

Can Trump cancel the midterms?

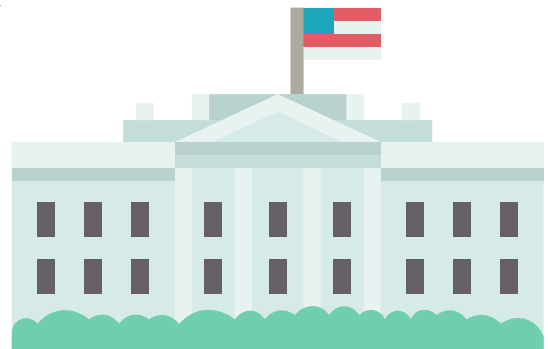
In a recent meeting with House Republicans, Trump floated the idea of cancelling the midterms. Senior democrats recently met to wargame a Trump attempt to illegitimize the midterms. The question of whether Trump can cancel the midterm elections is no longer hypothetical enough to ignore.

What Trump *has* done:

Erosion of public trust: Nearly a third of Americans still believe 2020 was fraudulent, and only 23% are confident the upcoming midterms will be free of “rigging.” This is likely due to Trump’s baseless and continued claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

In July 2026, Trump removed all members of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission — created after the 2000 election to certify voting tech, distribute security funding, and train officials — leaving it without a quorum to act. Professor Toby James of the University of East Anglia, describes this move as raising “concern that the executive is seeking to interfere in elections.”

Trump has issued two executive orders in an attempt to reshape federal elections — a March 2025 order requiring proof of citizenship to register, and a March 2026 order letting DHS and USPS restrict who receives mail ballots. Courts blocked both, ruling that only Congress and the states can set election rules.



Reasons to worry:

Elections are rarely cancelled outright. More often, they are quietly undermined. For example, Hungary saw civil society and press freedom collapse over two decades while elections never stopped. In fact, electoral autocracies are the most common regime type in the world. In fact according to a report from international research database vDem, in 2025 the U.S. has slid from a liberal democracy to an electoral democracy.

The Supreme Court has been removing democratic guardrails. In *Trump v. Slaughter*, the Court voted 6–3 to overrule a 90-year precedent that prevented the president from firing the heads of independent agencies at will. The reasoning follows “unitary executive theory”: anyone wielding executive power answers to the president alone. When Trump purged the Election Assistance Commission in July, the White House cited the *Slaughter* decision by name as its authority. A body originally designed to be a nonpartisan referee of elections now serves at the president's pleasure.

Reasons for hope:

Instead of renouncing democracy, autocrats often practice duplicity: holding elections while hollowing out what makes them work. That duplicity is a vulnerability — maintaining the appearance of democracy keeps Trump within reach of citizens, courts, and journalists.

Courts have repeatedly acted on that autocratic vulnerability. Judges have already blocked both of Trump's election-related executive orders, and more broadly, the administration has now been sued more than 750 times, with courts halting its policies in over 150 cases.

In 2020, Trump suggested delaying the election over COVID. This never happened. Instead, the episode triggered a wave of legal review that left courts and election offices better prepared than they were four years ago to defend American elections. Generally, the Supreme Court has empowered an imperial presidency. However, history tells us that they will not allow infringement on elections.

What can be done?

1. Support independent journalism — media control is often the first step in a democracy's slide toward electoral autocracy, used in 73% of currently autocratizing countries.
2. Vote. Apathy is easier to engineer than suppression. Hungary proved it: despite his rigging of the playing field, huge turnout was enough to remove Orbán from power. Landslide elections are much harder to steal than narrow victories, as we saw in Bush v Gore.
3. Sign up to be an election monitor. Help make sure eligible voters aren't turned away at the polls. As thousands of anti-voter restrictions are being proposed, this nonpartisan work is more important than ever. Go to protectthevote.net and sign up!
4. Support watchdog organizations challenging executive overreach. The ACLU, Brennan Center for Justice, and a coalition of civil rights groups sued over the March 2025 proof-of-citizenship requirement, and a federal court permanently blocked it.

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