

2018 MIDTERM ELECTION PREVIEW

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The upcoming elections on Tuesday, Nov. 6 are the first midterms under President Donald Trump. With the entire U.S. House of Representatives and one-third of the seats in the U.S. Senate on the ballot, the stakes for both parties are high. This document is intended to provide an overview of where the races stand currently, how they compare to previous midterms, and what experts are predicting could happen this fall.

II. ELECTION OVERVIEW

The 2018 midterms have the potential to be a so-called wave election in which Democrats could pick up significant seats, especially in the House, where they have a clearer path to a majority than in the Senate but are by no means a “lock.” Historically, the party of the President loses seats in the first midterm of the new administration, and it is typically framed as a referendum on the sitting president.

President Trump – although certainly expected to have an outsized impact – is not the only factor that will shape the outcome of the elections. Largely Republican-dominated redistricting in 2012 gives the party a significant advantage in many House races, Democrats have to defend 10 Senate seats in states President Trump won in 2016, and issues such as health care, immigration, and the economy are expected to be the focus of the policy debate.¹

III. CURRENT MAKEUP OF THE CHAMBERS

U.S. House of Representatives

All 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives will be on the ballot in November. Republicans currently hold 236 seats, Democrats hold 193 seats and there are six vacancies. Democrats need to gain at least 25 seats to take control of the chamber. Republicans can lose no more than 18 seats to maintain control.

U.S. Senate

35 Senate seats are up in November, and due to special elections, two states have both seats on the ballot (Mississippi and Minnesota). Of the 35 seats, nine are currently held by Republicans and 26 are held by Democrats (counting Senators Angus King (I-M) and Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who caucus with the Democrats).

Posing an uphill challenge for Democrats hoping to capture a very narrow Senate majority, 10 of the 26 seats held by Democrats are in states that voted for President Trump over Secretary Clinton in 2016, some

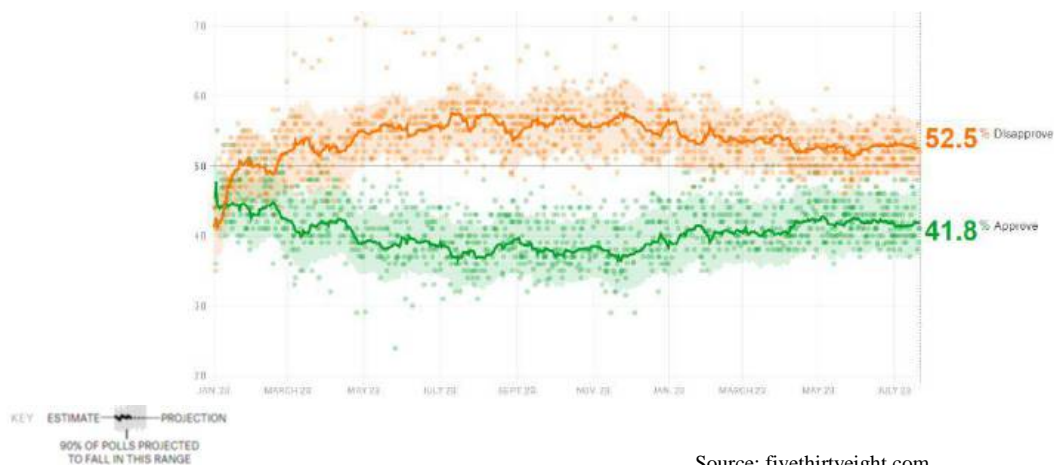
by significant margins. Democrats need a net gain of +2 seats to take control of the chamber. Republicans need to lose less than two seats (net -1) to maintain control, as the Vice President has the tie breaking vote in the event of a 50-50 seat split. While it is conceivable that Democrats could take the Senate, they essentially have no margin for error and Republicans are likely to retain a razor-thin majority.

