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Despite omicron, Covid-19 will become endemic. Here's how.

The variant has changed how we get from “pandemic” to “endemic,” but that doesn't mean we're back to square one.

By Sigal Samuel | Updated Jan 1, 2022, 11:17am EST



A health care worker hands out a Covid-19 test kit at a drive-through testing site in Riverside, California, on December 21. | Gina Ferazzi/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

With omicron rates soaring, you may find yourself despairingly asking when — or even if

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— this pandemic is ever going to end.

The good news is that it *will* end. Experts agree on that. We're not going to totally eradicate Covid-19, but we will see it move out of the pandemic phase

and into the endemic phase.

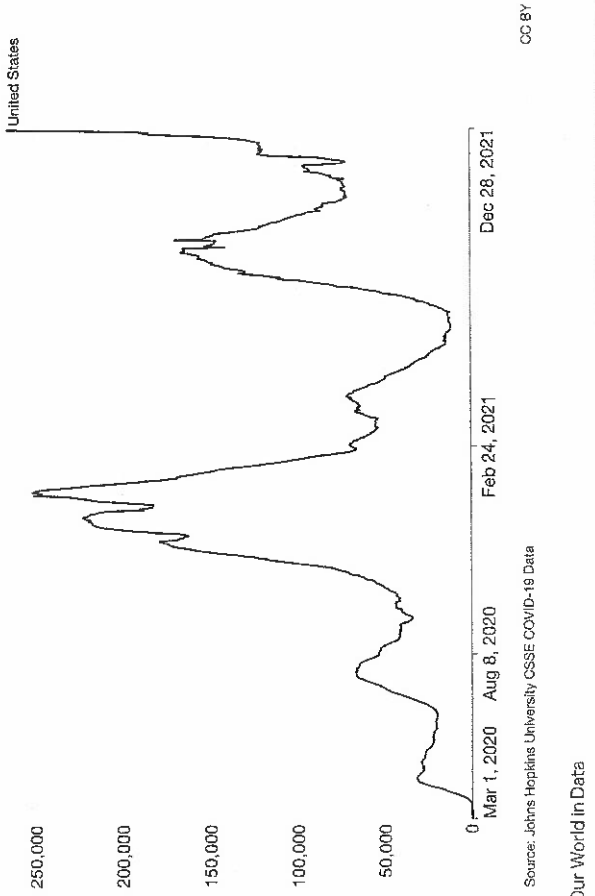
Endemicity means the virus will keep circulating in parts of the global population for years, but its prevalence and impact will come down to relatively manageable levels, so it ends up more like the flu than a world-stopping disease.

For an infectious disease to be classed in the **endemic phase**, the rate of infections has to more or less stabilize across years, rather than showing big, unexpected spikes as Covid-19 has been doing. “A disease is endemic if the **reproductive number** is stably at one,” Boston University epidemiologist Eleanor Murray explained. “That means one infected person, on average, infects one other person.”

We're nowhere near that right now. The highly contagious omicron variant means each infected person is infecting more than one other person, with the result that cases are exploding across the globe. Nobody can look at the following chart and reasonably conclude that we're in endemic territory.

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases

7-day rolling average. Due to limited testing, the number of confirmed cases is lower than the true number of infections.



endemicity by infecting so much of the population so swiftly that we more quickly develop a layer of natural immunity?

“That is really the million-dollar question,” Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, told me. “It’s really hard to say right now.”

That’s partly because endemicity isn’t just about getting the virus’s reproductive number down to one. That’s the bare minimum for earning the endemic classification, but there are other factors that come into play, too: What’s the rate of hospitalizations and deaths? Is the health care system overburdened to the point that there’s a precipitous space or staffing shortage? Are there treatments available to reduce how many people are getting seriously ill?

In general, a virus becomes endemic when we (health experts, governmental bodies, and the public) collectively decide that we’re okay with accepting the level of impact the virus has — that in other words, it no longer constitutes an active crisis.

With omicron surging right now and many governments reimposing stricter precautions as a result, it’s clear we’re still in crisis mode. “But so much depends on the burden it’ll place on the health care system,” Rasmussen said. “And that’s going to be different from community to community.”

Even though omicron so far seems to result in **milder disease than previous variants**, a massive increase in cases could still lead to a big increase in hospitalizations and deaths. That could further stress health care systems that are already in dire straits. That’s why Rasmussen concludes that “omicron certainly has the potential to delay endemicity.”

But there are also some hopeful things to bear in mind. “The incredible number of infections is building up population-level immunity. That’ll be crucial in terms of muting future waves,” said Joshua Michaud, associate director for global health policy at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

In addition to omicron potentially building up some immunity in the vast numbers of people who are becoming infected with it, vaccinations and boosters are also

Looking at this data might make you wonder about some of the predictions that were floating around before omicron came on the scene. In the fall, some health experts were **saying** that they thought the delta variant might represent the last big act for this pandemic, and that we could reach endemicity in 2022.

The outlook is more uncertain now. So how should you be thinking about the trajectory and timeline of the pandemic going into the new year? And how should omicron be shaping your everyday decision-making and risk calculus?

When we’ll know we’re finally in “endemic” territory

Here’s one big question you’d probably like the answer to: Does omicron push endemicity farther off into the future? Or could it actually speed up our path to

contributing to “a significant immunity wall that’s being built,” he said. But he cautioned that “that’s a wall to the variants we’ve seen already. There could be another variant which could evade immunity down the road.” Some experts are already **conjecturing** that getting infected with omicron may not give you much cross-protection against other variants, though a small early study showed **positive signs on that front**.

This is why Ramussen says “the key determinant” of when the pandemic ends is how long it will take to make vaccines accessible around the world (and to combat ongoing vaccine hesitancy). Currently, **we’re not vaccinating the globe fast enough** to starve the virus of opportunities to mutate into something new and serious. “If only a very small proportion of people are getting access to vaccines, we’re just going to keep playing variant whack-a-mole indefinitely,” Rasmussen said.

In the meantime, we do have another ace up our sleeves, which will hopefully also become available around the globe sooner rather than later: **new treatments** — like Pfizer’s paxlovid, recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and Merck’s molnupiravir, also **FDA approved** — that reduce the rates of hospitalization and death from Covid-19.

“Very important in the context of endemicity is the antiviral pills,” Michaud said. “If we have those tools, we’re looking at a very different state going into 2022. People shouldn’t feel like we’re back to square one.”

We’re not back to March 2020. But it makes sense to modify our behavior during the omicron surge.

Dire headlines notwithstanding, we’re in much better shape than we were at the start of the pandemic. We’ve discovered a lot more information about how Covid-19 works. We’ve manufactured effective masks, vaccines, boosters, treatments, and rapid tests.

We’ve also learned that having to hunker down comes at a real cost to our mental and economic health and wellbeing. The cost of a strict lockdown may have been worthwhile in March 2020, but by and large, that’s not what US experts are advising now.

They are, however, urging us to take more precautions than we might have been in the

weeks leading up to omicron.

Take Bob Wachter, for example, the chair of the department of medicine at the University of California San Francisco. In the fall, he shifted from being very cautious about Covid-19 to taking some more calculated risks, including **dining indoors at restaurants** and even **hosting an in-person medical conference with 300 attendees**. But now that omicron is causing cases to skyrocket, he’s being more cautious again.

“I see the next few months as a time to fortify one’s safety behaviors,” he **wrote** on Twitter. Here’s how he explained his reasons:

Bob Wachter @Bob_Wachter · Dec 17, 2021
Replying to @Bob_Wachter
1st, Omicron looks to have peaked in So Africa; we'll likely see a familiar surge-then-plunge pattern, just with a much steeper upslope. Second, I'm quite worried about an overwhelmed healthcare system — we'll rapidly hit capacity limits in meds, beds, ICUs, testing... (9/25)

Bob Wachter @Bob_Wachter
... and most importantly people (many MDs/RNs out sick too). Trust me, you want to avoid getting sick when the system is stressed. Third, I see the Pfizer oral anti-viral as a very big deal, and it won't be available for 4-6 weeks (even then it'll be in short supply). (10/25)

5:08 PM · Dec 17, 2021

1.4K See the latest COVID-19 information on Twitter

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The other experts I spoke to agreed that now is a time to limit risky activities.

"I had taken my foot off the brakes in terms of my own behavior. But I've now started to put it on again," Michaud told me. "I canceled plans to go to New Jersey to visit my family over Christmas. I'm avoiding more indoor environments. As of now, it does make a lot of sense to me to take additional steps to prevent yourself and those around you from getting infected."

After the omicron wave passes, he said, he envisions relaxing precautions again. Modeling suggests that omicron could peak in **mid- to late January** in the US, with case rates steeply declining — and activities becoming correspondingly safer again — in February.

Rasmussen is also modifying her behavior in light of omicron, though she emphasizes that's not the same as going back to a spring 2020-style lockdown. Although she canceled an international flight over the holidays, she still felt comfortable going over to her colleague's house for a Christmas meal. That's because she and they had vaccinations, boosters, rapid tests, and great ventilation working in their favor.

"We have a lot more tools at our disposal for dealing with this than we did in March 2020," she said.

We'll know endemicity has arrived when those tools — and the long, painful experience of the pandemic itself — has enabled us to fully adapt to the virus, as the virus has adapted to us.

Update, January 1, 2022: This story has been updated to reflect **new evidence on the severity of omicron illness.**

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Opinion: Omicron is bad. But we don't need to resort to lockdowns.

By [Leana S. Wen](#)
Contributing columnist

Yesterday at 6:36 p.m. EST



We are entering the third year of the pandemic with a confusing state of affairs. The United States has far surpassed the number of daily covid-19 infections compared with the previous peak last winter, yet many businesses remain open, stadiums are packed and children are headed back to school. News headlines announce that "omicron infections seem to be milder" than earlier variants, yet this could be the "worst public health challenge of our lifetimes."

Here's how to reconcile the seeming contradictions of where we are: The risk to *individuals* is low, while the risk to *society* is high. Policy solutions that demand substantial individual sacrifice will not work; instead, we need to acknowledge the public's very real weariness and come up with practical strategies that keep society functioning.

Research is increasingly pointing to omicron causing less severe disease compared with previous variants. In addition, vaccination — especially with a booster — appears highly protective against hospitalization and death. The tsunami of viral transmission means that many vaccinated people will have breakthrough infections, but the vast majority will have symptoms somewhere between a mild cold and the flu.

As a result, it's unreasonable to ask vaccinated people to refrain from pre-pandemic activities. After all, the individual risk to them is low, and there is a steep price to keeping students out of school, shuttering restaurants and retail shops, and stopping travel and commerce.

At the same time, out of control virus dynamics pose existential threats to society. So many firefighters and emergency medical personnel are out because of covid-19 that Cincinnati declared a state of emergency. One in 6 police officers in New York City had symptoms or were diagnosed with covid-19 last week. Thousands of flights have been canceled, in part because of inadequate staffing from quarantined workers.

The situation facing hospitals is particularly dire. At least six *Maryland hospitals* have succumbed to crisis standards of care, citing depletion of existing resources. New York state has asked 32 hospitals to postpone nonurgent elective scheduled surgeries. Leaders from nine Minnesota hospitals took out an ad that began, "We're heartbroken. We're overwhelmed."

The United States has three options for dealing with this surge. First, we could reimpose lockdowns. While some European and Asian countries have chosen this path, I believe it's a nonstarter here. Even if lockdowns could more quickly bring omicron under control, there is no political appetite or public backing for this level of collective sacrifice.

Second, we could let omicron run its course. There's a school of thought that omicron is so contagious it will infect nearly everyone anyway, and it's better to get this variant and develop additional immunity. Instead of trying to stop it, we could treat omicron as we do a common cold: We don't isolate people with colds, and getting rid of isolation and quarantine would alleviate staffing shortages and keep the economy going. However, this path of uncontrolled spread would almost assuredly push many hospitals over the edge, and patients could die because they can't access timely care.

There is a third path that aims to save our hospitals while also minimizing disruption. We don't need to ask people to stay home, but we should require that they wear high-quality masks in all indoor public spaces. We don't need to cancel gatherings, but we should mandate proof of vaccination — and boosters — for all indoor dining, gyms, movie theaters, and sporting events.

Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that it is shortening the isolation period for those infected with covid-19 from 10 days to five. It can go even further — not to get rid of isolation requirements for everyone but to reduce or even forgo isolation and quarantine (while mandating high-quality masks) for those working in public safety, transportation, education and other critical jobs.

In the meantime, we must do much more to protect the most vulnerable, including ensuring boosters for all nursing home residents and staff, ramping up production of preventive monoclonal antibodies for the immunocompromised and expediting vaccine approval for children under 5.

