FUTURE CAUCUS

ON THE RISE

COMPREHENSIVE DATA ON GEN ZERS AND MILLENNIALS RUNNING FOR CONGRESS





ON THE RISE 2026

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ABOUT FUTURE CAUCUS

Future Caucus is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with an audacious mission: activate young leaders to bridge the partisan divide and transform American politics. We work directly with our nation's leading young policymakers on both the federal and state levels to transcend political polarization and initiate a new era of collaborative governance. Future Caucus connects rising leaders across the United States with resources and support to develop and enact innovative policy solutions—and to forge productive partnerships on the issues affecting Americans.

ABOUT *ON THE RISE*

The first edition of *On the Rise* was published in 2020 as *Millennials on the Rise*. The biennial, election-year report analyzes a wide range of demographic data—including but not exclusive to age group, generation, gender, and political-party affiliation—on candidates for Congress, with an emphasis on generational trends.

The report is the only one of its kind and informs the work of academics, journalists, advocates, and policymakers.

Letter from the President

Dear Future Caucus Community,

This summer, the United States turned 250. I spent the week after July 4 in Washington with nearly a hundred young state legislators—almost exactly half of them Democrats and half Republicans—who had chosen to set aside some of their precious time out of session, away from their nonlegislative "day jobs," and off from caregiving in order to build relationships with colleagues regardless of partisan affiliation. What struck me was not the disagreement over policy or ideology, but the joy in the room. There is a particular kind of optimism that comes from discovering that politics doesn't have to be a zero-sum game, and I watched it spread during those days in the DC heat.

I thought about that room constantly while reading this report.

Since 2020, *On the Rise* has tracked the arrival of millennial—and since 2022, Gen Z—Americans to the national political stage. In 2022, one in six congressional candidates was a millennial. In 2024, one in four was a Gen Zer or millennial. In 2026, the figure is one in three. More than a third of the people who filed to run for Congress in this year's cycle—36.7%—are under the age of 45. And for the first time in the history of this report, millennials are the largest generational cohort running for the US Senate.

Some of that growth is a function of sheer volume: The candidate pool expanded by 31% this cycle, from 2,983 in 2024 to 3,918 in 2026. Forty-two members of Congress announced that they would not seek reelection before a single primary ballot had been cast. Across party lines, voters have been telling pollsters that they want something other than what they have, and more of them than ever are stepping up to the plate to make that change themselves.

"I got mad," one Future Caucus member told me, recounting her political origin story. "So instead of continuing to get angry, I decided to get elected."

This surge in participation comes at a moment when the age of America's political leaders has become a prominent topic in our national conversation. Questions about age and representation are ultimately about whether our institutions reflect the people they serve, whether leadership pipelines are open to new generations, and whether Americans can see a place for themselves in public life.

The data in this report give us reason for optimism. Young Americans are not simply demanding change from the sidelines. In growing numbers, they are volunteering to take responsibility for creating it.

But *On the Rise* also reminds us that stepping forward is only one part of the story. Filing to run for office is not the same as winning, a candidate pool is not a Congress, and a younger candidate pool is not necessarily a more representative one.

Men still outnumber women by roughly three to one among congressional candidates, and the gap does not disappear—or even meaningfully narrow—as we move down the generations. We cannot assume that generational change will resolve long-standing disparities in who sees elected office as a viable aspiration. If we want our governing institutions to draw on the full range of talent in this country, we need to understand not just who is raising their hand, but who isn't, and why.

There is another gap in this year's data that I find just as interesting: Current and former state legislators who run for Congress are much more likely to make it to the ballot. Roughly two in three reach the general election, compared with about one in three candidates who have never served in a state legislature. Yet remarkably few of the young people running for Congress this year have served in state legislatures—just 9% of millennial candidates and fewer than 2% of Gen Z candidates.

To us, that represents an enormous opportunity. If more young people than ever are raising their hands to serve, we should be making sure that they know just

how many places there are to make a difference. Congress is one of them. So are the 50 state legislatures and thousands of city councils, school boards, county commissions, and other elected bodies where consequential decisions are made every day.

State and local offices offer something else: a place to learn how to govern.

At Future Caucus, we have spent 13 years betting that if you find young leaders early and give them a genuine cross-partisan community in which to grow and learn, they will become more effective public servants. Research from the Center for Effective Lawmaking has found that members of state-level Future Caucuses are 24% more effective at advancing legislation than comparable lawmakers in other states. That finding is incredibly important, because nearly half of the current members of Congress once served in a statehouse, and some of this year's highest-profile young candidates are leaders of their state's Future Caucus. The bench is deep, and it is young.

The founders of the United States handed this country an unfinished project with historic potential. They codified our right to argue over it and improve it, and they assumed that every generation would take up the tools of democracy and continue the work. This report is a portrait of a generation that is ready to do so.

Thank you for engaging with *On the Rise* 2026.

Sincerely,

Layla Zaidane

PRESIDENT & CEO, FUTURE CAUCUS



Key Findings

Younger candidates are on the rise. In 2026, for the first time, Gen Zers and millennials made up more than a third of the congressional candidate pool, narrowing Gen X's lead to less than half a percentage point. Millennials are also now the largest generational bloc running for the US Senate, by a margin of three candidates, while the US House of Representatives continues to draw the youngest candidates. Overall, incumbents are a decade older on average than the people challenging them.

Men outnumber women by three to one in the overall congressional candidate pool, and the gap widens among younger candidates: More than four in five Gen Z candidates are men, the largest gender disparity of any generational cohort. The gender gap in ballot qualification is small, but among Gen Z and millennial candidates, men drop out at notably higher rates than women. Women candidates lean Democratic across every generation, while men only do so among Gen Z and millennials. Among candidates challenging incumbents, men with state legislature experience outnumber women by nearly three to one.

Mirroring the growing independence of Gen Z voters, Gen Z candidates are the most likely to run outside the two major parties. One in six filed as third party or unaffiliated, most of them as independents. Millennials are the only generation running majority Democratic for the US Senate, a field in which Republicans lead every other cohort. In a cycle shaped by mid-decade redistricting, 85% of House races are rated Solid Democrat or Solid Republican, with only 29 in the most competitive middle bands. Across generations, Democrats are more likely to be running in long-shot or competitive districts than their Republican counterparts.

Candidates with state-level experience made it to the general election ballot at twice the rate of those without. Among current and former state legislators who are running for Congress, two in three reached the general election, compared with one in three of those who have not served at the state level. Most younger congressional candidates have yet to take this career path, particularly on the Republican side. With the exception of the Baby Boom generation, Democrats running for Congress are more likely than Republicans to have held state legislative office.

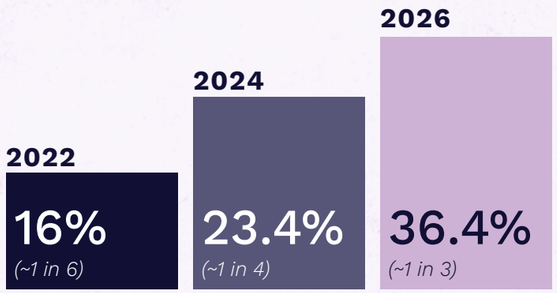
But the younger the candidate, the less likely they are to remain on the ballot in November. Despite the trends supporting generational change, the field tends to narrow by generation over the course of the election cycle. Senate candidates face an especially steep drop-off.

By the Numbers

In 2026 congressional races . . .

36.4%

of candidates are Gen Z (4%) or millennial (32.4%), up from 23.4% in 2024 and 16% in 2022.



36.7%

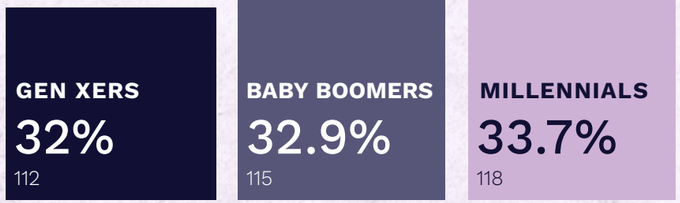
of candidates are under the age of 45

As of January 2026, the average age of members of the US House of Representatives was 57.9 years; the average age of senators was 63.9 years.[1]



***92.9%** of millennial candidates and **99.2%** of Gen Z candidates are challengers as opposed to incumbents.*

Rep. Maxwell Frost, D-FL, is the only Gen Z incumbent



For the first time, millennials represent the single largest generational cohort running for Senate

1 "Membership of the 119th Congress: A Profile," Congress.gov, 2025, https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48535.

***9%** of millennial candidates have experience as a state legislator, and just **1.7%** of Gen Z candidates have experience as a state legislator.*

47% of incumbent members of Congress are former state or territorial legislators.[2]

16.2%

Gen Z has the highest proportion of third party/ unaffiliated candidates

58.2%

Millennials have the highest proportion of Democratic Party candidates

47.1%

Baby Boomers have the highest proportion of Republican Party candidates

State Leaderboard: Gen Z and Millennial Candidates

MOST CANDIDATES



California (72)



Florida (69)



Texas (66)



New York (55)

MOST CANDIDATES PER CAPITA



Alaska
(1 per 100,000)



Wisconsin
(0.9 per 100,000)

FEWEST CANDIDATES



North Dakota (0)



New Hampshire (0)

*Gen Z has the **lowest** proportion of women candidates (17.1%), while Gen X has the **highest** proportion of women candidates (30.7%).*

2 "Map Monday: Former State Legislators in the 119th Congress," National Conference of State Legislatures, May 23, 2025, https://www.ncsl.org/resources/map-monday-former-state-legislators-in-the-119th-congress.

Authors' Note

Jamie Smith, PhD, and J. D. Rackey, PhD

The defining narrative of the 2026 congressional midterm election cycle is a call for change. Polling consistently puts congressional approval levels at their lowest point in decades, with recent polls suggesting that only about 10–15% of the country approves of the job Congress is doing.[3] Other indicators, such as public satisfaction with the economy and the direction of the country,[4] all suggest that Americans are unhappy with the status quo. Robust dissatisfaction will of course be associated with a call for a change in the policies and politicians that are in place. It should be no surprise that 2026 has seen the candidate pool grow by 31%, with 3,918 candidates filing to run for Congress, compared with 2,983 candidates who filed to run in 2024.

Even before the first ballot was cast during primary season, 32 House members and 10 senators declared that they would not be seeking reelection. Given additional vacancies caused by death or resignation and incumbents seeking other offices, the 2026 election cycle was set to spur a large shift in how Americans are represented in Congress. Now, after a primary period in which 11 incumbents lost their bids, the freshman class of the 120th Congress is already expected to be one of the largest in the 21st century, regardless of the general election outcome in November.

One of the major factors driving turnover in this cycle has been a call for generational renewal. Recent polling indicates that an overwhelming majority of voters would support age limits on candidates running for Congress, with 78% of Democrats, 83% of Republicans, and 79% of independents saying they would favor the adoption of such a policy.[5]

3 "Congress and the Public," Gallup, accessed on September 9, 2026, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx.

4 Joseph Copeland, "Most Americans Continue to Rate the US Economy Negatively as Partisan Gap Widens," Pew Research Center, October 3, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/10/03/most-americans-continue-to-rate-the-us-economy-negatively-as-partisan-gap-widens/; and "Satisfaction with the United States," Gallup, accessed September 9, 2026, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1669/general-mood-country.aspx.

5 "President Trump While at War, May 2026," Marist Poll, May 6, 2026, https://maristpoll.marist.edu/polls/president-trump-while-at-war-may-2026/.

Even without age limits in place, high-profile primary races suggest that age is a factor weighing on the minds of voters and would-be candidates alike. For example, 14-term incumbent Rep. John Larson (D-CT), 78, lost his primary to Luke Bronin, 47, whose campaign made the point that "the goal is to shake things up in Washington, DC."[6] Many candidates of both major parties explicitly stated that they were entering the electoral arena out of a desire for generational change, and noted that some incumbents had been in office since before they were born.

Calls for change can only be fulfilled if enough new candidates step forward. As will be explored further in the report below, we find that one in three candidates who filed to run in the 2026 congressional elections were Gen Z or millennial, with 36.7% of all candidates under the age of 45. This represents a departure from the current makeup of Congress, in which 80% of those serving are Gen X or older. Slowly but clearly, candidate pools are getting younger over time,[7] and the generational profile of those serving in Congress is moving in the same direction.[8] The remainder of this report examines the composition of the candidate pool running for Congress in 2026.

6 Daniela Altimari, "Democrat John Larson Loses to Younger Primary Challenger in Connecticut," Roll Call, August 12, 2026, https://rollcall.com/2026/08/12/democrat-john-larson-loses-to-younger-primary-challenger-in-connecticut/.

7 From previous *On the Rise* reports: In 2022, only one in six candidates were millennials. That number rose in 2024, when one in four candidates were millennials or Gen Z. In 2026, the number is one in three.

8 Drew Desilver, "Age and Generation in the 119th Congress: Somewhat Younger, with Fewer Boomers and More Gen Xers," Pew Research Center, January 16, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/01/16/age-and-generation-in-the-119th-congress-somewhat-younger-with-fewer-boomers-and-more-gen-xers/.

Methodology Overview

DATA

On the Rise 2026 uses data from the KnowWho Candidate Data Service. KnowWho editors have managed, maintained, and updated these data since November 2025. The information is updated weekly by the organization; the data used in this report were last updated on September 6, 2026.

House of Representatives candidates were identified in all US states and territories; Senate candidates were only collected for states in which a race occurred in the 2026 cycle.

KnowWho identified 3,918 candidates who filed to run for the House and Senate in the current cycle. Of these, 3,428 candidates filed for the House, including delegate seats representing Washington, DC, and overseas territories, and 490 candidates filed for the Senate.

CANDIDATE UNIVERSE

Some candidates appeared multiple times in the dataset. Handling these cases required special scrutiny. When candidates were outright duplicates—with the same name, biography, electoral contest, and other details—the extra entries were removed. This is accounted for in the candidate total of 3,918. Of these candidates, researchers sourced or estimated age data for 2,758.

