

Midterm Elections

What are they? What is at stake?

Kristen McKenna



USE THIS IN CONJUNCTION WITH the Elections Issue #26 of *The Change Agent*, “Democracy in Action,” where you will find more excellent lesson plans, student essays, and engaging election-related activities—content that will evoke deep thinking about the meaning of democracy and the multiple ways adults participate in public life. “Democracy in Action” is available for free at our website. Hard copies are available at a small cost. See the back page for more information.

BEFORE YOU READ, share what you know or what you’ve heard about the upcoming elections.

NOTE THE GLOSSARY on p. 11. Refer to these definitions as you read.

Midterm Elections: Don’t Forget about Us!

There’s a big election coming up this November. Thirty-six senators in the U.S. Congress and all 435 representatives are facing re-election. But we are hearing a lot less about this election than we heard about the last election in 2008. Why? Because in 2008, Americans were electing a president, and a presidential election always gets a lot of attention. This election, in 2010, is called a midterm election because it happens halfway through the president’s four-year term.

The main players in the U.S. government serve various terms. The chart below shows how long each term is and whether there are limits on how many terms an elected official can serve.

With politicians serving terms of different lengths, you can see how sometimes their election would fall on a presidential election year and sometimes on a midterm election year.

Elected Official	Term	Term Limits?
President	4 years	two terms
Senator	6 years	no limits
Representative	2 years	no limits

Let’s look at the example of Barbara Boxer from California. She was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1992. That was the same year that Bill Clinton was elected president. Since then, she has had to run for re-election 3 times – in 1998, 2004, and again this year, 2010. Which of her four elections have happened during presidential elections? How do you think it affects her campaign to run during a presidential election year compared with a midterm election year?

Write down the names of some of your elected officials in the chart below. If you don’t know, look it up at <www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>.

Office	Name	Up for re-election?
President		
Senator		
Senator		
Representative		
Governor		

Nothing in this magazine is intended to reflect an endorsement for or opposition to any candidate or political party.

What Is at Stake?

As you can see on the chart on the next page, voter turnout is lower during midterm elections than during presidential elections. Why do you think this is true? Make a list of some of the important issues the next Congress will be addressing. Use these signs from recent protests to get started. Do you think it is important to vote? Why or why not?



Making Sense of Voter Turnout

Calculate the missing percentages in the Voter Turnout table on the next page.

Study the table and write three true statements about the data you see:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Predict what the numbers will be for 2010. Fill in the open spaces in the 2010 row. Check your prediction against the actual outcome after the election takes place.

National Voter Turnout in Federal Elections: 1960–2008

Year	Voting-age population	Number of Registered Voters	Voter turnout	Turnout of voting-age population (percent)
2010				
2008*	231,229,580	NA	132,618,580	56.8%
2006	220,600,000	135,889,600	80,588,000	37.1%
2004	221,256,931	174,800,000	122,294,978	55.3
2002	215,473,000	150,990,598	79,830,119	37.0
2000	205,815,000	156,421,311	105,586,274	
1998	200,929,000	141,850,558	73,117,022	36.4
1996	196,511,000	146,211,960	96,456,345	49.1
1994	193,650,000	130,292,822	75,105,860	38.8
1992	189,529,000	133,821,178	104,405,155	55.1
1990	185,812,000	121,105,630	67,859,189	
1988	182,778,000	126,379,628	91,594,693	50.1
1986	178,566,000	118,399,984	64,991,128	36.4
1984	174,466,000	124,150,614	92,652,680	53.1
1982	169,938,000	110,671,225	67,615,576	39.8
1980	164,597,000	113,043,734	86,515,221	
1978	158,373,000	103,291,265	58,917,938	37.2
1976	152,309,190	105,037,986	81,555,789	53.6
1974	146,336,000	96,199,020	55,943,834	38.2
1972	140,776,000	97,328,541	77,718,554	55.2
1970	124,498,000	82,496,747	58,014,338	
1968	120,328,186	81,658,180	73,211,875	60.8
1966	116,132,000	76,288,283	56,188,046	48.4
1964	114,090,000	73,715,818	70,644,592	61.9
1962	112,423,000	65,393,751	53,141,227	47.3
1960	109,159,000	64,833,096	68,838,204	

Sources: <http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html>; <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0781453.html#ixzz0xQnPzcEh>>. NA = not available. **Note:** Presidential election years are in boldface.

