**Midterm Edition: 5 Things to Know About the Midterms**

Transcript

*This transcript was created using a combination of machine and human transcribing, so there may be some typos.*

**CPB:** [00:00:00] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:04] In 1965. Opponents of President Lyndon Baines Johnson referred to him as King Lyndon the first.

**Archival:** [00:00:13] For in your time. We have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:21] His approval rating 70 percent.

**Archival:** [00:00:24] But upward to the great society.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:31] Since being sworn in as president after the assassination of JFK in 1963 Johnson had launched a set of programs called the Great Society to demand an end to poverty. And racial injustice.

[00:00:45] He signed the heart Sellar Immigration Act created Medicaid and Medicare.

**Archival:** [00:00:49] Integration of Martin Luther King receives his pen. A gift he said he would cherish.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:54] It was in this administration that protests led by Martin Luther King in DC and in Selma resulted in two pieces of the most important legislation of our country the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. All of this ball navigating our involvement in Vietnam.

**Archival:** [00:01:13] Main purpose of the operation was to clear the area of the Viet Cong.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:18] Democrats held 289 House seats and 68 Senate seats. Political minds declared the Republican Party officially dead. Andrew

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:28] How can you unseat a King?

**Archival:** [00:01:33] It's like entering a gambling casino to walk into a grocery store in Prince's County.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:43] The Great Society was no match for the price of milk. In 1966 small protests in Baltimore and Denver caught the eye of the Republican National Committee which claimed Johnson's Great Society programs and America's involvement. Vietnam were to blame for rising grocery costs.

[00:02:00] Republican candidates for office latched onto the idea. They brought Giant grocery carts to campaign events. They printed out oversized price tags showcasing rising food costs. They pushed inflation hard. This was the stage for the 1966 midterm election.

**Archival:** [00:02:18] Big shot in the arm of the American Republican Party. Ronald Reagan as governor of California. Most of the polling station was from west to east showed a swing away from President Johnson's Democratic Party.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:34] So what happened?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:35] What happened? What happened and it was huge. One of the biggest losses to the Democratic Party in the history of elections. Republicans gained 47 House seats. Three Senate seats eight governorships 557 state legislature seats. Nixon got elected two years later. Newsweek wrote in the space of a single autumn day that 1000 day reign of Linden the first came to an end.

[00:03:02] The Emperor of American politics became just a president.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:06] That is wild.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:08] Crazy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:09] It was in a midterm which nobody cares about. And not only that not only did Ronald Reagan get elected as governor of California six others Hanah seven people total who are involved in the 1966 midterms became president. Later.

[00:03:24] The Republican Party became decidedly not dead at all. In the wake of a midterm election.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:30] Get out.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:38] I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:38] And I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:39] And this is Civics 101 the podcast refresher course on the basics of how our democracy works. And today we're kicking off a five part series on midterm election.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:48] We're going to look at campaigning state and local government.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:51] The difference between the House and the Senate and what is on your ballot but before we get into any of today's episode is about finding the midterms and the five reasons why they matter to tell us what happens in a midterm. First we spoke with Cheryl Cook Kallio.

**Cheryl Cook Kallio:** [00:04:06] I'm Cheryl Cook. Kallio I'm a teacher. I taught government for 39 years.

[00:04:10] My claim to fame is that Sandra Day O'Connor held my hand.

**Archival:** [00:04:13] And he said Sandra I'd like to announce your appointment to the Supreme Court tomorrow.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:19] Sandra Day O'Connor as the first woman to hold a seat on the Supreme Court Sandra Day O'Connor.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:23] The very one.

**Cheryl Cook Kallio:** [00:04:24] Any national election that takes place without a presidential candidate is considered a midterm. Most people they're not so focused on midterm elections because they think the president is all important. And certainly our chief executive is important however we elect some extremely important positions during this period of time.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:44] And in all of these offices the term lengths can vary. So senators in WashingtonD.C. have a six year term. But some state senators can have an election every two years. That's what we have in New Hampshire. Yes but some states have a four year term and others have completely different terms. But I wanted to cut to the heart of midterm elections. So I asked this guy my name is Keith Hughes.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:05:05] I'm a social studies teacher. I also run a YouTube channel called Hip Hughes history.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:09] He's made over 500 educational videos aboutU.S. and world history. I asked him to tell me the one thing he wished Americans knew about the midterm elections and he gave me five.

