



**Thoughts on the 2022 Midterm Elections
November 10, 2022**

Given the historical gains made by the party not controlling the White House and the state of the economy, Republicans reasonably expected to have a very good night on November 8th. While I believe too many are being dismissive of the fact that Republicans likely will take back the U.S. House and are within one seat of taking back the U.S. Senate, Republicans should be a bit disappointed by the results, as history, the economy, and polling all indicated a wave-to-tsunami type outcome. There is more to the story than Donald Trump's candidate performing poorly or abortion driving voters to the polls. It frankly would be irresponsible not to carefully think through what occurred and posit likely causes.

Thus, with the dust nearly settled on the 2022 midterm elections, here are some thoughts on what I believe happened.

1. Gerrymandering Has Made Big House Waves Unlikely

Both parties have fully leveraged computers and political advantages over the last thirty years in states they control to draw congressional districts that heavily favor one party over the other party. As a result, there simply are few congressional seats truly up-for-grabs each year.

Going forward, it is unlikely either party will see a 63-seat swing like Republicans did in 2010. In fact, since the Republican Contract with America election in 1994 when they gained 54 seats and excluding the three other elections in which a party gained 30 seats or more, in the ten other elections, the average gain in the U.S. House was just 8.1 seats. Thus, it appears we will see trench warfare type gains in the coming years over control of the U.S. House.

2. Hide the Candidate Works in the Early Voting Era

With the advent of mass mail-in ballots and early voting, Democrats have figured out how to get-out-the-vote far more impressively than Republicans up to Election Day. In 2022, they decided it was best to hide weaker candidates like John Fetterman in Pennsylvania and Katie Hobbs in Arizona by delaying or nixing debates.

In Pennsylvania, once Fetterman debated Mehmet Oz showing the true extent of his incapacitation, nearly 700,000 voters already had cast a ballot. If those early votes heavily-favored Fetterman as expected, his 180,000-vote margin easily could have been set before voters could truly gage his fitness for office.

Republicans need to adapt to this reality or face more losses in the future.

3. A Tale of Two Gubernatorial Races

While there is much talk about Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' massive 19-point win in Florida, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's bigger 25-point win in Ohio has fallen to the wayside. Why is that? I believe there are three key reasons. First, unlike DeSantis, DeWine faced a largely unknown and underfunded opponent in former Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley. Compared to DeWine's seven statewide runs, Whaley had never run statewide so most Ohioans had no idea who she was and her campaign spent roughly \$7.5 million compared to DeWine's \$20 million war chest.

DeSantis faced former Florida Governor Charlie Crist who was running statewide in Florida for the fifth time, making him very well-known among voters. His campaign also spent more than \$21 million to get his message out. This contrast in opponents makes DeSantis's win simply more impressive.

The second reason people are ignoring DeWine's big win is because most people know it came from getting the support of Democrat voters who liked that DeWine and his Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted severely shutdown Ohio during the pandemic. DeSantis kept Florida open and worked aggressively to ensure Florida businesses and kids faced as few obstacles to normalcy as possible. As a result, not only has Florida recovered 100% of the jobs lost during the pandemic, but it is now ranked 3rd for its jobs recovery and has added 460,200 MORE private sector jobs than it had in February 2020. Ohio's post-pandemic recovery is ranked 41st in America, with it still needing to recover 93,300 jobs before it breaks even. Thus, Florida has added nearly five times the jobs Ohio still needs to bring back from the pandemic.

Finally, unlike DeSantis whose victory had coattails that helped secure the U.S. Senate race for Marco Rubio and several U.S. House seats, DeWine's win didn't really help other Republicans in Ohio. Most statewide Republicans won with roughly the same percentage (59%-60%), with DeWine's vote difference coming from Democrats. For example, in the nine traditionally Democrat big-city counties (Cuyahoga, Franklin, Hamilton, Lorain, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery, Stark, and Summit), DeWine secured 398,667 more votes than U.S. Senate candidate J.D. Vance and those votes more than cover his vote margin over fellow statewide Republican candidates. Republicans also lost U.S. House seats, including incumbent Steve Chabot, that should have been won had DeWine-Husted had coattails.

Other key election outcomes in Ohio are the three Ohio Supreme Court races in which all three Republicans won. These victories ensure that Republicans hold a majority on the court, which will become critical as policymakers retackle redistricting that was hindered by a retiring Republican justice mad that policymakers refused to extend the forced retirement age and abortion post-*Dobbs*. Not that they will use the advantage on issues other than redistricting and

the life issue, Republicans also secured a supermajority in the Ohio House with at least 67 seats and increased from 25-to-8 to a 26-to-7 supermajority in the Ohio Senate.

4. Biggest Winners and Losers

A. Winners

As many pundits have said ad nauseum, DeSantis clearly is the biggest winner in 2022, as noted above. He should be the nominee in 2024.

Another winner is the 2024 Republican nominee. Because there wasn't a red wave in 2022, President Joe Biden has doubled-down on his policies and appears reinvigorated to run again in 2024. America likely will experience more economic pain due to Biden's policies. Republicans, therefore, enter the 2024 cycle in the driver's seat assuming they nominate someone who can win and doesn't drive certain voting segments to the other side.