Midterm Elections: A Chance to Balance Power?

Midterm elections are an important barometer of the popularity of an administration, and they play a big role in determining the president's ability to pursue his agenda; if a president has an oppositional Congress, he will find it much harder to pass laws or channel money to his chosen causes. He will spend as much time battling Congress as he spends running the country.



Looking at Party Power

Study the chart (on the next page) of how Republicans, Democrats, and Independents are spread out through the Legislative branch (the Senate and the House of Representatives) and the Executive branch (the presidency). Write three true statements about the data you see. (For example: *While Carter, a Democrat, was president from 1976 to 1980, Democrats controlled the House and the Senate by a large margin.*):



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Make three lists: the presidents who have governed when their party controlled *both* the House and the Senate, the presidents who have governed when their party controlled *neither* the House *nor* the Senate, the presidents whose party split control between the two houses of the legislature. Discuss what you think it all means.

Why are there so few Independents? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a government that is dominated by two parties?

Find out what seats are open in the 2010 midterm elections, where the biggest races are, and whether your senator or representative is up for re-election. Visit <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/2010-race-maps/senate/>.

Control of Senate, House, and Presidency by Party, 1960-2008

Year	Senate				House				President		
	Dems.	Reps.	Inds.	Control	Dems.	Reps.	Inds.	Control	Elected	Took over	Party
2008	57	41	2	Dem.	257	178	0	Dem.	Obama		Dem.
2006	49	49	1	Rep.	233	202	0	Dem.			
2004	44	55	1	Rep.	202	232	1	Rep.	GW Bush		Rep.
2002	48	51	1	Rep.	205	229	1	Rep.			
2000	50	50	0		212	221	2	Rep.	GW Bush		Rep.
1998	45	55	0	Rep.	211	223	1	Rep.			
1996	45	55	0	Rep.	206	228	0	Rep.	Clinton		Dem.
1994	48	52	0	Rep.	204	230	1	Rep.			
1992	57	43	0	Dem.	258	176	1	Dem.	Clinton		Dem.
1990	56	44	0	Dem.	267	167	0	Dem.			
1988	55	45	0	Dem.	260	175	0	Dem.	GHW Bush		Rep.
1986	55	45	0	Dem.	258	177	0	Dem.			
1984	47	53	0	Rep.	253	182	0	Dem.	Reagan		Rep.
1982	45	55	0	Rep.	269	166	0	Dem.			
1980	46	53	1	Rep.	242	192	1	Dem.	Reagan		Rep.
1978	58	41	1	Dem.	277	158	0	Dem.			
1976	61	38	1	Dem.	292	143	0	Dem.	Carter		Dem.
1974	60	38	2	Dem.	291	144	0	Dem.		Ford	Rep.
1972	56	42	2	Dem.	242	192	1	Dem.	Nixon		Rep.
1970	54	44	2	Dem.	255	180	0	Dem.			
1968	57	43	0	Dem.	243	192	0	Dem.	Nixon		Rep.
1966	64	36	0	Dem.	247	187	0	Dem.			
1964	68	32	0	Dem.	295	140	0	Dem.	Johnson		Dem.
1962	66	34	0	Dem.	259	176	0	Dem.		Johnson	Dem.
1960	64	36	0	Dem.	263	174	1	Dem.	Kennedy		Dem.

1. Baker, Peter; VandeHei, Jim (2006-11-08). "A Voter Rebuke For Bush, the War and the Right." *Washington Post* <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/07/AR2006110701697.html>. Retrieved 2010-05-26. "Bush and senior adviser Karl Rove tried to replicate that strategy this fall, hoping to keep the election from becoming a referendum on the president's leadership."

2. "Election '98 Lewinsky factor never materialized." CNN, 1998-11-04 <www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1998/11/04/impeachment/>. "Americans shunned the opportunity to turn Tuesday's midterm elections into a referendum on President Bill Clinton's behavior, dashing Republican hopes of gaining seats in the House and Senate."

NOTE: Dem. = Democrat; Rep. = Republican; Ind. = Independent

Midterm Elections: A Popularity Contest for the President?

Midterm elections are sometimes regarded as a referendum on the sitting president’s and/or incumbent party’s performance. They usually don’t turn out well for the party of the president. Over the past 17 midterm elections, the president’s party has lost an average 28 seats in the House, and an average 4 seats in the Senate. Why do you think midterm elections do not usually turn out well for the sitting president? Look at the chart below and the chart on who had control of congress to make your conclusions.


