



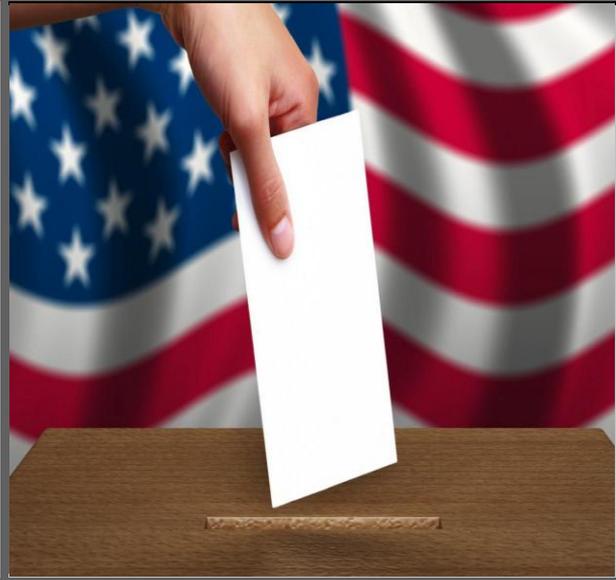
US MID-TERM ELECTIONS 2018: THE RACE FOR CONGRESS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Mid-term elections in the United States are the general elections held in November every four years, near the midpoint of a president's four-year term of office. This time mid-term elections will be held on November 06, 2018 to contest 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives. 35 of the 100 seats in the United States Senate will also be contested. 50 state governors, along with many state and local offices are on the ballot.¹ According to the US law, only the President of the United States is selected for a four year term. Other representatives of the House and the lower chamber of Congress are elected for two years only.

Battle between the two main parties - the Democrats and the Republicans - is expected to be as fierce in the mid-terms as in presidential elections while shaping the course of action in the Senate. Presumably, if Republicans emerge as a majority party in the Senate, the impact would be remarkable since it would then have control of both the chambers of Congress. It would allow the legislature to become an even greater force in Washington than it already is.

Already, the Republican Party holds a 51-seat majority in the chamber. Democrats hold 47 seats, and the remaining two are held by independents that confer with the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party faces greater partisan risk in 2018, as they are defending 25 seats, while Republicans are only

¹ "US Mid-Term Elections: What Is at Stake?." *BBC News*, May 7, 2018.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-29412354>

defending eight.² Additionally, the Democratic Party must defend seats in 10 states that supported Donald Trump (R) over Hillary Clinton (D) in 2016, whereas the Republican Party is defending just one Senate seat in a Wisconsin state won by Clinton.³

Political observers have discussed the possibility that 2018 will be a wave election against President Trump and the Republican Party since Democrats are already holding 47 safe seats and they need only three more seats to take a lead.⁴ Nonetheless, it is very difficult to predict which party is going to take the lead. It would largely depend upon both local and national factors such as the voter turnout, choice of the candidates and the party.

Moreover, this year's mid-term campaign is extraordinary in another way. It is expected to be a closely fought contest. Most estimates suggest that the Democrats could wrest control of the House if they manage to win 53-54.5% of the total votes cast for the two major parties. According to 2018 Pollster's reports, 53.5% are Democrat supporters. The Republicans are likely to keep control of the Senate, but Democrats could sly their way in.⁵

Historically, a particular pattern has always persisted in which voters have shown a tendency towards the opposition party in the mid-term elections.⁶ If history is repeated, the Democrats are expected to lead from a preceding 6.4 percentage points in 2016 to 8.8 percentage points in November 2018. This number will hold significance in the special elections, particularly those for federal congressional seats held within a year of the vote, in which Democratic challengers have fared well.

