

Alert

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Cozen Currents: November 15, 2022

The Cozen Lens

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Midterm elections are often a referendum on the president and his party in power. But in 2022, it was a referendum on both Bidenism and Trumpism as President Biden and former President Trump continue to remain atop their respective parties despite a majority of Americans wishing otherwise.

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After an unexpectedly strong midterm's performance from the Democrats, they have found themselves still in control of the Senate and with an outside chance to retain the House.

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As Democrats and Republicans sort themselves geographically, urban areas have become central to the Democratic Party's base of support. Rising homicide rates since the pandemic, particularly in major cities, have posed a significant political challenge for progressives, however.

Post-Midterms Governing: The White House Perspective

Biden's Delicate Balance Towards 2024. An unpopular president presided over a midterm result that has only been experienced by presidents with approval ratings in the 60s. President Joe Biden has reason to feel very good about remaining a potent force in American politics.

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Biden's strength is being the least worst option. The president's approval rating is in the low 40s and three-quarters of Americans believe the country is heading in the wrong direction. Yet Democrats won voters who "somewhat" disapprove of Biden and view the economy as "not so good." Americans may not love Biden, but the clear verdict is that the alternative is worse.

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Biden already wanted to run for reelection and the midterms only bolster his case. He is perpetually underestimated and that chip-on-the-shoulder mentality only drives Biden and his White House staff to stay in the political arena.

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The traditional turnover for the White House could be more of a shuffle than a pivot. Some personnel will leave, possibly including Chief of Staff Ron Klain. But Biden keeps his advisors close and most will stay on for the entirety of Biden's first term. The leading candidates to replace a would-be Klain departure also come from within the administration, like former Counselor Jeff Zients, Senior Advisor Anita Dunn, and Domestic Policy Council Director Susan



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Biden wants to keep the progressive base relatively happy but will look for ways to pivot to the middle. The president will empower his administration to push forward a relatively progressive regulatory regime. At the same time, there could be moderation in the face of a likely Republican-controlled House and as voters are looking for the government to do less.

The Trump Show Endures for Now. The knives are out for former President Trump as his continuing presence in American politics and many of his endorsed candidates were a drag on the GOP. But is this any different from all the previous Trump scandals and controversies?

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Trump isn't going to walk away; Republicans will have to beat him. All signs are pointing to Trump announcing another run for president. Despite plenty of blame for Republican underperformance being put at Trump's feet, there still isn't a critical mass of Republican support to rebuff him.

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Republicans want Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL) to out-Trump Trump. The Florida governor has the money, conservative media, and grassroots support to mount a challenge from Trump's right in 2024. His reelection last week showed that Trumpism without the baggage can result in a resounding state-wide win.

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Other Republican hopefuls will continue to push forward on unofficial presidential campaigns. Beyond Trump and DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, Governor Glenn Youngkin (R-VA), and a number of Republican senators will continue to make speeches, schmooze with donors, and build up the political chits as they look for a possible opening in a 2024 race. A larger field, however, could benefit Trump who could win the nomination with just 30 percent of the overall vote.

Post-Midterms Governing: The Congressional Perspective

A Chance to Flex. The red wave expected these midterms did not materialize and now House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) is staring down the challenge of navigating a path to being elected speaker and managing what is expected to be a slim majority.

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McCarthy is still the favorite to win the speakership if the GOP wins the House, but getting there could be painful. The House Freedom Caucus may look to leverage their votes and score a victory, which could hamstring McCarthy.

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Even after gaining the speaker's gavel, it would still likely be a bumpy road for McCarthy, as the right wing of the Republican Party will look to use their leverage on key legislation. Navigating a potential debt ceiling crisis would be particularly challenging. There is no expectation of a default, but his members would inevitably eye this as another opportunity to win concessions.

A Changing of the Guard. For House Democrats, this election was expected to be a resounding defeat, leading to a change in leadership. But after the surprising success, some are wondering if Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and her leadership team will step aside.

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Pelosi has yet to make an official announcement on whether she will be stepping down and no decision is expected to be made before control of the chamber is official. If she does decide

to leave, it is likely that House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC) will step aside as well.

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If this does end up happening, there are three members of the caucus that appear best poised to take over. They are Reps. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Katherine Clark (D-MA), and Pete Aguilar (D-CA), who are expected to fill the first, second, and third spots, respectively. The three have positioned themselves as a package deal representing a new generation.

Democrats Retain Senate. With their victory in Nevada over the weekend, Senate Democrats are assured to hold at least a 50-50 majority with Vice President Kamala Harris as the tie-breaking vote.

