Inside Elections
with
Nathan L. Gonzales
Nonpartisan Analysis

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Iowa 3: Will a Wave Crash on Nunn?

By Jacob Rubashkin

Des Moines, Iowa can't help but find itself at the center of the political universe. The Hawkeye State's largest city is an important piece in the competitive Senate and gubernatorial races this fall — but its starring role will be in the 3rd Congressional District, where Republican Rep. Zach Nunn faces his toughest re-election yet.

Nunn won one of the closest House races of 2022, flipping a top GOP target, and clinched re-election in 2024 thanks in part to a stronger-than-expected performance by Donald Trump at the top of the ticket.

This cycle, Iowa Democrats are feeling rejuvenated, with a strong candidate for governor and a shot at reclaiming liberal lion Tom Harkin's Senate seat after two terms of GOP control.

But Nunn has frustrated his Democratic opponents for years, evading attacks on his voting record and background in expensive and competitive races up and down the ballot.

Will a favorable political environment make this the year Democrats finally win back a congressional seat by ousting Nunn? Or will their dreams fall flat in the fields of southwestern Iowa? The answer will help determine how big a potential Democratic House majority is next year.

The Lay of the Land

The 3rd District is a southwest Iowa seat that includes all of Polk County (Des Moines) as well as 20 other, more rural counties to the west and south.

Polk County accounts for roughly 60 percent of the votes in the 3rd, while neighboring Dallas County accounts for another 15 percent. No other counties cast more than 3 percent of the 3rd's votes.

Demographically, the district is the most favorable to Democrats in the state: 38 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree, and the median household income is $80,284, making it the best-educated and highest-earning of Iowa's four districts.

In recent years, statewide Democrats have performed the best in the 3rd District of Iowa's four seats.

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2026 House Ratings

Toss-Up (2D, 8R)

AZ 1 (Open; Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CO 8 (Evans, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
MI 7 (Barrett, R)
NY 17 (Lawler, R)
OH 1 (Landsman, D)
PA 7 (Mackenzie, R)
TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

Tilt Democratic (6D, 2R)

CA 13 (Gray, D)
CA 45 (Tran, D)
CA 48 (Open; Issa, R)
NE 2 (Open; Bacon, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)
NY 4 (Gillen, D)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
WA 3 (Perez, D)

Tilt Republican (1D, 6R)

CA 22 (Valadao, R)
MI 10 (Open; James, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
PA 8 (Bresnahan, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)
WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

Lean Democratic (10D)

FL 23 (Moskowitz, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
MI 8 (McDonald Rivet, D)
NH 1 (Open; Pappas, D)
NJ 9 (Pou, D)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NY 19 (Riley, D)
NY 3 (Suozzi, D)
VA 7 (Vindman, D)

Lean Republican (1D, 4R)

IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 4 (Huizenga, R)
NC 1 (Davis, D)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
VA 1 (Wittman, R)

Likely Democratic (7D)

CA 6 (Open; Bera, D)
CA 21 (Costa, D)
NH 2 (Goodlander, D)
MI 3 ((Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Open; Craig, DFL)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)

Likely Republican (2D, 13R)

AK AL (Begich, R)
AZ 2 (Crane, R)
CO 3 (Hurd, R)
CO 5 (Crank, R)
FL 7 (Mills, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)
IA 2 (Open; Hinson, R)
ME 2 (Open; Golden, D)
MT 1(Open; Zinke, R)
NC 11(Edwards, R)
TN 5 (Ogles, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)
TX 23(Open; Gonzales, R)
TX 35 (Open; Casar, D)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	186	187
Likely/Lean/Tilt	27	25
Total	213	212
Toss-up	10	
Needed for majority	218	

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

CALENDAR

April 16	New Jersey's 11th District Special General Election
May 5	Indiana, Ohio Primaries
May 12	Nebraska, Wyoming Primaries
May 16	Louisiana Primary
May 19	Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Oregon, Pennsylvania Primaries

Report Shorts

Florida's 20th District. The House Ethics Committee found Democratic Rep. Sheila Cherfilus McCormick guilty of 25 of 27 counts of ethics violations. Considering Harris finished ahead of Trump by 40 points in the Fort Lauderdale-area seat, McCormick's biggest vulnerability is in the August 18 Democratic primary, if she's not expelled before then.

Georgia's 14th District Special. Republican Clay Fuller won the special election to succeed GOP Rep. Majorie Taylor Greene 56-44 percent over Democrat Shawn Harris on Tuesday. Once Fuller is sworn in, Republicans will have a 219-214 advantage in the House. But Democrat Analilia Mejia is expected to win the special election in New Jersey's 11th District next Tuesday, bringing the House margin to 219-215, with one vacancy. California's 1st District, which is vacant after the death of GOP Rep. Doug LaMalfa, likely won't be filled until after the August 4 special general election.

Courtesy Fuller Campaign

Clay Fuller

Even though Republicans held Greene's seat in Georgia this week, there was good news for Democrats. In 2024, Harris lost to Greene by 29 points and Donald Trump defeated Kamala Harris by 37 points, and yet Fuller prevailed by just a dozen points. The Georgia 14 special continues a long string of Democrats overperforming in races around the country over the last year that should portend significant gains this fall unless the political dynamic fundamentally changes.

