Democrats Didn’t Make History. They Just Showed Up for It.

Democrats won because history and Donald Trump handed it to them, and Republicans have nobody to blame but themselves.

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Democrats have spent this week celebrating as if they made history. They flipped the House and the Senate, Hakeem Jeffries is preparing to become Speaker, and cable news is treating Tuesday night as a political realignment. It wasn’t.

A party out of power won a midterm against an unpopular president in the middle of a war. That’s how American politics normally works.

The record is hard to argue with. The president’s party has lost House seats in 20 of the last 22 midterms. Since World War II the average loss is 26 House seats and four Senate seats. Democrats needed three in the House and four in the Senate to take over. They cleared the lowest bar in American politics, and they expect to be congratulated for it.

History Did the Heavy Lifting

The losses cut across both parties and every era. Truman lost 55 House seats in 1946. Obama lost 63 in 2010. Trump lost 41 in 2018. Voters grow frustrated in the middle of a term and punish whichever party holds the White House, regardless of who occupies it.

Escaping that pattern is rare. The president’s party has avoided those losses about three times in the last century, and each time it took something extraordinary. In 1934 voters stuck with Roosevelt through the Great Depression. In 1998 Republicans pursued Clinton with impeachment while his approval sat in the mid-60s, and Democrats picked up five seats. In 2002 Bush was at 68 percent after September 11 and Republicans gained eight. A depression, an impeachment backfire and the worst terrorist attack in our history.

Nothing like that protected Republicans this year. They walked into this election with Trump’s approval in the 30s, about as low as any president’s at this point since 1946, a war in Iran driving up gas prices, and insurance premiums climbing after the subsidies expired. Every president since Truman who went into a midterm under 50 percent lost House seats. Every one. Democrats didn’t need a great message to beat that record. They just had to be on the ballot.

Democrats will respond that they won in spite of Republican gerrymandering. The numbers don’t back that up. Ten states redrew their maps mid-decade, and Cook Political Report projected Republicans would net about four seats from those changes. Four, against a historical average of 26.

Democrats weren't innocent bystanders either. California redrew its map to flip five seats, and Virginia Democrats reportedly spent more than $62 million trying to do the same before their state Supreme Court threw it out. Democrats fought the same redistricting war. They don't get to call themselves its victims.

The last midterm shows how much the other side's mistakes matter. In 2022 Biden sat at 40 percent and his party lost just nine House seats. Republicans squandered that opportunity, Democrats called it strategy, and now the favor has been returned. Neither party has won anything on its own merits in four years.

The Court Record

If Democrats earned credit anywhere over the last two years, it was in the courthouse. Their attorneys general filed their 100th lawsuit against the Trump administration this spring and claimed 55 wins in 67 rulings. That's their own count, so it deserves some skepticism, but some of those wins are real. The Supreme Court struck down Trump's global tariffs 6-3 in Learning Resources v. Trump and his birthright citizenship order 6-3 in Trump v. Barbara. Federal judges blocked his proof-of-citizenship order. Courts stopped the OMB funding freeze, the National Guard deployment into Illinois and the SNAP suspension, and a federal panel let California keep its Proposition 50 map.

Now look at who did the work. Small businesses fought the tariffs right alongside the Democratic states, and the lead case is named after an educational toy company. The ACLU argued birthright citizenship, and the opinion came from John Roberts, a George W. Bush appointee. As for California, the judge who ruled for Democrats called Prop 50 "a political gerrymander designed to flip five Republican-held seats to the Democrats." Democrats spent years calling gerrymandering a threat to democracy, then celebrated when a court upheld theirs.

Nor did Democrats win everything. By one SCOTUSblog count, the Supreme Court sided with Trump in 20 of 24 emergency rulings in 2025, and later narrowed a key Voting Rights Act protection in Louisiana v. Callais.

Even the wins point to a bigger problem. Read the Illinois attorney general's list of victories and count how often the word "stopped" shows up. Some of those rulings mattered, and any conservative who believes in limits on presidents ought to say so out loud. But Democrats have confused a restraining order with a governing philosophy, and you can't run a country on "no."

An Agenda of Undoing

Now Democrats have the power to do more than say no, and the plan looks a lot like more of the same. In the first 100 hours, House Democrats plan floor votes to restore the expired Affordable Care Act subsidies and reverse roughly $1 trillion in Medicaid cuts. They want a bill to undo Trump's tariffs and another vote to end the Iran war or force him to seek authorization. Behind that comes an affordability agenda on housing, groceries, gas and caregiving, Progressive Caucus bills on child care and overtime pay, Ron Wyden's billionaire taxes, and talk of paid leave, AI rules and even Medicare for All. Investigations will follow.

