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### An unforeseen result of Trumpism

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Published: 26/03/2018

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Leith, M., & Bradshaw, C. (2018). *An unforeseen result of Trumpism: are we seeing the (re)rise of the democratic-socialist left in contemporary America?*. Paper presented at PSA Annual International Conference 2018, Cardiff, United Kingdom.

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# **An Unforeseen Result of Trumpism:**

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**Are we seeing the (re)rise of the Democratic-Socialist left in contemporary America?**

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## Introduction

This paper explores the US ‘off-year’ 2017 election results, with a particular focus on Virginia, although our analysis also considers results from other States and races, such as New Jersey, New York, and Washington State. Specifically, we address a number of questions, such as whether the achievements of the Democratic Party are a reaction caused by ‘Trumpism’ and the emergence of an ‘anti-Trump’ movement, or whether we are looking at the renaissance of the democratic-socialist left in the US, as a component of the Democratic Party. Finally, it may well be the case that either of such aspects are slightly over-stated or emphasised, and that, instead, we are witnessing the continued trajectory of: a Democratic voting coalition that emerged during the 1960s; the tri-partite voting bloc of women, younger voters, and African-American, Hispanic and other minority Americans.

Our paper uses a mixed method approach, employing secondary analysis of existing quantitative results from such contests as the Virginia House of Delegates 2017 elections, combined with qualitative analysis and predictions of current and potential future candidate and party behaviour. Such predictions, based on analysis of turnouts and voting behaviour in 2016 through 2018 (and associated opinion polling) are undertaken for the purpose of considering the nature of the circumstances indicating a potentially significant resurgence in Democratic Party fortunes at the national level.

We begin with an analysis of voter turnout and behaviour in off-year and special elections since November 2016; particularly in Virginia. This leads to the focus and question of our research: are the campaigns of Republican candidates helped or hindered by the Trumpist agenda and/or President Trump’s specifically stated goals? Has Trump caused a seismic shift in voting behaviour, or simply re-ignited a voting pattern that has already been attributed to previous Democratic victories? The paper goes on to consider the potential implications of the raft of Republican retirements, particularly from the US House of Representatives. Also discussed are the opportunities open to the Democratic Party in this potentially new or resurgent reality. Finally, we will discuss the chances of Democratic Party success in the 2018 November congressional midterms and will briefly comment on the prospects for the 2020 presidential race. For now we begin with a look at recent off-year elections.

First we issue a note of caution. Any analysis of the results of off-year special elections and in some ways, the congressional midterms, needs to be approached with restraint. Traditionally, such contests are characterised by low turnout and a swing away from the incumbent president’s party. However, a recurring theme of this paper, as well as contemporary media accounts is the question of whether or not we are living in traditional electoral times. Is this a new Trumpian reality, or are we witnessing a ‘back to the future’ form of behavior?

## On to Virginia

Nothing illustrates the core question of the political reality of America today better than the November 2017 results in Virginia, and also the New Jersey gubernatorial race (not to mention a variety of results in State and Federal elections in diverse parts of the nation. As CNN reported:

Republican candidates were swamped - particularly in the suburbs - by Democrats thanks, in large part, to President Donald Trump's dismal poll numbers. Democrats turned out in large numbers to send a message to Trump while Republicans, broadly speaking, were less enthused to go vote (Cillizza, 2017)

This follows a media narrative that seems to indicate voting results in Virginia and other places were a purely partisan test on Trump Republicanism. The New York Times, quoting unnamed election analysts, stated that the 100 races for the Virginia House represented, 'the purest test of grass-roots anger at the president'. And argued that, because voters knew little about individual candidates, and that advertising, especially on TV, was often minimal, the races would become 'a generic partisan ballot'.

It is certainly the conventional wisdom that the party of the White House resident tends to suffer losses in mid-term Federal elections, and state elections during the same period. This can be witnessed within contemporary political science literature, for example, Jacobsen states that, 'party fortunes in midterm elections are broadly shaped by three basic factors: the number of seats the president's party already holds; how well the economy is performing and how the public views the president's performance in office' (Jacobson, 2007)

It is agreed that such factors have previously been accurate predictors of midterm swings. Certainly the Obama years saw the Democrats lose a significant number of seats within several States, not to mention a loss of gubernatorial control across America (Malone, 2017). This was not a new pattern as since 1938 the incumbent president's party has lost House seats in the midterms on every occasion except two. In 1998 during the Gingrich inspired polarity, Clinton's Democrats gained five seats. In 2002, perhaps aided by a post 9/11 bounce, Bush's GOP gained eight. In the same period any incumbency has only ever resulted in a swing of, at most, two senate seats. We are unconvinced the Trump's GOP will buck the usual trend. However, the question remains, what will be the root causes of that continued trend?