Wisconsin Supreme Court. While technically nonpartisan, contests for the Wisconsin Supreme Court have become high-profile and expensive partisan battles. Even though Wisconsin is the most evenly-divided state in the country, according to Inside Elections' Baseline, liberal Chris Taylor finished ahead of conservative Maria Lazar by 20 points, 60-40 percent.

2026 Senate Ratings

Toss-up (3)	
MI Open (Peters, D)	Ossoff (D-Ga.)
NC Open (Tillis, R)	
Tilt Democratic (1)	**Tilt Republican (1)**
NH Open (Shaheen, D)	Collins (R-Maine)
Lean Democratic	**Lean Republican (2)**
	Husted (R-Ohio)
	Sullivan (R-Ak.)
Likely Democratic (1)	**Likely Republican (3)**
MN Open (Smith, DFL)	IA Open (Ernst, R)
	MT Open (Daines, R)
	Cornyn (R-Texas)
Solid Democratic (9)	**Solid Republican (15)**
IL Open (Durbin, D)	AL Open (Tuberville, R)
Booker (D-N.J.)	KY Open (McConnell, R)
Coons (D-Del.)	OK Open (Armstrong, R)
Hickenlooper (D-Colo.)	WY Open (Lummis,R)
Lujan (D-N.M.)	Capito (R-W.V.)
Markey (D-Mass.)	Cassidy (R-Lou.)
Merkley (D-Ore.)	Cotton (R-Ark.)
Reed (D-R.I.)	Graham (R-S.C.)
Warner (D-Va.)	Hagerty (R-Tenn.)
	Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)
	Marshall (R-Kan.)
	Moody (R-Fl.)
	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
	Risch (R-Idaho)
	Rounds (R-S.D.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

Wisconsin doesn't have a competitive U.S. Senate race this year, but will host at least one competitive House race. In 2024, Trump finished ahead of Harris by 7 points in the 3rd District, represented by GOP Rep. Derrick Van Orden but the liberal candidate finished ahead by 21 points on Tuesday, according to VoteHub. In the 1st District, where Democrats still don't have a top challenger to GOP Rep. Bryan Steil, the liberal candidate finished ahead by 15 points. (Trump finished ahead of Harris by 4.5 points.) IE

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Virginia Redistricting: Democrats Pushing for Four More Seats

By Jacob Rubashkin

On April 21, Virginia voters will decide whether to implement a new congressional map that could hand Democrats an additional four seats in the Old Dominion. The referendum is the latest, but not the final, battle in a larger redistricting war set off by the Republican redraw of Texas last summer, and the outcome will help determine which party controls Congress next year.

Democrats have the upper hand in the referendum, given the commonwealth's partisan lean, but the outcome isn't a foregone conclusion. That hasn't stopped Democratic candidates from launching campaigns for districts that do not exist yet in anticipation that the new map will ultimately be approved.

Virginia's current delegation comprises six Democrats and five Republicans, with two competitive GOP-held seats and one competitive Democratic-held seat.

Under the proposed map, Democrats would be heavily favored in eight seats and favored in another two seats, while Republicans would be heavily favored in just one seat.

Virginia's Proposed Congressional Districts

2024 Presidential Results

DISTRICT	CURRENT MAP	PROPOSED MAP
1st	R+5	D+8
2nd	R+0	D+5
3rd	D+35	D+26
4th	D+33	D+16
5th	R+12	D+9
6th	R+24	D+3
7th	D+3	D+8
8th	D+49	D+18
9th	R+44	R+49
10th	D+8	D+12
11th	D+34	D+13

How It Plays Out

There is limited public polling of the referendum, and only one survey, sponsored by the Washington Post, actually presented respondents with the full, official language they will see on the ballot.

Courtesy McAuliffe Campaign

Dorothy McAuliffe

That poll, conducted March 26-31, found "yes" winning by 5 points, 52-47 percent. Other surveys with less rigorous methodologies have found leads of up to 9 points for "yes" or 8 points for "no." Democratic operatives are cautiously optimistic heading into the final weeks of the race but stress that either outcome is a possibility. "Virginia is a wild animal," said one national strategist, "and we probably gut it out but so much spending to be competitive does not feel great." A longtime Virginia operative concurred, saying "Democrats have the edge but it's going to be an education campaign and a slog."

Nationally, environmental signs point to a fired-up Democratic base. Democrats have shown up to vote in off-year and special elections across the country, leading to significant overperformances.

But a mid-April ballot measure election pulled together in 100 days is without precedent and incredibly difficult to model, leaving pollsters and operatives in both parties flying more blind than they would like. Early voting narrowly continues to outpace last year's gubernatorial race, and while the general expectation is that Election Day turnout will be lower as a result, nobody really knows what will happen on the 21st.

