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The Daily News Journal

BEYOND 2026

GOP control deeply rooted in Tennessee but challenges persist

Vivian Jones

Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

As Republicans maintain a firm grasp on power across Tennessee ahead of elections this year, one Republican party trailblazer is questioning whether the single-party control that Tennessee has had for the last 15 years has resulted in quality policymaking.

Republican control is so deeply rooted in Tennessee that there's not much more ground to gain. Tennessee Republicans won both House and Senate majorities in 2008, and expanded to a veto-proof supermajority in 2012. Republicans have now long controlled every lever of power in the state.

Voters in 2026 will evaluate the job performance of the 102 Republican and 30 Democrat state lawmakers.

All nine U.S. Representatives and one U.S. Senator will be on the ballot.

And perhaps the most far-reaching decision they'll make? Which candidate for governor will lead the state to 2030 and beyond.

"One-party politics, it mainly produces mediocrity, with occasional exceptions," said former Republican governor and U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander during an event honoring the legacy of Republican Sen. Howard Baker late last year.

Nearly every state decision is made by a Republican.

The GOP's majority in the legislature determines how long lawmakers can debate bills and what visual aids can be used.

They hold the power to redraw district maps for the state legislature and U.S. Congress.

Republicans have held the Tennessee governor's office since 2011.

Every sitting state Supreme Court justice on the bench is a Republican appointee.

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Gov. Bill Lee and other Republican leaders leave after a news conference on the last day of session at the Tennessee Capitol in Nashville on April 22, 2025. NICOLE HESTER/THE TENNESSEAN

TN Dems play long game, eye resurgence

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Democratic National Committee Chairman Ken Martin speaks to a crowd of about 85 canvassers knocking on doors for Democratic congressional nominee Aftyn Behn at Charlotte Park Elementary School on Nov. 8, 2025. VIVIAN JONES/THE TENNESSEAN

Going into election season this year, Tennessee Democrats are playing the long game.

While it's unlikely the party will win a statewide race or pick up a congressional seat this year — though odds are shifting in Democrats' favor in Tennessee's 5th Congressional District — state Democratic Party Chair Rachel Campbell said she is focused on building a strong foundation of organizing that results in local elected officials and can later lead to a groundswell.

"Tennessee is now, always has been and will continue to be worth fighting for," Campbell said.

See **DEMOCRATS**, Page 4A

Southern Baptist leaders say outcry, new budget signal less division

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Southern Baptist leaders portrayed the future of the nation's largest Protestant denomination as one less

defined by factional rifts over abuse response, women pastors, and funding after years of debates that fueled administrative turmoil.

The Southern Baptist Convention's administrative arm, called the SBC Executive Committee, gathered Feb. 16-

17 in Nashville, where the committee affirmed a significant funding change and the ouster of two churches.

The decisions touched on major debates within the Nashville-based denomination between different factions — a mainstream conservative

group versus those who have sought to pull the convention further to the right. But SBC leaders pointed out at the recent Nashville gathering there are signs this division is subsiding some.

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