



Midterm Election

The election that falls at the halfway mark of a four-year presidential term is known as the midterm or, less precisely, off-year election. Every seat in the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate seats are at stake in this election.

The midterm election is often referred to as a referendum on the president and the president's party. If the economy is poor, if lives are being lost in an unpopular war, or if the president has a low approval rating in the PUBLIC OPINION polls for any of a variety of reasons, it is likely that the president's party will lose congressional seats, perhaps enough to change control of one or both chambers. The biggest swings in party strength in Congress over the past quarter-century have, in fact occurred during midterm elections .

Most midterm elections that ended badly for the president's party were influenced by economic problems for which voters tend to blame on the president, outright missteps by the president, corruption scandals touching on the president

or members of his party, or other circumstances that could have either been prevented or at least ameliorated.

One interesting aspect of the phenomenon is that members of Congress of the president's party often suffer more in these midterm "referendums" on a president than does a president eligible to seek reelection. Several presidents have successfully rebounded from problems that caused losses for their parties and adjusted to the verdict of voters in the midterm elections.

Part of the reason why the White House part tends to do worse in midterm election years is that the president is not out on the campaign trail justifying the administration's policies—and spending hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign funds to do so. In midterm elections, members of Congress find themselves having to act as surrogates for the president, and some are placed in the awkward positions of having to distance themselves from the president's less popular policies.

Another factor is that voter turnout tends to be considerably lower for midterm elections than for presidential elections. Therefore, it takes a smaller numerical swing in voting behavior to effect major changes in Congress than it does during a presidential election year.

Effect on Turnout

Compared with presidential contest, the midterm congressional election lacks interest for many voters. The relative apathy is reflected in the lower voter turnout figures for election years not having a presidential election.

Factors that help explain the difference in participation between the two types of elections include the greater media coverage of presidential campaigns, the lower significance that voters attach to congressional offices, the relative importance of the issues raised in the campaigns, and the attractiveness of the candidates.

Continue to page 4

Inside this issue:

Midterm Election	1
Article-GOP Likely to Capture Control of House	2
Article-The Party of Nonvoters	2
Article-Testing the Tea party: Will the Movement Live or Die	2
Article-Recession Mid-term	2
E-Publications	2-3
IRC Books	3
About IRC	4

Articles

GOP Likely to Capture Control of House/by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010

Pew Research Center's final 2010 pre-election survey finds the Republican Party continuing to hold a solid lead in preferences for Tuesday's midterm elections. The poll, conducted Oct. 27-30 among 2,373 registered voters, including 1,809 voters considered the most likely to vote, shows that 48% of likely voters say they will vote for the Republican in their district, compared with 42% who favor the Democratic candidate. Full report is accessible at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1787/2010-pre-election-survey-gop-win-house-wide-turnout-advantage-engagement-gap>

The Party of Nonvoters/by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2010
Understandably, most of the attention in this fall's elections has been on likely voters, not on those unlikely to cast a ballot. Almost certainly, however, there

will be far more nonvoters¹ than voters this year.

Turnout in midterm elections typically is less than 40% of the voting age population (in 2006 it was 37%), and there is no reason to expect that it will be dramatically higher in 2010.

Full report is available at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1786/who-are-nonvoters-less-republican-educated-younger>

Testing the Tea Party: Will the Movement Live or Die?/by Shannon Travis, CNN, 2010

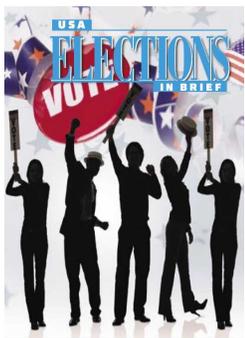
In a few days, Americans could carve out a monument to the Tea Party's power -- or etch out the movement's political tombstone. The outcome of the midterm elections will either validate the Tea Party as a national force or cause both Democrats and Republicans to second-guess the movement's impact. But dead or alive after Election Day, the Tea Party has earned a place in history. The movement was born of frustration and anger at the political establishment and steeped in eco-

nomie anxiety. It now bubbles with the hope of electoral success in the midterm elections. But how did it get here?. Get the answers at: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/10/27/sweep.tea.party/index.html>

Recession Midterm/by David Wasserman, National Journal 2010

The article focuses on the ability of Republicans to defeat Democrats in the U.S. *midterm elections* in November 2010 amid the low approval ratings of President Barack Obama. About 71 seats in the House of Representatives are more likely to shift to Republicans due to public discontentment. To achieve the House majority, it suggests that Republicans win 80 Democratic seats and sustain their momentum until November 2. The victory of Democrat Mark Critz in Pennsylvania in a special *election* reflects the skill of the Democratic Party in executing races. To get the full text of this article please email us at: ircjakarta@state.gov

E-Publications



USA Elections in Brief/by America.gov, 2008

Free and fair elections are the keystone of any democracy. They are essential

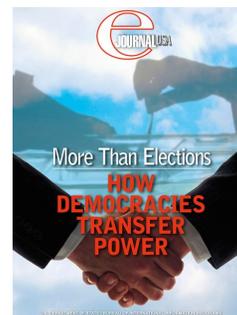
for the peaceful transfer of power.

When voters elect representatives, they elect the leaders who will shape the future of their society. This is why elections empower ordinary citizens: they allow them

to influence the future policies of their government, and thus, their own future.

The United States has been a representative democracy since the ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1787 - although the electoral tradition began during the Colonial era and had its roots in British history. This book discusses the nature of the modern American electoral process, and how it works at the federal, state, and local levels. The process, complicated and sometimes confusing, has evolved to ensure universal suffrage to all men and women

who are U.S. citizens — 18 years-of-age, or older Available online at: <http://www.america.gov/publications/books/elections-in-brief.html>



More than Elections: How Democracies Transfer Power/by America.gov, 2010.

