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USA

Trump Seems Vulnerable for First Time in Second Term

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President Donald Trump appears for the first time in his second term to be facing serious challenges that threaten his until now nearly absolute domination of government. First and foremost, is the sense that he is not fulfilling his promise to make the economy affordable for most Americans.

This is the reason that he and his party suffered defeat in the November 4 elections across the country. In New York City, Trump supported Andrew Cuomo who was defeated by socialist Zohran Mamdani as Democrats also won the governorships in New Jersey and Virginia, while in California Democrats beat Republicans 60 to 40% on a referendum on congressional redistricting.

Trump blamed the government shutdown for the election defeats. The unprecedented 43-day closure of the government, caused by the inability of Republicans and Democrats to reach an agreement on the budget caused tremendous misery. Most of the 42 million Americans, children, the elderly, and the disabled, who depend on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program lost their food benefits for over a month. And now, the Republican budget will increase medical insurance costs for 92% of the 45 million people covered by the Affordable Care Act, for some it will double. The higher rates will make health care unaffordable for millions. No surprise then that 48% of Americans placed the blame on President Trump and Republicans while only 34% blame the Democrats.

With the budget no longer on the agenda, the demand by both Democrats and Republicans that the government release the files of deceased financier and sex offender Jeffrey Epstein is back on the congressional agenda. The Make America Great Again (MAGA) base wants the file opened. Trump calls the whole thing “a hoax” but he has demanded that Attorney General Pam Bondi investigate Democrats whose names appear in the Epstein files, including former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of the Treasury and Harvard president Larry Summers. It seems likely that a motion to open the files will pass the House and possibly the Senate, at which time it would go to Trump to pass or veto. But dare he veto it? Does he fear what the files contain about him?

The issue has led to the first open break in MAGA, with congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene publicly criticizing Trump for failing to open the Epstein files and for rising health care and food costs. Trump calls Greene “wacky” and a “disgrace to our great Republican Party.” But other Republicans are also demanding the files be opened and some express concerns about health care costs. So, Greene’s defiance could signal a coming rift.

Trump has never been popular. Today, as usual, only 42 percent of the American people approve of him but 58% now disapprove, according to polls. How will Trump keep his grip on his base and on the country?

Trump has announced that he plans to give every American making under \$100,000 per year a \$2,000 dividend to be paid for by tariffs. The problem is that the dividend would cost \$300 billion while tariffs have generated only \$175 billion. Trump also promised a dividend earlier in the year, when Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency were slashing programs and jobs. That bonus never came.

Trump seems less focused on transparency and affordability than on warfare on two fronts: sending Immigration and Customs Enforcement and National Guard to U.S. cities governed by Democrats and preparing for an invasion of Venezuela. The MAGA base supports the first but it will rankle at a foreign war aimed at regime change, which Trump campaigned against.

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Tangled in contradictions, Trump is in trouble. So eyes are now focused on the November 2026 midterm elections as everyone wonders whether the Democrats can take back both the House and the Senate.

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