Another key to party success, and possibly a cause of voter engagement, is that for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the US Congress operated on a much greater bipartisan basis. While the Democrats controlled the Presidency For example, in 1938 and 1963) their own legislators provided checks on Roosevelt's attempts to influence specific policies and Kennedy's drive on Civil Rights, respectively. As Fortier points out,

For much of the twentieth century, the two political parties looked quite different from the way they do today. Each party contained within it a significant amount of ideological diversity, and the two parties' ideological leanings overlapped in important ways (Fortier, 2015: 53)

Political scientists have focused and emphasised discussion about increases in polarisation and the effect on voting patterns. One contested view is presented by Rogowski, who states 'When the level of conflict increases between elites, voters respond by increasing their support of the candidate who shares their partisan or ideological identity' (Rogowski, 2016: 20). This may be so but historically it is the presidency which shapes the midterms as Busch points out,

The president's party consistently loses seats because it consistently suffers a fall-off of approximately 5 percent in its national vote share in midterm elections. Indeed, from 1894 through 1994, the two-party vote share of the president's party in congressional elections fell in every election except that of 1926 (Busch, 1999: 16)

On top of this, the decline in the power of party elites and the weakening of party identity amongst voters does not have the same effect in midterms as it might do in presidential elections. The party members and activists tend to vote, while turnout is low amongst the general electorate (Ware, 1981). The composition of the senate is never drastically affected as only one third of seats are contested in any cycle. In addition the continued rise of social

media use and engagement in campaigning and increasing levels of constant political reporting seems to have increased the vehemence of left and right in their particular entrenched positions.

Nonetheless, Republican candidates and campaigners in Virginia, prior to the elections, argued that they were not witnessing such ‘anger’ and that they were ‘just not seeing’ any evidence of a potential backlash (Gabriel, 2017). Nor were they alone in their (as hindsight tells us) unexpected lack of foresight. Indications from pundits and analysts were also un-predicting of huge changes in the makeup of the Virginia House. Some argued that if more than a single digit number of seats changed hands, this could indicate a direct response to the actions of President Trump. David Wasserman of the Cook Political Report echoed both the ‘anti-Trump’ media narrative, and the traditional ‘White House Party loses seats’ conventional wisdom argument.

Still, if Democrats managed to pick off 10 or more GOP-held seats, it would send a signal that voters are in the mood to punish President Trump and Republicans - a mirror image of the GOP legislative gains in 2009 that foreshadowed Republicans taking back the House in 2010 (2017)

However, Wasserman, while talking down the possibility of the Democrats making significant gains in the Virginia House, also foretold potential implications of a more successful Democratic result, arguing that a with ‘pick up 10 to 15 seats, it would be a strong sign they're on track to pick up the House majority next year. If Democrats pick up more than 15 seats, we're looking at a potential tidal wave in 2018.’ Interestingly enough, the Cook Report predictions of ‘likely’ and ‘toss-up’ Democratic gains were quite prophetic, but the ‘Reaches’ and ‘Tidal Wave’ predictions were more hit and miss, indicating that the resultant Democratic wins were unexpected in a number of specific Virginia locations.

Nonetheless, with the Democratic Party contesting 88 out of 100 races, a level higher than in preceding years, clear signs of activism and activity were present, at least on the ground, if not obvious to the pre-election punditry. At the same time, The Center for Public Integrity stated that ‘Taken as a whole, however, the House of Delegates races show that Democrats are seriously behind in fundraising, and still have their work cut out for them.’ (Jordan 2017). Likewise, several Democratic fundraising 527 groups also saw limitations in any potential victory. The Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC) thought eight seats were potential pickups, and Flippable saw only five instead, picking four of the same but one not identified by the DLCC. All but one of these combined nine seats did indeed result in Democratic victories. The singular exception, District 40, saw the Republican incumbent win with 50.17%, which was a 101 vote margin of victory, with just over 30,000 votes cast in total.

