

US Midterm Elections 2018:

What is at Stake
for the Middle East?

US Midterm Elections 2018: What is at Stake for the Middle East?

*Mary SALIBA
Merve KESKİN
Humza AZAM*

© TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

WRITTEN BY

Mary Saliba *

Merve Keskin **

Humza Azam ***

PUBLISHER

TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE

November 2018

PHOTO CREDIT

ANADOLU AGENCY

TRT WORLD İSTANBUL

AHMET ADNAN SAYGUN STREET NO:83 34347

ULUS, BEŞİKTAŞ

İSTANBUL / TURKEY

TRT WORLD LONDON

PORTLAND HOUSE

4 GREAT PORTLAND STREET NO:4

LONDON / UNITED KINGDOM

TRT WORLD WASHINGTON D.C.

1819 L STREET NW SUITE, 700 20036

WASHINGTON DC / UNITED STATES

www.trtworld.com

researchcentre.trtworld.com

*** Mary Saliba**

Mary Saliba is an Istanbul based journalist with TRT World. She has special expertise in Middle East political, security, legal and humanitarian affairs. Mary contributed extensively to Al Jazeera's global news coverage of the "Arab Spring" and has moderated several intergovernmental panels on peace-building and the eradication of violence. She has provided international commentary on religious affairs and cultural diversity.

**** Merve Keskin**

Merve Keskin is an Associate Researcher at TRT World Research Center. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Relations from the Marmara University. She is currently a post graduate student at İstanbul Şehir University in the same department. Her research interests are non-state actors, political violence and terrorism, proxy wars, Iranian foreign policy.

***** Humza Azam**

Humza Azam is an intern at the TRT World Research Centre. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in History from the İstanbul Şehir University. He is currently a post graduate student at the Boğaziçi University. His research interests include South Asia, Ottoman history, and the contemporary politics of Pakistan.

Overview



The November 2018 mid-term elections in the United States (U.S.) have been the subject of global attention, and for good reason. Almost two years after the election of Donald Trump as President, the elections are an important indicator of how well Republican policies have been faring in the eyes of the public.

The stakes were high from the beginning: a continued Republican majority in both houses would mean an overall acceptance of the administration's existing policies (subjecting much of the policies instated by the Obama administration to Congressional review, an inwards-looking "America First" foreign policy, and anti-immigration measures, among others). On the other hand, they also presented the outnumbered Democrats with a golden opportunity to restrict Republican policy-making and legislation not just in rhetoric, but also in practice.

The mid-terms affect the composition of both houses of Congress: the Senate and the House of Representatives, where the Republican held majorities. Until the beginning of November 2018, the 435-seat House of Representatives was composed of a 235-seat Republican majority and a 193-seat Democrat minority. In the 100-seat Senate, the Republicans very narrowly outnumbered the Democrats 51-49. While the potential margin for change was relatively small - approximately 30 seats were estimated to be shaken up in the House of Representatives, and nearly 6 in the Senate - in both cases there existed a potential to break the Republican majority and considerably strengthen the Democrat's hand

Since 2017, the Republican administration under Donald Trump has made efforts to repeal many of President Obama's domestic reforms, which has been met with great ire by the Democrats. Trump's populist rhetoric has left an increasingly polarized electorate in its wake, which has butted heads on key issues, such as abortion, immigration laws, health care, and employment.

The Trump administration has been successful in revoking nearly 130 policies (concerning health care, environmental laws, governmental reforms, and immigration), failed to do so on 22, and currently is in the process of reviewing another 37. Given the slim majority held by the Republicans, the mid-term election results not only reflect the popularity of these changes, but will also impact the future approval or rejection of these reforms.

As of November 7th 2018, the Democrats have succeeded in wresting a 223-seat majority in the House of Representatives, leaving the Republicans in the minority with only 197 seats. While the Republicans succeeded in retaining their 51-seat majority in the Senate, the loss of their majority in the House of Representatives will have lasting consequences for the domestic policies of the US.