[00:05:20] Are you ready for a listicle?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:21] I am always ready for a listicle.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:23] Number one.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:05:24] So number one the president is going to take it on the chin. Well at least most of the time. Midterm elections many times are called a referendum on the president and what that means is people are going to the polls not so much just voting on local issues which they do a lot but they're really kind of judging in evaluating the president and deciding if they want to give them full rein to do what they're doing or if they think that checks and balances might be in order terrain that President in a little bit.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:53] So if you love the president. Love love love what he's doing. This is a thumbs up.

[00:05:57] Or if you're super frustrated with the president even though he's not on the ballot you can take your frustrations out on his party.

**Dan Cassino:** [00:06:04] So the midterm elections wind up being important because what we get in the mater is as it's called surge and decline this is Dan Cassino Abdel Cassino an associate professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University. No political science spent a lot of time worrying about Sturgeon decline but the basic principles this which ever party did better in the presidential election does worse in the midterm election. Why is that. Why is that. If your party does really well in the presidential election it's because you turned out a lot of voters who otherwise wouldn't vote. These are of marginal voters may stay home. Well guess what. Two years later they're gonna stay home.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:06:41] In the past modern era at least 50 or 60 years the president in power has always lost seats in the midterm election except for 1998. Bill Clinton was lucky enough to have a really good economy and George Bush in 2002 and I'm thinking 9/11 might have had something to do with that. But every other election whether it be Barack Obama or it be Bush or Nixon or we can go way back to Harry Truman. Usually Americans that are going to turn out want to see a constitutional republic that works. And usually that means that the president who is in power. Like I said before it's going to take it on the chin.

**Archival:** [00:07:16] How bad a night was this for Democrats. It was really bad. I think it was. Would you take a look at the election results in 2010 and this year. This was a wave a Republican wave that hit and hit that Democrats.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:29] So the surge is when everyone comes out to vote in the presidential election and then the decline is what happens two years later when lots of those voters just stay home.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:07:42] So number two is really the cyclical cycles that occur in the House and the Senate and there really isn't a cyclical cycle in the house because every single House member is going to be up for re-election. That's right. All 435 members of the House have to face the music. But in the Senate it's one third of the Senate.

**Dan Cassino:** [00:08:01] So the Senate is divided into three classes actually called in class a class B and Class C in each of those classes is up for election every two years so every two years one third of the Senate is up for re-election. Again this is Dan casino. Now the reason that matters is because no matter how big a wave you get in a midterm election or even the present election it can't affect more than one third of the Senate. This creates a temporal division of power where in the Senate one third of it is governed by what happened two years ago. One third both happened four years ago.

[00:08:34] One third about what happened six years ago.

**Archival:** [00:08:36] Meanwhile domestic politics also makes headlines. The 1966 election chooses governors senators and congressmen and serves as a significant preview of the 68 presidential election.

**Dan Cassino:** [00:08:46] So in 2016 in the Senate for instance you are still seeing a bunch of people who've been elected in the Tea Party wave of 2010. Now that wave wasn't really going very much anymore in 2016 but it didn't matter because they were still in there. You're still sharing power across all those years. And the idea is to kind of average things out where the house is reflecting all of these the minute whims of the people they want and a Masonic party. They want the Tea Party. Well the Senate is going to be the insulation between those whims and the actual power of government.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:19] So the Senate by design has this long institutional memory and the House is more reactive.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:09:25] That's right. But the staggered Senate means every election is different when it comes to who even has a chance a chance.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:09:31] So depending on which states are up for grabs you can see a year where the Democrats are very safe or the Republicans are very safe. This cycle happens to be where there are more Democrats in red states that have to face the music. So it's going to be a little bit more difficult for the Democrats not only to hold their seats but to flip seats as well. So we see very red states states like Montana where you have Democrats that have to face Trump voters they have to face red voters and hold those seats. So not only if the Democrats gained power in the House or the Senate are they going to have that ability to investigate the president. But it also means they're going to be able to put the kibosh on the president's agenda. So in terms of passing legislation that's not going to be so easy for Donald Trump anymore if the Democrats take over either branch because obviously you have to pass legislation out of the House and the Senate. So even taking one branch totally puts the brakes on the Trump agenda legislatively at least.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:27] OK so this is like when Obama lost the house in the 2010 midterms right.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:32] Yes. So Obamacare went through before that election but it never would have made it out of the House if it had happened after the election.