Pro-redrawing ads have largely hit on two main messages: that the redraw is necessary to push back against Republican gerrymanders elsewhere in the country, and that the proposed changes are temporary, meaning the state would revert to its bipartisan redistricting commission after the 2030 census. Former President Barack Obama features prominently in the advertising campaign. So does at least one former member of Virginia's bipartisan redistricting commission, as well as a slew of military veterans and law enforcement officers intended to lend nonpartisan credibility to the campaign.

Gov. Abigail Spanberger appears in one ad urging a "yes" vote, which hit the airwaves after some Democratic strategists grew concerned the newly elected Democrat wasn't doing enough to support the effort, which she had kept at arms length during the 2025 gubernatorial campaign.

Anti-redistricting ads have largely hit on good-government themes, highlighting the bipartisan commission process Virginia currently uses and the evenly divided delegation. "Richmond politicians," rather than Democrats, are the enemy, and some ads even use Obama and Spanberger as validators, highlighting their past comments decrying gerrymandering in an effort to peel off some Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents.

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Rob Wittman

Other ads, especially airing in Southwest Virginia and other more Republican areas, point to the increased dominance Northern Virginia voters would have over the delegation.

Dollars and Cents

Supporters of the new map have significantly outraised and outspent the ballot measure's opponents. Virginia law does not limit campaign finance donations, which has opened the floodgates to tens of millions of dollars with untraceable origins.

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The pro-redraw group, Virginians for Fair Elections, has raised nearly $50 million. House Majority Forward, a 501(c)4 nonprofit that does not disclose its own donors and is aligned with Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, contributed $29 million. The Fairness Project, a dark money group affiliated with organized labor, has chipped in another $11 million, and a George Soros-linked nonprofit has contributed $5 million.

The anti-redraw group, Virginians for Fair Maps, has raised just $17 million, though another anti-redraw group, Justice for Democracy, has raised an additional $5 million. Virginians for Fair Maps' funding comes almost exclusively through an affiliated nonprofit that does not disclose its donors. Justice for Democracy's primary funder is a Peter Thiel-linked group.

That fundraising advantage has translated to paid media, where pro-redraw groups have outspent the opposition, $37 million to $7 million, according to data from AdImpact. That disparity could narrow as Republicans begin to direct more money into the race — half of Fair Maps' war chest, $9 million, just appeared in the past three days, and House Speaker Mike Johnson is headlining an upcoming fundraiser for the effort. But Democrats will almost certainly have a significant overall financial advantage.

The Changes

The new map would essentially dismantle the seats of current 1st District Rep. Rob Wittman, 5th District Rep. John McGuire, and 6th District Rep. Ben Cline, while leaving 9th District Rep. Morgan Griffith largely unscathed. The new map makes less drastic, but still significant, changes to 2nd District Rep. Jen Kiggans' seat.

Democrats in the state legislature took advantage of fast-growing and increasingly Democratic Fairfax County, the most populous in the state, to bolster Democratic performance in Northern Virginia, splitting the county between five different districts (up from the current three). Other Democratic-trending suburban areas, including the Richmond area's Henrico County and Charlottesville's Albemarle County, take on starring roles elsewhere.

1st District. The proposed 1st is a successor to the old 7th District and would include roughly 80 percent of Democrat Eugene Vindman's current constituents. The new 1st would extend north into Fairfax County, and shed its western counties. Vice President Kamala Harris would have won by 7 points, an increase from her 3-point win in the 7th District. State Sen. Tara Durant is the most notable Republican candidate running against Vindman, along with retired Army Lt. Col. Douglas Ollivant, Army veteran Wave Washington, and accountant John Gray. Ollivant's home county would be drawn out of the new district.

2nd District. The proposed 2nd District is largely the same as its predecessor, though it trades a few critical voters with neighboring Rep. Bobby Scott's solid Democratic seat. Those swaps turn the 2nd from a district that voted for Donald Trump in 2024 by 0.2 percent into one that would have voted for Harris by 5 points. That puts pressure on Kiggans, who faces a likely rematch with her 2022 opponent, former Rep. Elaine Luria. Former state Secretary of Natural Resources Matt Strickler and physician/attorney Nila Devanath are also running but Luria is the favorite in the primary. No Republican won a

