TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

NOVEMBER 15, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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THE MIDTERM LANDSLIDE CREATES A VOLATILE TRANSITION AS DEMOCRATS TARGET THE IRAN WAR AND EXECUTIVE OVERREACH

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The political landscape of the United States has undergone a seismic shift following a decisive repudiation of MAGA extremism in the 2026 midterm elections. Democrats have secured a commanding majority in the House and a clear 56-seat majority in the Senate, framing the results as a mandate to end the reckless and illegal war in Iran and address an acute "affordability crisis" fueled by high gas prices and tariffs. This "blue wave" has triggered immediate internal leadership contests, most notably Senator Chris Van Hollen's challenge to Chuck Schumer for Senate leadership, signaling a move toward aggressive economic populism and structural institutional reform.

Simultaneously, the fragility of national infrastructure was exposed by a nationwide halt of all air travel caused by a "steering casualty" during a contractor-led fiber optic upgrade at a remote FAA facility. While the administration attempted to frame this as a routine maintenance error, the failure highlights the dangerous state of aging systems and the consequences of long-term underinvestment. This crisis converges with the political transition as the Trump administration appoints Stephen Miller as Chief of Staff, a move interpreted by the incoming majority as an escalation of anti-immigrant and authoritarian "Project 2025" policies that they intend to aggressively investigate and defund.

The day is also characterized by a heavy cultural emphasis on military tradition and the preservation of historical narratives, with extensive coverage of Veterans Day events and the 251st anniversary of the Marine Corps. However, beneath the nationalistic pageantry lies a deep-seated anxiety regarding the stability of the Department of Justice and the civil service. Analysts and authors are highlighting a "profiles in cowardice" trend among elites who failed to check executive overreach, even as a new generation of "blockers" within the federal workforce is celebrated for resisting the politicization of nonpartisan agencies.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Democratic Midterm Landslide and Leadership Realignment

- Democrats flipped the House with 256 seats and secured 56 Senate seats, winning in traditionally Republican strongholds like South Carolina and Kansas.
- Senator Chris Van Hollen launched a bid for Senate Majority Leader, arguing that the party needs "new leadership" to meet the public's demand for fundamental economic change.
- Representative Hakeem Jeffries is poised to become the first Black Speaker of the House, focusing on a "Super Agenda" of affordability and anti-corruption.

National Air Travel Grounded by Infrastructure Failure

- A nationwide ground stop of all U.S. flights occurred on November 14, 2026, due to a failure in the FAA's telecommunications infrastructure.
- Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy attributed the failure to a faulty router configuration by contractor L-3 Harris during a transition from copper to fiber optics.
- The incident resulted in the cancellation of approximately 12,000 flights and exposed the risk of "propagation" errors in the nation's air traffic control system.

Trump Administration Personnel Escalation

- The President appointed Stephen Miller as Chief of Staff, signaling a doubling down on mass deportation strategies and hardline immigration policies.
- Incoming Democratic leaders have pledged to impeach Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and investigate DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) head Elon Musk for alleged corruption and "retribution" against civil servants.

Economic Affordability and the "Iran War" Backlash

- Voter sentiment was heavily driven by the high cost of living, with gas prices cited as a primary grievance against the administration's foreign policy.
- The conflict in Iran is being framed by the incoming majority as driving up energy costs and depleting the treasury while providing no strategic benefit.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- The "war in Iran" is a central political flashpoint; the incoming Democratic majority vows to use the power of the purse to defund the conflict and force a withdrawal.
- Operational details of "Operation Midnight Hammer" reveal a massive strike on Iranian nuclear sites involving 125 aircraft, highlighting the scale of the ongoing aerial campaign.

Critical Infrastructure Security

- The FAA ground stop reveals that 31% of the FAA's copper communications lines have yet to be modernized, leaving the system vulnerable to sustainment failures.
- The dependency on a single prime contractor (L-3 Harris) for the FTI (Federal Telecommunications Infrastructure) network is identified as a systemic risk point.

