

TUESDAY TAKEAWAYS

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What, if anything, did the midterms

tell us about the country — other than underwhelming Republicans could still take the House and Senate albeit barely?

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, American elections radically changed to mail-in and early voting. They did so in a wild variety of state-by-state ways. Add ranked voting and a required majority margin to the mess and the result is that once cherished Election Day balloting becomes increasingly irrelevant.

Election Night also no longer exists. Returns are not counted for days. It is intolerable for a modern democracy to wait and wait for all sorts of different ballots both cast and counted under radically different and sometimes dubious conditions.

The Democrats — with overwhelming media and money advantages — have mastered these arts of massive and unprecedented early, mail-in, and absentee voting. Old-fashioned Republicans count on riling up their voters to show up on Election Day. But it is far easier to finesse and control the mail-in ballots than to “get out the vote.”

The country is divided in more ways than ever. America’s interior just gets redder and the bicoastal corridors bluer.

Exceptional Republican gubernatorial or senatorial candidates like Lee Zeldin, Tudor Dixon, and Tiffany

Smiley in blue states like New York, Michigan, or Washington cannot win upsets against even so-so Democratic incumbents — even during a supposedly bad election cycle for Democrats, laboring under a president with a 40 percent approval rating.

Similarly, media-spawned leftist heartthrobs like Beto O'Rourke and Stacey Abrams can burn through hundreds of millions of dollars. But they still cannot unseat workmanlike Republican incumbents in Texas and Georgia.

Out-of-state immigration has only solidified these red-blue brand polarizations.

Over the last decade, millions of conservatives have fled California, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania to Florida and Texas.

The former states got bluer as New York governors like Andrew Cuomo and Kathy Hochul said good riddance to fleeing conservatives — who were welcomed as refugees to red “free states.”

As voters self-select residences on ideological grounds and the deleterious effect of blue-states' governance, the country is gravitating into two antithetical nations. Americans vote not so much for individual personalities as blocs of incompatible parties, causes, and ideologies.

Debates count for little anymore, especially after the disastrous performance of winners Pennsylvania Democratic Senate nominee John Fetterman and Hochul.

Democrats often limited or avoided them altogether. And the Republican charging and complaining that they did so meant little at all.

Democrats still voted for Democrat candidates, regardless of Fetterman's clear cognitive inability to serve in the Senate and despite President Joe Biden's failures, harm to the middle class, and unpopularity.

Most Republicans are similar party loyalists, but not quite to the same degree — at least if some feared supporting a hardcore Trump-endorsed candidate might give them grief among family and friends.

Winning or losing means revving up party bases, not running as much on a variety of issues. Biden's vicious attacks on conservatives as semi-fascists and un-American worked. When he recklessly warned that democracy's death was synonymous with Democrats losing, he further inflamed his base.

Biden also goaded young people to vote by temporarily lowering gas prices through draining the strategic petroleum reserve, offering amnesty for marijuana offenses, and canceling half a trillion dollars of student loan debt. He told young women that they would die without unlimited abortions. And most of that mud stuck.

In contrast, Republicans wrongly assumed all voters, red and blue, sensibly cared most about spiking inflation, unaffordable food and fuel, an open border, and a disastrous foreign policy.

Americans do worry, but also demand concrete solutions that they often did not hear from even insightful critics of Biden's ruinous agendas.

Moreover, in the last days of the election, Biden and the media effectively smothered those existential issues by claiming the country was threatened by insurrectionists and pro-life fanatics. Stooping to claim the attacker of Paul Pelosi — a crazed, homeless, nudist, illegal alien — was the veritable tip of the supposed MAGA

insurrectionary spear proved to be effective Harry-Reid-style, October-surprise demagoguery.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis now emerges as the dominant force in conservative politics. His landslide win in Florida carried all down-ticket statewide candidates throughout Florida, which has become as utterly red as California has turned all blue.

To the degree Republican gubernatorial candidates not supported by Trump easily won their races in states like Georgia and Ohio, they helped Trump-supported senatorial candidates. To the degree Trump-supported gubernatorial candidates lost badly such as in Pennsylvania, they hurt Trump-supported senatorial candidates.

Trump's pre-election unexpected attack on DeSantis may have turned off a few thousand independents and Republicans from voting for Trump-affiliated candidates. And his pre-midterm boast that he would likely run for president may have scared — and energized — some last-minute, hard-core anti-Trumpers and Democrats to go out to vote.

Pollsters got it wrong — again. But this time once trustworthy conservative pollsters had little inkling that the simmering left-wing base was enthused by wild talk of abortion and insurrection. The real under-pollled voters were not silent, wary Trump supporters, but this time around seething upscale women and college students.

Final takeaways?

Democratic opposition to a flawed and impaired Biden running again in 2024 will recede. Republican loyalty to the unpredictable Trump could fade.

And both those realities will empower DeSantis.

Victor Davis Hanson is an American military historian, author, classics professor emeritus, and scholar of ancient warfare. He is currently the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

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