Therefore, the idea that the Democrats could seriously challenge for control of the House, or start a tidal wave, was limited. Furthermore, the 2017 off year election results in Virginia could be taken as indicative of arguments around the idea that what was witnessed was a reaction to the election and subsequent activity of Trump, or simply the usual ‘Anti White House incumbent’. Such a conclusion seems *prima facie* plausible. The State saw an 8-point victory for Democratic Gubernatorial candidate Ralph Northam with impressive results in the suburban north of the State as well as an increased turnout among the traditional Democratic base. This was despite earlier polls that indicated the race was neck and neck (and some that indicated that the Republican candidate had closed a previously existing gap). Allied to this were the highly unexpected (to put it mildly) results from the Virginia House of Delegates races themselves, where as we noted above, few expected the Democrats to capture such a

significant number of seats, let alone potentially challenge the existing Republican majority. However, we now consider the specific results, and examine the exit polling data, for specific insight into what conclusions can and should be drawn from Virginia in 2017.

### Governor and State-wide Results

In a state that Hillary Clinton won in 2016, the Democrats had their hopes, although pre-election polling was, as noted above, mixed at times. Nonetheless, Northam (Dem) prevailed with 53.9% of the popular vote, or 1,405,041 votes, giving him a clear majority over his Republican opponent, Gillespie, who gained 45% of the vote. A Libertarian candidate achieved 1.1% of the votes cast. In similar fashion, the Democrats swept the State-wide contests, winning both the Lt Governor race and that for Attorney General, with very similar results of 52.7% and 53.3% respectively.

The Virginia Senate (comprising of 40 seats) was not in contest in 2017 (which seems lucky for the Republicans), but the 100 seat Virginia House of Delegates was. In a distinct, and given our discussion above, somewhat unexpected set of results, the Democratic Party picked up 15 seats from the Republicans, shifting the balance within the Chamber from a previous Republican dominated 66 to 34 seats to a much closer 49 to 51. This was the most dramatic shift toward the Democratic Party since the end of the 19th Century. However, it should be noted that 14 of the 15 seats were in districts that had Supported Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Presidential election (Business Insider 2017).

Furthermore, within this closest of margins overall result, there were four seats that were subject to closely watched and highly argued recount situations. The most noted of these would be House District 94. Here, initial results had the Republican, David Yancey with a 10 vote lead, but the recount placed his Democratic opponent Shelly Simonds on a one vote lead. It was not until 20 December that a panel of election judges ruled that one ballot, which had previously been disqualified, should be counted for Yancey. This made the formal result of the election a tie, with both major party candidates receiving 11,608 votes (again, there was a Libertarian candidate in the race, who had 675 votes). As per Virginia State Law, random chance now came into play. In a 'random drawing' in early January 2018, Yancey (Rep) won, thereby keeping the House, by a majority of one, in Republican control. But for random chance, the overall result could have been even more spectacular.

Nonetheless, such a singular event should not underplay the impressive victory achieved by the Democrats in their Virginia House races. While party and pundits alike had indicated that Democratic pick-ups were on the cards, none really considered the possibility they would be challenging for a significant gain, or even a tied chamber. So, exactly what was behind this impressive victory?

An analysis of exit poll data, conducted by Edison media Research on behalf of the National Election Pool and the Washington Post among others, indicates a clear shift in behaviour amongst the Virginia electorate between the 2016 presidential election and the 2017 races. In terms of gender, while men made up a slight majority of voters, at 51% (the first time in recent Virginia voting history), they still supported the Republican candidate for Governor. However, while Trump gained the support of 52% (to 43% for Clinton) Gillespie (Rep) only gained 50% of the male vote, only two points ahead of Northam (Dem). The telling difference in gender activity was in the shift in female support. In 2016 Clinton gained 56% of female voters, with Trump gaining only 39%. In 2017, Gillespie also received the support of 39% of female voters, but Northam support jumped to 61%, and women clearly gave the Democratic Party the edge in Virginia in 2017. In addition, some women voters clearly stayed at home, giving men the marginal turnout lead.