Leadership Dynamics & Governance

- The emergence of "DOGE" under Elon Musk is characterized as a "power grab" intended to replace a nonpartisan civil service with a "loyalist army."
- The "Four Country Caucus"—a bipartisan group of veterans—is being cited as a model for governing in a period of extreme polarization, though its influence is tested by the new Democratic mandate.

Legal Warfare & Regulatory Risk

- Democrats are preparing comprehensive ethics and anti-corruption legislation, including a permanent ban on members of Congress trading individual stocks.

- The use of the War Powers Resolution of 1973 is being revitalized as a tool to check the President's unilateral military actions in the Middle East.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

Institutional Erosion vs. Civil Service Resistance

A major narrative theme is the conflict between the Trump administration's attempt to "hollow out" the federal government and the resistance of career civil servants. Authors Michael Lewis and Jacob Weisberg describe a "demolition" of government expertise, where "blockers" within agencies like the IRS and the Institute of Peace are the only remaining check on unconstitutional executive orders. The appointment of Stephen Miller as Chief of Staff is seen as the ultimate manifestation of this "loyalist" strategy, intended to bypass institutional guardrails that held during the first term.

The Rebirth of Economic Populism

The midterm results signify a shift away from "woke" identity politics toward hardline economic populism. New leaders like Ro Khanna and Andy Kim are articulating a vision of "Medicare for All" and "Medikids" as essential responses to a "rigged economy" controlled by billionaires. This movement explicitly rejects the "moderate" label, seeking instead to build a "multiracial, multiethnic labor movement" that can out-organize the populist appeal of the MAGA movement by focusing on the "kitchen table" issues of housing, healthcare, and debt.

Militarism as a Cultural Anchor Amidst Political Chaos

While the political sphere is fractured, the transcripts show an intense reliance on military ritual and veteran history to provide a sense of national continuity. The exhaustive coverage of the Marine Corps Birthday Pageant and the history of the Tuskegee Airmen serves as a stabilizing narrative. However, even this is politicized, as incoming leaders contrast the "honor" of veterans with what they term the "cowardice" of the current administration's leadership at the Department of Defense.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

United States

- **Elite Infighting:** The Democratic party is experiencing a generational shift, with the "New Blue Wave" demanding the removal of Chuck Schumer and other "old guard" leaders perceived as too conciliatory to the donor class and corporate interests.
- **Partisan Polarization:** Public sentiment remains deeply skeptical of government capacity; while voters favored Democrats, only 43% believe Washington can actually "make a positive difference" in their lives, indicating a persistent "trust deficit."
- **Institutional Decay:** The FAA crisis and the hollowing out of the Justice Department suggest a state capacity that is increasingly unable to manage basic functions or uphold the rule of law without political interference.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The Middle East Flashpoint

The U.S. is currently engaged in a high-intensity air war with Iran, framed as a defensive measure against nuclear proliferation but interpreted domestically as a primary driver of global economic instability. The transcripts portray an international system where the U.S. is "projecting power" through strikes like Operation Midnight Hammer, yet faces diminishing returns as domestic political support for "forever wars" has collapsed.

Global Alliances and Strategic Vulnerability

The dependency on foreign-produced microchips and the potential for a "war in the Pacific" over Taiwan are referenced as looming threats that the current administration's "tariffs-first" trade policy may be exacerbating. The "outside world" is increasingly framed as a hostile threat matrix where traditional allies (like those in Europe) are being alienated by the Trump administration's erratic statecraft and preference for "nonstate actors."

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. economy is currently defined by a "trickle-up" crisis where efficiency gains are being captured at the top while labor costs and debt increase for the middle class. National debt has reached $40 trillion, with interest payments exceeding $1 trillion annually, creating a "fiscal timebomb" that constrains all future governance. Market sentiment is volatile, reacting to the potential for new tariffs and the uncertainty of the midterm results.