[00:10:44] Number three congressional redistricting aka gerrymandering.

**Dan Cassino:** [00:10:51] Now we've probably heard a lot about gerrymandering in the House of Representatives. That's where state legislatures draw districts to help one party or another. So they might draw districts to make sure that Republicans are always going to one seat or the Democrats win one seat. And both parties do this although in recent years generally Republicans have done a better job of it than Democrats have.

**Archival:** [00:11:09] Because the politicians are only one thing it does is to stay in power.

[00:11:14] To stay in power no matter what. It doesn't matter if you're a Democrat or a Republican.

**Dan Cassino:** [00:11:19] Now what that means is the House of Representatives I am largely representing a district that already likes my party. So I'm speaking to here from Montclair New Jersey in Montclair New Jersey as a whole is a city that is slightly to the left of Trotzky.

[00:11:39] That means if I'm the representative from Montclair I run as far left as I can and that'll get me elected. If I go to towns over I'm going to be in a town that had the birth of the Tea Party. And guess what.

[00:11:50] I'm going to run as far right as I can. I'm going to win re-election. House of Representatives districts tend to lead to polarization with members of Congress trying to go as far left as far right as they can get.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:01] Just a quick clarification. Congressional redistricting and gerrymandering aren't interchangeable. Gerrymandering is when you do congressional redistricting to favor your party.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:12:12] OK so what does this have to do with midterm elections.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:15] Well statistically older whiter more conservative people vote in midterms and that means these districts can be drawn to favor conservatives and that won't change for another 10 years.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:12:26] Most political scientists put it at about 40 seats that are truly up for grabs with all of the rest if you can think of that 435 seats. There's only 40 really competitive districts which means the other ones are really really red are really really blue. Just to put it in perspective in the last election it was pretty split in terms of the House the House of Representatives we saw if you took the total vote for House members it was about 50 percent 50 percent split between Democrats and Republicans. But when you break that 50 50 percent down and you look at what happened in terms of the outcome of the vote you know the Republicans have more of a 40 seat advantage in the house.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:06] I have to restate this Ana because I could not believe it when I heard it the first time in 2016. Even though almost the exact same number of votes were cast for Democratic Representatives and Republican Representatives the Republicans won 241 House seats and the Democrats won 194.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:26] So when are those districts actually drawn.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:29] That happens every 10 years after the census is done. So this election coming up 2018 midterms is huge because some of the people who will go in will determine the next drawing of congressional districts. Oh man that's big big big big but let's move on to number four.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:13:44] Number four midterms matter because you really are pressing the button for new ideas. If the Democrats are able to flip the house or flip the Senate not only does it give a chance for the party to redefine itself to have new leaders to have fresh faces to try to put that agenda in front of the American people and maybe put you know the president under some pressure in terms of is he going to support ideas that might be popular with most Americans because that legislation is now coming out of the House and coming out of the Senate. But in the long term it really can help a party rejuvenate itself. You know come out new start over again.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:19] The guy who wrote the book on midterms AndyE. Bush told me about this. He said that if we look at huge areas of new policy in American history say the New Deal or LBJ Great Society. They were bracketed by midterm elections not presidential elections.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:14:36] Yeah it's like midterms are a test kitchen for politics and we saved the best for last. Here comes number five.

**Keith Hughes:** [00:14:41] And finally number five why midterm is really important is because voting counts voting really matters and when you look at statistically the type of turnout that you get in midterm elections it's really really sad. My fellow Americans you know in a national election you might see 55 65 percent of registered voters coming out. But in a midterm election it could be as low as 25 30 percent.

