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POLITICS | POLICY

# Why So Many Lawmakers Are Quitting Congress

House retirements are on pace for a midterm record, with members citing a range of political and personal reasons

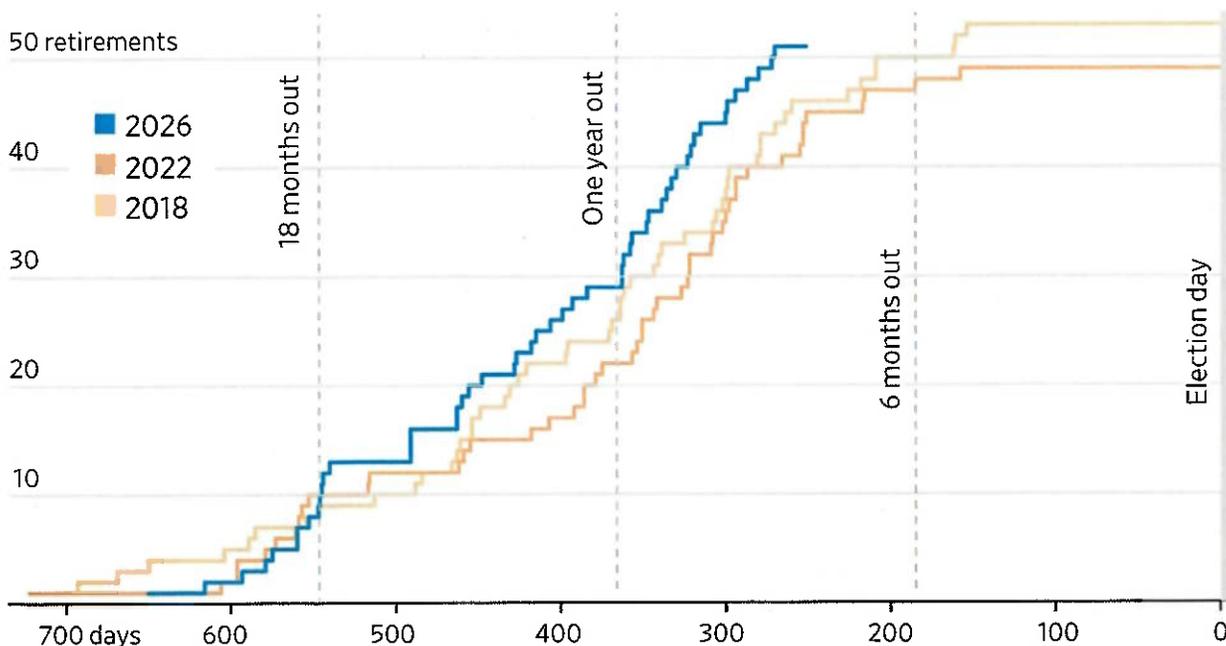
By [Anvee Bhutani](#) [Follow](#) and [Brian McGill](#) [Follow](#)

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House retirements are piling up. Ahead of the 2026 midterm elections, more than four dozen lawmakers have already announced they won't seek re-election. That puts the number of planned departures on pace to exceed past election cycles—and potentially set a record for a midterm.

Retirements can reshape the battlefield. An open seat is typically more competitive than one defended by an incumbent, who benefits from name recognition, fundraising networks and established voter relationships. When those decisions come early, both parties have more time to recruit candidates and redirect national resources, expanding the map of competitive districts. Republicans now have a 218-214 advantage in the House.