The Biden administration should be up front and say that it is taking these actions out of necessity. These are not the scientifically most sound or the most efficient ways to curb covid-19, but they are the practical middle path that balances what Americans can tolerate with what we need to do to avert the collapse of our health-care system.

This is our new reality going forward. There could well be surges of new variants every year — or even every few months. As long as vaccines continue to protect against severe illness and the risk to most individuals remains low, our paradigm has to shift from preventing infection to stopping societal devastation.



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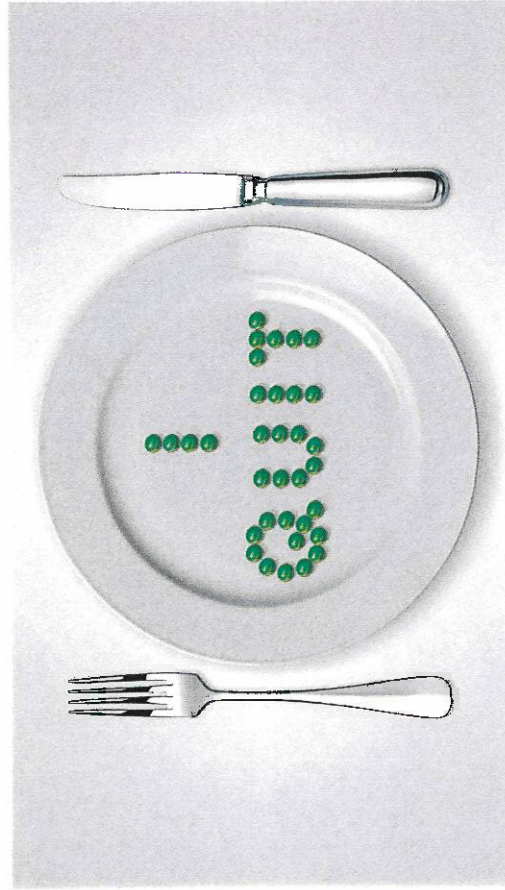
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Three Myths of the Great Resignation

What if I told you the Big Quit wasn't really about "quitting"?

By Derek Thompson



Getty; Adam Maida / The Atlantic

DECEMBER 8, 2021

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About the author: Derek Thompson is a staff writer at The Atlantic and the author of the book In Progress newsletter. He is also the author of Hit Makers and the host of the podcast Plain English.

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The "Great Resignation" remains one of the buzziest economic stories of 2021. But the more people talk about it, the more I wonder whether most people know what they're talking about. As so often happens with other nifty phrases and neologisms, use of the term and abuse of the term are in equal proportion.

Let's start with what's true. More Americans left their job in April this year than in any other month on record, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' analysis of what it calls "quits." Even more people quit in July, setting a new record. We broke that new record again in August. And then again in September. This is what people refer to as the "Great Resignation," and it is, as I've written, getting *greater* by the month.

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mostly about low-wage workers switching to better jobs in industries that are raising wages to grab new employees as fast as possible. From the quitter's perspective, that's a job hop. The low-wage service-sector economy is experiencing the equivalent of "free agency" in a professional sports league. That makes it more like the Big Switch than the Big Quit.

Let's zoom in on one sector: the accommodations and food-services industry. Mostly composed of restaurants and hotels, this sector has seen more quits than any other part of the economy. But it's not bleeding jobs. Quite the opposite: Accommodation and food services added 2 million employees in 2021, more than any other subsector. I could identify.

Derek Thompson: Where did 7 million workers go?

In fact, accommodation and food services, which has been hardest hit by the Great Resignation, has also created *one out of every three net new jobs in 2021*. Does that make any sense? Only if you think about this as a job-switching revolution.

Myth 2: The Great Resignation is about white-collar burnout.

Although burnout has remained steady or declined for most workers during the pandemic, according to Gallup polling, remote workers are significantly more likely to say they're burned out now compared with before the pandemic. Because remote workers are a very white-collar group, this fact has led to a great deal of news coverage claiming that the Great Resignation—or whatever!—is being driven by white-collar professionals.

But quits aren't rising much in finance, real estate, or the broad information sector, which includes publishing, software, and internet companies. This year, quits for leisure and hospitality workers have increased *four times faster* than for the largest white-collar sector, which is professional and business services.

Derek Thompson: The Great Resignation is accelerating

Now for what's not true. Here are three popular myths about the Great Resignation and who is affected by it.

Myth 1: The Great Resignation is about quitting.

One problem with the term *Great Resignation* is that *resignation* sounds like a pure subtraction. If I told you, "My company suffered a great resignation last year," you'd probably think that the company had lost a lot of workers. If I continued, "And the firm grew by 20 percent!" you might be very confused.

But that's what's happening in the broader economy. The increase in quits is

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I'm not saying "Stop talking about burnout; it's just for rich people." I'm suggesting that we shouldn't conflate white-collar burnout with whatever's driving lower-wage service workers to hop around. Given the government statistics and private survey data we currently have, these just seem like different phenomena. Strange as it sounds, the increase in self-reported burnout is happening in industries where workers are less likely to quit.

Myth 3: The Great Resignation is a 2021 phenomenon.

The term *Great Resignation* was likely coined by Anthony Klorz, a professor at Texas A&M, in May; at the time, he framed a mass exodus from the workforce as a *preludium* for this year. But since the bottom fell out of the economy in April 2020, the labor-force participation rate has increased for most groups—men and women, white and nonwhite. The biggest exception is older Americans, who by and large quit their jobs (and stayed quit) *last year*.

For Americans over 65 without a disability, the participation rate is still down more than 10 percent since before the pandemic. This suggests that roughly one in 10 seniors left the labor force before we might have expected and didn't come back. (Not surprising, because the pandemic poses a much higher risk of severe illness to older people.)

The great majority of this economy's "quitters," in the permanent sense of the word, are seniors. But they quit a while ago, and calling their decisions "resignations" is sort of weird. When a 70-year-old leaves a business she's worked at for three decades, we don't throw her a big resignation party. We

throw her a retirement party. The pandemic economy—with its health risk of in-person work for the elderly, its economic shocks, and maybe even its rise in asset prices and savings rates—has produced a large number of early retirees.

The Great Resignation isn't really about burnout. And it's not really about what most people think of as resignations. To put it as concisely as possible:

The Great Resignation is mostly a dynamic "free agency" period for low-income workers switching jobs to make more money, plus a moderate surge of early retirements in a pandemic.

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Dec 3, 2021 - Politics & Policy

McConnell: No legislative agenda for 2022 midterms



Jonathan Swan, Alayna Treene



Photo: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Mitch McConnell has told colleagues and donors Senate Republicans won't release a legislative agenda before next year's midterms, according to people who've attended private meetings with the minority leader.

Why it matters: Every midterm cycle, there are Republican donors and operatives who argue the party should release a positive, pro-active governing

outline around which candidates can rally. McConnell adamantly rejects this idea, preferring to skewer Democrats for their perceived failures.

Behind the scenes: On the night of Nov. 16, McConnell met with donors, lobbyists and a group of Republican senators in a private function room upstairs at the Capitol Hill Club. The 2022 agenda was on the menu.

- In attendance was Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.), chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which convened the dinner.
- Also on hand were some Republican senators up for re-election next year: Chuck Grassley of Iowa, James Lankford of Oklahoma, Rand Paul of Kentucky and John Boozman of Arkansas.
- Each senator sat at his own table with donors, and each spoke for a few minutes about his re-election race. A microphone was passed around for a question-and-answer session.

A donor asked a question that could only be answered by McConnell. According to a source in the room, the donor said something to the effect of: We all know what's wrong with the Democrats, but what are we going to be running on to help us win?

- McConnell's response was something to the effect of, With all respect, that's not what we're doing, the source said.

McConnell has long held the view that putting out an agenda ahead of midterm elections is a mistake — at least for Senate Republicans, the sources told Axios.

- He believes his view has been vindicated by recent history. McConnell points, in particular, to when he led Republicans to win back the Senate in the 2014 midterms without proposing an agenda.
- Some donors and operatives point to a different memory: the "Contract with America." House

Republicans released a governing action plan before the 1994 midterm elections, and their party won back unified control of Congress for the first time in nearly 50 years.

The current House minority leader, Kevin McCarthy, is a "Contract with America" guy. He's told his colleagues he thinks it's important they tell voters what they support — not just what they oppose.

- He wants to release a legislative agenda to unite the conference ahead of the midterms, according to sources with direct knowledge of his caucus statements.
- McCarthy's already released a first element: what he calls the "[Parents Bill of Rights](#)."
- He's also appointed Republican members to seven "[issue-specific task forces](#)" to work up this pre-midterm agenda.

During the mid-November dinner, McConnell told the donor it would be the job of the next Republican nominee for president in 2024 to lay out the party's future agenda.

- Until then, Republicans should be 100% focused on Democrats and all the "terrible" things they're doing to the country, McConnell said, according to the source.
- McConnell made clear, the source said, the entire focus of the 2022 campaign should be about the things the Democrats are doing wrong. He cited the history of midterm losses for the party in power.

Asked about this dinner and the intra-party conversation, Scott, the NRSC chair, told Axios: "There's some conversation that people would like to have some agreement that everybody runs on something. That sounds good, but it's hard to do."

- A McConnell spokesman declined comment.

Between the lines: A top GOP operative, who didn't attend the dinner but has often heard such conversations involving McConnell, said these kinds of discussions happen regularly with the Republican leader.

- "It happens all the time," the source told Axios. "Donors especially are always asking for an agenda of some kind and McConnell pushes back hard. Because he knows that all it does is take the focus off unpopular Dem policies and gives Dems something tangible to tear apart."
- "One of the biggest mistakes challengers often make is thinking campaigns are about them and their ideas," the source continued. "No one gives a sh-t about that. Elections are referendums on incumbents."
- "Challengers need to keep the focus on what incumbents promised and point out how they failed to deliver and how that has negatively impacted voters' lives," the source said.

The bottom line: Current polls appear to support McConnell's political calculation.

- By almost any measure — from President Biden's approval rating to the generic ballot — Republicans are enjoying their best political environment for a decade.
- They're in this position having barely uttered a word about their plans for the future.



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U.S. NEWS JAN. 1, 2022 / 7:15 PM

Congress' 2022 to-do list: Revived social spending bill, voting rights, Capitol riot probe

By Jake Thomas



1/6

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, speaks during a news conference on the Protecting Our Democracy Act at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC on Thursday, December 9, 2021. Congress faces many politically difficult challenges in 2022. Photo by Sarah Silbiger/UPI | License Photo



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Jan. 1 (UPI) -- The new year brings many old challenges for members of Congress who will face a tightening timeline for work on a revived social spending bill, voting rights, a probe into the Capitol riot and others.

Both the House and Senate in the coming weeks will reconvene for the first time in 2022. One of the most pressing challenges facing Congress is one of the most basic.

President [Joe Biden](#) last month signed legislation funding the government through Feb. 18. Although the funding mechanism was approved, some Republican lawmakers [had hoped to use a government shutdown](#) as leverage to oppose Biden's vaccine mandates for private employers.

As the November 2022 midterm elections draw nearer, Democrats are expected to face a more politicized environment as they seek to shepherd their legislative priorities through the narrowly divided Congress.

World's COVID-19 cases rise 59% but deaths down 7%; Australia triples in week



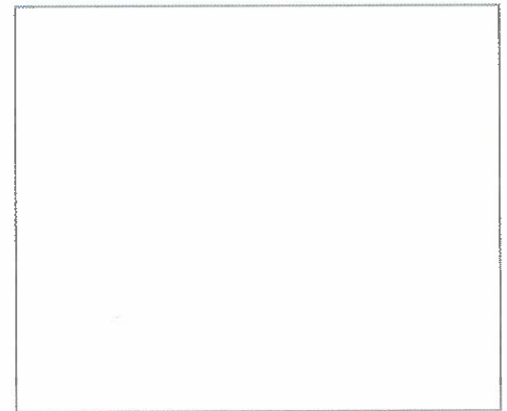
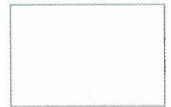
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Build Back Better 2.0?

Sen. [Joe Manchin](#), D-W.V., [potentially doomed](#) a key priority of congressional Democrats' agenda when he said last month he couldn't vote for the \$2 trillion Build Back Better bill. The sweeping bill contained funding for social programs and climate initiatives. Democrats had hoped to pass it through the evenly divided Senate by using the filibuster-proof budget reconciliation process.

