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Donald Trump, Nationalization, and the 2018 Midterm Elections

Abstract: The 2018 midterm elections resulted in record levels of turnout, campaign funding, and the representation of women and minorities in Congress. Moreover, Democrats regained control of the US House of Representatives while Republicans shored up their minimal majority in the Senate. What made such a historic outcome possible? This article examines the candidates, expectations, outcomes, and implications of the 2018 midterm elections. In doing so, it offers an analysis into the primary elections, suggesting that the 2018 midterm results in the House were largely a result of successful nominations of quality Democratic candidates who were able to capitalize on the unpopularity of President Donald Trump despite an otherwise strong national economy. It closes with an in-depth analysis into the implications of the 2018 midterm election on both the incoming 116th Congress as well as the upcoming 2020 Presidential election.

Introduction

"A vote for Marsha is really a vote for me and everything we stand for. It's a vote for 'make America great again.'" President Donald Trump made this impassioned plea on October 1, 2018, at a rally in Johnson City, Tennessee, for then-Senate candidate Marsha Blackburn in an attempt to mobilize support in the waning months of the campaign against former Governor Phil Bredesen.[1] Locked in a race for what appeared at the time to be a potentially winnable seat for the Democrats, Trump nationalized the campaign and equated a vote cast for her as a vote for himself, all but affirming that the Tennessee Senate race and the midterm election in general would be a referendum on him or his presidency to date. This event, while anecdotal, raises an important question: was President Trump

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[1] See "Trump Bashes Bredesen at Rally," *National Journal*, 2 October 2018, https://www.nationaljournal.com/s/673120/trump-bashes-bredesen-at-rally.

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correct in his assertion that the 2018 midterm election was a referendum on his administration and the majority party?

Pundits and scholars proclaimed 2018 – like 1992 – as another "year of the woman" due to the record number of women running for office across the ballot and as a "referendum on Trump" as a result of low presidential approval and a slowly improving economy.[2] Many expected the midterm to result in a massive blue wave of Democrat victories across the entire federal system as a reaction to the Trump Presidency.[3] However, the election results turned out a bit differently, with the highest ever proportion of women being elected to serve in the 116th Congress, the Democrats retaking control of the House of Representatives, but failing to regain the Senate majority while sustaining a net loss of two seats in the upper chamber. What factors contributed to such a unique and historic result? What issues were unique to the incumbents who lost, as well as the Democratic gains in the open seat races? Additionally, what role did nationalization play in the 2018 midterm elections (Jacobson 2015; Jacobson and Carson 2016)?

In this article, we examine the role of nationalization in the 2018 midterm election and offer a unique analysis of the primary and general election candidate composition and outcomes. To do so, we begin with a brief summary of the first 2 years of the Trump presidency before shifting our emphasis to the types of candidates both major parties ran in the 2018 primaries. We focus specifically on both the gender and background of candidates running in all congressional primary races as well as the eventual outcomes. Next, we assess the general election outcomes as well as pre-election predictions, interesting and unique trends in diversity and turnout, as well as an examination of the changing control of the House and Senate. Additionally, we offer evidence of the effect of nationalization on the 2018 midterms. Finally, we conclude with an examination of the possible effects this election might have on the remaining 2 years of the Trump Presidency as well as candidate selection in the upcoming 2020 Presidential Election.

The Climate of the Trump Presidency

With 2 years having passed since the polarizing 2016 Presidential election that resulted in Donald Trump's nomination and election to the Presidency, the

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2 See Elaine Kamarck, "2018: Another 'Year of the Woman,'" Brookings Institution, 7 November 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2018/11/07/2018-another-year-of-the-woman/.
3 Nate Cohn and Dominic Kesterton, "A Democratic Blue Wave? Don't Forget the Republicans' Big Hill," *The New York Times*, 7/19/2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/07/19/up-shot/democrats-midterm-elections.html.

2018 midterm election was seen by many as the Democrats' best chance to retake power and halt the Republican President's agenda.[4] Under unified Republican control since 2017, Congress and the President had passed significant tax legislation and had appointed Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. Despite unified Republican government, however, they failed to repeal and replace the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a fundamental policy goal in their 2016 electoral platform. Meanwhile, the executive branch was weathering self-inflicted scandal and high turnover, as can be seen through the firing of FBI Director James Comey, the ongoing investigation into possible Russian collusion in the 2016 election, and the exit from both the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal.[5] Given these factors, in the week leading up to the first congressional primary in Texas – February 26-March 4 – President Trump's approval rating rested at 39% and his disapproval rating rose to 55%.

