



U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) speaks to reporters during a weekly press conference at Capitol Hill in Washington, on April 16. (OSV News/Reuters/Michael A. McCoy)



by Michael Sean Winters

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@michaelswinters](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 28, 2024

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

When Americans go to the polls, they will not only be selecting a new president. All 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives will be elected next week too. And the margin for control of the lower chamber is likely to be very close.

The Republicans took control of the House in 2022 but only barely, [winning 222 seats](#) to the Democrats 213. With such a small margin and such a divided caucus, that gavel turned into a hot potato for Speaker Kevin McCarthy who was ousted by fellow Republicans [after only nine months](#). After three weeks of wrangling, the GOP [finally settled](#) on Rep. Mike Johnson as the new speaker. It has been a bumpy year for Johnson, and he has only passed key legislation on a bipartisan basis.

The constitutional requirement of election every two years was supposed to make the House the most responsive to popular opinion, but, as of this writing, [according to the Cook Political Report](#), 365 of the seats are not even competitive and only 26 contests are rated as "toss ups." Gerrymandering has made the House the least responsive to changes in public attitudes.

In 2022, the Republicans [flipped four competitive districts](#) in New York state, providing the margin of victory. New York had undergone a [messy redistricting process](#) after the 2020 census, but it yielded more competitive districts. Unfortunately for the Democrats, they were not prepared.

The state Democratic Party claims it has learned its lessons from 2022 and aims to [reclaim all four](#) of those seats from the GOP. Democratic Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries has emerged as a point-person in the effort which, if successful, would make him Speaker of the House. "Jeffries is completely focused on New York because he has to be," [a source told CNN](#). "He's been fundraising, doing campaign stops, strategizing, meeting with all the relevant entities, having regular phone calls with the delegation to strategize, connecting them with donors — he is doing it all." Three of the four seats the GOP flipped two years ago are listed as "[toss ups](#)" by Cook Political Report: New York's 4th, 17th and 19th districts.



House Democratic Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.) speaks during his weekly news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, on March 30, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Tom Brenner)

Two Democratic incumbents are in toss-up races in the most heavily Catholic part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Unlike New York, Pennsylvania is also a swing state in the presidential race so those races are highly nationalized whether they want to be or not.

Rep. Matt Cartwright is defending his seat in Pennsylvania's [8th Congressional District](#), centered on Scranton. Cartwright has represented it since 2013. He won reelection in 2022 with 51.2% of the vote to GOP challenger Jim Bognet's 48.8%, but midterms are low turnout events. In 2020, Cartwright won with a slightly larger margin, also against Bognet, 51.8% to 48.2%, but the district has grown increasingly Republican over the past few election cycles [according to a report](#) from the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. If Trump wins this district it will be hard for Cartwright to hang on.

The same holds for Rep. Susan Wild, who represents the 7th District, just south of the 8th District. It is [anchored](#) on Allentown and the Lehigh Valley. Allentown is now a majority-minority city, with 54% of the citizens identifying as Latino. Trump and the GOP are making inroads with working-class Latinos [in the area](#), which has generally been trending Republican since 2008.

Advertisement

Arizona is another swing state in the presidential contest that is home to two toss-up districts, both currently held by Republicans. [In the 1st District](#) GOP incumbent Rep. David Schweikert narrowly held the suburban Phoenix seat for two years against a relatively unknown and underfunded challenger. National Democrats are [pouring money](#) into the campaign of state Rep. Amish Shah.

Arizona's 6th District pits incumbent GOP Rep. Juan Ciscomani against Democrat Kirsten Engel, who serves in the state senate. [In The Washington Post](#), León Krauze characterized the race: "The Republican is focusing on the economy and border security, while Engel has [centered](#) most of her appeal to voters on reproductive rights, especially among Hispanic women." Given how close Arizona is in the national polls, the ground game in these two districts could have a spillover effect.



Members of the House of Representatives walk up the steps of the U.S. Capitol, Feb. 13 in Washington. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

Michigan's 7th District, centered around Lansing and the 8th District, stretching from Flint to Saginaw, are both currently held by Democrats but are open seats. Rep. Dan Kildee is retiring and Rep. Elissa Slotkin is running for Senate. If Harris is having a good night, she could tip these two swing districts towards the Democrats as well, or Trump could do the same for the GOP.

These are the races I am going to be keeping an eye on election night — along with key contests that could determine control of the U.S. Senate, [which I discussed in an earlier column](#). The easiest route for the Democrats to regain control of the House is through the upstate New York districts they lost two years ago, but the strong winds blowing through the presidential contest are likely going to have an impact on races in Arizona, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

If the Democrats lose the Senate, regaining the House will be vital. If either party captures both chambers and the White House, it could be a recipe for further

polarization. Divided government might yield a paralyzed government. Either way, these House races will prove enormously consequential.