

Converging on The Big Middle in the US Midterm Elections

October 2026 · 27 participants · Live online session

01 Executive Summary

Participants agreed on how the midterms should be run more than on what should be decided in them. Every respondent called 2026 "far more consequential" than a typical midterm. The strongest shared ground is election integrity: no federal or ICE presence at the polls, high turnout, and acceptance of results. Affordability is the clearest policy overlap.

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CALL 2026 FAR MORE
CONSEQUENTIAL
THAN MOST
MIDTERMS

75%

NAME EMERGENCY,
MARTIAL LAW OR
INSURRECTION TO
BLOCK ELECTIONS
AS A TOP-FIVE
NEGATIVE OUTCOME

14 of 19

EXPECT POSITIVE
OUTCOMES TO BE
MORE LIKELY THAN
NEGATIVE ONES

14 of 17

PROFILED PARTICIPANTS
LEAN LIBERAL, SO THE
"MIDDLE" HERE IS NOT YET
CROSS-PARTISAN

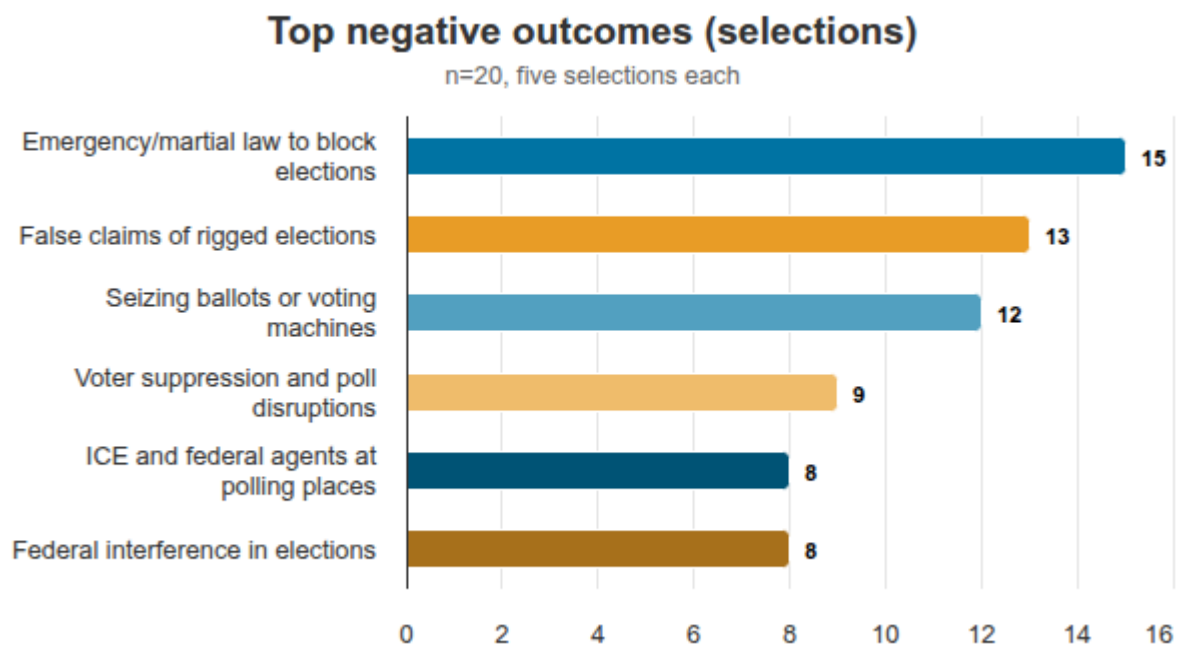
INSIGHT

The process norms in this session are the strongest candidates for a shared Big Middle. They are still untested with conservative voices, because the room was overwhelmingly liberal-leaning.

02 Election Integrity Is the Center of Gravity

1 Fear of interference outweighs any single policy concern

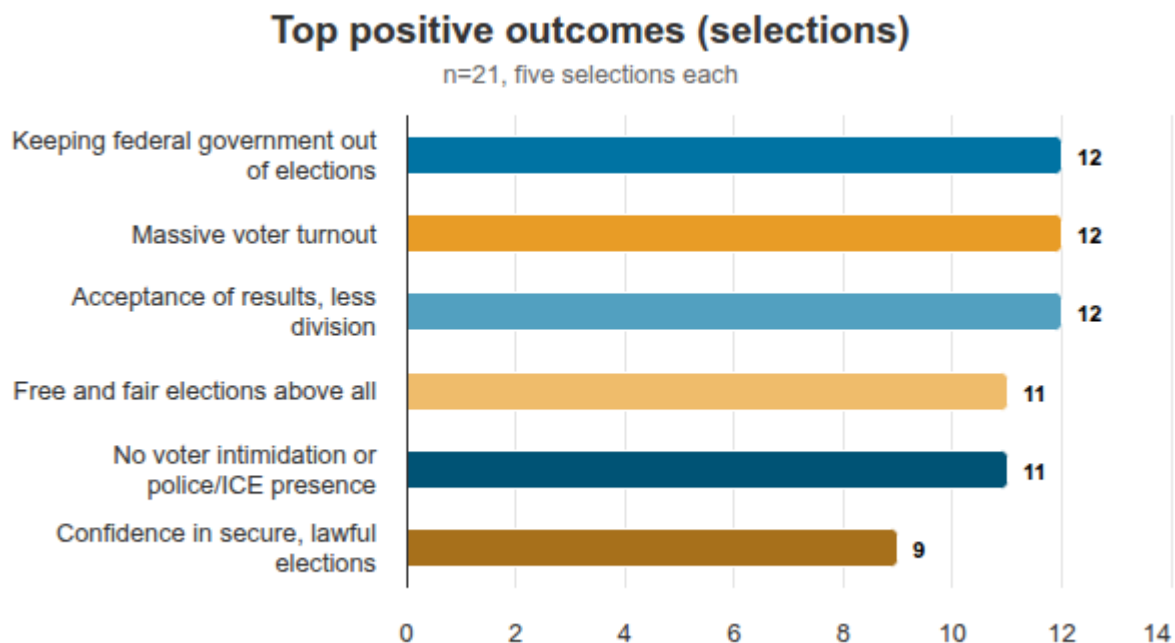
The three most-selected negative outcomes were all about the election process itself. Declaring an emergency or martial law to block elections led at 15 of 20 (75%). False claims of rigged elections followed at 13 (65%), then seizing ballots or voting machines at 12 (60%). Policy outcomes did not make the top of that list.



