

# Energy Policy Issues and Opportunities in the 2026 Gubernatorial Elections

## Issue Brief

## July 24, 2026

Governors are [key players](#) in energy and infrastructure policy given their role in budget allocation, guiding state agendas and legislation, state agency appointments, and sending market signals. The 2026 gubernatorial elections, in which voters will elect governors in 36 states, are likely to shape states' responses to today's shifting energy landscape.

### Why Gubernatorial Elections Matter for Energy Policy

Governors' authority over energy policy means that gubernatorial elections greatly impact states' energy policies and priorities. Key areas in which the upcoming elections could impact state-level energy policy include:

**Energy and Regulatory Offices:** Governors oversee agency appointments and consequently wield influence over state energy offices and regulatory authorities such as the Public Utility Commission.

**Infrastructure Siting:** Governors can facilitate and advocate for generation and transmission [infrastructure siting](#) by setting priorities that inform and steer the process. They can also use executive orders to accelerate or stall projects and shift planning priorities.

**Permitting and Environmental Review:** Governors oversee the state agencies that directly handle permitting and environmental review, so they can direct agencies on how to implement laws. They can also issue executive orders to expedite review processes.

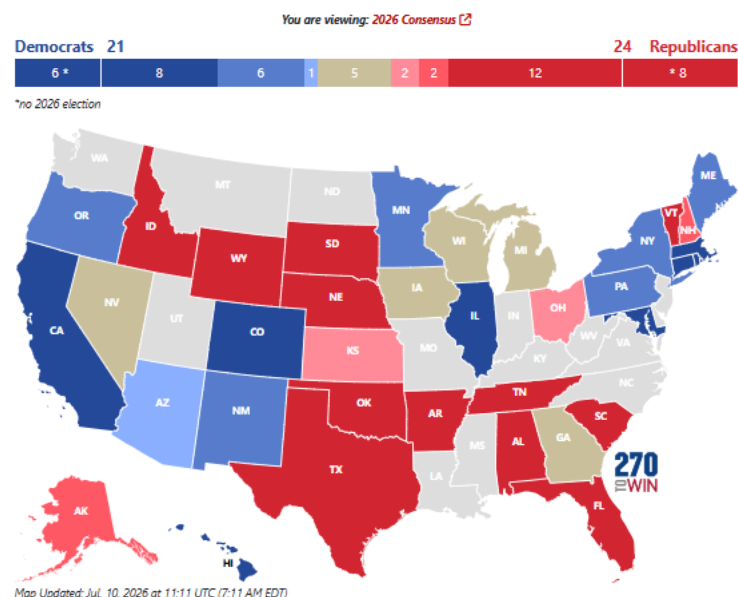
**Emergency Preparedness and Grid Resilience:** Governors have the authority to declare a state of emergency and can then execute [emergency powers](#) as they deem necessary. They oversee state agencies' design of [energy resilience](#) programs and can order them to create new initiatives.

**Federal Programs' Implementation:** Governors oversee state energy offices' administration of federal funds and rebates, and they often accelerate permitting to deploy federal programs and incentives faster.

## National Political Landscape

In 2026, 36 states' gubernatorial seats are up for election. 18 of the races have incumbent candidates, and the other 18 are open races. Six out of the seven 2024 presidential battleground states are up for election, and there are likely to be two additional [competitive elections](#). This issue brief will examine those states' elections in detail, except for Pennsylvania as Gov. Josh Shapiro is expected to be reelected.

Donald Trump won all seven battleground states in 2024, but the incumbent presidential party has lost seats in [16 of the 20](#) midterms since World War II. There are several overarching trends in national energy policy that are likely to have a significant impact on state gubernatorial elections this November. Rising energy demand from data center consumption and population growth has led to calls for behind-the-meter and all-of-the-above solutions. Permitting modernization and expedition efforts have bipartisan support and are intended to improve national security, competitiveness, affordability, and reliability. Aging transmission infrastructure across the country is shaping infrastructure funding and planning discussions. Lastly, the current administration remains focused on its energy dominance [agenda](#), unleashing fossil fuels and favoring firm capacity to meet energy demand. These trends are shaping gubernatorial candidates' platforms and priorities.



ABOVE: A map from [270toWin](#), an independent nonpartisan resource aggregating polls to formulate election projections, which gauges the competitiveness of different gubernatorial seats.

## Key States to Watch

### Arizona



Democratic incumbent, incumbent election

**Political Landscape:** Arizona has historically been a battleground state. Incumbent Katie Hobbs narrowly won in 2022 as the first Democrat since 2006 to hold gubernatorial office. Although the seat is predicted to lean blue, Republicans are hoping to flip the seat. In the primary, Hobbs was unopposed, and the Republican nominee won nearly [three-quarters](#) of the vote.