Candidates could appear more than once in the dataset for a variety of reasons. In some cases, individuals "shop" among districts, looking for a race where they were more likely to find success. This could mean running in two states at once, or losing the primary in one state and then filing for a race in a different state. In other cases, candidates filed to appear on the ballot in one race and then jumped to another, for example abandoning a Senate bid to run for the House. For some statistics used in this report, it was important to tally candidates' data for all of the races in which they participated. In those cases, multiple observations pertaining to a single individual were left in the dataset and treated as independent. There were 11 candidates to whom this practice was applied; age data were sourced or estimated for 9 of them.

Figures and analysis throughout the report specify the denominator or total set of candidates as necessary for clarity.

CANDIDATE AGES

Identifying a candidate's exact age can be difficult, as doing so requires an exact date of birth, with month, day, and year. Neither Federal Election Commission (FEC) nor state filing forms require this information. Occasionally, as in Alaska, official state candidate statements will ask for the individual's age, but this is rare, and candidates are not required to submit a statement at all, let alone a complete one.

KnowWho provides biographies for some candidates, from which age data could be sourced. Other well-known candidates have Wikipedia pages with source-supported birth dates. In a handful of cases, full birth dates were posted on campaign websites. If none of these sources were available, researchers turned to publicly available databases and candidate social media.

In the absence of age data from the sources above, the team performed internet searches using the candidate's name, state, and electoral contest, combined with Boolean operators. Search results including specific age data were given priority, but secondary sources citing a candidate's age were used to estimate birth year when other information was lacking. The secondary sources were mainly dated news articles or candidate surveys.

In the event that full or partial date of birth could not be determined, common life or major historical events were also used to estimate age. These included high school graduation or military enlistment, if there was some indication that the enlistment occurred immediately after high school or college. In some cases, a combination of concrete years and events were combined to generate an estimated age.[9] Similarly, if a candidate mentioned their age at the time of a known historical event, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that was used to estimate their current age.

For some candidates, all that could be determined was the year they graduated college, which posed additional hurdles to estimation. In the event that the college graduation year was identified, candidate biographies, social media posts, and interviews were examined to ensure that no gap year or military service preceded the higher education.

9 For example, if a candidate said they enlisted at age 19 on their website, and said in a candidate survey that they enlisted in 1983, that information was combined to estimate a year of birth.

If there was reason to suspect that a candidate's college enrollment or graduation was delayed, college graduation was not used to estimate age.

A final source for estimation was the rare set of cases in which a candidate reported their decade of birth or a news article identified their generational cohort. These data were only used if no other information about the candidate's age could be found.

When the year of birth was estimated rather than precise, researchers used a conservative estimate. For example, if someone graduated from high school in 2005, it was assumed that they graduated at the age of 18 but had not yet had a birthday that year. Their birth year would thus be estimated at 1986. In the instances for which this methodology was used, the estimation rarely fell along the dividing lines for generational cohorts, only affecting 88 individuals, or 2% of cases.

As stated above, age data were sourced or estimated for 2,758 candidates, or 70.4% of all candidates in the dataset. For 30 of these candidates, the only age data available was birth month and day, but there was not enough information, or information was too contradictory, to estimate a birth year. Therefore, any generational analysis in the report includes 2,725 candidates.

Concrete data (full birth date or exact birth year) were sourced for 1,044 candidates, or 38.3% of those for whom ages were sourced or estimated. A birth year was estimated for another 1,678 candidates. The proportion of candidates with known or estimated ages was roughly the same across chambers of Congress: 70.2% for House candidates and 71.8% for Senate candidates.

It is worth noting that candidates for whom age data could not be sourced were less likely to make it to the primary election ballot. Among candidates without age data, 44% failed to make it to the ballot, compared with 19.6% of candidates whose ages were known or estimated.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Data on party identification was collected by KnowWho for all candidates in the dataset. For some statistical outputs, these data were recoded to simplify analysis and reporting, for example by grouping all third parties and those identified by KnowWho as "other" into a single category. These data are 100% complete.

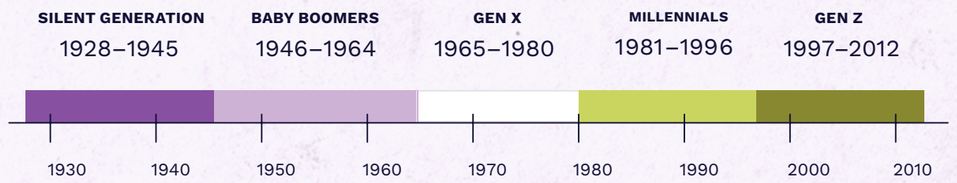
CANDIDATE GENDER

Data on gender were collected by KnowWho for most candidates. Of the 3,918 candidates in the dataset, 22 were missing gender designations. For those, researchers used Boolean searches to source the information. Transgender candidates were coded according to gender identity, and candidates with a nonbinary gender identity were coded as such. Gender information could not be reliably found for four candidates; age data were also lacking for these individuals. Overall, gender data are 99.9% complete for all candidates and 100% complete for those with age data.

GENERATIONAL COHORTS

Following the precedent of previous reports and to facilitate analysis over time, generation breakdowns follow the Pew Research Center's description of generations.

See the Appendix for more details on the contours of data following the strategy described in this section.



2026 Snapshot

GENERATIONAL DYNAMICS

For the first time, Gen Z and millenials make up more than a third of the congressional candidate pool, narrowing Gen X's lead to less than half a percentage point.

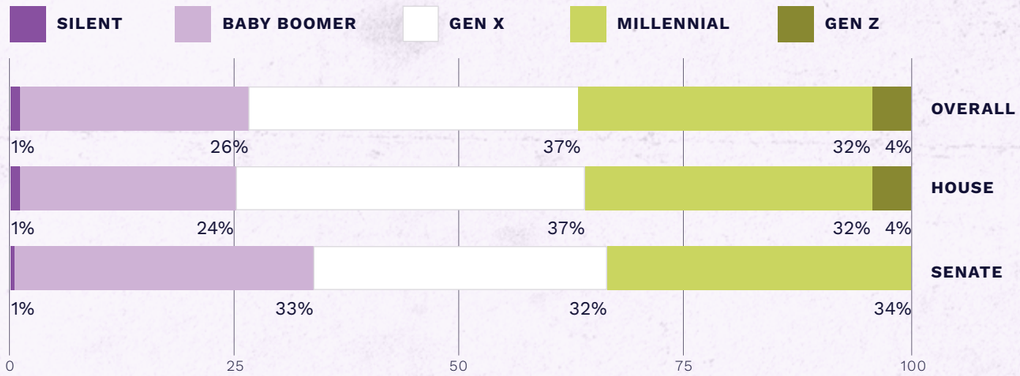
Candidates running for Congress in 2026 represent a nearly 75-year span of ages. The oldest candidate was born in 1931 while the youngest was born in 2004. The median birth year was 1975. As we mention at the outset, a key theme of this election cycle has been one of a call for generational change. This broader narrative has spurred many more young people to enter congressional races. For the first time ever, more than a third of the candidate pool–36.4%–are Gen Zers and millennials.

Of candidates with age data, 36.4% are millennial (32.4%) and Gen Z (4%). This is up from the nearly one in four (23.4%) reported in 2024. This marks a statistically significant change across cycles (χ^2=68.1 with a p<0.001), indicating that these changes are larger than we would expect to see as a result of random year-over-year changes. Discourse about the electorate wanting younger representation seems to be producing a younger universe of candidates.



As in 2024, the largest share of candidates in 2026 are Gen X. However, their lead is much narrower in this cycle, at less than half a percentage point; Gen X candidates outnumbered Gen Zers and millennials by more than 10 percentage points in 2024.[1] They now represent 36.6% of all candidates, while Baby Boomers have fallen to 25.5% and the Silent Generation to 1.2%.

Generational Breakdown of Candidates



	OVERALL	HOUSE	SENATE
SILENT	33	30	3
BABY BOOMER	695	580	115
GEN X	999	887	112
MILLENNIAL	882	764	118
GEN Z	117	115	2

Table: Count of Candidates by Generation and Chamber

1 In 2024, Gen X constituted 35.9% of all candidates, and Gen Zers and millennials constituted a combined 23.4%. See *On the Rise* 2024 for details.

GENERATIONAL DYNAMICS BY CHAMBER

Millennials are now the largest generational bloc running for the Senate, by a margin of three candidates, while the House continues to draw the youngest candidates.

Unsurprisingly, the age dynamics differ across chambers. Baby Boomers represent a much larger proportion of candidates running for the Senate (32.9%) than for the House (24.4%). Interestingly, Silent Generation candidates are much more likely to be running for the House (1.26%) than for the Senate (0.9%). This may be a result of long-term incumbency bolstered by gerrymandering in the House, recent redistricting that pits older House incumbents against one another, or the happenstance of open seats in each chamber.

For the first time, millennials represent the single largest generational cohort running for Senate. They account for 33.7% of all Senate candidates with age data available, compared with Gen X's 32% and Baby Boomers' 32.9%. However, it is worth noting that in raw numbers, just three more millennials than Baby Boomers, and six more millennials than Gen Xers, filed to run for the Senate. Gen Z is largely too young to hold a Senate seat, aside from a handful of people who would have just turned 30 in the first week of 2027.[11]

The mean candidate age does not differ dramatically between the House and the Senate, but the gap is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).[12]

	HOUSE	SENATE
MIN AGE[11]	22	27
MAX AGE	95	83
MEDIAN AGE	51	54
MEAN AGE	51.5	54

Table: Candidate Age Profiles by Chamber

10 Under the US Constitution, individuals must be 25 years old to take a seat in the House and 30 years old to take a Senate seat. However, some states have allowed younger people to file for candidacy in practice, even if they would be unable to serve.

11 The two Gen Z candidates who filed to run for the Senate are not old enough to take the seat should they win.

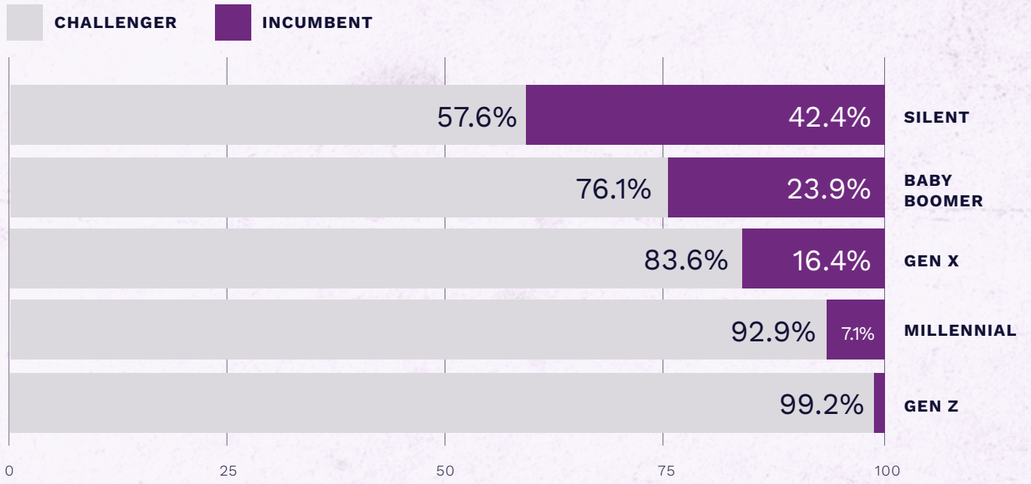
12 Difference means test using Welch's T-Test, one tailed $p = 0.0010$.

GENERATIONAL DYNAMICS OF INCUMBENTS VERSUS CHALLENGERS

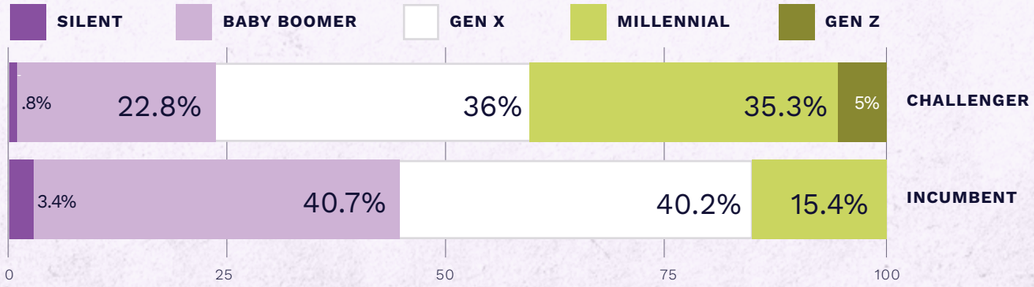
Incumbents are, on average, a decade older than the people challenging them.

While a key narrative of the 2026 election cycle has been a call for generational change, there is simultaneously an anti-incumbent fervor within the electorate. Our analysis shows that these two factors have influenced the candidate pool in several ways.

Percent of Each Generation that are of Each Candidate Status



Percent of Candidates of Each Candidate Status from Each Generation



While Gen Zers and millennials make up a larger share of congressional candidates than ever before, most of them are challengers rather than incumbents. More than 80% of incumbents are Baby Boomers (40.7%) and Gen X (40.2%). Though Silent Generation candidates make up a smaller percentage of the overall candidate pool, they account for a much larger share of incumbents (3.4%) than challengers (0.8%). The push for younger representation has clearly changed who runs for office; the impact has not been equally felt among those who are currently in Congress.

Of the Silent Generation candidates in this cycle, 42.4% are seeking reelection to the office they already hold, while more than half are seeking office as challengers. No other generation comes so close to parity between incumbents and challengers. Among Gen Z candidates, the disparity is particularly stark: Rep. Maxwell Frost (D-FL) is the only Gen Z incumbent in Congress.