By contrast, during President Obama's first term in the same week preceding the midterm primaries, he polled at 83% approval among Democrats and 17% among Republicans (with an average approval of 46%) and subsequently lost 63 seats in the following midterm.[6] Economic conditions in the lead up to Election Day were record setting, with unemployment dropping to 3.7%, a low not reached in 49 years.[7] Additionally, in the month prior to the general election, polling suggested that a majority of Americans viewed economic conditions under the Trump Presidency in a positive manner, with 14% viewing conditions as "excellent," 41% as "good," 32% as "only fair," and only 12% as being "poor."[8]

Gender was also a central point of discussion in the leadup to the 2018 midterms. In the 2016 Presidential election, sexual assault, equality, and treatment of women in the workplace, among other important gender-related issues facing American culture, came to the forefront of political discussion. Such issues became the topic of attacks between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in debates and rhetoric in the campaign, with one candidate having a history of crude assault discussions and accusations of sexual misconduct and the other with a history

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4 See John Harwood, "Trump's missteps are giving Democrats a better shot at winning back the House," *CNBC*, https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/13/trumps-missteps-are-giving-democrats-a-better-shot-at-winning-back-the-house.html.

5 Ryan Teague Beckwith, "The Year in Trump: Memorable Moments from the President's First Year in Office," *Time*, 11 January 2018, http://time.com/5097411/donald-trump-first-year-office-timeline/.

6 https://news.gallup.com/interactives/185273/presidential-job-approval-center.aspx.

7 Lydia DePillis, "The US economy added better-than-expected 250,000 jobs in October," *CNN*, https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/02/economy/jobs-report-october/index.html.

8 The remaining 1% had no opinion: https://news.gallup.com/poll/1609/consumer-views-economy.aspx.

of marital issues stemming from sexual misconduct in the workplace (Byers and Carson 2017; Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018). On January 21, 2017, 1 day after the inauguration of President Trump, hundreds of thousands of women and supporters marched on Washington, Chicago, and throughout the country, demanding to be heard. Among those at the Women's March calling for women to run and vote in the following midterm was Civil Rights legend and Georgia Representative John Lewis. In an impassioned plea to encourage 2018 participation, he stated "the next election, we must get out and vote like we never, ever voted before."[9]

Such discussion and a demand for representation intensified after the election with the allegations of sexual assault against Harvey Weinstein, the meteoric rise of the subsequent #MeToo movement, and increased calls for accountability regarding sexual assault in American entertainment and public service. Meanwhile, allegations arose of sexual misconduct once again with President Trump, this time asserting extra-marital misconduct with model and actress Stormy Daniels. This scandal, combined with the #MeToo movement, spurred an ever-increased push for gender equality and increased representation in government.[10] Finally, on July 9, 2018, President Trump nominated Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court to fill a vacancy left by the retirement of Justice Anthony Kennedy. Nearly 2 months later, on September 12th, news broke of sexual assault allegations made against President Trump's nominee. The ensuing Senate hearings, testimonies, additional allegations, and presidential rhetoric against his initial accuser, Professor Christine Blasey Ford, culminated in an FBI investigation, a confirmation to the Supreme Court, and an intensely divided nation.[11]

Leading up to the 2018 midterm elections, Table 1 shows that 52 incumbents chose to retire or seek higher office, creating increased competition and district vulnerability. Of the 32 members who retired, 23 were Republican and nine were Democrats. Additionally, 11 Republicans and nine Democrats sought higher office. Finally, four seats remained unfilled from the 16 resignations or deaths in the 115th Congress, with Republicans and Democrats making up 13 and 3, respectively, spurring special elections on November 6th and bringing the open seat total to 56. In the Senate, three incumbents retired, all of which were Republican. Many of these departures stemmed from the political climate and poor approval ratings for the president. In light of the social climate surrounding

9 See Anemona Hartocollis and Yamiche Alcindor, "Women's March Highlights as Huge Crowds Protest Trump: 'We're Not Going Away,'" *The New York Times*, 21 January 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/womens-march.html.
10 See Brian Steinberg, "Media Coverage of Sexual Assault, #MeToo, is Rising," *Variety*, 5 October, 2018, https://variety.com/2018/biz/news/media-coverage-sexual-assault-metoo-1202970077/.
11 http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/10/politics/timeline-kavanaugh/.

Table 1: Departures from the 115th House of Representatives.

	Republicans	Democrats
Retired	23	9
Sought higher office	11	9
Resigned*	13	3
Died in office	0	1

*Of the 16 House members who resigned from office, 12 were replaced in special elections prior to the November 6 midterm election while the remaining four were filled on Election Day.

gender equality and record numbers of incumbents not seeking reelection, many also wondered if this would be another "year of the woman" and if Democrats could successfully pull off a blue wave to retake the House and Senate during the midterms. The following analysis will examine both questions and offer insight into the primary and general elections.

The 2018 Congressional Primaries

In order to shift the balance of power in the US House, the Democrats needed a net gain of 24 House seats in the midterm election. To do so, they had to run a slate of candidates who could defeat the remaining Republican incumbents and win the open seats available from the 36 Republicans and 20 Democrats having resigned, sought higher office, retired, or died. On the other hand, the Republicans needed to retain as many of the seats held by the 194 Republican incumbents that were seeking reelection and make up for any losses by holding at least 24 of the 56 open seats to maintain a minimum majority in the House.[12] The question is, then, were the parties strategic in their nomination of strong candidates in the primaries to set themselves up for potential success in the general election?