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No changes to the party leadership of the Democrats or Republicans are expected in the Senate. There had been some murmurs of a possible challenge of Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) by National Republican Senatorial Committee Chair Rick Scott (R-FL), but Scott has reportedly backed away from this.

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Most legislation that passes the Senate will still need 60 votes and thus have some modicum of bipartisan support. However, if Democrats are able to still manage to retain control of the House, this would open up the possibility of passing partisan priorities through reconciliation, which only requires a simple majority.

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Controlling the upper chamber will allow Biden to continue to push through nominees and let Democrats continue to set committee agendas. The ability to confirm nominees may have an impact on what Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) tries to achieve in the lame duck session knowing that it will no longer be his last chance to fill judicial and executive positions. Control of the committees will be important to serve as a foil to a House GOP agenda and reduce some of the scrutiny the White House was expected to be under from congressional Republicans.

Post-Midterms Governing: The Cities' Perspective

US Cities and Crime. Homicide rates are rising, particularly in cities.

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The parties are aligning more strongly according to geography. The Republican Party increasingly dominates in rural areas, while the Democratic Party draws most of its support from urban areas. The mayors of the [top ten largest cities](#) by population in the United States are all Democrats. The most populous city with a Republican mayor is Jacksonville, FL, which ranks 12th.

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Since the pandemic, homicides have increased, especially in major cities. According to [FBI data](#), the national homicide rate increased from 5.1 per 100,000 people in 2019 to 6.9 in 2021. For the 50 largest cities, it went from 10.7 per 100,000 people in 2019 to 15.5 in 2021. So far in 2022, homicides have gone down slightly from last year but property crime, including robberies, car thefts, and home burglaries, have all increased, per [Council on Criminal Justice data](#).

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As a result, crime – and voters' perceptions of crime – became a major issue of this year's midterms, and because Democrats are in charge in major cities, it put them on defense. According to [Reuters/Ipsos polling](#), 10 percent of voters said that crime or corruption were

their top issue, and by a margin of 9 points, voters placed more trust in Republicans to address crime.

Backlash to Progressives. Election results indicate that crime is a vulnerability for Democrats in urban areas.

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In New York City, Mayor Eric Adams has made fighting crime a priority of his tenure. A former police officer, Adams defeated more progressive rivals in last year's Democratic Party, and he has spoken out against changes to the bail system on the state level. "This catch, repeat, release system is just destroying the foundation of our country," he said on MSNBC on Thursday. "And that's why we are losing this election. Six out of 10 New Yorkers in the Hispanic and Asian community voted Democrat compared to seven to eight out of 10 last time. We are losing the base Black and brown who really believe in those basic things: Public safety, housing, education." Republicans had a strong election performance in Brooklyn last week, winning three state Assembly seats with several other races too close to call as of Friday.

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Former Republican-turned-Democrat businessman Rick Caruso made crime and homelessness a centerpiece of his mayoral campaign against progressive Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA). The race is still too close to call, but Bass is leading. Even if Caruso ultimately loses, the fact that he came so close to winning demonstrates progressives' political woes in the face of homelessness and other social problems in Democratic-controlled cities. Voters in San Francisco, one of the most progressive cities in the country, recalled District Attorney Chesa Boudin (D), known for his criminal justice reforms, this past summer as the city faced major problems with crime.

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Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot (D) will be up for re-election in February 2023. Though she started her campaign in 2019 as a progressive alternative to Mayor Rahm Emanuel (D), she now faces a primary challenger from the left after governing for four years. On Thursday, progressive Rep. Jesús "Chuy" Garcia (D-IL) announced that he would run for mayor, teeing up another key test for progressives and establishment Democrats over the future of the party in the third largest US city.

Building a Democratic Bench. Cities offer a launching board for Democrats to seek higher office.

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The Democratic Party's leadership is a gerontocracy, with President Biden, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), and House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) all in their 70s and 80s. Cities increasingly offer opportunities for the Democratic Party to develop a bench of future candidates for office, especially in red states or swing states where Republican gerrymandering makes it hard to win control of state legislatures but Democrats remain in control of cities. Many up-and-coming figures in Democratic politics are former mayors, such as Secretary of Transportation and 2020 presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg (formerly mayor of South Bend, IN), White House Infrastructure Coordinator Mitch Landrieu (formerly mayor of New Orleans), and Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement Keisha Lance Bottoms (formerly mayor of Atlanta).