There is a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$) in the median age of challengers versus incumbents, lending further credence to the notion that calls for generational change and anti-incumbency are meaningfully shaping the types of individuals who file to run for Congress.[13]

	CHALLENGERS	INCUMBENTS
SILENT	19	14
BABY BOOMER	529	166
GEN X	835	164
MILLENNIAL	819	63
GEN Z	116	1

Table: Candidate Status by Generation

	CHALLENGERS	INCUMBENTS
MIN AGE	22	29
MAX AGE	94	95
MEDIAN AGE	49	59
MEAN AGE	50.5	59.1

Table: Age Profiles by Candidate Status

Pew Research Center found that the median age of House members dropped over the past five cycles.[14] The median age of House challengers versus incumbent candidates suggests that this trend will continue. While the current Senate is younger than in previous Congresses, Pew found this to be counter to the previous trends of an aging Senate. Given the dramatic difference between the median ages of incumbents and challengers here, the more youthful Senate associated with the 119th Congress may be the start of a new trend.

13 Difference means test using Welch's T-Test, one tailed p = 0.0000.

14 Drew Desilver, "Age and Generation in the 119th Congress: Somewhat Younger, with Fewer Boomers and More Gen Xers," Pew Research Center, January 16, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/01/16/age-and-generation-in-the-119th-congress-somewhat-younger-with-fewer-boomers-and-more-gen-xers/.

	HOUSE		SENATE	
	Median	Mean	Median	Mean
CHALLENGERS	49.0	50.1	53.0	53.0
INCUMBENTS	58.0	58.6	67	65.8

Table: Age Profiles by Candidate Status and Chamber



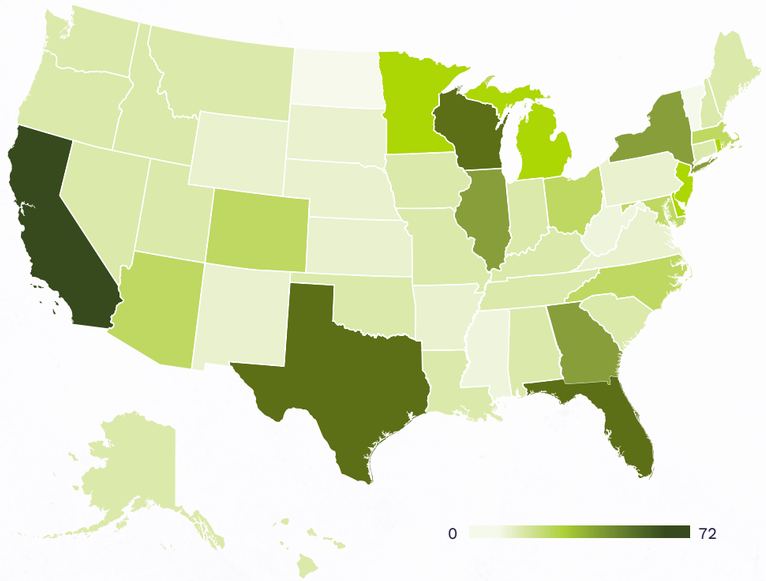
GENERATIONAL DYNAMICS AND GEOGRAPHY

Alaska and Wisconsin field the most young candidates per capita, while California's raw-number lead mostly reflects its size.

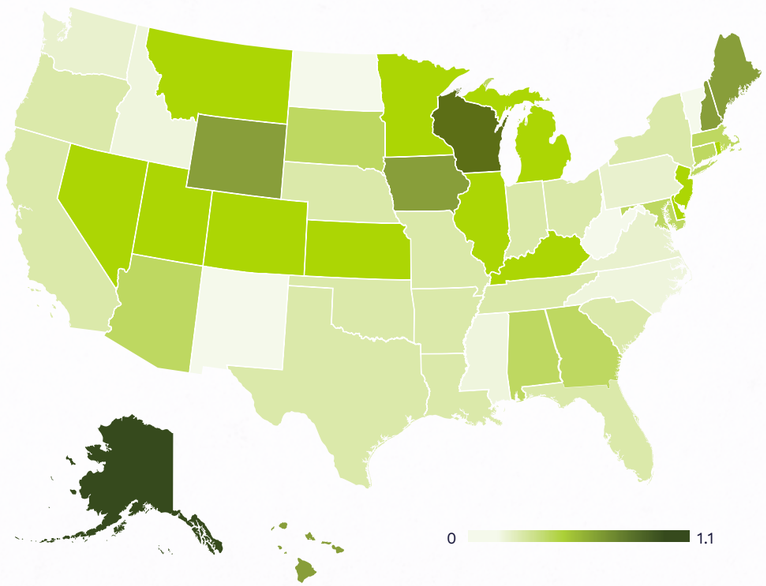
With respect to raw numbers, California leads the way in fielding younger candidates, with 72 Gen Zers and millennials vying for seats in its 52-member House delegation. Other high-performing states include Florida (69 Gen Z and millennial candidates), Texas (66), and New York (55).

However, these are also the largest states by overall population. When the figures are recalculated on a per-capita basis, new leaders emerge. Alaska has the largest share of Gen Z and millennial congressional candidates, with one per 100,000 residents.[15] Wisconsin is close behind with 0.9 per 100,000. At the bottom of the list are North Dakota and New Hampshire, which fielded no younger candidates this cycle.

Heat map of Gen Z and millennial candidates, raw count



Heat map of Gen Z and millennial candidates, per capita



15 State populations are drawn from 2025 Census estimates.

Who Runs and Who Makes it Through

ATTRITION RATES

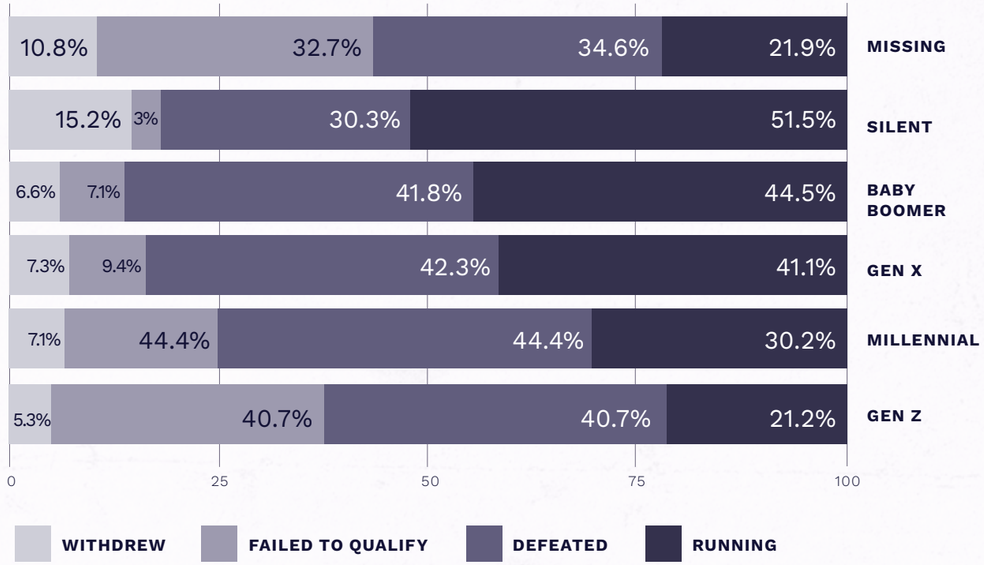
The field narrows by generation during the election cycle, with younger candidates less likely to remain on the ballot in November.

Consistent with previous cycles, younger candidates are less likely to make it to primary election day, especially Gen Zers. More than one in three Gen Z candidates who filed to run for Congress either withdrew (5.3%) or failed to qualify for the primary ballot (32.74%). The proportion of Gen Z candidates who failed to qualify is higher than for any other single generation and is exceeded only by the proportion of candidates without available age data who failed to qualify (32.7%). While millennials fare better (18.3%), the proportion of those who failed to qualify is nearly double that of Gen X (9.4%) and nearly 2.5 times that of Baby Boomers (7.1%).

Interestingly, a roughly equal proportion of candidates from the four youngest generations lost their primary elections. Millennials fared the worst (44.4%) and Gen Z the best (40.7%) among these groups.

The proportion of candidates who make it through to election day goes up as generations age. Gen Z candidates were less likely to make it to the general election, with 21.2% surviving, whereas more than half of Silent Generation candidates were still in the race at that point.

Percent of Each Generation that are of Each Candidate Status



	SILENT	BABY BOOMER	GEN X	MILLENNIAL	GEN Z
PERCENT	51.5%	44.5%	41.1%	30.2%	21.2%
COUNT	17	305	402	260	24

Table: Candidates on the General Election Ballot by Generation

CANDIDATE ATTRITION RATES BY CHAMBER

House candidate attrition mirrors the overall pattern, while younger Senate candidates face a steeper drop-off.

The percentages of congressional candidates from each generation who make it to the general elections roughly match the disaggregated data for House candidates in particular.

The Senate is a different story, partly because no Gen Z candidate is old enough to meet the upper chamber's constitutional age threshold of 30, and the youngest millennials, born in 1996, have only just hit that mark. Another notable difference is the success of Silent Generation Senate candidates, two-thirds of whom made it to the general election ballot. However, this finding should be received with caution, as there were only three Silent Generation Senate candidates in total, making for an extremely small sample size. For comparison, 27 of 116 millennial Senate candidates made it to the general elections.

	SILENT	BABY BOOMER	GEN X	MILLENNIAL	GEN Z
PERCENT	53.3%	42.3%	42%	31.6%	21.6%
COUNT	16	266	365	236	24

Table: House Candidates on the General Election Ballot by Generation

	SILENT	BABY BOOMER	GEN X	MILLENNIAL	GEN Z
PERCENT	33.3%	35.14%	33.9%	20.7%	0%
COUNT	1	39	37	24	0

Table: Senate Candidates on the General Election Ballot by Generation

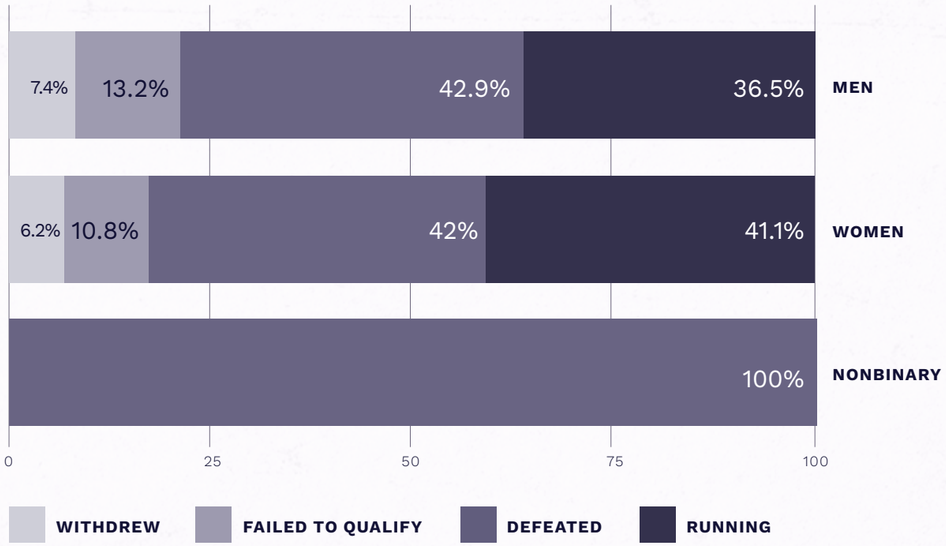
CANDIDATE ATTRITION RATES BY GENDER

The overall gender gap in ballot qualification is small, but among Gen Z and millennial candidates, men dropped out at notably higher rates than women.

Overall, male and female candidates failed to make it to the primary ballot at roughly the same rates (13.2% and 10.8%, respectively).

However, when the data are broken down by generation, new trends emerge. Gen Z and millennial men were far more likely to fail to make the primary ballot than their female counterparts. Among millennial men, 27.4% either withdrew or failed to qualify, compared with 19.7% of millennial women. The trend holds for Gen Z men as well, with 39.4% failing to appear on the primary ballot versus 31.6% of Gen Z women.[16]

Attrition Rates by Gender for Candidates with Age Data



16 Percentages of nonbinary candidates may appear as zero in graphics due to rounding.

Many factors affect candidate attrition and electoral outcomes. That said, one potential takeaway of this analysis is that public support for generational change—as reflected in polling on age limits—might not operate as a single-issue voting concern.[17] Even if primary voters want the torch passed, they will not necessarily treat a candidate's age as decisive at the ballot box. The fact that such high proportions of Gen Z and millennial candidates withdrew, failed to qualify, or were defeated in primaries also suggests that not all donors and organizers, let alone voters, are bullish on the prospects for generational change. Another contributing factor might be the types of voters that participate in primary elections. Early results indicate that primary election turnout has increased in 2026,[18] and while it is too soon to assess the makeup of the participating electorate, we know from previous research that primary voters tend to be older than general election voters or the total pool of eligible voters.[19] This trend—along with the gap between young people's rising candidacy numbers and low voter-turnout rates—is worth watching as the political behavior of Gen Zers and millennials continues to evolve.

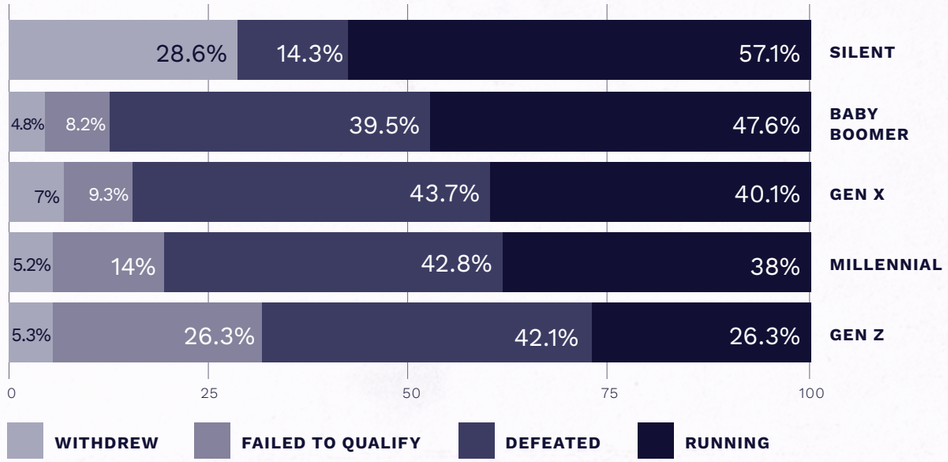


17 "President Trump While at War, May 2026," Marist Poll, May 6, 2026, https://maristpoll.marist.edu/polls/president-trump-while-at-war-may-2026/.