Strategic candidates, as defined by past research, are risk-averse individuals who possess both campaign resources and political talents. As such, they only run for elective office when the benefits are higher than the costs (Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Jacobson 1989). Quality challengers, traditionally defined as candidates who have held previous elective office, are considered the "most

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12 All primary totals in this section exclude Louisiana since they did not hold their primary until November 6 2018.

formidable" strategic candidates and are on average five times more likely to win than amateur challengers (Jacobson 1989). Since World War II, the proportion of quality candidates running against incumbents has averaged about 20 percent, but it has begun to decline during the past two decades. In seats that the incumbent won with 50–54.9% of the vote in the previous election, quality challengers make up 44% of challengers, a trend that decreases rapidly as the incumbent's margin of victory increases. Alternatively, in open seat races during the same period, roughly 54% of all candidates were quality candidates, suggesting overall that the likelihood of success is a determinant factor in a quality challengers' strategic emergence (Jacobson and Carson 2016). So, having examined the ability of quality challengers to emerge strategically and win at higher rates than amateurs, what characteristics does "previous electoral experience" actually give a challenger that makes them more successful in electoral bids?

Quality challengers typically raise more campaign funds than their amateur counterparts. While the candidate emergence literature debates whether quality challengers elect to run due to increased funding by influential donors, or influential donors donate because quality challengers emerge, the fact remains that substantial donations and spending are necessary for competition. From 1972 to 2014, only 1 in 3715 challengers were successful with less than $100,000 whereas nearly one-third of all challengers won when spending at least $1.2 million (Jacobson and Carson 2016). As candidate quality and spending increase, the electoral margins of incumbents decrease. In 2016, incumbents won with margins of 60% or greater nearly 70% of the time when facing strong quality candidates with weak funding. When facing strong quality candidates with high levels of funding, incumbents won with margins of 60% or greater only 36% of the time, suggesting that a candidate's quality combined with strong funding can give challengers potential success against incumbents (Aldrich et al. 2018).

Additionally, quality challengers are more successful than amateurs because they have successfully run a previous campaign and can employ that same name recognition, visibility, reputation, and experience to persuade voters for their support again (Jacobson and Carson 2016; Aldrich et al. 2018). The strength of a quality challenger helps determine their calculus for emergence, as well as the strategy they employ in the election. For instance, candidates who are former state legislators and whose former constituencies overlap with the House district they are seeking election in, are more likely to run and also receive a larger margin of the vote (Carson et al. 2012). This suggests that the strategy a challenger takes is in some part determined by their level of political experience as well as the parties' efforts to recruit the best candidates to run in the primaries (Hassell 2018).

In total, 1988 candidates ran in the 2018 congressional primaries (excluding Louisiana) as displayed in Table 2. The Republican slate consisted of 858

Table 2: US House Primary Candidates in 2018.*

	Incumbents	Quality candidates	Amateurs	Total
Republicans	194 (22.6)	115 (13.4)	549 (64.0)	858
Democrats	176 (16.4)	131 (12.2)	768 (71.4)	1075
Third party	0 (0)	0 (0)	55 (100)	55
Total	370	246	1386	1988

*Percentages in each category are shown in parentheses and total 100 percent read across from left to right.

candidates, with 194 running as incumbents. Alternatively, Democrats outpaced their opposition by running 1075 candidates, with 176 of those serving as incumbents. Finally, 55 candidates were independent or third-party candidates, making up less than 3% of the total, with no incumbents present.[13] Overall, 370 incumbents sought reelection in primaries. Given this breakdown, several important questions remain in understanding the candidate makeup leading up to the general election. How many quality challengers ran, whom did they oppose, and how did they ultimately fare in the election? Additionally, if this were expected to be another year of the woman, how many women ran, how many were quality challengers, and who went on to win?

As shown in Table 2, 246 quality candidates ran in the 2018 congressional primaries. Of those, 115 candidates were Republicans, whereas the remaining 131 were Democrats. In seats that were held by Republican incumbents, 76 quality candidates ran against these incumbents in the primaries – 22 Republicans and 54 Democrats. Democrat incumbents, by contrast, faced 27 quality opponents – 15 Republicans and 12 Democrats. In open seats previously held by Republicans, 91 quality candidates emerged, with Republicans and Democrats making up 67 and 24 of the candidates, respectively. Finally, in open seats that were held by Democrats, 52 quality candidates ran, 41 of which were Democrats with the remaining 11 Republicans.

