



# 119th United States Congress

## *2026 Vote Record Analysis*



# Index

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| About the Institute for Legislative Analysis .....     | Page 1 |
| The Research Process Behind the 2026 Report .....      | Page 1 |
| Methodological Framework .....                         | Page 2 |
| The Three-Year Trendline: FY 2023-2025 .....           | Page 2 |
| Top Finding No. 1 .....                                | Page 3 |
| Top Finding No. 2 .....                                | Page 4 |
| Top Finding No. 3 .....                                | Page 5 |
| Member-Level Interpretation .....                      | Page 6 |
| What the Findings Suggest About Congress in 2026 ..... | Page 7 |
| Conclusion .....                                       | Page 8 |

## About the Institute for Legislative Analysis

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The Institute for Legislative Analysis (ILA) is a national public policy research and data hub focused on tracking lawmaker ideology through recorded votes. The ILA annually produces the most comprehensive ideological dataset on the U.S. Congress, with its reports designed to look past rhetoric, branding, and campaign messaging and focus on something more concrete: how lawmakers actually voted on substantive policy questions.

The Limited Government Index (LGI) is the flagship product of the ILA. Public debate constantly uses labels such as conservative, progressive, populist, nationalist, or MAGA as though their meaning is fixed. In reality, those labels shift over time as party priorities, presidential agendas, and media narratives change. The LGI and its methodology is meant to deal with that by keeping the measuring standard the same even when the language around the vote changes.

The following report expands on the main notes and score trends from the forthcoming 2026 ILA voting record release. It explains how the research was structured, highlights the biggest findings, and looks at what those findings suggest about the ideological direction of Congress in the period leading into and immediately following the 2024 election cycle.

## The Research Process Behind the 2026 Report

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The 2026 ILA report evaluates every substantive vote cast by members of Congress during calendar year 2025. The study covers January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025 and includes both chambers. ILA researchers identified 130 Senate roll calls and 175 House roll calls that met the project's standards for inclusion, for a total of 305 scored votes and 89,125 individual votes cast across 535 lawmakers.

The ILA deployed a disciplined research process to ensure the integrity of lawmaker ideological mapping. The research team screened for votes that involved substantive policy content, excluded duplicative votes that were identical in both policy meaning and outcome, and left out measures whose structure would have made ideological interpretation unusually noisy. For example, votes pertaining to confirmations or the renaming of a post office were not included. When lawmakers from opposite ideological camps took the same position for very different reasons, ILA also subdivided the roll call so the final score reflected the underlying policy rationale rather than a misleading coalition effect.

## Methodological Framework

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As previously noted, ILA's scoring system is built around a fixed limited-government and constitutional standard rather than a changing partisan benchmark. Each member receives a score on a 0-to-100 scale. A score of 100 represents the strongest alignment with reduced federal spending, narrower regulatory power, a smaller scope of government, and a lock-step adherence to constitutional structure and civil-liberties protections. A score of 0 reflects the opposite. The point of the scale is not to mirror partisan branding. It is to preserve a consistent baseline against which party behavior can be measured over time.

To add more context, ILA also applies a simple weighting system ranging from 1 to 3 so that votes with greater significance for policy direction or internal party ideology carry more weight in the overall score. The report also categorizes votes into ten policy domains: tax and fiscal policy, education, healthcare, law and scope of government, individual liberties, energy and environment, local and national security, regulations, free speech and elections, and workforce and labor. That layered approach lets the report speak both to overall ideology and to issue-specific patterns.

This methodology is especially useful at a time when polarization alone no longer tells the whole story. Long-run congressional research has documented the rise of party-line voting and the disappearance of meaningful ideological overlap between the parties. Against that backdrop, ILA's value is in showing how coalitions move inside an already polarized system - especially on questions such as trade, surveillance, fiscal restraint, and executive accountability that do not always line up neatly with older left-right assumptions.