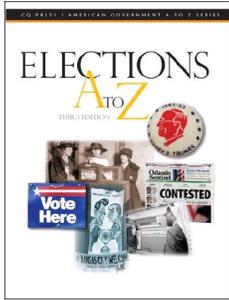
Democracy requires

more than holding elections.

Continue to page 3

IRC Books

Election A to Z, 3rd edition /by Bob Beneson. Washington D.C: CQ Press, 2008.



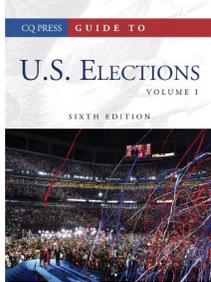
Elections A to Z provides readers with the information they need to understand how cam-

paigns and elections are conducted in the United States and how voters, candidates, political parties, and others participate in the electoral process.

Guide to U.S. Election, 6th edition//by CQ Press. Washington

D.C: CQ Press, 2009.

The sixth edition of Guide to U.S. Elections presents an informative and balanced overview of the electoral process in America. The set



covers federal and gubernatorial elections from 1776 to 2008. Information provided is not just the statistics but the historical background behind elec-

tions. Content is separated into five sections. "Elections in Amer-

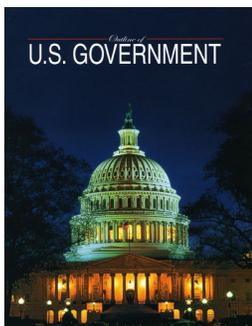
ica" sets the stage with historical background and is followed by sections on political parties and the presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial elections. Articles are well written and cross-referenced and interspersed with numerous tables and graphs. Bibliographies are extensive, as is indexing.

Check more of IRC books collection at:

<http://69.63.217.22/U10086Staff/OPAC/index.asp>

E-Publications (continued from page 2)

Healthy democracies are defined by the expectations of citizens and the common rules, understandings, and trust they build. This *eJournal USA* explores the contours of civil society and political legitimacy within which peaceful transitions of power can occur. Link to the full version: <http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa/0110.html>

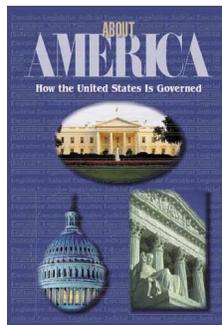


Outline of U.S. the Government/by America.gov, 2000

What makes U.S. government uniquely

American...its Constitution, the separation of powers, the concept of "checks and balances," the decentralized roles of state and local governments, and a citizenry with wide opportunity to be part of it all. Available online at: [http://](http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa/0110.html)

www.america.gov/publications/books/outline-us-government.html



About America: How the U.S is Governed/by America.gov, 2005. This joint publication of the State Department's Bureau of Interna-

tional Information Programs and Braddock Communications presents a comprehensive yet easy-to-read overview of the various of levels of and institutions related to government in the U.S. It describes how federal, state, and local governments are elected, how they operate, and how the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government relate under the U.S. constitutional system. Available online at: <http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#0110>

More Resources

America Votes: 2010 Midterm

The United States conducts midterm elections in "off-years" between presidential elections, which are held every four years. These articles bring into focus how these elections for U.S. senators, U.S. representatives and state governors are held across the nation.

Link: <http://www.america.gov/st/usg-english/2010/Octo->

[20101020103528elrem0.1804621.html](http://www.america.gov/st/usg-english/2010/October/20101020103528elrem0.1804621.html)

CNN Politics-Midterm Elections 2010

Link: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/the.basics/>

Brookings Institute on Midterm Elections 2010

Link: <http://www.brookings.edu/search.aspx?doQuery=1&q=midterm%20elections>

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Disclaimer: Books, articles, and websites described in this info package present a diversity of views in order to keep our IRC users abreast of current issues in the United States. These items represent the views and opinions of the authors and do not necessary reflect official U.S. Government policy.

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Continued from page 1

Presidential Involvement

It is often to the president's advantage to campaign vigorously in the midterm election for congressional candidates of the president's party. The stronger the president is in the Congress the easier it is for the White House to carry out its legislative program. But in practice the level of presidential enthusiasm for midterm campaigning varies widely.

Because it is all but inevitable that the president's party will lose House seats in the midterm election, there is almost no way for the president to look good by getting closely involved. The most he can hope to do is minimize losses.

Midterm campaigning that inflames partisan opposition may make it harder for the president to work

with the new Congress, especially if the opposition party controls it. Some presidents have also found members of the opposition party to be more supportive than their own partisan. As a result, they have naturally been reluctant to campaign against those members.

Effect on State Elections

Like House elections gubernatorial elections are affected by national issues and conditions. For that reason, most states elect their Governors in the middle of presidential terms, rather than at the same time as the president, when the White House race is likely to overshadow battles for the statehouses.

But the move to midterm elections has not prevented state contests

from being caught up in national partisan politics. The president's party loses governorships in midterm elections as consistently, and sometimes larger percentages, than it loses Houses seats. The president's party has lost governors in most midterm elections since the middle of the twentieth century.

Midterm elections of state legislators also consistently result in losses for the president's party. The losses of seats in these elections are more likely to result in change of party control of one of both chambers than in presidential election years.

Source: Election A to Z, 3rd edition /by Bob Beneson. Washington D.C: CQ Press, 2008 (for details on this book, please see page 3).