

OCT 30, 2022

Which Party Will Control Congress?

This is The Weekly Letter for October 30, 2022. [About this newsletter](#)

Big Story

At the federal level, the U.S. midterm elections will determine whether the Democratic Party will keep its tenuous hold on Congress, enabling left-of-center policy favored by President Biden to pass in the final two years of his term. Conversely, if the Republican Party wins control of one or both houses of Congress, Republicans will have the opportunity to put the brakes on Democratic policies.

Historically, the president's party has lost seats in [every midterm election except for two](#) since WWII. And Democrats have feared a decisive setback this year at least since the party performed dismally in the 2021 elections. However, Democrats appeared to be gaining ground since the *Dobbs* Supreme Court decision which overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Democrats [overperformed](#) in four special elections held since the decision, and, according to *FiveThirtyEight*, a [September poll](#) indicated that voters think Democrats would do a better job than Republicans on the issue of abortion (47% to 25%).

But recently, Republican fortunes seem to have improved. The Democratic Party led in [FiveThirtyEight's average](#) of 'generic ballot' polls—which "ask people which party they would support in an election"—in the late summer, but on October 20 the GOP took the polling lead. The September poll mentioned above indicated that voters trusted Republicans on the issue of the economy—47% thought Republicans would do a better job compared to 28% for Democrats. And it is the economy and inflation that appear to be the top issues for voters.

Democratic control of the House looks particularly jeopardized. In his [summary](#) of the state of the midterms as of October 25, *The Washington Post's* Philip Bump cites the Cook Political Report's analysis that the majority of House seats considered toss-ups are currently held, or were most recently held, by Democrats. And *FiveThirtyEight's* [forecast](#) gives Republicans a roughly 8 in 10 chance of winning the House (as of 12:25 PM on Oct. 29). *FiveThirtyEight* notes, "The fate of the House likely rests on the outcome of a [handful of key seats](#), such as Iowa's 3rd District, North Carolina's 13th District and [Colorado's 8th District](#)."

The Republican and Democratic parties both have a strong chance of winning a Senate majority. *FiveThirtyEight* [says](#) it is a "dead heat" for overall control of the Senate, and a [Washington Post article](#) notes that "polling averages show at least seven Senate races within the margin of error..." The article also outlines the dynamics of the contest for the Senate:

"Democratic Senate incumbents benefited as Republicans picked novice candidates in bruising Senate primaries in key states, in some cases elevating candidates who had advocated expansive bans on [abortion](#). But polls in several key Senate races have tightened since the summer, as conservatives have consolidated around the candidates and independent voters have shifted. Recent polls have shown Mehmet Oz, who consistently trailed Fetterman, nearly catching up to the Democrat before [last] Tuesday's debate. The same dynamic is at play in Arizona, as traditionally conservative voters appear to be coming home to the Republican candidate, despite his relatively high unfavorability ratings."

In a reminder of the dangers of the contemporary political era, the husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was [attacked with a hammer](#) at the couple's home early Friday morning. The specter of further political violence and a further breakdown of democracy hangs over the U.S. But for now, Americans will resolve their differences at the ballot box.

Opinion

John Cassidy: The dangers of Elon Musk's [Twitter takeover](#). (New Yorker, 10/28)

Rev. Clinton L. Stancil: How I came to support a woman's [right to choose](#). [Video] (NY Times, 10/25)

Longform

An interview with the scholar Asef Bayat on the [Mahsa Amini protests](#) in Iran. (New Lines Magazine, 10/26)

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