Even with the West Virginia moderate's defection, Democrats haven't given up hope of passing a scaled-back version of the bill.

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"We will continue to fight to pass the legislation," House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) said at a news conference following Manchin's announcement. "It must happen and we will do it as soon as we can. There are conversations that are ongoing, but we cannot walk away from this commitment."

Negotiations to revive the package are underway. Just days after his announcement, Manchin signaled to the White House he was open to a tax hike on billionaire's wealth to pay for the legislation, [according to The Washington Post](#).

But a clear picture of Build Back Better 2.0 has yet to emerge and congressional leaders have a difficult needle to thread.

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Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a Washington Democrat who leads the roughly 100-member Congressional Progressive Caucus, [said during a press conference](#) last month that "it is abundantly clear that we cannot trust what Sen. Manchin says."

She added, "No one should think that we are going to be satisfied with an even smaller package that leaves people behind or refuses to tackle critical issues like climate change."

"Failure is not an option here," Sen. [Ron Wyden](#), an Oregon Democrat who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, said [in a statement](#) in response to Manchin.

He said his committee has put forward more revenue options to pay for programs intended to reduce health care costs, clean energy jobs and other priorities.

Build Back Better would have authorized Medicare to negotiate drug prices. Saying that drug companies had been "mugging Americans at the pharmacy window for too long," Wyden said Democrats must deliver on their promise to lower Americans' health care costs.

Wyden also pointed out that families have received their final child tax credit payment authorized by Congress earlier this year. Build Back Better would have extended the credit by another year.

Voting on voting rights

Democrats could be headed toward a similar intra-party struggle over voting rights and Senate rules.

With 2022 midterm elections on their way, Democrats will take up legislation that [advocates say are needed to counter restrictive voting measures](#) adopted by GOP-controlled legislatures. Senate Majority Leader [Chuck Schumer](#), D-N.Y., said in a letter that the chamber could take action early in January, [reports The Hill](#).

The House in August [passed](#) the [John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#). Among its provisions, the bill would restore Justice Department oversight of jurisdictions with histories of voter discrimination seeking to change their election rules.

Despite having enough votes to pass the bill in the Senate, Democrats have been unable to move it in the face of a Republican-led [filibuster](#). Sixty votes are required to overcome a filibuster, and a

group of Democrats are crafting potential updates to the Senate's arcane rules.

"We're looking at reforms to restore the Senate," Sen. [Tim Kaine](#), D-Va., told [The Hill](#). "It's not just filibuster reforms."

The ideas include a return to a talking filibuster where an opponent of a bill could delay the bill as long as they hold the Senate floor, the paper reports. Another idea would create an exception for voting rights or election legislation. Yet another option would change the number of votes from 60 "yes" votes needed to halt a filibuster to 41 "no" votes to sustain it.

Saying "there's nothing domestically more important than voting rights," Biden [told ABC News](#) he would lobby hard for the changes.

However, Manchin [has said](#) he's opposed to changing the filibuster saying it makes senators work together. Manchin reiterated his stance during [a recent appearance on Fox News Sunday](#) but said he is "working on trying to make the Senate work better."

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, another Democratic moderate from Arizona, said in a [Washington Post op-ed](#) she opposed eliminating the filibuster because it could lead to "repeated radical reversals in federal policy, cementing uncertainty, deepening divisions and further eroding Americans' confidence in our government."

Jan. 6 probe

The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection will continue its legal wrangling over records and witnesses as it races to complete its work in time for the 2022 midterm elections.

The committee is looking into the circumstances surrounding the deadly incident where rioters supporting then-President [Donald Trump](#) attempted to prevent Congress from certifying the 2020 election. Trump has [gone to court](#) seeking to block access to presidential records. Members of Trump's inner circle, including former Chief of Staff [Mark Meadows](#), [have resisted cooperating](#) with the probe.

Congressional Republicans have opposed the probe. After Senate Republicans last year filibustered legislation to create an independent commission, the House voted largely along party lines to create the committee.

The committee is expected to face an uncertain future if Republicans retake the House in the 2022 midterms.

With the election looming, Rep. [Bennie Thompson](#), a Mississippi Democrat who chairs the committee, [told Politico](#) that he hopes to wrap up work by "early spring."

Rep. Liz Cheney, the committee's vice-chair, said the panel would hold multiple weeks of public hearings in 2022 to set "out for the American people in vivid color exactly what happened on Jan. 6," [according to Politico](#). The Wyoming Republican also said the hearings would examine the White House and Trump's handling of the attack on the Capitol.

Tech legislation

A bipartisan group of lawmakers has expressed optimism about passing legislation seeking to rein in large tech companies.

Rep. David Cicilline, a [Rhode Island](#) Democrat who chairs an antitrust subcommittee, [told CNBC](#) that he was optimistic that a package of bills intended to promote competition in digital markets would pass. The bills were introduced in response to a congressional investigation that found tech giants like [Amazon](#), Apple, Facebook and [Google](#) held monopoly power.

"When people study the bills and are briefed by my staff, there is tremendous support for the entire package," Cicilline said.

But Paul Gallant, managing director of Cowen's Washington Research Group, [told CNBC](#) that with Republicans likely to take over Congress in the fall, "2022 is do or die for tech antitrust legislation."

The bills passed the House Judiciary Committee in June with bipartisan support.

Rep. Ken Buck, a Colorado Republican and ranking member of the antitrust subcommittee, [told Axios](#) in November that the industry "knows such bills will create competition in the marketplace."

In the Senate, a bill sponsored by Sens. [Amy Klobuchar](#), D-Minn., and [Chuck Grassley](#), R-Iowa, would block online platforms, such as Amazon or Google from favoring their own services and products over competitors, [reports MarketWatch](#).

Topics [Joe Manchin](#) [Joe Biden](#) [Ron Wyden](#) [Nancy Pelosi](#)

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Schumer promises filibuster debate if voting rights bill doesn't advance

Jan. 3 (UPI) -- Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., promised Monday to call a vote possibly changing Senate rules on the filibuster if Republicans block a vote on voting rights.

U.S. News // 45 minutes ago

AT&T, Verizon say they will not delay 5G services near airports

Jan. 3 (UPI) -- AT&T and Verizon told federal officials in a letter on Sunday they would not postpone the rollout of 5G wireless services near airports, rebuffing calls by transportation officials to do so.



The House staffer quit after awakening one night and imagining a pack of Proud Boys amassing outside his apartment door. Another left after questioning whether strangers he encountered had helped plot the insurrection. A police officer resigned, still agitated by the frantic voices of co-workers she recalled hearing on her radio scanner that day.

"What's the plan?" one had asked.

"I've got an officer down!" another had shouted.

A year ago, they all worked at the U.S. Capitol, a citadel of American democracy they believed was as impervious to attack as any center of Washington power. But Jan. 6, 2021, upended all that. An invading mob of Donald Trump's followers destroyed that sense of security — not only on that day but in the long year that followed.

"There's a dark cloud over Capitol Hill," said Jodi Breiterman, a Capitol Police officer who submitted retirement papers in November after almost 21 years on the force, and will officially leave the agency in mid-January. "I look at officers' faces, and they've changed. They've lost weight and they don't know why."

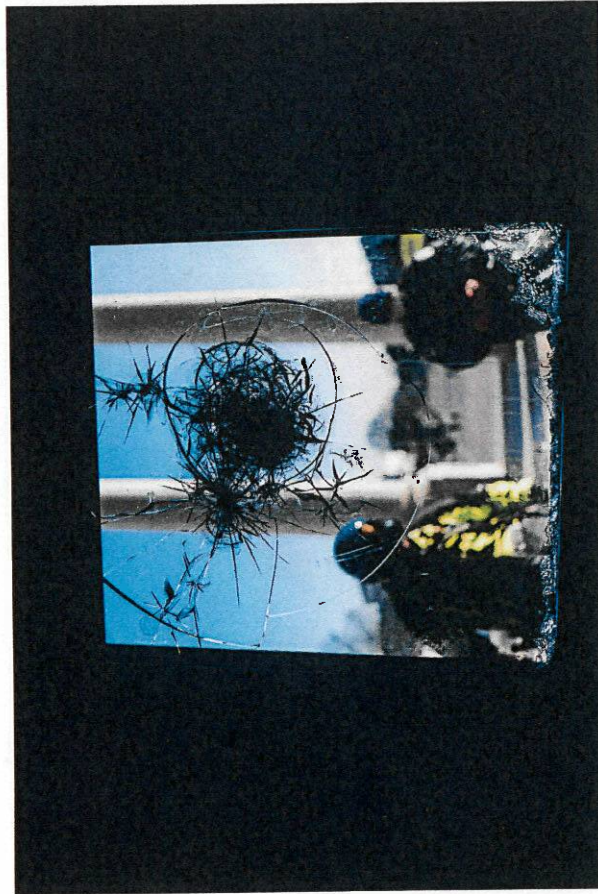
In the months since the insurrection, senators and representatives have chronicled the trauma of Jan. 6, recalling how they covered behind seats in the House chamber and barricaded themselves in offices as Trump acolytes pounded on doors and shouted threats of violence.

Yet alongside the political leaders, there were hundreds of Capitol workers who suffered their own trauma that day. They are the supporting cast on the edges of Washington's biggest stage: the legislative aides, police officers, custodians and cafeteria workers who keep the business of government moving and ensure that the Capitol is safe, clean and well-functioning.

In many cases, they soldiered on after the insurrection, entrenched in positions that can be high-pressure and demanding even on routine days. But for other Capitol workers, Jan. 6 became a psychic tipping point, a reason to leave jobs that had made them targets for threats and potential danger.

Shaken by the Jan. 6 attack, Capitol workers quit jobs that once made them proud

The trauma suffered by thousands of legislative aides, police officers and blue-collar workers after the insurrection has prompted some to leave the Capitol



Capitol Police are seen through the broken glass of a Rotunda door at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 7, 2021, the day after hundreds of rioters stormed the premises. (Melina Mara/The Washington Post)

By [Paul Schwartzman](#) and [Peter Jamison](#)

Yesterday at 1:54 p.m. EST

"The idea that you're in a place where your life is at risk was just -- on top of everything else -- the clinching factor for me," said Rich Luchette, 35, a former senior adviser to Rep. David N. Ciollino (D-R.I.). "It becomes overwhelming at some point."

A sign of the enduring trauma, Luchette said, occurred a week or so after the insurrection, when the sounds of partying neighbors woke him up in his Navy Yard apartment. As he opened his eyes, his first thought was: "Are there Proud Boys out in the hallway?"

Luchette had considered looking for a new job before Jan. 6. By July, he had found one.

In any given year, staff turnover at the Capitol is constant, making it difficult to quantify the number of employees who quit or retired because of the insurrection. More than 100 U.S. Capitol Police officers had departed as of early December, a figure that was a sharp increase over the previous year.

On a typical day, the 290-acre Capitol complex is a veritable city unto itself, spread out over multiple blocks, with its own subway system, an array of cafeterias and a workforce approaching 30,000 people.

Jan. 6 was anything but typical, with the coronavirus having kept many employees at home. Yet, no matter where they were as the insurrection unfolded, Capitol employees could not help but feel violated as they saw rioters invade and vandalize their workplace.

Another former House staffer, a Democrat who quit months after Jan. 6, said the toll of that day grew as time passed.

"I got to the point where my mental health just took an absolute nose dive because I was still trying to process all this stuff," said the former aide, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because she fears retribution from Trump supporters.

Death threats continued to arrive daily by phone from constituents who were convinced that Democrats had stolen the election. "It absolutely broke me to know that people would be fine if my boss was dead, if I was dead, if my co-workers were dead," she said. "The American people stopped believing in the institution. And if they don't believe in it, what the hell are any of us doing working for it?"

Tyree Douglas, 34, knew long before Jan. 6 that he wanted out of his laborer job at the Capitol, where he felt underpaid and trapped after 10 years of picking up garbage, delivering cups and ice to members' offices, and cleaning bathrooms, if needed.

Douglas, a cancer survivor, had taken a medical leave at the start of the pandemic. Although he was not working on Jan. 6, he said the insurrection was another signal that he should not return. "The dangers, the risks were not helpful," he said. "I did not need that in my life."

But Douglas, who was then president of AFSCME union Local 626, which represents hundreds of laborers and custodians, said few blue-collar workers could afford to quit after the attack, even if they wanted to leave.

Hours after the riot ended, some were back at work, repairing doors, removing broken furniture and cleaning up cigarette butts, shattered glass and other trash left behind.

