



## What to Make of the 2018 Elections

Following the 2018 U.S. midterm elections—with results dripping in well after Election Day—both the Republicans and the Democrats claimed victory. They were both right, but it was not a complete victory for either side. Republicans increased control of the Senate (good for judicial appointments) and Democrats took control of the House (good for investigations). Republicans won some key gubernatorial races such as Florida, Ohio and Iowa. Democrats picked up seats in many state legislatures.

Yet there are some red flags that should concern conservatives as we look to the 2020 presidential election. Consider these larger points:<sup>1</sup>

- Voters turned out in large numbers. A record 113 million Americans voted—more than voted in the last presidential election. That's 49 percent of the total eligible voting population, a record turnout for a midterm election. Democrats accounted for 38 percent of the voters, Republicans 32 percent and independents 30 percent.
- This compares to 2014 when Democrats made up 36 percent, Republicans 37 percent and independents 27 percent; and 2016, when Democrats made up 37 percent, Republicans 33 percent and independents 29 percent. **The key here is that that the Republican vote was down in 2018 compared to 2016 or 2014.**
- Republicans lost suburban voters, specifically college-educated women, but white women overall voted Republican, as did whites in general. Suburban voters went Democrat as more than 80 suburban counties and cities flipped from Republican to Democratic.
- Hispanics voted in larger numbers and voted more Democratic.
- Democratic donors funneled huge amounts of money into Senate and House races. A total of \$5.2 billion was spent on the 2018 midterms.

- President Trump helped bring fairly weak candidates across the finish line, including Ron De Santis as governor in Florida and Mike Braun as U.S. Senator from Indiana. Trump is a two-edged sword, however. He rallies both his base and his opponents' base. The turnout of Republican voters in states where he campaigned, however, suggests that he is more popular than his favorability ratings show. His campaign stops for Josh Hawley likely helped turn the U.S. Senate seat for Missouri from Democratic to Republican.
- If the midterm pattern holds, Florida and Ohio should remain Republican in the Electoral College presidential vote, while Pennsylvania and Michigan could go Democratic in 2020. Trump can win re-election without Michigan or Pennsylvania, but he probably needs to keep Florida, Ohio, Wisconsin and Arizona.

### Breaking Down Voters' Concerns

The 2018 midterms resulted in a split of voters handing the keys to the House to the Democrats while giving the Republicans two more U.S. Senate seats for a total of 53. The last time the House and the Senate moved in opposite directions was in President Reagan's first term, when Democrats gained 27 seats in the House and Republicans picked up one in the Senate.<sup>2</sup>

After the shellacking that Democrats experienced in 2010 in the House, they were thrilled to regain control of the House by winning at least 39 additional seats (as of November 26). Democrats poured vast sums into these congressional races. They promoted moderates in purple/red-leaning districts and states. Democratic candidates pounced on health care and immigration issues.

Senator John McCain's last vote in the Senate prevented health care reform from passing, and his false reason that the reform bill did not protect people with pre-existing conditions was picked up by Democratic candidates in their

campaigns. The Freedom Caucus refused to go along with an immigration reform bill backed lukewarmly by President Trump. Health care favored House Democrats by a 50-point margin, while Republicans won those voters concerned about immigration by a wide margin of 58 points. About half the voters called for repeal of all or part of the Affordable Care Act, but the other half wanted to either leave the law alone (13 percent) or expand it (34 percent). These voters went overwhelmingly Democratic.

President Trump hit the immigration issue hard, as television (well, Fox News) pictured a massive immigrant caravan approaching the southern border. While voters concerned with immigration tended to vote Republican, overall voters' positions on immigration are neither strongly pro nor anti-immigration. Close to 60 percent of voters think immigrants help the country (although this might not mean undocumented immigrants), while 39 percent think immigrants hurt the country (this probably means undocumented immigrants). Forty-seven percent favor building a wall; 52 percent oppose; but most people want tighter border security.<sup>3</sup>

### The Challenge of Suburban Women

Political junkies and serious analysts will sort through the numbers, but certain voter statistics should give Republicans looking at 2020 a wake-up call. Others should give them some optimism.<sup>4</sup> Republicans won Senate races in states that Trump carried in 2016. Rural voters backed Republican candidates by a four-point margin. White voters went Republican, especially white working class voters, white men and whites over the age of 45.<sup>5</sup>

The bad news is that college-educated women, especially suburban women, went for Democrats by a double-digit margin, while white women overall went Republican by about four points.<sup>6</sup> Democrats won the Hispanic vote by close to 30 points. Independents broke Democratic. Young voters, only 12 percent of the electorate (about the same as 2016), went heavily Democratic. Those who did not vote said they would have voted Democratic. College-educated white women swung heavily to the Democrats, by 8 points more than in 2016. These voters account for 15 percent of the electorate.<sup>7</sup>