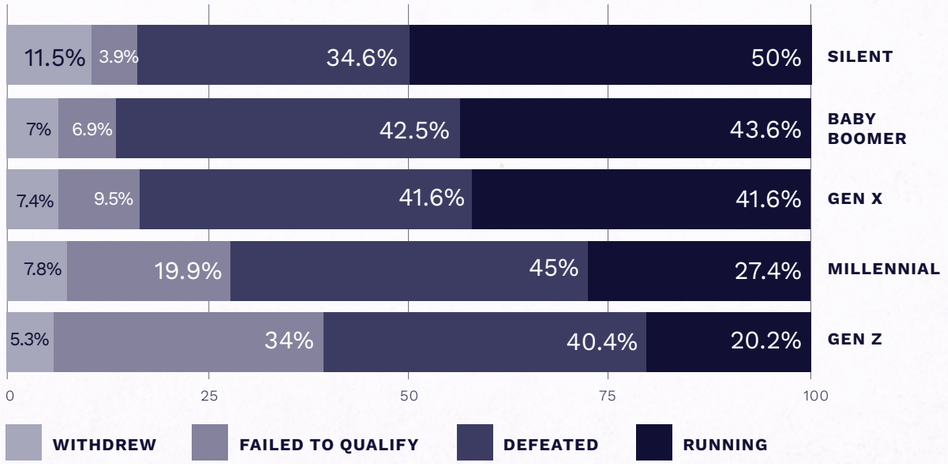
18 Michael Thorning et al., "The 2026 Midterms: Primary Turnout Trends as of July," Bipartisan Policy Center, August 3, 2026, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/article/the-2026-midterms-primary-turnout-trends-as-of-july/.

19 Joshua Ferrer et al., "The Effects of Open Primaries on Turnout and Representation," Bipartisan Policy Center, October 30, 2024, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/the-effect-of-open-primaries-on-turnout-and-representation/.

Candidate Status of Women by Generation



Candidate Status of Men by Generation



Party, Gender, and Generational Crosscurrents

Party Affiliation

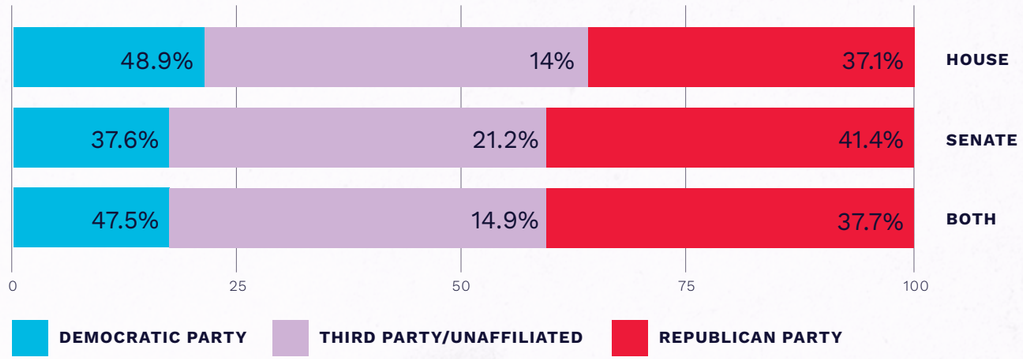
Democrats now field nearly half of all candidates, up 10 percentage points from 2024.

Democrats represent a larger share of congressional candidates than in 2024, both overall and for each chamber. Among all candidates, including those without age data, Democrats form a clear plurality of 47.5%, up from 37% in 2024.[20] This increase holds true for House candidates, among whom 48.9% are Democrats (compared with 38.8% in 2024), and Senate candidates, among whom 37.4% are Democrats (compared with 23.8% in 2024). This rise in Democratic candidates across cycles is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 144.5$ with a $p < 0.001$).

Looking just at candidates with available age data, the trend persists. Democrats represent an outright majority of these candidates and of the House candidates with age data, up from 40.6% and 42.1%, respectively, in 2024.

20 This number and those that follow come from the *On the Rise 2024* report.

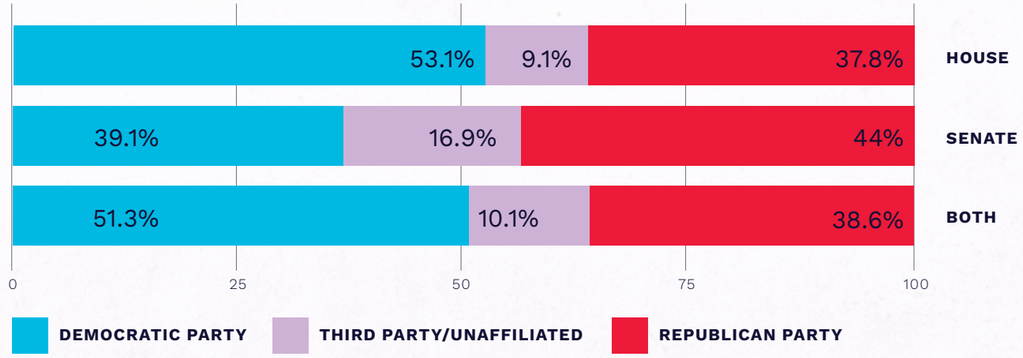
Party ID by Chamber for All Candidates



	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	THIRD PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
HOUSE	1,258	220	899
SENATE	136	58	154
BOTH	1394	278	1,053

Table: Party ID by Chamber for All Candidates

Party ID by Chamber for Candidates with Age Data



PARTY AFFILIATION BY GENERATION

Gen Z candidates are the most likely to run outside the two major parties: One in six filed as third-party members or unaffiliated, with most running as independents.

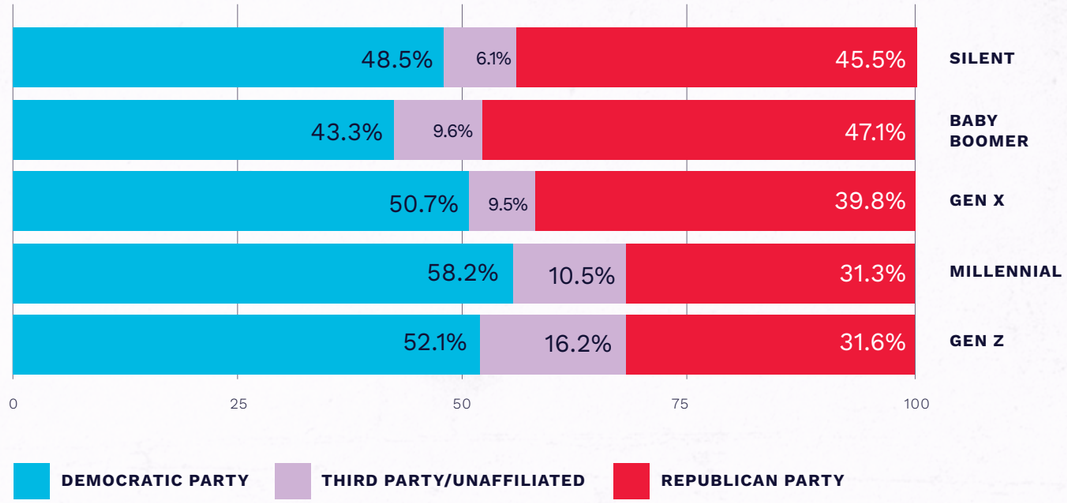
The Democratic Party's candidate-affiliation lead in this cycle persists when the data are broken down into generational cohorts. The proportion of candidates who were Democrats grew among each generation compared with 2024 rates. Furthermore, Democrats constitute a plurality of candidates in all generations except Baby Boomers. Among Gen X and younger generations, they represent an outright majority, with nearly six in 10 millennials running as Democrats. The only group for which Republicans represent a plurality is Baby Boomers (47.1%); this is also the only generation in which the proportion of candidates running as Republicans held relatively steady cycle over cycle, shrinking by just 1.1 percentage points from the 2024 level.[21]

A larger share of Gen Z candidates, 16.2%, ran unaffiliated or with third parties than candidates of other generations. Most of the Gen Zers in question ran as independents (15 of 19, or 12.2% of the whole cohort). While independents are the largest third-party-or-unaffiliated subgroup among every generation, the Gen Z independent subgroup far outstrips its counterparts in other generations (3% of the Silent Generation, 4.9% of Baby Boomers, 6.2% of Gen X, and 6.6% of millennials). Similarly, fewer Gen Z candidates ran with the Libertarian Party (0.9%) than did all other generational cohorts except the Silent Generation, which had no Libertarians. Among the remaining cohorts, the share of candidates running as Libertarians did not exceed 2.5%.[22]

21 In 2024, 48.2% of Baby Boomers ran as Republicans. See *On the Rise 2024* report for details.

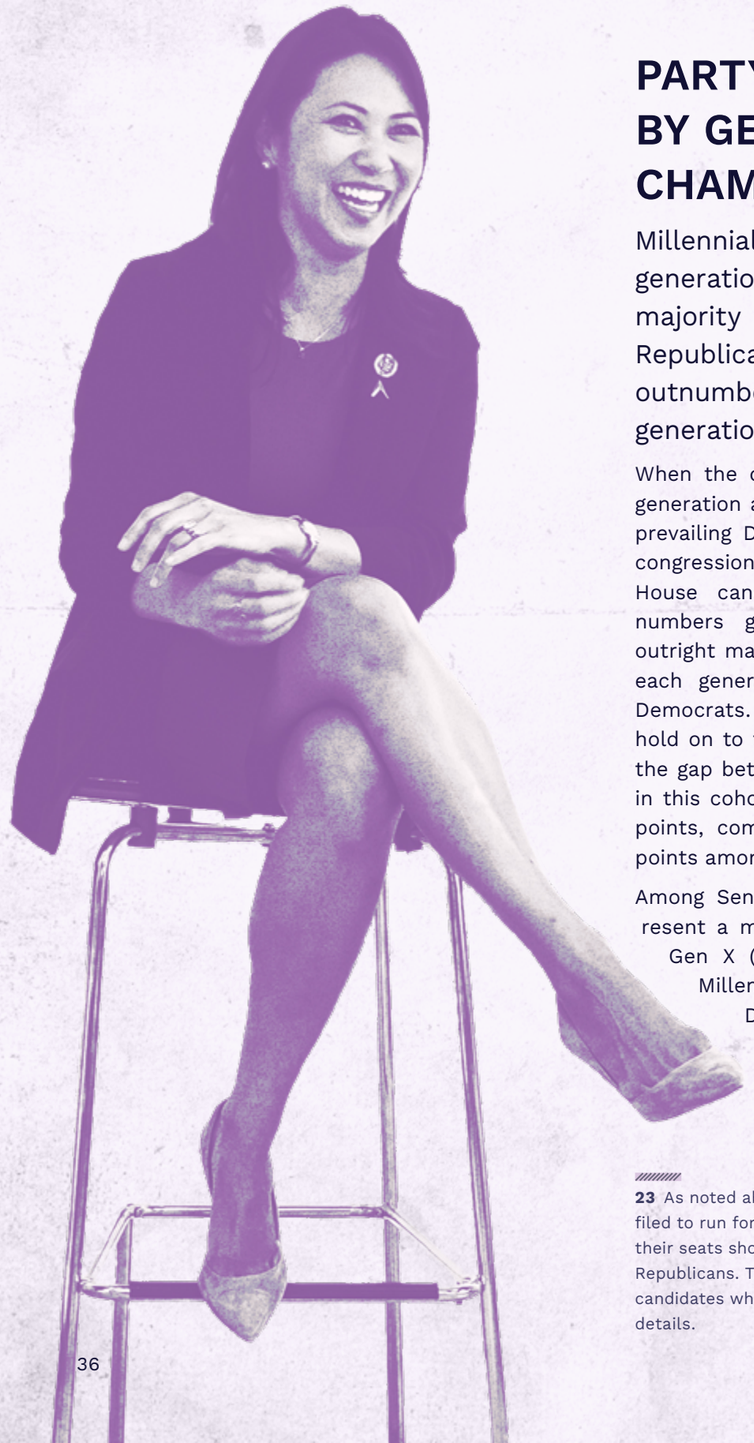
22 Baby Boomers 2.5%, Gen X 1.8%, millennials 2.2%.

Party ID by Generation



	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	THIRD PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
SILENT	16	2	15
BABY BOOMER	301	67	327
GEN X	506	95	398
MILLENNIAL	513	93	276
GEN Z	61	19	37

Table: Candidate Party ID by Generation



PARTY AFFILIATION BY GENERATION AND CHAMBER

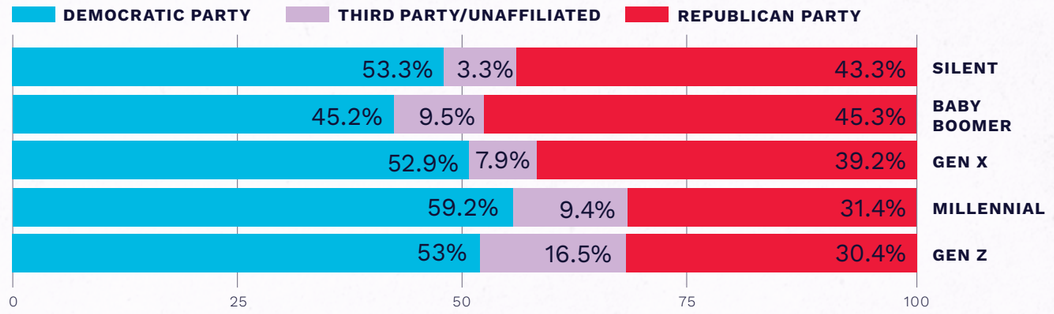
Millennials are the only candidate generation with a Democratic majority running for Senate, while Republican Senate candidates outnumber Democrats in every other generational cohort.

