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Exploring the 2022 US Midterms

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Foreword



Lara M. Brown

Despite regular and careful study of the campaigns, conditions, and events surrounding U.S. midterm elections, each quadrennial cycle yields some surprising outcomes and offers scholars new opportunities to reconsider past findings. In this regard, the 2022 midterm election cycle was no different from any of the other [twenty-two](#) in the modern era that have occurred since 1934, when Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt's first midterm election became the most notable exception to the historical rule that the president's political party is likely to lose seats in Congress.



Statue of President Franklin Roosevelt, 2012

Still, the 2022 midterm cycle's results were ['very unexpected.'](#)

President Joe Biden's Democratic Party sustained a net loss of only nine seats in the House of Representatives. Crucially, of the nineteen cycles between 1934 and 2018 when the president's party has lost seats in the House, there have been only three others when the president's party has lost fewer than 10 seats (1962: -4; 1986: -5; 1990: -8).

To help us make sense of this historic election cycle, the American Politics Group (APG) of the UK Political Studies Association has collected a series of papers that investigate and analyse not only what happened (Republicans performed worse than expected), but also offer a number of perspectives about the ways in which we might think about this electoral cycle within the broader political contexts of racial and gender diversity, economic and socio-cultural issues, campaign and candidate rhetorical frames, diverging national, federal, and local interests, and the development of the political parties and the laws that pertain to the casting and counting of ballots.

It is because of the many intriguing lines of inquiry and deeper ruminations in these papers that I am honoured to have been asked to author a foreword for this brief. As the editor notes, this brief is meant to serve as a 'bridge between the more immediate...work of journalists and the canon of academic work that with time, should provide a more fine-grained understanding of events.' From my perspective, it is also appropriate for the APG to prepare just this sort of

document—a thoughtful exploration intended to help scholars further their initial suppositions--because this is precisely what they have collectively done for nearly fifty years at their annual conference.

Having had the good fortune to serve as a keynote speaker at the APG annual conference in January 2017, shortly after another most surprising U.S. election (2016), I found that my conversations with this group of mostly European social scientists and historians who study American politics

were terrifically edifying. These scholars, which included many of the participants who served on the 2023 APG panel on the midterms, helped me to consider the U.S. election's results in a broader, more global context, which included, but was not limited to the 2016 Brexit referendum. I am grateful to the APG for having extended that invitation. I am also hopeful that you will accept my invitation to engage with the rich analyses contained within this brief. The varying perspectives offered here are sure to prove invaluable.

Lara M. Brown, Ph.D.

Bio: Lara is Former Director of The Graduate School of Political Management, The George Washington University. She is a political scientist and author of *Jockeying for the American Presidency: The Political Opportunism of Aspirants* (Cambria Press, 2010) and *Amateur Hour: Presidential Character and the Question of Leadership* (Routledge, 2020).

Statue of President Franklin Roosevelt, 2012:

<https://pixabay.com/photos/face-roosevelt-president-statue-18173/>

A Note on Method, Aims, and Context

This brief has its genesis in conversations between the APG Chair, Phil Davies, and Vice Chair, Dafydd Townley, of the APG and myself about how we might both make best use of the [new website](#) of the APG and feed into the intellectual debates around US politics in a meaningful way. Based on my prior experience of writing and editing previous [reports](#) and [briefings](#) to draw on the APGs members seemed an obvious way to do this. The focus of this brief came into view over Summer 2022 as the US midterms came into view. Calls for contributors were [distributed](#) in late Summer and Early Autumn, with briefing sessions held, and a writing guide distributed, in September and October. The Editorial Committee came together during this period.

The original deadline of December 5 was extended when (inevitably) it was superseded by the [Georgia runoff](#), but after this chapters came in thick and fast. By mid-December, half a dozen chapters had been submitted, joined by two more by January 10 2023. As draft chapters came in, the Editorial Committee worked with authors to develop chapters with impressive speed.

A panel at the [2023 APG](#) annual conference at Leicester University in January 2023 arose from the brief. It featured Clodagh Harrington, Alex Waddan, Amy Tatum, Matthew Schlachter, and myself. Andrew Rudalevige was Chair.

This brief is meant to compliment the literature that will inevitably develop around the 2022 midterms, building on the work of journalists and commentators in the process. In time, there will be peer-reviewed articles, monographs, and edited collections exploring the nuances of the elections at local, state, and federal levels. If we are lucky, some of the trends and narratives identified in this brief will be borne out by (perhaps even inform?) the more nuanced analysis that arises from the peer review process. As such, this brief should be viewed as a bridge between the more immediate, but essential, work of journalists and the canon of academic work that, with time, should provide a more fine-grained understanding of events.

It is fair to say without being alarmist that US democracy, like the strands of democracy present in other places, faces challenges at present. Some of these challenges are explored in this brief. I hope this brief plays a small role in helping the understanding of these challenges.

Peter Finn, Kingston University
Project Lead, January 2023

1. Gender Representation and the 2022 Midterms, *Amy Tatum*

Key Takeaways

- No significant change for numbers of women in the United States Congress following previous historic midterm results.
- Record numbers of women elected in gubernatorial races across the country, but a lack of intersectional representation.
- Important wins for trans and non-binary people at state level races that shows promise for substantive representation.

Introduction

In the 2022 midterm elections gender played a part not only in the makeup of the candidates but issues of gender dominated political discourse in the run up to election day. Abortion rights, predominantly impacting women, continued as a divisive and galvanising campaign topic and the war being waged against the trans and non-binary community was prevalent in rhetoric at the state and national level. The election results painted a mixed picture for issues of gender representation and although there were not substantial gains across the board there were significant and important wins that should be recognised.

Gender representation in all areas of politics is vital in order to encourage substantive representation within political institutions. [Substantive representation](#) means not only representing a group in terms of identity but importantly representing the *interests* of that group. In terms of women gaining political representation Professor [Sarah Childs](#) warned not to mistake women's bodies for feminist minds. Such a warning can be applied to all areas of gender representation, having the bodies in office does not assure that meaningful representation of issues will follow. However, in order to increase policies and legislation that will define, protect, and defend all genders, research has shown electing members of those groups is necessary in order to raise such issues on the political agenda. This paper explores the results of the midterm elections through the lens of gender and substantive representation.

Women in United States Congress

The [numbers of women elected to Congress](#) in the 2022 midterm elections did not reach new heights that could herald a leap forward for women's political representation. 149 women will serve in the 118th Congress which is an increase of 2 on the preceding Congress. This now means 27.9% of Congress identifies as a woman. The disparity between the two parties remains with 107 of the 149 Congresswomen belonging to the Democratic Party. In the House and the Senate there was an increase of 1 woman following these elections.



Image 1: The US Capitol, 2020

The 2018 midterm election was largely viewed as the [Year of the Woman](#) with record numbers of women winning seats nationally in both the House and the Senate. It was hailed as a direct response to Donald Trump's 2016 election win and a show of solidarity against he and his supporters' misogynistic rhetoric. Boatright and Sterling, in their book [Trumping Politics as Usual](#) argued that the language used by Trump against women had, and would have, an impact across the political spectrum and would trickle down to all political races, making misogyny more acceptable and a substantial voting motivation. The 2022 election results arguably can be seen as a response to this with less gains for women as would have been expected following the most recent trends.

The lack of repeated growth in representation for women in Congress is a disappointing midterm result and is one that potentially is concerning for gender scholars. In recent years, we have seen a rise in misogynistic rhetoric in politics, and women's roles and rights have been a constant source of political discourse. The recent abortion rulings from the Supreme Court and state legislatures have meant that women's rights have been at the forefront of these midterms however, this has not resulted in higher numbers of women in Congress. In the 1990s [Susan Faludi](#) wrote of the 'Backlash', she argued when there is a perception that there have been advances in women's equality, a backlash ensues in response in order to keep any advances in check. This is to counter any threat to patriarchal dominance and creates a more hostile environment for women. Evidence of this backlash could be pointed to in order to explain the stagnation in numbers of women in Congress and an ever growing narrative around threats to masculinity and women's traditional roles within society.



Image 2: Then House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 2019

One significant event for gender representation to come from this midterm cycle has been the end of the tenure of the first, and only, woman Speaker of the House of Representatives. Nancy Pelosi has been, arguably, the most powerful woman in United States politics and has been seen by many as a trailblazer for women in leadership and political office. In her [resignation speech after the election](#) she said, “I never would have thought that someday I would go from homemaker to House speaker”. Pelosi has been a powerful symbol of women in political leadership in the United States in the 2000s and again since 2019. She has represented women in leadership during a time of increased misogynistic rhetoric under the previous president and has been a vocal presence in domestic and foreign affairs. The response to her departure has evoked praise for her glass-shattering tenure. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez [said her leadership](#) “has had profound ramifications for the United States”, Senator Elizabeth Warren [called her](#) leadership “barrier-breaking”, and former Representative Gabby Clifford [tweeted](#) ‘strong women get things done!’. Speaker Pelosi’s departure from the national stage will mean an absence of women in positions of leadership in legislative politics and with it brings a return to the dominance of the male political archetype.

Governors

Outside of the executive branch of the federal government, the role of governor is one of the most prominent political positions in United States politics. Although the scope of the role differs depending on state constitutions, the role of governor is politically powerful and symbolic. After the 2022 midterm elections there will be a record number of women holding the position of state governor, the number will sit at 12, up from 9. Arkansas, New York, and Massachusetts elected their first women to the office of governor in the midterm elections. Women will now make up 24% of governors across the United States. [Research](#) has shown that in midterm elections candidates for governor can bypass more national trends and through targeted media campaigns, focusing on social media, can “counteract or exploit” gender stereotypes. Arkansas’ Governor-elect Sarah Huckabee Saunders, the state’s first woman governor, created a social media campaign that emphasised both her communal and agentic traits. Her [Instagram](#) bio reads ‘Christian. Wife. Mom. Arkansan.’ with her feed

focusing heavily on her pro-gun stance and her role as caring, loving homemaker. Huckabee Saunders navigates the gendered terrain but balancing her role as a wife and mother, with her more agentic policy stances. By evaluating the campaigns the women holding gubernatorial office ran, so could there be important clues for women seeking executive office at the federal level and provide key insights into voter responses to women candidates.



Image 3: Boston, Massachusetts, 2016

When evaluating the historic gains women have made in gubernatorial races it is important to recognise that of the 12, 11 are white women. Only 1 governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, is Hispanic, notably Grisham was the first Democratic Hispanic woman governor in United States history. A record 6 Black women ran for governor across the nation in the 2022 midterm election, [DeArbea Walker](#) explored the role Black women played in electing President Biden in 2020 and the impact of seeing Vice President Harris in office. Hopes were high for seeing the first Black woman governor in United States history however, this was not the midterm for such a historic win. This lack of intersectional representation of women in the position of Governor has important implications for women of colour across the United States and speaks to the barriers that face women of colour when seeking political office. When thinking of the substantive representation that the women governors provide for their constituents, this lack of representation of women of colour speaks to a lack of potential focus or understanding of the lived experiences and needs of large proportions of constituents in each state. Celebrating the wins in terms of gender representation at the state level is a must, but it would also be wrong to not recognise the enduring absence of women of colour within state executive office across the United States.