'An ever-present fear'

By Jan. 6, the usual rigors of working at the Capitol had mushroomed after four years of the turbulent Trump presidency, the unceasing acrimony between Republicans and Democrats, and hostility from constituents. The pandemic, in its 10th month, added another level of unprecedented strain.

After the insurrection, heavily armed platoons of National Guard troops and 10-foot-high fencing surrounded the campus.

Yet there were additional incidents that caused alarm. Later in January, police arrested a 71-year-old man from West Virginia after noticing him leaving his car improperly parked near the Capitol. In his vehicle, they found a handgun, 20 rounds of ammunition, paperwork related to the Jan. 6 rally, and a list of U.S. and state lawmakers.

A few months later, a motorist rammed his car into two Capitol Police officers, killing one and injuring the other.

Then, in August, a Trump supporter who had expressed disgust for President Biden parked his pickup truck outside the Library of Congress and told police he had a bomb. That his claim turned out to be false did not ease the anxiety engulfing the Capitol.

"There is definitely just this large sense of doom," said Aaron Fritschner, who has remained in his job as deputy chief of staff to Rep. Don Beyer (D-Va.). "There's definitely an ever-present fear about what kind of threats are out there, but at this point it's not as much a question about 'Is there going to be another one?' It's like, 'How long is it going to be and what form is it going to take?'"

'Are you okay?'

Brian Baird, a former Democratic congressman from Washington state and a longtime clinical psychologist, visited the Capitol in early December for a series of meetings. As he walked between offices, Baird said he was astonished by the sorrow he detected as he greeted police officers, some of whom he had known from his days as a legislator.

"Whereas before the people would always be very positive, upbeat, conversational and positive, there was now more a sense of withdrawal, tension, sadness, resignation," Baird recalled in an email. He described the mood as "heartbreaking despondency."

"I saw one officer who I hadn't met before and I asked him point-blank, 'How are you all doing?'" Baird said. "His answer in words was 'We're doing okay' but the way he said it and the expression did not look or sound at all okay."

By early December, a total of 135 officers had left the 2,000-member Capitol police force in 2021, compared with the 80 who departed the previous year, said Tim Barber, a department spokesman. He added that "not all of these departures are because of Jan. 6."

A police officer who confronted the rioters that day said he remains on the job only because he has not worked long enough to retire with adequate benefits and has no other options available. He described his emotional recovery as difficult, in part because he did not get time off. On Jan. 7, he was back on the job.

The officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject, said an especially painful part of his post-Jan. 6 experience was hearing Republicans minimize the insurrection's significance. One even compared the rioters to tourists. At moments, the officer said, he has had to pass those same lawmakers in the halls of Congress.

"You sign up to do your job for the right reasons and all that stuff and then you see people don't even appreciate what you've been through," he said. "You've got people that we protect that were literally out there pumping the crowd up. What the f---?"

Jodi Breiterman's two-decade career with the Capitol Police had its ups and downs. She was honored as officer of the year in 2011. But after she leaked a photo of an unattended police firearm to a reporter in 2015, she was demoted from sergeant, and later filed a lawsuit against the agency alleging gender discrimination. But through it all, she loved her job and envisioned staying another 10 years — until Jan. 6.

The events of that day and the ensuing weeks of distress altered her plan.

On the day of the insurrection, Breiterman was part of a group of officers who responded to a bomb threat near the Capitol. Away from the worst of the fray, Breiterman listened as her police radio transmitted the panicked calls for help from fellow officers who were battling the mob outside the Capitol. Months later, she said the voices from her radio still intrude on her thoughts at the most unlikely moments.

"When I take a shower, I hear the radio," she said. "The calls were terrible."

For 22 consecutive days beginning on Jan. 6, Breiterman worked around-the-clock, staying in a D.C. hotel where the department put her up with other officers whose grueling schedules kept them away from their families.

She eventually resumed a normal schedule, commuting from her home in Maryland. As weeks stretched into months after the attack, the National Guard troops eventually left their posts and lawmakers returned to work. But something was different, she said. The anger, terror and despair that had consumed the Capitol on Jan. 6 never seemed to recede.

All the while, Breiterman said, officers seldom talked about what had transpired.

"Are you okay?" she recalled asking a fellow officer whose vacant stare alarmed her.

"No," the officer replied. "I'm not."

'Anything could happen'

When he left the Capitol complex late on Jan. 6, Jabir McKnight, then the communications director for Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Tex.), arranged for a friend to pick up him and a co-worker in a car.

At another time, McKnight might have called an Uber. But in the hours after the insurrection, he wondered if his driver could have been part of the mob at the Capitol, some of whom carried Confederate flags and shouted racial epithets.

"You didn't know who was who," said McKnight, who is Black, describing a feeling of uncertainty that metastasized as the days passed. He found himself questioning how the insurrectionists had been able to traverse the Capitol as if they knew where they were going and gain access to places he himself could not get into.

"The way they were navigating the building was among the most frightening parts of the experience," he said. "Were you let in? Did you have prior understanding?"

McKnight, 24, had started his job only seven months earlier, arriving in Washington from Philadelphia, where he grew up before graduating from Lincoln University. Although he had no set plan, he expected to work at the Capitol for a year or two, maybe longer, gaining exposure to politics, policy and the ways of Washington.

But Jan. 6 created a "fork in the road," he said. The riot echoed the vitriol of the white supremacist march in Charlottesville in 2017 and a 2020 plot orchestrated by extremists to kidnap Democratic Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

McKnight began to reevaluate his purpose and how he could be "part of positive change in a way that is most authentic for me." He also was concerned about his safety at work, where he now felt like "anything could happen."

"It wasn't a one-day event," he said of Jan. 6, recalling the weeks of round-the-clock news coverage, mounting security and fear of new attacks. "I wasn't comfortable. We were all uncomfortable."

By the end of February, McKnight had taken a new job at an IT consulting firm.

Others such as Gabby Richards were already exhausted by the tumult of Trump's presidency, his tweets, the debates over his border policy, impeachment, the Mueller report and the pandemic.

But Jan. 6 became the decisive factor in her departure, the moment that "pushed me over the edge," said Richards, 28, who left her job in February as communications director for Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon (D-Pa.). "You get to the point where you're like, 'Okay, we're done.'"

Richards was working from home in Philadelphia on Jan. 6, communicating throughout the insurrection with her boss, who was alone, barricaded inside her Capitol office. In the ensuing days, Richards found herself cataloging the "what-ifs" from that day — what if there had been no pandemic and the Capitol had been open? What if there had been the normal routine of staffers on hand? What if there had been school tours and tourists?

"The what-ifs associated with that day are terrifying in the same vein as what happened," she said.

A month after the insurrection, Richards returned to the Capitol and walked with Scanlon through Statuary Hall, a setting that typically inspired in her a sense of awe. Instead, she could not help but think about the insurrectionists who had been there, an association she compared to the "stencil" of a house fire that takes "forever to get out."

"It felt like something bad had happened, and I didn't want to be there anymore," she said.

Democrats were not the only ones who felt anguish.

A former Republican staffer who was at the Capitol complex on the day of the riot said it was difficult for aides within her caucus to cope with what had occurred as many GOP leaders began downplaying the attack's severity.

"There was just a lack of candid conversations about what had taken place," said the staffer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the politically sensitive nature of the subject. She said she was shaken to know that a mob riled by a Republican president — the leader of her party — had gone to the Capitol and done "the worst possible thing they could do."

"These were the very people we were supposed to be working on behalf of," she said.

'We're gonna kill you!'

Months after the insurrection, Jay Rupert has grown accustomed to recurring dreams of the mob storming into his office inside the Capitol, above the entrance to the East Front, where he had locked himself in with a cluster of journalists.

In actuality, the rioters had screamed, "We're gonna get you!" and "We're gonna kill you!" as they banged on the door. But no one had made it inside, except for in his dream, where he is prepared to fight.

"I want to bash them in the face," said Rupert, 49, deputy director of the House Periodical Press Gallery. "I can only do it in my dream."

Another House employee, a friend he's known for more than two decades, was shaken enough by Jan. 6 to leave. But Rupert said that the mob had only made him more committed to the Capitol, where he has worked in various capacities for 25 years.

"I came to that defiant conclusion that night," he said. "You're not going to stop me from doing what I do."

The constant reminders of that day — the ubiquitous video footage, the unrelenting news coverage — have made the past year daunting.

When he walks downstairs from his office to the area inside the entrance of the East Front, he often thinks about what he saw that day as the mob assembled outside — "the faces in the windows," their expressions twisted with rage.

He remembers the police officer who looked at him and warned, "You gotta get the f--- outta here." He remembers looking at his boss and saying, "How did this happen?" In his office, he remembers grabbing a fire extinguisher he would use to pummel anyone if they got through the door.

Several months later, after reading an article about police miscommunications on that day, he punched his kitchen wall out of frustration. On another day, when a relative compared the insurrectionists to people who protested the Vietnam War, he replied: "Don't go there with me. It won't end well."

A year removed, he said he largely feels secure at the Capitol, that the insurrection was a "once-in-a-lifetime occurrence." But he also acknowledges a "sliver of doubt" when he thinks about the complex reopening to the public.

When that happens, he said, it will be impossible to know if someone who had been part of the mob is "in my hallway taking a tour."

What if they sneak a knife in, he wonders. What if they find his office?

The thought, he said, "makes my head want to explode."

Meagan Flynn, Tom Jackman, Peter Herrmann and Aaron C. Davis contributed to this report.

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Schumer says Senate will vote by Jan. 17 on changing rules if GOP continues to block voting rights legislation

By John Wagner

Today at 2:12 p.m. EST



Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) told colleagues Monday that the chamber would vote no later than the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday on changing Senate rules if Republicans continue to block voting rights legislation.

The announcement of the planned action by Jan. 17 represented Schumer's strongest endorsement yet of trying to muscle through legislation that has been stymied because of Senate rules requiring a 60-vote threshold.

"We hope our Republican colleagues change course and work with us," Schumer said in a letter. "But if they do not, the Senate will debate and consider changes to Senate rules on or before January 17, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, to protect the foundation of our democracy: free and fair elections."

For the strategy to succeed, however, Schumer will need buy-in from two fellow Democrats — Sens. Joe Manchin III (W.Va.) and Kyrsten Sinema (Ariz.) — who have voiced skepticism or opposition to changing Senate procedures in a way that would be needed to push voting rights priorities across the finish line.

With Republicans unified against Democrats' plans, the only way to pass legislation is to alter Senate filibuster rules. That would mean all 50 Democrats uniting in favor of both a rule change and underlying legislation.

In his letter, Schumer argued that the issue of voting rights presents one case where changing Senate rules is warranted.

"We must ask ourselves: if the right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy, then how can we in good conscience allow for a situation in which the Republican Party can debate and pass voter suppression laws at the State level with only a simple majority vote, but not allow the United States Senate to do the same?" he wrote. "We must adapt. The Senate must evolve, like it has many times before."

Republicans blasted Schumer for threatening to change the rules.

"Senator Schumer's rash, partisan power grab should be seen for what it is — desperation and a failure to do what Joe Biden and Democrats ran on: unity," Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) said in a statement.

Lee, who supported previous filibuster rule changes backed by then-Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (K-Ky.), said that Schumer's "disastrous plan must be stopped."

In his letter, Schumer also made clear that Democrats will use this week's anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection to build the case for protecting voting rights.

"Make no mistake about it: this week Senate Democrats will make clear that what happened on January 6th and the one-sided, partisan actions being taken by Republican-led state legislatures across the country are directly linked, and we can and must take strong action to stop this antidemocratic march," he said.

Schumer assailed former president Donald Trump, who has perpetuated the false claim that the 2020 presidential election was rigged, and Republicans who have embraced and promoted that widely debunked allegation.

"Much like the violent insurrectionists who stormed the U.S. Capitol nearly one year ago, Republican officials in states across the country have seized on the former president's Big Lie about widespread voter fraud to enact anti-democratic legislation and seize control of typically non-partisan election administration functions," Schumer wrote.

Mike DeBonis contributed to this report.





How to Reform the Filibuster

Posted: December 21, 2021

How to Reform the Filibuster

Al Franken and Norm Ornstein

With the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill (BIB) and the impending passage of the Build Back Better legislation, Congress is ready to move on to its next urgent priority—protecting our elections and voters from disruption, chicanery and voter suppression. With the laws racing through a number of states that enable partisan actors to remove or intimidate election officials, use outrageous tactics to threaten poll workers and suppress votes, and with what we know about the background of the violent insurrection on January 6, there is clearly an existential threat to the most fundamental bedrock of our democracy.