In Republican-held open seats, 20 of the 67 experienced Republican candidates who ran won their party's nomination, constituting a win percentage of 29.8%. In those same seats, only 10 quality Democrats were successful, constituting a 41.6% election rate. Alternatively, in Democrat controlled open seats, the same trend reversed for each party. Democrats were able to elect 11 or 26.8%

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13 Third party candidates are only included for states having a top-two primary system, California and Washington.

of their quality candidates, whereas Republicans elected 6 or 54.5%. Overall, in open seats, 32.9% of quality challengers were successful, whereas amateurs won only 20.9% of the time. In incumbent-held seats, the 103 quality candidates who chose to run fared better than those in open seats, winning 39.8% of their races. Amateur challengers on the other hand, successfully ran 311 challengers in incumbent held seats, or won with 31.8% of their candidates. By seat type, 40.8% or 31 quality challengers won nominations in Republican incumbent held districts, as compared to a 28.7% success rate by amateurs in the same races. Democrat incumbent-held districts became less successful for challengers, with 37% of both quality challengers and amateurs winning, suggesting that those attempting to supplant Democrat incumbents were less strategic than against Republican incumbents.

Women constituted roughly one-fourth of the House primary candidate pool – a total of 469 candidates. Republican women represented only 119 candidates, and as can be seen in Table 3, those consisted of 18 incumbents, 16 quality candidates, and 85 amateur challengers. As such, women constituted only 13% of all Republican candidates, and made up only 11% of their quality challengers. Alternatively, Democratic women represented 342 or roughly three-fourths of all female candidates, with those consisting of 240 amateurs, 50 quality challengers, and 52 incumbents. When compared to their overall party totals, Democratic women consisted of roughly 31.8% of all Democrat House candidates and 38.2% of their quality challengers.

Of the 469 women who ran in the 49 states excluding Louisiana, 236 were successful, with 23 of those forcing runoffs and 12 succeeding and moving to the general election. Of those 236 winners, 26 were quality challengers. Quality Republican women made up six winners, with 3 and 1 being in Republican and Democrat open seats respectively, and the remaining two facing incumbents in runoffs or the general election. Finally, 20 Democratic quality women won, with 11 and 2 opposing Republican and Democrat incumbent's respectively, and

Table 3: Women Running in the US House Primaries.

	Republicans	Democrats
Incumbents	18	52
Quality candidates	16	50
Political amateurs	85	240
Percentage of women*	25.4	72.9
Percentage by party	13	31.8

*Eight of the candidates who ran in the House primaries were third-party candidates.

the remaining seven competing in open seat races, three of which were held by Republicans. Overall, with the 70 women incumbents seeking reelection, the three major party women in Louisiana and 166 women winning in the primaries, a total of 228 women competed in the general election.

Overall, the primary elections resulted in the defeats of four incumbents, two from each party. From one perspective, this does not seem to suggest an anti-incumbency tide in 2018. However, one must also remember that politicians behave strategically and are often inclined to retire voluntarily if they believe their electoral security is in jeopardy. As such, the fact that only four incumbents were defeated in the congressional primaries should not be meant to suggest that a similar pattern would occur in the fall midterm elections. After all, only four incumbents were defeated in the 2010 congressional primaries before 54 incumbents went onto electoral defeat in the midterm election several months later. Given the primary election results, the distribution of quality candidates, President Trump's low approval, and a strong economy, what were the expectations moving into the 2018 midterms?

General Election Predictions and Expectations

On October 10, 2018, in London, Former Vice President Joe Biden gave his predictions, albeit hopeful, for the upcoming 2018 midterms when he stated, "I predict to you the Democrats will win 40 seats in the House. And I predict to you there's a slightly better than even chance we win the Senate."[14] Would the Democrats swing congressional power and gain the House and Senate? Additionally, would the 2018 midterm replace 1992 as the "Year of the Woman?" Finally, would this election actually be a referendum on an unpopular president, or would his supporters stem the tide and minimize potential losses?

On Election Day, November 6th, FiveThirtyEight forecasted that the probability of the Democrats winning the House rested just shy of 88%. As such, it was hypothesized that Democrats had an 80% chance of gaining between 21 and 59 seats; an estimated loss close to both the 2006 expected range of Republican losses and 2010's expected Democratic defeats.[15] In 2010 the Republicans had a

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14 Rachel Elbaum, "Biden Predicts Dems Will Win 40 House Seats, Take Back Senate." *NBC News*, 10 October, 2018, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/biden-predicts-dems-will-win-40-house-seats-take-back-n918596.
15 "Forecasting the race for the House." 6 November, 2018. https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2018-midterm-election-forecast/house/.

net gain of 63 seats, riding low presidential approval and an even lower economic rating, with unemployment reaching 9.6% (Jacobson 2011). In 2006, by contrast, the President rode record low approval but had high economic ratings (Jacobson 2007). For the Senate elections in 2018, it was hypothesized that Republicans would retain control of the chamber, predicting roughly an 81% chance of such an outcome. Given such prediction, it was expected that the Senate outcome would constitute a Republican 52–48 majority.