With this new majority, the Democrats have greater power to block new Republican legislation, turn back potential reversals of Obama-era policies, as well as impeach and prevent the appointment of Republican-selected officials to key posts in the federal government. The mid-terms have also led to greater representation of minority groups and women: Ayanna Presley became the first black female representative from Massachusetts in Congress, while Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar (who is a Somali refugee) became the first Muslim women to be elected to Congress representing Michigan and Minnesota respectively. Deb Haaland of New Mexico and Sharice Davids of Kansas, both became the first Native American Congresswomen.

The impact of the mid-terms extends beyond dissatisfaction with the Trump administration's domestic policies and greater representation of minorities in Congress. Many across the globe have been watching carefully to assess whether the "America First" doctrine of increased protectionism, unilateral sanctions and increasing disengagement from international cooperation will remain a lasting feature of the US government's foreign policy.

The Democratic victory in the House of Representatives also means that the Republicans may face a number of investigations and probes in to cases which ignited controversy last year: the accusations of Russian meddling in the 2016 elections, as well as the Trump family's business dealings in China and Saudi Arabia. In light of the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Congress has already prompted the Trump administration to put greater pressure on the Saudi government. Similarly, the defeat is a symbolic blow for states pursuing similar populist, anti-immigrant policies throughout Latin America and the Middle East, as it was their popularity in the US which gave them increased legitimacy in the international political arena.

Nevertheless, the Republicans continue to hold a majority in the Senate, and the foreign policy is likely to remain faithful to the "America First" doctrine. While Democrats may repeal anti-immigrant legislation, advocate a stronger US stance on humanitarian catastrophes such as in Yemen, and investigate the legality of the international business dealings of the Trump family, their general focus appears to be on curtailing Republican influence in domestic policy issues. There appears to be no serious intention to revoke the fresh sanctions on Iran, or to otherwise bring in any major change in the US's policies towards the Middle East or China, among others.

Muslim Women in Congress



Rashida Tlaib

Rashida Tlaib is a daughter of a Palestinian immigrant family and is now one of the first Muslim Women to be elected in Congress. She won the Democratic primary in Michigan's 13th Congressional Districts made up of portions of Detroit and its suburbs. In 2008 she became the first woman to serve in the Michigan Legislature. She served three terms in the House, becoming the Democratic leader of the powerful Appropriations Committee, where she provided transformative constituent services. Her campaign biography emphasizes working on education, universal health care, after-school programs for children, and Meals on Wheels nutrition programs for senior citizens. After serving three terms in the state legislature, she worked as an attorney and advocate for the non-profit Sugar Law Center and Economic and Social Justice in Detroit, and held a strong stance on campaigning against the anti-Arab and Anti Muslim sentiments in the US. During the elections for House of Representatives she ran in succession of John Conyer's seat in the Congress and on 6th November, she defeated Brenda Jones and Bill Wild by receiving 84.8% of votes.



Ilhan Omar

Ilhan Omar is a Somali American politician from Minnesota who won the general election for US Representatives in Minnesota's 5th congressional district, becoming one of first Muslim woman to be elected in the US congress. Ilhan was born in Mogadishu, Somalia, and after the civil-war broke out her family lived as refugees for four years in Kenya and then moved to the US in 1997. In 2016 Ilhan became the first Somali-American Muslim legislator in the United States and through her advocacy worked on and advanced pressing issues, including support for working families, educational access, environmental protection, and racial equity. In 2018, Omar filed to run for U.S. Representative after Keith Ellison announced that he would not seek reelection. During the midterm elections, Ilhan achieved a breakthrough victory against Republican party's Jennifer Zielinski by receiving 78.2 percent votes

1. How will Trump Lead the Country with a Divided Congress?

Before the midterm elections, the legislative and executive bodies were in the hands of a single party, namely the Republican Party. Now that the Democratic Party has won control of the House of Representatives, Democrats have more power in setting the legislative agenda.

This constitutes a different configuration and more balance is expected between Congress and the White House. In practice, however, the Trump Administration's policy priorities in some domains will face more resistance from lawmakers, which will more probably than not provide ammunition for the expected political battles ahead of the 2020 presidential race.

What is clear, however, is that Democrats confirmed what major polls had projected; that they would gain strength in states such as Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Florida. There were also some unexpected wins in red-state population centres such as western New York and some southwest Texas districts, where Democrats won a firm majority.