When the data are further broken down by generation and chamber, the same pattern of prevailing Democratic affiliation among 2026 congressional candidates largely endures for House candidates, with Democratic Party numbers growing somewhat stronger. An outright majority of House candidates among each generation except Baby Boomers are Democrats. Among Baby Boomers, Republicans hold on to their plurality, but only nominally; the gap between Republicans and Democrats in this cohort shrinks to just 0.17 percentage points, compared with an average of 14.7% points among all generations.

Among Senate candidates, Republicans represent a majority for all generations except Gen X (44.6%) and millennials (30.5%).[23] Millennials are the only cohort in which Democrats represent a majority of Senate candidates (51.7%).

23 As noted above, the two Gen Z candidates who filed to run for the Senate are not old enough to take their seats should they win. They are both running as Republicans. This was also true among the Gen Z Senate candidates who ran in 2024. See *On the Rise 2024* for details.

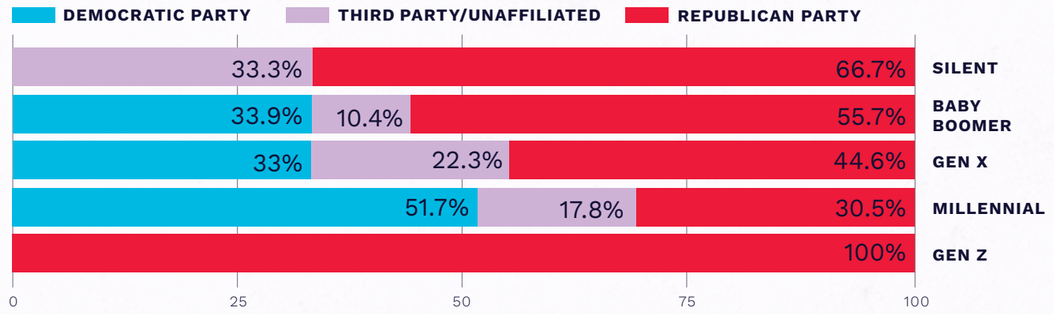
Party ID of House Candidates by Generation



	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	THIRD PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
SILENT	16	1	13
BABY BOOMER	262	55	263
GEN X	469	70	348
MILLENNIAL	452	72	240
GEN Z	61	19	35

Table: Party ID of House Candidates by Generation

Party ID of Senate Candidates by Generation



	DEMOCRATIC PARTY	THIRD PARTY	REPUBLICAN PARTY
SILENT	0	1	2
BABY BOOMER	39	12	64
GEN X	37	25	50
MILLENNIAL	61	21	36
GEN Z	0	0	2

Table: Party ID of Senate Candidates by Generation



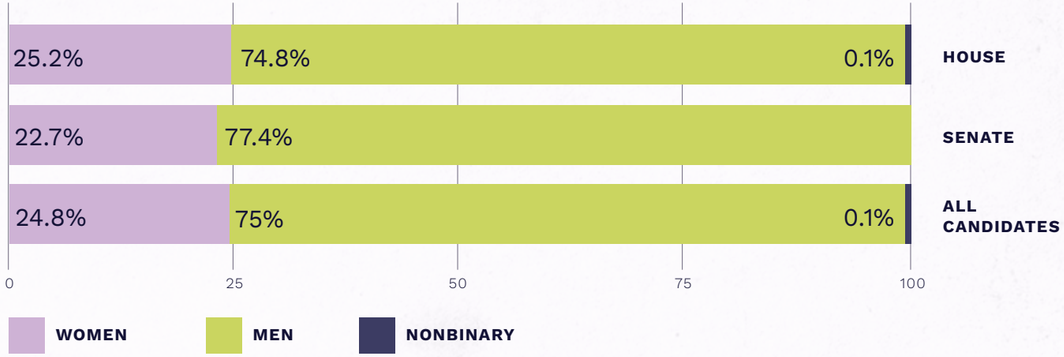
GENDER

Men outnumber women by three to one in the candidate pool, a ratio that holds across generations rather than narrowing among younger candidates.

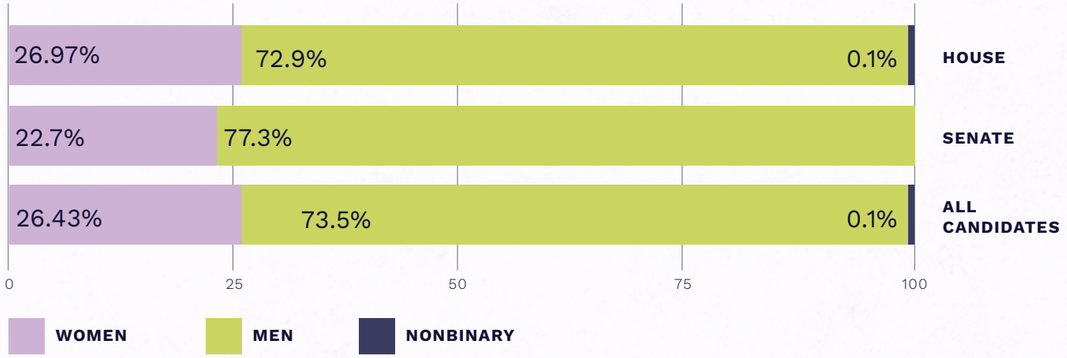
Women remain demographically underrepresented, not only among sitting members of Congress but among congressional candidates as well. Men account for three out of four in all. When the data are broken down by chamber, the gap largely holds for House candidates and increases for Senate candidates.

Among candidates with available age data, the proportion of women running does rise slightly, both overall (26.4%) and among House candidates (27%). However, men remain overrepresented compared with the population at large. There are no substantial differences in age among men versus women candidates. The median age is 51 among congressional candidates, regardless of gender.

Gender by Chamber for All Candidates



Gender by Chamber for Candidates with Age Data



GENDER AND GENERATION

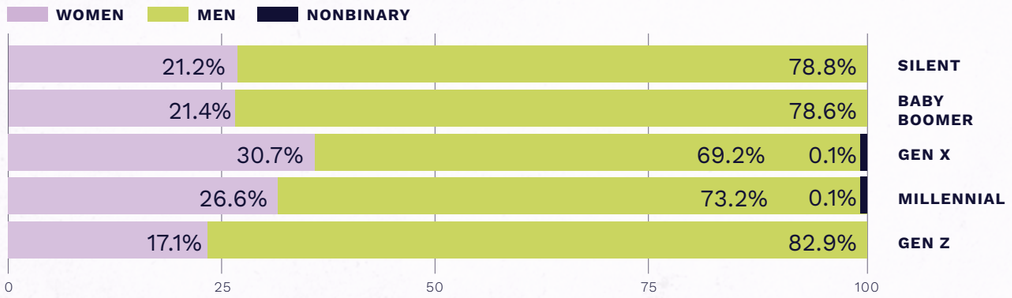
The generational surge has not brought gender parity closer; more than four in five Gen Z congressional candidates are men, the steepest imbalance of any cohort.

When the data are broken down by generation, the pattern of men accounting for roughly three in four candidates holds steady for all cohorts except Gen X and Gen Z. Among Gen X candidates, women form a larger proportion of candidates (30.7%). Among Gen Z, however, women constitute an even smaller share of candidates, with men making up more than four-fifths of the total (82.9%). These trends persist when House candidates are assessed separately.

Senate candidates present a slightly different picture. For every cohort except the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, the proportion of women candidates declines compared with the House candidates and the overall figure. For Baby Boomers, the gender ratio holds remarkably steady across all breakouts. For the Silent Generation candidates, there is a marked increase in the proportion of women candidates for the Senate, though the sample size is limited to just one woman and two men. For Gen Z, both of the two Senate candidates are men.[24]

24 Percentages of nonbinary candidates may appear as zero in graphics due to rounding.

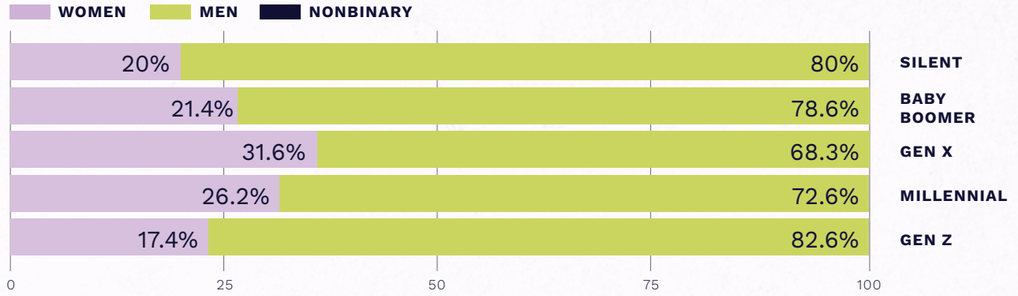
Candidate Gender by Generation



	WOMEN	MEN	NONBINARY
SILENT	7	26	0
BABY BOOMER	149	546	0
GEN X	307	691	1
MILLENNIAL	235	646	1
GEN Z	20	97	1

Table: Count of Candidates by Gender and Generation

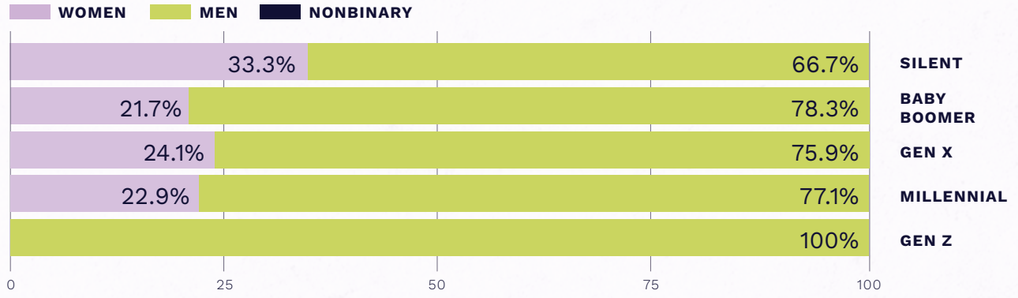
Gender Breakdown of House Candidates by Generation



	WOMEN	MEN	NONBINARY
SILENT	6	24	0
BABY BOOMER	124	456	0
GEN X	280	606	1
MILLENNIAL	208	555	1
GEN Z	20	95	0

Table: Count of House Candidates by Gender and Generation

Gender Breakdown of Senate Candidates by Generation



	WOMEN	MEN	NONBINARY
SILENT	1	2	0
BABY BOOMER	25	90	0
GEN X	27	85	0
MILLENNIAL	27	91	0
GEN Z	0	2	0

Table: Count of House Candidates by Gender and Generation

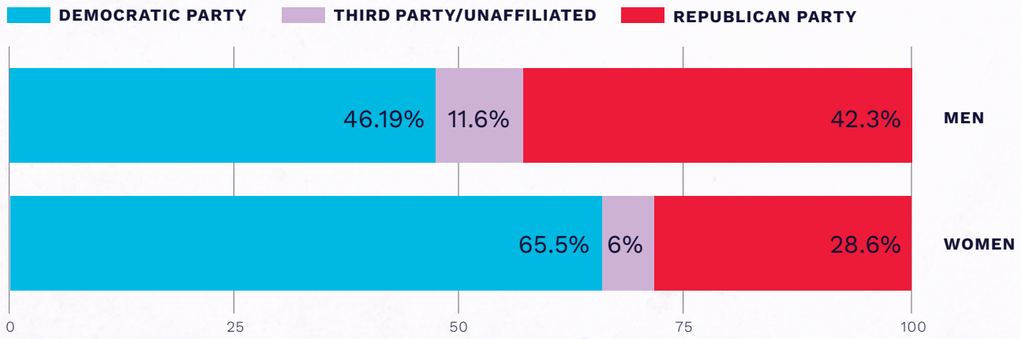
GENDER, GENERATION, AND PARTY AFFILIATION

Women candidates lean Democratic across every generation, while men only do so among Gen Z and millennials.

A 2026 Pew poll found that 52% of women and 43% of men identify as Democrats.[25] Much like the general population, women congressional candidates in 2026 are more likely to be Democrats than their male counterparts. Among candidates with available age data, nearly two in three women are running as Democrats, compared with just 46.1% of men. On the other hand, men running as third-party or unaffiliated candidates outnumber women by nearly two to one.

This trend holds when the data are further broken down by generation. Among men running for Congress in 2026, Republicans constitute at least a plurality of candidates in the three older generations. For the younger two generations, Democrats represent a larger share of male candidates. Among millennial men, Democratic candidates represent an outright majority (53.7%). The proportion declines slightly among Gen Z men, but Democratic candidates remain a plurality (48.5%). Third-party and unaffiliated candidates are more likely to be men across all generations.