- **Inflation/Affordability:** Gas prices around $4.50/gallon and rising grocery costs are the primary drivers of consumer dissatisfaction.
- **Labor/Unions:** A resurgence in labor organizing is noted, particularly the Amazon Labor Union's fight against "Bezos-ism" and the "disposability" of workers.
- **Housing:** The "American Dream" of homeownership is described as "out of reach" for young adults, with the average age of first-time buyers rising to 40.
- **Tech/AI:** The "AI Age" is seen as a potential threat to the payroll tax base, requiring a restructuring of the welfare state to account for automated job loss.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

The midterm elections have triggered a massive turnover in personnel and a restructuring of the executive-legislative power dynamic.

- **Stephen Miller:** Appointed as Chief of Staff; his status is one of extreme controversy, viewed by Democrats as the architect of a "radicalized and racist" deportation agenda.
- **Senator Chris Van Hollen:** Emerging as a top contender for Senate Majority Leader, signaling a likely end to Chuck Schumer's leadership tenure.
- **Representative Hakeem Jeffries:** Solidified as the Speaker-elect, representing a younger, more "narrative-driven" leadership style.
- **Pete Hegseth:** The Defense Secretary is a primary target for impeachment by the incoming majority for his role in the Iran conflict and alleged redlining of career generals.
- **Todd Blanche:** Framed as a politically compromised Attorney General nominee (or acting head) who has hollowed out the DOJ's integrity units.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

The network's editorial hierarchy for the day was dominated by **Political Victory and Realignment**, with the midterm sweep treated as an era-defining moment. There was an **emotional tone of nationalistic reassurance** during the military segments, punctuated by **fear-inducing narratives** regarding the "destruction of the Justice Department." The FAA ground stop was initially treated with **high urgency** but was quickly pivoted into a discussion on the need for **bipartisan infrastructure funding**, a classic C-SPAN framing.

Buried Stories: The actual humanitarian impact of the Iran strikes (casualties on the ground) was almost entirely ignored in favor of tactical and political analysis. The **Conspicuous Omissions** include any detailed discussion of the Trump administration's legal defense against these impending investigations, or a clear breakdown of the "Project 2025" counter-narrative from the White House perspective.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The subtext of the day's stories frames the U.S. as a "house divided" that is **outwardly aggressive** but **inwardly fragile**. The international perception is of a superpower whose internal systems (FAA, DOJ) are beginning to fail under the weight of partisan warfare and neglect.

COUNTRIES and LEADERS

- **United States (Donald Trump):** Portrayed as **corrupt and authoritarian**, leading a "lame duck" administration that is "ripping off the American people." Incoming leaders describe him as a leader who "does not understand democracy" and is using government as a tool for personal and political "retribution."
- **Iran:** Framed as a **hostile foe** and "evil regime," yet the war against it is portrayed as **inept and reckless** by the incoming majority, who argue it was manufactured for domestic political distraction.
- **Israel (Benjamin Netanyahu):** Implicitly characterized as a **friend/foe hybrid**; while some defend him as the "greatest Prime Minister," progressive members like Ro Khanna call for "zeroing out aid" due to the "genocide" in Gaza.
- **Russia (Vladimir Putin):** Portrayed as **dangerous and opportunistic**, leveraging the U.S. focus on Iran to escalate the war in Ukraine.

NON-STATE & CORPORATE ACTORS

- **Elon Musk (DOGE):** Framed as a **threat to civil service stability**; critics describe him as a "loyalist" leader using "efficiency" as a guise for destroying government oversight.
- **L-3 Harris:** Characterized as **competent/ inept**; responsible for a national infrastructure failure due to a simple configuration error, raising questions about contractor accountability.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

The "meta-narrative" of the day is a sophisticated battle between **"Project 2025"** and the **"Blockers."** The Trump administration appears to be **narrative seeding** the idea that the midterms were "stolen" or "rigged" by the "deep state" (represented by the 40 warnings leading up to 9/11 in a historical parallel). Conversely, Democrats are weaponizing the "affordability crisis" to frame the GOP as "apologists for billionaires."