## House retirements by days before midterm election



Note: Through Feb. 25

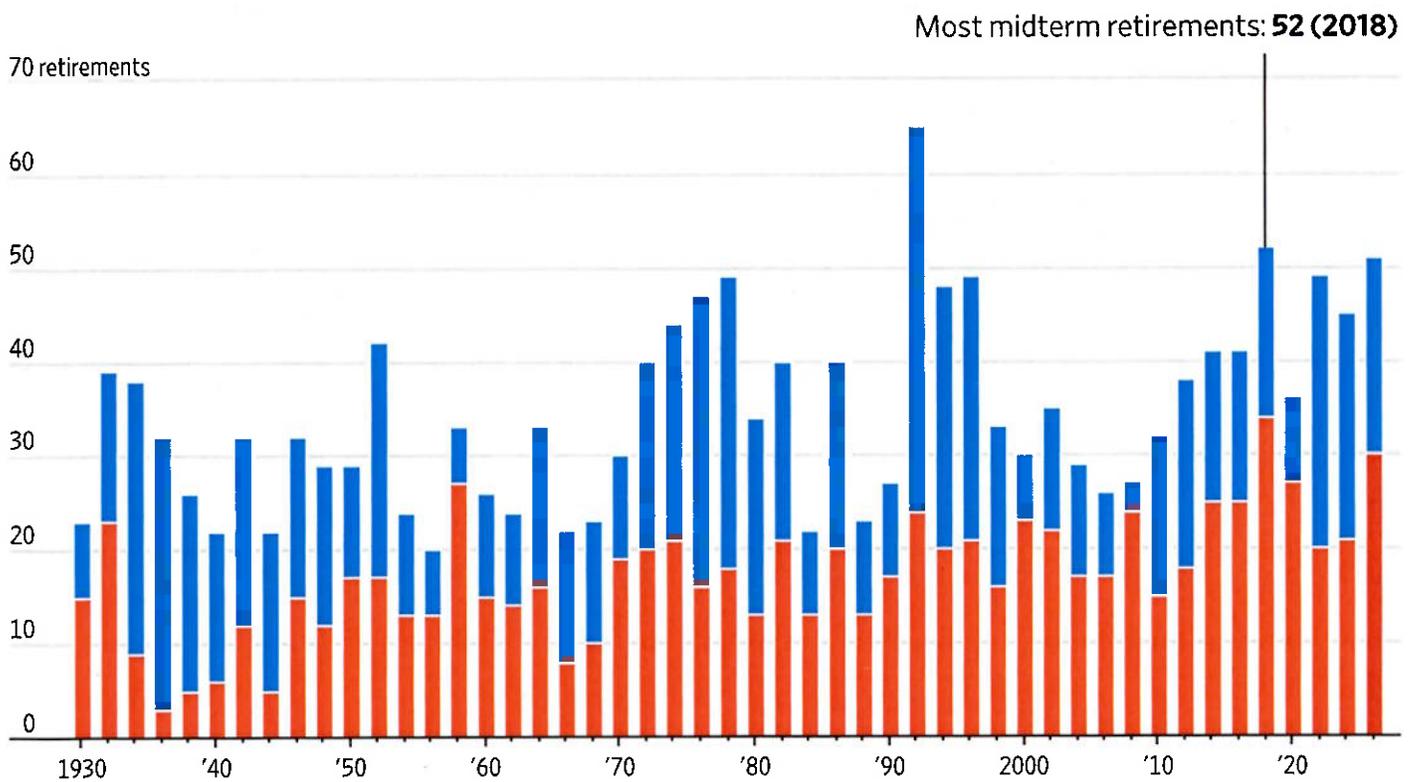
Source: Ballotpedia

Midterm elections often serve as referendums on the party in power, and retirements can track expected gains or losses. Members considering retirement might want to stick around if their party will be in the majority—but might decide to hang it up if their party’s prospects look bleak. The current high mark for departures in a midterm cycle was set in 2018, during President Trump’s first term, when Republicans faced an uphill fight to hang onto the majority.

If the present trajectory holds, 2026 could surpass previous highs and mark the largest midterm exodus of House members in nearly a century of data. The moves signal broader unease inside the chamber about the direction of the political winds—and the value of remaining in office in a fraught political environment.

### House retirements by party

■ Republicans ■ Democrats



Note: 2026 through Feb. 25

Sources: Brookings Institution’s Vital Statistics on Congress (1930-2022); Ballotpedia (2024); WSJ analysis (2024)

Retirement decisions stem from a mix of political and personal factors. Some lawmakers are at or above the traditional Social Security retirement age of 67 and are ending long congressional careers. Others are pursuing different offices, such as the Senate or governor, or navigating newly redrawn district lines. Some faced potentially difficult re-election campaigns. On the Republican side, run-ins with Trump have made life difficult for a number of lawmakers who have decided to quit.

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Jodey Arrington (R, Texas): Arrington served as a primary architect of the landmark 2025 tax package. Having reached the pinnacle of his legislative influence as [Budget Committee chair](#), he is framing his exit as a return to citizen-stewardship.

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