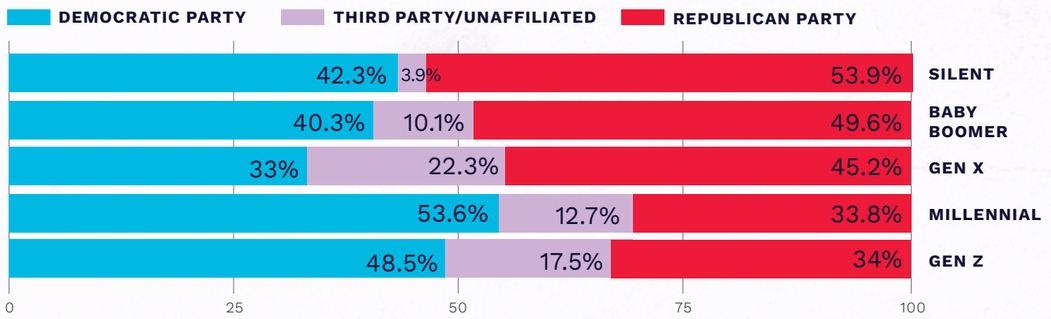
Party ID by Gender



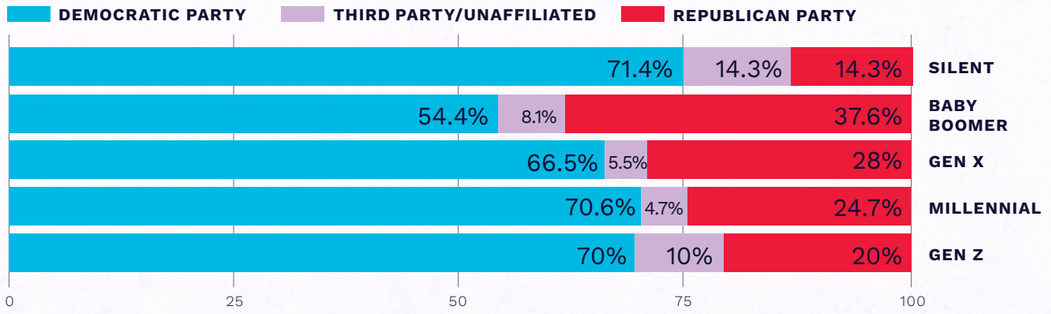
For women candidates, Democrats constitute a large majority in each generation. Only among Baby Boomers, at 54.4%, does the proportion come close to reflecting the 2026 Pew polling data on Democratic affiliation for women in the general population (52%), and even then, Democratic women candidates remain overrepresented.

This pattern is likely linked to the partisan dynamics of the election period. The fact that it is a midterm election during a Republican presidency may naturally drive up the number of Democrats willing to run for office. The motivation to run may also be more keenly felt among women candidates due to gendered policies and rhetoric from the administration that have persisted throughout this cycle.

Men's Party ID by Generation



Women's Party ID by Generation

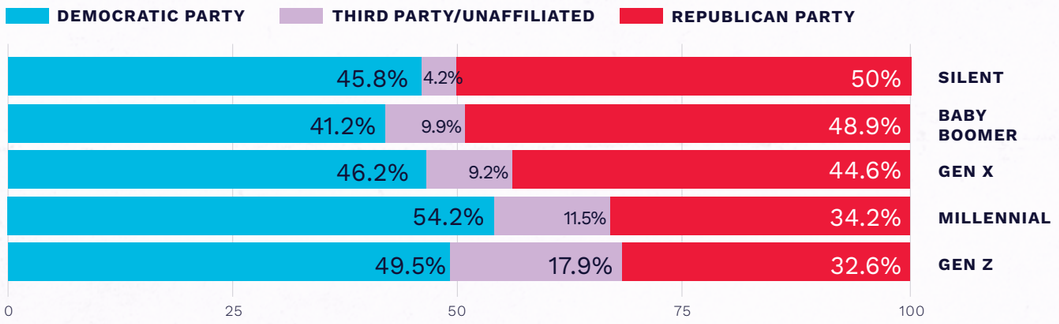


25 "Party Affiliation Fact Sheet (NPORS)," Pew Research Center, July 14, 2026, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/fact-sheet/party-affiliation-fact-sheet-npors/.

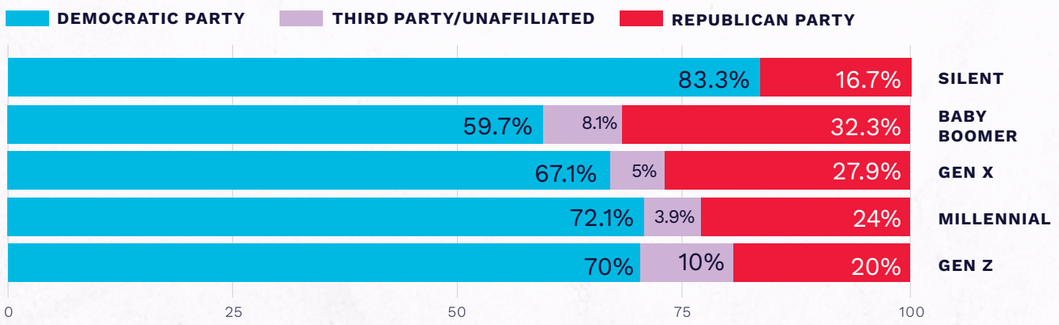
Among Senate candidates, it is millennial men and Baby Boomer women who stand out. Democratic candidates make up a clear plurality and a near majority of the millennial men. This Democratic male cohort features the smallest share decline of any generation of Senate candidates when compared with the House or overall percentages.

Among women running for Senate, it is Baby Boomer Republicans who post the largest jump when disaggregated from the House candidates, representing a nearly two-thirds majority over their Democratic counterparts. Indeed, this is the only group of Republican women who make up a majority—across all generations of women running for the Senate, all generations of women running for the House, or the two chambers combined.

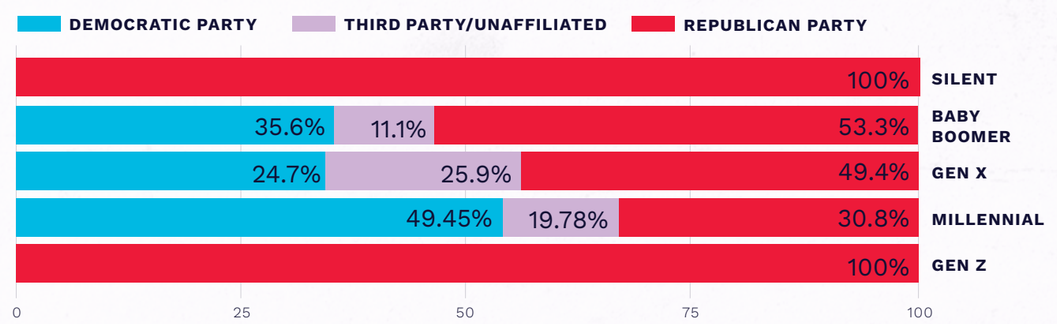
Men's Party ID Among House Candidates by Generation



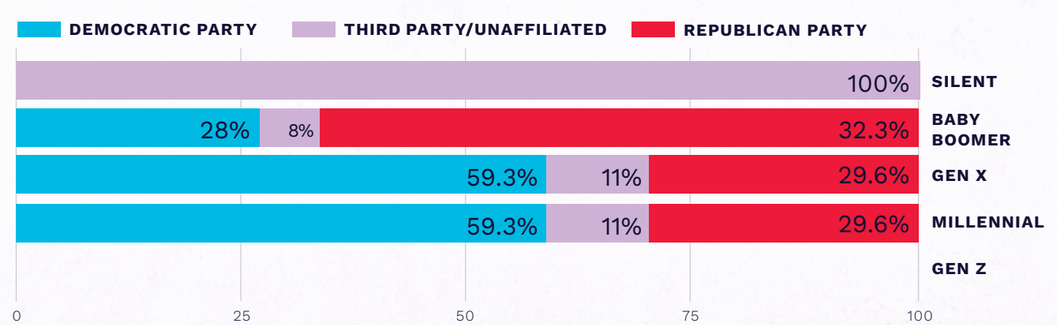
Women's Party ID Among House Candidates by Generation



Men's Party ID Among Senate Candidates by Generation



Women's Party ID Among Senate Candidates by Generation



DISTRICT COMPETITIVENESS

In a cycle shaped by mid-decade redistricting, 85% of House races are rated Solid Democrat or Solid Republican, with only 29 in the most competitive middle bands.

Unsurprisingly in a cycle dominated by a partisan battle over mid-decade redistricting, most House races are not rated as meaningfully competitive by *Inside Elections*,[26] falling into either the Solid Democrat (184 districts, or 42.3%) or Solid Republican (185 districts, or 42.5%) categories.[27] Only in 29 districts, or 6.6% of the House total, were the races rated in the three most competitive of the group's nine categories: Tilt Democrat (8), Toss Up (16), or Tilt Republican (5).

Though the Senate is not subject to redistricting, the story for that chamber is much the same. Of the 35 seats up for election during this cycle, 23 (65.7%) are rated as either Solid Democrat (9, or 25.7%) or Solid Republican (14, or 40%). Only 7 seats are rated as either Tilt Democrat (3, or 8.5%), Toss Up (1, or 2.9%), or Tilt Republican (3, or 8.5%).[28]

As a result, most congressional candidates—nearly four in five (79.1%)—are running in uncompetitive Solid Democrat or Solid Republican districts. Just under a tenth (9.7%) are running in the three most competitive categories.

26 *Inside Elections* does not rate the competitiveness of races for nonvoting members of Congress, meaning the House delegates for Washington, DC, and US overseas territories. In this section of the analysis, the N for all candidates is 3,875 and the N for candidates with available age data is 2,698.

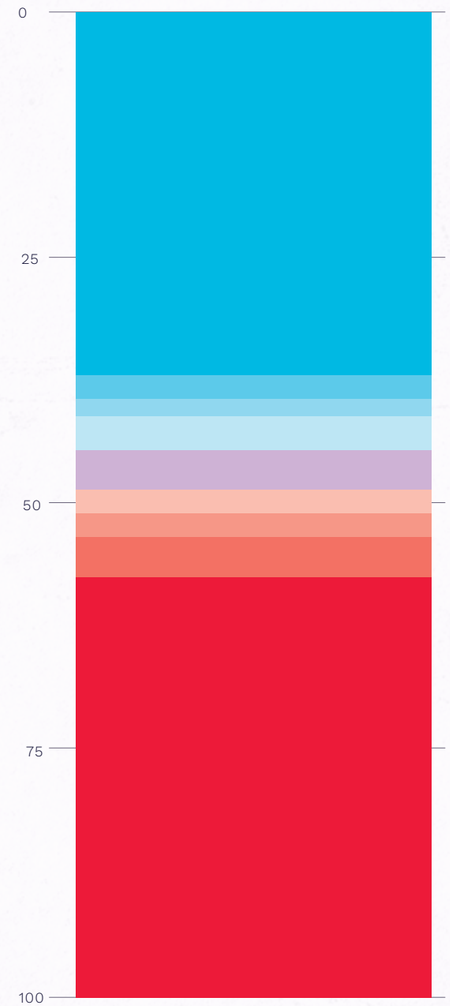
27 *Inside Elections* district ratings were accessed on August 20, 2026, and do not reflect any rating changes announced since then. House race breakdowns were also accessed on August 20, 2026. See https://insideelections.com/ratings/house/.

28 Senate data were drawn from an *Inside Elections* article updated on August 6, 2026. See https://insideelections.com/ratings/senate/.

Distribution of *Inside Elections'* Congressional District Ratings

DISTRICT CATEGORY	SHARE OF CANDIDATES
Solid D	36.7%
Likely D	2.1%
Lean D	1.7%
Tilt D	3.4%
Toss Up	4.3%
Tilt R	2.1%
Lean R	2.8%
Likely R	3.7%
Solid R	42.4%

Table: Share of All Candidates per District Category



DISTRICT COMPETITIVENESS AND CANDIDATE NUMBERS

Seats in the more competitive districts appear to attract a larger pool of candidates.

There are a few different hypotheses on how district competitiveness may affect candidates' decisions to run for Congress. One might argue that safer, less competitive seats should draw more candidates from the dominant party, since winning the primary election would all but guarantee victory in the general election. Because safe seats also discourage members of the disadvantaged party from contesting the race, however, the effect on the overall number of candidates may be negligible.

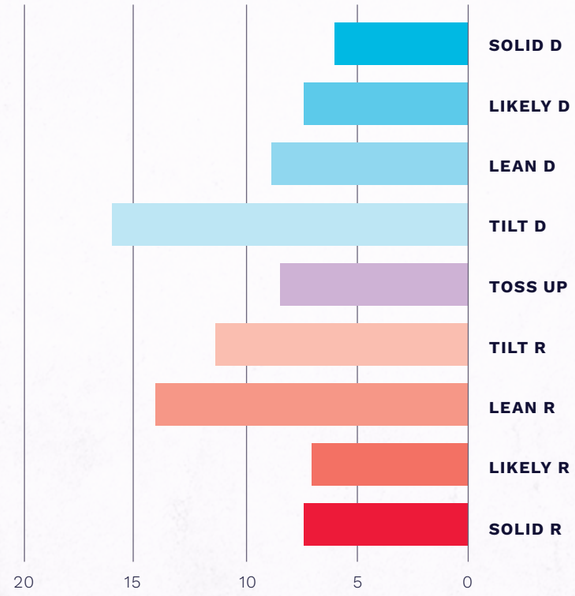
Alternatively, competitive seats could draw more candidates overall because people from both major parties perceive a viable path to victory and are willing to throw their hats in the ring.

A review of the median number of candidates in races within each *Inside Elections* rating category seems to support the latter hypothesis. Lean Republican and Tilt Democrat races have the most candidates, suggesting that larger numbers of candidates are drawn to more competitive districts.

Median Number of Candidates in Each *Inside Elections* Category

CATEGORY	MEDIAN
Solid D	6
Likely D	7.5
Lean D	9
Tilt D	16
Toss Up	8.5
Tilt R	11.5
Lean R	14
Likely R	7
Solid R	7.5

Table: Median Number of Candidates in Each InsideElections Category



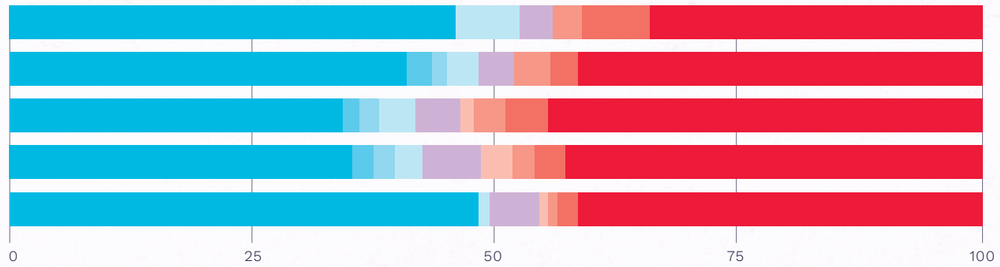
DISTRICT COMPETITIVENESS AND GENERATIONAL COHORTS

While Gen Z candidates appear most willing to enter the least competitive races, millennials are more focused on Toss Ups and other highly competitive districts.

