TODAYS TRENDS ON CAPITOL HILL

NOVEMBER 20, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONAL FRAGMENTATION AND SYSTEMATIC INFRASTRUCTURE FAILURES CLASH WITH HIGH-STAKES GEOPOLITICAL REALIGNMENT

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The reporting of November 20, 2026, depicts a United States government in a state of profound transition and internal conflict following a "voter tsunami" in the 2026 midterm elections that has effectively stripped the Trump administration of its legislative mandate. While President Trump attempts to forge a **historic trilateral realignment** in Shenzhen with the leaders of China and Russia to end the war in Ukraine, his administration is besieged at home by systemic failures. A week of **cascading technological outages** affecting the FAA, major banking institutions, and the NSA has left the public "on edge," with officials struggling to reconcile their claims of "routine upgrades" against congressional skepticism of potential state-sponsored sabotage.

Domestic governance is characterized by an aggressive Democratic majority-elect preparing to "unfurl a series of investigations" into alleged executive overreach and corruption. The administration's pivot to a highly visible "Declaration of Peace" and a posture of **"flexible realism"** in foreign policy appears to be a strategic attempt to mitigate the fallout from a domestic repudiation. Simultaneously, the Senate has narrowly rejected yet another attempt to curtail the **"unconstitutional" war in Iran**, even as the economic toll of the conflict—manifesting in $6.50/gallon fuel prices—is cited as a primary driver of the recent Republican electoral wipeout.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Shenzhen Trilateral Summit and Ukraine Realignment:** President Trump, President Xi, and President Putin have reached a preliminary **"Declaration of Peace"** regarding the Ukraine conflict. The framework includes potential security guarantees for Ukraine based on NATO's Article Five, though Russian officials remain publicly skeptical of this specific concession.
- **2026 Midterm "Blue Wave" Realignment:** Analysts and departing lawmakers describe the recent election results as a "repudiation election" rather than a mandate for leftist ideals. Significant shifts were noted in **traditionally "Ruby Red" Utah** and the first Democratic Senate win in Texas since 1988, driven by concerns over corruption, the Iran war, and aggressive deportation policies.
- **Systemic Infrastructure Crisis:** A series of massive outages hit Microsoft, United Airlines, Chase, Wells Fargo, and the NSA within a single week. The administration denies a coordinated cyberattack, attributing the failures to **aging 55-year-old air traffic control systems** and the rapid pace of "superintelligence" compute upgrades.

- **The Iran Conflict Flashpoint:** The ongoing "Epic Fury" military operations in Iran continue to drain the treasury ($47 billion to date) and have claimed **23 American lives**. The conflict remains the primary wedge between the executive and a legislative body that has repeatedly declared it illegal.
- **Politicization of Oversight and the GAO:** The nomination of Eric Euland to lead the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has sparked a fierce partisan battle. Democrats allege the move is a **"hostile takeover"** of a nonpartisan watchdog by a partisan operative meant to shield the administration from scrutiny.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