The transcripts highlight **domestic propaganda** regarding "Sanctuary States," with callers echoing the administration's claim that these cities "allow rapists and killers" to go free. This is countered by the "ABC's of Democracy" narrative from Hakeem Jeffries, which attempts to **reclaim "American Values"** through an alphabetical list of principles associate with maturity and rule of law.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Hypothesis 1: Constitutional Crisis in 2027.** If the Trump administration ignores War Powers Resolution mandates or Congressional subpoenas (especially regarding the Miller/Hegseth investigations), a full-scale constitutional crisis is inevitable by February 2027.
- **Hypothesis 2: Infrastructure Cascades.** The FAA stop is likely the first of several cascading infrastructure failures as aging copper systems are "rushed" through modernization without adequate redundancy, potentially affecting energy grids next.
- **Hypothesis 3: Democratic Realignment.** The party will move violently leftward on economics to prevent a populist resurgence from the right in 2028, potentially alienating centrist "donor class" allies.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect leadership battles within the Senate Democratic caucus to result in a more progressive policy floor; immediate House ethics investigations into DOGE and the "Iran War" origins will commence.
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** A massive budgetary showdown will occur as the new Congress attempts to defund the military campaign in Iran, likely leading to a government shutdown or the first test of "Project Overreach" executive defiance.
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** A fundamental restructuring of the Department of Justice and potentially the Electoral College (via the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact) will be pursued to prevent a "third Trump term" or another minority-rule presidency.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The U.S. is currently operating in a high-risk environment characterized by systemic institutional fragility and the potential for a "hot" war transition.

- **Risk 1: Energy Grid/Communications Collapse.** Triggered by rushed upgrades to "unsupported" infrastructure (copper to fiber); Likelihood: High; Impact: Catastrophic domestic economic halt; Mitigations: increased redundant funding and slowing the pace of contractor-led transitions.

- **Risk 2: Civil Service "Loyaist" Purge.** Triggered by Stephen Miller's first 100 days as CoS; Likelihood: High; Impact: Loss of critical expert capacity in IRS, FAA, and DOJ; Mitigations: Congressional "Blocker" protections and whistle-blower support.
- **Risk 3: Debt Default/Interest Rate Shock.** Triggered by the $40T debt hitting a $1T/year interest threshold amidst high inflation; Likelihood: Medium; Impact: Global currency instability; Mitigations: Negotiating immediate "Iran War" cost reductions.
- **Risk 4: Retaliatory Cyber-attack from Iran.** Triggered by Operation Midnight Hammer's strikes on nuclear sites; Likelihood: Medium-High; Impact: Disruption of FAA and banking systems; Mitigations: Hardening critical telecomm switch points.
- **Risk 5: Domestic Civil Unrest Over Deportations.** Triggered by the use of active-duty military for mass deportations starting January 2027; Likelihood: High; Impact: Urban violence and loss of state legitimacy; Mitigations: Congressional defunding of ICE "Secret Police" units.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The transcripts do not explain the **precise legal basis** the Trump administration will use to bypass the War Powers Resolution if they refuse to withdraw from Iran.
- There is no **counter-analysis** from the Republican side regarding how they intend to manage the $40 trillion debt without the massive cuts proposed by DOGE.
- The **humanitarian toll of Operation Midnight Hammer** is missing, which is necessary to gauge the potential for international sanctions against the U.S.
- The **technological readiness** of the proposed FAA Smart Radar system to withstand the "propagation errors" that caused the current halt is unverified.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

- **The "Fake Strike" Scenario:** The strikes on Iranian nuclear sites were strategically timed to provoke a cyber-attack that would justify the FAA ground stop, allowing the administration to "test" its ability to halt national movement during a period of transition.
- **The "Economic Honeymoon" Trap:** The Democratic landslide was actually **allowed to happen** by Trump-aligned elites to shift the blame for the impending $40T debt crisis onto the new majority, who will be forced to raise taxes or cut benefits by 2028.
- **Black Swan:** A **massive regional war** in the Middle East resulting from a "Midnight Hammer" escalation leads to oil prices hitting $250/barrel, causing a total collapse of the U.S. dollar and the suspension of the 2028 presidential election.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- **Security:** Immediately implement the War Powers Resolution to cap Iranian engagement costs before the debt ceiling debate.
- **Economic:** Prioritize "affordability relief" over tax cuts to prevent a mid-transition recession.