According to the Cook Political Report, as of 50 days out from the general election, more than 65 House seats controlled by Republicans were "seats at risk," compared to less than 10 under Democrat control. Comparing levels of "at risk" districts to 2 other years, notably the 2010 "wave election" and a more general 2006 swing of lesser size, we can examine the predictions in the context of tides and other midterm trends necessary to predict a swing. In 2010, roughly 80 Democrat seats were labeled "at risk" 50 days out from the election, a count that increased to 100 as the election neared. Alternatively, as early as 250 days out from the election, the number of "at risk" Republican districts remained at less than 10, and did so until election day.

By contrast, and as mentioned earlier, 2006 remains much more comparable to 2018 estimates, both in the expected electoral swings as well as the president's approval and state of the economy. Fifty days out from the 2006 midterm, Cook placed Republican "at risk" seats at roughly 35, a value which eventually rose to approximately 55 on election day. Meanwhile, Democrats were only at risk of losing less than 10 seats throughout the electoral cycle. In all, given high economic approval, low presidential approval, and Cook estimates similar to 2006, trends supported a comparable midterm in 2018.[16] The one notable exception was little to no expectation for a loss of Republican control in the Senate, due in part to less than one-third of the seats up for reelection in 2018 being held by Republicans.

Was 2018 a Wave Election?

The 2018 midterm elections resulted in a year of record turnout, expenditures, and electoral outcomes. For the first time in American history, a midterm election turned out over 100 million voters.[17] According to the US Elections Project,

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16 All House election predictions in this and the preceding paragraph come from the Cook Political Report, https://www.cookpolitical.com/ratings/house-race-ratings.
17 Maggie Astor and Liam Stack "Midterm Election Turnout Was Up. How Much? We Don't Know Yet," *The New York Times*, 9 November 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/09/us/politics/election-turnout.html.

roughly 118 million people, or approximately 50.3% of voting eligible citizens, turned out to vote. In comparison, in the most recent midterm election in 2014, voter turnout reached a 36.7% low, a figure not seen since the Hoover Presidency in 1930. Alternatively, in 2018, the proportion of turnout was the highest for a midterm since 1914, when voter turnout reached 50.4%. Comparing 2018 to the 2000s average midterm turnout of 39.4% shows that voter turnout increased over 10 points as compared to the modern average.

Additionally, the turnout compared to the most recent Presidential election in 2016 decreased by only 9.8 points, becoming the lowest difference in turnout since the 1948–1950 presidential and midterm elections. The low 9.8-point decrease from the previous presidential race to the midterms is also 9.4 points lower than the 2000s average of 19.2 points.[18] As seen from these data and data examined later in the paper, the turnout surge needed to shift the power in the House of Representatives was met, a trend that pundits suggested was necessary to see a Democratic take-over of the lower chamber.[19] Overall, while never reaching midterm turnout peaks seen in the 1800s and early 1900s, voter turnout was historically high, suggesting that in this extremely nationalized environment, voters turned out as a result of the current political climate under the Trump Presidency.

In the 2018 general election, campaign financing also reached a midterm record high. According to the Center for Responsive Politics, House candidates raised over $1.25 billion, with an average of $1.43 million per candidate, irrespective of quality. This was considerably higher than in 2014, in which candidates raised a total of $956 million with an average of $1.14 million per candidate.[20] In the 2018 general election, the average Republican candidate raised $1.41 million, whereas the average Democrat raised $1.67 million. Republican incumbents seeking reelection raised on average $2.09 million compared with an average of $1.53 million by their Democrat colleagues. Republican challengers attempting to unseat a Democrat incumbent raised only $205,050 on average whereas Democrat challengers raised over $1.61 million to challenge Republican incumbents, a sizeable difference reflecting the favorable national tides in 2018. Finally, in open seat races, Democrat candidates raised roughly $2.29 million while Republican

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18 Data compiled by the United States Elections Project (http://www.electproject.org).
19 Ben Brody, "Democrats on Track to Take House if They Turn Out, CBS Poll Says," Bloomberg News, 14 October 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-14/democrats-on-track-to-take-house-if-they-turn-out-cbs-poll-says.
20 All 2014 values are adjusted for inflation to the 2018 dollar value and current as of December 2018.

challengers raised only $1.23 million, which reflects almost a 2:1 advantage in these races.[21]

In the Senate, campaign financing in the general election was equally record setting for a midterm election. Overall, Democrat Senate candidates raised an average of $13.43 million with incumbents raising $16.9 million on average to defend their seats. Republican Senate candidates raised $8.03 million on average, with an incumbency average of only $12.97 million. In 2014 by comparison, Democrats raised on average $9.67 million, whereas Republicans raised $7.63 million. When challenging incumbents in 2018, Democrats raised $12.3 million on average as opposed to an average of $7.29 million by Republicans. In open seats, Democrats raised $12.04 million on average, whereas Republicans raised $11.3 million.[22]

The House results suggest that Democrats took the offensive in a campaign to take open and Republican-held seats, whereas Republican incumbents outspent Democrat incumbents to defend seats, clearly suggesting a referendum on the majority party and President Trump's administration. In 2018, House Democrats mobilized fundraising in opposition to Trump and raised roughly 72.9% more than the previous midterm. Alternatively, Republican candidates raised almost 2% less than 2014, and roughly 41.6% less than Democrat candidates in 2018. In the Senate, the results are equally biased toward Democrat mobilization. In 2018 as compared to 2014, Democrats raised roughly 60.4% more than the previous midterm, whereas Republicans raised 5.6% less. In a pairwise contest in 2018, Republicans raised 40.2% less overall than Democratic Senate candidates.