- **Tech Sovereignty & AI:** The administration is moving to ban American companies from building **AI data centers in foreign countries**, threatening "tremendous penalties" to ensure the U.S. wins the "AI war." Concurrently, NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang is being scrutinized following allegations he was **compromised by a Chinese spy agency**.
- **Leadership Dynamics & Governance:** Internal Democratic divisions have emerged as Senator Chris Van Hollen **challenges Chuck Schumer** for Senate leadership, advocating for an end to "concentrated power" and a "new generation" of leadership that prioritizes legislative results over procedural delay.
- **Cybersecurity & Threat Actors:** CISA officials report a **40% vacancy rate** in key mission areas, even as the risk of "cyber 9/11" events increases. Lawmakers expressed alarm that CISA and the FBI have "decimated" their cybersecurity personnel due to political purges related to past investigations.
- **Macroeconomics & Trade:** The U.S. national debt has reached **a record $41 trillion**. Average tariff rates have surged from a post-WWII baseline of 2% to 12%, which the Federal Reserve Bank of New York identifies as the primary driver of current 3.5% inflation levels.
- **Civil Unrest & Social Order:** Testimony reveals deep-seated concerns regarding **ICE enforcement tactics**, including the fatal shooting of a bystander in Maine and the deployment of tear gas near elementary schools, which have galvanized Latino and immigrant communities against the administration.
- **Energy & Critical Minerals:** Despite the Iran conflict's impact on oil, the administration is pushing for a **"third subsurface energy revolution"** through gigawatt-scale geothermal projects, intended to bolster domestic grid reliability and lower energy costs.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The End of the "Blank Check" Era: Disparate reports from both the House and Senate indicate that the incoming Democratic majority intends to use the "power of the purse" to effectively **freeze offensive military spending** in Iran. The era of unilateral executive action without legislative oversight is facing a structural dead-end, as even retiring Republicans like Don Bacon call

for a restoration of **checks and balances** to prevent governance by "rubber stamp."

Flexible Realism vs. Idealism: The Trump administration has officially adopted a foreign policy of **"flexible realism,"** which critics describe as an absence of a moral compass. This is most evident in the President's characterization of Vladimir Putin as a "friend" during the same week Putin launched **deadly assaults on Ukrainian infrastructure**. The shift toward "dealmaking" with autocrats is framed as a pragmatic necessity to end "negative sum" wars, despite the cost to traditional alliances.

Institutional Decay and Oversight Attrition: A disturbing trend of institutional attrition is visible across federal agencies. The Department of the Interior's IG office has seen its staff **drop from 330 to 220**, while over 20,000 employees have left the Veterans Affairs department in under 18 months. This drain of professional expertise, coupled with the **firing of over 20 Inspectors General**, suggests a deliberate hollowing out of the permanent state in favor of political appointees.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

The American domestic landscape is marked by extreme polarization and a perceived breakdown in the rule of law. Retiring lawmakers describe a **"hyper-partisan"** environment where the "standards have dropped" to the point that officials on both sides view their domestic opponents as greater threats than foreign adversaries. This internal friction is compounded by the "legal warfare" surrounding the administration, with **nearly 1,000 lawsuits** currently filed against unilateral executive actions. The use of "Schedule F" to strip civil service protections is creating a climate of fear within the federal workforce, further diminishing state capacity to respond to the ongoing infrastructure and cyber crises. In the legislative branch, the "Psychology of Consensus" that once governed the 117th Congress has been **replaced by absolutism**, leaving the nation vulnerable to a potential government shutdown on December 11.

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

The United States is currently projecting power defensively and through transactional statecraft. The Shenzhen Trilateral Meeting represents a **strategic pivot** where the U.S. is treating Russia and China as co-equal victors of the global order to manage nuclear risk. Simultaneously, the U.S. is aggressively weaponizing trade, with the President boasting of **slashing trade deficits** with partners like Thailand and the Philippines by forcing 100% purchases of American agricultural and energy products. However, this "America First" posture is fraying traditional alliances; European allies are described as **"openly working around us"** and preparing to go their own way due to perceived betrayals by the current administration. The framing of the international system has shifted from a rule-based order to a "position of unmatched economic and diplomatic strength" where relationships are purely transactional.

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. economy is currently a study in contradiction, with record manufacturing growth occurring alongside a fiscal "house of cards" driven by a $41 trillion debt. The

Federal Reserve's policy of maintaining high interest rates is a point of acute contention between the executive and the central bank.

