

The 2006 Midterm Elections in Historical Perspective

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- What happened yesterday?
- How does the 2006 election “fit”? What was typical? What was atypical?

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In addition, states and localities often have other races or issues on the ballot.

Midterm Loss

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On average, the president's party has lost nearly 26 seats in the House, and 3 seats in the Senate, in each midterm election between 1934 and 2002.

Midterm Loss: Trends

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Presidential parties did a little better over this period in the *Senate*: in 1962, 1970, and 1982, gains of 1–3 seats by the president's party were realized. But in most of the other elections, substantial losses were incurred.

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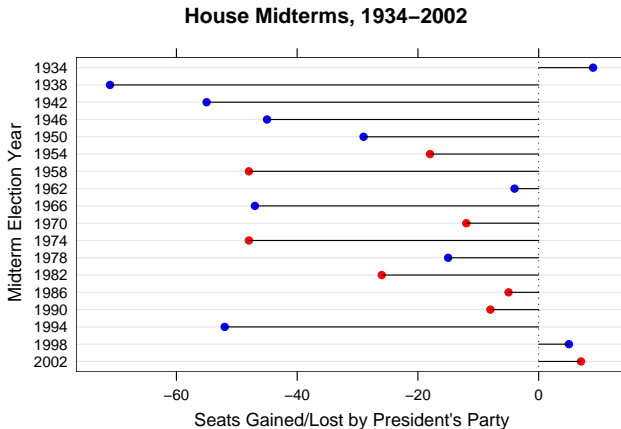
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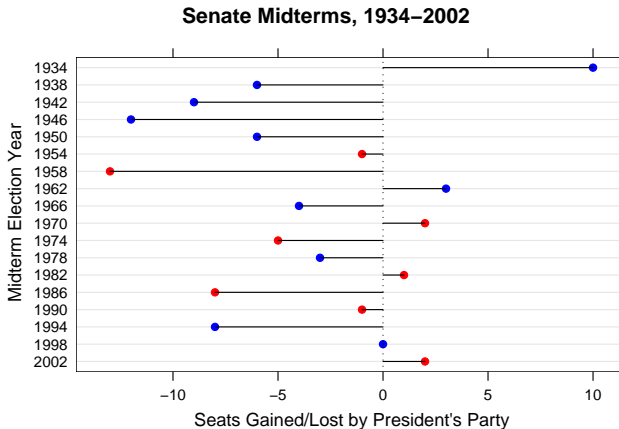
- 1998: The Democrats gained five seats in the House of Representatives, and saw no change in the Senate.
- 2002: The Republicans gained seven seats in the House and two in the Senate.

Midterm Loss Illustrated: The House



Source: Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek. 2005. *Congress and its Members*, 10th ed. Washington: CQ Press.

Midterm Loss Illustrated: The Senate



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Explanations for Midterm Loss

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Divided Government Voters prefer split control of Congress and the presidency—"cognitive Madisonianism."

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- Controls the disposition of most of Congress' budget and staff.

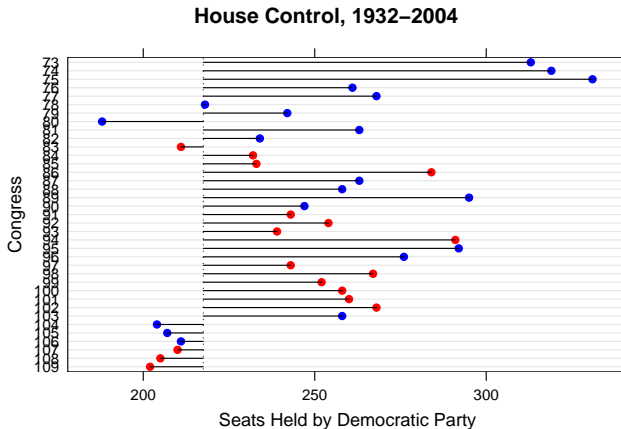
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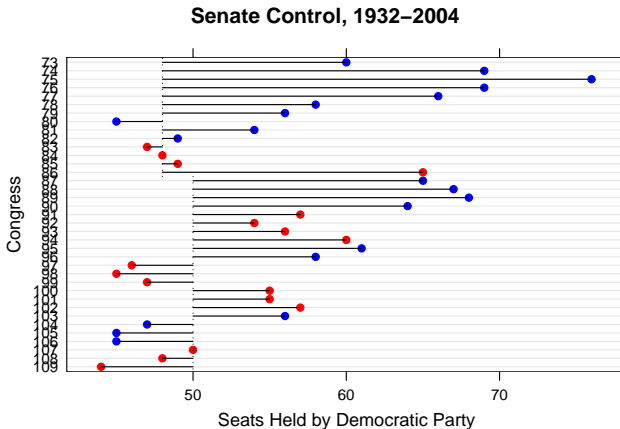
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- In the House: can limit floor debate using the Rules Committee and controls the Speaker's office.

Party Control of the House, 1932–Present



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Party Control of the Senate, 1932–Present



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So what happened last night?

Let's find out!

Two questions political scientists will want to keep in mind:

- Are the results consistent with midterm loss?
- Will the results cause a change in party control of one or both chambers?