## The Three-Year Trendline: FY 2023-2025

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This report encompasses a three-year voting period beginning on January 1, 2023 and concluding on December 31, 2025. The 2023-2025 series gives more than an annual snapshot; it captures a meaningful political transition. The period includes a pre-election governing year, the 2024 election cycle itself, and then the first full governing year after the 2024 election, when a new administration and congressional majority could pursue a revised agenda.

That matters because ideology is often easiest to see when parties are actually trying to govern. During campaign years, the focus is often on coalition maintenance and message discipline. In a governing year, the pressure shifts toward concrete implementation. That helps explain why the ILA data do not show a simple, linear move toward either "more conservative" or "more moderate" behavior. Instead, the data show selective movement on particular issue clusters, with trade, surveillance, spending restraint, and accountability measures all playing an outsized role in reshaping how members score on the limited-government scale.

## **Top Finding No. 1: The Republican high-score cohort has been cut in half**

The clearest development in the three-year data is the drop in the number of Republicans scoring above a 90 percent on the Limited Government Index (ILA scale). In 2023, 63 Republicans cleared that threshold. In 2024, the number fell to 39. In 2025, it fell again to 27. That means the share of Republicans in the most hard-line constitutionalist and limited-government tier was cut by more than half in just two years.

That does not necessarily mean the Republican conference simply moved in a uniformly statist direction. The pattern is more specific than that. ILA's issue-by-issue scoring suggests that certain questions on which limited-government traditionalists used to hold the party's center of gravity - especially trade, surveillance, and some accountability-related disputes - now produce different coalitional alignments. Where earlier Republican orthodoxy often emphasized free trade and skepticism toward broad industrial policy, a more populist and nationalist governing style appears to have normalized a wider use of tariffs and more situational departures from older constitutional and civil-libertarian instincts.

One useful example is Sen. Josh Hawley's tariff amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility Act in 2023. Senate records show that Hawley amendment no. 93, which would have imposed additional duties on imports from the People's Republic of China until bilateral trade reached balance, was rejected by a vote of 17 yeas to 81 nays on June 1, 2023. On that vote, 31 Republicans opposed the tariff, taking the the limited government and free trade position, while 17 Republicans took the protectionist position.

In 2025, multiple roll call votes were taken in the Senate pertaining to increased tariff rates imposed on China, Canada and Brazil. The votes reveal a seismic shift in ideology, with only 5 Republicans taking the limited government and free trade position, and now 47 Republicans supporting the protectionist position. In ILA's view, this is one of the clearest signs that the party's internal baseline is changing.