- **National Debt:** Currently at **$41 trillion**, growing by $2 trillion annually. Interest payments now exceed military spending.
- **Inflation and Tariffs:** The current 3.5% inflation rate is attributed **entirely to global tariffs**. The administration has signaled it will maintain these levels despite the midterm electoral losses.
- **Energy Costs:** Diesel prices are at **record highs near $6.00/gallon** nationally, impacting agriculture and supply chain logistics.
- **Wealth Generation vs. Loss:** The President claims $25 trillion in new wealth was created over two years, but notes a **$4 trillion loss** immediately following the midterm election results due to "market unhappiness."
- **Trade Agreements:** New commercial deals totaling **$17 billion** were secured with Southeast Asian nations, including the purchase of 20 Boeing 787s by Philippine Airlines.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

- **Hakeem Jeffries:** Positioned as the incoming **Speaker of the House**, promising a wave of investigations into the administration's "self-dealing."
- **Eric Euland:** Nominated as the **Comptroller General of the GAO**. Critics describe him as a "partisan operative" designed to neutralize the agency's oversight role.
- **Jensen Huang:** The former NVIDIA CEO is at the center of a national security scandal; while he is seeking to **return to his post**, the President has demanded a "big apology" before any such reinstatement.
- **Sean Caracross:** Sudden resignation as National Cyber Director. The President claims the removal was due to a **lack of "proper experience"** to handle the recent outage crisis.
- **Markwayne Mullin:** The Secretary of Homeland Security is reportedly being **"sidelined"** by the White House due to communication failures following the FAA ground stop.

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

C-SPAN's editorial hierarchy for the day is split between the "pageantry of statecraft" and the "grit of oversight." The lead stories are dominated by the Shenzhen summit and the President's subsequent press conference, which are presented with a tone of triumphalist "flexible realism." However, this is immediately juxtaposed with dense, contentious confirmation hearings and legislative debates that reveal deep institutional rot. The "buried story" of the day is the **human cost of ICE enforcement**, which is minimized in administration statements but amplified in the RAMIREZ and HERNANDEZ questioning. There is a conspicuous omission of any technical detail regarding the NSA and banking outages; while the administration dismisses them as "coincidental upgrades," the network fails to present independent cybersecurity experts to challenge this unlikely narrative.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

Geopolitical framing has abandoned the binary of "democracy vs. autocracy" in favor of a "great powers" framework that prioritizes stability over sovereignty. The U.S. is increasingly framed as a "country of second chances" that is willing to trade security for economic concessions.

- **Russia / Vladimir Putin:** Portrayed by the President as a **"friend"** and a misunderstood leader who was "very nice" during past U.S. internal investigations. Putin is framed as a necessary partner in the new global security architecture, despite his continued military strikes during summit talks.
- **China / Xi Jinping:** Characterized as a strong, competent leader who **"does his job"** for his people. The administration frames China as the primary economic adversary but a vital partner in "superintelligence" guardrails.
- **Ukraine / Volodymyr Zelensky:** Portrayed by administration officials as a leader who is **"stuck in mud"** and unable to end a war that is a "negative sum" for the world. Zelensky is increasingly framed as a junior partner whose sovereignty is secondary to a broader "Declaration of Peace" negotiated between major powers.
- **Iran:** Consistently framed as an **"evil group of people"** and "crazy" actors who must be denied nuclear capability at any cost, justifying the ongoing unconstitutional war.

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding of "Coincidental Outages":** The administration is aggressively pushing the narrative that the week's **cascading outages** are purely technical coincidences. This is likely a preemptive strike against the realization that domestic infrastructure is increasingly vulnerable to hybrid warfare.
- **Astro-turfing and Disinformation:** Lawmakers report that social media campaigns against domestic infrastructure projects are often **fueled by foreign accounts** (e.g., "MAGA moms" in Iowa that are actually posting from Australia).
- **Weaponization of the "Deep State" Narrative:** Administration officials are using the recent election losses as a justification to **purge CISA and FBI** personnel, framing them as actors who "interfered" in past elections to mask the reduction in national defensive cyber capacity.