Trans and Non-binary Wins

Although there were no trans or non-binary winners in the United States Congress midterm elections, [there were important wins at the state level](#), which has been called a [Rainbow Wave](#) for the LGBTQ community. [Gay Times reports](#) there

were 1065 queer candidates on the midterm ballots and 466 of those were elected. Notably in relation to gender, New Hampshire elected its first trans man to the state senate in James Roesener, he is also the first openly trans man to be elected to a [state legislature](#). Montana and Minnesota elected their first trans lawmakers to the state legislatures in Zooey Zephyr and Leigh Fink. Sarah McBride, who became the first trans woman state senator in history, was re-elected to the Delaware state senate. Montana also elected its first non-binary state representative in SJ Howell. These ground breaking wins follow a recent [increase in anti-LGBTQ proposed legislation](#) and a rise on specifically [anti-trans campaigning](#). [Research](#) shows that LGBTQ politicians are vital in advancing the rights of the LGBTQ community, and members of the community in the United States are much more likely to be disadvantaged within society, especially within the [trans community](#). After her historic win [Representative Zephyr said](#) on her motivation to run for office, “watching bills pass through the legislature by one vote, I cried and thought to myself, ‘I bet I could change one heart, I bet I could change one mind. We need representation in that room, I’m going to try to get in there”.

As discussed previously, substantive representation for trans and non-binary people is needed in order to ensure legislatures and institutions are representing these communities. Ann Phillips calls it the [politics of presence](#) and argues representation of lived experience is vital. Such wins for trans and non-binary people at the state level represent a significant move forward for the political presence of different genders, and has the potential to provide important progress for gender trans and non-binary people.

Conclusion

Gender representation remains an issue in United States politics at all levels and in all branches of government. The recent midterm elections showed modest gains for gender representations and for many scholars studying women’s roles in United States politics specifically, they could be seen as disappointing. From an intersectional perspective the persistent lack of women of colour in political office remains a serious concern. However, it is important to recognise the state wins for women in governor’s offices, and also state wins for trans and non-binary candidates. Substantive representation of different gender identities is paramount to ensuring democratic institutions speak for differing lived experiences. In time the hope would be that the developments at state level will be reflected in federal offices and chambers. For the coming two years, in the run up to the next elections, it will be important for parties to focus on fostering inclusion and intersectional diversity in their candidate selection, and for existing office holders to be representing their communities in a meaningful, substantive way.

Image Credits:

Image 1: The US Capitol, 2020

<https://pixabay.com/photos/capital-usa-government-landmark-5043172/>

Image 2: The House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 2019

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nancy_Pelosi_%2847999011913%29.jpg

Image 3: Boston, Massachusetts, 2016

<https://pixabay.com/photos/boston-massachusetts-city-urban-1775870/>

Bio:

Dr Amy Tatum: Amy is a lecturer in Media and Communication at [Bournemouth University](#). She has recently completed her PhD exploring women's responses to women in political leadership. Her research focuses on gender in politics, representation, media influence, and leadership. She recently published an article on perceptions of women leaders at times of crisis and has written regularly for the [LSE blog](#) on gender and politics in the United States. Research in progress includes a book chapter on American First Ladies in Vogue Magazine, and articles on women in political leadership and constructions of gender.

2. Material V Post-Material: Inflation and Reproductive Rights as 2022 Voter Priorities, *Clodagh Harrington & Alex Waddan*

Key Takeaways

- In summer 2022, Democrats experienced a poll bounce in the aftermath of the *Dobbs V Jackson Women's Health Organization* Supreme Court ruling.
- Inflation in 2022 reached its highest levels since 1982, peaking at 9.1% in June.
- By autumn 2022, polls suggested that material issues, specifically inflation and related consequences, were surpassing post-material concerns for voters.
- When voters are hurting financially and facing significant economic uncertainty, how much might the most emotive of post-material priorities fare among midterm voters?

Introduction

From early summer 2022 partisans and political commentators presented competing narratives of the issues that would mobilise voters in the upcoming midterm elections. All sides acknowledged that economic concerns, especially the inflation rate, would be high on the agenda. The bad economic news was widely perceived to be good political news for Republicans as, regardless of the merits of the case, voters would blame the party in the White House and in control of Congress for the spike in prices at gas stations and in supermarkets. At the start of May, however, a quite different issue dramatically jumped into the election landscape. A leaked Supreme Court opinion suggested that the Court was soon to overturn the constitutional right of women to an abortion embedded in the 1973 *Roe* decision. Democrats quickly predicted that this would change the dynamics surrounding the mid-terms to their partisan advantage. The confirmation of the Court's intent at the end of June then coincided with an improvement in the Democrats' polling numbers and over performance in a small number of special elections. In another turnaround, however, by mid-October the conventional wisdom had reverted back and again predicted a red wave, hurried along by the underlying current of economic anxiety.

The final results suggested a more nuanced issue environment than captured by the simple inflation or abortion rights dichotomy. This chapter will explain how each of these issues did come to be important concerns for voters and how the polls and then the actual election outcomes reflected their impact. We also take note of other matters, such as the Democrats insistence that 'democracy' itself was on the ballot and Republican efforts to push immigration and crime to the centre of popular debate. Throughout our discussion, however, it is critical to remember that the issues, whatever their resonance and importance, are not debated in an intellectual and political vacuum, but are framed and filtered by partisan loyalties.

Inflation

In March of 2021 the Chair of the Federal Reserve, Jerome Powell, [commented](#): "What we see is relatively modest increases in inflation... But those are not permanent things". If not exactly complacent, this message - that rising prices were not something to worry about unduly - was misjudged. To be fair to Powell, his view did capture much of the conventional wisdom, especially from figures associated with the Biden administration who dismissed the idea that the big spending contained in the recently enacted American Rescue Plan might be inflationary. In January of 2020, just prior to Covid-19's impact on the economy, the 12-month inflation rate in the U.S. was 2.5%. In January 2021, it was just 1.4%, but a sharp increase followed. In June 2021 it stood at 5.4%, peaking at [9.1% a year later](#). In October 2022, with the midterms imminent the inflation rate was 7.7%. As the [Bureau of Labor Statistics reported](#) in September 2022, this hit especially hard on key consumer products: 'The index for cereals and bakery products increased 16.2 percent over the year and the index for dairy and related products rose 15.9 percent.'

One particular focus of attention was gas prices. In early summer of 2022, accounting for some regional variation in prices, the average gallon of gas was [55% more expensive](#) than it had been a year earlier. Republican leaders were quick to link the rise in gas prices to the Biden administration's wider energy policy. In spring 2022, House Republican Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California [complained](#): "Democrats want to blame surging prices on Russia. But the truth is, their out-of-touch policies are why we are here in the first place. Remember what happened on Day 1 with one-party rule? The president cancelled the Keystone pipeline, and then he stopped new oil and gas leases on federal lands and waters". Whatever the economic literacy of this messaging, blaming the Biden administration for high prices at the pump was perceived as a winning political narrative.

The Dobbs Decision

On 24 June 2022, the US Supreme Court [ruled](#) that '[T]he Constitution does not confer a right to abortion. *Roe* and *Casey* must be over-ruled, and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives.'

In doing so, the 6:3 decision upended a half century of abortion rights dating back to *Roe V Wade* and allowed states to once again introduce major restrictions or even bans on women's access to abortion providers: And many states wasted little time in exercising this power. [By mid-September 2022 15 states](#) had bans for abortion for women at six weeks or less into a pregnancy, most without exceptions for rape or incest. Some of these bans were undergoing court challenges while other state bans were on hold while courts considered the legitimacy of the bans. For some voters at least, this dramatic reorientation of access to reproductive services changed the issue environment, with abortion rights rivalling economic concerns as a top mid-term election priority.



Image 1: US Supreme Court, 2017

Arguably the most controversial Supreme Court decision of the twentieth century, the constitutional rationale behind *Roe* was that a woman's right to privacy (including that of bodily autonomy) was protected by the 14th amendment. The Guttmacher Institute [estimates](#) that one in four American women will have an abortion by age 45, yet women's rights advocates have long feared that the *Roe* ruling may be overturned. Still, it took the Trump-era realignment of the Court via the appointment of three highly conservative justices for this concern to become a reality.

Speculation began when the *Dobbs* case opened in late 2021 regarding its potential impact on the midterms. Usually such elections act as a referendum on the incumbent party, with relatively low turnout and the 'out' party's voters more highly mobilised by their frustration at being locked out of power. One feature of the *Dobbs* decision was that it reversed some of this election year dynamic as the 'out' party had managed to achieve one of its major policy goals and in doing so fuelled a sense of grievance on the other side.

Among the sea of opinion polls, pre-*Dobbs* results from dataforprogress.org showed that more Democrat and Republican voters were concerned about extremism in the other party than they were about abortion. Post *Dobbs*, the significance of abortion moved in the [rankings](#), acting perhaps as a bell-weather for partisan concerns about other (majority) party extremism (i.e. the consequences of sending abortion decisions back to the states).

A Red Wave!

In late spring, the public mood about the state of the economy made grim reading for the party in power. In May 2022, Gallup's index of economic confidence was at its lowest point since February 2009, when the Great Recession was at its most severe. [Gallup's polling](#) also found that 18% of respondents named the 'high cost of living' as the most important issue facing the country and another 12% mentioned the 'economy', with only 5% saying abortion at this point. Around the same time, [polling for CNN](#) found that the dissatisfaction with the economy spanned the political spectrum. An overwhelming 94% of Republicans, 81% of Independents and even 54% of Democrats described the economy as being in 'somewhat' or 'very' poor shape.

Ominously for Democrats, many blamed Biden for the economic woes. Hence, in spring 2022, it did not seem unreasonable for [CNN election analyst Harry Enten](#) to conclude “it will be difficult to displace the economy as the top issue. Given how poorly Biden and the Democrats are polling on the issue, that’s very good news for Republicans and very bad news for the Democrats.”

Democratic Recovery & Closing Vibes

The potential of the *Dobbs* outcome to change that narrative and in particular to electrify younger liberal voters, especially female, was real. One Democrat pollster described the issue as an electoral ‘[wildcard](#)’ whilst a Republican counterpart voiced concerns regarding the damage that upending *Roe* would have with suburban female voters who had already distanced themselves from the GOP since Trump’s 2016 election.

By high summer of 2022 there was real-world evidence to support Democrat claims that the *Dobbs* decision had reconfigured the political environment to their party’s advantage. In the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision there were a handful of congressional special elections for the House. These saw a quantifiable [over-performance for the Democratic candidates](#) when set against the baseline of Biden’s 2020 performance in the respective districts. Moreover, in early August, [538’s analysis](#) of generic ballot polls gave the Democrats a narrow lead for the first time since November 2021. There were different factors playing into this – the price of gas was at least stabilising – but there was also evidence that abortion was affecting political behaviour. Most starkly in a state-wide vote in Kansas at the start of August, a proposed constitutional amendment that there be no right to an abortion in the state was defeated by a [59% to 41% margin](#).

The closing weeks of the campaign, however, saw another shift in the conventional narrative. Driven to some extent by polling numbers, the mood music once again played a tune that cheered the Republican ear. By mid-October the GOP led, if marginally, in [generic ballot](#) polling and some evidence suggested that, although abortion rights was an intensely important issue to some voters, those remained a minority as the economy was once again ‘[top of mind](#)’. Making no effort to temper expectations, Republican leaders and strategists predicted [a big red wave](#) that would lead to their party’s capture of both the House and also the Senate. This confidence was not only a result of the sense that materialist concerns about the economy had trumped the issue of abortion, but also reflected a rise in the profile of [crime and immigration as](#) issues motivating voters. In addition, there was a sense that Democrats, and the Biden administration in particular, had [miscalculated](#) by emphasising ‘the threat to democracy’.

Or The Poll That Counts!