- **Diplomatic:** Re-engage with NATO and regional allies to socialize a peace plan for Iran that addresses the oil supply chain.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain:** Diversify away from single-prime infrastructure contractors (like L-3 Harris) who present systemic failure risks.
- **Regulatory:** Prepare for aggressive antitrust and ethics enforcement from a DOJ that will likely be restructured under a "Second Reconstruction" model.
- **Capital Allocation:** Reallocate from AI speculative sectors toward "physical resilience" infrastructure as the aging copper system continues to fail.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The legislative agenda is currently a battlefield between the "Project 2025" executive goals and a "Super Agenda" of institutional and economic reform from the incoming Democratic majority. Proposals range from fundamental DOJ reconstruction to the immediate defunding of overseas military operations.

BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Congressional Stock Trading Ban:** Intended to forbid lawmakers and their spouses from trading individual stocks to restore public trust.
- **Medicare at Home:** Legislation to allow millions of seniors to age in place instead of expensive institutional care.
- **Medikids:** A proposal for universal healthcare coverage for all children from birth to age 26.
- **The 11th Step Act:** Proposed to overhaul the criminal justice system and reduce "over-criminalization."

HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Sports Betting on College Campuses:** A Senate hearing investigating the "public health crisis" of predatory gambling apps targeting students.
- **FAA Ground Stop Briefing:** Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy explaining the technological root cause of the November 14 air travel halt.
- **NTSB New Orleans Tanker Briefing:** Details on a "steering casualty" involving a tanker and the passenger vessel American Heritage on the Mississippi River.

KEY STORIES

- **The Democratic "Blue Wave" Election Victory:** Democrats secure a "landslide" victory in the 2026 midterms, winning 256 House seats and 56 Senate seats, driven by voter anger over the "Iran War" and affordability.
- **FAA System Failure and Ground Stop:** A nationwide halt to all U.S. flights for four hours on November 14, caused by a faulty router configuration by contractor L-3 Harris at a remote site.
- **Operation Midnight Hammer strikes Iran:** U.S. forces conduct a massive aerial strike involving 125 aircraft against Iranian nuclear facilities, escalating regional conflict.
- **Stephen Miller Appointed Chief of Staff:** The Trump administration doubles down on hardline immigration and "retribution" politics following the midterm loss.

- **Senate Leadership Challenge:** Senator Chris Van Hollen officially bids for Senate Majority Leader, challenging Chuck Schumer to shift the party toward "bold economic populism."
- **NTSB New Orleans Tanker Incident:** A tanker collision on the Mississippi River caused by a "steering casualty" at the Crescent City Connection bridge.
- **College Sports Betting Crisis:** Senate hearing reveals 67% of students living on campus are betting on sports, leading to a spike in problem gambling and financial ruin.
- **Project 2025 and the Civil Service Resistance:** Authors describe the targeting of nonpartisan government employees by "DOGE" (Elon Musk) and the efforts of "blockers" to prevent illegal executive actions.
- **Veterans Day and Marine Corps 251st Anniversary:** Extensive memorial ceremonies and parades nationwide, emphasizing military tradition as a cultural anchor.
- **The "Affordability Super Agenda":** Incoming Speaker Hakeem Jeffries outlines a plan to ban Congressional stock trading and cut "wasteful" military spending to lower domestic costs.
- **SNAP Rule Extension for Bodegas:** NYC Mayor Zoran Mamdani announces a 90-day extension for small bodegas to comply with new federal food stocking rules, preventing 1.6 million New Yorkers from losing benefits.
- **The Tuskegee Airmen Legacy:** A historical reflection on the struggle against segregation and the contribution of Black pilots in WWII.

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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