The last winners from 2022 are taxpayers and businesses. Assuming Republicans secure at least one chamber in Congress, gridlock will prevail in Washington, D.C., which means no new taxes or laws that drive inflation even higher. It also means no new attacks on America's energy industry that cause widespread pain. It could result in a deal to extend the Trump tax cuts that spurred such a strong economy in 2017.

B. Losers

As much as it is unfair to lay the blame on the failure of a Republican wave to materialize on Trump, he does deserve some blame for what occurred, especially in U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races where his handpicked candidates didn't fair very well outside of J.D. Vance in Ohio. He also caused unnecessary distractions by hitting Colorado Republican U.S. Senate candidate Joe O'Dea because O'Dea bucked him and then inexplicably attacking DeSantis as DeSanctimonious just days before the election. These episodes got played up by the media as a reminder to undecided voters of the chaos that comes with Trump.

Ironically, while NeverTrumpers like Liz Cheney, Democrats, and the media have tried to oust Trump via non-political, overly zealous, and, in some cases, illegal means, it may turn out that the end of Trump came via the ballot box when he and his handpicked candidates failed to secure consistent wins since 2016. Republicans, however, should not throw out the Trump policies as they transition to Trump as an elder statesman era—assuming Trump will accept that role instead of thrashing around seeking redemption and, understandably, political compensation for what was unfairly done to him during his presidency.

Specific candidate polling also lost—again. It seems clear that pollsters just have not been able to truly capture the electorate in races given the movement to smartphones and the resistance of people to participate in polls. As they say, the only poll that really matters is the one on Election Day.

The biggest loser this election cycle was American civic society. The Democrats, led aggressively by Biden and the media, to label Republicans as extremist who are a threat to democracy may have motivated base Democrat voters, but irresponsibly widened the schism that exist in America between the Left and the Right. We've now moved well past the days of policy criticisms or scaremongering over policy (Republicans want to cut Medicare!!!). We've even moved past vague slurs about "clingers" and "deplorables." Republicans are now terrorists on par with al Qaeda.

Given the violence we've seen from the Left since Trump's election in 2016 and the weaponization of the Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation by Democrats, such reckless rhetoric pushes America closer to moving from the civic war we are engaged in to a violent civil war. In just the last few months, we've seen an assassination attempt on a Supreme Court Justice and the murder of a Republican by a rhetoric-fueled Democrat.

5. Silver Lining: A Look Down the Road to 2024

As many pundits have noted, the U.S. Senate election map in 2024 is a tough one for Democrats, with several Democrat-held seats up in solidly red states like Montana, Ohio, and West Virginia. More positive for Republicans is that the "meh" midterm outcome appears to have emboldened Biden who is signaling he is more likely to run for reelection now. After all, he did what far more talented politicians like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama failed to do in their first midterm election by limiting the damage to his governing coalition.

This silver lining should present Republicans with an excellent contrast election opportunity if they can nudge Trump aside and nominate a younger, more vibrant DeSantis, U.S. Senator Tim Scott, or South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem. Biden will be nearly 81-years-old in 2024, with two more years to age and deal with a likely recession, job losses, inflation, and global instability.

In looking at the map for 2024, it is clear after the last four elections in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 that there really are only five truly battleground states that will decide the presidency.

Is Michigan really a battleground state still? In 2016 when Trump won Michigan by less than 11,000 votes, it contained 9.954 million people. Six years later, it holds 10.05 million, or just 96,000 more people. Reports indicate that more people are leaving Michigan than moving there. One has to wonder if the net outmigration has changed Michigan from a state Republicans can win top-of-the-ticket races to one in which it just can't make the math work without some fundamental shift in voter preferences.

It is hard to believe a true battleground state would reelect Governor Gretchen Whitmer who so tragically locked down the state causing enormous harm to businesses and kids, but it did comfortably by more than ten points in 2022. Since Trump's win in 2016, Republicans haven't

won a single statewide election and the legislature just flipped to the Democrats. Those facts don't bode well for 2024 or Michigan's states as a true battleground

Things look a bit bleak in the other battleground states, too. Currently based on results, nine out of ten U.S. Senate seats will be held by Democrats in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Three of those same states will be governed by Democrats. In the last two presidential elections, the Democrat candidate won six states (all in 2020 plus Nevada in 2016) and the Republican (Trump) won four states (all in 2016). Thus, in top-of-the-ticket races in the five states over the last six years, Democrats are twenty-four out of thirty-three races (I think I counted correctly). That win rate raises serious questions about the battleground (versus closeness of races) status of these five states.

Republicans must find a way to win more consistently in Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin if they want to run the U.S. Senate and win the presidency. Mathematically, Republicans cannot win the Electoral College without winning three of the five battleground states. Thus, Republicans must spend the next two years building an early vote infrastructure in those states and continue the excellent work started by Trump to bring Hispanic and black voters into the Republican tent.

All-in-all not the election outcome Republicans were expecting, but, if they end with control of at least the U.S. House, then I'd mark the 2022 midterm election as a Republican win.