Breaking down the competition data by generational cohort yields further insights. A much greater share of Gen Z candidates are running in solidly partisan districts compared with their older counterparts. In fact, a combined 89.8% of Gen Z candidates are running in Solid Democrat (48.7%) or Solid Republican (41%) races, compared with 78.8% of Silent Generation candidates (46.9% and 34.4%, respectively), 81.6% of Baby Boomers (40.9% and 41.6%), 77.7% of Gen X (34.4% and 44.3%), and 77.3% of millennials (35.2% and 42.7%). However, Gen Z also has the second-largest proportion of candidates running in Toss Up races (5.1%).

Millennials, meanwhile, have the largest proportion of candidates running in the three most competitive categories (12.2%), and the largest proportion of candidates running in Toss Up races (5.7%).

Distribution of Candidates by Generation and District Competitiveness



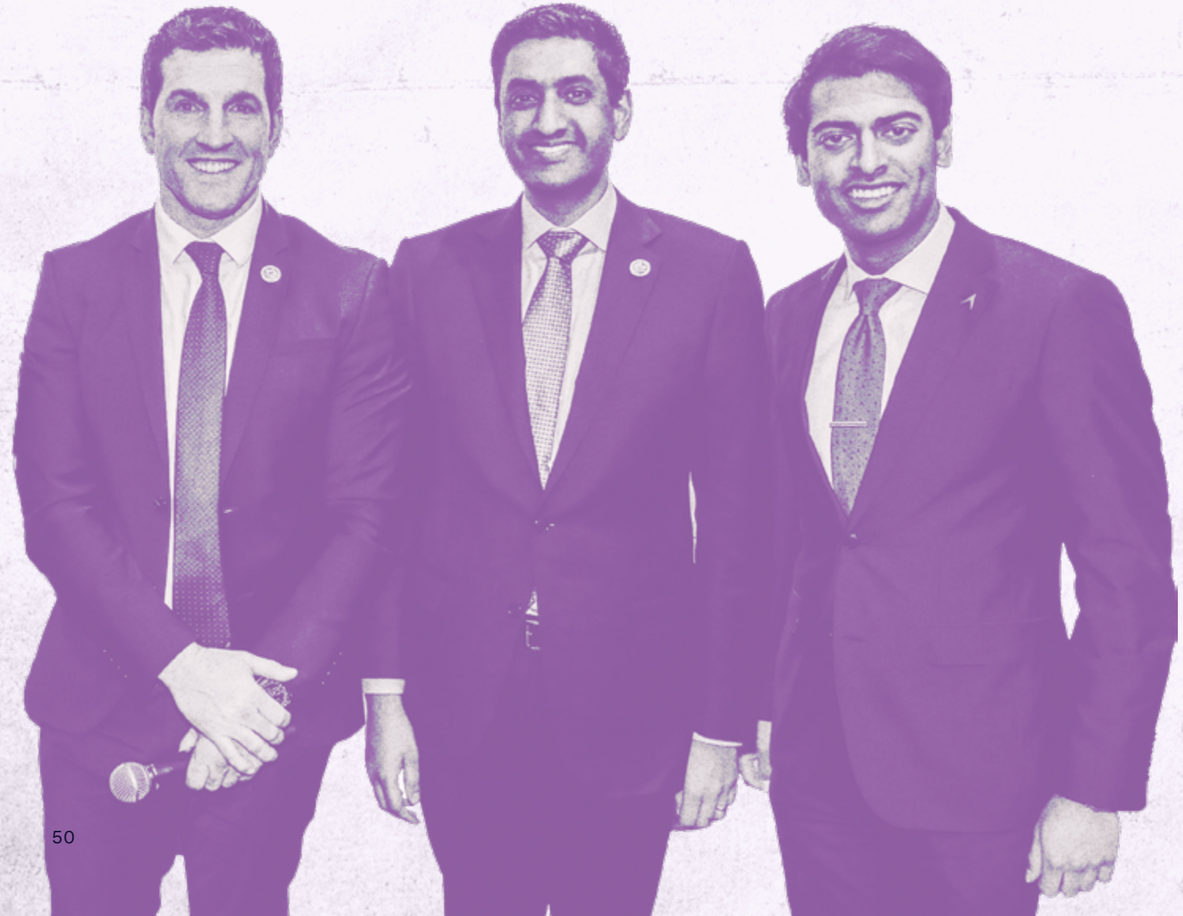
	SILENT	BABY BOOMER	GEN X	MILLENNIAL	GEN Z
Solid D	46.9%	40.9%	34.4%	35.2%	48.7%
Likely D	0	2.8%	1.8%	2.3%	0
Lean D	0	1.5%	1.7%	1.9%	0.9%
Tilt D	6.3%	3.1%	4%	3.4%	0
Toss Up	3.1%	2.3%	4.5%	5.7%	5.1%
Tilt R	0	1.9%	1.5%	3.1%	0.9%
Lean R	3.1%	3.4%	3%	2.3%	0.9%
Likely R	6.3%	32.6%	4.9%	3.3%	2.6%
Solid R	34.4%	41.6%	44.3%	42.74%	41%

Table: Distribution of Candidates by Generation and District Competiveness

DISTRICT COMPETITIVENESS AND PARTY AFFILIATION

Across generations, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to be running in long-shot or competitive districts.

When the data on competition and generational cohort are further sorted by partisan affiliation, additional trends emerge. Democrats, across every cohort except for the Silent Generation and millennials, are more likely to be running in races that *Inside Elections* has rated as solidly safe for the opposite party than are Republican candidates. Similarly, across generations, Democratic candidates are more likely to be running in Toss Up races than their Republican counterparts in the same cohort. The only exception is Gen Z Republicans, 8.11% of whom are running in Toss Up races, compared with 4.35% of Gen Z Democrats.



Democratic Candidates by Generation and District Rating

	SILENT	BABY BOOMER	GEN X	MILLENNIAL	GEN Z
Solid D	60%	47.6%	42.5%	39.6 %	45.6 %
Likely D	0	2%	1.6%	1.4%	0
Lean D	0	1.4%	1.2%	1.8%	2.2%
Tilt D	6.7%	2%	3.4%	4.5%	0
Toss Up	6.7%	2.7%	5.4%	5.1%	4.4%
Tilt R	0	2%	1.2%	2.1%	0
Lean R	0	2.4%	3.6%	2.1%	0
Likely R	6.7%	2.4%	4%	3.9%	2.2%
Solid R	20%	37.5%	37%	39.6%	45.7%

Republican Candidates by Generation and District Rating

	SILENT	BABY BOOMER	GEN X	MILLENNIAL	GEN Z
Solid D	40%	33.6%	25.9%	41.2%	43.2%
Likely D	0	4%	2%	3.1%	o
Lean D	0	1.9%	2.8%	1.1%	0
Tilt D	6.7%	3.4%	4.5%	1.4%	0
Toss Up	0	2.2%	2.5%	3.7%	8.1%
Tilt R	0	1.5%	1.8%	3.7%	2.7%
Lean R	0	3.7%	2.5%	2.3%	0
Likely R	6.7%	3.1%	5%	3.9%	2.2%
Solid R	46.7%	46.7%	52.9%	41.2%	43.2%

The Pipeline Effect

STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE

Of the 3,918 candidates who filed to run for Congress in the 2026 cycle, 414 or 10.6% had experience as a state legislator. Among candidates with age data available, that proportion rises to 15%.

Of the candidates who had experience in a state legislature, just under half (47.2%) were congressional incumbents running for reelection to their current office.

	STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE	NO STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE
INCUMBENT	22	27
CHALLENGER	95	83

Table: State Legislature Experience and Congressional Incumbency (for Candidates with Age Data)

STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE BY GENERATION

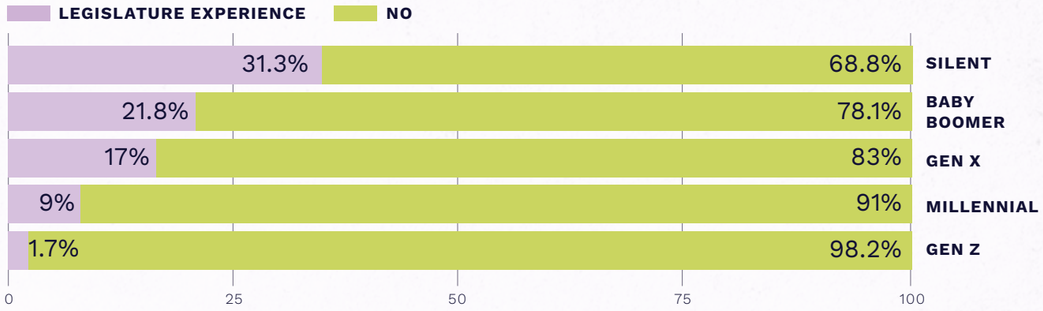
The road to Congress often runs through state legislatures, and most younger candidates have yet to take that route.

Among all congressional candidates with available age data, a greater share of older candidates have experience in a state legislature.

Among challenger candidates, the proportion with experience in a state legislature drops among all generations. While Silent Generation challengers lead the way proportionally, with 16.7% showing state legislature experience, this reflects just 3 out of 18 candidates in raw numbers. Also in the raw count, Gen X far outpaces other generations, with 91 challengers who have state legislature experience. Still, this represents just a tenth (10.9%) of all Gen X challenger candidates.

Baby Boomers, Gen X, and millennials account for 97.6% of the challengers who have served as state legislators (28.2%, 42.1%, and 27.3%, respectively).

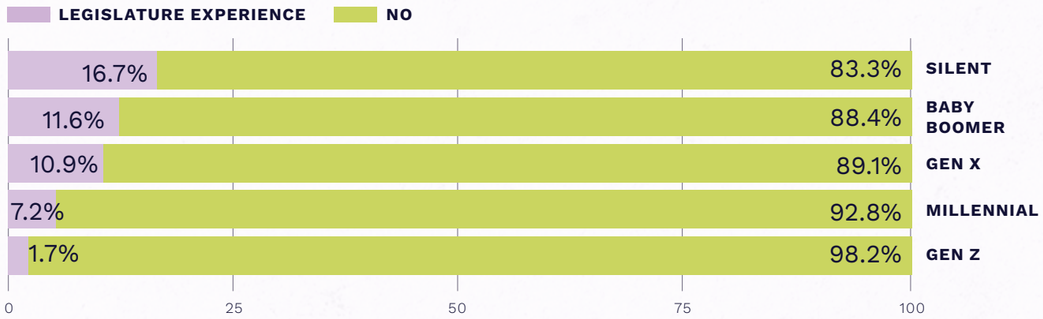
State Legislature Experience by Generation for Challengers



	STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE	NO STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE
SILENT	10	22
BABY BOOMER	150	536
GEN X	169	827
MILLENNIAL	79	799
GEN Z	2	114

Table: Count of Candidates by Generation and State Legislature Experience for All Candidates

State Legislature Experience by Generation for All Candidates



	STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE	NO STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE
SILENT	3	15
BABY BOOMER	61	463
GEN X	91	742
MILLENNIAL	59	756
GEN Z	2	113

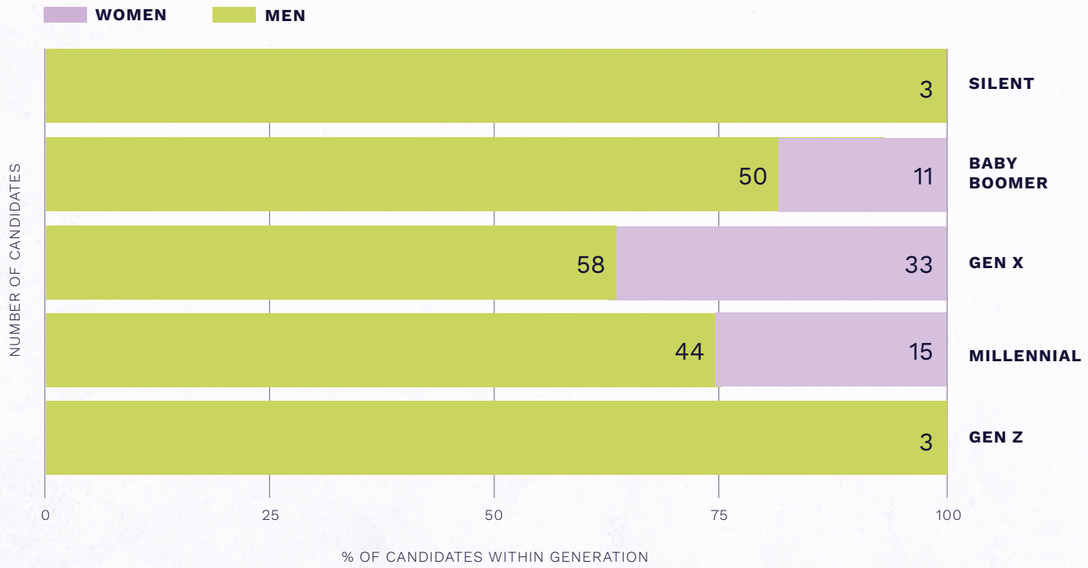
Table: Count of Candidates by Generation and State Legislature Experience for Challengers

STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE BY GENERATION AND GENDER

Among the challengers, men with state legislature experience outnumber women nearly three to one.

Among congressional challengers with age data available, more men (157) than women (59) have state legislature experience. However, among candidates of both genders, state legislature experience is concentrated among Baby Boomers, Gen X, and millennials, with Baby Boomers leading the way.