In the end, just as the election results were a mixed bag for both parties, so too the evidence about which issues had been the most important was ambiguous. The overall exit polls reported that 31% of respondents said that inflation was the most

important issue to them and 27% said abortion. 71% of the former voted Republican and 76% of the latter voted Democrat. Further, the national polls did not capture the full picture. In particular, abortion rights were an explicit theme for some voters as five states California, Vermont, Michigan, Montana, and Kentucky followed the earlier example of Kansas and allowed voters to have a direct say on the matter. Depending on the state, the measure was to maintain, introduce or prohibit abortion access rights. In all cases, the pro-choice position won. [Elaine Kamarck](#) suggests that such developments helped Democrats to keep some Congressional seats.



Image 2: Detroit, Michigan, 2016

Furthermore, [exit polls](#) suggested that there was a significant gender divide in the youth vote. Young women voted 72% for Democrats and 26% for Republicans. Among the same age group among males, 54% voted Democrat and 43% Republican. These numbers surpass the regular gender divide and strongly suggest that the *Dobbs* effect was in play here.

Finally, the exit polls suggested significant state to state variation in how voters prioritised issues. For example, in the Senate race in Ohio 35% named inflation as the central issue against 26% citing abortion: Yet, in neighbouring Pennsylvania's Senate election 37% prioritised abortion against 28% naming inflation.

Clearly, further research needs to be done to tease out these complex patterns – or perhaps to find out if there were any identifiable patterns. In the longer-term, it remains to be seen whether the reaction to the *Dobbs* decision provides an organising point for pro-choice politics in the way that the *Roe* decision had done for so long for pro-life advocates.

Image Credits:

Image 1: US Supreme Court, 2017

<https://pixabay.com/photos/us-supreme-court-building-2225766/>

Image 2: Detroit, Michigan, 2016

<https://pixabay.com/photos/detroit-downtown-city-architecture-1819179/>

Bios:

Clodagh Harrington: Clodagh taught US politics at De Montfort University, Leicester for sixteen years and moved to University College Cork in 2022.

Alex Waddan: Alex is an [Associate Professor](#) in Politics at the University of Leicester. He has written extensively about U.S. politics and social policy.

- Their most recent monograph, '[Obama V Trump: The Politics of Presidential Legacy and Rollback](#)' was published by EUP in 2021. The sequel '[Biden V Trump](#)' is due from EUP in 2024.

3. Rising Stars and Fading Stars: Challenges and Opportunities for the Democratic Party After the Midterms, *Caroline Leicht*

Key Takeaways

- While the midterms turned out better for Democrats than expected, a split Congress poses significant challenges to President Biden.
- Approval ratings for Harris have started to improve after the midterms which could be good news for a potential 2024 bid.
- Pete Buttigieg and Gretchen Whitmer have emerged from the midterms as rising stars for a potential 2024 Democratic primary contest.
- In the wake of the midterms, the Democratic Party has both challenges and opportunities to consider as it sets the course for 2024.

Introduction

Historically, the midterms pose a challenge for the incumbent president, and it was no different for Joe Biden in 2022. His low approval ratings caused Democrats to fear a Red Wave in November. But a wave did not sweep the nation. Instead, Biden's Democrats did far better than expected, retaining control of the Senate. But the initial enthusiasm post-midterms may not carry over to 2024.

Despite unexpected successes, the results of the midterms pose significant challenges to Biden and his administration's agenda going forward. With Republicans winning control of the House in the midterms, Biden's more liberal campaign promises are unlikely to make it through Congress, which could hurt his standing with voters. The president's relationship with the American electorate is already on thin ice. Even an initial post-midterms boost has not helped to keep Biden from his ongoing [approval ratings low](#).

But all hope is not lost for the Democratic Party going into 2024. Should Biden decide not to run for re-election, the party has other options now. The midterms proved to be a catapult for potential 2024 candidates. Among them are familiar names like Kamala Harris, but the midterms have also put new names like Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer on the radar and opened up opportunities for rising political stars in the party. Insofar, then, the midterm results are both a challenge and an opportunity for Democrats.

Biden's Post-Midterm Challenges: Cause for Concern?

The midterms turned out better for Biden than expected. The dreaded Red Wave did not occur; instead, Democrats retained control of the Senate. The curse of the incumbent at the midterms, however, may not have been overcome entirely. Democrats lost control of the House, where Republicans now hold a 221-213 majority,

a significant challenge for any progressive legislation the Biden Administration hopes to pass.

As of December, Biden had kept 23% of his [campaign promises](#), compromised on 5%, and started on another 68%. At the same point in his presidency, [Barack Obama](#) had kept 29% of his campaign promises, compromised on 10%, and was working on delivering another 56%. While Biden is faring slightly worse than Obama, he is already doing better than his predecessor [Donald Trump](#). By the end of his presidency, the Republican had kept 23% of his campaign promises, compromised on 22%, and broken 54%. While Biden's is not a bad record two years into his presidency, a split Congress will make it very challenging for Biden to pass further legislation to set himself up for a positive record if he decides to run for re-election in 2024.

Whether Biden does run is yet to be confirmed. In the past, both the president himself and his aides have said that it is his ["intention"](#) to stand for re-election. But Biden, who would be 81 on Election Day in 2024, is facing challenges beyond a split Congress as he enters his third year in office. While American voters seemed content with his performance as president during his [first few months in office](#), his approval ratings have been subpar since his first summer in the White House.



Image 1: Cartoon of then Candidate, now President, Joe Biden, 2020

In July 2022, he received his worst [approval ratings](#): 57.2% of registered voters had an unfavourable view of Biden as president, while only 37.5% said they had a favourable view. In [October](#), Biden's approval rating was at 40%. At the same point in their presidency, the average predecessor had an approval rating of 53%; Obama and Trump had approval ratings of 45% and 42% respectively.

Despite faring better than expected in the midterms, Biden's [approval rating](#) is still just around 40%, while his disapproval rating is steadily above 50%. But hope is not lost for Biden and his party: The president has been busy getting many agenda items passed that are important to Democratic voters. The [gun safety bill](#), the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) and [student loan forgiveness](#) announced over the summer might have played a role in avoiding the dreaded Red Wave at the midterms. Particularly younger voters and women [turned out](#) for Democrats, two demographic groups whose top voting issues have been reflected in the Biden administration's agenda over the summer. And with further legislation like the Respect for Marriage Act passed in early

December, Biden has further positives for progressives to add to his portfolio if he decides to run.

Kamala Harris: In Biden's Shadow?

Should Biden decide to step down and not run for re-election, his number two appears to be the obvious second choice. As Vice President, Kamala Harris has done very poorly in approval ratings. A year into her time in office, 54.7% of American voters had an [unfavourable view](#) of her, while only 44.6% gave her a positive job rating. Her numbers have since dropped even lower, and on [Day 666](#) in office, she was doing significantly worse than her predecessors.

As with Biden, though, the midterms appear to have given her a slight boost. On [8 November](#), she had a 52.0% negative and 39.5% positive rating; by the time the Georgia Runoff took place on [6 December](#), this had improved to a 46.1% negative and 41.8% positive rating. That Harris' approval rating appears to be linked to Biden's should come as no surprise. [Research](#) suggests that favourability and job approval of vice presidents is consistently linked to presidents as most citizens do not form 'independent opinions' about vice presidents.



Image 2: Then Former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris, 2020

For Harris, though, this could all change. At 58, Harris is significantly younger than Biden and despite her current low approval ratings, she may yet be a good option for Democrats. She has a 53.2% [approval rating](#) among those under 30 and a 48.9% approval rating among 30-to-44-year-olds. She does better among female voters than male voters and enjoys particular popularity among Black and Hispanic voters. Beyond the primaries, where these demographic groups could help her win the nomination, Harris would need to do significantly better among other voters to gain the electoral college victory. She is currently performing worse than [Biden](#) among White voters and only does well with voters who completed a [postgraduate education](#).

[Current polls](#) have Harris losing to Donald Trump or Ron DeSantis in a potential general election match-up; however, this data is based on smaller numbers of polls as the focus is still on Biden so far. And almost two years from the election, they are hardly representative of the 2024 election mood yet. If Biden does not run, Harris would have the opportunity to set her agenda and portfolio, step out from Biden's shadow and have voters form independent opinions about her, a process that would

almost certainly change current polling patterns. As the incumbent vice president, however, Harris would face the challenge of balancing setting herself apart from Biden and not diminishing their administration's efforts.

The Wild Cards: Who the Midterms Put on the Map

While Harris is the second choice behind Biden among Democratic voters, it is unlikely that she would run unopposed if Biden does not seek re-election. Potential opposition she may face in the Democratic primary contest may come from within the administration: Transport Secretary Pete Buttigieg would be a likely candidate.

The former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, was [“the most requested surrogate on the campaign trail”](#) ahead of the midterms, which speaks to his popularity within the party. Biden made significantly less campaign appearances and was [notably absent](#) from states with close races, not least because his low approval ratings were seen as a potential liability among Democrats. Buttigieg, on the other hand, is less disliked than Biden and Harris (Buttigieg 27%, [Biden](#) and [Harris](#) both 37%) and enjoys [high name recognition](#) among voters (76%).

[Current polls](#) show Harris only slightly ahead of Buttigieg in a potential primary match-up; however, the [schedule](#) might be in Harris' favour here. In 2024, Iowa is poised no longer to be the first primary contest in the nation. This honour is instead expected to go to South Carolina, which is similarly rural to Iowa but has a larger share of Black voters. While Harris has consistently received [very high favourability and approval ratings](#) among this voter group, starting the campaign in South Carolina may be bad news for Buttigieg, who has previously had [significant challenges](#) securing support from minority voter groups. In 2020, he suspended his campaign just a day after the South Carolina primary, where he picked up no delegates.

Following the midterms, there may also be a potential wild card on the horizon. Gretchen Whitmer, who was a rumoured finalist to be Biden's running mate in 2020 and was the target of a [kidnapping plot](#) thwarted by the FBI in October of the same year, has become a rising political star in the Democratic party. The Michigan Governor just won a [second term](#) in the midterms, defeating Trump-backed Republican Tudor Dixon by 10.6 percentage points, a higher margin than her [first win in 2018](#).

Unlike Buttigieg, Whitmer did not have an Ivy League education; she attended university in her home state of Michigan and began her political career there in 2000. She was the first female Democratic leader of the Michigan Senate, and in 2013 gained national attention for her passionate [speech on abortion rights](#), revealing that she had been sexually assaulted as a young woman. Whitmer has been a [leading voice](#) among Democrats on this vital healthcare issue, particularly in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade. Ahead of the midterms, she received the endorsement of a [coalition of over 150 Michigan Republicans](#), a testament to her ability to work across the aisle. In their endorsement, the coalition of Republicans praised Whitmer for having passed 900 bipartisan bills during her tenure as governor.



Image 3: Gretchen Whitmer, 2018

With Democrats winning the majority of House seats, the Secretary of State and Attorney General races, and scoring victories on ballot measures on expanding voting access and the right to abortion [in the state](#), Whitmer has received widespread attention. Within the party, she has already been making a name for herself: She was selected to give the Democratic response to the 2020 State of the Union address and has been a vice chair of the Democratic National Committee since 2021. And while an [early November poll](#) saw only 13% of voters saying they would want her to run and 3% saying she would be their top choice, Whitmer should not be ruled out as a wild card favourite for a potential Democratic primary contest after her success in the midterms.

Conclusion: How the Midterms Lead into 2024

Moving beyond the initial celebratory mood, many of Biden's challenges prevail. Despite an initial boost in approval ratings, his numbers are still well below passing grade. Should this trend continue, it may just be the case that Biden's ["intention"](#) to stand for re-election could change. Biden's low approval ratings, along with his age and the new challenges posed by the post-midterms split Congress, could be a combination that would outweigh the incumbent advantage.