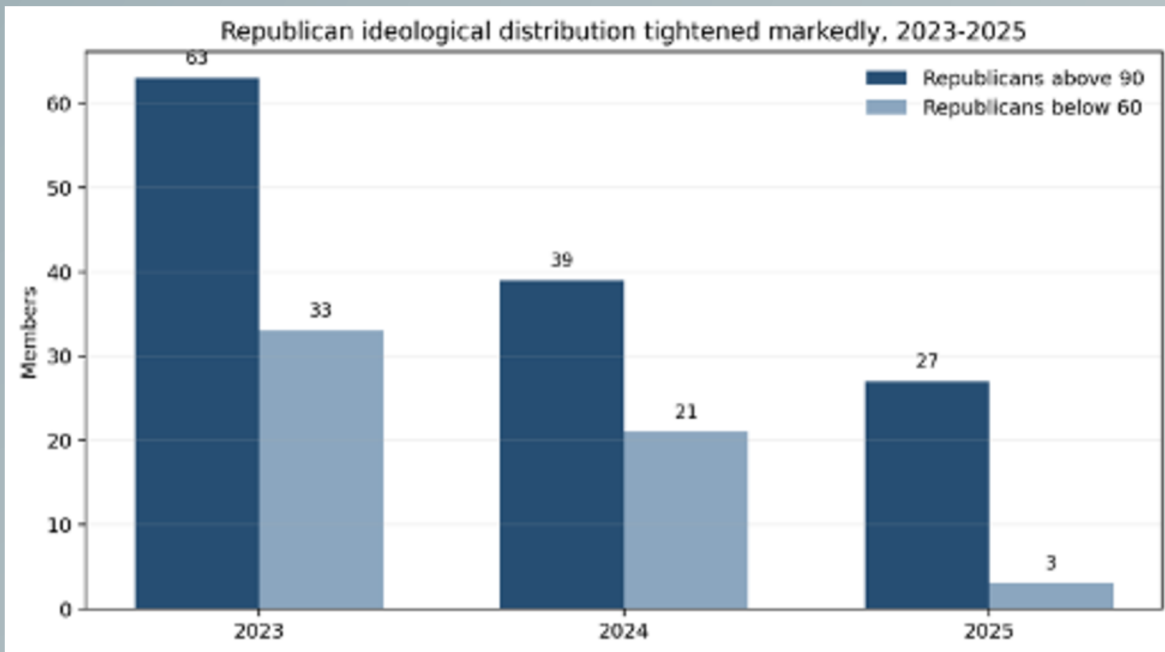


Figure 1. The hard-core limited government and constitutionalist wing of the Republican caucus shrank sharply, while the low-scoring moderate bloc nearly disappeared.

## Top Finding No. 2: Moderate Republicans moved upward even as the top tier shrank

A second and equally important finding is that the Republican conference tightened from both ends. While fewer members occupied the 90 percent-plus tier, the number of Republicans scoring below 60 percent also fell dramatically - from 33 in 2023 to 21 in 2024 and just 3 in 2025. This data reveals the party did not simply drift downward on the ILA scale. It compressed toward a different center of gravity.

That distinction matters because it points to internal consolidation, not ideological collapse. Some of the most moderate Republicans began voting more consistently for spending restraint and other limited-government measures, even as members at the libertarian or constitutional-maximalist end of the scale lost ground relative to prior years. The conference therefore appears more internally unified than it did two years earlier, but unified around a somewhat different mix of priorities.

Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY) offers a useful case study. In 2023, Lawler opposed most all Republican-led fiscal restraint measures. According to the three-year ILA trendline, Lawler moved from 46.83 in 2023 to 56.03 in 2024 and then to 64.14 in 2025. The shift stands out because it suggests movement not in rhetoric but in voting behavior. The House Clerk's record shows that the Rescissions Act passed the House on June 12, 2025 by a 214-212 vote, with Republicans – including Lawler – providing all 214 yeas. For ILA, support for measures of this kind helps explain why previously moderate Republicans posted higher scores in 2025 than in either of the preceding two years.

This finding complicates the usual media narrative about intra-party betrayal or softness. A conference can lose some of its purest limited-government members at the top of the scale while also becoming harder to distinguish from itself at the median. In that sense, the Republican story in the ILA data is one of re-sorting and consolidation, not simple dilution.

