



**Thought Experiments from AI**  
**What If Republicans Finally Took the Big Hit to Govern?**  
**By Perplexity, an AI assistant**  
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### **Background**

Imagine a Republican Congress that stopped playing it safe and actually risked their own seats to pass sweeping conservative laws on elections and citizenship. This thought experiment asks what would happen if they treated one term of power as a once-in-a-generation chance to govern, not just to message.

### **Editor's note**

This column is part of an ongoing Wilmington Standard series, “Thought Experiments from AI.” Each piece is generated by an artificial intelligence in response to a prompt from our editors. In this installment, we asked: “What would happen if Republicans in the United States House of Representatives and the Senate decided to take the big hit in politics by risking re-election to pass major party objectives including the SAVE Act, restricting birthright citizenship and other bills and acts that are conservative in nature and will bring generational change to this country?”

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### **A Congress that stops playing defense**

Picture this: Republicans in Congress sit down after a bruising week at the U.S. Supreme Court, look at each other, and finally say, “We have two years. Let’s act like it.” Instead of trying to win every fight with press conferences, executive orders, and fundraising emails, they decide to use raw legislative power to change the rules of the game—even if it costs some of them their careers.<sup>npr+1</sup>

This is not how Washington normally works. Most members in both parties treat re-election as the prime directive. But as a thought experiment, imagine that House and Senate Republicans decide to take the “one-term majority” approach: risk their seats to pass the SAVE Act on citizenship verification, tighten election rules, and push serious changes on issues like birthright citizenship. It is not impossible, but it would reshape both policy and the GOP itself.

## **How the big hit would work**

Step one would be accepting that the Supreme Court is not going to deliver their wish list for them. In the past week, the Court upheld birthright citizenship and rejected President Trump's attempt to curb it by executive order, making clear that the Fourteenth Amendment—not a White House memo—controls who becomes a citizen at birth. In a separate case, the justices allowed states to keep counting mail-in ballots that arrive after Election Day if they are postmarked on time, turning away a Republican effort to force a national stop date through the courts. Those rulings effectively tell Congress: if you want different rules, write different laws.[npr+4](#)

A “big hit” Congress would respond by treating legislative calendars like campaign calendars. In the House, GOP leaders would bring up a SAVE-style bill requiring proof of citizenship to vote in federal elections, tying it to federal funding and election administration rules. In the Senate, they would either narrow the filibuster for election and immigration bills or be prepared to use budget reconciliation and procedural creativity to get as much as they can through with 50 or 51 votes. That means telling cautious Senators from purple states—and their own donors—that the goal is policy, not personal job security.

On birthright citizenship, the path is even steeper. The Court's reaffirmation of broad birthright citizenship means that any statute trying to carve out categories of U.S.-born children would be tested immediately against that precedent. A serious “big hit” strategy would likely pair a clarifying statute with the opening moves of a constitutional amendment, knowing full well that the amendment will be a long shot. Republicans would be making a conscious trade: accept years of litigation and political backlash to test whether their view can even survive under the current Constitution.[nbcnews+1](#)

## **What would actually change**

If Republicans took this path, some things would move very fast. A SAVE-style bill that ties voter registration and ID checks to federal elections could quickly reshape how states administer voting. States that rely heavily on mail voting and grace periods—like Washington, Oregon, and parts of the Midwest—would have to adjust procedures to meet new federal standards, even though the Supreme Court just confirmed their current systems are allowed under existing law. Urban counties that already struggle with election staffing would feel the pressure almost immediately.

For North Carolina, the implications would be concrete. The General Assembly and county boards from New Hanover to Wake would have to align state law with new federal baselines, revisiting questions about voter ID, ballot deadlines, and how to handle

provisional ballots. The old pattern—Raleigh fights, courts rewrite the rules, county officials scramble—would be replaced by a clearer but tougher set of federal expectations layered on top. In practice, that could make elections more predictable but also more contentious as every glitch becomes a test of whether the new rules are working.

On citizenship, even attempting to narrow birthright citizenship would force a national conversation about who is “in” and who is “out” of the American civic family. Hospitals, schools, and local governments in coastal communities, the Sandhills, and major metros like Charlotte and the Triangle would have to navigate new categories of residents: native-born non-citizens, long-term visa holders, and mixed-status families. Whatever the policy details, it would make the immigration system more complex in the short term, even if the goal is to make it more controlled over time.

### **The political cost to Republicans**

The biggest impact, though, would be on the Republican Party itself. A “big hit” approach forces every member to answer a simple question: are you in politics to hold a title, or to pass hard laws that outlive you? For safe-seat conservatives, that might sound appealing. For Republicans in swing districts around Raleigh’s suburbs or in states like North Carolina where statewide races are close, it is a direct threat to their careers.

In the short run, you would expect significant backlash. National media would frame SAVE-style election laws and citizenship changes as a coordinated assault on democracy and immigrants. Some Republicans in Biden-won districts (or counties that swing back and forth) would almost certainly lose in the next cycle. The party might sacrifice a future Senate majority to lock in near-permanent changes to the rules of voting and citizenship. In other words, it is the opposite of the usual “protect the majority at all costs.”

Yet in the long run, the gamble could pay off in a different way. If those laws survive court challenges and become the new normal, they would shape who can vote, how votes are cast, and who counts as a citizen for decades. That would change not just election outcomes, but how campaigns are run, where parties invest, and which communities feel courted or ignored. The GOP would be betting that the policy environment they create will ultimately favor their ideas, even if they lose some short-term power.

### **Why this probably stays hypothetical**

All of that is possible—but it runs against deeply ingrained habits in Washington. Both parties talk about “doing the right thing even if it costs us,” but the incentives are reversed: leaders are rewarded for keeping their coalitions intact, not for pushing members off a cliff. The Supreme Court’s recent decisions on mail-in ballots and birthright citizenship make

clear that big changes must come from Congress, not the courts or the Oval Office. But knowing that and acting on it are very different things.

There are also legal and practical limits. The Court's reading of the Fourteenth Amendment sets a high bar for any attempt to narrow birthright citizenship. Federal election law changes must still respect state authority and voting rights protections. And voters themselves may rebel against a Congress they perceive as overreaching, even if that Congress insists it is restoring order or integrity. The risk is not just lost seats, but a public backlash that delegitimizes the reforms the GOP wants to preserve.

That is why this remains a thought experiment. It is doable in the sense that the Constitution gives Congress the tools; it is unlikely because most politicians are not eager to be one-term revolutionaries. For readers in North Carolina and beyond, the exercise is less about predicting the next Congress and more about clarifying the stakes. If conservatives really want generational change on elections and citizenship, they cannot expect courts to deliver it for them. They have to decide whether they are willing to take the big hit themselves—and whether they want their representatives to do the same.