The United States in 2026: condition and resilience

Nevo Goor The Governance Atlas, a project of the World Academy August 2026

A reading of where things stand and what can still be turned back — not a forecast of the November midterms, and not a risk score.



The seat of the legislature — the branch whose constraint on executive power sits at the centre of this reading.

THE READING AT A GLANCE

A democracy under acute institutional stress — no hard floor breached, and the damage still looks reversible.

17%	**−10%**	**12**
Trust in the federal government — near the lowest ever measured	Federal civilian workforce, cut over 2025 by executive action	Governance functions checked, from rights to reserves — none past a hard floor

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

What this reading is

I built the Governance Atlas to read the state of a democracy one country at a time, and I want to use it here on the United States as it stands in the summer of 2026. Before anything else, I want to be clear about what this is, because the timing invites people to read it as something it is not.

This is a reading of current condition and resilience. It is a structured analytical opinion, built only on public indicators, at an early (Stage 0) validation status, and every number here traces back to a named source. If you came for a prediction, I do not have one for you. If you want to see where the system is strong, where it is under strain, and what can still be turned back, that is exactly what I built this to show.

WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT IS NOT
• A structured reading of condition and resilience • Built only on public indicators • Every figure traceable to a named source	• A forecast of the November midterms • A prediction of who will win • A number placed on collapse or recovery

THE QUESTION I CARE ABOUT MOST

Not the label — the resilience

Most of what I read about American democracy right now is an argument over a label: is it still a democracy or not. I understand the instinct, but that argument hides the thing that actually matters to anyone trying to act.

The question I keep returning to is about resilience. Given the strain the system is under, is the damage the kind that ordinary elections and courts can undo, or the kind that locks in and would take far more than one election to reverse. That is the reading the Atlas is built around, and it is the one I want to walk you through.

WHERE THE STRAIN IS

Three developments move this reading

Three kinds of development move this reading more than anything else. I want to name each one and where it sits.

01 The weakening of checks and balances

THE CHECKPOINT · THE LARGEST MOVER

V-Dem records the constraints that the legislature and the courts place on the executive at their lowest level in over a century, and calls the speed of the change unprecedented in modern history. This year it moved the United States from the liberal-democracy category to the electoral-democracy one — the largest single-year fall in its dataset. In the Atlas this is the checkpoint function, and I treat it as the most important mover, because it is also the hinge of the resilience question.

02 The erosion of anticorruption enforcement

ACCOUNTABILITY, NOT THE HEADLINE NUMBER

Freedom House cut the United States to 81, its sharpest single-year decline among established democracies, and tied it directly to weakened anticorruption safeguards and ethics enforcement. Transparency International put the country at 64, its lowest score ever. The World Justice Project notes that officials are increasingly not sanctioned for misconduct. The headline corruption number is still in healthy territory. The part that actually holds power to account is not.

03 The information environment

THE SENSOR · THE SYSTEM SEEING ITSELF

Reporters Without Borders placed the United States at 62.61, a record low, down seven places in a year, and V-Dem records freedom of expression at its lowest since the end of the Second World War. In the Atlas this is the sensor — the system's ability to see its own problems.

> None of these three has crossed one of the framework's hard floors yet. What concerns me is that all three are moving the same way at once.

THE CONDITION, IN SHORT

A democracy under acute institutional stress

Across the twelve functions I check, the United States in 2026 reads as a democracy under acute institutional stress. No hard floor breached yet, but strain across rights, the information environment, the checks on power, the trust loop, and reserves.

17%

Trust in the federal government — near the lowest ever measured.

−10%

The federal civilian workforce, reduced over 2025 through executive action.

That workforce change is big enough to affect how well the state delivers, and one the slower official measures have not caught up to. The full function-by-function table, with every source, is at the end of this piece. But the label is not the point. The trajectory and the reversibility are.

REVERSIBLE OR ENTRENCHED

The distinction that decides how

worried to be

Here is the distinction that decides how worried to be, and no single score shows it. Damage to the checks on power comes in two forms.

FORM ONE · REVERSIBLE	FORM TWO · ENTRENCHED
Statutory & behavioral	**Structural**
Norms strained, institutions leaned on, enforcement weakened — but the constitutional architecture still intact. An election and working courts can turn it back.	The rules themselves rewritten to entrench whoever holds power. At that point the same election no longer reaches the problem.

The second form has a property I want to state plainly. Reversing it takes overcorrection, not just a return to how things were, because the threshold to climb back out sits higher than the one that was crossed going down. A system does not simply retrace its steps.