While his vice president may be the obvious choice to replace him, Harris faces the same challenges the president does: Low approval ratings and the challenge of delivering on key voting issues while Republicans control the House. But the midterms have not only created challenges for Democrats; they have also fostered opportunity. Buttigieg's many appearances on the campaign trail across the nation have not only raised his public profile but have also been very telling of the support he enjoys within the Democratic Party. And Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, with the successes across her home state in her corner, has certainly claimed her status as a serious challenger in a potential 2024 Democratic primary as well.

The key takeaway of the midterms may thus not be that it could have been worse for Democrats, but that there are both challenges and opportunities that should receive equal attention as the party sets its course for the year ahead and going into 2024.

Image Credits:

Image 1: Cartoon of the Candidate, now President, Joe Biden, 2020

<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/smile-politician-man-adult-male-5621670/>

Image 2: The Former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris, 2020

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bidenforpresident/49721663391/in/photostream/>

Image 3: Gretchen Whitmer, 2018

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gretchen_Whitmer_In_Southfield.jpg

Bio:

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4. The 2022 Midterms were about more than just Congressional Elections: State Elections Mattered too, *Chris Gilson*

Key Takeaways

- The 2022 midterms were not only good for the Democrats in Congress, they also succeeded at the state level, gaining four legislative chambers, and the number of Democratic trifectas increased to 14. While the party also added three governorships, results in New York and New Mexico point to the party's vulnerability to Republican attacks on crime.
- More than £1 billion was spent on the 140 ballot measures campaigns voted on by Americans in 2022. Many measures codified or further codified individuals' rights to reproductive freedom, to legally use certain drugs, and to not experience slavery or involuntary servitude as a criminal punishment.
- Despite concerns ahead of the elections, candidates for Secretary of State who had previously denied the results of the 2020 election were largely not successful.
- Elections for State Supreme Court in 27 states resulted in only one Court, North Carolina, changing its partisan majority.

Introduction

From outside of the US, it's often easier to focus on the 'top-line' of American politics: the race for the White House every four years, and contests for the US House and Senate alongside presidential elections and every two years in Midterm elections. And while these bodies have a significant amount of political power, there are many, many other actors in US politics that have a direct influence on Americans' lives, a number of which were up for election at the midterm elections on 8 November. The Democrats' Congressional election successes were mirrored by pickups in state legislative and gubernatorial races. Following years of being on the back foot at the state level, the Democratic Party now appears to be regaining momentum outside of Washington DC. While not directly coded as partisan contests, the midterms also had positive results for many progressive causes which had made it to voters as ballot initiatives. Perhaps spurred on by the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* in the summer of 2022, voters in five states opted to protect reproductive freedom. Four states gave the nod to the legalisation of cannabis or the decriminalisation of other types of previously banned drugs. Democracy was also a winner in these midterms, with the majority of 2020 election-denying Secretary of State candidates losing their bids for office. Finally, state Supreme Court elections have mostly left us with the status quo.

The state of the states' governors

Most elected officials in the US do not take their seats in Washington D.C; compared to the 535 elected and voting members of Congress, there are 7,383 [state legislative seats](#), and potentially [more than half a million](#) elected officials across the US at the municipal, town, county, and school district level. And while not all these seats were up for election in the most recent midterm cycle (just as the presidency was not), many were, and the results will have important implications for US politics over the next two years.

There are 99 state legislative chambers in the US (Nebraska is unicameral); ahead of the midterms, nearly [6,300 legislators in 88](#) of these were up for election. Following the November 8 vote, the Democrats gained control of four chambers – in Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania – and a bipartisan coalition took Alaska's State Senate. As it stands, the GOP now control 57 state legislative chambers to the Democrats' 40. There are 23 Republican trifectas – where one party controls the State house, Senate, and Governorship – to the Democratic Party's 14. Government is divided in the remaining 13 states.

While much of the media coverage on state elections focused on incumbent Governor (and potential 2024 presidential candidate), Ron DeSantis' significant victory in Florida, of the 36 gubernatorial elections which were taking place on 8 November the Democrats were able to flip three states: Maryland, Massachusetts, and Arizona. Republicans, by contrast, were only able to gain the Nevada governorship, and now hold the position in 26 states to the Democrats' 24. While not a pickup, incumbent Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer's [victory](#) in Michigan by more than 10 percentage points over her GOP challenger was a surprise to many as polls leading up to the election had her [only one or two](#) percentage points ahead. Whitmer's victory cements the state's new Democratic trifecta – [the first since the 1980s](#).



Image 1: Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, 2019

Despite their gains, this cycle saw close shaves for the Democrats. In New York State, for years regarded as a Democratic stronghold, Republican Congressman Lee Zeldin was able to [play up concerns about crime](#) in New York City, reducing the incumbent Governor Kathy Hochul's winning margin to less than 6 percentage points,

down from an 18-percentage point win in 2018 by Hochul's predecessor, Andrew Cuomo, who resigned in 2021 following allegations of sexual misconduct. In New Mexico, incumbent Democratic Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham kept the governorship with a [6 percentage point win](#) over Republican Mark Ronchetti – who also campaigned on crime - down from nearly [15 percent](#) when the party retook the governorship in 2018. If the Republican Party can learn from these close results, especially in the context of relatively low unemployment and falling petrol prices, we may see them continue to play up fears of crime to increase their success in future electoral contests.

The state of ballot measures

Seldom covered outside of the US, ballot measures are an important part of the country's electoral cycles. This year [140 measures](#) were voted on across 37 states, with 68 of the measures approved by voters (eight were voted on outside of the midterm elections). The process by which measures arrive with voters varies: 30 were initiated by citizens who had collected the required number of signatures to trigger a vote, while 110 were referred to a state's voters to approve either by the state legislature or commission.

A wide variety of measures were decided on 8 November by US voters. Some measures were 'operational', such as [New Mexico's Bond Question 2](#), where the state's voters confirmed a \$19 million bond - which had already been approved by the state legislature - to fund public library improvements, and [Missouri's Amendment 1](#), which was rejected by voters, which would have amended the state's constitution to give the state's treasurer greater powers to invest funds in certain areas.

By contrast, other measures were approved – or were not – to enshrine important rights in state law or state constitutions. Following the US Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe vs. Wade* in the summer, voters in California, Michigan, Kentucky, Montana, and Vermont voted to protect abortion rights and reproductive freedom. Cannabis legalisation was also the subject of five ballot measures on 8 November, with Missouri and Maryland voting to approve the drug's use recreationally, while voters in North and South Dakota and Arkansas rejected legalisation. Colorado's measure to decriminalise psychedelic plants and fungi was approved by voters. Four states – Tennessee, Oregon, Vermont, and Alabama - voted to repeal existing laws or change language in their constitution which until now allowed slavery or involuntary servitude as a criminal punishment. A similar measure in Louisiana did not pass after opposition from its original sponsor who cited [ambiguity](#) in the language put to voters.

It's worth noting that ballot measures and the campaigns around them can be expensive when compared to other state and even federal elections. This past cycle, over [\\$1 billion](#) was spent on ballot measure campaigns, nearly as much as was spent on [the midterm US Senate races](#). California's Propositions 26 and 27, which would have legalised sports betting on Indian Land, and the practice more widely in the Golden State, accounted for nearly \$600 million of this spending, with over \$300 million spent in opposition and a similar amount in support of the measures, which were both

defeated. Michigan's reproductive freedom proposal accounted for over \$60 million in spending, while Nevada's ranked-choice voting measure saw more than \$21 million spent.

The state of Secretaries of State

Election administration – including federal – is a matter for the individual US states, and in each the Secretary of State (or Secretary of the Commonwealth in three states) is responsible for them (the US Secretary of State, by contrast, is responsible for representing the country overseas). In 35 states the position is an elected one, and 27 were on the ballot this cycle. Heading into the midterm elections as many as [nine](#) candidates running for Secretary of State had previously denied Joe Biden's 2020 election victory or endorsed Donald Trump's false allegations of voter fraud. While Secretaries of State are usually not household names in the way that a state's Senator or Governor might be, they hold a great deal of power in how state elections are run, and there were [concerns](#) about how a Secretary of State election-denier might undermine a state's election systems and cast doubt on the reliability of its elections in the future.

On the day, candidates who had previously cast doubt on the 2020 election result prevailed in only [four states](#) - Alabama, Indiana, South Dakota and Wyoming – all of which are fairly solidly in the Republican column in presidential elections for the time being. In addition, in Pennsylvania, which has become a key decider in presidential elections in recent years, and where Secretaries of State are appointed by the governor rather than elected, the Democratic candidate Josh Shapiro beat his election-denying GOP opponent Doug Mastriano. These victories for democracy – and for the Democratic Party – may be down to the Democrats' [push](#) to defend their elected officials. With these defeats behind them, in combination with generally poorer than expected midterm election results, the Republican Party should think again before pursuing election-denial as a campaign strategy.



Image 2. Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, 2022

The state of State Supreme Court elections

State Supreme Court justices are chosen by election in 38 US states, and 25 held partisan or nonpartisan elections (or what are known as 'retention' elections where voters can opt to retain previously appointed justices or not) for Court positions in the 2022 midterms. State Supreme Courts have the final (other than the US Supreme Court) word on state laws, and as such, can make [important decisions](#) on state elections, such as in gerrymandering cases, or making a ruling if an election result is in dispute.

Though the Republican Party made [significant efforts](#) to unseat sitting state Supreme Court Justices, the midterm elections left the State Supreme Court landscape largely [unchanged](#), with only North Carolina switching its partisan majority, from Democratic to Republican. This shift may have implications for redistricting in the state, as North Carolina will need to redraw its Congressional election maps ahead of 2024. Ohio's Court [remained](#) Republican, but the now retiring state Supreme Court justice had been voting with the Court's three Democratic justices in some decisions.

Image Credits:

Image 1: Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, 2019

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gretchen_Whitmer.jpg

Image 2: Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, 2022

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/governortomwolf/52102723372/>

Bio:

Chris Gilson: Chris is the Managing Editor of USAPP, the Phelan US Centre's daily blog on US politics and policy. He is the co-author of *Communicating Your Research with Social Media: A Practical Guide to Using Blogs, Podcasts, Data Visualisations and Video* (Sage, 2017). He has an undergraduate and a Masters degree in Geography, and a postgraduate diploma in Strategic Management, all from the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Chris can be contacted at c.h.gilson@lse.ac.uk

5.A Phoenix from the Ashes or a Dead Duck: The Fate of Moderate Republicans in the 2022 US Midterm Elections, *Matthew Schlachter*

Key Takeaways

- Moderate Republican candidates continue to run in elections for federal and state offices, although their chances of success in contested primaries is increasingly precarious.
- If successful in their primary elections, most moderate Republican candidates stuck to standard Republican Party messaging during their general election campaigns, although some opted to run on more explicitly moderate campaign platforms.
- Aside from incumbents and the strong electoral performance of Republicans in New York, moderate Republican electoral victories in the 2022 midterm elections were limited.
- Despite these limited victories, moderate Republican candidates were more competitive than their more conservative counterparts – tending to overperform the partisan lean of their congressional districts in US House of Representatives elections and coming closer to defeating their Democratic opponents.

Introduction

This chapter will consider the role played by moderate Republicans in the 2022 midterm elections. Although considered something of an oxymoron by most observers of contemporary American politics, moderate Republicans continue to exist as a faction within the wider Republican Party – with moderates continuing to run as candidates in Republican primaries, standing as Republican Party nominees in general elections and winning elected office at the federal, state and local level.

