

How Rooster Odds Works

Rooster Odds is our own forecast of the 2026 Senate, House and key governor races. We built it from the ground up, from raw public data, and we report it straight, whether the news is good or bad for Republicans.

The short version: we average the real polls carefully, mix in each state's and district's voting history, simulate the election 40,000 times, and count how often each candidate wins.

What the numbers mean

- **A percentage is a chance to win**, not a vote share. "48.2%" means the candidate won 48.2% of our simulated elections.
- **Odds are shown to the tenth of a point.** Seat counts are whole numbers.
- **Chamber odds** are the share of simulations where a party wins control: 50 Senate seats for Republicans (the Vice President breaks a tie) or 218 in the House. If an independent who hasn't picked a side holds the balance, we count control as undecided.
- **Arrows** (▲ / ▼) show the change since our last published card.
- **We never call races.** The official count and the networks' decision desks do that.

| What goes in

1. Public polls

Every poll we use is checked against the pollster's or sponsor's own published release: the topline, the sample size, who was surveyed and the field dates. If we can't trace a poll to its source, it doesn't count.

2. Certified past results

Official results from the U.S. House Clerk and state election officials, plus published presidential results by congressional district. We use them to measure how each state and district leans compared with the nation, and to check how polls have missed in past elections.

3. The national environment

Our own average of raw national generic-ballot polls, using the same careful weighting as state polls, combined with this year's district-level polling. No outlet's average is used.

4. Incumbency

Sitting officeholders running again get a modest edge.

5. Campaign money (FEC)

Candidate fundraising from Federal Election Commission filings, counted so money moved between a candidate's own committees isn't counted twice. It feeds our House district model, where it measurably improved accuracy in testing on past elections.

Early-vote numbers are tracked, but party registration of returned ballots shows turnout, not votes, so they are mostly shown for reference. The one exception is a tiny, capped adjustment in a state where official ballot data allow a same-point comparison with 2022.

How polls are handled

Not every poll deserves the same say. Each one gets a weight based on:

- **Recency.** Older polls count less as they age.
- **Sample size.** Bigger samples count more, up to a cap, so one huge poll can't run the show.
- **Who was asked.** Likely voters count more than registered voters, who count more than all adults.
- **Sponsorship.** Polls paid for by a campaign, party or partisan group count less. Partisan labels go by who paid for the poll (or, for an unsponsored poll from a party-aligned firm, that firm's alignment), and the same rules apply to both parties.
- **Track record.** Pollsters that have been more accurate in past races count somewhat more, and less accurate ones somewhat less.
- **No flooding.** A pollster that releases poll after poll can't take over a race's average.
- **Consistent lean.** A pollster that keeps running to one side, in either direction, gets corrected.
- **Incomplete releases** that leave out key details count less or are dropped.

Learning from past misses

We compare hundreds of past polls, each verified against its original release, with certified results. Where a state's polls have missed in a consistent direction over several cycles, we apply a partial correction. We don't apply a blanket national "the polls are biased" fudge, because midterm misses have gone both ways.

| Uncertainty and simulation

Polls plus fundamentals

Each race blends its poll average with "fundamentals": the state or district lean, the national environment, incumbency and past results. The more good polling a race has, the more polls drive the number. Races with few polls lean on fundamentals.

Races move together

If polls miss nationally, they usually miss in the same direction everywhere. Our simulations build that in: a shared national error, shared state-level errors, and race-specific error. A miss that hurts Republicans in Texas also hurts them in Maine and Michigan in that same simulated election. That's why chamber odds aren't just the single-race odds added up.

Sizing the error honestly

- How big the errors are comes from our own measurement of real past poll misses against certified results, not from anyone else's figures.
- We allow for surprises bigger than usual ("fat tails").
- Races further from Election Day, with thin polling or lots of undecided voters, get more uncertainty.

40,000 elections

Every Senate and House race is simulated together 40,000 times. A candidate's odds are the share of those simulations they win.

Example: Ohio Senate

Jon Husted (R)

48.2%

Sherrod Brown (D)

51.8%

Published Oct. 19, 2026. Expected margin: D+0.2.

The expected margin is a fraction of a point, well inside normal polling error. That's a true coin flip: in our simulations Husted wins about 48 of every 100. A small polling miss either way decides it.

Checked before it's posted

- **Refreshed twice a day.** New polls and data are pulled each morning and afternoon, and updated cards post around 11 AM and 6 PM Eastern.
- **Independent data check.** Every new poll and input is verified against its original source.
- **Skeptical review.** A separate review challenges every forecast update before its numbers are published.
- **Reproducible.** Every published number can be rebuilt exactly from the saved inputs and code.

What we don't use

- No prediction markets or betting odds.
- No other forecasters' odds or ratings.
- No polling-aggregator averages.
- No poll numbers taken from Wikipedia.

Every poll, vote count and money figure traces back to a pollster's release, an official election record or an FEC filing. Some historical background details, such as which House incumbents ran in past elections, come from public reference compilations.

Honest limits

- **Polls can miss, and miss together.** They underestimated Republicans in 2016, 2020 and 2024, and midterms have gone both ways. Our uncertainty is built to cover that, but no model is perfect.
- **Unlikely isn't impossible.** A 30% chance happens 3 times in 10. An underdog winning doesn't mean the odds were wrong.
- **House polling is thin.** Many districts have few or no public polls, so those races rest more on fundamentals.
- **Things change.** The odds are a snapshot of today's evidence, not a call on Election Day.

Our rule: the number is the number. Optimism goes in our commentary, never in the odds.