IV. PRESIDENT TRUMP'S APPROVAL RATING AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE MIDTERMS

Current Approval Rating

Based on an average all polling analyzed by fivethirtyeight.com, President Trump's current approval rating is 41.8 percent, with 52.5 percent saying they disapprove.² When just averaging polls of likely or registered voters, these numbers change to 43.7 percent approve, 52.0 percent disapprove.³

Average of All Polls: Approve-Disapprove of President Trump



Impact on the Midterms

Poll averages show Trump about five percentage points less popular than Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama when their party lost 52 and 63 seats in 1994 and 2010, respectively.⁴

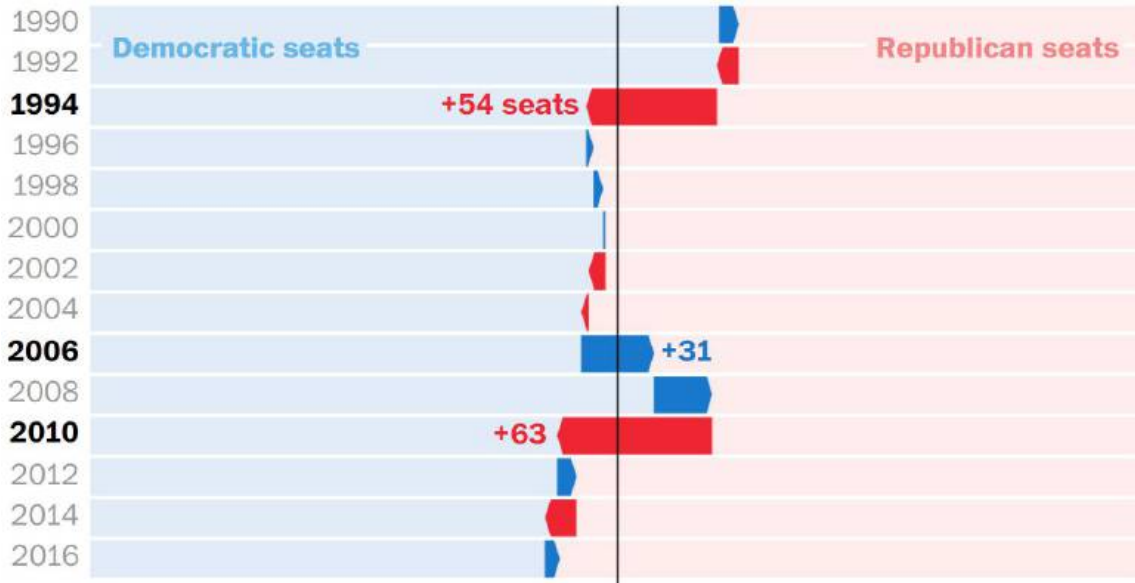
Additionally, polling from the Pew Research Center indicates that Donald Trump will play a particularly outsized role in November, with more voters saying he will be a factor in 2018 than they did about any previous president in an election dating back to 1982.⁵

V. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the last 60 years, control of the U.S. House of Representatives has changed hands just three times: 1994, 2006 and 2010. All of these were midterm elections and resulted in control shifting away from the party of the sitting president. The 1994 and 2010 elections were largely characterized by opposition to the incumbent president and his party over health care.

The 2006 election could be described as a referendum on the president and his party over perceived poor governing and corruption. Interestingly, the 2018 elections seem poised to include elements of both, at least to some degree.

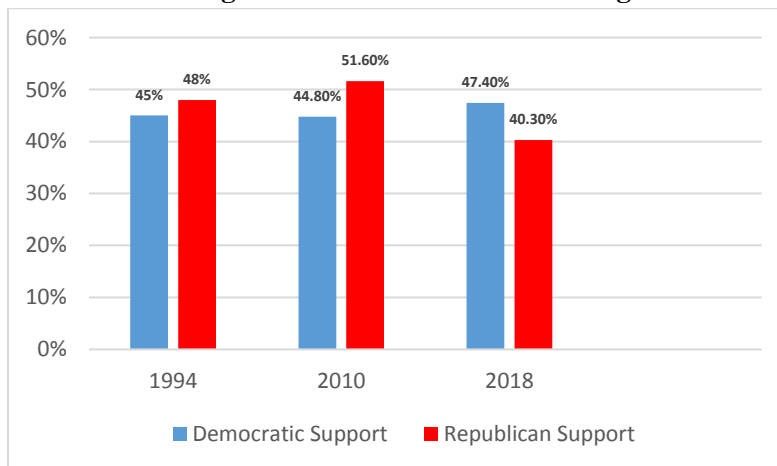
House Election Outcomes 1990-2016



Source: Washington Post

Based on fivethirtyeight.com’s average of congressional generic ballot polls, Democrats currently have a +6.5 percent advantage over Republicans.⁶ RealClearPolitics’s average of generic congressional ballot polls has Democrats with a +3.9 percent lead, as of Aug. 14, 2018. RealClearPolitics found an average congressional generic ballot polls to be +9.4 percentage points in favor of Republicans in 2010 when the party took control of the House and gained seats in the Senate, several points higher than the current Democratic generic ballot advantage at this time.⁷