With a traditional base of support in the Northeastern United States, this chapter will concentrate on the electoral impact of Republican moderates in this region as it is defined by the United States Census Bureau: the New England states of Connecticut (CT), Maine (ME), Massachusetts (MA), New Hampshire (NH), Rhode Island (RI) and Vermont (VT), as well as the Middle Atlantic states of New Jersey (NJ), New York (NY) and Pennsylvania (PA). The chapter will also predominantly focus on congressional elections, although some brief discussion of races for state governorships will also be made. Finally, for the purposes of this chapter, moderate Republicans will be identified primarily on ideological grounds as well as by membership of or campaign support given by existing moderate Republican organisations, such as the Republican Main Street Partnership or the Republican Governance Group.

As such, the 2022 US midterm elections not only highlight the continued existence of moderates within the wider Republican Party but also demonstrate their electoral impact. In fact, the five seats flipped by Republicans in the Northeast would have been sufficient to secure Republican control of the US House of Representatives.

The Primary Elections

Several moderate candidates challenged for the nominations of their respective offices in the various Republican primary elections across the [Northeast](#) – but with varying degrees of success.

Overall, moderate Republicans enjoyed the most success when these primary elections were uncontested. This was the case for candidates for the US House of Representatives Larry Lazor and George Logan from Connecticut and Allan Fung from Rhode Island. Both Lazor, an OB-GYN, and Logan, a former state senator, were unopposed in their respective primary elections for CT-01 and CT-05 after [receiving the endorsement of their district's Republican congressional conventions](#). In Rhode Island, Fung – a former Mayor of Cranston and two-time candidate for Governor – initially had competition from state senator [Jessica de la Cruz](#) and 2020 candidate [Bob Lancia](#), but the former dropped out to endorse Fung and the latter did so under pressure from the state Republican Party.

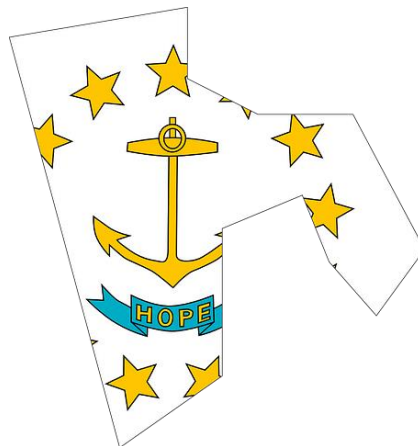


Image 1: Rhode Island state flag imposed on an outline map of the state, 2015

However, moderates were noticeably less successful in contested primaries. In both of New Hampshire's congressional districts, moderate candidates were defeated by [Trump-endorsed opponents](#). In NH-01, Gail Huff Brown – who released a [campaign ad](#) pledging to “protect choice” post-Roe – finished third in a crowded primary field. In NH-02, the pro-choice George Hansel, [lost the Republican nomination](#) despite support from the popular incumbent Governor Chris Sununu, himself a moderate Republican. NH-02 was also one of the primaries that [Democrats were accused of interfering](#) in to boost the Trump candidate over the moderate, in the belief that the more conservative candidate would be easier to beat in the general election. Furthermore, in NY-22, Steve Wells, who received campaign funds from both the [Republican Main Street Partnership](#) and [Republican Governance Group](#), as well as the [support of Republican leadership](#), was defeated by the Conservative Party backed Brandon Williams.

More conservative candidates also captured the Republican nominations for US Senate in both Vermont and Connecticut. In Vermont, Christina Nolan, a former US Attorney who supports [LGBT+ rights and environmental protection](#), had the support of both [national](#) and [state](#) Republican leaders but lost to a relatively unknown

conservative candidate, Gerald Malloy. This was also the case for Themis Klarides in Connecticut. [A pro-choice, pro-gay rights Republican](#), who was formerly state House Minority Leader, Klarides [won the state party endorsement](#) but lost the primary election following a late [endorsement by former President Trump](#) of her opponent Leora Levy.

Some moderate Republicans who fought contested primary elections did see success. Yet these successes mainly consisted of incumbents such as Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-01), Chris Smith (NJ-05), Andrew Garbarino (NY-02) and Nicole Malliotakis (NY-11), or incumbent and former state and local officials such as Tom Kean Jr. (NJ-07), Michael Lawler (NY-17) and Jayme Stevenson (CT-04). This was also true for popular moderate incumbent governors Phil Scott of Vermont and Chris Sununu of New Hampshire.

The General Election Campaigns

Of those moderate Republican candidates who successfully emerged from their primary elections, most ran campaigns that stuck closely to the [national Republican Party messaging](#) on rising inflation and crime rates – which Republicans pinned on a Democratic-controlled Congress led by an increasingly unpopular President Biden. For instance, in NY-17, the [Republican Governance Group](#) funded Mike Lawler put out a [campaign ad](#) outlining the ‘record inflation’ and ‘surging crime’ that he argued was occurring ‘under Biden.’ In NJ-07, despite also expressing opposition to federal abortion bans, Republican candidate Tom Kean Jr. [argued](#) that “breaking the back of inflation” was the “top priority.”

Some, however, ran on explicitly moderate campaign platforms. For instance, Larry Lazor in CT-01 called for a Republican Party [“reset”](#), while outlining his support for abortion rights and opposition to President Trump. Taking an equally explicit pro-choice stance, Jayme Stevenson in CT-04 [attacked](#) the incumbent Democratic congressman Jim Himes for failing to codify Roe v Wade during his time in office. Nonetheless, a moderate platform did not prove to be successful in non-competitive races, as indicated by the outcomes in [CT-01](#) and [CT-04](#).

On the other hand, in RI-02, it could be argued that Allan Fung’s equally moderate campaign was the reason that this district in typically Democratic Rhode Island came to be seen as competitive. Fung, while “laser-focused on inflation” like most Republican candidates across the country during the 2022 midterm election campaign, [stated his support](#) for bipartisan legislation, such as the recent infrastructure package, as well as congressional efforts to codify Roe v Wade. In fact, Fung hoped that his campaign would help to usher in something of a [“rebirth”](#) of moderate Republicanism. All of this saw Fung consistently leading in the [polls](#) ahead of election day.

The General Election Results

With the increased competitiveness of Republican candidates and a widely predicted ‘Red Wave’ for Republicans across the US, some [observers](#) suggested that

the 2022 midterms could witness a possible revival of Northeastern Republicanism after years of Democratic dominance in the region.

Yet, once the campaigns had concluded, of the 22 competitive House seats in the Northeast only nine were won by Republicans (see Table 1). All but one of these wins was in the state of New York, which witnessed a particularly strong Republican performance more broadly – [with Republican messaging on crime appearing to resonate strongly in this specific state](#). It is worth noting that of these nine successful candidates in the competitive Northeastern House districts, all but two conform to the classification of moderate Republican as set out in the introduction. Despite this, it is important to note that redistricting in both [New York](#) and [New Jersey](#) also improved the Republicans electoral chances in these seats.

Nevertheless, candidates considered moderates tended to overperform the partisan leaning of their districts. Of the thirteen moderate Republican candidates in competitive Northeastern congressional districts, nine overperformed their districts partisan leaning and one performed as expected.

Outside of New York, which was something of an outlier in terms of Republican performance, the only Republican overperformers were moderates Allan Fung in RI-02, George Logan in CT-05 – who came within 0.8% of his Democratic opponent – and Tom Kean Jr. who won election in NJ-07.



Image 2: Then Cranston Mayor Allan Fung with his wife Barbara Ann Fenton-Fung, 2016

Only three moderate Republicans underperformed their districts partisan orientation. Bruce Poliquin lost handily in a Republican-leaning district to popular incumbent Jared Golden in ME-02, [himself a moderate Democrat](#). In Pennsylvania, Jim Bognet in PA-08 and Jeremy Shaffer in PA-17, who [both received campaign funds from the Republican Governance Group PAC](#), underperformed the expected partisan performance in their districts – although this could have been a down-ballot effect of the successful Democratic candidates for both Pennsylvania’s governorship and US Senate seat.

Table 1: 2022 Midterm Election Performance by Republican Candidates in Competitive Northeastern US House Districts (as rated by The Cook Political Report)

Cook Race Rating (As of Nov. 7)	House District	Candidate	Moderate (Y or N)	Cook PVI	Result Margin	Difference
Likely Democrat	CT-02	Mike France	N	D+3	D+17.8	D+14.8
	NJ-05	Frank Pallotta	N	D+4	D+9.3	D+5.3
	NY-25	La’Ron Singletary	N	D+7	D+7.2	D+0.2
Lean Democrat	NH-02	Robert Burns	N	D+2	D+11.8	D+9.8
	NJ-03	Bob Healey	N	D+5	D+11.9	D+6.9
	NY-18	Colin Schmitt	Y	D+1	D+1	EVEN
Toss Up	CT-05	George Logan	Y	D+3	D+0.8	R+2.2
	ME-02	Bruce Poliquin	Y	R+6	D+3.3*	D+9.3*
	NH-01	Karoline Leavitt	N	EVEN	D+8	D+8
	NY-03	George Santos	N	D+2	R+8.2	R+10.2
	NY-04	Anthony D’Esposito	Y	D+5	R+3.8	R+8.8
	NY-17	Michael Lawler	Y	D+3	R+0.8	R+3.8
	NY-19	Marcus Molinaro	Y	EVEN	R+2.2	R+2.2
	NY-22	Brandon Williams	N	D+1	R+1	R+2
	PA-07	Lisa Scheller	N	R+2	D+2	D+4
	PA-08	Jim Bognet	Y	R+4	D+0.4	D+4.4
	PA-17	Jeremy Shaffer	Y	EVEN	D+6.8	D+6.8
	RI-02	Allan Fung	Y	D+4	D+3.7	R+0.3
Lean Republican	NJ-07	Tom Kean Jr.	Y	R+1	R+3	R+2
	NY-01	Nick LaLota	Y	R+3	R+11.8	R+8.8
Likely Republican	NY-02	Andrew Garbarino	Y	R+3	R+22	R+19
	NY-11	Nicole Malliotakis	Y	R+6	R+24.2	R+18.2

**Results as of first round of ranked choice voting.*

It is also clear from the results of competitive Northeastern US House Districts that non-moderate candidates tended to underperform – some quite significantly so. For instance, in the two congressional seats in New Hampshire, Karoline Leavitt in the

'Even' seat of NH-01 lost by eight points and Robert Burns in the D+2 district of NH-02 was defeated by almost 12. In fact, only two of the nine non-moderate candidates in competitive Northeastern House seats overperformed their districts lean – both in New York.

A bright point for Northeastern Republican moderates were the races for state governors. While conservative and Trump-endorsed candidates lost in [Maine](#), [Massachusetts](#) and [Pennsylvania](#), moderate incumbents Governor Phil Scott of [Vermont](#) and Chris Sununu of [New Hampshire](#) won by double digits – at the same time as Democrats were winning federal races in their respective states.

Conclusion: Moderate Republicans Post-2022 Midterms

Just as the national 'Red Wave' failed to materialise, the 2022 US midterm elections were not the Northeastern Republican rebirth that some had anticipated. Yet moderate candidates continued to stand in Republican primaries and tended to overperform the partisan leaning of their districts in general elections, whether ultimately elected or not.

In assessing the Republican Party's 2022 midterm performance, Governor Chris Sununu of New Hampshire [stated](#) that the election results showed that "candidate quality matters" with voters opting to "fix policy later [and] fix crazy right now." He went on to argue that the election results were "[a rejection of extremism.](#)"

The competitive races conducted by moderates Allan Fung in RI-02 and George Logan in CT-05 when compared to the underperformance of conservative candidates in both of New Hampshire's congressional districts help prove this point. Indeed, the 2022 midterm election results make clear that moderate Republican candidates remain competitive in the Northeast, particularly so when they receive the financial and organisational support of national Republicans.