According to a model published by *The Economist*, Democrats will win 222 seats, 27 more than they won at the most recent elections. This would give them a nine-seat majority since they would obtain control of the House in 65% of simulations. This probability is slightly more positive for the

² Scott, Dylan. 2018. "The Odds That Democrats Will Take the House in the 2018 Mid-term s Keep Looking Better." *Vox*, July 24, 2018.
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/7/24/17607138/2018-mid-term-elections-predictions-generic-ballot-democrats>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dunkelberg, William. 2018. "Blue Wave? What The Economy Says About the Mid-term Elections." *Forbes Magazin*, June 12, 2018.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamdunkelberg/2018/06/12/blue-wave-what-the-economy-says-about-the-mid-term-elections/#37a7f44d5beb>

⁵ Sattler, Jason. 2018. "Blue Wave? Five Reasons Republicans Could Still Crush Democrats in the 2018 Elections." *USA Today*, Gannett Satellite Information Network. July 9, 2018.
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/07/09/five-ways-republicans-beat-democrats-2018-elections-congress-column/759931002/>

⁶ Johnson, Marcus H. 2018. "Why Does The President's Party Lose Seats In The Mid-term Elections?" *Medium. Augmenting Humanity*, April 9, 2018.
<https://medium.com/@marcushjohnson/why-does-the-presidents-party-lose-seats-in-the-mid-term-elections-ee84760a69ae>

Democrats than previous opinions on the subject suggest. When applied to past elections, the model's predictions in late May have missed the final totals by an average of just seven seats. There is, of course, no guarantee that the model will hold true in 2018 as well. A two-in-three chance measured almost six months before the election is hardly secure enough for the Democrats to rest easily. This year's race is so close that it would take only a shift of 0.6 percentage points towards the Republicans in the model's expectations of the national popular vote for it to appoint Trump's party as a favorite to retain control.⁷ So far, President Trump's approval rating has already defied the historical pattern of declining sharply in the first half of a mid-term year. His party could have bottomed out unusually early. Furthermore, the most important factor for the Republican's voters to consider is, "Are you with Trump? That consumes everything".⁸

Ultimately, the impact of these mid-term elections will not be limited to a few years. Rather these results combined with those of 2020 census will significantly impact the mid-term elections of 2022 as well and will also help to define the political combat all the way through next presidential elections in 2020.

However, the Democrats have a serious issue regarding the vision of America and they are promoting the message of "Impeach Trump!" They need to clarify their vision of America, the message for this vision, and the way they are going to get there. Democrats would need to pivot back to the economy. If they simply campaign against Trump, their victory in November 2018 will be a hollow one. Voters want to know what will change if Democrats control the majority. This is the thing that political strategists never stress enough: every election is about change. No one wants to stay on the same course.

Democrats need to explain why people should vote for them, not why people should vote against Trump. Even Trump is not on the ballot in 2018, and mid-term elections are never a true referendum on the President, they're a referendum on the policies of his first two years in office. Most Presidents adjust after suffering devastating defeats in the mid-term mid-terms. It is just a part of governing. Instead of splintering into silly goals and personal agendas, the Democrats would need to portray a focused message that appeals to a large majority. They should point out Republican drawbacks and problems in the current administration such as their inability to create jobs.

⁷ "Who's ahead in the mid-term race," *The Economist*, 23 May, 2018.

<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/05/24/whos-ahead-in-the-mid-term-race>

⁸ Lee Drutman, "Yes, the Republican Party Has Become Pathological. But Why?" *Vox*, September 22, 2017. <https://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2017/9/22/16345194/republican-party-pathological>

Conclusively, if Democrats succeed in taking control of House or Senate, they will get the veto power over the legislation and passing of the bills and Republicans will not be able to send bills to the president only with party votes. It would also give them authorization which would let them investigate the Trump administration far more aggressively. The more governorships and state legislatures the Democrats manage to win, the more opportunities there will be for new liberal legislation across the country. If Democrats pick up a sizeable number of state attorney general offices, they will have many more people looking to file lawsuits against the Trump administration for policies they find legally unreliable or controversial.