

Introduction

"If we don't do that it's going to be a sad, sad two years. Think about Republicans if they controlled the Congress these last two years." If the message from President Biden to the members of the Democratic National Committee sounded like it had a note of alarm to it, that's because it did. The occasion was the DNC's winter meeting in Washington, D.C. in March 2022. Biden was deeply concerned that Democrats were not doing enough to assure that they kept control of Congress in the upcoming congressional midterm elections in November 2022.

Biden sounded the alarm bell about the midterms for two very troubling reasons. One, given the long and mostly disastrous history of midterm performance for the president's party, the odds were better than good that the following would happen. The president's party would lose one, or both wings of Congress. At best, his party would suffer some losses.

In every midterm election since World War II, the scorecard on losses for the president's party has been nothing short of astounding. The average loss for the president's party is twenty-six seats in the House, and four in the Senate. Only six presidents, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton, and George Bush Jr. saw their party hold onto or make gains in the midterms. Fine-tuning that dismal history, even more, only Roosevelt in 1934, and George W. Bush in 2002, registered gains in midterm seats in *both* houses for their parties.

FDR and Bush's midterm gains, though, are somewhat misleading. In 1934 America was in the near-death grip of the Great Depression and FDR had won a landslide election victory in 1932. His New Deal was widely cheered and did much to take some of the harshest edge off the country's Depression woes. In 1934, he was still riding the crest of popularity. Millions of voters in part trusted him and the Democrats

to best deliver on their promise to fulfill the desperate need for jobs and economic recovery.

Bush rode the same crest of popularity in 2002 with his still sky-high approval ratings following the shell shock of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Bush vowed to wage a take no prisoners war on terrorism. Voters believed him and regarded him as a tough wartime like President.

There was another reason Biden was explicit in warning the DNC that there would be much sadness if the Democrats lost the House and or Senate in 2022. A Republican-controlled Congress could dither, duck, dodge, and obstruct any and every initiative and piece of legislation that he proposed. It could block his administration's appointments to key administrative department heads, and judicial appointments. The most crucial being the SCOTUS.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell flatly pledged a replay of his thwart of former President Obama's legislative initiatives during his last two years in office from 2014 to 2016 if the GOP won back the Senate in the 2022 midterms. When the subject of the confirmation of a Biden pick to the SCOTUS came up, and if he again held the Senate Majority post, McConnell was blunt, "I think it's highly unlikely." He meant his words. He blocked Merrick Garland, Obama's pick to the High Court, in 2016.

When Biden warned about the absolute importance of the midterms to him and the Democrats, he had to be thinking about the horror that former President Obama faced during his second term from 2012 to 2016. The GOP snatched back both the House and the Senate during the 2014 midterm elections. It held tightly to them during Obama's second term. It blocked dozens of his judicial appointments, most importantly his nomination of Garland to the SCOTUS.

Obama got through almost no new legislative initiatives in his final White House days. The 2014 midterm Democratic defeats ensured that his administration was an

administration in little but name only. In other words, it was a lame-duck administration two years before his term officially ended.

Biden had much cause for worry. History abundantly showed that the party in power –in 2022 it was the Democrats- almost always lost seats sometimes lots of seats to the other party. At times, this resulted in a flip of Congress to the other party. Polls in early 2022 showed that GOP voters were much more fired up about the 2022 midterms and the prospect of seizing back Congress than Democratic voters. Polls also found that the public generally agreed that the party that controls Congress controls the government. Polls also found substantial agreement among Democrats that they should control Congress. Conversely, Republicans agreed that they should control Congress.

Opinion was divided over which was better, a unified Congress in which Democrats or Republicans controlled both wings of Congress. Or there was a divided Congress in which the Democrats controlled one wing and the GOP the other. Unfortunately, this was a sure prescription for even more congressional turbulence.

If the Democrats lost just one seat in the Senate in 2022, they lost control of the Senate. If they lost just a relative handful of seats in the House, the same. Control was lost. The midterms then were almost literally a matter of political life and death for the Democrats and Biden.

Yet, given the outsized importance past and present of the midterms in determining the shape and direction of the country, why have millions of voters taken them so lightly, if not outright ignored them? The evidence for this is the repeat pattern of the low to sometimes abysmal voter turnout in the midterms, particularly among Black, Hispanic, and young voters.

There are legions of books that examine the presidential elections, and the issues, the personalities, and the pitched battles the presidential candidates and their parties have fought during those elections. However, in my extensive research on the rich and checkered history, enormous political impact, and colossal struggles political parties

have waged over the midterms, I was struck by the near nonexistence of any books examining the midterm's tremendous importance to the political shape of the country.

I provide a revealing, in-depth examination of why the midterm elections for Congress, as well as tens of thousands of state and local offices, are so important to both parties. I assess the issues such as the chronic low turnout of voters, especially Black, Hispanic, and young voters, and the resultant deepening political polarization. He details why the GOP has had phenomenal success in mobilizing and energizing its voters for the midterms.

There's an ominous note to that success going forward, "I think that people are very angry. I think you're underestimating the anger of the people on the right." This is Donald Trump speaking in an interview he gave after his 2020 presidential defeat. It underscores that point. Hutchinson discusses Trump's continuing impact on the GOP and how that casts a foreboding shadow on politics in America.

I tell why the midterms during much of their history have flown far under the media and public's radar. I examine the reasons why the president's party has done so poorly in the midterms. Most importantly, he provides a blueprint for the Democrats to reverse their often-dismal showing in the midterm elections.

The Midterms Why They are so Important and so Ignored offers fresh insights into a part of the American political process that has meant so much to the governance of the country. But at the same time has received so little public attention and so little overall voter participation and interest. So little that it represents an embarrassing stain on our democracy.

No one knew that better and the high stakes involved in the midterm elections than Biden. In a meeting with key Democratic House members in October 2021, Biden was emphatic, "I know that I need you all to hold your seats in order for the second two years of my term to be productive."

He and every other president in the nation's history have said the same about the midterms.