Source: Yasin Öztürk - AA

The numbers also validated the existence of an ever-deepening gulf that separates urban and suburban America on the one hand, and rural America on the other. The former have overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Democratic Party, while the latter voted overwhelmingly for the Republicans.

The party's committed enlistment of women candidates, for example, was a good bet. Therefore, it was no surprise to see more women joining the new Democratic caucus in the House than ever before. Nevertheless, Democrats should be concerned about their losses in the agricultural and industrial communities where they once had the upper hand. Conversely, the Republicans have to ponder about their continuous decline in the metropolitan areas and the counterproductive rhetoric from the Trump Administration which has alienated many demographics such as the youth, women, young liberals, and minorities in urban and suburban settings.

It was staggering to note that districts, which once were fervent supporters of the Republican Party, rejected President Trump's avowed nationalist dogma as a form of bigotry. Losing urban and sub-urban centres could prove very detrimental to the Republican Party in the medium and long run, as these communities continue to grow. On the contrary, the rural electorate that pushed the Republicans ahead in the race for the Senate is an aging population of mostly conservative whites.

Even though the President called the midterm results as a 'tremendous success', it is evident that he lost his full authority and freedom of action in the Congress.

On the other hand, Trump is still able to have free hand in the Senate. Republican victories in the Senate came mainly in the conservative hinterlands where Mr. Trump's popularity has continued unabated since 2016. The Republicans' control over the Senate means that the president will still preserve his foreign trade powers, for example, particularly in light of the fact that some of Trump's most vocal critics lost their seats in the Senate.

The question is how the President will lead the country with a divided Congress, and how this duality will affect the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

2. Implications for Trump's Middle East policy

a. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia was the first international destination that Trump visited after he took office. Their close relations have been further consolidated via mega arm deals struck in May 2017. This historical visit was also seen as a signal of a consolidating US position against the influence of Iran in the Middle East.

However, the Democratic Party's strong grip over the House of Representatives is potentially bad news for the Saudis. The grisly murder of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul further undermined support for the Saudis in Congress. For example, key Democratic Senators Bob Menendez and Chris Murphy have supported legislation that seeks to limit arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Newly elected Ilhan Omar was a big detractor of U.S. arms deals with the Saudis during the course of her electoral campaign. Another incoming congressman, Tom Malinowski, is also a strong opponent of arming the Saudis in their brutal war in Yemen.

In practice, this means that more scrutiny on the Saudis is coming to Congress, and Democrats are likely

going to push the Trump administration to revoke the Saudis' blank cheque in the region, stop Saudis' campaign in Yemen, and clip the wings of the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS).

It should be noted that a vote to limit aid for the Saudi war effort narrowly failed back in March 2018 despite a high level of bipartisan support. This time, the Saudis will have to show more goodwill or face the prospects of sanctions, delays or even cancellations of arms deals.

Democrats are also likely to demand more accountability on human rights issues. This will put human rights back in the agenda for America's allies in the Middle East. As such, countries that witness horrible exactions and abuses are likely to be put on notice, with Saudi Arabia being one of the main culprits in this regard.

On the other hand, Congress will probably navigate shrewdly between the imperatives of maintaining the Saudi alliance and the need to mitigate the excesses of MBS.

b. The War in Yemen

The ongoing war in Yemen, which has displaced millions of people, is nowhere nearer to finding a solution than it was when the Saudi-led coalition intervened in 2015, particularly in light of the fact that it has transformed into a major geopolitical conflict involving regional and international actors alike.

The U.S. routinely launches air attacks on Al Qaeda and, as of the last few months, has a small number of special forces troops deployed on the ground. Together with

other western powers such as the UK and France, the U.S. has also provided armament, training, and intelligence to the Saudi-led coalition.

US-Saudi relations have witnessed what can perhaps be characterized as their worst moment with the killing of Jamal Khashoggi. The outcry

that followed the latter's gruesome murder has forced the hand of the Trump administration, which has been obliged to issue an ultimatum to the Saudi-led coalition, which depends on logistical support from the U.S.

