

A LOOK AHEAD TO THE 2026 MIDTERM PRIMARIES

OVERVIEW

South Carolina's 2026 midterm elections present a pivotal moment for the state's electoral landscape. With an open gubernatorial race, all seven Congressional seats in flux, and a contested U.S. Senate race featuring incumbent four-term Senator Lindsey Graham, voter turnout and issue prioritization will likely determine outcomes across multiple races. This brief discusses the various State and federal-level primary races for the two main political parties.

ELECTORAL CONTEXT

2026 represents a consequential election year for South Carolina. Governor Henry McMaster, the incumbent since 2017 and the longest-serving governor in state history, is constitutionally term-limited and cannot seek reelection.

This open-seat race contrasts sharply with the state's recent political stability and creates a genuinely competitive environment in the absence of an heir apparent within the GOP.

RACE TO WATCH

The main race to keep an eye on this primary season is the GOP gubernatorial primary. Two House members, Rep. Mace and Rep. Norman, have vacated their House seats to contest Lt. Gov. Evette, Sen. Josh Kimbrell, Rom Reddy, and SC AG Alan Wilson for the nomination.

With the seat likely to remain in GOP hands in November, the winner of this race is very likely to become South Carolina's next governor.

The electoral calendar is compressed: primary elections are scheduled for June 9, 2026, with runoff elections, if necessary, on June 23. The general election follows on November 3, 2026.

At the Federal level, all seven Congressional seats and the U.S. Senate seat will be contested. At the state level, all 124 South Carolina House seats are up for election. The state Senate remains off-cycle and will not be elected until 2028.

South Carolina's Republican dominance—the state has not elected a Democratic U.S. Senator since 1998 and controls all statewide offices except the Comptroller—means the Republican primary, particularly for governor and Congressional seats, will likely be the decisive contest in most races.

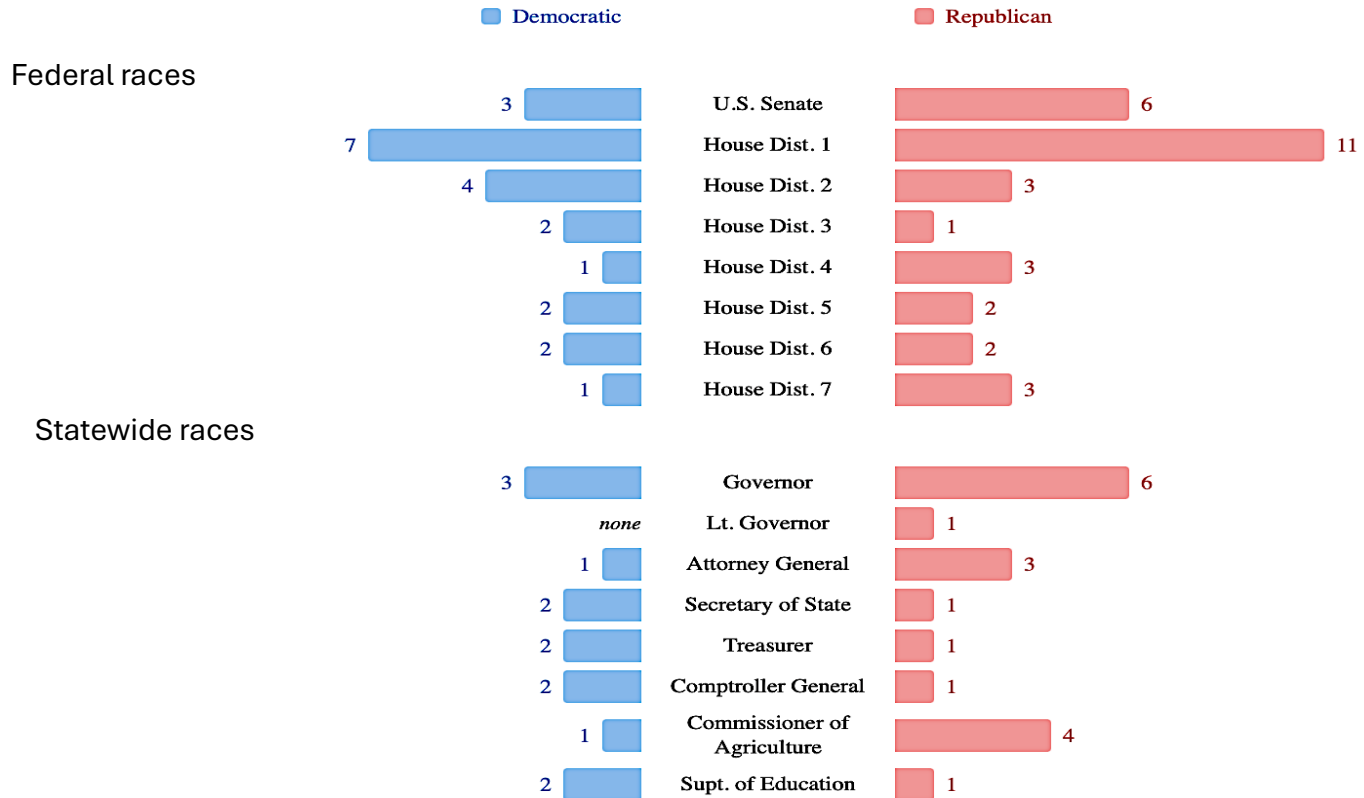
The U.S. House and Senate Races

The US Senate and House seats in the state have 21 Democratic candidates, with Rep. Clyburn the only incumbent. The GOP has 31 candidates with challengers for all 5 incumbents in these primaries. A breakdown of the number of candidates for each party is presented below.

State Races

The gubernatorial race is heavily contested this year, with 10 Candidates entering the primary. The safest of all the candidates going into the midterm is Mike Reichenbach, who faces no primary challenger on the GOP side and looks likely to face no challenger in November's election.

PARTY PRIMARIES IN NUMBERS



THE FIELD

For the US Senate race, Incumbent Lindsey Graham faces 5 primary opponents for the Republican nomination - two more than he faced in the 2020 primary contest. The Democratic primary has 5 declared candidates, with the winner of the 2020 primary, Jaime Harrison, not running this term.

Six Independent candidates are in the running, along with a Constitutional Party and a Libertarian candidate, Kasie Whitner, who is already on the general election ballot.

This Senate race is heated, with 6 Republicans, 5 Democrats, 6 independents, a Libertarian, and a Constitution Party candidate competing in next month's primary.

The US House seats in the 7 SC districts also present very competitive primary races, especially in Districts 1 and 5, where incumbents Nancy Mace and Ralph Norman are stepping into the Governor's race.



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