Year	President’s Party	House Election Results	Senate Election Results
2006	Republican (R)	R: -30	R: -6
2002	R	R: +8	R: +2
1998	Democrat (D)	D: +5	0 (no change)
1994	D	D: -54	D: -8
1990	R	R: -8	R: -1
1986	R	R: -5	R: -8
1982	R	R: -26	0 (no change)
1978	D	D: -15	D: -3
1974	R	R: -48	R: -4
1970	R	R: -12	R: +1
1966	D	D: -48	D: -3

1. Baker, Peter; VandeHei, Jim (2006-11-08). "A Voter Rebuke For Bush, the War And the Right". Washington Post. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/07/AR2006110701697.html>. Retrieved 2010-05-26. "Bush and senior adviser Karl Rove tried to replicate that strategy this fall, hoping to keep the election from becoming a referendum on the president’s leadership."

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Go ahead! Say what you really think! These election-year messages (above and left) pull no punches. Would you put that bumper sticker on your car? What do you think of the T-shirt? Write your own bumper sticker, bill board, or sound bite to reflect your thoughts on the midterm elections.



Overview

The immense power to change U.S. laws and rewrite federal rules rests in the hands of the party that controls Congress.

When voters cast ballots for House and Senate candidates, their choices could give the minority party enough seats to become the majority party. The majority party holds power over House and Senate committees that write legislation. Chairmen and women on each committee belong to the majority party. Committee "ranking members" are the highest ranking members of the minority party.

Click on the tabs to learn who holds the power on Capitol Hill.

Levers of power HIDE CAPTION

Picture and text taken from June 2, 2010 CNN Politics page article "Learn More about Who Controls the Reins of Power" <www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/06/02/reins.of.power/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

Midterm Elections Can Change Who Controls Committees

What are Congressional Committees and why is it important to have certain members in Congress on certain committees? Anyone can write a bill, but members of Congress from either the House or Senate must introduce the bill. The first hurdle is for a bill to get through a committee – without a committee’s approval, a bill will die before it gets to the House or Senate floor for a vote.

There are committees on policy areas ranging from Agriculture to Veterans’ Affairs. Bills are first referred to a committee, which can consider the bill right away or can refer the bill to a subcommittee for study and hearings. You may hear that a bill is “marked up” – that means it meets a subcommittee’s approval and gets handed back to

the standing committee. The full committee can go ahead and have further hearings of its own or it can just vote to have the bill go to the full House or Senate.

The rules of the House require that committee chairpersons be elected from nominations submitted by the majority party at the beginning of each Congress. The committee chairperson may have to cast the deciding vote on a piece of legislation, so it is a powerful position. A representative gets to be a committee chairperson if he or she is politically powerful and has experience dealing with the issue. For more detailed information on the rules of Congress as well as current legislation being considered go to: <<http://thomas.loc.gov>>.

Senate Committees

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, Forestry
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Armed Services
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, Urban Affairs
Senate Committee on the Budget
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, Transport
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Senate Committee on Finance
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senate Committee on Health, Educ., Labor, Pensions
Senate Ctte. on Homeland Security and Govt. Affairs
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
Senate Ctte. on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Senate Select Committee on Ethics
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Senate Special Committee on Aging
Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control

House Committees

House Committee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on Armed Services
House Committee on the Budget
House Committee on Education and Labor
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
House Committee on Financial Services
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
House Committee on Homeland Security
House Committee on House Administration
House Committee on the Judiciary
House Committee on Natural Resources
House Ctte. on Oversight and Government Reform

House Committee on Rules
House Committee on Science and Technology
House Committee on Small Business
House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House Committee on Ways and Means
House Committee on Intelligence
House Ctte. on Energy Independence/Global Warming

Joint Committees

Joint Committee on the Library
Joint Committee on Printing
Joint Committee on Taxation
Joint Economic Committee

Important Committee Chairpersons Up for Re-Election or Change in 2010

- Senate Appropriations: Chair is D. Inouye, Hawaii (D) seat is up for re-election
- Senate Armed Services: C. Levin, Michigan (D)
- Senate Finance: J. Baucus, Montana (D)
- Senate Judiciary: P. Leahy, Vermont (D) seat is up for re-election
- House Appropriations: Chair is D. Obey, Wisconsin (D) retiring, seat is up for election
- House Armed Services: I. Skelton, Missouri (D) seat up for re-election
- House Energy and Commerce: H. Waxman, California (D) seat up for re-election
- House Judiciary: J. Conyers, Michigan (D) seat up for re-election
- House Ways and Means: S. Levin, Michigan (D) seat up for re-election

Use <<http://elections.nytimes.com/2010/house>> or <<http://elections.nytimes.com/2010/senate>> and click on the state to see the status of the House and Senate Committee Chair seats.