On October 31st 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called all protagonists in the Yemen war to agree to a ceasefire within the next 30 days. If the U.S. ends its support, the coalition will find it extremely problematic to continue its intervention.

Several attempts have been made to end U.S. support to the Saudis in their war in Yemen, however, to date these efforts have not been successful. With the Democrats controlling the house, things may prove to be different.

Senator Chris Murphy from the Democratic Party is planning to reintroduce legislation that would end all U.S. support to Saudi forces in Yemen. Senator Murphy seems resolute to succeed, stating: "there is an American imprint on every single civilian death inside Yemen."



Source: Mohammed Hamoud - AA

c. Iran

The U.S. has had tumultuous relations with Iran ever since the hostage crisis and establishment of Islamic Republic in 1979. Iran was branded as part of “axis of evil” by George W. Bush back in 2002. Iran has also been subjected to various rounds of sanctions and economic pressures from the U.S. over its nuclear program and military activities in the Middle East.

In 2015, The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal or Iran deal, was negotiated between United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members, the European Union and Iran (known as the P5+1). This deal was seen as one of the major diplomatic achievements for the West in recent years.



Source: Islam Yakut - AA

However, in May 2018, the Trump Administration announced its

withdrawal from the accord, labelling the latter as the ‘worst deal ever’, and announcing the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran. When the U.S. withdrew from the deal, many Democrats including former President Barack Obama criticized Trump for making America more isolated and less secure, and eroding American credibility.

With the Democrats’ domination over Congress, the Iran file may see some developments. While the Democratic Party does not depart from the traditional U.S. policies vis-à-vis Iran, they are opposed to Trump’s rhetoric and, in principle, to the full re-imposition of tough sanctions, which only serve to create more hostility between both sides.

The Trump administration announced the second phase of its action plan towards Iran on November 5th 2018 right before the midterm elections. This was not a coincidence, rather it represented yet another attempt to win the support of hard-line Republicans who want to impose even tighter sanctions against Iran.

One of the expectations from the midterm elections is that Democrats would push the President to ease the tensions with Iran, and tone down the severity of the sanctions.

d. The War in Syria

The United States has been criticized for its inaction regarding the peace process in Syrian civil war. Democrats and Republicans do not have many divergences regarding US policies in Syria. They share the view that the fight against Daesh should be the number one priority for the US. While it is true that the Trump administration has reversed many Obama era policies, US policy in Syria has remained essentially static. The crux of overt US policy in Syria combines support for the Syrian off-shoot of the PKK terror group, the PYD-YPG, against Daesh while trying to gain more leverage over the trajectory of the peace-process in the country. For this reason, the result of the midterm elections may not have much impact on Syria.



Source: Bera Muhammed - AA

On the other hand, Democrats are more willing to provide humanitarian aid for internally displaced people and refugees, whereas Republicans are not supportive of this approach because they suspect such assistance may strengthen Assad’s hand.

With a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives there may be cuts in the defence budget. The funding for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO), which finances the U.S. wars in Iraq and Syria, is expected to witness cuts in 2019, which means the White House will have much less room for manoeuvre in its overseas military operations.

e. Israel/Palestine

The US has historically been the greatest supporter of Israel, often depicted as the “only democracy in the Middle East.” The Trump Administration took a series of dramatic steps with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the most significant of which was the moving of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, something that previous presidents had promised but never enacted. Trump also promised to present his own peace plan, his so-called “deal of the century”, a promise that is yet to be delivered.

U.S. support for Israel has traditionally been strong across party lines, however, there are growing constituencies that would like to bring more balance to American policy on this issue. In the Congress, newly elected left-leaning liberal democrats seem to have a different approach than their predecessors.



Source: Mostafa Alkharouf - AA

Rashida Tlaib, the first Palestinian-American woman elected to Congress, will no doubt try to do more to improve the situation of the Palestinians in US policy. She has in past criticised Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and human right abuses. Along with Tlaib, the election of Ilhan Omar as first Muslim woman may slowly shift the prevalent narrative about Israel and initiate changes in the long run.