Courtesy Luria Campaign

Elaine Luria

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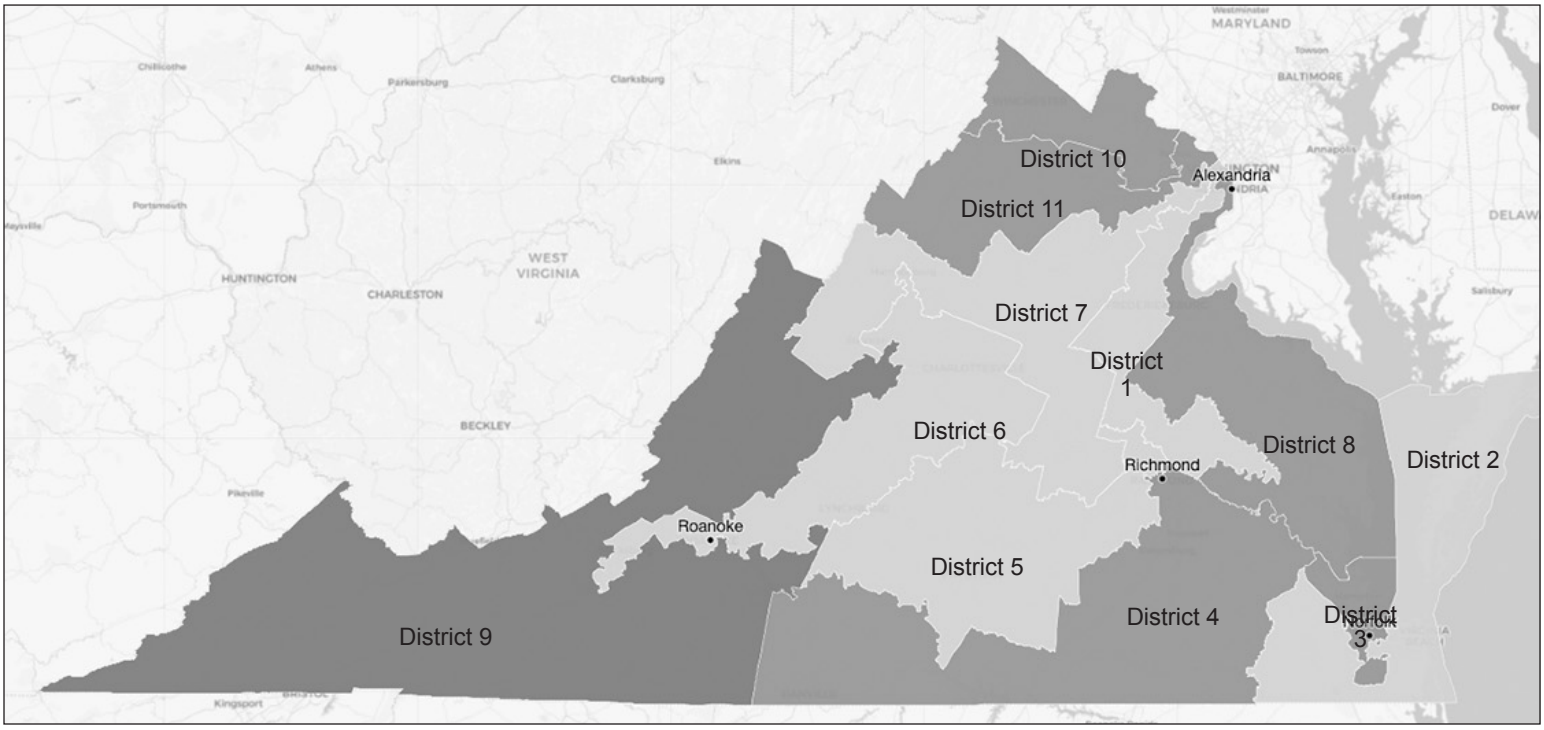
Virginia's Proposed Congressional Districts



Source: Virginia Public Access Project

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district Harris carried by more than 4 points in 2024, and the political environment is likely to be less favorable to Kiggans this year.

3rd District. Rep. Bobby Scott's Norfolk district is largely unchanged. It would have voted for Harris by 26 points.

4th District. Rep. Jennifer McClellan's district trades some of the city of Richmond and surrounding Henrico County to the 5th District in exchange for more rural counties along the North Carolina border. As a result, the 4th becomes less Democratic, shifting from a seat Harris won by 33 points to one she would have won by just 16 points — a large change but not enough to endanger the incumbent.

5th District. The proposed 5th remains anchored in Central Virginia but a plurality of its constituents are actually pulled from the current 1st District, in Henrico and Chesterfield counties. Another third are Democratic-leaning voters from the 4th District, and just 20 percent are currently represented by Rep. John McGuire. Harris would have won the new 5th by 8 points, compared to a 12-point Trump margin under the current lines.

Democrats have lined up behind Henrico County Attorney Shannon Taylor, though she's currently running against Wittman in the 1st District. It's not clear if McGuire would run here under the new lines.

6th District. The proposed 6th District cobbles together the Democratic portions of the old 5th and 6th Districts to create a new seat from whole cloth. The district is anchored by Charlottesville and surrounding Albemarle County but also includes the Democratic enclaves of Harrisonburg, Staunton and Roanoke. On paper, the proposed 6th is the most evenly divided seat on the map: Harris would have carried it by just 3 points.

Courtesy Macy Campaign

Beth Macy

A Democratic primary is brewing between Beth Macy, the author of *Dopesick* and other bestsellers, and former Rep. Tom Perriello, who is currently running in the 5th District but would move with Charlottesville to the 6th. A third candidate, Roanoke state Del. Sam Rasoul, could also run. Rasoul ran for the 6th District in 2008, and also placed second in the 2021 lieutenant governor primary, when he was backed by progressives such as Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Rasoul, who is Palestinian-American, is also a sharp critic of Israel, and his outspokenness has made some Democratic operatives concerned he could put this seat at risk if he is the nominee. Neither Rep. Ben Cline nor Rep. John McGuire would live in the new district.