Challengers with State Legislature Experience by Gender



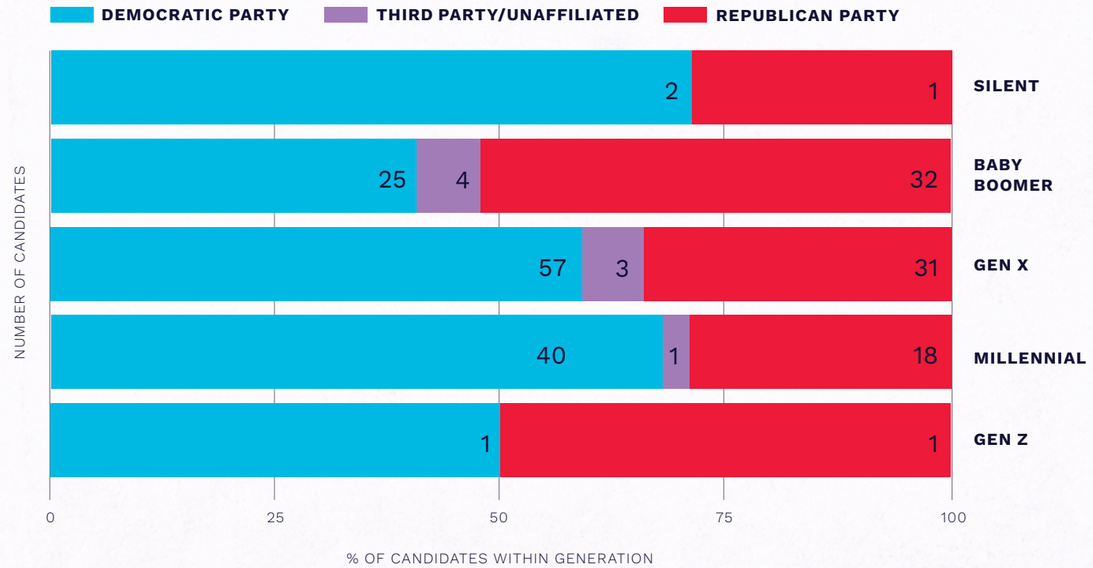
STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE BY GENERATION AND PARTY AFFILIATION

In most generations, Democrats running for Congress are more likely than Republicans to have held state legislative office; Baby Boomers are the exception.

Among candidates with available age data, Democrats are more likely to have state legislature experience than their Republican counterparts. This is true, proportionally, for every generation except Baby Boomers, among whom Republicans with experience in a state legislature (32) outnumber Democrats (25).

The partisan difference may be an artifact of the sheer volume of Democratic candidates running in the 2026 cycle. It may also reflect dynamics within the Republican Party and electorate after nearly a decade of populist rhetoric that favors candidates who are “outsiders” rather than “career politicians.”

Challengers with State Legislature Experience by Party ID and Generation

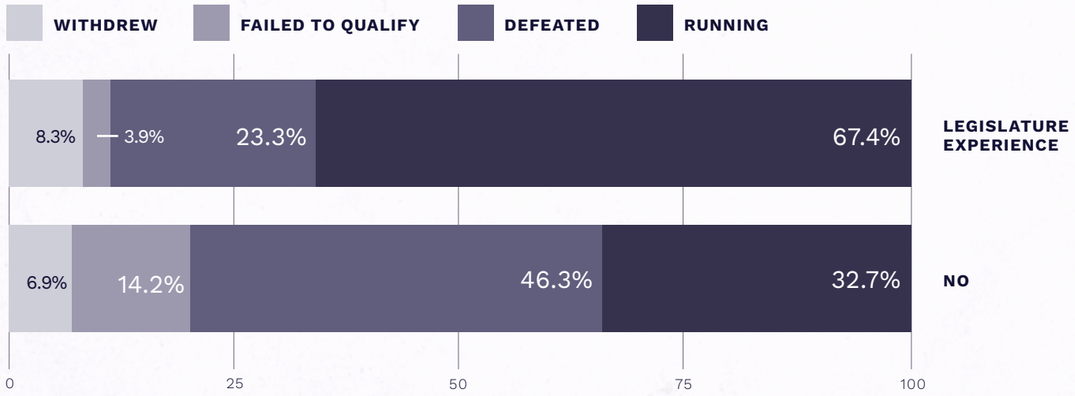


STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE AND ATTRITION RATES

Current and former state legislators who file to run for Congress are far more likely to reach the ballot; two in three reach the general elections, compared with one in three of those who have not served at the state level.

An examination of candidate attrition over the course of the election cycle sheds light on the value that experience in a state legislature may provide. Among those with age data available, a smaller share (3.9%) of candidates with state legislature experience failed to qualify for the ballot than candidates who had no such experience (14.2%). In addition, two out of every three current or former state legislators made it to the general election ballot, compared with one in three of those who had never served at the state level.

State Legislature Experience and Candidate Status for Candiates with Age Data



	STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE	NO STATE LEGISLATURE EXPERIENCE
WITHDREW	8.4%	6.9%
FAILED TO QUALIFY	3.9%	14.2%
DEFEATED	23.3%	46.3%
RUNNING	64.4%	32.7%

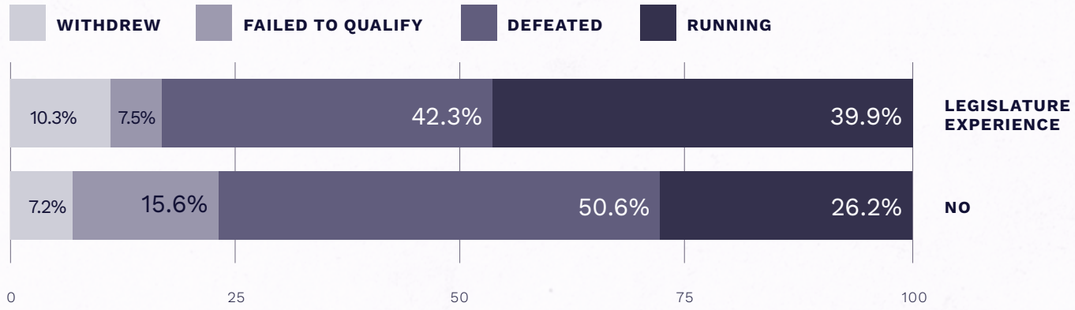
Table: Candidate Status and State Legislature Experience

However, these numbers encompass all candidates who had ever served in a state legislature, including congressional incumbents running for reelection. Since nearly half of the candidates with experience as a state legislator are in fact congressional incumbents, incumbency may be obfuscating the true impact of state-level experience. Filtering out congressional incumbents changes the story.

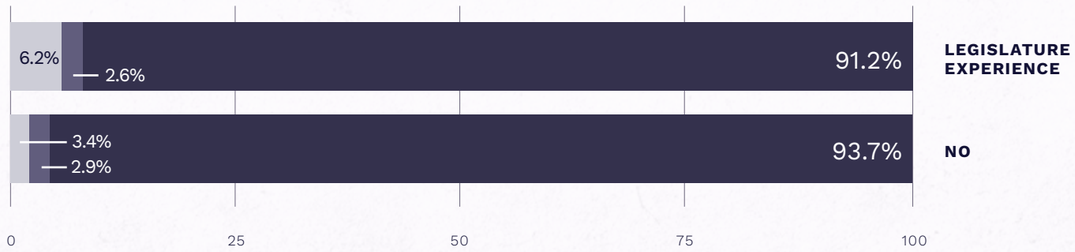
Among the 217 candidates who are not congressional incumbents and do have experience in a state legislature and available age data, just under two in five (39.91%) made it through to the general election ballot. A smaller share of these candidates failed to qualify for the primary election compared with challengers who had not served at the state level (7.5% versus 15.5%). This suggests that insights gained from previous winning campaigns, political service, and other experiential factors remove common institutional hurdles to congressional candidacy—like filing deadlines, residency requirements, or signature collection—for candidates with state legislature experience.

Among congressional incumbents, there is little difference in primary election success rates between those who served in a state legislature and those who did not. This suggests that the advantages of congressional incumbency—including the professional staff—may trump any benefits or deficits associated with having or lacking state-level experience.

State Legislature Experience and Candidate Status for Challengers with Age Data



State Legislature Experience and Candidate Status for Congressional Incumbents



Looking to the Future

This report presents mixed findings about the future of American democracy. On the positive side, among other things, the candidate pool grew by 31% this election cycle, meaning more people are interested in running for Congress. A healthy democracy requires vigorous competition, and that can only happen when an ample number of capable individuals are willing to enter the political arena.

Public trust in Congress has declined in part because people feel that the institution is out of touch and unrepresentative of the general population. However, the 119th Congress was younger than the four that preceded it, and this year's general elections will show whether 2024 marked the beginning of a new trend of younger lawmakers. Our data indicate that the candidate pool is younger than it has ever been, with one in three candidates now belonging to the youngest two generations. In fact, the candidate pool has grown more representative with each cycle when it comes to age.

Not all the signs are so encouraging. Previous Future Caucus research on the reasons why elected officials—specifically state legislators—choose to leave public service revealed that the decision usually stems from an official's fear for their or their family's personal safety amid rising threats of political violence; low wages for public service; lack of resources to succeed in the job; and rising partisanship that makes it difficult to address genuine policy problems.[29] Academic research shows that many of the same factors have led potential candidates to decide against running for office in the first place.[30]

We find that only 10.6% of candidates in 2026 had previous experience as state legislators, indicating that our political environment may be affecting the career paths that lead to Congress. This has significant implications for the future and may point to a coming increase in governance challenges. Previous studies have shown that members of Congress with state-level legislative experience tend to be more effective during their first years in office and are more bipartisan in their work.[31] Should effective state lawmakers no longer wish to run, there is a real risk that Congress will become even more partisan and more gridlocked.

The factors that discourage individuals from entering public service have also been shown to disproportionately affect women.[32] Our findings confirm that the candidate pool is less representative when it comes to gender, with a smaller proportion of women running for Congress than in 2024.

As we look to 2028, it seems likely that continued dissatisfaction with the status quo will cause more individuals to become active in politics and consider running for office. Because we are in an era of intense nationalization, with national rather than state or local issues gaining most media attention and weighing more heavily on voter considerations, we can expect that more candidates will file to run for Congress in particular.

Americans' dissatisfaction with the status quo extends to their views of the two major parties. An increasing share of the electorate identifies as independent. In 2024, for the first time ever, more voters identified as independents than as Republicans or Democrats.[33] While the majority of candidates running in 2026 are still affiliated with one of these parties, Gen Z had proportionally more independent candidates than other generations. This will be one dynamic to watch in future election cycles.

Finally, we are likely to see younger cohorts grow in their share of the candidate pool as Gen Z comes of age, particularly with respect to Senate eligibility, and as the Silent Generation continues to pass from the scene.

29 The Exit Interview: Why Decent People Are Struggling to Serve in Public Office (Washington, DC: Future Caucus, February 2026), https://futurecaucus.org/the-exit-interview.

30 Andrew B. Hall, Who Wants to Run?: How the Devaluing of Political Office Drives Polarization (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

31 Rachel Porter et al., "Electing Amateurs Reduces Cross-Party Collaboration," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 122, no. 41 (2025), https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2519787122.

32 Gowri Ramachandran et al., Intimidation of State and Local Officeholders (New York: Brennan Center for Justice, January 2024), https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/intimidation-state-and-local-officeholders.

33 Joseph Cerrone, "Research Brief: Growing Cohort of Independent Voters Becomes Critical Segment of Electorate," Unite America, November 15, 2024, https://www.uniteamerica.org/articles/research-brief-growing-cohort-of-independent-voters-becomes-critical-segment-of-electorate.

Appendix

	COUNT	PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES WITH AGE DATA	PERCENTAGE OF ALL CANDIDATES
CONCRETE YEAR FOUND	1,044	38.3%	26.7%
DATED NEWS ARTICLE	933	34.2%	23.8%
UNDATED NEWS ARTICLE (E.G., 2026 CANDIDATE SURVEY)	14	0.5%	0.4%
AGE ON KNOWN EVENT	125	5.0%	3.5%
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	223	8.2%	5.7%
COLLEGE GRADUATION	373	13.7%	9.5%
GENERATION REPORTED	2	0.07%	0.05%
DECADE REPORTED	1	0.04%	0.03%

Table: Age Estimation

	COUNT	PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES
KNOWWHO	594	15.2%
CANDIDATE WEBSITE	100	2.6%
NEWS SOURCES	807	20.6%
BALLOTPEDIA (CANDIDATE SURVEY)	226	5.8%
SOCIAL MEDIA	580	14.8%
WIKIPEDIA	184	4.7%
COMBINATION OF SOURCES	154	3.9%
OTHER	114	2.9%

Table: Source of Age Data

	COUNT	PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES
HOUSE	3,428	87.5%
SENATE	490	12.5%
TOTAL	3,918	100%

Table: Distribution of All Candidates by Chamber

	COUNT	PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES WITH AGE DATA	PERCENTAGE OF ALL CANDIDATES
MONTH, DAY, YEAR	1,061	38.5%	27.1%
MONTH, YEAR	22	0.8%	0.6%
YEAR	1,642	59.6%	41.9%
MONTH, DAY, NO YEAR	30	1.1%	0.8%

Table: Age Data Completenaess

	HOUSE		SENATE	
	Count	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percent**
MONTH, DAY, YEAR	925	38.5%	136	38.8%
MONTH, YEAR	13	0.5%	9	2.6%
YEAR	1,437	59.8%	205	58.4%
MONTH, DAY, NO YEAR	29	1.2%	1	0.3%
TOTAL	2,404	100%	351	100%

Table: Age Data Completeness by Chamber

	HOUSE		SENATE		ALL CANDIDATES	
	Count	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percent**	**Count**	**Percent**
SOURCED	2,406	70.2%	352	71.8%	2,758	70.4%
MISSING	1,022	29.8%	138	28.2%	1,160	29.6%
TOTALS	3,428	100%	490	100%	3,918	100%

Table : Overall Age Data Completeness by Chamber



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