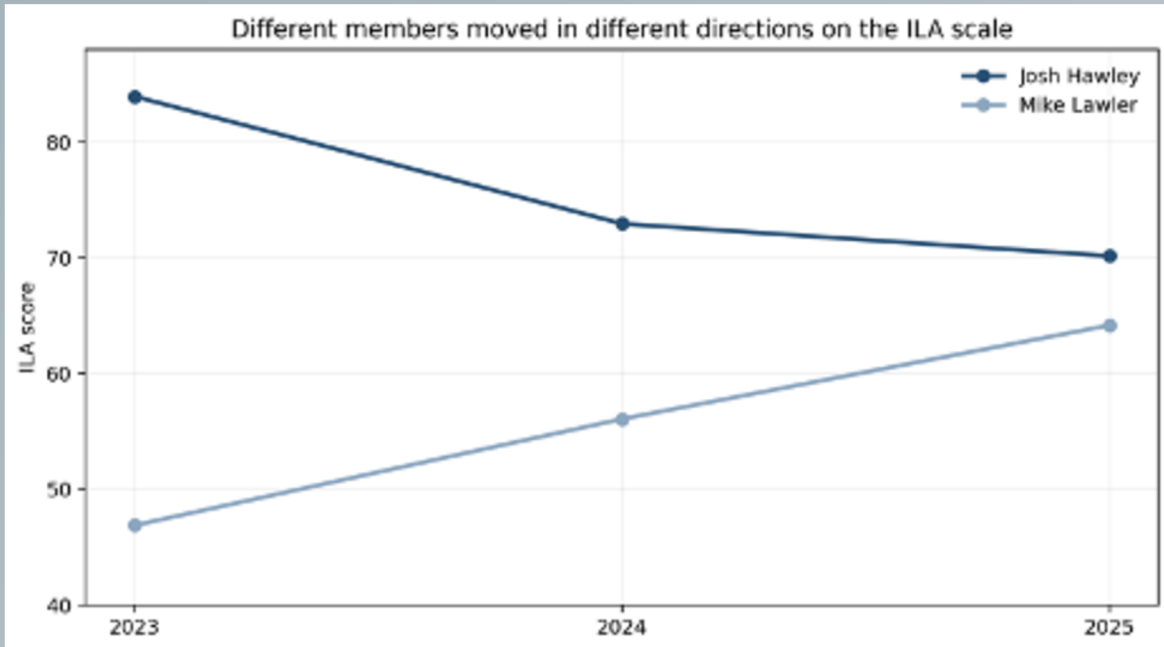


Figure 2. Lawler and Hawley illustrate two different forms of movement on the ILA scale: one upward from the moderate wing, the other downward from a once more traditionally limited-government profile.

### Top Finding No. 3: Democrats remain more philosophically unified, but less compressed than before

ILA's third major finding is that Democrats continue to be far more philosophically unified than Republicans when evaluated against a limited-government baseline. In 2025, the average Democratic score was 10.31, compared with 79.62 for Republicans. On the ILA scale, that means Democrats remain clustered much closer to one another near the low end, while Republicans still span a wider range of positions.

At the same time, the Democratic caucus was somewhat less compressed in 2025 than in prior years. In 2023, the average Democratic score stood at 7.52. By 2025 it had risen to 10.31. An even clearer indicator is the number of Democrats scoring above 10 percent. That figure rose from 28 in 2023 to 71 in 2024 and then to 99 in 2025. The data shows Democrats remained more united than Republicans, but a larger share of the caucus still moved modestly upward on the ILA scale.

That does not mean Democrats are becoming a limited-government party in any broad sense. Instead, it suggests slightly more dispersion inside the caucus. Broader congressional scholarship helps place this in perspective. Historical party-unity data compiled in Brookings' Vital Statistics define party-unity votes as roll calls on which a majority of voting Democrats opposed a majority of voting Republicans, and related Brookings analysis has argued that ideological overlap between the parties has largely disappeared. ILA's findings fit within that broader polarized environment, but they add a more granular point: even inside highly sorted parties, meaningful movement can still happen within each coalition's bounds.

