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Analyzing the Midterm Election for 2020

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By

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The midterm elections earlier this month produced several interesting trends which illustrate that the Trump Presidency is causing a realignment of American Politics. Democrats made substantial (yet inconsistent) gains in formerly red suburban sunbelt states while underperforming in the rust belt. For example, Team blue completed a sweep of all but one vulnerable Virginia House seats while falling to make headway in the crucial swing state of Ohio. Similar developments would happen in other demographically similar states down the line. These trends clearly illustrate that a significant realignment of the electoral map. While for the Trump Administration the results highlight areas of the electoral map that have moved in their favor and areas where improvement is needed if the President should secure a second term.

The Washington oriented 10th district, Virginia Beach-based 2nd and Richmond centered seventh were considered key pickup opportunities by Democrats throughout the 2018 campaign. This design was intentional since all three were suburban seats where President Trump was becoming increasingly unpopular. However, more importantly, Virginia had undergone a complete demographic transformation over the past 30 years Virginia has moved from being a Republican-leaning state to a tossup, and now it appears Democratic-leaning territory. The last time it voted for a GOP Presidential candidate was in 2004.

In the State's 2017 elections, the Democrats had comfortably won all three constitutional offices (Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General) by comfortable margins. While at the same time, they erased the GOP's [vast majority](#) in the House of Delegates and came within [one seat](#) of taking the chamber. On election night 2018, the Democrats completed a clean sweep of all them ousting the GOP incumbents that held the three suburban seats. Senator Tim Kaine won re-election by a whopping 57-41% [margin](#) over hard-right pro-Trump candidate Corey Stewart.

The same trends manifested themselves on election night in similar new growth states such as Texas, Georgia, Nevada, and Arizona where Democrats made varying gains across the board. In 2016 Donald Trump had won all these except for Nevada and Colorado. Both Nevada and Arizona presented the two single Senate seat pickups for Democrats in the 2018 cycle. While in Texas progressive upstart Beto O'Rourke came within 2 points ([50-48%](#)) of defeating Ted Cruz and scored down ballot by [gaining](#) 2 US House seats combined with wins in the Texas legislature. Even though the scope of Democratic gains varied in all these states varied the common link was that the party's performance depended on big margins in their fast growing, diverse, composition centers like [Atlanta](#), [Houston](#), and [Phoenix](#).

The Democrats ran the table in educated, suburban house districts nationwide, conducting a clean sweep of them from California to New Jersey. Notably, this included a large number of districts that across the country that had decisively [voted](#) for Mitt Romney in 2012. For instance, voters in Rep. [Dana Rohrabacher](#) and [Miami Walter's](#) Orange County-based districts (a traditional bastion of suburban conservatism) opted to kick both out. Democrats now control [41 out of 50](#) of the wealthiest House seats in the country. Illustrating that Trump's Presidency is increasingly putting white upper classes voters into play for Democrats.

These developments contrasted with the crucial swing state of Ohio. Where [despite high hopes and investment](#) in the progressive Richard Corday, the state fell deeply short of

Democratic expectations. Mike DeWine maintained Republican control of the Governor's Mansion in Columbus, while Republicans swept every other state-wide office. At the same time, despite facing a weak opponent, potential Presidential candidate Sherrod Brown won re-election by less than [7](#) points. Brown's performance is only a marginal improvement over his 2012 showing in what was considered a generally positive environment for Democrats. Down ballot, Democratic House candidates also failed to pick up a single seat in Ohio, even in contested areas like suburban Cincinnati or Columbus where GOP incumbents held on.

Despite Democratic gains in other Rust Belt states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa the results were not entirely bad for Republicans here either. Despite the loss of Republican star Scott Walker in Wisconsin, the GOP still maintained control of the State legislature. While in Michigan cutting edge candidate [John James](#) posted the best Republican performance since [2000](#), against an entrenched, well-funded, Democratic candidate. These results are especially impressive given that Republican candidates have historically performed very poorly in Michigan Senate races. While in Iowa, the GOP kept the governor's mansion despite losing two House races.