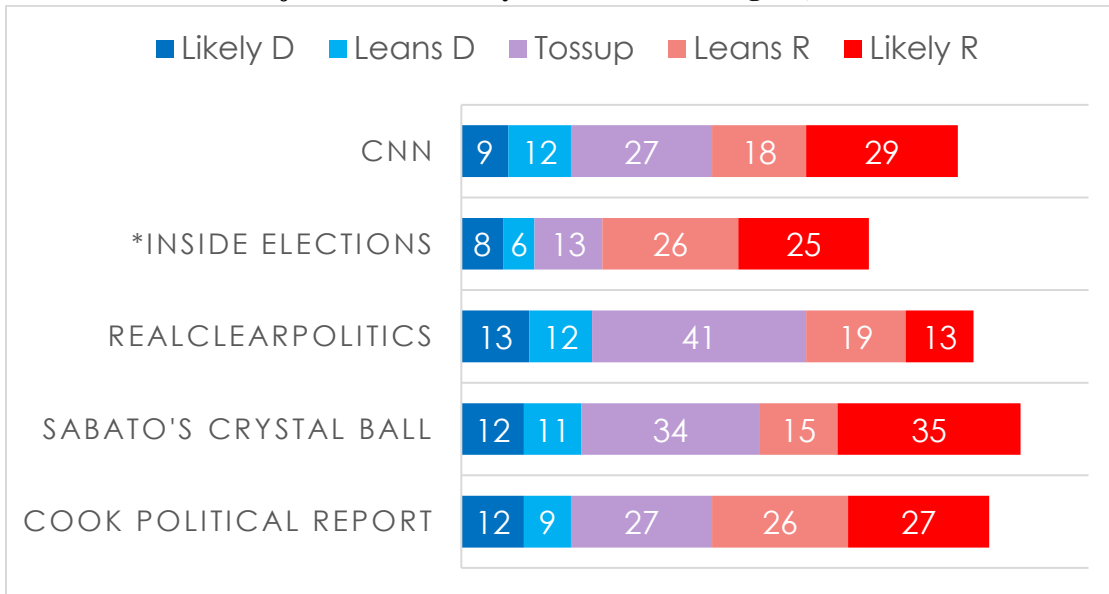
Congressional Generic Ballot Polling



VI. COMPETITIVE RACES IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Based on analysis of projections from CNN Key Races, Inside Elections, RealClearPolitics, Sabato’s Crystal Ball, and the Cook Political Report as of Aug. 14, 2018, 81 to 107 Congressional districts are considered “in play,” with Inside Elections being on the low end and Sabato’s Crystal ball on the high end. Republicans are currently representing 25 districts won by Hillary Clinton in 2016, and there are 13 seats currently held by Democrats that voted for Donald Trump in 2016 (factoring in the redrawn Pennsylvania electoral map).

Projections of ‘In Play’ House Races (Aug. 14, 2018)



**Leans” incorporates both races rated as “leans” and as “tilt” per Inside Election’s forecasting.

The chart below is based on an analysis of all five organizations’ ratings for the House races in contention. A seat’s rating is based Wynne Health Group’s aggregation, reflecting the consensus of at least three of the five projections.

Seats that did not appear on at least three projections were not included. The asterisk denotes where only three of the five projections concurred. The absence of an asterisk means at least four of the five concurred on the race rating. These are based on projections available as of Aug. 14, 2018.^{8 9 10 11 12}