In terms of age, we again see a clear and significant shift that indicates the foundation of these Virginia Democratic Party fortunes. Among older voters, where habits are predicted to be more embedded, the differences between 2016 and 2017 were limited. With 65+ voters (who comprised roughly 20% of voters in Virginia in 2017) 53% supported Gillespie, almost equal to the 52% who supported Trump in 2016. However, this 1% gain was offset by Northam gaining 47% of 65+ voters, to Clinton's 45% in 2016. Likewise, in the 45-64 age category (roughly 42% of voters and thus a significant support group for any party) Northam gained the support of 49%, a 2% gain on 2016, while Gillespie only equalled Trump's 50% support. This indicates a small, but potentially significant shift. Nonetheless, it should be taken with precaution as older voters continued to favour the Republican Party, but, as we see below, in figures that are difficult to offset the more Democratic leaning younger voters.

In the 30-44% age group, roughly 24% of Virginia voters, 53% had supported Clinton over 40% for Trump in 2016. Here, in 2017, a clear shift occurred as 61% supported Northam over the 37% who favoured Gillespie. This 8% shift indicates clear movement and offsets the potential Republican lead among older voters. Furthermore, this is not the largest demographic shift between the two elections. The 18-29 age group (the smallest group of voters, representing only 14% of voters in 2017) saw an even more dramatic shift of support to the Democratic Northam. In 2016, Clinton had led Trump in this group with 54% to 36%, but Northam increased his share to 69%, while only 30% supported Gillespie. It is clear, that even while representing a smaller proportion of the vote, there was a clear 'youthquake' in Virginia in November 2017.

When the exit polling is considered by race, an even larger margin of support for the Democratic Party becomes evident among non-white voters. As in previous races, White voters in Virginia tend to vote Republican. In 2016, 59% supported Trump, a 24 point advantage over Clinton's 35%. In 2017, white voters made up 67% of voters in Virginia but Gillespie only led among them by 15 points, with 57% support. With Black voters, who made up one fifth of the electorate, supporting Northam at 87% to Gillespie's 12%, clear divisions emerge. However, Gillespie still managed to increase Republican support among this group by 3 points from Trump's level of 9% in 2016.

However, it is when an analysis by both gender and race is undertaken that the clear division between demographic group support, and a shift in that support, for the Republicans and Democrats emerges. With the Black vote broken down by gender, the slight support that Gillespie gained is still present – but clearly from Black men only. Black women support Northam at exactly the same level as Clinton in 2016. However, among White women Republican voting shifted from 54% in 2016 to only 51% in 2017 and Democratic support increased seven points to 48% in 2017. Likewise, even while Democratic voting among White men remained low at 36% support, this was still an increase of seven points, while Gillespie managed 63%, a two percent decline from Trump's 2016 support.

Analysis over differing demographic groups is also available, and illustrates clear division and yet also highlights important changes. For instance, college educated individuals in 2017 broke 60-39 for the Democrat, while in 2016 the breakdown was 55-39. Likewise, White evangelical or White born-again Christians supported the Republican by 79% to 19% - but this group still witnessed a shift of 5 points towards the Democrats from the 2016 results.

If, among these losses, there was a silver lining for Republicans in November 2017, it is that the damage was contained, albeit only somewhat contained, among their core groups. Their political position may be tenuous, but they had 12 months until the nationwide congressional midterm elections and a number of high-profile governor races to do something about it. It



clearly would not be easy, however. Clinton carried Virginia in 2016 and Republicans still won nationwide, but Northam's winning margins in the state were bigger. Moreover, when added to the wider picture and final outcomes that the Virginia House of Delegates painted, the trend-lines are heading in the wrong direction for the GOP.

As Anthony Zurcher, BBC North American political correspondent observed,

If the lesson that Trump takes from these results is that Republicans either embrace him or face defeat - then 2018 is going to be an even bigger referendum on Trump's presidency than 2017 was. That is a thought that will keep a lot of Republican office holders up at night. (Zurcher, 2017b)

Nonetheless, without interrogating the exit poll data any further, clear conclusions can be drawn, and we cannot necessarily assume that we *are* witnessing an anti-Trump movement, or the traditional drop off in support for the incumbent party of the White House; these state-wide demographic figures are seemingly slightly too big for that. Also, when taken alongside the results of individual races for the Virginia House, the losses for the Republicans become much greater than these traditional approaches or explanations can potentially explain. Among specific groups, the Democratic candidate saw not only significant support, but support in higher terms than the Democratic presidential candidate in 2016. These groups clearly constitute the 'Democratic Coalition' that has emerged among voting groups within the US since the 1960s; women, minorities, and the young. This leaves us with the question of what exactly we witnessed in Virginia in 2017. Was this clear 'blue wave' a new phenomenon driven by a new style of politics, a Trumpian era event? Or was it the emergence of an older Democratic theme? To consider this fully we need to move to the wider US picture.

