



U.S. Votes in the Midterms—Results and Consequences

Andrzej Dąbrowski

Initial results of the midterm elections to the U.S. Congress indicate that the Republican Party will take control of the House of Representatives. It may be uncertain until early December whether Republicans will be able to take control of the Senate. Losing control of even one chamber of Congress could make it difficult for President Joe Biden to implement his major initiatives in the next two years in office. However, the election is seen primarily as a failure for Republican candidates backed by Donald Trump.

Who won the midterms?

The provisional results show that the Republican Party will gain control of the House of Representatives. According to preliminary estimates, Republicans will win 222 seats, two more than Democrats had before the elections, with 218 seats ensuring control over the House. The race for the Senate, in which U.S. citizens chose 35 out of the 100 senators, remains open. Full control of the Senate requires 51 seats, but after the votes from most constituencies were counted, the Republicans had 49 seats to the Democrats' 48 (with independents), with three states remaining in contention. The final seat will be decided on 6 December in a runoff election in Georgia since none of the candidates gained 50% of the votes—the same scenario as in the 2020 elections. Both Republican politicians as well as most polls pointed to Republican victories in key Senate races in the states of Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania—all races in which Trump backed the Republican candidates. However, despite low job approval for Biden and Congress, the Democratic Party managed to maintain seats in some of these districts. Most commentators said that despite taking control of the House of Representatives, Republicans fared much more poorly than the polls showed and that the failures were primarily among Trump-backed candidates.

What were the issues in the midterms campaigns?

One of the key issues raised by candidates, like in previous campaigns, was domestic policy. While Republican politicians tried to convince voters that the Democrats were responsible for rising inflation and energy costs, Democratic candidates focused on ideological issues, including the availability of abortion. An important issue for Democrats was to emphasise that among the Republican candidates, there was a group of people—including Trump—who deny the results of the 2020 presidential election. Democrats sought to convince voters that the stakes in these elections was the durability of the democratic system of the United States. U.S. foreign policy was a marginal issue in the campaign. Some Republican representatives suggested the need to limit American military and financial support to Ukraine, which is defending itself against the Russian invasion, while stressing the credibility of U.S. obligations towards its allies, including those within NATO.

What are the likely consequences of the elections for U.S. domestic policy?

The poor performance of Trump-backed candidates could make it harder for him to get the Republican nomination for the presidency in the 2024 elections. Losing Democratic control of the House of Representatives could hinder Biden's possible re-election in 2024. Republicans will try to use their position to intensify attacks on him, including by investigating Hunter Biden, the president's son, who is

PISM SPOTLIGHT

accused of tax and business abuses. Taking control of the House of Representatives will make it easier for Republicans to block flagship initiatives of the current administration, such as fighting climate change or reforming the immigration system. Republicans will try to launch congressional investigations, including into the administration's fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 presidential election, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. They will also gain influence over federal fiscal policy. As an instrument of pressure, they will be able to use the threat of blocking funding for the federal government, which could force a "shutdown", to get their demands.

How might the midterms results affect U.S. foreign policy?

While the influence of Congress on day-to-day U.S. foreign policy is limited, Republican politicians will try to use their control of at least the House to push for a more confrontational policy towards China. Republicans have limited options after the administration adopted the new

[National Security Strategy](#) and [National Defence Strategy](#), as these already focus U.S. attention on the rivalry with China. However, by accusing the Chinese authorities of triggering the COVID-19 pandemic, stealing intellectual property, and preparing for a war over Taiwan, they may seek to obstruct the administration from even limited cooperation with China.

It may be politically attractive for some Republicans to question American support for Ukraine. Until now, the majority of the public has been in favour of maintaining it, but if the economic situation deteriorates further, it will be easier to convince voters that these funds should be allocated in the U.S. However, the internal division in the Republican Party in this area would be expected to deepen. While this should not change U.S. support for Ukraine in the short term, there is a risk that if the war continues for a long time, the support may be limited after the presidential election in 2024.