



Midterm Election Update: Thin Majorities Continue to Create Uncertainty

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Election Results Overview

While the balance of power in the 118th Congress remains undecided, two things are clear –Democrats outperformed expectations, and the era of thin majorities in Congress will continue. As of today, Senate control hinges on three races: Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia, a race which will not be settled until after a December 6th runoff. Even after the final vote counts are completed in these races, there will be no more than a 1 vote majority for either party in the Senate. In the House, approximately 30 races remain too close to call. The final vote count in those races will determine the House majority. Republicans would need to net 7 additional seats to claim the majority in the House.

Historically, the President's party loses a significant number of seats during midterm elections, with just three exceptions since the 1930s (1934, 1998, and 2002 during which the President's party gained seats). According to Gallup, Presidents with a sub-50% approval rating lose an average of 36 seats in the midterms. The past is not always prologue, and 2022 is likely to be regarded as an election that ran contrary to these trends of the past.

Party Leadership in the 118th Congress

Congress will return to Washington the week of November 14th. Both parties in the House and Senate will meet separately to determine their leadership for the next Congress. House Republicans are expected to hold their leadership elections on Tuesday, November 15th while House Democrats will organize on November 30th. In the Senate, Republicans are expected to hold their party leadership elections on Wednesday, November 16th. Senate Democrats have not yet announced the date for their leadership elections.

Should the final vote counts track the results as of today, Republicans are more likely than not to hold a very slim majority of 3-7 seats in the House. If so, Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) will seek his party's nomination to be Speaker of the House. He does not have a declared challenger, but one could emerge, thereby impacting other leadership races. At this point, Republican Whip Steve Scalise (R-LA) will run uncontested for Majority Leader.

The race for Majority Whip will be between Rep. Tom Emmer (R-MN), the current chair of the National Republican Campaign Committee; Rep. Drew Ferguson (R-GA), the current Deputy Whip; and Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN), the head of the Republican Study Committee. Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY) will seek re-election as House Republican Conference Chair. She is being challenged by Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL), who is in his first term.

On the Democratic side, current Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) has not announced her intentions for the next Congress. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) may vie for the top Democratic post should Speaker Pelosi step down from leadership. A decision to remain in place must also be made by current Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC). Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA) and Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) have signaled their interest in the Minority Whip spot.

In the Senate, Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) are expected to retain the top leadership spots while Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) could face a challenge from Senator Rick Scott (R-FL), the current chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Republican Whip John Thune (R-SD) is expected to remain in his post.

Committee Impacts & Potential Ratios in the 118th Congress

The leadership and rosters of several powerful Committees will change next Congress regardless of who wins the majority. VNF has put together an [initial list](#) of vacancies on key House and Senate Committees

in the energy, environment, natural resources, and healthcare space. This reflects those Members who retired, sought other office, are no longer in office, or lost their re-election to-date.

For the 117th Congress, House Democrats hold an eight-seat majority and have a 5- to 7-seat advantage on most Committees. In the Senate, Vice President Kamala Harris is the tie-breaking vote, and therefore Committee ratios are equally divided between Democrats and Republicans, with the Democratic Member serving as chair. Committee rosters for the new Congress will be determined after outstanding races are settled. If numbers are similar - in favor of either party - we may see similar ratios for Committee membership in the 118th Congress.

Conclusion

With many House races and three Senate races yet to be decided, actual majority status in the House or Senate, which is an issue of great national importance in federal legislative initiatives and oversight, is yet to be determined. What is certain is that a remarkably close majority status looms for either party in Congress. The electorate itself has delivered its own message—it clearly remains divided in politics and on elections.

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