

US midterm elections 2026**Trump-Vance's US midterm pitch: vote Republican or live with the 'lunatics'**

Party far more comfortable raising fear of Democratic alternative than discussing own policies, including Iran war



Donald Trump is battling broad public dissatisfaction over issues such as affordability © Al Drago/Bloomberg

James Politi, Joe Miller, Alex Rogers and Stephanie Findlay in Dallas

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At the end of Donald Trump's two-day midterm election convention in Dallas, the US president urged the crowd to raise their right hands and pledge to go to the polls in November to preserve Republican control of Congress.

"You know what happens if you don't vote? You go to hell," he told the crowd.

A few minutes earlier, his vice-president and heir apparent [JD Vance](#) made his own appeal to the MAGA faithful to defy increasingly dire polling and avoid a sweeping rebuke from a restive American public.

“The contrast in this election is about the party of common sense beating the party of crazies,” Vance said at the stadium-sized event usually reserved for presidential election years. “Let’s send these lunatics packing.”

With the White House’s ability to enact its agenda over the next two years riding on Republican success in the midterms, and growing fears that Democrats could launch sweeping investigations of the administration if they win control of Congress, speakers sought to rally around the party’s classic causes.

PLAY | 00:58

Donald Trump warns voters they will 'go to hell' if they do not vote © GOP YouTube

There was bashing of transgender people and undocumented immigrants, the touting of tax cuts and Christianity, as well as relentless warnings about a looming communist scourge if Democrats take the House of Representatives and the Senate.

But what stood out during the Texan jamboree were the topics Republicans tried to avoid, starting with the political and economic impact of the six-month-long Iran war.

The conflict has pushed petrol prices above \$4 a gallon and diesel prices cents away from \$6 a gallon, exposing Republicans to persistent attacks over their failure to bring down the cost of living.

On the second night of the convention, it was Vance's job to allay those concerns. "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Don't hand over the country to a bunch of crazy people because you happen to disagree with this one policy issue here," he said.

But Trump, Vance and their party are battling broad dissatisfaction on issues ranging from their handling of the Jeffrey Epstein documents to affordability, threatening to depress Republican turnout and turn swing voters towards Democrats.



JD Vance, right, sought to energise the crowd with appeals to the value of the American 'birthright' © Al Drago/Bloomberg

"There's definitely some trepidation over the consequence of the Iranian conflict and gas prices," Pat Harrigan, a Republican congressman from North Carolina on the House armed services committee, told the FT in a phone interview.

Steve Deace, a rightwing talk-show host, said it was time for Republicans to have some “internal accountability on ourselves” in terms of the rising costs of energy and “virtually everything else”.

“No one wants to talk about [the Iran war],” Deace lamented. “We are playing ‘tollbooth manager of Hormuz’ . . . what in the hell are we doing?”

Vance sought to energise the crowd with blood-and-soil appeals to the value of the American “birthright” and lashed out at a protester brandishing a Mexican flag. “My friend, if you love Mexico so much, get your ass over there, I’ll buy you the plane ticket,” he said.

Overall, Republicans were far more comfortable raising fear of the Democratic alternative than discussing their own policies.

Ted Cruz, the Texas senator and a potential 2028 presidential candidate, warned that the US was facing “new and dangerous red-green alliance, communists and Islamists coming together” on the left.

“They are united because they share the same enemies. They hate Christians, they hate Jews, they hate capitalism, they hate the Constitution and they hate America,” he said.

PLAY | 00:16

US vice-president JD Vance: 'Let's send these lunatics packing' © GOP YouTube

The bogeymen in Dallas were Abdul El-Sayed, the progressive Democratic candidate for Senate in Michigan, and James Talarico, the Texas Democrat who is in contention to defeat Republican Ken Paxton, a close Trump ally, in the state's Senate race.

"A guy that age who was so obsessed and focused on transgender children — I don't know about you, but I never want to see that guy's web browser history," Vance said of Talarico, who has defended transgender athletes.

There was also anxiety over AI policy and the data centres built with the blessing of the Trump administration but that have generated a fierce bipartisan backlash.

"The biggest problem is there's no transparency. There's very little input from the American public," said Russ Walker, executive director of Humans First, a conservative anti-AI group.

On the first night of the convention, Trump made plain the party's desperation to win with an outlandish bid to issue \$5,000 payments to more than 250mn adult citizens if his party keeps control of Congress.

On the opening night, Donald Trump vowed to issue \$5,000 to every US voter if his party keeps control of Congress © AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

The move was not universally acclaimed. While some Republicans cheered the plan, others denounced it and many remained awkwardly mum as it defied any notion of fiscal conservatism in a world of high inflation and rising borrowing costs.

“I’m for that, after we address the deficit,” Joe Wilson, the longtime Republican congressman from South Carolina, told the FT with a chuckle.

Outside the arena, Democrats trolled the Trump show. “On the ballot: Iran war. Data Centers. Rising Gas Prices,” said one message plastered across a black truck with Trump’s image on it paid for by a pro-Democrat spending group.

At Dallas City Hall, a crowd of 200 gathered in front of a small stage where people waved American flags and carried signs reading “Maga = Nazi” and “no kings resist!”.

Beto O’Rourke, the former Texas congressman who mounted an unsuccessful bid to unseat Cruz in 2018, said Republicans were holding their convention in Texas “because they are so afraid to lose this state”.

Trump and the Republicans are hoping to pour millions of dollars into the final stretch of the campaign to try to change the dynamic and have courted donors with high-dollar fundraisers in Dallas.

For Vance, the occasion also marked a chance to present himself as the frontrunner for the 2028 Republican presidential nomination, despite the gloomy political environment. But he was demure about any future plans.

“We’ve got to take care of business this November,” he told the crowd. “Then we can worry about what comes next.”

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