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To: Interested Parties
From: Navigator Research
Date: November 2026
Re: Americans Are Done Waiting: What the 2026 Midterms Told Us

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Americans sent a clear message in the midterms: they're fed up with the status quo and want change now. This wasn't an election about the old moderate-versus-progressive divide. It was a rejection of Trumpism and the status quo in search of transformative economic populism. Voters showed, yet again, that they don't catalogue their views as either progressive or moderate but instead want solutions that will improve their lives and wallet. This was a demand for change and a clear and pervasive understanding that the status quo is not working for Americans. There is an underlying impatience that their demands for change for the last 20 years (at least) have gone unheard, and traditional institutional norms are not an acceptable excuse for inaction.

Democrats flipped more than 30 congressional seats, defeating 20 Republican incumbents in the House and six in the Senate. Control of the House and Senate decisively flipped to Democrats, as did governors' mansions and state legislatures across the country.

Voters made clear that the issues President Trump and Republicans in Congress have prioritized – ICE raids, foreign conflicts, restricting voting rights, and White House renovations – are misplaced. In Navigator's October polling, 60% of Americans wanted their leaders to focus on inflation and the cost of living, yet only 19% saw Trump and Republicans in Congress focused on these issues. 44% wanted a focus on jobs and the economy, yet only 20% saw Trump and Republicans in Congress focused there.

"I see the president building a ballroom when there's people that can't feed their families." – MI woman, weak Democrat

The 2026 election was not necessarily a sign the Democratic Party has improved its brand, but it absolutely was a mandate for change. But the change isn't defined in Beltway policies, it's defined in people's lives. The status quo is out of control and people are looking for changes in their lives that will bring about stability again, and an end to chaos.

From Change Candidate to Changing Nothing

Trump won in 2024 by promising major changes: ending inflation on day one, slashing energy and electricity prices by half, no new wars, and making America affordable again. Shortly after returning to power in February 2025, Trump had a net approval rating of +2 (49% approve – 47% disapprove).

Then, he–and Congressional Republicans–failed to deliver. Not only did nothing change for the better, in truth, things got worse. In less than two years, Trump's net approval rating plummeted to a new low in Navigator tracking of -26 (36% approve – 62% disapprove). Importantly, not only did his overall job approval plummet, his net job approval on the economy plummeted from +1 to -33, fundamentally defining his presidency as harmful to the cost of living issues that are top of voters' minds.

"People voted Trump because we thought we were going to get lower costs of living, to some degree at least, and everything has just increased in price." - GA man, Trump '24 voter

We've seen a growing number of Trump 2024 voters regretting their choice, reaching a record high of 25% in early October, with many pointing to his broken promises, war with Iran, and focus on the wrong things.

"I feel really duped…I voted for [Trump] because I was expecting him not to go to war. And then he's going to war everywhere and in America, you know what I mean?" - NC man, Trump '24 voter

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One Thing is Constant: Most People Want Major Change

For years, rising costs and stagnant wages have squeezed American families, and many are looking for both change and relief when casting their vote.

"People are trying to decide, 'do I pay my rent or do I eat? Do I pay my electric bill or do I feed my children?'" - OH woman, independent

In polling conducted around midterm and presidential elections since Navigator's inception in 2018, change has been a major driver for voters:

- In Navigator's 2018 exit survey, "**change**" was one of the top reasons given when asked why Americans voted for Democrats.
- In Navigator's 2020 exit survey, more than three-in-five (61%) agreed that "We need to adopt **major changes** to the way our government and democracy works to put power back in the hands of ordinary people and end partisan gridlock in Washington preventing the passage of policies supported by most Americans."
- In Navigator's 2022 exit survey. "**change**" was one of the top reasons given when asked what gave people hope about a Republican majority in the House.
- And in Navigator's October 2024 survey, days before the presidential election, 72% said the political and economic systems needed at least **major changes**.