Image Credits:

Image 1: Rhode Island state flag imposed on an outline map of the state, 2015
<https://pixabay.com/vectors/rhode-island-state-usa-flag-map-890633/>

Image 2: Then Cranston Mayor Allan Fung with his wife Barbara Ann Fenton-Fung, 2016
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cranston_mayor_Allan_Fung_July_4_2016.jpg

Bio:

Matthew Schlachter: Matthew is a PhD student at UCL's Institute of the Americas. Matthew's current research focuses on the role of moderates in the US Republican Party from 1980 to the present day. Such research fits neatly into Matthew's wider research focus on comparative party politics, with a particular emphasis on mainstream centre-right parties.

6. Extreme Weather and Climate Change Narratives in the Florida 2022 Midterm Elections, *Felicia Ronnholm*

Key takeaways

- Ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, the Democrat and Republican nominees for Governor and Senator in Florida had contrasting discourses concerning Hurricane Ian and the effects climate change has on tropical cyclones.
- The Democrats' gubernatorial and senatorial candidates, Charlie Crist and Val Demings, framed Hurricane Ian as proof that climate change is real and requires urgent action. Contrarily, Ron DeSantis, the Republican gubernatorial nominee, abstained from mentioning climate change when speaking of Ian, and Marco Rubio, the Republican senatorial incumbent, avoided making references to the climate crisis.
- DeSantis and Rubio's tendency to avoid mentioning climate change is especially important, as their frames of Hurricane Ian aligned with the scientific research on how hurricanes are evolving due to climate change.
- The two incumbents, DeSantis and Rubio, used positive campaign strategies that highlighted their personal strengths and ideas, as well as their achievements related to the rescue and recovery operations after Hurricane Ian, Michael, and Irma. DeSantis also balanced these frames with negative campaign strategies to present himself as a good choice for governor and his challenger, Crist, as unsuitable for the role. Conversely, Crist and Demings mostly adopted negative campaign strategies, centring on policy and character-based criticism toward their opponents.

Introduction

Six weeks before the midterm election, Hurricane Ian made landfall near Cayo Costa, Florida on 28 September 2022. The storm surge reached a record high of [7.26 feet](#) in Fort Myers, and the extreme rainfall caused one-in-a-thousand-year floods in Placida and Lake Wales. Over four million homes and businesses lost power, and [144](#) people died. Florida's senatorial and gubernatorial midterm candidates adopted narratives concerning the hurricane that reveal how they perceive tropical cyclones and their link to climate change. The Democrats framed Hurricane Ian as evidence that urgent climate action is needed. Simultaneously, the Republican candidates usually abstained from mentioning climate change and avoided making references to it. Coincidentally, both DeSantis and Rubio described Ian in line with how scientists have warned hurricanes will evolve as climate change worsens. Moreover, the Democrat and Republican contenders adopted contrasting framing techniques. DeSantis and Rubio primarily adopted positive campaign strategies, in contrast to Crist and Demings who used negative campaign strategies. This chapter will unpack these differences and similarities in the extreme weather and climate change narratives of

Florida's senatorial and gubernatorial elections. Furthermore, it will discuss what DeSantis' frames may indicate as we approach the 2024 presidential election.

What's Climate Change got to do with it?

Throughout his campaign, DeSantis avoided mentioning climate change when speaking of Hurricane Ian. For instance, during a [press conference](#) attended by Joe Biden, DeSantis solely spoke of the storm's immediate effects and the rescue and recovery operations. Contrarily, Biden [stated](#) that: 'I think the one thing this has finally ended is a discussion about whether or not there's climate change'. Moreover, in the [gubernatorial debate](#), DeSantis focused on the hurricane's short-term impacts on infrastructure when asked if any new policies were needed to change where and how coastal Florida homes are built following the destruction caused by Ian. Meanwhile, Rubio did not avoid mentioning climate change, having published an [op-ed](#) on 15 September 2022 titled: 'The Left's Climate 'Whataboutism' is on Full Display in California', but he did abstain from making references to it during Florida's [senatorial debate](#). When asked: 'what federal actions [are] needed [...] to protect Florida from sea levels projected to rise a foot or more in less than thirty years, while more frequent monster storms threaten our lives and livelihoods'? Rubio did not make any references to climate change or sea level rise, instead focusing on immediate emergency response and long-term recovery efforts.

Conversely, Crist and Demings repeatedly mentioned climate change and its link to Hurricane Ian and conveyed what science reveals about the impact of rising temperatures on tropical cyclones. For instance, [Demings' answer](#) to the question of what federal actions need to be taken to protect Florida from sea level rise and extreme storms was: '[...] we have got to get serious about climate change. [...] If we don't do something about it, then we are going to pay a terrible price [...]. More intense storms, [...] as the waters and the ocean continue to warm up, [...] more flooding, more [...] devastation, as we've seen with Ian'. This statement acknowledges that climate change intensifies hurricanes and flooding events. Similarly, Crist claimed in an [interview](#) on the impact of Hurricane Ian that 'we [...] need to address climate change for crying out loud. They're getting bigger. They're getting stronger. [...] there's proof positive that we need to address climate change'. Consequently, the Democrat candidates were more likely to mention climate change, address its role in the growing intensification of hurricanes, and link their frames of Ian to the science on the issue.



Image 1: Hurricane Ian, 2022

Hurricane Ian Narratives and Hurricane Science

DeSantis and Rubio's tendency to avoid speaking of climate change is of particular interest, as both have framed Hurricane Ian in line with how scientists have anticipated that tropical cyclones will evolve as climate change escalates. During a press conference on the destruction caused by Ian in southwest Florida, [DeSantis](#) stated: 'I think we've never seen a flood event like this. We've never seen storm surge of this magnitude'. Similarly, [Rubio claimed](#): 'I went to the National Hurricane Center and I remember asking them: what would be the worst possible storm that you can imagine hitting our state? And they described basically what we're facing right now, which is a powerful hurricane that sort of stalls off the coast. Doesn't even have to make landfall over Florida. Just stalls off the coast and pushes a bunch of water into the Tampa Bay region and into the western part of the state. We're talking about five-to ten-foot storm surge [...]'. Scientists have established that rising temperatures caused by climate change will [slow the movement](#) of storms after they make landfall. Additionally, increasing global ocean temperatures cause [more high-intensity storms](#), enable hurricanes to maintain their intensity for longer, and contribute to a rising sea level. Normally, tropical cyclones lose most of their intensity after making landfall, as they are powered by moisture from the sea. However, since the 1960s, [hurricane intensity](#) has escalated in direct proportion to the ocean temperature rise, resulting in hurricanes maintaining an average of 50% of their intensity a day after making landfall, as opposed to losing 75% of their intensity in the 1960s. Consequently, hurricanes are increasingly likely to stall over communities, cause major storm surges by pushing more water onto land, and generate massive flooding due to sea level rise, storm surges, and excessive rainfall. Thus, Hurricane Ian presented several elements of being impacted by climate change, most of which are mentioned in DeSantis' and Rubio's frames of the event.



Image 2. Flooding caused by Hurricane Ian, 2022

Positivity or Negativity

As incumbents, DeSantis and Rubio could use [positive campaign strategies](#). Consequently, they drew on their hurricane-related accomplishments to prove their suitability for their jobs. This can be linked to research by [David Twigg](#), who found that incumbents gained four advantages after Hurricane Andrew, including the ability to associate themselves with the reception of external goods and services; intensify constituency service; gain more visibility and media coverage; and appear non-political or above politics. DeSantis' discourse on Ian enabled him to link himself to the flow of external assistance. During the [press conference with Biden](#), DeSantis used the word "we" to link his administration's work to goods and services provided by the government, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Florida Power and Light, and Elon Musk. By associating himself with the external assistance Florida received, DeSantis also intensified and enhanced the visibility of his constituency service. Finally, his discourse enabled him to appear above politics, as he thanked the Biden administration, which he had previously criticised on [multiple occasions](#), for their help in Florida's rescue and recovery operations and asserted that they had cooperated well. Similarly, Rubio associated himself with the external assistance Florida received after Hurricane Michael and Irma. During [the senatorial debate](#), he stated: 'I'm very proud that in 2017, and [...] in 2018, I was able to get President Trump and the [...] government to fully reimburse our counties for the help they needed'.

Conversely, Crist used [negative campaign strategies](#), focusing on character and policy attacks toward DeSantis instead of Crist's personal strengths and ideas. [Crist stated](#) that: '[DeSantis] had access to all the modern technology you could have [...] and he still failed to [...] evacuate' Lee County. This frames DeSantis' performance before Ian's landfall as inadequate. Furthermore, Crist attacked DeSantis' character by asserting that he had displayed poor leadership skills by not evacuating Lee County on time. Such strategies are usually only used by challengers such as Crist, who are [down in the polls](#) and have no office to lose, as they can cause an electoral backlash. Additionally, Demings primarily adopted a negative campaign throughout the [senatorial debate](#). However, when speaking of Ian she chose to use positive campaign strategies that emphasised her ideas for short-term recovery and long-term solutions. Finally, [DeSantis](#) used negative campaign strategies to attack Crist's character, but this was balanced with a positive campaign, as he simultaneously stressed his own strengths.



Image 3. Fort Myers Beach after Hurricane Ian, 2022

Looking Ahead

DeSantis and Rubio won their [respective elections](#), but DeSantis' win has [attracted particular attention](#), making him a likely candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024. Hence, the rhetoric he has adopted on climate change and extreme weather is of particular importance, as it indicates what his position is on the issues and what climate and extreme weather-related policies he may support should he be nominated for and win the presidential election in 2024. Rubio, who ran [for president in 2016](#), may also be a potential candidate, but he currently lacks the momentum and media attention DeSantis has gained following his reelection as governor. DeSantis tends to avoid using the term 'climate change' and only addresses resilience when speaking of hurricanes, as [evidenced by](#) claims such as: 'what I've found is people, when they start talking about things like global warming, they typically use that as a pre-text to do a bunch of left-wing things that they would want to do anyways, and so, we're not doing any left-wing stuff. What we're doing though is just reacting to the fact that, okay, we're a flood-prone state'. As such, DeSantis appears unlikely to prioritise or develop any climate mitigation policies or programs that aim to tackle the climate crisis. Instead, any climate or extreme weather-related policies presented by a potential DeSantis presidential campaign will probably focus purely on resilience. Contrarily, the rhetoric of Demings, Crist, and Biden, indicates that the Democrats' 2024 presidential nominee will likely advocate for resiliency efforts and climate action policies. Both of these are needed to ensure that hurricanes like Ian do not cause as much devastation in the future and to prevent tropical cyclones from escalating in intensity and strength.

Image Credits:

Image 1: Hurricane Ian, 2022

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ian_2022-09-28_1527Z.jpg

Image 2: Flooding caused by Hurricane Ian, 2022

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/statefarm/52404690243/>

Image 3: Fort Myers Beach after Hurricane Ian, 2022

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/thenationalguard/52401981991/>

Bio:

Felicia Ronnholm: Felicia is a PhD student in Politics at [Kingston University](#). She is exploring how right-wing populists frame climate change and why they frame it as they do, with a particular focus on the Trump Administration. She works for the American Politics Group as a communication assistant on the 'Unfolding Our Shared Future: Challenge, Possibility and Potential in the 21st Century' talk series.