Electorally, the 2018 midterms resulted in record minority and female representation in the 116th Congress. A total of 123 women thus far will be serving in the upcoming Congress, with 23 of those being in the Senate. The previous record of 85 was set for the 115th Congress in 2016.[23] The 2018 midterm outcomes were also a year for firsts in America, whether that be the first Muslim or Native American women in Congress, the first openly lesbian member from Minnesota, or the first African American congresswomen from Connecticut and Massachusetts.[24]

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21 All spending figures reflect data collected from the Center for Responsive Politics, https://www.opensecrets.org/.

22 "Senate spending data from the Center for Responsive Politics," https://www.opensecrets.org/.

23 Claire Hansen. "The Women of the 116th Congress." *US News and World Report*, 13 November 2018, https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/slideshows/the-women-of-the-116th-congress.

24 Julia Reinstein. "Here Are Some Of The Historic Firsts From The Midterm Elections. BuzzFeed News," 12 November 2018, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/juliareinstein/historic-firsts-midterm-elections.

Overall, the Democrats were able to successfully gain a solid 235-seat majority in the House, a net gain thus far of 40 House seats.[25] A total of 47 seats flipped in the 2018 midterm, with the Republicans gaining 3 seats while losing 44 to Democrat challengers. This would suggest then that the net loss of 20% or 48 of the President's party's seats, the total often believed necessary to constitute a wave election, was not met.[26]

How successful were quality challengers in House elections? In seats with Republican incumbents, 24 amateur challengers, 5 quality challengers, and 1 Democrat incumbent were able to defeat Republican incumbents.[27] In seats with Democratic incumbents, no Republicans won, even after opposing those incumbents with 134 amateurs and 6 quality challengers. Republican-held open seats in the midterms, consisted of 17 races with no quality candidates, five with a Democrat quality challenger against an amateur Republican, 14 with quality challengers from both parties, and five with no opposition to a Republican candidate. In these open seats, only one quality Republican was successful, whereas 11 Democrat amateurs and three quality challengers successfully flipped seats. Democrat-held open seats consisted of seven races with no quality challengers, six with quality Democrats against amateur Republicans, three with quality Republicans against amateur Democrats, three with both parties fielding quality challengers, and one with no Republican opposition entirely. Of those candidates, only three Republicans were successful – one amateur and two quality challengers.

Alternatively, eight amateurs, eight quality challengers, and one unopposed challenger were successful in protecting their party's open seats. As shown in Table 4, 39.6% of quality Democratic candidates were successful, whereas 21.3% of Democratic amateurs won in 2018 irrespective of seat type (incumbent vs. open). Republican quality success is even more polarizing, with quality candidates winning 46.9% of the time, as opposed to political amateurs who were only successful 9.5% of the time. Although the difference in success between Democrat and Republican quality candidates is slight, volume in this election was

25 On December 6, 2018, *USA Today* reported an ongoing controversy surrounding the outcome in North Carolina's ninth congressional district as a result of potential voter fraud, suggesting the Republican winner may not be seated in the 116th Congress. See William Cummings, "North Carolina GOP leaders says he's open to new election amid 9th District voting fraud controversy," *USA Today*, 6 December 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/12/06/north-carolina-ninth-district-race/2225721002/.

26 See Rob Oldham and Jacob Smith. "Wave Elections (1918–2016)." *Ballotpedia*, https://ballotpedia.org/Wave_elections_%281918-2016%29.

27 Mid-decade redistricting caused Pennsylvania's 18th congressional district to have two incumbents run against one another.

Table 4: US House Outcomes by Political Experience.

Party	Quality candidates	Political amateurs
Republicans	46.9%	9.5%
Democrats	39.6%	21.3%

clearly a determinant of success, with Democrats successfully winning with 19 quality candidates as opposed to 15 Republicans and winning with 45 amateurs as opposed to 16 by Republicans.[28]

Finally, we can observe the effects of increased nationalization by how well each party's candidates did in districts won by their respective presidential candidate in 2016. In all but 10 districts won by a Democratic incumbent in 2018, Hillary Clinton won a majority of the vote for president in 2016. By contrast, Republican incumbents were only able to win in three districts that Clinton carried in the 2016 presidential election – the rest were in districts that Trump received a majority of the vote. As Jacobson and Carson (2016) demonstrate in Figure 6.3 of their book, this is a smaller proportion of races with split outcomes between presidential and House results. Lastly, we observe that for those races in which Republican incumbents were defeated in 2018, half were in districts that Clinton carried in 2016, whereas 10 of the remaining 15 were within highly competitive districts (i.e. Clinton received between 45 and 49.9 percent of the vote).