Top negative outcomes, five selections each (n=20)

2 The positive vision mirrors the fears

Three outcomes tied at the top at 12 of 21 (57%): keeping the federal government out of elections, massive voter turnout, and acceptance of results with less us-versus-them division. Free and fair elections above all, and no voter intimidation or police/ICE presence, followed at 11 each (52%). Participants often tied turnout to protection: "Too big to rig."



Top positive outcomes, five selections each (n=21)

INSIGHT

"Accept the results" and "stop false rigging claims" are the norms most likely to resonate across party lines. Most "interference" language in this session, however, pointed at the current administration. Other groups may read these same norms differently.

03 Issues: Enforcement, Affordability and Corruption Lead

Participants first brainstormed issues, then selected the five most influential. Three issues stood out.

Issues most likely to influence the 2026 midterms, five selections each (n=20)

3 Affordability is the clearest policy overlap

Cost of living was selected by 12 of 20 (60%). Affordability or economic relief appears in at least seven of the 20 one-sentence "Big Middle" summaries. As one participant put it, "Americans agree there is an affordability crisis in America."

4 Accountability links the issues

Government corruption also reached 60%. Limiting executive power (40%) and billionaire influence (40%) point the same way. Participants repeatedly framed the Big Middle as "holding politicians and our government agencies accountable."

ICE and immigration enforcement was the most-selected issue at 65%. Participants framed it as a rights issue, for example "not having to worry about being abducted by the government." It is also likely to be the most polarizing issue outside this room. War and Iran (20%) and NATO (20%) ranked lowest, although war and ending conflict appeared in several closing summaries.

04 Outlook: Cautious Optimism, Grounded in Turnout

14 of 19 participants (74%) expect positive outcomes to be more likely, and 5 (26%) expect negative ones.

5 Why optimists are optimistic

They cite voter fatigue and dissatisfaction, high expected turnout, and affordability pressure. "People are fed up and will come out in larger numbers to vote." Several also tie their optimism to a Democratic win as a check on the administration.

6 Why pessimists are not

They point to the absence of checks on executive power and to fear of interference. "I think most of us can't fathom the lengths this administration will do to stay in power."

INSIGHT

Low turnout is both the feared failure and the hoped-for safeguard, so turnout is the common lever between optimists and pessimists. Some participants were more guarded about unity itself: "people will only be happy if their party wins," and beliefs on how to achieve stability "remain far apart."

05 Limits: This Was Not Yet a Cross-Spectrum Room

The session aimed to find common ground across party lines. The profile of respondents shows that goal was only partly met.

Profile measure (n=17)	Result
Political leaning	8 strongly liberal, 6 lean liberal, 2 moderate/independent, 1 lean conservative, 0 strongly conservative
Generation	9 Gen X, 5 Baby Boomer, 3 Millennial, 0 Gen Z
Region	6 West, 5 South, 4 Northeast, 1 Midwest, 1 non-US
News attention	13 follow daily, 4 weekly
Plan to vote	15 yes, 2 no

Warm-up responses were also strongly partisan, with many focused on defeating Trump or Republicans. Findings here describe consensus among engaged, liberal-leaning, mostly Gen X and Boomer participants. They should not be read as the views of the American middle.

06 Recommendations

► Lead with process norms as the shared message

Free and fair elections, no intimidation at polling places, high turnout, and acceptance of results drew the broadest agreement. Test them as non-partisan commitments.

► **Pair affordability with accountability**

Cost of living and corruption each reached 60%. Together they form the most credible policy bridge in the data.

► **Repeat the session with a balanced panel**

Include conservative, moderate and younger participants before claiming a Big Middle. Compare how each group rates the same negative-outcome list, especially "federal interference" and ICE.

► **Treat ICE and enforcement as a divisive item to test**

It topped the issue list here (65%) but is the most likely to split a broader audience. Probe it separately rather than assuming it is shared ground.

07 Methodology

The session ran on 8 October 2026 and included 27 active participants. It combined brainstorming, facilitator-led categorization, and selection of the top five items across key issues, positive outcomes and negative outcomes. Surveys covered participant background, election consequence, an overall assessment, and a closing "Big Middle" sentence. Participation varied by activity, with 17 to 21 respondents on most structured questions, and all figures are counts of those respondents.