The suburban vote is especially important in states such as Pennsylvania and Michigan, which Trump carried in 2016.<sup>8</sup> In Pennsylvania, Democrats kept the governorship and the U.S. Senate seat. Democrats captured nine of the state's 18 congressional districts, a net gain of three districts. Democrats lucked out with new congressional districts drawn up by the courts that were even more favorable than what the

Democrats had proposed. It did not help that three Republican incumbents bowed out in eastern Pennsylvania. The only good news is that freshman incumbent Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick fought off a challenge by Democrat Scott Wallace, a multimillionaire who poured \$12 million of his own fortune in the race. Super PACs from both sides poured \$30 million into the race. Fitzpatrick won his tight race on a message of bipartisanship.<sup>9</sup>

Democrats won in unexpected places. In Oklahoma's 5th district, for example, including Oklahoma City, Democrats won for the first time since 1974. In New Jersey, Republicans lost in four districts, leaving the GOP only one seat there, the lowest since 1912.<sup>10</sup>

In Arizona, the suburban vote in Phoenix proved crucial in winning the state for Democratic Senate candidate Kyrsten Sinema, who presented herself as a moderate and hammered her opponent, former fighter pilot Martha McSally, on the health care issue by accusing her of voting for a bill in the House that allegedly would have hurt people with pre-existing conditions.

Increasing the suburban vote for Democrats in already blue states does not matter much when it comes down to the Electoral College. If the suburban and female college-educated vote holds through 2020, though, it means trouble for President Trump in any reelection bid. This demographic secured Orange County, CA—once a Republican stronghold—as a Democratic fortress. The turn in the suburban vote caught Republicans by surprise in historically Republican districts. Democrats won House seats in South Carolina's 1st district, which includes Charleston and Hilton Head, once Mark Sanford's district; Staten Island, NY; three of four competitive House races in Virginia; Buck County, PA; Tampa-Orlando, FL; the suburbs of Columbus, OH and Harrisburg, PA; and large parts of Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties.<sup>11</sup>

### The Allure of 'Moderate' Democrats

While the national media focused on far left-wing Democratic candidates such as New Yorker Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrats offered women voters moderate candidates in many districts. In Virginia's 7th district, former CIA officer Abigail Spanberger beat Tea Party incumbent Dave Brat. In the state's 10th district, Jennifer Wexton beat two-term Republican Barbara Comstock in a district that had voted for Trump by ten points. In New Jersey's 11th district, Democrats put up former Navy pilot Mikie Sherrill, winning a district held by Republicans for 36 years.<sup>12</sup>

The gender gap was larger than ever—about 26 points overall. The Republican gender gap has been a problem at least since Reagan's election in 1980. As Senator Lindsey Graham told Fox News on election night, when it was clear that the House had been lost, "We've got to address the suburban women problem, because it's real."<sup>13</sup>

## Projecting 2020

Democrats took the House for three reasons: Money, Money and Moderation. Democrats drew on fat cat donors to pour money into congressional races. The top donor in this election cycle was Republican Sheldon Adelson, who gave \$112,350,000 to Republican candidates. His donations were outweighed by progressive donors including Michael Bloomberg (\$61 million), Tom Steyer (\$58 million), Donald Sussman (\$19 million), James and Marilyn Simons (\$16 million), George Soros (\$15 million), Fred Eychaner (\$10 million), Reid Garrett (\$7 million) and others.<sup>14</sup> These were disclosed campaign donations, which do not include 501(c)(4) money.

Republican candidates for the Senate and the House found themselves being outspent often 3 to 1. In Texas, for example, the Democrat Beto O'Rourke outspent incumbent Senator Ted Cruz. O'Rourke received \$39 million in donations, most of it from out of state. In this case, O'Rourke lost, but the election was closer than anyone predicted.

With this money, Democrats put together well-organized campaigns that presented as moderate, especially in House races in red-leaning districts. In Texas, Florida and Georgia, Democratic candidates ran to the left—and lost. Given the success of Democrats running as moderate candidates, Republicans congressional candidates will be tempted to present themselves as Democrat-lite. This would be a mistake. Republicans should keep to their conservative principles. At the same time, they ought to come across as able to govern, not just angry naysayers.

Congressional Republican candidates need to win back districts they lost. They need to win the female college-educated vote and cut into the Hispanic vote. Trump won 49 percent of the female college-educated vote and 39 percent of the Hispanic vote. He had a weak economy and a weak opponent going for him in 2016.