Another significant development is the fact that millennial and grassroots Evangelicals have grown increasingly disillusioned with Trump's rhetoric, and some have supported Democrats during the midterm elections campaign, in which human rights and justice for Palestinians were emphasised. This constitutes a departure from the position of American Evangelical Christians, who are traditionally staunch supporters of Israel.

f. Afghanistan and Libya

The Taliban are said to be controlling more territory than ever before since their ousting from Kabul by American troops in 2001. In the process, civilian casualties continue to mount while government control of the country is waning. Similarly, the civil war in Libya continues unabated. The U.S. has intervened in both

countries. However, the Trump administration does not seem to have a clear strategy to end wars there with a clear roadmap towards peace. Congress can help pressure the administration via its budgetary discretion and link any future spending to an actual and effective strategy.



Source: Zabihullah Ghazi - AA

US: DEMOCRATS WIN HOUSE, REPUBLICANS KEEP SENATE

Democratic hopes for a “blue wave” fueled by opposition to U.S. President Donald Trump fell short on November 6th. While the party took control of the House of Representatives, it lost critical ground in the Senate

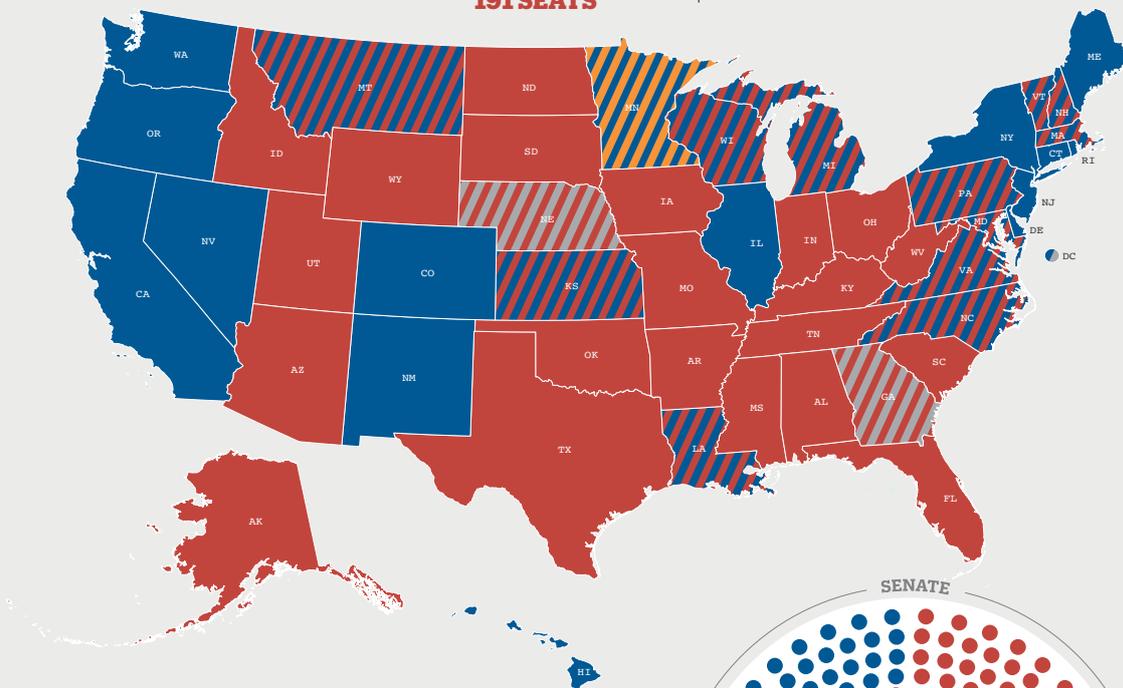
ACCORDING TO UNOFFICIAL RESULTS

US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DEMOCRATS 210 SEATS
REPUBLICANS 191 SEATS

Eight years after losing control, **Democrats won 24** seats from the **Republicans**, retaking the House of Representatives.

