integrity," likely depressing immigrant and minority turnout ICE at polls.

Medium Term (1-6 Months):

- Passing of the $350 billion defense reconciliation bill, cementing **long-term mandatory spending** for military industrial base expansion mandatory defense spending.
- Implementation of the $5,000 Trump Dividend, creating a **short-term consumer demand shock** that could further exacerbate inflation dividend impact.

Long Term (1-5 Years):

- Succession of the "Pre-War" political class in Israel, with the potential rise of a **National Religious-dominated government** Israel succession.
- The development of a **"NATO-like system" for hostage recovery**, where an attack on one citizen triggers automated economic sanctions from a coalition of states hostage recovery NATO.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The primary strategic risk is the **overextension of the unitary executive** and the resulting collapse of trust in the rule of law. If institutional guardrails are seen as purely partisan instruments, the capacity for the state to manage future crises (pandemics, infrastructure failure) will be fatally compromised.

- **Election Certification Conflict:** Triggers: Narrow losses in AK, TX, or IA; DOJ orders to seize ballots. Likelihood: High. Impact: Catastrophic civil unrest. Mitigations: Independent state certification and immediate judicial TROs litigation risk.
- **Escalation in the Strait of Hormuz:** Triggers: Successful Iranian drone strike on a U.S. carrier; total closure of the strait. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: $10/gallon gas and global recession. Mitigations: Diplomatic retrenchment or "Trump Strait" naval dominance Hormuz risk.
- **The Empathy Gap Social Breakdown:** Triggers: Widespread adoption of "empathy is dangerous" ideology; dehumanization of minority groups in campaign ads. Likelihood: High. Impact: Normalization of political violence. Mitigations: Civil discourse initiatives and non-partisan moral leadership empathy breakdown.
- **Supply Chain Failure in Tech:** Triggers: Banning high-skilled immigrants from China/India; theft of chip tech by adversaries. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Loss of 401(k) value and tech stagnation. Mitigations: Reform rather than suspension of H-1B programs skilled labor risk.
- **Cyber-Physical Threat (Drones):** Triggers: Coordinated domestic drone strikes on energy infrastructure by disaffected actors. Likelihood: Moderate. Impact: Regional power grid collapse. Mitigations: Rapid deployment of anti-drone architecture drone threat.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **The Fiscal Cliff:** The broadcasts focus on massive spending ($1 trillion military, $1 trillion dividends) but fail to address **how these will be funded** beyond "tariffs," especially as national debt approaches $40 trillion debt concern.
- **The Musk/State Conflict:** There is insufficient detail on the **contractual legality** of a private citizen (Musk) throttling military-grade communications (Starlink) during a foreign war Musk legality.
- **Health Crisis Divergence:** While the administration claims an "obesity rate drop," they omit the **accelerating Life Expectancy gap** in rural areas where hospitals are closing at record rates rural life expectancy.
- **The "Socialist" Label:** Candidates labeled "socialists" (Acton, Sayed) are rarely given space to **define their own economic models**, leading to a lack of clarity on whether they advocate for social democracy or full nationalization socialist label.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Mirage" Victory:** Mainstream polling showing a close race in Kansas and Texas is actually a **psychological operation** intended to draw Republican resources away from the Midwest "blue wall," which will ultimately hold for Democrats by larger margins than expected polling mirage.
- **The Diesel Trap:** The Russian diesel deal is not a fix for fuel prices but a **geopolitical stalling tactic** by Putin to deplete U.S. political capital before a planned winter offensive in Ukraine diesel deal analysis.
- **Black Swan Event:** A coordinated **refusal to certify** by 5 or more states leading to a temporary vacancy of seats in the House, preventing the election of a Speaker and paralyzing the federal government for the first quarter of 2027 certification paralysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Prepare for internal security threats from **private paramilitary actors** emboldened by "might is right" rhetoric and reduced federal oversight of state-level militias.
- **Economic:** Diversify energy and manufacturing dependencies away from "croney" partners who can throttle critical infrastructure at will.
- **Diplomatic:** Formalize subnational diplomatic agreements with provinces in Canada and states in the EU to bypass federal-level **isolationist trade barriers** subnational agreements.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Move production capacity into the **"Fortress States"** (FL, TX) where the regulatory environment is increasingly detached from international treaties and focused on hemispheric autonomy.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Audit all AI and data usage against the new **"Magnifica Humanitas" ethics framework**, as consumer backlash and global regulation (particularly from the EU and Vatican influence) will likely target "dehumanizing" automation Papal influence.
- **Capital Allocation:** Position for a **"Silver Wave" consumption boom** as seniors (who have 20% higher voting enthusiasm) prioritize health spending and domestic leisure silver wave.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