On 13 March 2018 Conor Lamb, a 'moderate' Democrat, won the PA18 congressional seat with a 20% swing to the Democrats, when compared to Trump's 2016 performance. In line with Virginia Donald Trump backed the GOP candidate and campaigned twice in the run-up to the poll for the GOP candidate. One commentator observed,

There are more than a hundred Republican-held congressional districts across the country that have a narrower margin than 17(%). If seats that look like this one in Pennsylvania are toss-ups in November, it's going to be a bloodbath (Zurcher, 2018b).

Moreover, and more worrying for the Republican Party, is the 'enthusiasm gap.' Lamb received 80% of the number of votes Clinton received in the district in 2016 — but Rick Saccone got just 53% percent of Trump's vote (Rakich, 2018). We need to be very careful here though; Democrat enthusiasm may not last and the midterm turnout is notoriously low (but then, so are special election turnouts). So while recent results may point to a Democratic revival, we will next consider the implications of recent GOP resignations and retirements from the House as another important and potential factor

#### Republican Retirements- a rush to the exit?

While election results are one measure of a potential 'blue wave', another is incumbents, or the lack thereof. Since fall 2017, a growing list of Republican state-wide office holders have announced that they will not seek re-election in 2018, in places giving the Democrats more competitive districts to fight. Examples include Rep. Frank LoBiondo, of New Jersey, who noted in a retirement statement,

As some of my closest colleagues have also come to realize, those of us who came to Congress to change Washington for the better through good governance are now the outliers ... we previously fought against allowing the perfect to become the enemy of the good. Today, a vocal and obstinate minority within both parties has hijacked good legislation in pursuit of no legislation (cited in Cillizza, 2017)

At the latest count, seven House Committee chairs have announced that they will not seek re-election. The polarisation temperature of US politics has been raised before, but now the GOP has come to be visibly represented by 40 or so of its most conservative members. Such individuals are characterised by automatic opposition to any Democratic Party initiative and epitomised by Steve Bannon and his stated, 'war against the traditional GOP' agenda and also to any semblance of bipartisanship, such as that typified by Senator John McCain of Arizona.

Perhaps the writing is already on the wall for several Republican members of Congress and that conceivably explains why the number of GOP members leaving congressional office in 2018, or having already left in 2017, is running ahead of historic norms (Petulla, 2017). Two-and-a-half times more Republicans are retiring than Democrats and, critically it is not just the regular numbers but also seven GOP House committee chairs who will vacate their seats.

Many of those stepping down hail from districts that are either competitive or potentially competitive, especially in light of 2017 results, let alone events since. Hillary Clinton carried Ros-Lehtinen and Reichert's districts and while Trump carried LoBiondo's seat by four points that news looked better in early 2017 than in early 2018 (Petulla, 2017). Recent electoral history and conventional wisdom suggests that open seats are easier to win than those in which an incumbent is seeking re-election. With open seats, and a recent history of victory, such seats could easily become Democratic victories.

Democrats need to pick up 24 seats to retake the majority from Republicans and are already eying 23 districts that Hillary Clinton carried and which will be defended by the GOP in November 2018. There are other Republican retirements occurring in congressional districts where Trump narrowly carried the vote, like New Jersey's 2nd or Michigan's 11th. Nor are such retirements unexpected, given these odds. It may well be that the current incumbents can see which way the wind bloweth, as Petulla notes,

Past research has found the emergence of "strategic retirement" by politicians when they think re-election is less likely. The recent results in Virginia and subsequent Republican departure suggest this phenomenon may be in effect (2017).