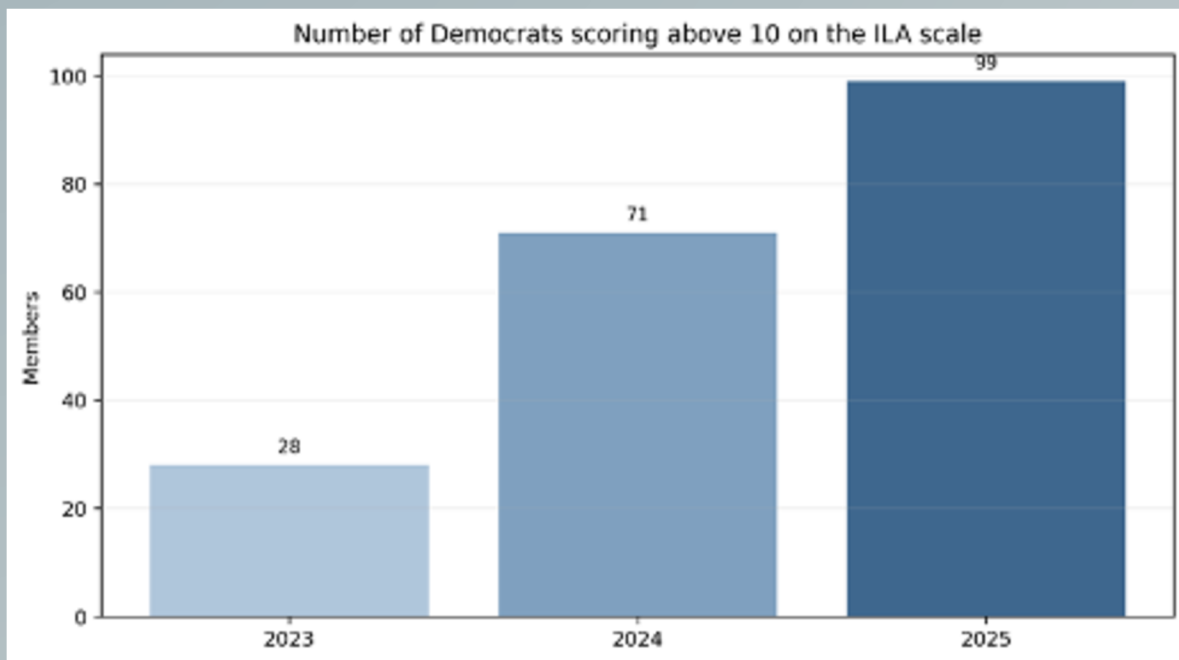


Figure 3. Democrats remained clustered near the low end of the ILA scale, but the number exceeding 10 percent rose sharply over the three-year period.

## Member-Level Interpretation: party movement is often mistaken for personal ideological change

One of the most useful insights in the ILA data is that public commentary often mistakes changes in the party around a member for changes in the member himself or herself. Social media criticism often treats lawmakers as though they have suddenly become establishment figures, sellouts, or “RINOs” whenever they appear less aligned with a newly dominant faction. But the ILA scores suggest that, in some prominent cases, the underlying lawmaker is fairly stable while the party baseline has moved.

Marjorie Taylor Greene and Thomas Massie are good examples. Greene scored 95.87 in 2023, 95.14 in 2024, and 93.18 in 2025. Massie scored 93.60 in 2023, 91.84 in

2024, and 93.62 in 2025. Those are small fluctuations within a narrow band. Whatever one makes of their rhetoric or public positioning, their ILA profiles do not support the claim that either lawmaker underwent a major ideological transformation over the period studied.

By contrast, Josh Hawley's score shows a clearer directional shift: 83.93 in 2023, 72.92 in 2024, and 70.13 in 2025. That decline matters because it lines up with a broader movement inside the party toward more populist and nationalist policy preferences, particularly where trade and state power intersect. The contrast between the Greene-Massie stability pattern and the Hawley trajectory helps clarify an important point: some individual members stay largely where they have always been, while the operative center of the party moves around them.