On the eve of the elections, Republicans had **237 seats** in the House, and Democrats had **193**, with 5 seats vacant

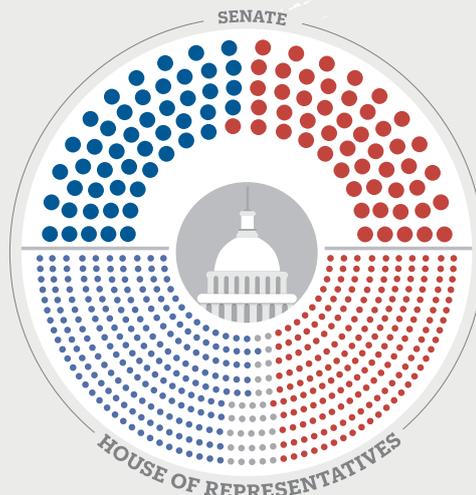


US SENATE

REPUBLICANS 51
DEMOCRATS 43

35 of the Senate’s 100 seats were in play on November 6th’s ballot

Before the elections, Democrats held 49 seats in the Senate, and the Republicans had 51



FIRST TWO MUSLIM WOMEN ELECTED TO US CONGRESS

Michigan’s **Rashida Tlaib** and Minnesota’s **Ilan Omar** both made history Tuesday by winning their elections and becoming the first Muslim women to be elected to the U.S. Congress

3. What the Experts Say?



Robert E Gutsche Jr

Robert E Gutsche Jr is a Senior Lecturer in the Sociology Department of Lancaster University. He is editor of *The Trump Presidency, Journalism and Democracy* and is working on a book titled, *Trumpled: Trump, the Demonization of the Press and the Rise of Media Power*, due out in 2019.

Democratic gains from the US Midterm election will do little to curb President Donald Trump's energy and efforts if they are unable to meet the tenor and effectiveness of his heightened nationalistic rhetoric to put "America first." Trump's ability to pick out an opponent and attack them through Twitter, press conferences, diplomatic visits, and rallies will likely silence liberals going forward, forcing their party further to the center - or to the right - to achieve outcomes that they can relay to constituents. Issues of immigration, health care, tax breaks, and internationalization will continue to be at the forefront. With Trump as president, however, other issues might come out of left field - such as the issue of school prayer or other conservative concerns - as did his plans for a new space fleet. Serious debates of impeaching Trump are likely off the table; such an effort would only distance Democrats further from the electorate by making them appear to be concerned

with nothing more than insider politicking rather than enacted real changes for the American people.

Newcomers to the political field will be especially vulnerable to attack, such as those in Wisconsin and Florida. There is some hope: that perhaps with a new makeup of the House of Representatives, Trump's rhetoric will be countered by voices of reason and evidence of inhumane treatment of immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, and women. The balance here, though, is to measure how much of the hatred targeted coming from Trump is rooted in the American consciousness. Speaking up for human rights, domestically and internationally, frustrates voters who have turned to the portion of Trump's rhetoric that speaks about distancing the US from the world for the sake of its economy and citizens.

Even with Democrats in control, there is little chance that Trump's rhetoric and policies will change in the Middle East. Decisions will continue to be made that benefit the US position in the world. The killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi for instance, regardless of whatever new information emerges about the case, will likely only lead to a verbal dressing down of the Saudis and nothing more. Anything stronger could result in negative dealings related to arms, investments by Saudis in US companies, and chatter that will distract Trump from his domestic agenda."



Nathaniel Rakich

Nathaniel Rakich is *FiveThirtyEight's* elections analyst. His writing has appeared in *FiveThirtyEight*, *The New Yorker*, *POLITICO*, *The Atlantic*, *Inside Elections*, and the *Boston Globe*—and his work has been noted

by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *NPR*, *BBC*, *CBS News*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and many others.

"No matter how much President Trump spins it, he has certainly been weakened by this week's election results. With the Democratic takeover of the House, his party no longer has full control of government in Washington, so he will need to compromise with Democrats if he wants to make any further policy accomplishments this term. Under Democratic control, the House may also decide to investigate Trump aggressively, whether over his ties to Russia or his or his Cabinet's financial scandals. Finally, Democrats gained full control of many state governments, such as New York, which can be used to fight Trump's agenda on issues like immigration and climate change on the local level."



