



It has been 20 years since the state last elected a Democrat as governor. And it has been even longer since a Democrat not named Sherrod Brown has won a second election to any nonjudicial statewide office.

But party leaders are daring to be optimistic in 2026, encouraged by polls that show their candidate for governor, physician Amy Acton, running close with newly official Republican nominee Vivek Ramaswamy. They also scored a recruiting win when Brown launched a comeback Senate bid. Brown won the Democratic nomination Tuesday to face Sen. Jon Husted, the Republican appointed to succeed Vice President JD Vance. Early polls foreshadow a close race in that contest, too.

“It just feels like Ohio is back,” said state Democratic Party Chair Kathleen Clyde, referring to years in wilderness when, except when Brown was on the ballot, both national parties retreated from what was once a fiercely contested battleground.

Alex Triantafilou, the Ohio GOP chair, acknowledged a tough political climate for Republicans this year. President Donald Trump’s job approval ratings have fallen to new lows as he takes the rap for an unpopular war in Iran and rising gas prices that have accelerated frustrations with the economy.

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