The Freedom to Vote Act, a product of compromise involving Joe Manchin, Amy Klobuchar and other Democratic senators, and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act (VRA) would together provide major protection against attempts to overturn the results of a legitimate election while making voting easier for eligible Americans. But both efforts have been filibustered by a nearly united phalanx of Republicans in the Senate, with only Lisa Murkowski of Alaska willing to buck party leader Mitch McConnell. This despite the fact that Manchin sought vigorously to recruit Republicans to support his broader compromise, and that McConnell and many other Senate Republicans were co-sponsors of the last Voting Rights Act in 2006—one the new version only seeks to restore after it was gutted by the Supreme Court's Shelby County decision.

Under the current rule, 60 of the 100 senators are needed to vote for cloture, to end debate and move to action. Because the motion to proceed to debate and vote can itself be filibustered, when the VRA was brought up recently, it did not even get the courtesy of a debate about its efficacy and importance—it just died because only 51 senators were willing to vote for cloture.

There is only one way to make possible the passage and enactment of these essential bills—and that is to change the rules of the Senate to give a fighting chance for a majority to be able to debate and vote to protect

our democracy. But here is the rub—doing so requires all 50 Democrats to join together for a rules change, and at least two have made clear that they will neither eliminate the filibuster or weaken it for legislation.

What to do? For a decade, we have joined together to promote an idea that does not eliminate the filibuster or weaken it. One that restores the filibuster to its longstanding role, where the burden was on the minority to make its case to the public as to why the majority is wrong, where long sessions of the Senate with debate on a critical national issue could inform the public, and where the filibuster was used only for those issues of great national moment. The need to get a supermajority was an incentive for both majority and minority to find broad support via compromise, to avoid the long sessions and disruption of routine.

A little background on why the filibuster was distorted from its original purpose: in 1975, the rule, Rule XXII, was changed in a way that appeared to make it easier to invoke cloture. Before the change, 2/3rds of senators present and voting were needed; the rules change reduced the number to 3/5ths—but crucially, made it 3/5ths of the entire Senate. Removing the present and voting standard created an opening for a very different dynamic, one which took decades to eventuate but which has transformed the Senate.

With a present and voting standard, the majority could make the Senate go around the clock, requiring the minority doing the filibuster to be around—sleeping on cots outside the chamber in case a 3am vote was called. If 25 senators were absent, the threshold for ending debate would be only 50, not 67. With an absolute standard, the minority did not need to be present at all—only one or two would need to be nearby, to keep the majority from acting by unanimous consent.

When Barack Obama became president, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell saw an opening to transform the rule to stymie Obama and the Democrats, calling for filibusters on nearly every action, even those that had unanimous or near unanimous support. The idea was to kill many of Obama's priorities, but just as much to delay action and obstruct by using precious floor time to overcome the filibuster effort. Once a senator says, "I will filibuster," by denying unanimous consent to move forward, it takes two days for a cloture motion to ripen, then a series of votes, and if the required 60 is reached, it can be followed by 30 hours of post-cloture debate before action—and on legislation, multiply by two because of the need to get cloture first on the motion to proceed, then again on the bill. The "debate," such as it was, did not have to be germane or refer to the issue at hand. In one debate, Ted Cruz read Green Eggs and Ham.

For Franken, the absurdity of this became clear early in his Senate service, when he told a Republican colleague to have a nice weekend and would see him on Monday. The senator, Jim Bunning of Kentucky, said "No you won't. It's a cloture vote. I don't have to be here. You do." As the use of the rule as a weapon of mass obstruction mushroomed under McConnell, it became clear that there was no longer any incentive for the minority to compromise, when with no effort it could stymie the majority in its tracks, causing major political damage. Compromises, when they occur, are now either on issues that are well below the radar, or when the minority sees strategic advantage for the next election—something we saw with the BIB.

After his encounter with Bunning, Franken called Ornstein to find a way to end the absurdity, and the result was this: flip the numbers from 60 required to end debate to 41 required to continue it, moving the burden from the majority to the minority. Require 41 to be on the floor at all times, and to debate the issue at hand, germanely. The minority could still prevail—the majority would have to stop all other business to go around the clock, and might decide after some time to cut its losses and move on to other issues, if the minority made its determination clear. But it would require a major effort by the minority to accomplish its ends. And for both sides, bipartisan compromise might be the best way to ease any mutual burdens.

Joe Manchin, a vocal opponent of ending or weakening the filibuster, has spoken favorably about this change. It answers every objection and hesitation about change made by him, Kyrsten Sinema, and other Democrats in the Senate. It fits within the traditions and norms of the Senate. If it were enacted, the Senate might again become a deliberative body, but one that can act when the times demand it. And the times certainly demand it now.



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What's ahead for 'Build Back Better': 4 scenarios

By Jeremy Dillon, Emma Dumain, Nick Sobczyk, George Cahlink | 01/03/2022 06:22 AM EST



Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chair Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) at the Capitol. Talks with Manchin in the coming days will help decide the future of the budget reconciliation package. Francis Chung/E&E News

Congress returns this week with President Biden's social spending and climate package hanging by a thread after Sen. Joe Manchin threw the effort into chaos last month.

How the Senate responds to the West Virginia Democrat's blockade will be the question of the year as more than \$1.7 trillion — including a record \$555 billion for climate-inspired initiatives — hangs in the balance.

Democrats have vowed to return to negotiations following Manchin's public proclamation that he would oppose the reconciliation package as currently constructed.

“Let’s go back to the table, let’s get this done, it is too important for us,” Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.), chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said on MSNBC’s “Sunday Show” with Jonathan Capehart.

Last month, a frustrated Jayapal called on the president to use his executive powers to secure policies on climate and other priorities, but there has been a growing consensus around salvaging “Build Back Better.”

Senate Democrats intend to force a vote on the package this month to put lawmakers on record, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) announced in late December (*Greenwire* (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2021/12/22/schumer-promises-january-vote-on-climate-spending-bill-284632>), Dec. 22, 2021).

That vote is expected to fail, but may serve as the catalyst for renewed efforts on the package. Over the holiday break, multiple Democrats said they remained confident that the bill would pass, though in reduced form.

Jayapal said yesterday her goal was to dial back the bill to the framework negotiated over the summer by multiple players, including Manchin.

“What we hope now, and what I know the president is working on with Sen. Manchin, is to go back to the original framework that he committed to,” she said.

Jayapal argued that only a few provisions, “maybe 10 percent” of the House-passed bill, [H.R. 5376](https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/BILLS-117HR5376RH-RCP117-18.pdf) (<https://rules.house.gov/sites/democrats.rules.house.gov/files/BILLS-117HR5376RH-RCP117-18.pdf>), were things he hadn’t agreed to.

“He also agreed to the provisions around climate change,” she said. “Those were already negotiated from what we had originally wanted,” but she said she still considered them “a significant investment on really taking on climate and reducing carbon emissions.”

Here’s a breakdown of four scenarios for how Congress could proceed:

1. Go small

Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) both made clear late last year that efforts to pass the “Build Back Better Act” would continue into 2022. That might very well mean negotiating a smaller package.

Democratic leaders and the White House have already twice scaled back their ambitions: from \$6 trillion to \$3.5 trillion, then down to \$1.7 trillion. While liberals grouched about the myriad concessions that had to be made to accommodate smaller price tags, Senate Budget Chair Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Jayapal were ultimately happy to tout the significant policy gains that would be achieved in the compromise bills.

If top negotiators are able to work with Manchin on a bill closer to his original \$1.5 trillion ballpark, there’s a not impossible scenario in which Sanders, Jayapal and their allies would continue to stand by that even smaller bill for the good of the party, boasting it would still make historic investments in climate and social welfare spending.

Environmental advocates, too, would likely be hard-pressed to publicly complain about legislation that would still spend a record number of dollars fighting the climate crisis, even if the climate portion of the overall reconciliation bill is whittled below the current \$550 billion mark.

At the same time, making cuts to the existing legislation is going to be a grueling, painful process, and there’s no guarantee lawmakers will be able to find satisfactory compromises in a 50-50 Senate and a House in which Democrats only enjoy their majority by a three-vote margin.

In the climate space, the first cuts could go to programs addressing natural solutions to combat climate change, like funding for coastal resiliency and wildfire mitigation on public lands.

Interior Department initiatives were originally going to be excluded entirely from the reconciliation bill until lawmakers and advocates fought to have that funding reinstated, a sign that the chief negotiators consider these line items expendable when stacked up against programs that would directly reduce emissions.

A final showdown could also take place around the imposition of a methane fee, which Manchin opposes as a punitive “natural gas tax” during a period of high inflation he has blamed for his opposition to advancing the larger, more expensive bill (*E&E Daily* (<https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2021/12/21/hill-climate-hawks-mull-next-steps-after-bills-collapse-284570>), Dec. 21, 2021).

2. No deal

Even for Democrats vowing to return to negotiations in the new year, Manchin’s opposition may be too much to overcome.

That could mean no deal at all ahead of the 2022 midterm elections, and the bill’s demise. Most prognosticators see Democrats losing seats in the House in November, imperiling their majority there. The Senate is likewise considered in danger for the party.

Outside the climate portions of the package, Manchin has still not consented to allowing an expansion of the child tax credit. Excluding that provision is considered a dealbreaker for many Democrats. And even though Jayapal discussed compromise yesterday, progressives have also been cool to keep shrinking the bill.

Manchin has been upfront about his concerns about the package, especially as it relates to inflation and the national debt. Those concerns are unlikely to ease in the first weeks of 2022, which could further entrench the Energy and Natural Resources Committee chair.

Bad blood between Manchin and White House staff may also prove problematic. Manchin allies have blamed leaks from the White House and its decision to blame him for the bill’s delay as souring the senator to the entire budget reconciliation effort. Burnt bridges need to be repaired.

Manchin was direct in his criticism of “Build Back Better” and deployed GOP talking points. The White House responded by accusing the senator of breaking his word. But both sides seem to have cooled that heated rhetoric after Manchin and Biden talked via phone before Christmas, according to POLITICO.

Still, Manchin’s statement of opposition specifically targeted the climate portion of the bill as a key hurdle to his support. As part of that statement, he cited a fear that the bill’s provisions could disrupt grid reliability.

“If enacted, the bill will also risk the reliability of our electric grid and increase our dependence on foreign supply chains,” he said. “The energy transition my colleagues seek is already well underway in the United States of America.”

Manchin already killed a key policy to address climate change, the Clean Electricity Performance Program, and he has publicly raised doubts about electric vehicle tax credits and charging grants.

Even if the White House can get Manchin on board again, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) also remains a wild card. And some of Manchin’s goals, including raising taxes on the rich, have encountered Sinema’s veto. The right balance could prove difficult to find.

3. Climate breakout

Some Democrats have suggested salvaging the situation by breaking the “Build Back Better Act” into chunks. That would mean separating the \$555 billion in climate spending from the rest of the package and passing it individually.

Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) suggested the strategy just hours after Manchin announced his opposition to the full legislation earlier this month.

In theory, that has some appeal. While Manchin's objections to certain climate provisions sent a shudder through the green advocacy community, most observers think he would be amenable to a climate bill with some tweaks to satisfy his concerns.

Manchin had been negotiating with Environment and Public Works Chair Tom Carper (D-Del.) on the bill's methane fee, but that matter was not seen as a hurdle to the clean energy tax credit expansions that make up the bulk of the climate spending.

But for now, there appears to be little appetite among Democrats for a breakaway package. For one, it seems impossible the party could get enough Republicans to join them in the effort.

Democrats could have multiple opportunities this year to pass legislation through budget reconciliation, the process they are using to skirt the Senate filibuster, meaning they could do more than one package on a party-line vote.

But process is time consuming, and Manchin has said repeatedly that he agreed to move forward with the current budget reconciliation effort to undo part of the Republicans' tax reform law. He has also been reluctant to set policy along party lines.

"In the last two years, as Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and with bipartisan support, we have invested billions of dollars into clean energy technologies so we can continue to lead the world in reducing emissions through innovation," Manchin said in his December statement.

4. Spending bills

If climate legislation can't move via the reconciliation package, lawmakers are likely to rely on the annual spending bills to bulk up agencies' work on Democratic energy and environmental priorities.

Congress is currently working on an omnibus spending package for fiscal 2022, with a goal of finishing by Feb. 18 when current stopgap funding expires.

Under proposed fiscal 2022 spending bills, lawmakers are already eyeing record investments in clean energy research at the Energy Department, major increases in climate work across the government, and adding 1,000 workers at both EPA and Interior Department.

While the spending bills are not on the scale of the hundreds of billions of spending proposed in the "Build Back Better" legislation for climate, they could provide new money for environmental justice programs, a Civilian Climate Corps and resiliency.