Sharon Toomer

Sharon Toomer is a journalist, published author, and public affairs & communications professional. She is the founder and publisher of the award-winning digital news

publication, BlackandBrownNews.com (BBN), and the previous executive director of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). Prior to joining NABJ, Sharon served as the senior vice president, public affairs & policy at a public relations agency, and as the chief of staff & senior policy advisor for U.S. Representative (DC) Franklin Garcia.

"The remarkable significance of the 2018 U.S. mid-term elections is women dominated victories throughout the country. This historic outcome can't be overlooked or understated. Voters elected Native American, Black, Latino, Muslim, Palestinian, progressive, White, and LGBTQ women. The implication is that the electorate radically rejected establishment representatives, and

also delivered power back to House Democrats with a message that status quo perspective and governing will not do. The expectations are high.

While the world has seen Trump-style politics and leadership; it is the American people who have acutely felt his governance style. He has no boundaries, no filter and does and says what he wants within a governing system that is unable -or unwilling- to check him. Arguably, Democrats are now positioned to weaken Trump on his policies, and to exact oversight. Whether they have the grit to effectively go hard on Trump, and fellow Republicans who carry his water, remains to be seen.

In general, the US public is in the dark on foreign policy. We do not connect dots on how our foreign policy throughout the globe, including the Middle East, affects us domestically. Republicans and Democrats alike take advantage of this blindspot. And, at this moment in history, the US is in heightened domestic turmoil. Culturally, politically and socially we are unhinged. The public is not focused on the Middle East."



Scott Lucas

Scott Lucas is Professor of International Politics at the University of Birmingham. His research interests now also cover current international affairs --- especially North Africa, the Middle

East, and Iran --- New Media, and Intelligence Services. Professor Lucas is the founder and editor of EA WorldView, a leading website in daily news and analysis of the wider Middle East, as well as US foreign policy.

Trump is weakened because of the change in political balance through Democrat control of the House of Representatives. He will also be wounded (perhaps more significantly) by the blow to his ego from the vote against him --- he will take it personally --- in much of the country.

But a weakened Trump will fight back and lash out. He has already attacked the press, berated Democrats and those Republicans whom he felt betrayed him,

and sacked the Attorney General as a prelude to the possible dismissal of Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

A weakened Trump lashing out is a chaotic, unpredictable Trump. We can expect, given his animus against Iran (and given his officials favoring regime change), that the line against the Islamic Republic will be even tougher.

Because Trump thrives on flattery and personal links, Saudi Arabia may benefit after the Khashoggi affair by playing up to Trump and advisors like Jared Kushner. And of course, the Trump-Kushner support of Israel will only be further entrenched.

As for Turkey, Trump's response will turn upon the approach of President Erdogan. Does the Turkish leader push a weakened Trump or somehow win him over with an appeal? Already this is being tested with Erdogan's latest statements that the US should detach itself from the Syrian Kurdish groups in northern Syria.



Lawrence Korb

Lawrence J. Korb is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and a senior adviser to the Center for Defense Information. He was

formerly director of national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. Korb served as adviser to the Reagan–Bush election committee in 1980 and was then appointed Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower, Reserve Affairs, Installations and Logistics) from 1981 to 1985. For his service he was awarded the Department of Defense's medal for Distinguished Public Service.

The 2018 midterm election, which gave the Democrats control of the House of Representatives, will make it more difficult for President Trump to continue to carry out his agenda and will therefore have a profound impact on US foreign and domestic policy.

On the foreign policy front the House will make it more difficult for the president to continue to increase defense spending as he has done since taking office (about \$100 billion over Obama's last budget) and slash spending for the State Department and US foreign aid. The democrats will also change the debate by launching investigations into Russian meddling in our elections, the agreements Trump may have made with Putin in Helsinki, which sanctions of the Congressionally mandated ones Trump is actually enforcing on Moscow and will cut off arms sales to Saudi Arabia (which they can do without the Senate) unless the Saudis are more transparent about the role of MBS in the Khashoggi killing and start negotiations to end the war in Yemen.

On the domestic side, the democrats will reinstate that part of Obama care that covers preexisting conditions, prevent Trump from building his border wall, and force Trump to withdraw US forces from the Mexican border.