7. An Overview of the Republican Party after the 2022 Midterm Elections, *Michael Espinoza*

Key Takeaways

- The supposed red wave ended up being a red trickle – a missed opportunity but not a complete failure.
- The opportunity for a sizeable swing to the right went unfulfilled – but the Republican Party still won a narrow House majority.
- Trump backed Senate candidates cost the Republican Party a Senate majority.
- The Republican Party still grapples with the Trump dilemma; however, moving on from Trump would not be easy, nor would it signal change within the Republican Party, 'Make America Great Again' cultural conservatism took hold of the party before Trump – it merely went by another name.

Introduction

In the 2022 midterm elections, the Republican Party failed to take advantage of favourable conditions like a waning economy and inflation. Although winning control of the House of Representatives is still a positive outcome for the Grand Old Party (GOP), Democrats were able to defy historical trends regarding the party in power for midterm elections (voters tend to punish the presidential party). Republican candidates who pushed the 2020 election fraud myth were viewed by enough voters as being too extreme. Another issue that hurt Republican candidates was abortion, which also played into the theme of Trump backed candidates as being too extreme. In swing states (such as Arizona, Michigan and Pennsylvania), the Trump backed candidates hurt the Republican Party to a larger extent, more so than in red states (Republican-leaning states) or blue states (Democratic-leaning states). However, while the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) extremism kept the GOP from controlling Congress, there were victorious congressional candidates who supported the election fraud myth. The election results revealed an increase in the Trump-supporting wing of the GOP. However, a quandary remained – is it time for the GOP to move out of Trump's shadow?

The Midterm Results: A Red Trickle Instead of a Wave

Going into the 2022 midterm elections, both parties, Democrats and Republicans, had expectations reach highs and lows that [seesawed](#) back and forth. Democrats were originally buoyed with optimism due to the increased importance placed on abortion rights after the US Supreme Court overturned [Roe v. Wade](#) on 24 June 2022. When this buoyancy started to wane in the fall, concerns over the economy, especially inflation, peaked. This buoyed Republican hopes for a '[red wave](#)' in the midterm elections on 8 November 2022. Some were so bold as to predict that this red wave would mean that the GOP picked up close to [40 seats](#) in the House of Representatives and a chance to flip at least [one Senate seat](#). Moreover, even [modest outlooks](#) still predicted a positive election outcome for the GOP; an outcome that would

give them the opportunity to win control of Congress. This balance in governmental power would likely offer gridlock and a power struggle not only between the Biden administration and a Republican Congress, but an GOP intraparty battle between a conservative Senate and an anti-government and increasingly illiberal dominated House (an [example](#) includes the recent bill to [avert](#) a government [shutdown](#)).

However, any Republican foretelling of a red wave was far off base. What resulted was the GOP winning a small House majority of [222-213](#) (a House majority requires at least 218 seats), as well as losing one Senate seat and conceding outright control to Senate Democrats ([49-51](#), if Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I – AZ) still votes or caucuses with Democrats, she [switched party affiliation](#) to independent on 9 December 2022). The result of the midterms was short of a historic defeat for the non-presidential party, although [results](#) were worse for Republicans in 1962 and 1934 (and for Democrats in 2002). [High expectations](#) for the GOP going into the midterms can make the election results look like a victory for Democrats (especially for President Biden). However, such a claim overlooks that the GOP won control of the House of Representatives by just nine seats.

A Razor Thin GOP House Majority

Although the GOP was hopeful of a larger majority, it still won [control](#) over one house of Congress. Overall, House Republicans picked up enough seats, nineteen, to enable a good working majority. However, House Democrats were able to blunt any momentum by flipping five Republican seats. More importantly, many Democrats from what were considered “[key races](#)”, or vulnerable incumbents were able to win re-election and helped to stem the tide and prevent a red wave for the GOP. The GOP failed to gain seats in key swing states, especially Michigan and Pennsylvania but was more successful picking up House seats in strongly Democratic states, with New York yielding the best result. In New York, the Republican Party gained four House seats, which was largely due to a failed attempt by the Democratic-controlled state legislature to ensure that the redistricting process was [gerrymandered](#) in favour of their party. Instead, a non-partisan map was used, which increased GOP opportunity to gain seats (whereas Florida’s GOP Governor, Ron DeSantis’s attempt was far more [successful](#)). Moreover, in very Democratic California, Republicans gained one seat and retained seats in a handful of races where [Joe Biden outperformed Donald Trump](#) in 2020. What resulted was not a stalemate, but it is not an ideal victory for an opposition party during economic headwinds. It strongly suggests that the [more extreme MAGA candidates kept the GOP](#) from picking up even more House seats.

Moreover, the new House majority proved to turn a usually straightforward vote for House Speaker into a very dramatic and drawn out [process](#). Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) was at the mercy of a bloc of election-denying MAGA [Republicans](#). He needed fifteen ballots to win them over – by making [concessions](#) – and earn enough support/votes to become the next Speaker of the House. It was the first time in a century that a vote for House Speaker went past the first ballot, and the fifth longest in House [history](#). And if the House GOP struggled to elect a Speaker with a majority, how

great of a challenge will it be for them to [govern](#) on a consistent basis? Or perhaps the main priority is to continue on with an anti-government [dogma](#). A dogma that is reliant on pursuing an illiberal MAGA [cultural conservatism](#) at the expense of governing within the current political [dynamics](#), a Democratic controlled Senate as well as a Democratic presidential administration.



Image 1: Then President Donald Trump, 2017

The challenges for the GOP in the House 2022 general election races were three-fold. Firstly, how red a district was or was not (meaning either it was a more solidly Democratic district, it leaned one way or the other, or it was a toss-up); secondly, if the candidate was endorsed/supported by Donald Trump; thirdly, if the state was a swing state. Of the three, the most important and divisive factor was the endorsement/support of the former president since an endorsement/show of support meant the candidate – either incumbent or challenger – [supported the 2020 election fraud myth](#). Where a candidate fell on the spectrum of conservatism and/or the electability of a candidate (in a general election) did not factor into any Trump endorsement decisions in my view, nor was there any candidate vetting [process](#). Trump's endorsement criteria was the same for the Senate candidates, which proved even less helpful to Senate Republicans.

Poor Candidate Quality Cost the GOP a Senate Majority

Senate elections are different from House elections and are more like other state-wide elections, such as the presidency and governorships. Broad election appeal is more important for a state-wide election versus an individual House district. Moreover, Senate Republicans had a very good opportunity to flip at least one seat, especially in key race states such as Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, and New Hampshire. Georgia, Nevada, and New Hampshire even had the advantage of a Republican governor leading the ballots. Yet what resulted was [calamitous](#), not a single Senate seat flipped. Worse, they lost the Pennsylvania seat to the Democratic Party. All five states also had one important point in common – a Senate nominee endorsed by Trump. The five GOP nominees were [Blake Masters](#) (AZ) (defeated 46.5% to 51.4%), [Mehmet Oz](#) (PA) (defeated 46.3% to 51.2%), [Herschel Walker](#) (GA) (defeated 48.6%

to 51.4%), [Adam Laxalt](#) (NV) (defeated 48% to 48.8%) and [Donald Bolduc](#) (NH) (defeated 44.4% to 53.5%).

What doomed the five Senate challengers was not so much the former president's endorsement. Rather it was the quality of the candidates that was the Achilles heel of each campaign, which was a noted concern of Senate Minority leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY), [who stated on 18 August 2022](#): "I think there's probably a greater likelihood the House flips than the Senate. Senate races are just different — they're statewide, candidate quality has a lot to do with the outcome". Taking a stance on issues at odds with the majority of voters was a factor regarding candidate quality. Election deniers made comments that were viewed as too extreme, which included abolishing the FBI ([Bolduc](#)), purging all liberal generals from the military ([Masters](#)), supporting constitutional sheriffs linked to far-right anti-government views ([Laxalt](#)), and anti-abortion support (all five candidates). Some candidates even attempted to soften and scale back previous comments to be viewed as less extreme to potential voters. For example, in Arizona, GOP Senate candidate Blake Masters had his campaign website '[scrubbed](#)' to soften the campaign messaging on abortion. Also, in Nevada, Adam Laxalt attempted to go on the offensive and [gloss over his history](#) of supporting anti-abortion causes. Both are examples of how abortion rights played a role for voters in key Senate elections (see [Arizona](#) and [Nevada](#) exit polls).



Image 2: Route 66 in Nevada, 2019

When it comes to moving on from Trump, democracy and the rule of law may clash with how successful Republicans can be with Trump as the face/leader of the party. And if this success is minimal, and if Trump is to blame for the disappointing election results, then is it time for the Republican Party to dump Trump?

Will the GOP Move on from Trump?

The question of who to blame for the disappointing midterm elections for Republicans has many pointing the finger at [Trump](#). Whilst that accusation has merit, there is a question about how much blame he deserved. There are other [considerations](#) and [individuals](#) who share part of the blame, including [influential GOP officials](#) (from a pro-Trump/anti-establishment perspective). Regarding endorsements, Trump-endorsed candidates had a good overall percentage of winning their campaigns. According to the tracked endorsements by [Ballotpedia](#), Trump made 255

general election endorsements and 215 won, which was a winning percentage of 84%. The issue was in key battleground races where the winning percentage was more than cut in half to 39%, with 41 endorsements and only 16 winning their races. On reflection, the key election defeats are those highlighted as failure.

However, if the GOP tries to move on from Trump, the party will likely have a deep internal battle. The GOP base has proved [loyal](#) to Trump up to this point in time, with 30% supporting him over the party. Trump supporters, MAGA Republicans (election deniers), have [increased](#) their numbers in [Congress](#), even with the disappointing midterm results taken into account. Furthermore, Trump loyalists dominate the Republican National Committee (RNC), and this has trickled down to GOP state parties. According to former RNC chair, [Michael Steele](#), which in his view has led to the GOP still being controlled in important positions by MAGA Republicans.

Conclusion

If the GOP wants to move on from Trump, it has options. A bold option would be for the GOP to [‘purge’](#) him from the party. An unlikely one would be Trump stepping away of his own accord. Another, would be for him to be defeated in the 2024 GOP primary elections ([he has already announced](#)). A [potential](#) challenger is Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. However, the GOP had the chance to move away from Trump after the 2020 presidential election and [did not do so](#). And while their 2022 Senate result was disappointing, Republicans did well enough in these midterms in parts of the country, especially GOP areas such as [Florida and Texas](#). It is hard to see in 2022, but Florida was once a ‘purple state’ that Obama won in 2008 and 2012. Other than moving on from 2020 and the election steal myth, what else do Republicans need to change? Trump remade the GOP and American conservatism in his image, but the party already had MAGA in its closet ([via the Tea Party](#)). Trump merely removed the filter and unleashed illiberal MAGA cultural conservatism. Given this fact, even if the GOP moves on from [Trump](#), it may not be enough to change much in the near future.

Image Credits:

Image 1: Then President Donald Trump, 2017

<https://pixabay.com/photos/trump-president-usa-america-flag-2546104/>

Image 2: Route 66 in Nevada, 2019

<https://pixabay.com/photos/utah-highway-route-66-nevada-4272944/>

Bio:

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8. Towards 24: Shifts in the US election system, 2022-2024, *Peter Finn & Robert Ledger*

Key Takeaways

- Important leadership changes will occur in the 118th Congress, with Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to be replaced by Republican Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House. Pelosi is stepping down as leader of the House Democratic caucus, to be replaced by Hakeem Jeffries.
- Democrats, led by President Joe Biden, are aiming to recalibrate the primary timetable in 2024 to dilute the role of Iowa and New Hampshire, with South Carolina proposed as the first primary. These proposed changes are not guaranteed.
- Some shifts brought about, or accelerated, by the Covid-19 pandemic occurring at the same time as the 2020 presidential election appear likely to become further embedded within the US electoral system, in particular hybrid conventions and early voting. Meanwhile, the federal certification process for US presidents will have new strictures aimed at raising the bar for objections and codifying the role of the Vice President as ceremonial.