Table 1 provides a list of representatives who have announced that they plan to leave office, broken down by resignation, retirement, or alternative employment/office-seeking. It should be noted that some members resigned before their terms ended.

| <b>Retiring Republicans</b> | <b>Retiring Democrats</b> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sam Johnson TX-3            | Niki Tsongas MA-3         |
| Jim Bridenstine OK-1        | Carol Shea-Porter NH-1    |
| Ileana Ros-Lehtinen FL-27   | Gene Green TX-29          |
| Lynn Jenkins KS-2           | Luis Gutierrez II-4       |
| John J. Duncan Jr. TN-2     | Sander Levin MI-9         |
| Dave Reichert WA-9          | Ruben Kihuen NV-4         |
| Charlie Dent PA-15          | Bob Brady PA-1            |
| Dave Trott MI-11            | Rick Nolan MN-8           |
| Jeb Hensarling TX-5         |                           |
| Lamar Smith TX-21           |                           |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Frank LoBiondo NJ-2        |  |
| Ted Poe TX-2               |  |
| Bob Goodlatte VA-6         |  |
| Joe Barton TX-6            |  |
| Blake Farenthold TX-27     |  |
| Bill Shuster PA-9          |  |
| Greg Harper MS-3           |  |
| Ed Royce CA-39             |  |
| Darrell Issa CA-49         |  |
| Pat Meehan PA-7            |  |
| Rodney Frelinghuysen NJ-11 |  |
| Trey Gowdy SC-4            |  |
| Tom Rooney FL-17           |  |

| <b>Republicans Resigned/ Resigning</b>        | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Democrats Resigned/ Resigning</b>        | <b>Comments</b>  |
|---|--|---|--|
| Jason Chaffetz UT-3                           | Left to become a Fox News contributor. John Curtis (R) won special election  | Xavier Becerra CA-34                        | Left to become CA attorney General. Jimmy Gomez (D) won special election |
| Tim Murphy PA-18                              | Announced he would leave on 10/21/17 following allegations about an extra-marital affair. Special election won by Democrat Conor Lamb. | John Conyers MI-13                          | Announced resignation after allegations of sexual harassment             |
| Pat Tiberi OH-12                              | Announced on 10/19/17, will leave "by January 31, 2018." Special election will be held on 7/8/18,                                      |   |  |
| Trent Franks AZ-8                             | Announced resignation after allegations of sexual harassment. Special election on 24/4/18  |   |  |
| <b>Republicans Running for another office</b> | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Democrats Running for another office</b> | <b>Comments</b>  |
| Kristi Noem SD-0                              | Running for Governor   | John Delaney MD-6                           | Running for President  |
| Raul Labrador ID-1                            | Running for Governor   | Michelle Lujan Grisham NM-1                 | Running for Governor   |
| James Renacci OH-16                           | Running for Governor   | Jared Polis CO-2                            | Running for Governor   |
| Evan Jenkins WV-3                             | Running for Senate   | Beto O'Rourke TX-16                         | Running for Senate   |
| Lou Barletta PA-11                            | Running for Senate   | Colleen Hanabusa HI-1                       | Running for Governor   |
| Steve Pearce NM-2                             | Running for Governor   | Jacky Rosen NV-3                            | Running for Senate   |
| Diane Black TN-6                              | Running for Governor   | Kyrsten Sinema AZ-9                         | Running for Senate   |

|                          |                      |               |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Marsha Blackburn<br>TN-7 | Running for Senate   | Tim Walz MN-1 | Running for Governor |
| Todd Rokita<br>IN-4      | Running for Senate   |               |                      |
| Luke Messer<br>IN-6      | Running for Senate   |               |                      |
| Ron De Santis<br>FL-6    | Running for Governor |               |                      |
| Martha McSally<br>AZ-2   | Running for Senate   |               |                      |

Table 1: House of Representatives Retirements Prior to 2018 Midterms (Petulla and Hansler, 2017)

### Prospects for the 2018 Midterms

We will now consider the wider issues of historical voting patterns, recent Congressional results described above, and other factors that might project forward to November 2018. We start with the prospects for Democratic Party success in the House and Senate and consider what kind of candidates the Democratic Party is choosing to take the fight to Trump and the GOP. Part of what caused the 2016 ‘disaster’ at the national level was that states like Iowa, which had been reliably Democratic, went for Trump.

We should point out that the Democratic primary in 2016 was a divisive contest with Bernie Sanders emerging as a creditable alternative during what many saw as the coronation of Hillary Clinton. The later allegation covering Clinton control of the DNC (Wilts, 2017) surprised few. The fact is that Clinton in 2016 was an unpopular choice for the Democratic Party nomination, even with the traditional Democratic base. Her performance failed to enthuse the electorate and her ‘flyover’ campaign arguably cost the states of Pennsylvania and Michigan.