7th District. The proposed 7th is a lobster-shaped district cobbled together from six different existing seats. The lobster's tail extends from Arlington south through Prince William and Fauquier counties, the body of the lobster comprises the rural western counties from the current 7th District, and one claw reaches west into the Blue Ridge Mountains while the other reaches west of Richmond.

Courtesy McClure Campaign

Adele McClure

Harris would have won the 7th by 8 points. With Vindman running elsewhere, a primary is taking shape between Fairfax state Del. Dan Helmer, who has run for Congress twice before, former Virginia First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe, an attorney whose husband Terry is a fixture of state and national Democratic politics, Arlington state Del. Adele McClure, and former federal prosecutor J.P. Cooney, who worked with Trump investigator Jack Smith. The field is still growing, as state Sen. Elizabeth Guzman of Prince William County and state Sen. Saddam Salim of Fairfax County appear poised to jump in.

8th District. Now a compact, Arlington and Alexandria district, the 8th would vastly expand on the new map, snaking southeast along the Potomac River to the Hampton Roads region and absorbing many of the voters currently represented by Republican Rob Wittman. While the current 8th voted for Harris by 51 points, the new district would have gone for her by a much narrower 17 points. That means it should still elect a Democrat, but with so many new constituents, incumbent Don Beyer may need to watch his back in a primary. Former Alexandria city councilman Mo Seifeldein is his most notable challenger, but others could emerge.

9th District. The only remaining GOP-friendly district on the new map, the 9th would still be a Southwest Virginia seat nestled in between West Virginia and North Carolina, though it would extend further north up the West Virginia border. GOP Rep. Morgan Griffith could face a primary challenge from colleague Ben Cline, but would begin as a heavy favorite.

10th District. The 10th's center of gravity shifts northwest under the new map, now extending through Winchester County, but it retains its core of Loudoun County, which is good news for Rep. Suhas Subramanyam. The 10th would also pick up a few more Democratic voters: Harris would have won the new seat by 12 points, as opposed to 8 points under the current lines. That won't change what should be a straightforward re-election for Subramanyam this cycle but could help insulate him in more difficult environments. Teacher and two-time state legislative candidate Julie Perry is the most notable Republican.

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Suhas Subramanyam

11th District. The newest member of the delegation, Democrat James Walkinshaw, would see his district significantly altered under the new map, with roughly 50 percent new constituents. His current, compact Fairfax district would instead stretch westward to the Shenandoah Valley and the West Virginia border, taking in rural, Republican-leaning counties along the way. Those changes would turn a Harris +34 district into a Harris +13 seat. That's not a big enough swing to make Walkinshaw vulnerable in a general election, but so many new constituents could expose him to some primary risk from a strong Prince William County candidate — especially because he's never had to run in a real primary before, only a firehouse special election primary last year. Retired Space Force Col. Bree Fram is running against him in the primary; she was pushed out of the military last year due to Trump's ban on transgender servicemembers. IE

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Donald Trump has won the 3rd all three times he's appeared on the ballot, but by small margins: 4 points in 2024, by a fraction of a percent in 2020, and by 3 points in 2016. In the 2022 Senate race, Republican incumbent Chuck Grassley carried the district by just 2 points, 51-49 percent, while winning statewide by 12 points. And in 2020, Sen. Joni Ernst won the 3rd by a fraction of a percent while winning statewide by 7 points.

In 2022, the 3rd voted for Democratic candidates for attorney general and treasurer by 9 points each. And in the state auditor race, the only contest Democrats won in 2022, the 3rd voted for Democrat Rob Sand by 12 points. Sand is the party's 2026 gubernatorial nominee.

Polk is the only Democratic-leaning county in the district — Harris won it by 11 points in 2024 while losing the other 20 counties. Dallas is also relatively evenly divided and the closest thing to a bellwether. In 2024, Trump won Dallas by 5 points, but in 2020 he won it by just 2 points.

Dallas is also the fastest-growing county in Iowa and was the fourth-fastest growing in America from 2010 to 2020.

Overall, the 3rd has a Baseline of D+0.9, a score still inflated by Iowa Democrats' strong 2018 performances.

The Republican Incumbent

Nunn, 46, is in his second term representing the 3rd, and previously served eight years in the state legislature. The central Iowa native graduated from Drake University in 2002 and also has two master's degrees from Air University in Alabama (2004 and 2020) and a master's in international relations and national security from Cambridge University (2007).

Nunn served in the Air Force as an airborne intelligence officer from 2003 to 2008 and since then has served in the Iowa National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. He also served in military and civilian cybersecurity positions at the National Security Council and Office of the Director of National Intelligence during the Obama administration. He was promoted to full colonel in 2024.

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Zach Nunn

Nunn won his first state House race in 2014, defeating a Democratic incumbent; four years later he succeeded a popular Democratic state senator in a swing district east of Des Moines.

