News



U.S. President Donald Trump gestures as he speaks during a midterm campaign rally at Salina Regional Airport in Salina, Kan., Nov. 1, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)

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Two years ago, the religious right rejoiced.

"Who deserves credit is God Almighty for saving this country," the late Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA, said a few weeks before Donald Trump took office for the second time.

But the coalition that brought Trump back to the White House — Christians, young men and Latino voters looking for a better economy — proved fragile. While a steady 82% of white evangelical voters still supported Republicans in the 2026 midterms (though fewer turned out to vote), the Catholic vote wavered, as did the youth and Latino vote.

That has left Christian conservatives pointing fingers and laying blame.

"You bite your nose off to spite your face," said evangelical author and influencer Eric Metaxas on his podcast, calling out conservatives for failing to support Trump's MAGA agenda. "That's what people did who voted against Trump or petulantly refused to vote. You've hurt yourself."

Republicans' midterm losses have exposed competing allegiances, with some blaming Trump's leadership and policies and others, like Metaxas, critiquing complacent voters or contrarian influencers. As the makeup of the religious right shifts — characterized by podcasters as much as institutional leaders — religious conservatives are assessing how to unite the movement and where to place their political hopes for 2028.

"There is no one religious right like we had in the '80s with the Moral Majority," said Anthony Bradley, a distinguished research fellow at The Acton Institute. "It's just a

bunch of factions who are warring with each other about what it means to be a religious conservative."

Some of Trump's most loyal supporters blame their fellow conservatives rather than the president or the party. Evangelical Christian musician Sean Feucht accused white evangelicals of staying home. Metaxas, along with Christian nationalist pastor Doug Wilson and influencer Joel Berry, formerly of the conservative Christian satirical site The Babylon Bee, pointed fingers at rival religious conservative influencers like far-right podcaster Candace Owens and former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, both of whom have broken with the MAGA movement to condemn U.S. support for Israel and the war in Iran.

Wilson called Owens a "chaos agent," while Metaxas blamed Carlson for attempting to "peel away" Trump's followers.

Metaxas also condemned voters who stayed home or who voted against the GOP for so-called pocketbook issues, like the cost of gas, groceries and housing.

"Gas is free in hell," he wrote on X.

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Daniel Darling, director of the Land Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, flagged the racism present in more extreme fringes of online conservatism. Republicans need an ethnically diverse coalition, he said. But while many Latinos, Muslims and Indian Americans who voted Republican in 2024 wanted social conservatism and a secure border, they didn't expect to be targeted by people and the policies they voted for.

"Some of the language of the new right … just openly said that we don't think these people are real Americans," said Darling, citing Texas Republican Bo French's racist social media post about Indian Americans at a football game. Darling called for leaders who can speak to issues like the "sanctity of life and marriage and family" while also being "leaders of character."

For other conservatives, the midterm results are a referendum on what they see as Trump's broken promises and his failure to deliver on a series of policies dear to them. Kelsey Reinhardt, president of the conservative lobbying organization

CatholicVote, told RNS that youth were let down by the Iran war, Latino voters and blue-collar workers by the state of the economy and pro-life voters by inaction on mifepristone, a drug that can be used to terminate a pregnancy.

"It certainly was a repudiation of a lot of the work that has been left undone by the Trump administration and the Republicans in Congress," she said.

For Kristan Hawkins, president of the anti-abortion group Students for Life, the Trump administration's failure to pull the abortion pill off shelves was at fault. The Rev. Tony Suárez, an evangelical pastor, Trump adviser and COO of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, said the "Republican-led House and Senate" were responsible for the high cost of living and broken immigration system. And conservative Baptist commentator Allie Beth Stuckey wondered if Trump's public presence alienated voters.

"He comes across as dismissive of economic concerns," she wrote on X.

Hunter Baker, senior fellow for civic renewal and religious liberty at the First Liberty Institute, said Trump appears to be a leader who was overtaken by pride after essentially rising from the dead politically following his defeat in 2020 and the aftermath of Jan. 6.

"He had all this momentum," Baker said. "I think he felt he could do almost anything and went after Iran."

Trump went against one of his core promises to stay out of wars, Baker said, and it backfired. "Once you have an unpopular Middle East conflict and rising prices, the script is written," he said.

Those rising prices were a key factor, according to Michael Clary, pastor of Christ the King Church in Fort Thomas, Kentucky, a Southern Baptist church just across the border from Cincinnati. He named groceries and housing as top concerns for voters.

The blame, he said, falls on Trump.

"This one is on him," said Clary, who called himself a Trump supporter.

Clary also worries that the country has lost its morality and become a place where people prioritize self-interest. He pointed to Trump's promise to send $5,000 to Americans if they voted for Republicans.

"That just seemed like a stunt," he said. "What's needed is virtue, and we're not going to be able to vote our way into virtue."

Daniel Bennett, professor of political science at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, said the losses were the result of multiple factors. He called the 2026 midterms a perfect storm — a bad economy, an unpopular president and an opposition party determined to change the course of the country, all combined to overwhelm the "fragile coalition" Trump had assembled.

"It was primed to be a disaster," said Bennett.

While Trump admitted on 60 Minutes that his deportation policy might have been "too tough," most religious conservatives are not blaming the election results on his immigration policies. Some argued that the policy was poorly executed — Suárez said deportation efforts should have prioritized criminals, and conservative commentator Ben Shapiro said he agreed with Trump's immigration policy but not the rollout — most people on the religious right blamed economics over mass deportations.

In the 1980s and '90s, the Moral Majority — founded by Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell Sr. and led by conservative evangelicals, Catholics and some Jews — emerged as a political force by opposing abortion and gay marriage. Those issues held the movement together.

Today, said Acton's Bradley, there's no one organizing force or unifying issue to bring together religious conservatives.

"Now, what you basically get is this amalgam of various influencers who have constituents and followers," he said.

Some religious conservatives saw Kirk, who was assassinated in September 2025, as a convener on the right. Turning Point USA's events historically welcomed speakers from across the conservative spectrum, and Kirk, known for touring college campuses, had access to the concerns of conservative youth and the ear of the Oval Office, Hawkins, of Students for Life, told RNS.

In the last year, the conservative movement has sharply divided over U.S. support for Israel and involvement in the Iran war.

Looking ahead to 2028, religious conservatives disagree on what issues to prioritize: moral and culture-war issues like LGBTQ+ rights, abortion and immigration, or matters related to affordability and the war in Iran.

Hawkins argued that voters motivated by morality are the ones who win elections.

"People who want a flat tax or are motivated for some fiscal policy, they're not the inspired, motivated base of the Republican Party," she said. "It's the social conservatives, the faith voters who want to see more babies born, want to see families prosper. They're the ones who are the most inspired."

Baker said Trump's strong attribute was winning. He reshaped the electoral map by drawing blue-collar voters with the promise of economic prosperity and what he called a "modest social conservatism," said Baker. He wonders if a future candidate with the same message and fewer flaws could recreate some of Trump's success.

"I think the Republicans will be looking for a better salesman of those same policies," he said.

This story appears in the **2026 Midterm Elections** feature series. View the full series.