On the evidence I have, the United States sits in the first form more than the second. The strain is real and it is broad, but the core mechanisms — competitive elections and courts that still rule against the executive — are under pressure rather than rewritten. That is the most important thing in this reading, and it is also the most fragile, because the line between the two forms is exactly what the checkpoint decline is testing.

The thing to watch is not the volume of the rhetoric. It is whether any single change moves from the statutory column into the constitutional one: rules that entrench an incumbent, courts stripped of the power to constrain, election machinery placed beyond independent challenge. Those are the moves that would flip this from reversible to entrenched.

WHY I FRAME IT THIS WAY

Where effort still lands

If the damage is reversible, then the leverage is real, and it is ordinary. Elections, courts, oversight, a free press, and the slow work of enforcement all still bite. That is the useful part, and it is why I do this work. It is not optimism and it is not reassurance. It is a statement about where effort still lands. The moment to watch for is the shift from the first form to the second, because that is the moment the leverage narrows.

THE HONEST LIMITS

One instrument's reading

This is one instrument's structured reading. It is calibrated across reference countries and tested against historical cases, but it is not externally validated, and it makes no claim to accuracy or prediction. Reasonable people will weigh these signals differently. I have tried to keep every step traceable, so you can argue with a specific number rather than with a mood. I want the pushback. That is the point.

STAGE 0 DISCLOSURE

The Governance Atlas is a structured analytical framework calibrated across a limited case set. It produces evidence-based governance assessments using public indicators and a documented method. It is not yet externally validated as a predictive instrument. No claim is made regarding accuracy, sensitivity, specificity, or predictive value.

It is not investment advice, legal due diligence, political endorsement, or a substitute for expert country-specific analysis. The method behind this reading — why these twelve functions and four floors, how indicators are chosen, and what the Atlas can and cannot claim — is documented on the Governance Atlas site under *How this works*. Open inputs, disciplined method, protected synthesis.

APPENDIX

The twelve-function condition table, 2026

Every reading traces to a named source. Bands are Healthy / Warning / Failure. This is a Stage 0 reading and not an election forecast; a few values are the latest available or inferred from published rank, noted as such.

FUNCTION	INDICATOR	2026 READING	BAND	SOURCE
1 · Rights floor	Freedom House total	81	Warning	Freedom House
2 · Information environment	RSF Press Freedom	62.61 (rank 64)	Warning	RSF
3 · Signal classification	WJP Constraints on Gov't Powers	rank 36 (declining)	Warning	WJP
4 · Checks on power	WJP + V-Dem judicial constraints	constraints at century-low	Warning → Failure	V-Dem, WJP
5 · Resource delivery	WGI Gov't Effectiveness	strong; workforce −10% (2025)	Healthy↓	World Bank; Pew
6 · Corruption clearance	Corruption Perceptions Index	64 (record low, declining)	Healthy↓	Transparency Int'l
7 · Tolerance / civil society	V-Dem Civil Society Openness	declining (rank-inferred)	Warning	V-Dem; WJP
8 · Emergency mode	Emergency architecture (law)	requires legal review	Not scored	n/a
9 · Feedback / trust	Trust in national government	17%	Failure	Pew Research
10 · Reserves	Debt / GDP (reserve-currency track)	123.9%	Warning	IMF
11 · Repair / accountability	Corruption-control trend; sanctioning	declining; officials less sanctioned	Warning	World Bank; WJP
12 · Future capacity	Gender gap / inequality / mobility	0.747 / Gini ~0.41 / ~70	Warning	WEF; World Bank

HARD FLOORS

None breached. Freedom House 81 > 70; CPI 64 > 40; RSF 62.61 > 50; emergency-powers floor not assessed.

HIDDEN STRESS: HIGH

Polarization speed and a ~10% civil-service reduction both at the top level. Overall: a democracy under acute institutional stress; the open question is whether the checkpoint erosion is reversible or entrenched.

SOURCES

Every reading traces to a named source

01 **Freedom House**
Freedom in the World 2026, United States · freedomhouse.org

02 **Reporters Without Borders**
2026 World Press Freedom Index · rsf.org

03 **V-Dem Institute**
Democracy Report 2026, University of Gothenburg · v-dem.net

04 **Transparency International**
Corruption Perceptions Index 2025, United States · transparency.org

05 **World Justice Project**
Rule of Law Index 2025 · worldjusticeproject.org

06 **Pew Research Center**
Public Trust in Government 1958–2025; Federal workforce 2025 · pewresearch.org

07 **International Monetary Fund**
2026 Article IV Consultation with the United States · imf.org

08 World Economic Forum

Global Gender Gap Report 2025 · weforum.org