

# Reflections on the Midterm Elections in the United States

Wednesday 28 November 2018, by [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date first published: 27 November 2018).

**In looking at elections in the United States, deeper trends in the population are difficult to discern, given that the choices are between two capitalist parties, both staunch defenders of capitalist rule and U.S. imperialism.**

There are no mass workers' parties of any stripe. If there were, we would be in a better position to understand the current relation of class forces.

This is not to say there are no differences between the two parties, there are. At present, Trump has the backing of Republican politicians, with a few exceptions. The Democratic politicians are generally opposed to Trump's authoritarian drive, however ineffectually.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that there are competing factions in both parties, more in the open among the Democrats, and muffled by the Republicans' need to go along with Trump's significant base or face the crumbling of their party.

The recent elections, called "midterm" meaning halfway through Trump's term, resulted in a shift in the House of Representatives, from a Republican to a Democratic majority. Trump said those Republicans who lost did so because they were not sufficiently supportive of him.

The Republicans maintained their control of the Senate. That means both parties can thwart any legislation passed by the other, since both houses must agree.

Neither party can by itself overturn any Presidential veto of legislation that is passed by both houses.

In the first two years of Trump's presidency the only major piece of legislation passed by the Republicans who controlled both houses was the giant tax cut for corporations and the rich. Another major decision was to increase the spending going to the military and related institutions to nearly \$1 trillion - passed with enthusiastic support from both parties.

The situation in the new Congress concerning legislation thus will remain basically as it was in the last two years. The attempt by the Republicans to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act (known as Obamacare) failed because of their own differences. They couldn't come up with a replacement. We can expect similar logjams in the next two years, except where the parties agree, for example on military spending.

That the Republicans maintain control of the Senate is quite important for another reason. The Senate must ratify appointments by the President to not only the Supreme Court, as we saw in the struggle to approve Kavanaugh, but all federal judges. This gives the Republicans the power to continue their drive to pack federal courts with right wing candidates. No significant change in this regard, either.

The Senate must also approve some 1200-1400 federal positions nominated by the President. This includes nominations to the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

We should also note that in the elections for Senate, many millions more voted for Democrats than Republicans, but the Republicans won anyway. This is because there are two Senators elected for each state, putting sparsely populated states on an equal footing with heavily populated states like California, which voted Democratic overwhelmingly.

Another thing to note is that a majority of African Americans, Latinos, women and young people despise Trump and all he stands for indicated their opposition, to the extent the two party duopoly that controls politics in the U.S. allows, by voting against him. Unfortunately, the only way to vote against Trump was to cast votes for the Democrats, who do not champion their interests or the interests of the workers.

As a result, the number of women elected to Congress increased. For the first time, two Muslims were elected to the House of Representatives, as were two Native American women. On a positive note, this demonstrates in the distorted mirror of U.S. elections that a lot more has been happening in the U.S. than the rise of Donald Trump.

One of the Muslims who was elected was a Black woman, Ilhan Omar. She was immediately smeared as an anti-Semite by some columnists, and the Anti-Defamation League, which backs every position and action of Israel, expressed "alarm" at her election. The reason? She supports the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

The other Muslim elected was Rahida Tlaib, daughter of Palestinian immigrants, who is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and supports a democratic, secular single state in historic Palestine that would grant equal rights and status to Jews and Palestinians who live there.

She was one of two DSA members elected. The other is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who became the most famous DSA leader in the country after she defeated a long-time establishment Democratic Party stalwart in the primary election, which paved the way for her election to Congress in the midterms.

Both were elected as Democrats, and will be part of the Democratic caucus in the House. Ocasio-Cortez urged people to vote for the Democrats across the board in the midterms. This reflected the long-term position of the DSA, which seeks to reform the Democratic Party.

The DSA grew substantially after the 2016 elections, largely by recruiting young people who had supported Bernie Sanders in 2016. Sanders identified himself as a democratic socialist. There is minority support in the renewed DSA to break from its historic position regarding the Democrats, but in the midterms the DSA mainly supported the Democratic candidates or in some cases made no endorsements.

The policy of socialists giving up their independent status and backing the Democrats goes back to the mid-1930s, when Stalin imposed on the world's Communist Parties the class-collaborationist policy of seeking alliances with progressive bourgeois forces. In the U.S., this meant supporting the Democrats. The Socialist Party followed suit, as did the labor movement bureaucracy. A minority of socialists, principally the Trotskyists, rejected this course.

For the next eight decades, this policy of supporting Democrats in hopes of reforming the party has failed and failed miserably. The ruling capitalist class has a firm grip on the Democrats as well as the Republicans.

The DSA faces a choice. Either reject the trap of running in the Democratic Party and endorsing it in elections, or break away and chart an independent course, which would be a big step forward for socialism in general in the U.S. There have been many indications that broader forces would welcome such a policy, from Black Lives Matter, the big women's marches and the #MeToo movement, Climate Change activists, the fight for a livable wage in the fast food and hotel industries, the teachers' strikes, and more.

**Barry Sheppard**

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