Much of that list starts by reversing something. Rep. Bobby Scott described the order of operations: “We have to undo what was done but then get back on the positive agenda.” Undo first, and a vision later, if one emerges.

Even the undoing faces long odds, and most of it will never become law. Democrats don’t have 60 votes in the Senate and Trump still has a veto pen. They have already tried this. They triggered a record 43-day shutdown last fall over those subsidies and came away with nothing. The House passed an extension 230-196 in January, after the Senate had already rejected a similar bill. Premiums don’t drop because one chamber passed a bill.

The 45-Day Myth

Democrats aren’t the only ones selling something they can’t deliver. My own side has its own way of dodging the result. I keep hearing about Trump’s executive order that supposedly launches a fraud investigation 45 days after any election. That’s Executive Order 13848, he signed it in 2018, and the people passing it around apparently haven’t read it. This is not a Hail Mary.

Read the text. The order does reach fraud and election systems, but only when a foreign government or its agents are behind it. The Director of National Intelligence gets 45 days, which lands in mid-December, to assess any such interference, and the attorney general and Homeland Security get another 45 to report whether it materially affected election infrastructure or vote tabulation. The remedy is sanctions on foreign actors. Nothing in it touches domestic fraud, overturns a result or unseats anybody. Even if the assessment finds something, the order removes no one from Congress.

If you’re waiting for somebody to be held accountable, remember 2020. Nobody paid then because nobody proved it. Bill Barr, Trump’s own attorney general, said his department found nothing to back up claims of extensive fraud. Georgia hand-counted every ballot and Biden still won. The FBI seized Fulton County’s 2020 ballots this year and Trump says they’ll prove the election was stolen. Then show the evidence. Until then, this order is false hope for people who haven’t accepted the result.

Congress and the Constitution

The 45-day talk points to a bigger problem. It seems clear a lot of Americans don’t understand how Congress works and have never read the Constitution. Article I, Section 5 makes each chamber the judge of its own elections. The new Congress takes over in January, and no executive order changes that.

The same document explains what comes next. Donald Trump is a lame duck for the next two years. He can’t run again, Congress holds the purse and the power to declare war, and he’s left with a veto and the bully pulpit. It cuts both ways, of course. Democrats need two-thirds to override him and 67 senators to remove anyone.

The people around him will feel that new balance of power, starting with Pete Hegseth. Many Americans already call him a war criminal, and he may have to answer those accusations under oath. Impeachment articles cite the double-tap boat strikes and a bombed girls’ school in Minab, Iran. The

Pentagon calls the investigations “sham witch hunts” and says it followed the law, and no court has ruled. The Senate will probably never convict him. Testimony under oath would still put the record before the public.

No Clear Path for Vance or Rubio

All of this will follow the party into 2028, and the front-runners aren’t built to escape it. Yes, JD Vance leads the 2028 polls, 33 percent to Marco Rubio’s 23 in the New York Times/Siena survey, with about a quarter of primary voters undecided or not answering. I still don’t see a road to the presidency for either man.

Vance went from 52 percent in Emerson’s February poll to 36 by May. He’s the sitting vice president and the supposed heir, and he couldn’t hold the lead, and Trump still won’t openly endorse him. Registered voters have him underwater, 41 favorable to 53 unfavorable. He campaigned for this ticket right up to the final weekend, and he will carry Tuesday’s result into any campaign.

Rubio has the opposite problem: he isn’t really running. He has said he’d defer to Vance, would have to quit as secretary of state to run, and is mostly selling himself as a normal Republican, a brand primary voters spent a decade rejecting. He lost to Trump in 2016 and now works for him.

Both men are tied to a record that gave away conservative arguments, and Democrats are now running on them. Congress should set tariffs. Congress should decide on war. Presidents can’t rewrite the Constitution by executive order. Conservatives used to say all of that, until we traded those principles for loyalty.

That’s why this party needs authentic conservative voices again, people who believe in limited government when their own guy holds the power and who form their opinions without first checking with Mar-a-Lago.

Democrats won this round because history handed it to them, and they’ve done nothing special. History will hand it right back the minute a Democrat sits in the Oval Office. If the best we can offer in 2028 is the supporting cast from 2026, we’ll deserve whatever comes next.

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