**Archival:** [00:15:05] Sometimes your instincts tell you when a man is right.

[00:15:08] For the job.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:13] So there it is. Keith uses top 5 1 President almost always take the hit to the Senate staggered election cycle is crucial. Three congressional redistricting aka gerrymandering is going to happen after the midterms for midterms are proving ground for new ideas and 5 your vote really counts in a midterm.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:35] I gotta say Nick I've really learned a lot in this episode.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:37] Me too. So before we say goodbye we're going to end this episode with a snapshot of the historic midterm broken down by Brady Carlson former NH PR reporter and current afternoon host at Wisconsin Public Radio as well as the author of Dead Presidents.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:52] Brady Carlson.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:54] You know him, right?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:54] I know Brady.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:55] He's going to tell us about a midterm from the past.

**Brady Carlson:** [00:15:58] Sometimes a midterm election can turn an era of good feelings. Into an era of hard feelings.

[00:16:11] Today's midterm is the 18 26 midterm election. And to understand the election of 1826 and 1827 they were split up back then. You first have to understand how weird the 20s are in American political history. This is one of the few times where the country doesn't have major political parties that oppose each other. There had been two main political parties the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans but the federalists collapsed and so the Democratic Republicans were kind of the only game in town by the 18 20 presidential election. James Monroe the incumbent ran. Basically unopposed for re-election and because there's no organized opposition to his administration this period becomes known as the era of good feelings.

[00:17:00] The feelings were actually a little more mixed than that especially when 1824 rolled around because there were a bunch of people angling to be Monroes successor at that time. The typical frontrunner to be the next president was the previous president secretary of state. And at that time the secretary of state was a guy called John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts. But there was also kind of a wild card thrown into the mix.

[00:17:25] Jackson of Tennessee had even gotten a national MSJ.

[00:17:30] He was a military hero in the War of 1812. He was enormously popular and he had thrown his hat into the ring. He wasn't going to wait around to become secretary of state first.

[00:17:39] There's only one thing that can keep you from being pretty and that you wish that the election happens.

[00:17:45] Jackson wins the most popular votes and the most electoral votes but not a majority of either. And under the Constitution when there's no majority in the Electoral College the House of Representatives chooses the presidents and in 1824 they chose the second place finisher John Quincy Adams determined Bacchis not to have a wedding present. So obviously the Jackson people are furious. They finished first and didn't win the election so they essentially say this is a rigged system. The Adams people had conspired with the insiders in the House of Representatives to take away the election not only from Andrew Jackson but to their minds. The will of the American people. So the Jackson people respond to this by organizing their own political party. They called it the Democratic Party and their mission was to basically wage a four year election campaign against President Adams and the people who would put him in office. So they specifically targeted those lawmakers from the projects Jackson districts who had voted to elect Adams. They called it a blacklist. Now Adams was still rooted in the old model that public officials were public officials not politicians. They shouldn't carry the banner of a party. He even once told Congress that they needed to pass some of his agenda even if it was unpopular with the people he told them and this is a quote Don't be quote palsied by the will of our constituents. Now that's not the kind of thing that wins you a lot of public support. So the Jackson forces took this opportunity and they started using something close to modern election techniques they were going district by district. They were really playing up the personality of their candidate. Jack's life. Was. Nuts.

[00:19:29] And when the mid-term elections were done they had majorities in both houses of Congress and they use those majorities to block the Adams administration and its priorities for the next two years until the 1828 presidential election rolled around which Andrew Jackson won in an outright majority. This was an early example of what's now known as the mid-term decline where a new president comes in and two years later voters move toward the opposition in Congress to serve as a kind of check on that administration. This is something that's happened not in every presidency but in enough that it's become an almost expectation when a new president comes into office.

[00:20:14] That is it for Civics 101 today and remember this is just the first in a five part series on the midterm elections. Stick around for number two which will be on state and local elections.

[00:20:26] Today's episode was produced by me, Nick Capodice and Hannah McCarthy and Jackie Helbert. Our staff includes Ben Henry and Justine Paradice Jimmy Gutierrez and Taylor Quimby Erika Jandek is our executive producer Maureen McMurry is the one who put the hat on the snowman music in this episode by Diamond Ortiz Rondo brothers Blue Dot sessions Yang logos dead boys Ethan Maxwell parvus decree Samuel Woodworth silent partner Franz Schubert the green orbs and Keen's as Merera. If you want to know more about civics 101 or you want to submit a civics question of your own. You can do that at Civics 101 podcast. Dot org Civics 101 is a production ofM.H. PR. New Hampshire Public Radio.