Introduction

As we have explored elsewhere, the US electoral system is complex. Rather than a single system it is, perhaps, [more accurately](#) described as a multilevel collection of interrelated and interconnected subsystems, while the overarching electoral infrastructure within the system manages elections at federal, state, and city/local levels across 50 states, plus Washington D.C. and the US's overseas territories. Although we are used to thinking about US elections within its [current](#) geographic shape, the current makeup of 50 states, Washington D.C., and overseas territories is relatively recent. For example, Alaska and Hawaii only gained statehood, and thus federal representation and electoral college votes, in 1959. Moreover, the system is constantly shifting at federal, state, and local levels, making US elections hard to follow, even for a [seasoned observer](#).

As one would expect, the period between the 2022 midterms and the presidential election in 2024 — as well as between the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath and 2024 — is not immune to such shifts. Across three sections below we explore areas where shifts are occurring (or may do in some cases) between the 2022 midterms and the 2024 presidential election: leadership changes, the Democratic Party primary process, the likely permanence of hybrid conventions, the continued importance of early voting, and the certification of the presidential election. This chapter is correct as of January 8 2023. Given the focus is on developing events, some parts may have been superseded by events by publication.

Changing of the Guard

Though not formally part of the system, as much as working within it, leadership matters. Indeed, rather than a simplistic structure versus agency distinction, we would assert it is better to think about the iterative manner in which key personalities act within the US electoral system, with such personalities sometimes tweaking how the system operates or is constituted.

The 2022 midterms led to the Republican Party taking control of the House of Representatives, albeit with a slim majority, with Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) finally elected as speaker on January 6 2023. This election occurred after [15 rounds](#) of voting, more than has occurred for the election of the speaker in [over a century](#), that were split across four consecutive days. This laboured process transpired after some members of the House Freedom Caucus, which represents a hybrid between far right wing thinking and support for Trump (or is it a transactional adoption of Trumpian style politics?), voted instead for a combination of others such as [Byron Donalds](#) (R-FL) and [Jim Jordan](#) (R-OH). Intriguingly, those Republicans voting against McCarthy did not fall in line when Trump [encouraged](#) them to elect McCarthy.

One imagines that the drawn-out election for the speakership will be a harbinger of the future problems McCarthy will face as he seeks to manage the dual pressures of a fractious body of Republican lawmakers and a wafer-thin majority. Indeed, he is likely to face significant difficulties keeping together a congressional caucus that includes House Republicans such as far right members like Marjorie Taylor Greene, agitators who were central in stalling the election of McCarthy to the speakership such as [Matt Gaetz](#) (R-FL), and moderates, such as those newly-elected in [New York](#). Party management is likely to leave McCarthy little room to compromise with House Democrats. As a result, meaningful legislation appears improbable during the forthcoming 118th Congress.



Image 1: Then House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, 2020

Meanwhile, the Democrats have achieved an orderly [succession](#) of power from the old guard, personified by former speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), to new House minority leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), a 52-year old, four-term New York congressman. The party also replaced the two other top ranking House leaders, Steny

Hoyer (D-MD) and Jim Clyburn (D-SC), both in their 80s, with 59-year-old Katherine Clark (D-MA) of Massachusetts and Pete Aguilar (D-CA), 43, of California. Despite the sometimes uneasy relationships between different Democrat factions, this transition was notably smoother than the more restive Republican process discussed above.

The current unity of the Democrats could be a harbinger for the 2024 presidential [campaign](#) in so far as the party could agree to get behind one presidential candidate, which seems most likely to be President Joe Biden, or to avoid a drawn-out primary process such as occurred in 2016 if Biden decides to step aside.

A key talking point during the midterms was the extent to which Donald Trump still dominates the GOP, influences candidate selection and whether he is likely to secure the 2024 presidential nomination. The midterms, however, were seen as unsuccessful for Trump-backed candidates with one [analysis](#) showing they trailed the national Republican performance by several points. Trump's relative position in the party seems to have diminished, perhaps presenting an opportunity for other contenders such as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who was [re-elected](#) by a landslide, to launch a 2024 presidential bid.

2024 Primary Process

The 2024 US Presidential Election will take place on Tuesday November 5, with the main event being the electoral college ballot for the presidency. However, this election will be preceded by primary processes to select candidates for the Democrats and Republicans, as well as smaller parties such as the Green Party and the Libertarian Party, for elected positions up and down the ballot. Formal primaries will run from early in 2024 through to the summer, but will be preceded by a sustained period of campaigning, both informally and by formally declared candidates, that has, in many cases, arguably already begun.

Reflecting each presidential election [since 1972](#), Iowa opened the formal primary process for Democrats and Republicans in 2020 on February 3 with caucuses. The Democratic Iowa Caucus was controversial, with the [botched introduction](#) of technology designed to tabulate and submit results. Reflecting the New Hampshire state constitution, the first primary for both parties was held a week later, with Nevada and South Carolina holding Democratic, but not Republican, primaries in late February. March 3 saw [Super Tuesday](#), with 14 states, Democrats Abroad, and American Samoa (the only jurisdiction on that day with a caucus) voting in the Democratic primary simultaneously, and 13 states voting in Republican primaries. From mid-March onward, the remaining primary process for both parties was disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, with many states suspending primaries and caucuses, some multiple times. The final primary for both parties was Connecticut on August 11. At a presidential level, the Republican primary process was somewhat of a formality, with then President Donald Trump the presumptive nominee from the start. So uncompetitive was the Republican process that seven states, including Alaska and South Carolina, did not hold Republican presidential primaries.



Image 2: Iowa Map, 2012

In December 2022, the Democratic Party proposed a shake up to its primary calendar for 2024. Building on a [letter from Biden](#) to the thrillingly named Rules and Byways Committee that stated it was ‘time to update the [Democratic Party primary] process for the 21st century’, the committee approved proposals for a shake-up of the early state primaries. With Iowa and New Hampshire to be [shunted in favour](#) of a new [first five](#) of South Carolina (February 3rd), New Hampshire and Nevada (February 6th), Georgia (February 13th), and Michigan (February 27th), with all other states able to run their primaries between early March and June. In short, the proposals are ‘meant [to signal](#) [...] commitment to elevating more variety — demographic, geographic and economic — in the early nominating process.’ As such, ‘Iowa, a largely White state that historically held the nation’s first Democratic caucus and experienced embarrassing problems tabulating results in 2020, would have no early role.’

Whether this calendar is adopted is still up for debate. As Caitlin Jewitt and Gregory Shufeldt [highlight](#), the proposals face multiple hurdles including the fact that ‘the presidential primary is a series of sequential elections conducted and administered by the states’, meaning even if a national party proposes something this ‘does not guarantee that state governments will follow or acquiesce’. Indeed, having the primary a week before any other state has theirs was actually passed into [law](#) in New Hampshire in 1975.

Hybrid Conventions, Early Voting, and Presidential Election Certification

Though the pandemic will, one hopes, not be a driving logistical factor in 2024, one certainly imagines that some changes arising from, or perhaps more accurately accelerated by, it will endure to some degree, while revisions to the Electoral Count Act of 1877 will drive alterations to the certification of presidential elections.

Hybrid Conventions: In 2020, [both parties](#) held their nomination conventions in August, the Democrats in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the Republicans in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Democrats had suspended their convention from July to August in April. Though formally based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the convention was a relatively uneventful big-tent affair reflecting the tone of the Biden campaign that was largely an online event. The Republican convention, meanwhile, was originally

scheduled for August in Charlotte, North Carolina. In June, however, following disputes about social distancing and event capacity, the bulk of the convention was moved to Jacksonville, Florida. Only to be moved back to Charlotte (though with certain events elsewhere), and streamed online, with some events drawing controversy for a lack of social distancing.

Where the mainly online conventions in 2020 were more of a reactive novelty implemented in response to the pandemic, one presumes that the 2024 nomination conventions for both parties will have hybridity baked into them from the start of the planning. Four years of technological evolution will surely aid the experience for those participating online. Expect promotion along the lines of 'We can't wait for you to join us, whether it's in person or online'. In August 2022, it was announced the [2024 Republican National Convention](#) would, reflecting the Democratic Party in 2020, be held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Seeing the GOP laying a marker down in a key [swing state](#). Meanwhile, Atlanta, Georgia, Chicago, Illinois, Houston, Texas, and New York, New York are in the running to host the [Democratic National Convention in 2024](#).

Early Voting: In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic drove record numbers of mail in ballots, with [65 million](#) people voting this way, as opposed to less than 34 million in 2016. As well as high pandemic related numbers, this also reflected a rise in recent elections of [early voting](#) (including, but not restricted to, mail in voting) overall. As the pandemic has receded, these numbers inevitably fell off slightly in the 2022 midterms, but still [remained high](#). However, a mixed picture is emerging. Reflecting the pre-pandemic environment, some states continue to [embrace](#) early voting in general, and mail in voting specifically. Yet, in other states, restrictions have been implemented. In [Georgia](#), for instance, mail in voting fell by 81% in 2022 compared with 2020 following a 2021 state law that 'significantly limited drop boxes, added voter identification requirements and prevented election officials from proactively mailing out absentee ballot applications.'

Potentially crucial for the longer term, it seems that at least some Republicans are starting to embrace mail in voting as the heat of the 2020 election recedes. Republican National Committee Chairwoman [Ronna McDaniel](#), for instance, has said Republican 'voters need to vote early.' Arguing there 'were many in 2020 saying, don't vote by mail, don't vote early, and we have to stop that, and understand that if Democrats are getting ballots in for a month, we can't expect to get it all done in one day'. As such, it seems, the access and options available for US voters to cast their ballots is likely to continue to shift, with consequences flowing from the strictures in place in any particular state or for specific elections.

Presidential Election Certification: Federal certification of presidential elections occurs via processes drawn from the [Electoral Count Act of 1877](#). Until the 2020 election, this act was rarely discussed, and 'remained a quaint relic' in the words of [Michael Waldman](#). But the certification ceremony, and pressure put on Vice President Mike Pence not to certify Biden's victory, became the locus of events that led to the [January 6th](#) Attack on the Capitol. This has, in turn, led to a sustained push to reform

the Electoral Count Act. [Changes](#) would include codifying the role of the Vice President in the process as purely ceremonial, raising the bar for objecting to the slate of electors of a state from a single member of the House of Representatives or the Senate to 20% of both chambers. There will also be a faster process to allow judicial review for legal challenges to certified state results, with appeals directly to the US Supreme Court and a [provision](#) to 'prevent state governments from changing rules after an election has been held'. The Senate bill, titled [the](#) 'Electoral Count Reform and Presidential Transition Improvement Act of 2022', was introduced by Susan Collins (R-ME) of Maine and Joe Manchin (D-WV) of West Virginia. It crucially had backing from both Senate Minority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (R-KY) and Senate Majority Leader [Chuck Schumer](#) (D-NY). A [similar bill](#) passed the [House](#) in September 2022, with the Senate bill [included](#) in a broader spending [bill that passed](#) in the lame duck session in late December 2022. The bill was signed into law by [Biden](#) on December 29 2022.

Image Credits:

Image 1: Then House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, 2020

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/gageskidmore/50548997671>

Image 2: Iowa Map, 2012

<https://pixabay.com/vectors/iowa-state-map-geography-usa-43756/>

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