Moving onto the Senate, the Republicans were able to strengthen their narrow majority with a net gain of two seats, bringing their total number of seats to 53. Of the 34 seats up for reelection in 2018, Republicans won four seats previously held by the Democrats, defeating the following incumbents: Bill Nelson in Florida, Joe Donnelly in Indiana, Claire McCaskill in Missouri, and Heidi Heitkamp in North Dakota. Democrats won two Republican held seats, specifically defeating incumbent Senator Dean Heller in Nevada and winning Jeff Flake's Arizona open seat left vacant upon his retirement at the end of his term. Every candidate who was able to flip the control of Senate seats, regardless of party, was a quality candidate. Additionally, 23.5% of Republican quality candidates and 22% of Democratic quality candidates were successful. In contrast, no political amateurs managed to win any Senate races in 2018.

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28 The percentages in Table 4 do not add up to 100 percent since we are examining the total number of quality and amateur candidates that won by party as opposed to the total that ran within each party.

Finally, all four of the Senate seats Republicans won in 2018 were in states Donald Trump had carried in 2016, whereas only one of the two Democratic wins were in states carried by Clinton. As we discussed with the electoral outcomes in the House races above, these results offer additional support for increased nationalization and its effect on congressional races, given that seats up and down the federal system continue to be aligned to the presidential vote in that state (Jacobson 2015; Hopkins 2018).

Looking Ahead: From the 116th Congress to the 2020 Presidential Election

With the polling stations closed, votes cast, and outcomes set, the electoral frame of view now shifts toward the 116th Congress and the looming 2020 Presidential Election. What effect will the 2018 midterms have on the 116th Congress? How might the Democratic take-over of the House and the increased Republican control of the Senate shift congressional productivity and policy outcomes? How might a divided government shift the nationalized narrative? How will President Trump handle the loss of unified Federal power? What did this election suggest may be necessary for success in the 2020 Presidential election? The following discussion will examine many such questions as well as offer insight and predictions regarding the divided 116th Congress and the 2020 Presidential Election.

With Democrats controlling at least a 35-seat majority in the House of Representatives, many expect increased oversight on executive branch activities as well as the distinct possibility of impeachment procedures, both actions not taken by the Republican Party during the first 2 years of the Trump Presidency. In the immediate aftermath of the election, the Democratic leadership is suggesting that impeachment procedures are not at the forefront of the House majority's agenda; rather their main focus will be on economic and oversight issues such as public works and healthcare. To that end, both Speaker-elect Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Judiciary Committee Chairman-elect Jerry Nadler (D-NY) have warned their Democrat colleagues that to focus the agenda too heavily on impeachment might be detrimental to their 2020 bid to retake the Senate and Presidency.[29] This suggests that one might expect to see a focus initially on policy

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29 Lisa Mascaro and Mary Clare Jalonick, "Impeach the President? House Democrats saying not so Fast," 23 November 2018, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/impeach-president-house-democrats-fast-59373877.

relating to infrastructure, criminal justice, and perhaps a renewed debate over healthcare reform.

More importantly, however, we should expect to see the Democratic majority push for protections on the Mueller investigation, as well as significantly increased House oversight and investigations on the President and his family. Finally, while Democratic leadership is increasingly reluctant to do so for fear of electoral retaliation, it is expected that in the next 2 years, impeachment articles will be filed in the House. With the Senate now under more solid Republican control, we should expect to see the comparatively smooth passage of any judicial and cabinet nominations in the next 2 years. With respects to judicial appointments, the lower court vacancies will likely be filled with relative ease given that the pivotal nomination vote now lies firmly in Republican control. Additionally, the vacancies and turnover in the President's cabinet may increase under Republican control, due to the ability of the President to more quickly replace "unsatisfactory" cabinet members under a strong Senate majority.

From a nationalization standpoint, we expect that the legislative narrative will become increasingly polarized, with Republicans shifting from explaining failures in a unified government to pointed accusations toward Democrats over gridlock. Alternatively, Democrats will shift from explaining Republican inefficiency in a unified government to championing gridlock in an effort to thwart the Republican agenda. President Trump has already affirmed such suspicions when answering a reporter 2 days after the election on questions pertaining to oversight and investigation, stating that the Republicans and his administration will retaliate with investigations of their own and do so with a "war-like posture".[30]

Moreover, with the combination of the Democrat takeover, high number of incumbent retirements, and the losses of moderate Republicans who publicly opposed the President, the 116th Congress is expected to be extremely polarized.[31] In the days following the midterms, President Trump publicly lauded those within his own party who supported his policies and denounced those who refrained from "embracing him" or his policies, to the point of, upon their defeat, publicly naming

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30 "Trump Warns of 'War-like Posture' if Democrats Launch Investigations," *The Washington Post*, 8 November 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/trump-warns-of-war-like-posture-if-democrats-launch-investigations/2018/11/08/f9ec41b4-e2ba-11e8-ba30-a7ded04d8fac_video.html?utm_term=.30c554899a4a.
31 On this point, see Bradley Jones, "House Republicans Who Lost Re-election Bids were More Moderate than those Who Won," *Pew Research Center*, 7 December 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/07/house-republicans-who-lost-re-election-bids-were-more-moderate-than-those-who-won/.

them in and celebrating their electoral defeat.[32] What this shows is an increase in partisan alignment, spurred through increased shaming and electoral punishment for defection. Overall, what this suggests is that the legislative narrative and policy objectives will remain increasingly nationalized, moving closer to the national party agenda that is dictated by the president as well as opposition to the president.

