

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

Democrats' Majority in the House of Representatives Slims After Republicans Make Some Gains

In addition to the presidential election, the seats in the House of Representatives were also on the ballot this week. Democrats sought to extend their advantage in the chamber from the current 35-seat majority they have held since 2018, when a wave of Democratic candidates were elected halfway through President Trump's first term. Republicans however, have made the argument that Democrats have failed to legislate effectively with their majority. Prior to the election, most polls indicated Democrats would be able to pick up several Republican seats, while defending the majority of their own. However, this has not occurred, as Republican candidates have defeated several Democratic incumbents, in addition to successfully defending the majority of their seats. Resultingly, the Democrats appear set to hold their majority in the House of Representatives, but their advantage has slimmed considerably, as Republicans have picked up multiple seats.

Across the country, Republican gains have been characterized by demographic shifts. This was most apparent in Florida, where Democrats saw three incumbents defeated, two open seats be filled by Republicans, and defeat in several races they thought were winnable. The key behind this was increased turnout and Republican support from members of the Latino and African-American communities. This is further illustrated in Texas, where Democrats failed to flip a single Republican-held seat, including in districts with large Hispanic populations. Additionally, among seats that Republicans flipped nationwide, the majority of the winning candidates were either women, minorities, or veterans. This is a marked shift in the Republican demographic that will worry Democrats in future elections.

In a more promising development for Democrats, the party's success in the suburbs during the 2018 election has carried on to this year. In the growing suburban areas outside major metropolitan areas, Democrats have performed exceedingly well. Republican strategists have indicated that a potential reason for this is the negative effect that President Trump has had on voters within these areas. However, Republicans also believe that Democrats' overwhelming focus on President Trump and the coronavirus pandemic hurt them electorally, while the Republican focus on the economy benefitted the GOP.

Among the candidates who won House seats are two outspoken conspiracy theorists. New Republican representatives, Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Lauren Boebert of Colorado, are vocal supporters of the baseless QAnon conspiracy theory. Republican leadership has said they would both be welcomed into the caucus, even though the conspiracy theory they espouse has been condemned.

Overall, the losses suffered by House Democrats are great enough to significantly impede Speaker Nancy Pelosi's ability to pass progressive legislation. Recently, Speaker Pelosi has used her commanding majority in the House to push legislation on her terms while in negotiations with the Republican-controlled Senate and White House. Now, however, her ability to do this will be diminished, regardless of who wins the presidency and majority in the Senate. It is also possible that Pelosi faces a challenge to her role as the Speaker from a left-wing coalition within the Democratic Party in the aftermath of Democrats' subpar performance.