

US MIDTERMS: CONSEQUENCES FOR THE SECURITY OF EASTERN EUROPE

Tomáš Moudrý

Recent midterms in the US made headlines around the world as media described it as a test for US democracy. Major topics that the voters were concerned about the most were the state of democracy and Rule of Law, abortion, economy, and education. One can see differences between voters' preferences from each party e.g.: Democrat voters were more concerned about climate change and abortion. On the other hand, immigration and violent crimes resonated with republican voters. But voters had one topic in common – economy.¹

The most expensive midterms in the US history are over. Republicans gained the House majority with 221 seats and the Democrats retained the Senate with 51 seats.² Is this a surprising result? Partly yes, partly no. Firstly, polls and even Republicans were sure about a “Red wave” that would sweep across the US. Instead, there was a tossup in both Chambers of the Congress.³ Secondly, the President's party usually lose the midterms. One can argue that midterms from the incumbent President's party perspective traditionally have just one major goal – to mitigate losses by the closest possible margin. The Democrats seem to have found a way to deal with this fate, despite Biden's low approval rating.⁴

What changes does it bring, if any, and what does it mean for Central and Eastern Europe? Researchers estimate that there will not be many changes in a direction of foreign policy. According to Jan Hornát, Head of the Department of North American Studies, IMS FSV UK, it is harder to change US foreign policy than domestic policy in Washington D.C. Because there are many pressures from

¹ Katherine Schaffer and Ten van Green, “Key facts about U.S. voter priorities ahead of the 2022 midterm elections”, *Pew Research Center*, 3rd November 2022.

² The New York Times, “Live Election Results: Top Races to Watch”, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/11/08/us/elections/results-key-races.html?name=styleIn-2022-midterms®ion=TOP_BANNER&block=storyline_menu_recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection&variant=show&is_new=false.

³ Louise Chetcuti, Understanding the Outcome of the 2022 US Midterms”, *Institut Montaigne*, 7th December 2022.

⁴ Jason Lange, “Biden approval ticks up as Democrats brace for midterm elections”, *Reuters*, 1st November 2022.

various sides e.g.: think tanks, embassies, military-industrial complex, and, of course, from the Congress.⁵ In general, the Senate plays more important role in foreign policy and relations. The Senate has the power to advice and consent on nominations and international treaties. Basically, the President nominates and negotiates treaties, and the Senate ratifies.⁶ Broadly speaking, maintenance of the Senate provides a leverage and safeguard for Biden's administrative. Furthermore, the majority of the Senate gives Democrat power to speed up some of the processes.⁷

On the other hand, controlling the House means more for domestic policy legislation, ratification of trade agreements and the confirmation of the Vice President.⁸ Although the Republicans gained majority in the House, it is far away from vast majority. In addition, the party that will lead the House is divided between classic republicans and Trump supporters.⁹ This factor is favourable for Central and Eastern Europe and may prove to be beneficial. A narrow victory in the midterms by Republicans split between the respective wings within the party likely weakens the anti-war views. It might lead to a stronger focus on non-partisan topics – such as China. Radical changes in foreign policy are also not estimated due to the Democratic majority in the Senate.¹⁰

With regards to Eastern Europe and its security itself, Kevin McCarthy, estimated new speaker of the House, said in October: “Republicans are not going to write a

⁵ Jan Hornát, “EU±// Vliv amerických voleb na vztahy s Evropou”, *Café Evropa*, [https://www.facebook.com/events/794538728503604/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A\[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D\]%7D](https://www.facebook.com/events/794538728503604/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22page%22%7D]%7D).

⁶ “Senate’s Role in Foreign Relations”, United States Senate, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Origins_ForeignRelations.html.

⁷ Louise Chetcuti, “Understanding the Outcome of the 2022 US Midterms”, *Institut Montaigne*, 7th December 2022.

⁸ “The Legislative Branch”, The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/the-legislative-branch/>.

⁹ Katarzyna Pisarska, “Pulaski policy paper: The 2022 U.S. Midterms”, Casimir Pulaski Foundation, 16th November 2022.

¹⁰ Ibid.

blank check to Ukraine.”¹¹ This statement made headlines and new wave of concerns about future US support of Ukraine. Hornát argues that this does not mean that republicans do not want to support Ukraine; they just want bigger monitoring of the money that goes to Ukraine. According to Kiel Institute for World Economy, the US sent the majority of the financial and military aid to Ukraine, and they are still sending it.¹² To conclude, according to the information mentioned above it is more likely that the course of US help and its foreign policy towards Ukraine and Eastern Europe will remain the same or at least very similar to the Biden’s previous course.

¹¹ Suzanne Lynch, “What election? EU sleepwalks into US midterms”, *Politico*, 7th November 2022.

¹² For further information about the assistance for Ukraine, visit: <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>.

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