There was some good news for Republicans in the Hispanic vote numbers. In Texas, O'Rourke struggled to match Hillary Clinton's performance in largely Hispanic South Texas. In Arizona, Democratic Senate candidate Kyrsten Sinema ran behind in heavily Hispanic border counties Yuma and Santa Cruz.<sup>15</sup>

Republicans have some advantages as they approach 2020. The Electoral College still favors them. Although Michigan and Pennsylvania may be lost, Ohio looks solidly Republican. 2018 portends well for Florida, and Wisconsin is winnable. There the suburban vote is less important outside the Milwaukee area. Toss-up states such as Arizona might prove decisive.

Republicans have a critical weapon at their disposal—Democrats. For all the moderates the Democrats elected in 2018, the Democratic leadership is leftist, represented by Maxine Waters, Elijah Cummings and Jerrold Nadler. The Democrats have roused their left-wing base and if they compromise on any legislative issue—such as health care or immigration—their base will have a fit. In the House, the Democrats will launch investigations into Trump and may even try impeachment, creating a backlash from voters who want things to get done in Washington.

Most of all, Republicans have an incumbent President. He may be a two-edged sword, but he knows how to rally the base, and he has shown he can have cross-over appeal—especially if the Democrats, as expected, nominate a coastal progressive. Buckle up for the next two years.

**We wish all our readers and supporters a blessed and peaceful Christmas.**

1 These figures can be found in ABC exit polls, "Elections by the Numbers," ABC News, November 15, 2018, and Brian F. Schaffner, "These 5 Charts Explain Who Voted How in the 2018 Midterm Election," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2018. The final voting statistics take longer to tally.

2 Andrew Schwartz, Margaret Ann Campbell, Peggy Dooley, "Fox News Voter Analysis: Democrats Win the House, Republicans Gain Ground in the Senate," *Fox News*, November 7, 2018. Also, Jim Geraghty, "The Not-So-Bad Duck-Rabbit Election," *National Review*, November 7, 2018; David Brady and Brett Parker, "Flipping the House: What '94, '06, '10 Turnout Tells Us," *Real Clear Politics*, November 6, 2018.

3 Andrew Schwartz, Margaret Ann Campbell, Peggy Dooley, "Fox News Voter Analysis: Democrats Win the House, Republicans Gain Ground in the Senate," *Fox News*, November 7, 2018.

4 A good start for political junkies looking at the numbers is available in "Election 2018 Exit Poll Analysis," *ABC News*, November 15, 2018.

5 "Election by the Numbers," *ABC News*, November 15, 2018.

6 Charles F. McElwee, "The Suburban Revolt," *City Journal*, November 13, 2018.

7 Brian F. Schaffner, "These 5 Charts Explain Who Voted How in the 2018 Midterm Election," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2018.

8 For Pennsylvania, see Dave Davies, "Analysis: Democrats Roar in Pennsylvania," <https://why.org/articles/democrats-roar-in-pennsylvania/>.

9 Ibid.

10 Charles F. McElwee, "The Suburban Revolt," *City Journal*, November 13, 2018.

11 Jim Geraghty, "The Not-So-Bad Duck-Rabbit Election," *National Review*, November 7, 2018.

12 Barbara Gypson, "Women Played 'Pivotal' Role in Shifting House to Democrats," *VQA News*, November 8, 2018.

13 Ibid.

14 For a full list of donors see <https://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/summ.php?disp=D>.

15 Nate Cohn, "Weak Spots in Democrats' Strong Midterm Results Point to Challenges in 2020," *New York Times*, November 13, 2018.

## In Memoriam: Eleanor Schlafly 1919-2018



The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation mourns the loss on October 31 of its beloved founder and longtime leader, Eleanor Schlafly.

Eleanor made the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation her life's work. She was the heart and soul of the organization from its founding in 1958. She and her co-founders—Fred and Phyllis Schlafly and Fr. Stephen Dunker—drew inspiration from the heroic resistance of Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty to the Communists in Hungary.

Working in the early years from a small outbuilding at her home in suburban St. Louis, Missouri, Eleanor attracted volunteers and donors to support monthly newsletters and frequent conferences and radio programs opposing Communism and supporting traditional Christian, family, social and patriotic values. She lived to see her labors rewarded when Cardinal Mindszenty was freed from long years of Communist oppression and blessed her work, and then when the Iron Curtain of Soviet domination fell across Europe. Yet communism persists in many guises around the world today and seduces new generations ignorant of its blood-soaked history. Eleanor's successors continue to spread her message of faith, family and freedom in opposition to communism today, in the **60th anniversary year of CMF's founding.**

Prior to founding CMF, Eleanor served in the American Red Cross during and after World War II, and lived in New York City for six years where she worked for the Assembly of Captive European Nations, dedicated to the ultimately successful effort to free Soviet-ruled countries from Communist rule.



CMF supporters remember Eleanor vividly as a vivacious, elegant, articulate, devout Catholic lady of wit and charm who devoted her life to educating the public about the most pressing ideological struggles of the last century. She will be sorely missed.

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