

2018 midterms

A guide to the 2018 midterm elections. Who were the key winners and losers from November 2018?



Significance of US midterm elections

US midterm elections involve all 435 members of the House of Representatives, around one-third of the Senate (33–34 senators) and many state governors standing for (re)election. There are also many state-level initiatives on the ballot. Midterms are seen as a verdict on how well the president is doing, and can provide a pointer to the outcome of the next presidential election in 2020.

Good news for the Republicans because...

They retained control of the Senate and actually picked up several seats, including Indiana and North Dakota, thus improving on their previously wafer thin majority of 51–49. This should particularly help President Trump if he finds himself able to make more cabinet or Supreme Court nominations. Brett Kavanaugh only scraped home on a vote of 50–48.

It could have been far worse. The Democrats were denied prize seats such as that of Texas senator Ted Cruz.

Good news for the Democrats because...

They took control of the House for the first time since the 2010 midterms, enjoying a net gain of around 30 seats, more than the 23 needed to flip control from the Republicans. This means with divided government back in the Capitol, the Democrats will be able to block most of President Trump's conservative legislative agenda, such as a 'beautiful border wall'. Also expect renewed scrutiny and investigation into Trump's tax affairs or alleged links with Russia.

They picked up seven governorships, including in reliably red states such as Kansas, and around 300 seats in state legislatures.

Good news for Trump personally because...

The relatively good showing of the Republicans suggests that, divisive as he undoubtedly is, Trump should face an easy path to securing the Republican nomination for 2020 should he seek a second term, which current indications suggest is on the cards. Many midterms have gone far worse for first-term presidents — in 2010, Obama's first midterms, the Democrats lost over 60 House seats and six seats in the Senate. A 'blue wave' would undoubtedly have prompted some serious Republican challengers to emerge vying with Trump for that 2020 nomination.

Trump's own energetic campaigning in key Senate races appears to have helped the GOP. His sacking of Jeff Sessions as attorney general barely a day after the result certainly suggests an emboldened not embittered Trump.

Democracy and diversity

- Bad news for democracy because campaign expenditure reached record levels (at least \$5.2 billion) — a 35% increase compared to 2014.
- Good news for democracy because the turnout at around 47% was the highest for nearly 40 years.
- Good news for diversity too because a record number of women were elected to Congress, including the first Muslim women, Democrats Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib. Tennessee elected its first female senator, Republican Marsha Blackburn.

Looking ahead to the next 2 years...

- There will be more gridlock.
- There will be no let up in the harsh and hyper-partisan rhetoric from both sides.
- The 2020 presidential campaign has truly begun.

Less good news for the Republicans because...

They failed to build on success in key rust belt states crucial to Trump's victory in 2016 (e.g. Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin). The 'blue firewall' looks not to have been permanently breached. Also, there is evidence that many affluent suburban Republican voters ditched Trump, for example, in Georgia.

Less good news for the Democrats because...

Despite gains in the House, the scale of victory was less stunning than many Democrats had hoped. Trump went into the midterms with historically low approval ratings (about 40%) and yet survived and arguably in the Senate at least, emerged strengthened. Progressive Democrats such as Kara Eastman (Nebraska Second District) in potentially competitive races do not appear to have won over moderate voters.

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Simon Lemieux is head of history and politics at The Portsmouth Grammar School, an experienced writer and an assistant editor of POLITICS REVIEW.