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Democrats' midterm 'blue wave' dreams face an icy challenge

di George F. Will

Speculation about a November “blue wave” wafting Democrats into power ignores the Law of Political Hydrology: There are no waves on frozen seas. The sheet of ice suffocating politics represents a balance of negative partisanship: Millions of voters have mild, flickering affection for their party, but detest the other one.

In the 25 presidential elections since 1928, [eight were won](#) by 10 points or more. But the last such landslide (Ronald Reagan's 1984 defeat of Walter Mondale) was 11 elections ago. Since Republicans ended 28 years of Democratic control of the Senate in 1980, Republicans have [controlled it 12 times](#), Democrats 11 times (once because a Republican senator defected). Forty-eight of [today's 53 Republican senators](#) represent states Donald Trump carried by at least 11 points in 2024.

Florida was until recently the most important swing state (Barack Obama carried it twice). But in 2024, Trump won Florida [more decisively](#) (by 13.1 points) than Kamala Harris won New York (12.5 points). Ohio was a swing state when George W. Bush narrowly carried it twice, with 50 percent in 2000 and 50.8 percent in 2004, and Obama carried it with just 51.5 percent in 2008 and 50.7 in 2012. Trump carried it three times, [by about 8 points](#) in 2016 and 2020, and 11.2 points in 2024.

In 1988, [34 percent](#) of congressional districts voted for a presidential candidate from one party and a representative from the other. In 2020 and 2024 just 3.7 percent did. The last four times a president's party entered midterm elections controlling both congressional chambers (1994, 2006, 2010, 2018) voters ended this trifecta, twice with Democratic presidents, twice with Republicans.

About [70 percent](#) of House Republicans were first elected after Trump took office in 2017. They have known nothing but enforced subservience; they fear nothing other

than a primary challenge instigated by a cranky Trump. Most red-state Republican senators also fear only that. Election analyst Charlie Cook says: Since 2000, 115 elected red-state Republicans [have been reelected](#), just six were not; 74 have been reelected since the last one to lose, in 2008.

Technologically sophisticated and ethically uninhibited gerrymandering has left few competitive congressional districts. Four huge waves washed over Congress relatively recently: [In 1994 and 2010](#), Democrats lost 54 and 63 seats, respectively; in 2006 and 2018 Republicans lost 30 and 40, respectively. This year, Republican losses might not come close to the post-1945 average of 26 seats lost by the president's party.

You think things cannot get worse? Remember the Law of American Political Geology: There is no such thing as rock bottom. Michael Barone, the mind behind the Almanac of American Politics, reports (in the Washington Examiner) [that an Illinois Democrat](#), dissatisfied with his party having only 14 of the state's 17 congressional seats, wants to "get over the mental hurdle of contiguity" in redistricting. Surplus Democrats in Chicago districts could be declared parts of downstate districts — hundreds of miles from being contiguous — where Republicans are intolerably competitive.

The political freeze will thaw when party competition again occurs between the 40-yard lines, around the center of the field. Republicans will not think ice-breaking thoughts until Trump's spell is broken and Republican thinking is again permitted. Democrats, however, can think about what Ezra Klein of the New York Times [has noted](#) about their party between 2012 and 2024:

"Democrats became more uncompromising on immigration and lost support among Hispanic voters. They moved left on guns and student loans and climate, and lost ground with young voters. They moved left on race and lost ground with Black voters. They moved left on education and lost ground with Asian American voters. They moved left on economics and lost ground with working-class voters."

In 2024, Trump improved his 2020 share of the vote in *90 percent* of all counties. In three consecutive elections, the GOP [has increased its presidential vote](#) share in 1,433 counties (almost half the nation's counties). The Democratic Party has increased its share in 57. What death wish has Democrats including Kamala Harris in their 2028 presidential conversations?

Harris's persistence beyond the call of plausibility is symptomatic. Until the freeze thaws, we are in "Groundhog Day," in the bar where the character played by Bill Murray has this exchange with a new acquaintance:

Murray character: "What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered?"

Acquaintance: "That about sums it up for me."