Borzou Daragahi

Borzou Daragahi is an Istanbul-based journalist who has covered the Middle East for more than 16 years. He is International Correspondent for The Independent. He was previously a correspondent for

BuzzFeed News and The Financial Times. He served also as Baghdad bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times.

Some say Trump is weakened because he won't be able to pass any legislation without gaining the approval of the House of Representatives, but he wasn't getting much done through the legislative channel anyway. Many of the things he has accomplished have been by executive fiat, and I don't think Democratic control of the House will mean anything in that regard. Forget about "The Wall" or further gutting healthcare, but he wasn't really able to get those done even when his party controlled the House, so I'm not sure of what a difference it will make now. The Democrats now have subpoena power and can possibly launch a bunch

of investigations of Trump's personal and political dealings, but unless they uncover something truly explosive it will be hard for them to weaken him.

Democratic control of the House might mean more scrutiny of the Saudi-US relationship, especially US support for the Yemen conflict, but I don't think it will seriously alter any major policies. Pressure on Iran will continue, as will strident support for the Israeli rightwing agenda. You might see more scrutiny of the U.S. military entanglements in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, but the generals mostly call the shots on those, and am sure Democrats will be happy to defer to them. One thing that might happen is that Trump becomes so distracted by the drama in Washington that he loses focus on the Middle East, which could mean less pressure on Iran. On the other hand, what better way to distract from domestic drama than to amp up tensions with a longtime foe?



Ahmed Bedier

Ahmed Bedier is a Florida-based community organizer, speaker and media commentator, who is recognized as an expert on Islamic issues. He has been asked to present commentary or participate as a panelist on CNN, Fox News Channel, NBC and MSNBC.

"This election ends the one-party-rule in Washington and is a referendum on Trump administration. The Democrats control of the House of Representatives is a blow to Trump and has greatly weakened him. They will use their newly gained powers to put a halt or slow down Trump's immigration initiatives, like building a

wall on the southern border or repealing Obamacare. The Democrats are also expected to use their oversight and subpoena powers to investigate Trump's taxes, business dealings, conflicts of interests and alleged collusion with Russia.

A weaker Trump administration will now have to answer to the Democrat led House of Representatives on foreign policy. There will be pressure to end the war in Yemen, to prevent war with Iran and to reexamine the U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman. There will be no drastic changes in foreign policy but the House will now be able to use different tools to slow down or halt arms sales as leverage over the White House. All of this means that Trump will likely have to compromise with the Democrats when it comes to foreign policy."



Bill Schneider

William "Bill" Schneider is an American journalist. From 1990 to 2009 he served as CNN's senior political analyst. He is a Distinguished Senior Fellow & Resident Scholar at Third Way, a Washington think tank. Schneider

is also serving as the Omer L. and Nancy Hirst Professor at George Mason University's School of Public Policy.

"Yes, President Trump has been weakened but not seriously. The midterm was a referendum on Trump, and the judgment of the voters was more negative than positive. But he will never acknowledge any defeat.

Republicans held on to the Senate because most of the contests took place in red states. Trump's campaign strategy was simply to rally his red state supporters, and they came out for him -- which was enough to hold the Senate. He did nothing to appeal to swing voters.

Trump's 2018 strategy is unlikely to work in 2020. Republicans lost a lot of college-educated white suburban voters this year. That is a bad sign for 2020.

In 2016, many Democrats did not vote. They were not enthusiastic about Hillary Clinton, and they were sure she was going to win. They figured she didn't need their vote. Democrats learned their lesson and came out in huge numbers this year. They will turn out in even bigger numbers in 2020 when Trump's name will be on the ballot.

Don't expect any major changes in President Trump's Middle East policy. Or any policy on anything. The same advisers are still with him.

He will continue to give Israel unqualified support, but the main focus will be on Iran. President Trump was looking to Saudi Arabia to lead two coalitions. The first, for a peace initiative with Israel. That's unlikely to happen. The Saudis are perfectly happy to ignore Israel. The second, an 'Arab NATO' to oppose Iran. Trump has been looking to Saudi Arabia to lead that coalition, too. But it's not clear that can happen after the Khashoggi tragedy. To quote Talleyrand, "It was worse than a crime. It was a mistake."



TRT WORLD
research
centre