He was elected to Congress in 2022, first winning an expensive GOP primary with 66 percent of the vote against a Ted Cruz-endorsed opponent and then defeating Democratic Rep. Cindy Axne by 0.6 percent in one of the closest House races of the cycle. In that contest, Republicans focused on a sluggish economy under President Biden, and allegations of improper stock trades against Axne.

In 2024, Nunn was a top target for national Democrats, who recruited Army veteran and longtime Democratic operative Lanon Baccam to run. While Baccam was a capable fundraiser and ran a point ahead of Harris, Nunn prevailed, 52-48 percent.

In Congress, Nunn sits on the Financial Services and Agriculture committees, as well as the special committee on China. He has largely voted the party line this Congress, supporting the GOP-authored reconciliation bill last summer and Trump's tariffs on Canada, and voting against the Iran war powers resolution. On at least two instances Nunn has broken ranks with GOP leadership, joining a handful of other Republicans who voted to extend premium Affordable Care Act subsidies, and to nullify Trump's executive order ending collective bargaining for federal employees.

Nunn's campaign team includes media consultant Annie Kelly Kuhle of FP1 Strategies, pollster Erik Iverson of Peak Insights, Redwave Communications for direct mail, and Targeted Victory for digital.

The Democratic Challenger

Initially, the Democratic primary looked like a bitter contest between state Sen. Sarah Trone Garriott and state House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst. The two women represent overlapping areas and know each other personally, and both deployed sharp elbows early in the race.

Courtesy Garriott Campaign

Sarah Trone Garriott

But Konfrst dropped out in January after trailing in fundraising, leaving Trone Garriott as the nominee.

Trone Garriott, 47, is in her third term as a state senator and represents parts of Dallas County.

A Minnesota native, Trone Garriott graduated from the College of St. Scholastica in 1999. After a year in Americorps in New Mexico, and a year working as an advocacy specialist for sexual assault victims in Duluth, Trone Garriott went to Harvard Divinity School, graduating with a master's in theological studies in 2003. From there, Trone Garriott attended seminary at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, earning a masters in divinity in 2008, when she was also ordained a minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (a somewhat confusingly named mainline church).

Trone Garriott worked as a pastor in Virginia from 2008 to 2013 before moving to a church in the Des Moines region. Since 2017, she has worked as an interfaith engagement coordinator at the Des Moines Area Religious Council.

In 2020, Trone Garriott challenged state Senate President Charles Schneider for his Polk and Dallas County district, which had trended toward Democrats during the 2010s. He retired rather than seek re-election, and Trone Garriott, who won a three-way Democratic primary with 48 percent, won a narrow general election victory, by 0.4 points in a district Biden carried by 12 points at the top of the ticket.

In 2022, Trone Garriott's seat was redrawn to be entirely within Dallas County, requiring her to move from Polk County and run in a less Democratic-friendly seat. In that race, she defeated state Senate President Jake Chapman by 3 points. In 2024, she won her closest race yet, finishing just 29 votes (0.07 percent) ahead of her GOP opponent as Trump carried her state Senate district by 4 points.

In the state Senate, Trone Garriott received a 100 percent lifetime

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rating from the AFL-CIO in 2024 and a 14 percent lifetime rating from the Club for Growth in 2024.

Her campaign team includes media consultant Travis Lowe of Three Point Media, pollster Matt Canter of Global Strategy Group, and direct mail consultant Norm Sterzenbach of GPS Impact.

How It Plays Out

Democrats trained much of their fire on Nunn's abortion politics in the 2022 and 2024 campaigns, but party strategists say this year will be different, with a greater focus instead on affordability and healthcare.

The most-aired Democratic ads of 2022 and 2024 all attacked Nunn for raising his hand during a primary debate when asked if he supported an absolute ban on abortion with no exceptions. (At other times Nunn has said he supports exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother.)

But this cycle, it will be Nunn's votes on the GOP reconciliation bill and tariff approval that feature most heavily, say Democratic operatives, who hope that an unpopular president in the White House and a GOP House majority will finally take some of the shine off of Nunn.

In past cycles, Democrats have struggled to knock Nunn off his footing or convince voters he was anything other than an "uncontroversial" clean-cut veteran. Attempts to highlight past embarrassing moments fell flat.

"It's easier to be a 'moderate' with a Democrat in the White House," said one Democratic consultant not working on the race. "He was a talented guy," said another Iowa Democrat, "but now he just feels like a politician."

In particular, Democrats have already highlighted rising costs as well as looming clinic closures in Ottumwa that the party has tied to the Big Beautiful Bill's Medicaid cuts. A Democratic outside group has spent nearly $2 million on TV ads since August tying Nunn to high prices.

At least two Democratic polls and one Republican poll from last fall found Nunn's image rating 10 points underwater; in 2024, private and public polling largely showed him at breakeven.

Republicans have begun to hit Trone Garriott on past comments she has made and votes she has taken in the state legislature to paint her as out of step with the district on social issues.

Trone Garriott voted along with all other Democrats in the state Senate against requiring transgender students to use bathrooms corresponding with their biological sex, and against restricting women's and girls sports teams to those born female.