Democrats and Republicans, however, have been unable to agree on overall spending levels. Democrats are pressing for record discretionary spending levels for domestic agencies and only modest increases for national security agencies. Republicans say both need to be raised equally.

After weeks of little negotiation, top appropriators in mid-December began weekly meetings on the omnibus — a sign they are eager to find a deal. But it remains to be seen if in a polarized Congress compromise is possible.

"I hope it will help advance the process," Senate Appropriations Chair Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) said. "The alternative to completing the appropriations process is a full-year continuing resolution, which does not serve the American people and locks in outdated spending priorities."

An appropriations failure would be another blow for the Democrats' agenda on climate and other issues. That's why Republicans have been open to level spending for the rest of the year.

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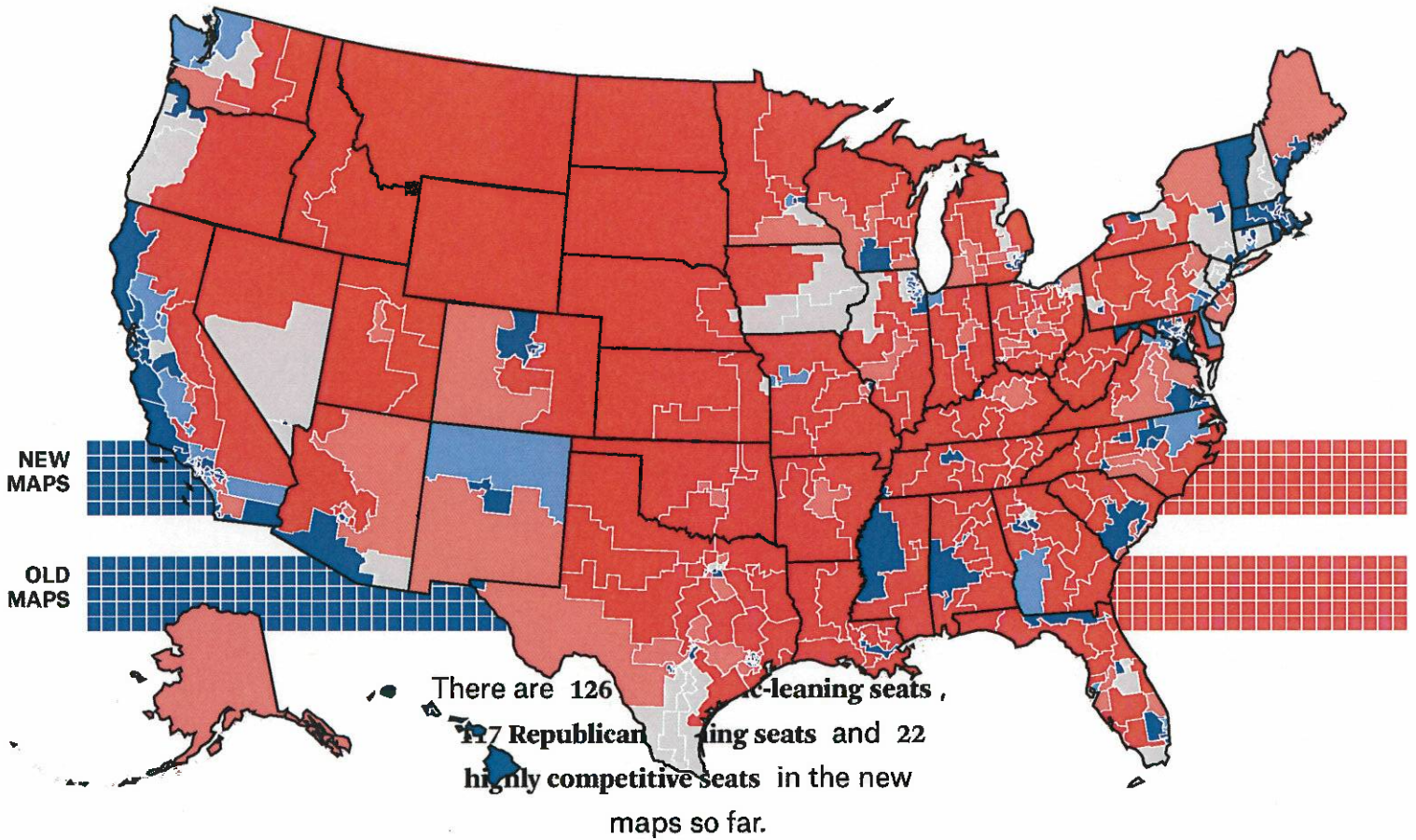
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NEW MAPS OLD MAPS



Change from old maps: +6 Democratic-leaning seats, -1 Republican-leaning seat, -4 highly competitive seats.

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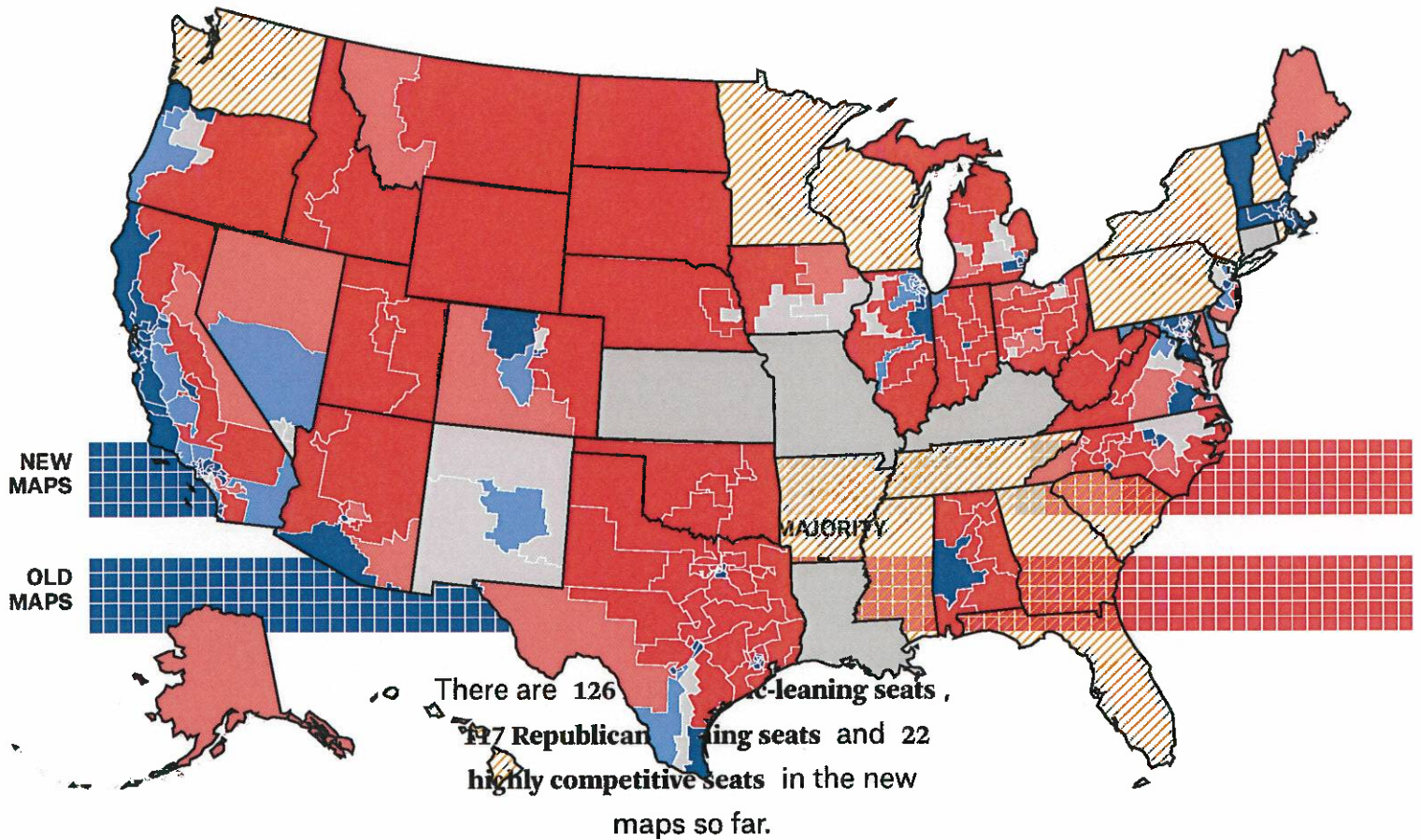
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☐ STATES WITH PROPOSED MAPS

NEW MAPS OLD MAPS



Change from old maps: +6 Democratic-leaning seats, -1 Republican-leaning seat, -4 highly competitive seats.

Twenty-five states — most recently **California**, **Michigan** and **Virginia** — have now finished redrawing their congressional maps (not counting the six states with only one congressional district). And several other states are already deep into the process. For instance, 10 maps have already been proposed in **Florida**, and **Georgia's** new map has already been drawn and is simply awaiting the governor's signature.

At this point, redistricting has created six more Democratic-leaning seats nationally, one fewer Republican-leaning seat and four fewer highly competitive seats. However, because many of those newly blue seats are already held by Democrats, it's actually Republicans who have **gained a handful of House seats** through the redistricting process so far. Republicans have also converted light-red districts into safer seats in states like **Indiana**, **Oklahoma** and **Utah**.

Overall, redistricting hasn't drastically changed the House landscape so far — but that's good news for Republicans, since the old maps already **tilted the House playing field in their favor**. Some of the most heavily biased maps this cycle have been enacted by Republicans in **North Carolina** and **Ohio**, but they are also so extreme that they run the risk of being overturned in court. There are already lawsuits alleging that they are **partisan or racial gerrymanders**.

A few states are running into more trouble redrawing their lines, particularly those where the two parties share redistricting power. A bipartisan redistricting commission in **Connecticut** failed to meet its deadlines to approve a map, kicking its redistricting process to the state supreme court. And redistricting looks destined to be decided by a court in **Wisconsin**, too, where the Democratic governor has vetoed the map passed by the Republican legislature.