Iowa, twice carried by Barack Obama, had a 15.9% swing to the right from 2012 - the largest in the nation. If Democrats want to find a path to victory in 2020, testing out possible messages, policies and candidates in Iowa in 2018 could be valuable (Zurcher, 2017a). Bernie Sanders has travelled widely in recent weeks. He, and his supporters, have,

attempted to harness the energy and enthusiasm generated by his presidential campaign into a durable political movement, Our Revolution... (and) is organising on a grass-roots level across the US and supporting local, state and national candidates in the 2018 mid-terms and beyond (Zurcher, 2018a)

Is the Democratic path to victory in 2018 on the back of such a movement? Perhaps the Goldwater campaign in 1962-4 provides a lesson? It’s early to judge, but in Texas 17 ‘Our Revolution’ supported candidates were successful in the Democratic primaries.

In Pennsylvania, the 18<sup>th</sup> district was fought and won by Conor Lamb, a moderate who does not take a liberal stance on gun control. In heavily Republican areas is selecting this type of Democrat the smart choice for the party? Interesting Lamb was selected, not through the traditional primary route, but through selection by the local party; a potentially contentious, if electorally successful strategy.

A recent Brookings Institution report showed that not only are there more Democrats in the field than is historically usual at this point in the cycle, but they have also raised more campaign funds than before. Crucially, these candidates are fighting the most contested

districts, where the GOP have had resignations and where the poll numbers indicate potential gains (Malbin (2018)).

President Trump’s approval rating has been around 37-40% for most of the last 6 months and while we have shown the importance of incumbency for mid-term elections, perhaps a better analysis can be derived from the polls. The latest generic congressional ballot shows the Democrats leading 45.7 – 37.8 a lead of 7.9 points, using the Real Clear Politics average (RealClearPolitics, 2018). While this average was early in the cycle, and the power of incumbency is noted, we are prepared to predict on our analysis and with the support of such data that the Democrats will take the House of Representatives on 6 November 2018.

Also, of clear significance to Democrats are the potential of the 2018 Senate races. Assuming Senate Independents continue to caucus with the Democratic Party, a swing of two seats is required. Of the 34 contests expected in 2018, thirteen (CA, CT, DE, HI, MA, MD, MN, NJ, NM, NY, RI, VT and WA) are considered to be safe Democratic seats. A further nine seats (FL, ME, MI, MN, OH, PA, VA, MT and WI) are likely Democratic or leaning that way. The GOP is thought to be safe in five seats, (MS (2), NE, UT, and WY). In two states which would normally be certainties for the GOP, Jeff Flake has left a messy legacy in Arizona, while he contemplates a challenge to Trump, and Ted Cruz is under pressure in Texas. Table 2 shows the swing states and key battlegrounds, with our predictions added. While it is almost impossible to predict the subsequent Senate make up at this stage - it may even go to contested run offs in some states – we come down on a Democratic Party (including two independents) majority 51–49.

| State        | Comments   | Prediction |
|--------------|--|------------|
| Arizona      | A seat vacated by Trump nemesis Jeff Flake should be interesting as the GOP fight a potentially messy primary until August. The state is moving to the left and Trump’s win in 2016 may not be enough to halt the impressive Krysten Sinema  | Dem. gain  |
| Florida      | The Democrats fear Gov. Rick Scott may be the GOP candidate. But if he doesn’t run, most commentators expect incumbent Bill Nelson to be re-elected  | Dem. hold  |
| Indiana      | Low profile incumbent Donnelly may benefit from a hotly contested GOP primary. But Trump won by double digits in 2016 and Donnelly has bad press from links to business in Mexico – perhaps our weakest prediction but...  | Dem. hold  |
| Minnesota    | Tina Smith replaced Al Franken in January and with Tim Pawlenty likely to run for Governor, she should be safe. Minnesota has three state-wide elections this year so worth keeping an eye on turnout  | Dem. hold  |
| Missouri     | The GOP seem to behind Hawley, but will it last? Claire McCaskill is at risk in a state Trump won by 19% but she is campaigning vigorously   | Dem. hold  |
| Montana      | Although Trump won the state by 21%, incumbent John Tester is a popular senator and farmer. He may be helped by a GOP dogfight in the primary  | Dem. hold  |
| Nevada       | Incumbent Heller faced a primary challenge, although Trump was successful in persuading a putative challenger to run for the House. This will be used against the GOP candidate. If Democrats pick the right candidate in a state Clinton won by 4 points, they can take advantage of GOP flips on Obamacare | Dem. gain  |
| North Dakota | Incumbent Heidi Heitkamp defends for the Democrats in a state Trump won by 36%. In any other time a clear GOP gain,  | Dem. hold  |