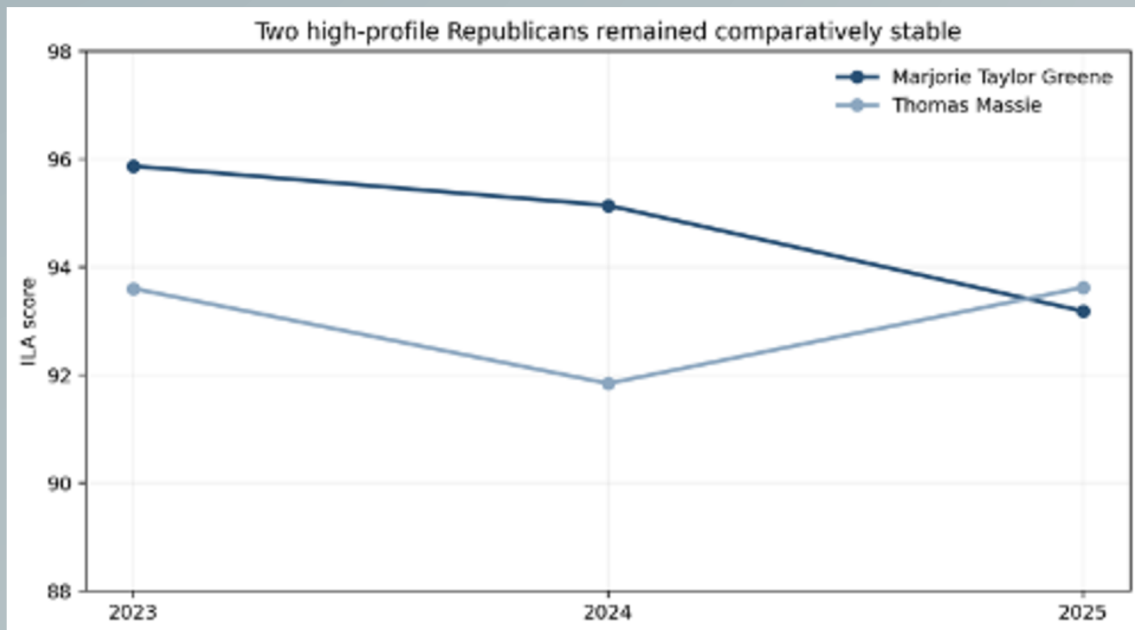


Figure 4. Greene and Massie remained within a relatively stable high-scoring band across the three-year period.

## What the findings suggest about Congress in 2026

Taken together, the ILA findings describe a Congress in which polarization is still real but no longer tells the whole story by itself. The deeper story is the internal restructuring of party coalitions. Republicans appear more unified than they were in 2023, yet that unity is not built around exactly the same limited-government package that once defined the conference. Democrats remain more tightly clustered against the ILA baseline, yet even they show signs of mild widening within the caucus.

For analysts, advocates, and lawmakers themselves, the main implication is straightforward: ideological language should be used with much greater precision. Terms such as conservative, moderate, populist, or constitutionalist

cannot be evaluated credibly without reference to actual voting behavior and a fixed analytical standard. ILA's methodology is useful because it resists the temptation to redefine the measuring stick every time party messaging changes.

The report also underscores the value of breaking issues apart rather than relying solely on one-dimensional ideological labels. A lawmaker may remain strongly limited-government on spending or regulatory issues while diverging sharply on trade or surveillance. Another may move upward overall because fiscal questions dominate the scorecard even while remaining mixed elsewhere. That complexity is not a flaw in the data; it is exactly what rigorous vote analysis is meant to capture.

## Conclusion

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The headline conclusion from the 2026 ILA congressional voting record is that important ideological shifts are underway, but they are unfolding in a more nuanced pattern than either partisan branding or social media criticism usually acknowledges. The top Republican tier of limited-government purists has shrunk substantially. At the same time, the moderate Republican bloc has also shrunk, pointing to movement toward a tighter but differently structured party center. Democrats remain substantially more unified against the ILA benchmark, though less compressed than they were two years ago.

Overall, the three-year evidence points to a Congress where the strongest story is coalition re-sorting. Some members remain highly consistent across time. Others move meaningfully as new policy agendas and issue emphases reshape what party leadership and activist bases reward. The result is not ideological stasis, but it is not random volatility either. It is measurable change, and ILA's vote-based framework is designed to capture it.

Detailed vote descriptions and member-level records are available through [limitedgov.org](https://limitedgov.org). For the current release cycle, the underlying data are also being made available in exportable CSV and Excel formats, making it easier for researchers, journalists, advocates, and policy analysts to test the patterns highlighted in this report for themselves.



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