Likely D	Lean D	Tossup	Lean R	Likely R
AZ-01 O'Halleran* CA-07 Bera* FL-07 Murphy* MN-07 Peterson* NH-02 Kuster NJ-02 Open NJ-05 Gottheimer* NV-04 Open NY-25 Vacant* PA-05 Vacant PA-06 Open PA-08 Cartwright*	AZ-02 Open CA-49 Open* FL-27 Open NH-01 Open NJ-11 Open* NV-03 Open* PA-07 Vacant PA-17 Rothfus VA-10 Comstock*	CA-10 Denham* CA-25 Knight* CA-39 Open CA-48 Rohrabacher* CO-06 Coffman FL-26 Curbelo IA-01 Blum IA-03 Young* IL-06 Roskam* IL-12 Bost* KS-02 Open* KS-03 Yoder* KY-06 Barr MI-08 Bishop* MI-11 Open MN-1 Open MN-02 Lewis MN-03 Paulsen* MN-08 Open NC-09 Open* NJ-07 Lance* NY-19 Faso* NY-22 Tenney* TX-07 Culberson* TX-32 Sessions VA-07 Brat* WA-08 Open	AR-02 Hill* CA-45 Walters* FL-15 Open FL-16 Buchanan FL-18 Mast GA-06 Handel IL-13 Davis* IL-14 Hultgren ME-02 Poliquin* MT-AL Gianforte* NC-13 Budd* NE-02 Bacon NJ-03 MacArthur* NM-02 Open* NY-27 Collins* OH-01 Chabot OH-12 Balderson PA-01 Fitzpatrick* PA-16 Kelly* TX-23 Hurd* UT-04 Love* VA-02 Taylor VA-05 Open* WA-03 Herrera Beutler WA-05 McMorris Rodgers* WI-01 Open* WV-03 Open*	AZ-06 Schweikert CA-04 McClintock CA-21 Valadao* CO-03 Tipton FL-06 Open* FL-25 Diaz-Balart GA-07 Woodall IN-02 Walorski* MI-01 Bergman* MI-06 Upton* MI-07 Walberg* MO-02 Wagner NC-02 Holding NC-08 Hudson NY-01 Zeldin NY-11 Donovan NY-24 Katko OH-10 Turner* OH-14 Joyce PA-10 Perry* PA-14 Open SC-01 Open** TX-02 Open** TX-21 Open TX-31 Carter** WI-06 Grothman*

*"Leans" incorporates both races rated as "leans" and as "tilt" per Inside Election's forecasting.

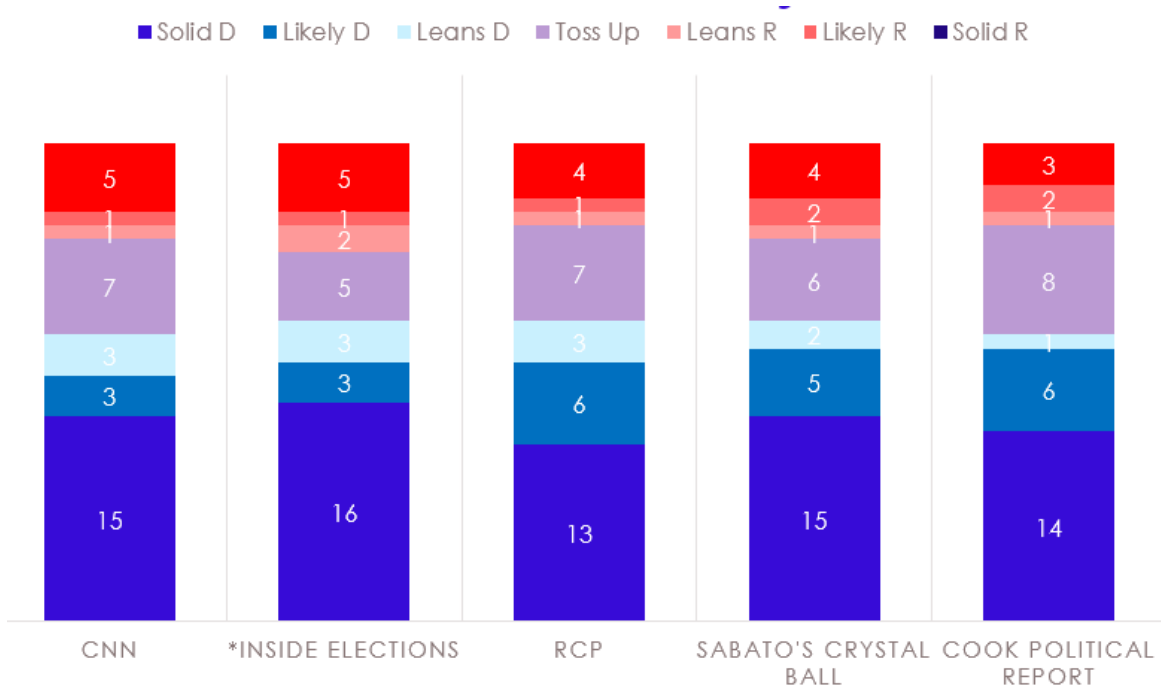
There do seem to be enough seats in play for the Democrats to have a real chance at taking control over the House chamber. While consistent, significantly poor voter turnout in previous off-year elections and a Republican-favorable map due to redistricting present and uphill climb, it appears likely at this point.