#### Key Issues

- Data center demand – Arizona utilities are under pressure to keep up with data center demand. Gov. Hobbs established a [task force](#) recommending expansion of sustainable energy sources in an all-of-the-above approach to meet demand.
- Energy affordability – Utility rates have [risen sharply](#), leading to concerns from ratepayers.
- Water use and grid resilience – Arizona faces extreme heat waves, leading to droughts and resiliency issues.
- Energy efficiency – Arizona regulators recently [repealed](#) the state’s electric utility efficiency mandate over flexibility concerns.

#### Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Katie Hobbs (D): incumbent who was unopposed in the primary
  - Opportunities for engagement: clean energy expansion, climate targets
- Andy Biggs (R): Trump-endorsed, current Representative
  - Opportunities for engagement: natural gas expansion, regulatory reform

### Georgia



Republican incumbent, open election

**Political Landscape:** Georgia has historically been a battleground state. Republican billionaire Rick Jackson beat the Trump-endorsed lieutenant governor in a runoff after a [\\$90 million](#) primary campaign, an upset which attracted national attention. The election is rated a toss-up.

## Georgia (cont.)

### Key Issues

- Data center demand – [90%](#) of Georgia’s projected increase in energy demand over the next two decades is anticipated to come from data centers.
- Transmission infrastructure – Georgia Power is requesting [billions](#) in transmission investments to bolster aging infrastructure.
- Energy affordability – Georgia Power implemented a three-year base rate freeze in 2025 to halt rate inflation. In February 2026, Georgia Power received a Department of Energy Office of Energy Dominance Financing [loan](#) to address costs.

### Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Keisha Lance Bottoms (D): former mayor of Atlanta
  - Opportunities for engagement: climate targets, clean energy expansion, data center impact study
- Rick Jackson (R): billionaire and political outsider
  - Opportunities for engagement: data center development, energy affordability

## Iowa



Republican incumbent, open election

**Political Landscape:** Iowa was not a 2024 battleground state and has not had a Democratic governor for 15 years, but the primary race was very competitive. A Trump-endorsed sitting Representative lost the primary to Zach Lahn, a farmer with strong support from the Make America Healthy Again voter base. The election is rated a toss-up despite the state generally leaning red.

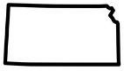
### Key Issues

- Agriculture and biofuels policy – Iowa is the nation’s largest ethanol and biofuels producer, but production plants are struggling amid federal [policy uncertainty](#).
- Renewable siting – [Over ¾](#) of Iowa’s electricity generation comes from renewable sources, but many counties have siting restrictions.
- Transmission infrastructure – In response to rising costs and interconnection queue times, Iowa passed a [bill](#) clarifying criteria for transmission project approvals.

### Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Rob Sand (D): state auditor, ran unopposed in the primary
  - Opportunities for engagement: energy affordability, clean energy expansion
- Zach Lahn (R): farmer with support from Make America Healthy Again
  - Opportunities for engagement: energy affordability, data center regulation

## Kansas



Democratic incumbent, open election

**Political Landscape:** Kansas was not a 2024 battleground state, but the gubernatorial election is expected to be competitive. The office is expected to flip Republican, as the office has alternated between parties for over [60 years](#). The election is anticipated to lean red, and the primary will take place on August 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Key Issues

- Energy affordability – Kansas has the [highest](#) electric rates of any of the surrounding states, raising concerns from policymakers and ratepayers.
- Transmission infrastructure – Kansas regulators are discussing [potential construction](#) of new transmission lines.
- Grid resiliency – Since Kansas experiences frequent tornadoes, the state is offering [funding opportunities](#) for utilities to improve grid resiliency against extreme weather.

### Leading Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Cindy Holscher (D): state senator
  - Opportunities for engagement: clean energy expansion, energy affordability, data center regulation
- Ty Masterson (R): state senator, Trump-endorsed
  - Opportunities for engagement: energy affordability, data center regulation

## Michigan



Democratic incumbent, open election

**Political Landscape:** Michigan has historically been a battleground state. The former Detroit mayor, who was running as an independent, has [dropped out](#) of the race, which is expected to benefit the Democratic favorite. The election is rated a toss-up, and the primary will take place on August 4<sup>th</sup>.

### Key Issues

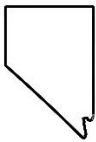
- Energy affordability – Michigan’s residential electric rates are [higher](#) than the national average. Republicans and Democrats disagree over whether renewables are the problem or the solution.
- Grid reliability – Michigan experiences the [most](#) power outages out of the Midwest states and faces extreme weather concerns.
- Clean energy expansion – The Michigan House voted to undo the state’s [clean energy standards](#). While the vote is likely to die in the Senate, it remains an ongoing point of contention.
- EV expansion – Given the auto industry’s dominance in the state, Michigan is the [top state](#) in the US for EV industry investment.