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Hypothesis: A "Peace for Trade" Grand Bargain:** The administration will likely attempt to trade a Ukrainian territorial settlement for a Chinese commitment to **purchase 100% of American agricultural surplus**. This would allow Trump to claim a "legacy win" while attempting to fix the economic indicators that cost him the midterms.

- **Hypothesis: Impending Constitutional Crisis:** The clash over the GAO and the **"New Sheriff" oversight** promised by Jeffries and Raskin will lead to an unprecedented series of executive privilege claims and potentially a total breakdown in the legislative funding process.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

- **Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect a high probability of a **government shutdown** on December 11 as Democrats leverage the spending bill to defund operations in Iran. Market volatility will continue as investors price in the "voter tsunami."
- **Medium Term (1-6 Months):** The first borough-based jails will face **significant construction delays** due to new environmental court orders. Regulatory battles over AI "circuit breakers" will pit California against a federal government seeking to deregulate for compute dominance.
- **Long Term (1-5 Years):** A permanent shift in U.S. alliances is likely, with a **"European Fortress" defense** model emerging that excludes a U.S. focused on its own internal "AI war" and domestic debt crisis.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- Risk of **Grid/Banking Collapse**: The week's "coincidental" outages demonstrate that the "digital neighborhood" is undefended; Triggers: Any further uncoordinated "upgrades" or a targeted hit on the SWIFT system; Likelihood: High; Impact: Catastrophic domestic unrest; Mitigations: Passing the **Consumer Product Safety Commission** updates for digital apps.
- Risk of **Nuclear Breakout**: Despite the Shenzhen summit, Iran and China continue "hot and heavy" munitions buildup; Triggers: A collapse in the "aggressive diplomacy" track; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Permanent shift in Middle East power; Mitigations: Restoring the **multi-lateral Iran Nuclear Agreement**.
- Risk of **Fiscal Default**: The $41 trillion debt is at a "red flag" level; Triggers: A further 10% increase in average tariff rates leading to hyper-inflation; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Global reserve currency collapse; Mitigations: Passing the **Fiscal Responsibility Act** on an up-or-down vote.
- Risk of **Civil Military Friction**: Lawmakers are actively advising troops to **refuse illegal orders**; Triggers: The deployment of federal law enforcement for political purges; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Fragmentation of the chain of command; Mitigations: Re-codifying the UCMJ protections in the next NDAA.
- Risk of **Supply Chain Shock**: China's "insatiable appetite" for American farm goods creates domestic scarcity; Triggers: Implementation of 100% export quotas; Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Record-high domestic food prices; Mitigations: Diversifying **energy and agricultural production** through the BAJA reform.

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- The broadcasts fail to address the specific role of **Elon Musk's DOGE** in the recent NSA and FAA outages; whether cost-cutting measures led to the system failures is entirely ignored.

- There is no mention of the **posthumous pardon of Pete Rose** in the context of broader judicial ethics—the news cycle transitioned too rapidly to the trilateral summit.
- The transcripts do not explain why **Latino voters in Kansas** shifted 50 points in two years; the local "Ice Raid" catalyst is mentioned but not analyzed for its potential as a national model.

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Managed Collapse" Scenario: The series of outages and the Shenzhen summit could be part of a "managed collapse" of the current American infrastructure to justify a **multi-billion dollar emergency contract** to a small group of favored tech companies (e.g., Raytheon, IBM) under the guise of "Superintelligence" modernization.

The "Summit as Stalling Tactic": While the "Declaration of Peace" is hailed as historic, it may be a **strategic stall** by Putin and Xi to allow for the replenishment of munition stocks while the U.S. legislative majority engages in a domestic funding war.

Black Swan Event: An **accidental "dirty bomb" event** involving an Iranian sleeper cell during the transition period would likely trigger an immediate suspension of the 2026 election results and a declaration of emergency rule.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector: 1. Immediately formalize the **"community of practice"** for veterans' therapies to prevent a privatized wellness-clinic bubble. 2. Establish a non-partisan "Cyber Red Team" to investigate the outages beyond administration claims. 3. Re-engage the **NATO-Russia Council** to verify Ukraine guarantees.