Republicans have also pointed to Trone Garriott's speeches and sermons on Christian nationalism and evangelicalism, when she has decried the rise of evangelicalism that centers "white, masculine power, violence over and against," and warned of "religion and political violence showing up more and more in our public spaces." And GOP operatives are still combing through Trone Garriott's many public speeches for more soundbites to highlight.

The goal will be to turn Trone Garriott's biggest strength — her relatability as a pastor — into a weakness by painting her as too radical for Iowa. "Visually, she's going to be good and her TV ads are going to be nice," said one Nunn ally, "but the idea that she's going to be moderate because she's a pastor is going to be debunked."

Democrats have not elected a white Protestant minister to Congress since Bob Edgar of Pennsylvania in the 1980s.

Nunn and his allies will also look to highlight his independence from Trump and the GOP brand where he can, pointing to his vote on the ACA subsidies and vocal advocacy for year-round ethanol fuel availability. And Republicans remain optimistic that the economy will

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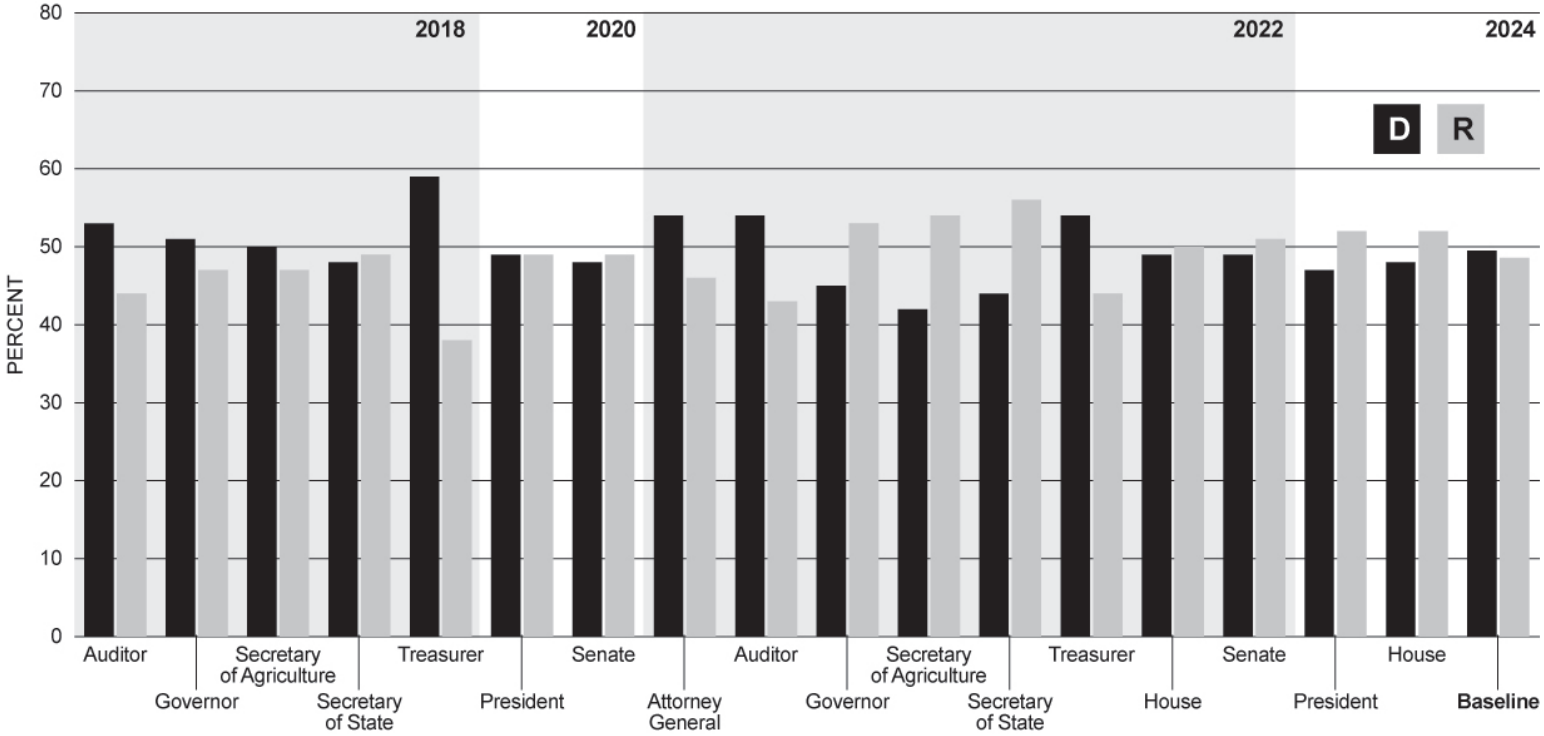
Statewide Election Results for Iowa's 3rd District



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improve before voters begin to tune into the elections this fall, depriving Democrats of their most salient talking point.