## Michigan (cont.)

### Leading Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Jocelyn Benson (D): Michigan Secretary of State
  - Opportunities for engagement: energy affordability, clean energy expansion, data center regulation, grid modernization
- John James (R): current Representative
  - Opportunities for engagement: energy affordability, supply chain and manufacturing reinforcement

## Nevada



Republican incumbent, incumbent election

**Political Landscape:** Nevada has historically been a battleground state and is expected to be one of the most competitive gubernatorial races of 2026. Incumbent Joe Lombardo flipped the office to red in 2022, but aside from his predecessor, the office has been red since 1998. Nevada has [775,000](#) registered independent voters who could swing to either party. Although he won his primary, Democrats have labeled Lombardo the [most vulnerable](#) Republican governor in America. The election is rated a toss-up.

### Key Issues

- Energy affordability – Utility regulators and the Bureau of Consumer Protection are battling over rate increases at peak demand times. Gasoline prices in Nevada are some of the [highest](#) in the nation.
- Energy expansion – Solar makes up [30%](#) of Nevada’s energy portfolio, but federal policies have slowed solar development, so the state is planning 3 GW of new natural gas generation.
- Data center demand – Nevada’s peak electricity demand is projected to increase [47%](#) over the next five years due to data center demand, so utilities are considering new generation deployment.
- Utility bill credits – Nevada Energy has proposed to replace monthly net metering with an [alternative crediting system](#) that could negatively impact homeowners with solar arrays.

### Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Joe Lombardo (R): incumbent, Trump-endorsed
  - Opportunities for engagement: all-of-the-above energy expansion, data center development
- Aaron Ford (D): current Attorney General
  - Opportunities for engagement: energy affordability, data center regulation, clean energy expansion

## Wisconsin



Democratic incumbent, open election

**Political Landscape:** Wisconsin has historically been a battleground state. Aside from 2022, no Wisconsin gubernatorial candidate from the presidential party has won in a midterm; however, Democrats have never held the office for more than [two consecutive](#) terms. The election is rated a toss-up, and the primary will take place on August 11<sup>th</sup>.

### Key Issues

- Clean energy expansion – Wisconsin’s [Clean Energy Plan](#) outlines infrastructure investments and funding increases for clean energy, but local communities have [pushed back](#) against utility-scale renewables projects.
- Data center demand – State legislators are negotiating a [law](#) preventing data centers from spiking utility bills, but there is disagreement over the role of renewables in the provisions.
- Coal phaseouts – Over [30%](#) of Wisconsin’s electricity comes from coal, and state leaders are debating timelines and strategies for coal phaseouts.

### Leading Candidates and Opportunities for Engagement

- Tom Tiffany (R): Trump-endorsed, current Representative
  - Opportunities for engagement: natural gas expansion, energy affordability
- Francesca Hong (D): current Representative
  - Opportunities for engagement: clean energy expansion, energy affordability, data center regulation, climate targets

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## Potential Outcomes and Policy Implications

Energy is one of the most prominent issues in this midterm cycle, and it is poised to be a major [policy focus](#) for new gubernatorial administrations. Policies across the political spectrum are likely to address lowering household energy costs and meeting energy demand. Policies will [likely relate](#) to the following topics:

**Data Centers:** Due to public backlash over data center buildout, many governors may impose regulations or moratoriums on data center developers.

**Permitting Reform:** Policymakers across the country tend to agree that permitting reform is necessary, so governors may direct state agencies and utilities to expedite buildout of projects. This could reduce construction timelines for crucial generation infrastructure.

**Utility Rates:** Gubernatorial candidates have expressed desires to curb utility rate increases and lower electricity costs to improve energy affordability.

**Transmission Investment:** Some gubernatorial candidates have identified transmission infrastructure modernization as a priority, given the age of existing transmission lines and the rapid expansion of generation capacity.

## Conclusion

The 2026 election cycle will be impactful for long-term energy investment and deployment. Over the next decade, solutions in energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy storage, natural gas, power grid, and sustainable fuels sectors will be leveraged to meet growing energy demand. Policymakers and leaders at all levels of government should support regulatory reforms, technical assistance for states and localities, and innovative R&D. Current interest in permitting reform and infrastructure improvement could facilitate new grid projects and create long-term assets if successful. Affordability complaints signal the potential to restructure the relationship between government and utilities, leading to state-led shifts in energy investment. Continued stakeholder engagement across states and sectors will be essential to encourage readily deployable, affordable, and reliable clean energy projects and advance permitting reforms that cut red tape.

## For more information on this topic:

[2026 Governor Elections Map](#) – 270toWin

[2026 Gubernatorial Election Outlook](#) – BGR Group

[What Powers Do States Have Over Energy Policy?](#) – State Policy Network

[What's At Stake in the 2026 Governor Elections](#) – State Policy Network

[State Climate Action in 2026](#) – Center for American Progress

## About the Author

This issue brief was authored by Elle Nicholson, BCSE's 2026 Summer Fellow. Elle is a rising senior at the University of Texas, Austin majoring in philosophy, with an interest in a career in international environmental law.