For Private Sector/Investors: 1. Anticipate a 10% inflation baseline if **global tariffs** are not rolled back by the new Congress. 2. Seek opportunities in **geothermal infrastructure** as federal subsidies shift from solar to subsurface. 3. Prepare for high regulatory risk in **AI models involving children** following the COPPA 2.0 push.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The final weeks of the 119th Congress are dominated by a "lame-duck" rush to pass permits and confirm political appointees before the Democratic wave takes effect. Key debates center on **tribal sovereignty** and the economic feasibility of the current permitting regime.

- **BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:**
  - **BAJA (Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act):** A massive permitting reform bill designed to streamline infrastructure and energy projects.
  - **EPSTEIN Files Transparency Act 2.0:** Strategic intent is to bypass DOJ redactions and allow survivors to **sue for their own records**.
  - **COPPA 2.0 / Youth AI Privacy Act:** Aims to ban targeted advertising for kids and set a **16-year-old age limit** for social media.
  - **War Powers Resolution (Iran):** Intent is to end a **"unilateral bombing campaign"** and restore legislative authority over war.

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**
  - **Shenzhen Trilateral Presser:** President Trump details his "friendship" with Putin and Xi while seeking **$50 billion for FAA upgrades**.
  - **GAO Confirmation Hearing:** Focuses on whether Eric Euland will **be an "umpire"** or a "stooge" for the executive.
  - **DHS Oversight Hearing:** Investigates a series of fatal shootings by **unvetted ICE agents** and the "missing children" crisis.

KEY STORIES

- **The Shenzhen Peace Accord:** Trump, Xi, and Putin meet for the first time as a "troika" to end the Ukraine war via a **Declaration of Peace**.
- **The "Outage Week" Crisis:** Massive systemic failures at Microsoft, United Airlines, the NSA, and major banks leave **American infrastructure paralyzed**.
- **The Blue Wave Repudiation:** Democrats secure a 56-seat Senate majority and win the House, flipping **Texas and Utah** congressional districts.
- **The Guerrero Shooting in Maine:** An unvetted ICE agent with "severe mental illness" shot and killed a bystander **in front of his family**, sparking a national debate on agent background checks.
- **The $41 Trillion Debt Ceiling:** Lawmakers warn that the U.S. is a "fiscal house of cards" with **interest payments** now exceeding the military budget.
- **Jensen Huang's Exile:** The NVIDIA CEO is ousted following claims he was compromised by **Chinese intelligence**; Trump demands an apology for his return.
- **The "unconstitutional" War in Iran:** Operation Epic Fury has cost **$47 billion** and killed 23 U.S. troops, with the Senate narrowly rejecting a shutdown of hostilities.
- **GAO Politicization Battle:** Nominee Eric Euland faces accusations of being a "partisan operative" meant to **neutralize congressional oversight**.
- **Zelensky's Berlin Summit:** The Ukrainian leader joins European counterparts to express **cautious skepticism** of the Trump-negotiated peace framework.
- **The Epstein Files Transparency Push:** Thomas Massie advocates for a discharge petition to release **3 million files** the DOJ is currently withholding.
- **The 2026 Capitol Christmas Tree:** A **76-foot Engelmann Spruce** arrives from Idaho amidst a domestic political storm.
- **Psychedelic Breakthroughs for Veterans:** The V.A. identifies **10 initial sites** for MDMA and psilocybin treatment programs for PTSD.
- **The "Declaration of Peace" Guarantees:** U.S. envoys claim **Russians are "comfortable"** with Article Five-style security for Ukraine, a claim Russians later deny.
- **The Pete Rose Pardon:** President Trump **posthumously pardons** the baseball legend as his final act before the Senate flip.

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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