VII. COMPETITIVE RACES IN THE SENATE

Of the 35 Senate seats up in 2018, CNN Key Races, Inside Elections, RealClearPolitics, Sabato's Crystal ball, and the Cook Political Report rated between 14-20 seats as a least somewhat competitive, and between five to eight seats as "toss ups." Unanimously, the seats in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Missouri, and Nevada were given a "toss up" rating.

The seat in Tennessee, currently held by retiring Senator Bob Corker (R-TN), was either given a "Leans Republican" or "toss up" rating. Senator Heidi Heitkamp's (D-ND) race for re-election in North Dakota was deemed a "toss up" by four out of five outlets, with the fifth deeming it "Leans R." Among others, additional seats seemingly most vulnerable include West Virginia and Montana.

Projections of 'In Play' Senate Races (Aug. 14, 2018)



**"Leans" incorporates both races rated as "leans" and as "tilt" per Inside Election's forecasting.

Below, we compile outlets' projections for competitive seats:

Outlet	CNN	RCP	Cook	Crystal Ball	Inside Elections
Likely R	TX (Cruz)	MS (Hyde-Smith)	MS (Hyde-Smith) NE Fischer	MS (Hyde-Smith) TX (Cruz)	TX (Cruz)
Lean R	TN (Open)	TX (Cruz)	TX (Cruz)	TN (Open)	ND (Heitkamp) TN (Open)
Toss Up	AZ (Open) FL (Nelson) IN (Donnelly) MO (McCaskill) ND (Heitkamp) NV (Heller) WV (Manchin)	AZ (Open) FL (Nelson) IN (Donnelly) MO (McCaskill) NV (Heller) ND (Heitkamp) TN (Open)	AZ (Open) FL (Nelson) IN (Donnelly) MO (McCaskill) ND (Heitkamp) NV (Heller) TN (Open)	AZ (Open) FL (Nelson) IN (Donnelly) MO (McCaskill) ND (Heitkamp) NV (Heller)	AZ (Open) FL (Nelson) IN (Donnelly) MO (McCaskill) NV (Heller)
Lean D	MT (Tester) OH (Brown) WI (Baldwin)	MT (Tester) NJ (Menendez) WV (Manchin)	OH (Brown)	MT (Tester) WV (Manchin)	MT (Tester) WV (Manchin) WI (Baldwin)
Likely D	MI (Stabenow) MN (Smith) PA (Casey)	MI (Stabenow) MN (Smith) NJ (Menendez) OH (Brown) PA (Casey) WI (Baldwin) VA (Kaine)	MI (Stabenow) MN (Smith) MT (Tester) NJ (Menendez) PA (Casey) WI (Baldwin)	MI (Stabenow) MN (Smith) NJ (Menendez) OH (Brown) WI (Baldwin)	MN (Smith) OH (Brown) PA (Casey)

With Democrats playing defense in politically challenging environments, the chances of control of the Senate changing hands seems unlikely. While wave elections can have an impact anywhere, Democratically-held seats in many of these states were the result of Democratic party over-performance and weak Republican party candidates in previous cycles. They would need to “run the table” and win in new places, as well as defend seats deep in “Trump country.”

VIII. CONCLUSION

We hope this is a helpful overview of the status of House and Senate races. While races will remain fluid until the moment ballots are cast in November, recent special elections give some credibility to expectations of Democrat gains. Though, Democrats have only won one out of eight special elections for seats in the House and in Alabama, the Senate seat won by Doug Jones was largely the result of a uniquely flawed Republican candidate. Democrats have come close and narrowed the margins in districts from Kansas to South Carolina to Georgia to Ohio, but it remains to be seen if they can successfully execute a winning message and drive voter enthusiasms to the degree necessary to get across the finish line.

¹ See: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/6/5/17386452/midterm-elections-2018-what-to-know-house-senate>

² See: https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/?ex_cid=rrpromo

³ See: Ibid.

⁴ See: <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/trump-approval-ratings/>

⁵ See: <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/08/14105411/8-9-2018-Validated-voters-release2.pdf>

⁶ See: <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-generic-ballot-polls/>

⁷ See: https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/2010_generic_congressional_vote-2171.html

⁸ See: <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/2018-house/>

⁹ See: <https://insidetheelections.com/ratings/house>

¹⁰ See: https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2018/house/2018_elections_house_map.html

¹¹ See: <https://www.cnn.com/election/2018/key-races>

¹² See: <https://www.cookpolitical.com/ratings/house-race-ratings>