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Peter Finn

April 24th, 2026

## The 2026 Midterms: Virginia's ballot measure shows how Trump's redistricting push may cost the Republican Party the midterms

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*Virginian voters have approved a map that increases the number of seats in the House of Representatives the Democrats are likely to win in the 2026 midterms. **Peter Finn** notes that the benefit to Democrats that the Virginia ballot measure may bring may be an unintended consequence of Donald Trump's pressure on Republican-held states to redraw maps to be more favourable to the GOP.*

- *This article is part of our **'The 2026 Midterms'** series curated by Peter Finn (University of Greenwich). The series explores the run-up to the*

*2026 US midterm elections at the state and national levels. If you are interested in contributing to the series, contact Peter Finn (P.D.Finn@greenwich.ac.uk).*

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This week voters in Virginia **narrowly** approved a ballot measure to redraw federal congressional districts in the state in a manner that will likely favour the Democratic Party. It is predicted that the new map, which was drawn up by state Democrats, will increase the Democratic seats from the state in the US House of Representatives from **six to 10**, out of 11 seats at the midterm elections in November.

Unlike in other countries like the UK, elections in the US are administered at the state level. Depending on the state and its laws, boundaries for Congressional districts can be drawn by state legislators themselves or by independent redistricting commissions (or a combination of the two). In addition, the chief electoral officer in a state – the Secretary of State – is an elected role, meaning that election administration is inherently political.

## Trump's desire for redrawn electoral maps

The Virginia ballot measure has its roots in a process kicked off last year when President Donald Trump **instructed Republican controlled Texas** to redraw maps to favour his party. This did occur, and a map favouring Republicans that was passed by the **state legislature** will be in effect in November in the Lone Star State.

Trump's desire for a gerrymandered map in Texas stems from the **slim majority** held by Republicans in the House of Representatives. Given the **general trend** for the party in the White House to lose seats in midterm elections, so the Trumpian logic went, the altering of maps was needed to protect Republican Party control of the federal trifecta of the

presidency, Senate, and House of Representatives for the final two years of Trump's time in the White House.

Unfortunately for the Republican Party, and though other red states have joined Texas in tweaking their maps, the Democratic Party quickly moved to counter Republican efforts and, along with the Virginian ballot measure, **California voters** approved a map in November that will likely secure five more Democratic seats in the midterms than they won in 2024. Following a **2025 court ruling**, Utah will also have a map that **could lead to Democrats** picking up an extra seat in the state.

Though such mid-decade redistricting **has a precedent**, maps are generally drawn at the start of each decade, following the census, after the 435 seats in the House of Representatives are reapportioned among states to reflect changes in comparative population between them (i.e., the absolute population of a state could grow, but if it grows less in comparison with other States, it could still lose seats).

## Unintended consequences for Trump and the Republican Party

Importantly, and beyond the processes occurring in any one state, in the current round of changes kicked off by Trump one can see a distinct difference between aims and outcomes. Indeed, what was initially seen as a simple tweak to the US electoral system to facilitate continued Republican control, has led to a Democratic response that may end up meaning that, depending on what happens in the **coming months**, overall changes to the US electoral map are **more favourable to the Democratic Party** than the Republican Party come November.

One point of note here is that Democrats involved in responses to the initial Republican push appear to be aware of the potential for such unintended consequences moving forward, and are framing their efforts

as **short-term measures** (Virginia's redistricting commission has only been bypassed temporarily) needed to counter the actions of the Republican Party under Trump.

Looking beyond the November midterms, one wonders whether a key takeaway for the Republican Party from the 2026 cycle may be the need to more clearly think through the potential differences between aims and outcomes when seeking changes within a **complicated** and diffuse electoral system.

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## About the author



**Peter Finn**

Dr Peter Finn is a multi-award-winning Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Greenwich. He is co-editor of *Official Record: Oversight, national security and democracy* (2024, Manchester University Press) and is Web Team Lead for the American Politics Group of the Political Studies Association. He



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