Nunn ended 2025 with a $2 million to $850,000 cash-on-hand advantage over Trone Garriott, but the Democrat is making up ground after clearing the primary. She reported raising nearly $1.7 million over the first three months of the year. Nunn raised half that, $835,000, in the same time, though he also raised $350,000 into a joint fundraising committee.

The Des Moines media market dominates the district, though there are small pieces of Ottumwa and Omaha at the east and west reaches, respectively. Des Moines is a relatively inexpensive market, which could encourage a multitude of outside groups to engage with the race.

It All Comes Down to Turnout

Democratic strategists are optimistic that Sand's gubernatorial campaign at the top of the ticket will boost all of their downballot candidates, thanks to the auditor's potential appeal among independents and soft Republicans, as well as his ample war chest. Sand, who is polling competitively statewide, will almost certainly win the 3rd District. To win statewide, he will need to win the 3rd by close to double digits.

Sand's prolific fundraising and access to even more money from his wealthy in-laws also means Iowa Democrats will have their first fully funded and engaged coordinated campaign in eight years, since the 2018 midterm elections. (While plenty of money flowed to the state in 2020, Democrats dramatically scaled back their in-person campaigning due to the pandemic, a decision some strategists still blame for Ernst's larger-than-expected win.)

Trone Garriott could also benefit from increased attention from prospective 2028 presidential candidates, who are still beginning to pop up in Iowa despite the Hawkeye State losing its first-in-the-nation status among Democrats. She recently held an event with Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin.

The additional attention and Sand's resources could help Democrats solve their turnout problem in Polk County, where Democrats have turned out at a lower rate than Republicans for several cycles. The GOP enjoyed a 2.5 percent advantage in 2020, which grew to 4.4 percent in 2022 and 3.8 percent in 2024.

Democrats also have a growing turnout problem in Dallas County that a well-funded coordinated campaign may target. In 2020, Democratic turnout actually outpaced Republican turnout by 0.4 percent, but that flipped to a GOP advantage of 0.6 percent in 2022 and 1.5 percent in 2024.

In 2018, the GOP turnout advantage in Polk County was just 0.7 percent, while Democrats had a 3.8 percent advantage in Dallas County.

There's also a competitive Senate race taking place in Iowa this year. GOP Rep. Ashley Hinson will face either state Sen. Zach Wahls or state Rep. Josh Turek in a race that Republicans hope will provide Nunn his own tailwind. While national and Iowa Republicans are increasingly concerned about the gubernatorial race, they retain more confidence in Hinson and her ability to keep the Senate seat in GOP hands.

But while Hinson might do better than the GOP gubernatorial nominee, she'll need to be winning statewide by double digits to carry the 3rd District. There's been no public polling of the Senate race so far, but the main Senate GOP super PAC, Senate Leadership Fund, recently announced an initial $29 million ad reservation for the fall.

The Bottom Line

Democrats need a net gain of just three seats to win back the House majority, a threshold the party can reach without flipping Iowa's 3rd District. But the race will be a good test for whether otherwise uncontroversial or rank-and-file Republican incumbents in competitive districts will be able to stand up to a poor national environment, or get washed away in a growing Democratic wave. IE

Inside Elections Podcast

Episode 68: Jacob, Erin Covey of The Cook Political Report and Kirk Bado of National Journal's Hotline draft the best and most memorable campaign TV ads of the 21st century.

Episode 67: Nathan, Jacob and Mary Ellen McIntire of Roll Call break down the fight for the House majority including rating changes in a dozen races.

Episode 66: Nathan, Jacob and Shia Kapos of Politico's Illinois Playbook previewed the Illinois races including top Democratic primaries where the new nominee will be a likely Member of Congress.

2026 Governor Ratings

Toss-up (4D)	
KS Open (Kelly, D)	WI Open (Evers, D)
MI Open (Whitmer, D)	Hobbs (D-Ariz.)
Tilt Democratic	**Tilt Republican (2R)**
	GA Open (Kemp, R)
	Lombardo (R-Nev.)
Lean Democratic	**Lean Republican (1R)**
	IA Open (Reynolds, R)
Likely Democratic (5D)	**Likely Republican (1R)**
ME Open (Mills, D)	OH Open (DeWine, R)
NM Open (Lujan-Grisham, D)	
MN Open (Walz, DFL)	
Hochul (D-N.Y.)	
Shapiro (D-Penn.)	
Solid Democratic (9D)	**Solid Republican (14R)**
CA Open (Newsom, D)	AK Open (Dunleavy, R)
CO Open (Polis, D)	AL Open (Ivey, R)
Green (D-Hawaii)	FL Open (DeSantis, R)
Healey (D-Mass.)	OK Open (Stitt, R)
Kotek (D-Ore.)	SC Open (McMaster, R)
Lamont (D-Ct.)	TN Open (Lee, R)
McKee (D-R.I.)	WY Open (Gordon, R)
Moore (D-Md.)	Abbott (R-Texas)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)	Ayotte (R-N.H.)
	Huckabee Sanders (R-Ark.)
	Little (R-Idaho)
	Pillen (R-Neb.)
	Rhoden (R-S.D.)
	Scott (R-Vt.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*