Many of these Rust Belt results are underwhelming for the Democrats compared to the previous "wave" years such as [2006](#), [2008](#), and [2012](#). Much as with the GOP case with diverse, educated, cohorts of voters, Democrats continue to struggle with non-college-educated whites. For instance, in the heart of blue-collar America in places like [Mahoning](#) County Ohio (Home of Youngstown) or [Genesee](#) County Michigan (Flint), Democratic candidates only showed modest improvement compared to 2016. Much like elsewhere, Democratic victories in the Midwest were on the backs of [suburban voters](#).

Overall, these results show that Trump's coalition's ability to deliver an electoral victory is holding in crucial states like Ohio, North Carolina, and Florida. While election night was less than ideal in places like Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Republican candidates were still able to put up competitive runs. All of this illustrates that Trump has an advantage in crucial states like Ohio and Florida going into what will surely be an aggressive Democratic challenge in 2020. Furthermore, the Senatorial results across the board for Republicans were generally positive and show that his Presidency still carries power with his base as evidenced by victories in Missouri, Indiana, North Dakota, and Florida. It is becoming increasingly evident that white working-class voters across the country have abandoned the Democrats en masse.

However, there are warning signs for the President's 2020 reelection in states like Arizona, Georgia, and Texas. Like other increasingly diverse former red states such as Virginia and Colorado which are trending sharply blue, the results in the above are worrying for the RNC heading into 2020. It is also now clear that Republicans have problems with educated white suburban voters,

Republican strategists might consider the Sunbelt to still be in the red column even after Trump's election, but this would be as grave a lack of imagination as Hillary Clinton's campaign considered states such as Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin to be Democratic-leaning going into 2016. The underwhelming results for the GOP in the South and the West illustrate a soft underbelly for the party's electoral prospects. For instance, the Democratic candidate could oust Trump by taking back Pennsylvania, Michigan, and adding Arizona to their electoral coalition. This scenario would be easy to accomplish given all three of these states went to Trump by less than [100,000](#) votes.

Political trends show that this realignment was long in the making, given that the Bill Clinton-Obama Presidencies made in-roads with suburban voters. While blue-collar white voters have been long trending towards the Republicans since the 1970's, the end product of these realignments as the 2018 elections show is an increasingly chaotic political map that is less dependent on local divisions to classify American politics. Given that the GOP's solid south is looking a little less so given the trend of election results in states like Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. While the same is true for the Democrats in parts of the Northeast and Midwest. Ex. Formerly blue states like Maine, Michigan, and Minnesota appear to be more competitive as well.

Most of all the 2018 midterms show that the 2016 Presidential cycle was a truly realigning election and that the party's coalitions have considerably changed from previous years. Trump's political ascendancy is transforming the Republican party into a rustic coalition of mainly white middle- and working-class voters. While the Democrats are becoming the exact opposite-an, an exclusively public party made up of wealthy, educated whites and minorities. At the same time, the issues are causing the electorate to shift.

For example, Democrats have forsaken their traditional labor and environmental interests through now [championing](#) trade. These developments have curtailed the Country Club Republican and Lunch Pal Democrat. While Republicans and the Trump White House are inter-fighting over trade, corporate regulation, and support for foreign policy institutions like NATO, this puts the GOP squarely at odds with its traditional business interest support base which favors all of the above.

The policy debates of both parties in the Trump era is shifting the electoral one as well. Pushing the urban-rural divide even further making it more difficult for the opposing parties to win in the ether. At the same time, the traditional north-south and east vs. west regional ones of American politics have become less critical. The 2016 and 2018 election results inform 2020 as it shows that despite polarization there will be a wider net of states up for grabs than ever. While both future conditions and the tendency of American voters to give their Presidents a 2nd term, it will be interesting to see if these trends continue to hold in Trump's quest for another four years at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

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