|               |   |          |
|---------------|---|----------|
|               | but Heitkamp has a strong brand and, despite Trump's efforts, the party has yet to unite behind Kevin Cramer  |          |
| Ohio          | Likely to be in play, only if the GOP re-nominate Josh Mandel. Mandel picked Marco Rubio over Ohio favourite son, Kasich, so we expect a primary fight              | Dem hold |
| Texas         | Polls show the race tightening but O'Rourke has a lot to do to unseat Cruz  | GOP hold |
| West Virginia | Incumbent Joe Manchin has survived a strong swing to the left but is under pressure over links to Mylan. Trump won with 69% of the vote so a potential game changer | GOP gain |

Table 2 – 2018 Senate Battleground.(Burlij and Bradner, 2018) (Robillard2017)

### What chance a Democrat in 2020?

Alec Baldwin the actor, who is probably most famous for his impersonation of Donald Trump on Saturday Night Live, recently spoke to roughly 3,000 Democratic officeholders and activists gathered in a Des Moines convention hall for the state party's annual Fall Gala. Amongst the jokes, Baldwin said that the Democratic Party had become riddled with complacency and riven by disunity. He warned that leftover animosity from the 2016 presidential primary between Hillary Clinton and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders needs to be put aside. "Both were infinitely better suited for office than Donald Trump," he noted. (Zurcher, 2017a)

It's still over two and a half years from the next US presidential election; the Democratic presidential field won't even begin to take shape until well after the midterms in November. Big names, like Sanders, former Vice-President Joe Biden and a raft of Democratic senators including Cory Booker of New Jersey, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Kamala Harris of California and Chris Murphy of Connecticut, have sidestepped Iowa for the time being. At this stage we contend that the Democratic field for president will be as crowded in 2020 as it was in 2008 and may bear comparison to the Republican primary in 2015-16. Such an occurrence could be a boon for either party, given the febrile nature of contemporary US politics. Such a crowded field worked for Trump in his drive for the nomination, but the Democrats play by a very different rulebook (Bradshaw, 2016).

At the time of writing, the only candidate officially in the race is Maryland Congressman John Delaney. The businessman-turned-politician, who announced in July 2017, has already visited Iowa five times and is more moderate than Sanders and his fellow progressives. Jeff Flake, most recently the GOP Senator from Arizona, has indicated that he may challenge Trump in 2020. While Flake may be itching for a fight, surely the Democratic Party lessons from 1968 and 1980 (Bradshaw, 2016) will lead to the GOP elite attempting to block this move.

While Trump is historically unpopular - at 40% approval in a recent Gallop poll (Gallop, 2018) the Democrats are far from unified. As Helmut Norpoth, a political science professor at Stony Brook University in New York, noted:

I think Democrats don't realise what kind of a special candidate they had in Barack Obama ... They had Bill Clinton, they had Obama, but these guys don't come around every year. I don't know who, at this point, would have that kind of appeal (Amos, 2017)

In a sense this echoes the Party's search for the 'new JFK' through the Republican domination of the White House between 1968 and 1992. But at the same time, whoever steps up to the plate will be inheriting a different electoral stage to that which led up to 2016. Most notably the candidate will need to appeal to the, possible shifting, Democratic base in the primary, while bearing in mind the traditional track to the right required in the general election. Democratic Party unity is a fickle thing and we make no prediction here as to the outcome of the 2020 primary; we merely emphasise that defeating the GOP at the highest level requires the nominee, the DNC and the grassroots to work together in a way that was not apparent in 2016.

### Conclusion

Our analysis has reflected on the rise of the Democratic Party's electoral fortunes since November 2017 and placed this in recent historical context. We have shown how this, and the raft of Republican resignations from Congress, may lead to Democratic control of the legislature and how that may provide a springboard to the 2020 presidential campaign. We note the risk of making predictions at this, or any, stage in the current US political climate and therefore our paper is limited by the shifting sands that preclude accurate projections. In other words, regular updates would be required to enhance the meaning and reliability of what we have written here. Therefore, it is the intention that this paper will be the first in a series of such works which will track the fortunes of the rise of the Democratic Party's liberal left, or indeed, the (re)establishment of the traditional Democratic coalition.



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