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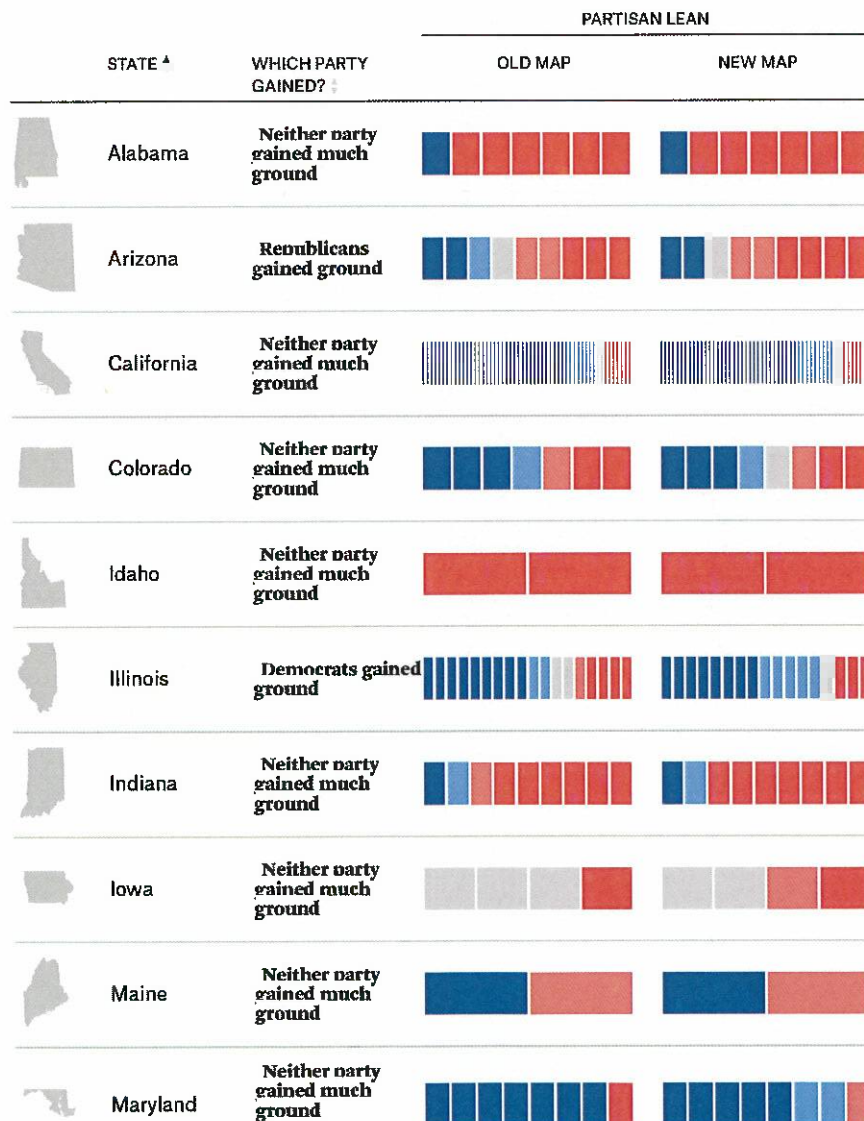
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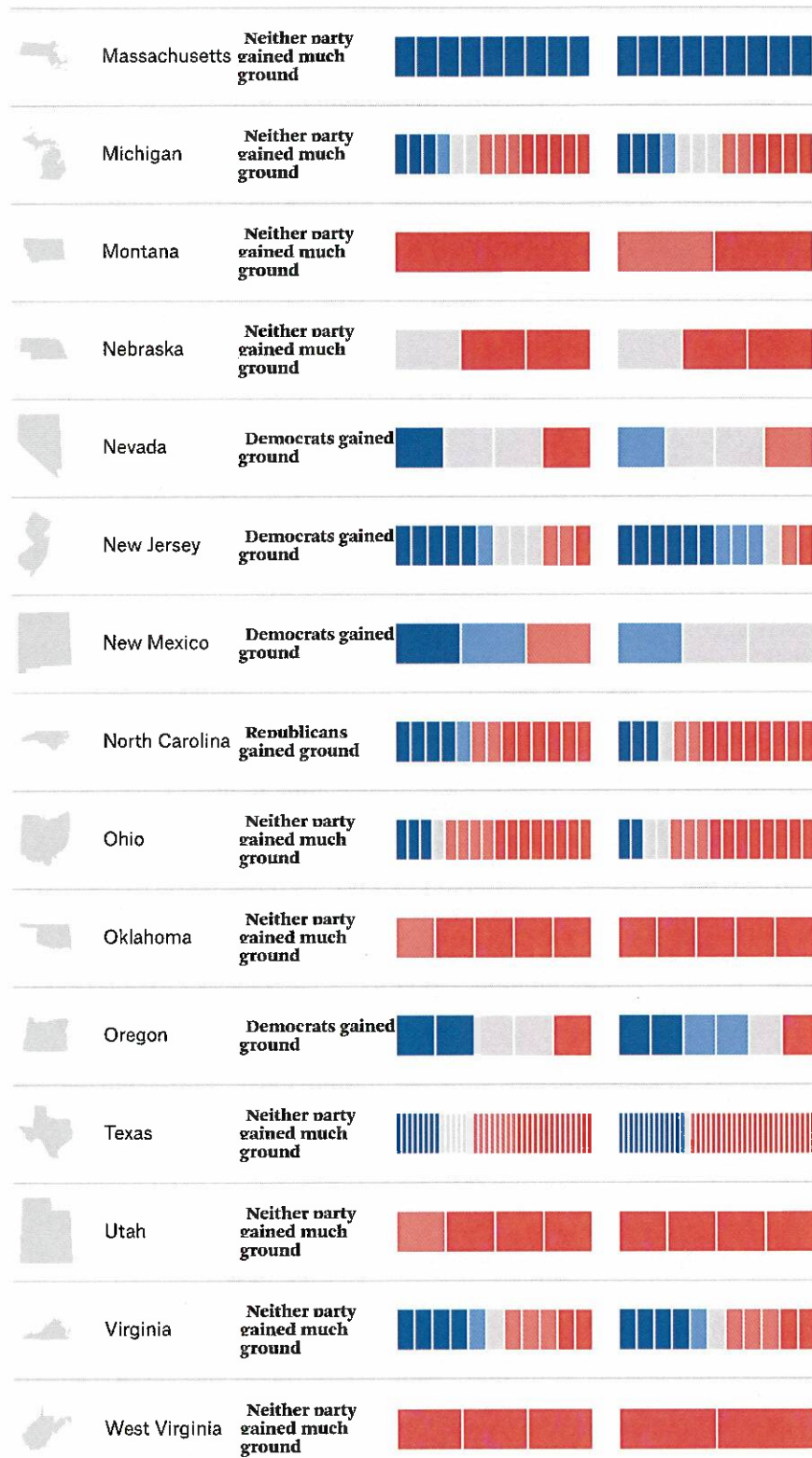
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Which party gained the most ground in each state's new map, along with how red or blue its old and new districts are based on partisan lean






























































When we can expect new state maps

Final deadlines for each state to have approved congressional maps, including how far along it is in the process and how red or blue its current districts are based on partisan lean

STATE ^	DEADLINE STATUS	PARTISAN LEAN	
		OLD MAP	NEW MAP

	Arkansas	2022	proposed		
	Connecticut	Dec. 21, 2021	No maps proposed		
	Florida	June 13, 2022	10 maps proposed		
	Georgia	March 7, 2022	3 maps proposed		
	Hawaii	Feb. 27, 2022	2 maps proposed		
	Kansas	June 1, 2022	No maps proposed		
	Kentucky	Jan. 7, 2022	No maps proposed		
	Louisiana	July 22, 2022	No maps proposed		
	Minnesota	Feb. 15, 2022	7 maps proposed		
	Mississippi	March 1, 2022	1 map proposed		
	Missouri	Feb. 22, 2022	No maps proposed		
	New Hampshire	June 1, 2022	2 maps proposed		
	New York	April 4, 2022	2 maps proposed		
	Pennsylvania	Feb. 15, 2022	2 maps proposed		
	Rhode Island	June 27, 2022	1 map proposed		
	South Carolina	March 16, 2022	3 maps proposed		
	Tennessee	April 7, 2022	1 map proposed		
	Washington	Nov. 15, 2021	5 maps proposed		
	Wisconsin	April 15, 2022	6 maps proposed		



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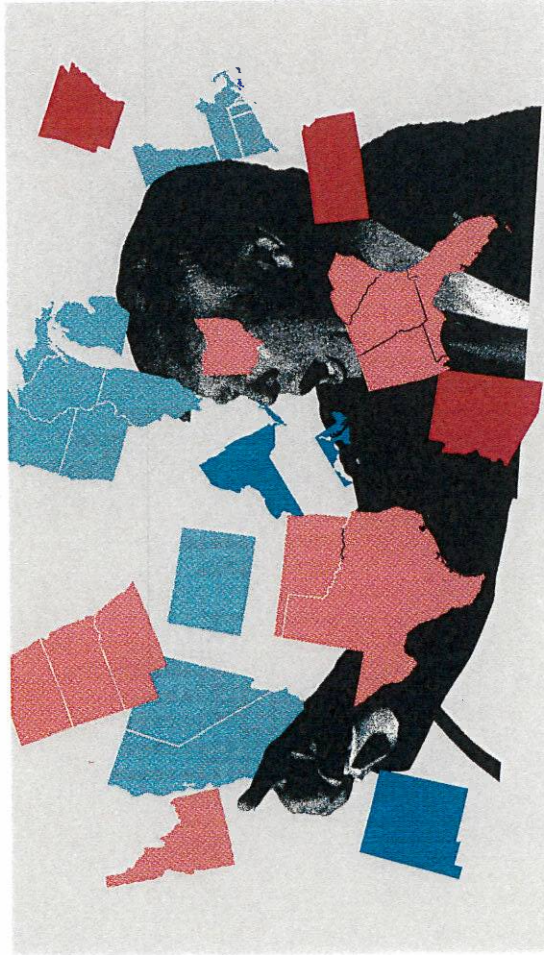
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POLITICS

Trump Is Making the Midterms a Referendum on Himself

The former president is already picking favorites in Republican contests. Whether they win will be a test of his power.

By David Caranese



Getty; The Atlantic

JANUARY 2, 2022, 6 AM ET

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When the 2022 midterm elections are appraised less than a year from now, the Washington commentariat will in all likelihood render them to have been a devastating blow to Joe Biden's presidency.

Barring a historic anomaly, Democrats will have lost at least one chamber of Congress, Biden's remaining legislative goals will be placed on life support, and the growing anguish over the party's 2024 presidential nominee will transform into a panic. Yet even sooner than that, a slice of the most reliable voters will also deliver a tangible verdict on the staying power of another politician who hovers over the next pair of election cycles like no other: the former president, who hardly needs to be named.

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Donald Trump will own the midterms just as much as Joe Biden will. Voters' verdicts on Trump will come in Idaho, Alabama, and Georgia this spring. Then in Arizona, Alaska, and Wyoming in summer. Trump has already endorsed candidates in 2022 primary contests in all of those states. He's made picks in nearly 40 congressional races to date, most recently training his ammunition on the House Republicans who voted for the bipartisan infrastructure package. He's made another nine endorsements in gubernatorial primaries, including one against the GOP incumbent in Idaho.

The former president's ultimate record in these races will serve as the first barometer of his continued strength as he eyes a comeback bid for the White House in 2024. So far, his picks have lifted challengers to GOP incumbents who have crossed him and a bevy of newcomers who are eager to align with his brand.

Make no mistake: Trump is making these picks himself. "I haven't seen a time where Trump is more in control than now," a Republican familiar with the ex-president's staff told me on the condition of anonymity to protect private conversations within Trump's circle. "Susie [Wiles] ain't making endorsement decisions. [Bill] Stepien ain't making endorsement decisions. It's a lot more him making these endorsement decisions than ever before."

[Read: The complicated truth about Trump 2024](#)

Sure, the 45th president will remain the overwhelming front-runner in hypothetical Republican presidential polling throughout the next year. But even his own allies acknowledge that his endorsement success will factor into his decision matrix. And perhaps more importantly, it'll be closely gauged by the fleet of Republicans lying in wait, seeking any shred of Trumpian vulnerability to justify their own 2024 runs.

"It is very important that the candidates that Donald Trump has endorsed prevail a significant majority of the time because that is a strong message to potential competing candidates of how strongly Republican primary voters like him," Representative Mo Brooks, a Trump-backed candidate for U.S. Senate in Alabama, told me, in an assessment that just happens to be self-serving.

Brooks, who appeared at the January 6 rally preceding the U.S. Capitol riot, nabbed Trump's blessing last spring, earning him a giant in-state MAGA rally this summer and a healthy double-digit polling lead even though one of his opponents, Katie Britt, is better funded. Brooks is now the undisputed favorite to be the next senator from Alabama. A Club for Growth survey showed that his support swells when people become aware that he's Trump's candidate.

But Brooks is only a baseline test for Trump. The full extent of the ex-president's power will be measured by his ability to dislodge current officeholders, who already have their own bases of support. At this early moment, he's most obsessed with a trio of targets: Representative Liz Cheney, Senator Lisa Murkowski, and Governor Brian Kemp.

At the top of the list—with no immediate equal—is Cheney. Trump's most vocal GOP critic and foe. Trump talks about Cheney so much that she regularly comes up in meetings with candidates nowhere close to Wyoming, an adviser familiar with the conversations told me.

Since endorsing Harriet Hageman, an attorney and former Trump critic, to take on Cheney, Trump has been engrossed with even minor developments in the campaign. On an almost weekly basis, he marks up printed-out copies of local-news coverage and op-eds with his signature Sharpie pen and mails Hageman notes of encouragement.

"He really wanted to get this right, and I think he feels very confident he did," a former adviser to Trump's presidential campaign who is involved in the Wyoming race told me. "I cannot fathom a possible scenario where Liz Cheney wins."

Trump is also 100 percent committed to defeating Georgia Governor Brian Kemp and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, according to Michael Wolff's book *Landslide*. "I gave her the drilling, but she's always been nasty to me," Trump said of Murkowski, according to Wolff. "The other is Kemp. He's finished."

Trump endorsed Murkowski's opponent, Kelly Tshibaka, out of his sheer disdain for the Senate incumbent, who was one of seven Republicans who voted for conviction in his February impeachment trial. This coming February, Trump will host Tshibaka at Mar-a-Lago for a fundraiser, and he recently warned Alaska's incumbent GOP governor that his endorsement comes with one condition: The governor must not back Murkowski for a fourth term. Murkowski's favorability among Alaska Republicans has been measured at as low as 6 percent, meaning that her only path for reelection relies on Democratic votes.

Trump's contempt for Kemp still simmers from the governor's certification of Georgia's 2020 election results, a normally perfunctory ritual that became a

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scarlet letter of disloyalty in Trumpworld. Notably, Trump was patient in this instance, resisting a snap endorsement of the first Trump-loving candidate to announce a primary challenge to Kemp, and then gradually coaxing former Senator David Perdue into the race.