Legislative activity is currently characterized by a push for **aggressive deregulation** and mandatory defense spending, while key bipartisan compromises on immigration and

debt reduction remain blocked by partisan leadership.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**
  - **The Forge Act:** Intended to streamline military acquisition by eliminating red tape and empowering portfolio managers Forge Act.
  - **The Take It Down Act:** Signed into law; requires removal of non-consensual deepfakes within 48 hours Take It Down Act.
  - **The Save America Act:** Proposed to mandate proof of citizenship for all voting Save America Act.
  - **The Ratepayer Protection Act:** Bipartisan bill to prevent data centers from increasing local utility rates; currently blocked in the Senate Ratepayer Protection Act.
- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**
  - **Artemis III NASA Briefing:** Outlined a shift to "extreme ownership" and in-house fabrication to meet the 2027 lunar orbit mission NASA briefing.
  - **DOJ Press Conference:** Announced RICO charges against VA State Sen. Louise Lucas and signaled litigation against California DOJ presser.
  - **Science: A New Golden Age Sumit:** Unveiled 4-year PhD pilot programs and regional compute hubs for AI research Golden Age Summit.

KEY STORIES

- **The Alaska Senate Name Controversy:** DOJ files a preemptive lawsuit to block certification of the Alaska Senate race, citing confusion between two candidates named Dan Sullivan AK name fraud.
- **The Ohio Amy Acton Ad Backlash:** Vivek Ramaswamy faces widespread condemnation, including from Governor Mike DeWine, for an ad featuring Acton's estranged mother addressing her childhood sexual abuse Acton ad.
- **The Starlink Throttling Scandal:** Reports suggest Elon Musk throttled Starlink/Starshield speeds for Ukraine, with President Trump claiming he will "ask" Musk about the ongoing issue Starlink scandal.
- **The Lucas Marijuana RICO Indictment:** Federal authorities indict 82-year-old VA State Sen. Louise Lucas for money laundering and drug trafficking linked to her cannabis stores Lucas RICO.
- **The $5,000 Trump Dividend:** In campaign stops, President Trump promises a one-time $5,000 check for every adult citizen if Republicans sweep the midterms, funded by tariffs dividend promise.
- **The Artemis III Mission Profile Change:** NASA pivots to a 14-day low-earth orbit test mission for Artemis III, focusing on docking with two different landers (Blue Origin and SpaceX) Artemis III profile.
- **The "Magnifica Humanitas" Encyclical:** Pope Leo XIV releases a document warning against the "dehumanization" of the workforce and calling for global regulation of AI Papal AI warning.
- **The Ilhan Omar Identity Probe:** Federal investigation into Representative Ilhan Omar's actual name and alleged marriage to her brother intensifies following White House calls for resignation Omar probe.
- **The Minnesota Gang Task Force:** Governor candidates debate a new 40-agency framework to address a surge in Somali and group-related violence in the state MN gang debate.

- **The Florida Early Vote Surge:** Republican voters in Florida are reportedly cutting into initial Democratic leads in early voting, with 65+ voters comprising 50% of the turnout in Georgia and Florida early vote surge.
- **The Texas "Non-Meat" Campaign Attack:** Ken Paxton targets James Talarico's veganism and "non-meat" campaign as an "attack on ranchers" and a "cry for help" meat culture war.
- **The British Columbia "Painfully Honest" Campaign:** City council candidate Brady Rogers goes viral and wins after a campaign based on admitting he doesn't know what he's doing honest campaign.
- **The Victoria's Secret "Sexy" Backlash:** The New York Times criticizes the return of traditional beauty standards in the fashion show as "objectifying," while the company cites consumer demand for the shift beauty standards debate.
- **The Artemis 4 Mission Acceleration:** NASA modifies the European Service Module to allow Starship to "push" Orion to the Moon, reducing the number of refueling launches required Artemis 4 push.
- **The Bush Family Backing of James Talarico:** Two members of the Bush family break from the GOP to donate to and support Democrat James Talarico in the Texas Senate race Bush/Talarico.
- **The World Trade Center Health Program Funding:** Senator Susan Collins helps pass permanent funding for responders and survivors of 9/11 Zadroga Act funding.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Trends On Capitol Hill is a public interest experiment in applying deep trend analysis to the daily business of the United States Congress to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists, scholars and Congressional staff better understand the overarching legislative trends, themes and patterns of Congress.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's Congressional activity to tease out its overarching themes and trends into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original source material, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the legislative themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

This inaugural report is based on deep analysis of CSPAN, CSPAN2 and CSPAN3 coverage in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive. It is currently limited to the Congressional business covered on those three CSPAN channels and thus may not include all major Congressional business, may include activity from previous days that aired on a later date, and/or may include other major federal, state and local governmental business. We will continue to refine this report to incorporate a growing array of Congressional information sources. This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

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