At the beginning of Trump's second term, Americans were unclear whether the big changes would help them or not, but they were pleased to see Trump take big swings and gave him the benefit of the doubt:

"[Trump's] implementing policy that's completely turning things upside down. Whether that's good or not…we'll see in the long run." - NC Latino man, Republican

In Navigator focus groups held shortly following these previous elections, many lamented that little, if anything, had changed and that lawmakers were slow-moving to keep their promises.

- *"**I haven't seen enough changes**. I just see little things here and there." - FL Black man, independent*
- *"**Nothing changes**. I mean, it's kind of been consistent no matter who's president. It's just always been that way." - MI white man, Republican*
- *"**I think nothing's going to change until our government decides that we're a priority**, that lowering the cost of things is a priority, or giving us affordable health care is a priority, and it doesn't seem to be a priority right now." – ME woman, weak Democrat*

At the same time, majorities of Americans continue to view our political system, Congress, and the economy as deeply broken:

- Six-in-10 (58%) said the **political system** is broken, including 29% who said it is completely broken. 59% said the political system needs major changes, while 17% want it torn down completely.
- A majority (53%) said **Congress** is broken, including 26% who said it is completely broken. 50% said Congress needs major changes, while 21% said it needs to be torn down completely.
- Nearly half (46%) said the **economy** is broken, including 22% who said it is completely broken. 65% said it needs major changes, while 9% said it needs to be torn down completely.

Additionally, focus group participants have consistently expressed perceptions of inequity and an economic system that is rigged for the wealthy.

"Honestly, about the last couple of years, it just seems like the rich are richer, the poor or poorer. There's not a whole lot of middle class around me. Either you can afford things or you can't." – MI woman, weak Democrat

Major Changes are Popular, More so Than Tweaks Around the Edges

Throughout the year, Americans across partisan ideologies have consistently told us that they want major changes that improve their lives, not just tweaks around the edges or more focus on Beltway infighting and process. While Democrats have gained trust on handling inflation and the cost of living – Democrats were at a two-point disadvantage in October 2025, but now hold a 17-point advantage – they now need to maintain that trust by delivering.

On healthcare, reinstating and expanding Affordable Care Act subsidies is popular, and a majority also support proposals that would lead to major systemic changes. Healthcare proposals that include a larger role for government, whether through a government-run public option or expanding Medicare enrollment, are popular with a majority of Americans.

On Trump's cost-raising tariffs, Americans not only want to see these tariffs reversed, they want to see meaningful policy change to lower the cost of everyday items like groceries. The most popular policies to lower grocery costs include providing free school meals to kids in need, restoring Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or food assistance to families, and banning corporate price gouging, including surveillance pricing.

On artificial intelligence (AI), two-thirds (66%) want more regulation of the technology that is increasingly influencing nearly every facet of our lives. Those supportive of more regulation include majorities across party lines, more than three-in-five (62%) frequent AI users, and 57% of people who view AI favorably.

Trump's war with Iran remains unpopular, with six-in-10 Americans not thinking it has been worth it, while Trump's campaign promise of no new wars and a focus on issues at home is popular and a frequent topic in focus groups.

On corruption, 81% of Americans think corruption in government is raising their costs personally. Term limits, refusing to take money from corporate donors and Political Action Committees, age limits, and banning stock trading are all popular accountability measures for elected officials. To fight corruption, Americans want to see lawmakers crack down on corporate price gouging, return stolen taxpayer money, cap hidden fees, and do more to ensure that corruption isn't raising our costs.

The midterm results are a strong showing of Americans embracing change – a change in the party in power and a change in the policies that have raised costs on everyday Americans, making their lives harder and more expensive.

It would be a mistake to think of these changes through a frame of progressive vs. moderate, as most Americans outside of Washington don't think or vote in those terms. Instead, the data and dozens of focus groups tell us it's about delivering on the mandate to make meaningful change in the actual lives of everyday people better. Democrats in Congress can meet this moment by refusing to let institutional norms or the status quo stand in the way of providing relief from high costs and corruption, and by taking on a rigged and broken system. For years that's what Americans have told us they want, and with decisive congressional majorities, Democrats in Congress have an opportunity to deliver.