Trump is the only thing that could upend what should be a historic midterm for the Republican Party. Larry Hogan, the anti-Trump term-limited governor of Maryland who is mulling his own path to the White House, argues. "It's the only way we can blow this thing," he told me. "The people that may try to be more Trumpy to win a primary may be the least electable in the general. That's the biggest worry I have for the Republicans."

Given what happened in Georgia's runoff elections, it's easy to envision a scenario in which Trump meddles so heavily and recklessly in a battleground state that the fallout from the divisiveness costs the party a governorship or a precious Senate seat. He's already suggested that Stacey Abrams, who just launched her second shot at the governorship and harbors her own White House ambitions, might be a better governor than Kemp.

Conversely, if Trump's highest-profile picks run the table, he'll look unstoppable and potentially head into 2024 as a stronger candidate than he was as an incumbent president in 2020.

Trump runs no formal endorsement process. Instead, he relies on spontaneous, freewheeling phone conversations. He's certainly not seeking anyone's approval to make a move, according to those at the other end of the line.

In early August, Trump phoned Senator Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, and the conversation turned to Herschel Walker, the former NFL star who was on the cusp of announcing a Senate campaign in Georgia amid reports he threatened his ex-wife's life and that he exaggerated his finances. (Walker has denied making the threats.) "People like a good redemption story," Cramer told Trump. "And he certainly is a good redemption story." Trump liked that argument and agreed. He formally endorsed Walker just weeks later, and much of what's left of the GOP establishment soon followed suit.

"Donald Trump's instincts on these things have been pretty darn good. And

for a guy who had plenty of things that could derail a candidate, he demonstrated himself ... [that] people are looking forwards not backwards," Cramer told me. "If he has a really successful track record, it's going to enhance his potency. I think it will, as much as anything, help inform his decision about whether to run or not."

David From: Revenge of the Donald

Trump serving as the party uniter, rather than a divider? That won't be the case everywhere.

And though his primary-endorsement track record is sterling, it isn't perfect. Earlier this year, his preferred candidate, Susan Wright, lost the nomination for a special Texas House race. In 2020, a businessperson he backed in North Carolina fell to now-Representative Madison Cawthorn.

For Trump, the risk of piling up so many endorsements—especially against incumbents—is that he'll blemish a tally that's been nothing short of extraordinary to date. In places such as Ohio and Missouri, home to crowded and complex GOP Senate primaries, he's held back thus far. But the temptation to intervene will be whetted by a coterie of his former aides who are deeply involved in those races.

Trump could easily sit on the sidelines, observe the trajectory of the race and then intervene in the final weeks on behalf of the leading candidate.

Trump would never have gotten this far by playing it safe, so going all in only boosts his brand. Dethroning Cheney, Murkowski, Kemp, and a few others will also bend the makeup of the party in his favor if he ends up returning to the White House. Then again, if his big picks fall flat, Trump won't worry too much.

He'll simply deploy another time-tested Trumpian play: He'll blame them.

NATIONAL POLITICS

Why 2022 Rhymes With the Previous Four Midterms

December 30, 2021



Amy Walter
@amyewalter

It feels safer to bet on unpredictability than stability in this era of tremendous political and social churn and upheaval. While we know that the midterm elections favor the 'out' party (i.e. the party that doesn't control the White House), many wonder if history can be a reliable guide when it feels as if history is being rewritten on a daily basis?

After all, there's plenty about 2022 that's unique. It's the first since 2002 that corresponds with redistricting; the first since at least 1998 that Democrats are not defending any Senate seats carried by the Republican presidential nominee two years earlier; and the first in memory where a defeated president is playing an outsized role.

Yet, there's more this upcoming midterm has in common with its predecessors. Or, to paraphrase Mark Twain, history may not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

And, that's not great news for President Biden and Democrats in Congress. Here are the four ways in which 2022 "rhymes" with the last four midterm elections in which the party in the White House lost their House and/or Senate majorities.

1. One Party in Power

Democrats control the House (narrowly), the Senate (barely) and the White House. Holding onto that trifecta past the first midterm election has become almost impossible in the modern era.

The last president to hold onto both the House and Senate majorities post-midterm was Jimmy Carter in 1978. Although Democrats lost 15 seats in the House and three in the Senate that year, Democrats came into the midterm with a whopping 292 seats in the House and 61 in the Senate.

In fact, according to Pew Research (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/02/03/single-party-control-in-washington-is-common-at-the-beginning-of-a-new-presidency-but-tends-not-to-last-long/>), "the longest period of leadership for any one party has been eight years, when Democrats maintained one-party control from the beginning of President John F. Kennedy's term (87th Congress of 1961-1962) to the end of Lyndon B. Johnson's (90th Congress of 1967-1968). In the 27 congressional sessions following Johnson's presidency, one-party control has existed for just eight total sessions."

The last three midterm elections which featured one-party control of the White House, House and Senate were 2006, 2010, and 2018. In all three cases, the president's party lost the House. In 2010, Democrats lost seats but managed to hold the Senate. They lost Senate control in the 2014 midterms.

2. President Biden's Low Job Approval Ratings

Midterm elections, at their core, are a referendum on the party in power, or more specifically, a referendum on the sitting president. As our politics have become more and more nationalized, it's all but impossible for a candidate to escape the drag of an unpopular president of their party.

We saw that drag most recently in the race for Governor of Virginia this past November. According to exit polling, President Biden's job approval rating among Virginia voters was 46 percent to 53 percent disapprove. Democrat Terry McAuliffe took 48.6 percent of the vote - just 2 points above Biden's job rating.

Nationally, Joe Biden's job approval rating sits at 43 percent, with 52 percent viewing him unfavorably. To put this into perspective, Biden's national approval rating in the 2020 exit polls was 52 percent to 46 percent unfavorable — or 14 points better than today.

Biden's job approval sits within the range of the previous three presidents who presided over big midterm losses. According to Gallup, Pres. George W. Bush clocked in at 38 percent in late October of 2006. Pres. Barack Obama was between 42-45 percent in the 2010 and 2014 midterms, while President Trump's showing in late October of 2018 was 43 percent.

The good news for Biden is that it's not November of 2022.

But, how much he can realistically make up between now and next fall?

Like Trump before him, Biden came into office with almost universal opposition from the other party and universal support of his own party. This means that his job approval range is very narrow; he's not going to get much above 50 percent or below 40 percent.

Even so, it doesn't mean he can't improve his current standing by next year. Trump was able to improve on his between the end of 2017 and the fall of 2018. For example, in December of 2017, Gallup polling showed Pres. Trump with a dismal 36 percent job approval rating. By October, Trump's approval rating was 43 percent, a seven-point improvement from 10 months earlier. That improvement wasn't enough to stave off a 40-seat loss in the House. But the electoral carnage would have been much, much worse had he still been mired in the mid-to-high 30 percent range.

A gain of just 4 or 5 points in job approval might not be enough to save the Democrats' very narrow House majority. But, it could be enough to protect the Senate.

3. Enthusiasm Gap

Motivating voters is something campaigns and strategists constantly think/study/stress about. But, while technologies and techniques change and evolve, there's a fundamental truth that's been very consistent over the years: Angry people vote, and complacent or disappointed people don't.

This, more than anything else, is why the 'out' party has an advantage in midterm elections. Their voters are confronted with the consequences of losing the last election every day. That keeps them frustrated, angry and engaged (think, #resistance or #letsgrabandon movements). It's much harder for the winning side to keep their voters engaged. This is especially true for someone like Biden, whose appeal to many voters wasn't as much who he was as who he wasn't.

Moreover, sitting in focus groups this year, I've been struck by the number of Biden voters who say they've disconnected from watching or following the news post-2020 election. They were exhausted by the Trump presidency and are happy to drop out of the daily/hourly news cycle.

President Trump successfully kept his base consistently stoked with his tweets and attacks on Democrats and the media. A polarizing Supreme Court battle helped supercharge his base in late

October. Yet, even that wasn't enough to overcome Democrats' enthusiasm advantage in 2018.

A validated voter survey of 2018 voters by Pew Research

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2020/09/08/democrats-made-gains-from-multiple-sources-in-2018-midterm-victories/>) found that the electorate contained more Clinton 2016 voters than those who had voted for Trump that year. For example, while 78 percent of 2016 Clinton voters turned out in that mid-term election, only 74 percent of Trump voters did as well. More important, Democrats succeeded in winning over new voters. Of the 11 percent of 2018 voters who didn't vote in 2016, 68 percent voted for a Democratic candidate.

There are multiple ways to explore the enthusiasm gap for the upcoming midterm.

First, we can look at the intensity of support/opposition to Biden from 2020 voters. In this case, I looked at a cross-tab in Marist polling taken this year that asks respondents to say if they voted for Trump or Biden in 2020. Between April and June, those who voted for Biden and those for Trump felt equally supportive/unfavorably about Biden. For example, in June, Biden's job approval rating among those who said they voted for him last year was +86, while those who voted for Trump disapproved of Biden by a similar margin -86.

But, starting in August, opposition to Biden rose among Trump voters (-92), while support among Biden voters dropped (+67). In the most recent polling, the gap between support of Biden voters and the opposition by Trump voters is 19 points (+74 to -93).

We can also look to qualitative research. Focus groups

(<https://www.cookpolitical.com/analysis/national-politics/can-democrats-get-surge-voters-show-2022>) of Democratic-leaning younger and so-called 'surge' voters (those who showed up in 2020 but not in a previous election year), show decided drop in enthusiasm for the president and the party.

And then there are election results. An analysis of the recent New Jersey governors election by Tom Bonier of TargetSmart, a Democratic data firm, found that while turnout among Democrats was up by 65,000 voters from 2017, turnout among Republicans was up a whopping 195,000. As such, the overall share of the electorate in New Jersey was 4.2 percent less Democratic and 3 points more Republican.

What can get Democrats more engaged in 2022? Many Democrats argue that passage of the Build

Back Better Act will be a prime factor. But, proactive policy rarely results in benefits for the party in power in a midterm. As the Atlantic's Ron Brownstein (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/10/course-presidents-second-year-biden/620391/>) noted "it is extremely difficult for presidents to translate legislative success in their first year into political success in the midterm elections of their second year. Those early achievements can boost presidents in their reelection bids, but in almost all cases they have not proved an antidote to the other midterm factors that cause the president's party to lose ground in Congress."

Instead, Democrats need to rally their voters *against* something. Which is why you are seeing so much attention focused on Pres. Trump and the events of January 6th. Republicans tried a similar strategy in 2018 by trying to link every Democratic candidate with Nancy Pelosi or Bernie Sanders. This counter-attack only works if the other side falls into the trap. In 2018, Democrats worked hard to side-step controversial issues like abolishing ICE. Others promised to vote against Pelosi for speaker. We'll have to see how well Republicans avoid nominating controversial candidates or engaging in unpopular behavior.

4. Independent Voters

With Democrats feeling less enthusiastic, and Republicans united in opposition, Democrats can ill-afford to lose support from independent-leaning voters. Unfortunately, that's exactly what's happening. And, is similar to what happened in the previous midterms.

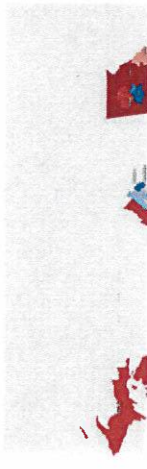
Since 2010, the sitting president entered the fall of the midterm election year with a job approval rating among independents anywhere between 38 and 45 percent. In all three of those midterm elections, the party in the White House lost independent voters by double-digits.

The most recent Gallup polling puts Biden's job approval ratings among independents at 40 percent, not much better than President Trump's 38 percent rating in October of 2018.

The good news for Biden is that, unlike Trump, he began his presidency with some goodwill among independent voters. From February until June, opinions of Biden among independent voters ranged from 50 percent to 58 percent. Meanwhile, opinions of Trump among independents were always more negative than positive. Trump's approval ratings among independent voters never broke out of the mid-to-high 30 percent range for all of 2017 and 2018.

In other words, the opinions of Trump, even among these 'swing' voters were hardened, and nothing good or bad moved them very much. Biden, however, has been seen both positively and negatively by independent voters. This suggests that he can also gain with these voters just as he has slipped with them.

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Month	Biden 2020 voters approve/disapprove of	Trump 2020 voters approve/disapprove of
April	93/5	6/91
May	93/4	9/89
June	91/5	7/88
August	80/13	3/95
September	85/6	3/93
October	80/13	5/92
November	81/10	2/96
December	86/12	3/96

Source: Marist Poll

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