What does the 2018 midterm election results mean for the upcoming 2020 Presidential election? Perhaps the biggest takeaway when looking ahead to the 2020 presidential election is that running the "right" candidate still matters. Specifically, strategic decision making on which candidates run, especially in the primaries, will determine success in the general election. In 2016, Donald Trump won the Republican Presidential nomination, not due to overwhelming support from the Republican electorate, but rather because of poor strategic decision making by the party. Given the party's inability to strategically choose a strong single candidate, a crowded pool of 17 candidates emerged and through this, the majority's voice was dispersed and drowned out by the Trump minority. Donald Trump successfully won a plurality but not majority of votes, still propelling him into the general election (Byers and Carson 2018). In a pairwise contest collected from polled preferences between Donald Trump and a perspective single challenger being either Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, or John Kasich, Donald Trump likely would have lost (Kurrild-Klitgaard 2017).

This suggests, and the 2018 midterm election reaffirms this 2016 phenomenon, that strategic candidate selection during the primary nomination process is vital to general election success. Quality challengers, or the candidates with experience and resources necessary to win, are still necessary for victory. As seen in this preceding discussion, voter turnout and financing reached record highs and are necessary for greater competition, but are not singular determinants of success. Alternatively, quality candidates, those who are most strategic and have the financing and prior experience, were still more successful in both the primaries and the general election than amateurs.

Conclusions

On June 20th, 2017, the most expensive House election in history came to an end, with Republican Karen Handel narrowly winning against Democrat Jon Ossoff to fill the GA-06 left vacant by Tom Price. Engaged in a struggle to win against a Democrat who raised $23 million, Handel embraced the newly elected President Donald Trump,

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32 Morgan Chalfant, "Trump Calls Out GOP Lawmakers Who Lost in Midterms," *The Hill*, 7 November 2018, https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/415528-trump-calls-out-gop-lawmakers-who-lost-in-midterms.

ran a campaign centered around him, and nationalized the election. While eventually winning the seat, she did so by only 3.6 points in a seat won by roughly 20 points the year before by Price, also a Republican.[33] In 2018, Handel once again embraced the president, voting in line with the President's position 87.5% of the time.[34] Just 1 year later, after winning in a previous Republican stronghold, Karen Handel was defeated by 3264 votes, or 1% of those voting.[35] This surprising seat swing in Georgia suggests that not only are congressional elections becoming increasingly nationalized, they are also flipping over any perceived closeness to Trump, offering additional evidence that 2018 was a referendum on President Trump.

Such a trend however was not limited to only Georgia's 6th district. In 2010, over 50% of survey respondents suggested that their vote in the midterm would be a vote either for or against the president (Jacobson 2011). Although exit poll data suggests President Trump was not as relevant of a factor in 2018, he clearly motivated an increased number of Democrats to go to the polls on Election Day.[36] Additionally, the effect of increased nationalization can clearly be seen in the House election results and in the 5 of 6 Senate seat flips, which reverted to the party of the presidential candidate who carried each of these states in 2016.

In sum, the 2018 midterm appears to be a referendum on President Trump, as a result of the high voter turnout for a midterm, record amounts of money raised by candidates, quality Democratic candidate emergence, and overall voter enthusiasm. Moreover, 2018 shattered the previously set 85-seat ceiling for women serving in Congress, witnessing record levels of emergence and success in both the primary and general elections. After 2 years of unified governmental control by the Republican Party, and with a President and executive branch that remained largely unregulated, the electorate voted out moderates, realigned seats to their previous presidential vote leanings, and elected a new and more diverse Congress never before seen in American history.

33 Aaron Blake. Winners and Losers from the Georgia Special Election, *The Washington Post*, 21 June 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/21/winners-and-losers-from-the-georgia-special-election/?utm_term=.a38dc5a2a861.

34 "Tracking Congress in the Age of Trump." https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-trump-score/karen-handel/.

35 https://www.politico.com/election-results/2018/georgia/.

36 Gary Langer and Benjamin Siu, "Election 2018 Exit Poll Analysis: Voter Turnout Soars, Democrats Take Back the House, ABC News Projects," *ABC News*, 7 November 2018, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/election-2018-exit-poll-analysis-56-percent-country/story?id=59006586.

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