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INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
1275 K STREET NW, SUITE 1000
WASHINGTON, DC 20005
202.393.6801 | DOWNTOWN.ORG

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE 2022 ELECTION

Twelve hours after the polls closed, there's a lot we don't know yet about the outcome of the election – but a few trends and projections are coming into (hazy) focus. From the Agora Election Desk, here are a few initial observations:

1. **A Red Ripple, not a Tsunami.** Republicans are still likely to win control of the House, although with a much smaller majority than they hoped (see #2). That said, it is not entirely out of the question that Democrats keep the House – a result that seemed utterly unthinkable 24 hours ago.

Meanwhile, the Senate is still up for grabs. While Democrat John Fetterman appears to have picked up a Republican Senate seat in Pennsylvania, Republicans have a decent shot at taking one back in Nevada, where challenger Adam Laxalt leads incumbent Catherine Cortez Masto. That means Senate control may come down to Georgia, where incumbent Democrat Raphael Warnock leads Herschel Walker but neither is likely to surpass the 50-percent mark, triggering a Dec. 6 runoff.

Either way, the results suggest that the hoped/feared for red tsunami did not materialize. The GOP may still end up with a majority in one or both chambers, but a large mandate is out of the cards.

2. **Kevin McCarthy May Get the Worst of Both Worlds.** With the GOP still poised to win a majority in the House, McCarthy may achieve his dream of becoming speaker. But with what could be a razor-thin majority, he will have very little room to maneuver. With a number of MAGA Republicans – a group that doesn't entirely trust McCarthy – winning election, he will have to thread a very fine needle to get anything done.

That might not matter when it comes to the promised investigations of the Biden administration or messaging bills on abortion or the border that have no chance of passing the Senate. But conducting the basic tasks of legislating, like passing appropriations bills to keep the government running, will be extremely hard – giving Democrats the chance to lay the blame for gridlock and any government shutdowns at the feet of the GOP. And with a narrow majority, any hint that McCarthy is compromising with the White House could trigger a revolt in his caucus. McCarthy may soon learn a version of [Uncle Ben's axiom](#): Even a minuscule amount of power comes with great responsibility.

3. **Who to Credit/Blame for the Results?** It's way too early to draw any conclusions from the results. Did the Supreme Court decision in Dobbs significantly help Democrats? Or was it defending democracy and the Jan. 6th insurrection? And in places where Republicans made gains, was it pocketbook issues like inflation and crime, or perceptions that the Democrats have become too extreme on social issues?

Pollsters and political scientists will be parsing the results for years, but it's safe to assume that in both parties, the moderate and more extreme wings will claim credit for success and reject blame for failure – with big implications for policymaking the next two years. Expect Democrats to continue battling over whether to highlight “kitchen table” issues to regain the trust of moderate suburban voters or push hard on progressive goals like reproductive rights and equity.

One thing that is clear: candidate quality matters. Had Pennsylvania Republicans nominated someone who was actually from Pennsylvania [and knew when the Steelers were playing](#), it's entirely possible they would have held their seat. And in such a challenging environment, Georgia easily could have gone the Republican's way had Herschel Walker not been the nominee.

4. **Florida And Ohio Are Not Swing States.** It's a long way from the 2000s, when presidential elections came down to the Sunshine State (2000) and the Buckeye State (2004). Gov. Ron DeSantis' blowout re-election win in Florida, coupled with Senator Marco Rubio's defeat of Val Demings, should put to bed once and for all the notion that Florida is purple (and Miami-Dade may very well be the reddest metro area in the nation).

Likewise, despite an energetic campaign that highlighted his working class, centrist views, Rep. Tim Ryan was not able to defeat Trump-backed Republican JD Vance. Democrats should think twice about putting their hopes on winning those states in 2024 and beyond. (And, by the way, Texas once again has demonstrated that the progressive belief that the Lone Star State is turning blue is more a wish than reality).

5. **The Night's Biggest Loser: Donald J. Trump.** Not only did many of Trump's favorite candidates crash and burn on election night, but his biggest potential 2024 GOP rival, Ron DeSantis, won big in Florida. Increasing numbers of Republicans do not want Trump to lead the party, looking for new leadership. That does not mean that Trump will go away; and any Republican who counts him out should talk to Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and the other 2016 GOP candidates who did not take him seriously until it was too late. Trump has a unique ability to draw attention to himself, and if multiple Republicans enter the 2024 primary, they could easily split the vote and hand the nomination back to Trump.
6. **A Better-Than-Expected Night for Biden Won't Stop the Questions.** It's still too early to know for sure, but President Biden is on track to fare better in his first midterm election than virtually all of his predecessors in terms of House and Senate losses. That Democrats appear to have kept losses to a minimum (remember: it's still early) amid high inflation and crime is a notable achievement.

That said, the 2024 presidential election began at 11:00pm last night when the West Coast polls closed. Biden will be almost 82 on election day 2024, and with his approval ratings still in the low 40s, the calls for him to step aside may grow. The good news for Biden is that there don't appear to be any viable challengers in the waiting at the moment: VP Harris has not caught fire, and California Gov. Gavin Newsom has ruled out running in two years. Also, don't forget that 40 years ago, a geriatric president with a weak economy and low approval ratings saw his party decimated in the midterm elections. Two years later, Ronald Reagan won 49 states. Biden isn't Reagan, to be sure, but two years is an eternity in politics.

7. **Democracy Held Together ... More or Less.** One of the most significant developments in the 2022 election was the defeat of at least two election-denying GOP gubernatorial candidates, Doug Mastriano in Pennsylvania and Tim Michels in Wisconsin (Michels had gone so far as saying that “Republicans will never lose another election in Wisconsin after I'm elected governor.”) This

matters, because both would have led swing states that were ground zero for false claims that the 2020 election was stolen. Having either in charge of the mechanics of elections could have had major implications for the 2024 election. That said, election denier Kari Lake, the GOP nominee for Arizona Governor, could still win – and other election deniers were elected to office yesterday.

And while the election appears to have run smoothly, long lines, armed security outside polling places, and wild misinformation on social media indicate that the infrastructure of democracy is still not as healthy as it should be.