Why is it important for a member of Congress to be on a committee or to be the chairperson of a committee?

Discuss what you think each congressional committee works on. Underline the committees you think are most important.

Are there any committees you would like to see your Senator or Representative be on?

After looking at the election maps on the *New York Times* web page (url noted above), what conclusions have you made about the upcoming midterm election?

Midterm Elections 2010

Consequences for Adult Education

Art Ellison

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS! The special section on grassroots advocacy on pp. 18-23 of Issue #26 of *The Change Agent* includes student stories about talking to legislators, ideas for actions, tips for meeting with legislators, and much more. Find it and download it for free at <www.nelrc.org/changeagent>.

BEFORE YOU READ, discuss what adult learners and teachers can do to support adult education.

SHARE STORIES about times when you have advocated for change.



Adult learners in the MA State House during Adult Learner Awareness Day, March 2007.

What Is at Stake for Adult Education?

The adult education field has a strong interest in the outcome of the upcoming election. Several of our champions in the U.S. Congress and key members of the Appropriations and Health, Education, and Labor Committees are retiring or are in tough reelection bids to keep their seats. Also, our lawmakers will be making some important decisions about how adult education will be funded.

Important Committee Chairs in the House Will Change Hands

The Chair of the House Appropriations Committee and Chair of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, Congressman David Obey from Wisconsin is retiring. If the Democrats retain control of the House the new Chairman will probably be Congressman Norm Dicks from Washington. If the Republicans win control of the House the new Committee Chair would be Congressman Jerry Lewis from California.

Changes in Key Senate Committees

On the Senate side Senator Patty Murray (WA), a champion for adult education on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee is in a tough fight for her seat. Christopher Dodd (CT) is retiring from the HELP Committee and another Committee member, Michael Bennet (CO) is also engaged in a difficult contest to retain his seat. Lisa Murkowski (AK), another HELP Committee member, was defeated in her primary election. Judd Gregg (NH), another HELP Committee member and the ranking member of the Senate Committee on the Budget, is retiring from the Senate.

A Supporter in the House Is Retiring

One of the strongest supporters of adult education in the House, Patrick Kennedy (RI) who is on the Appropriations Sub-Committee for adult education funding, is retiring.



Adult learners rally for support of adult education, Arizona.

Key House Supporters are up for Re-Election

The following strong supporters of adult education in the House are running for re-election: Congressman Polis (CO), Congresswoman Shea-Porter (NH), Congressman Hinojosa (TX), Congressman Grijalva (AZ), Congressman Roe (TN), Congressman Maffei (NY), Congressman Yarmouth (KY), Congressman Tierney (MA), Congresswoman Fudge (OH), Congressman Ryan (OH), Congresswoman DeLauro (CT), and Congressman Conyers (MI).

How Will the Government Fund Adult Education?

The key issues for adult education are: 1) funding and 2) the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act.

The appropriations process for fiscal year 2012 (which is the process that will decide how much funding will be available to the states for their adult education programs) will begin with the President's Budget Proposal to Congress in early February 2011. Negotiations will continue through the spring, summer, and fall while the House and

Senate work to approve funding levels. This is an important time for students, teachers, and allies of adult education to contact their legislators and ask them to support adult education!

We had hoped that we would have a new Workforce Investment Act (WIA) during the current session of Congress but that will not happen before January when the new Congress comes into session. So we look to the new Congress to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act, and we can help shape what it looks like by learning the issues and letting the lawmakers hear from us.

Art Ellison, state director of NH adult education, is the Policy Committee Chair of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education.

The Elections and You

How do legislators affect adult education?

What can you do to influence your legislator's vote?

Are any of your elected officials mentioned in this article? If so, what impact might that official have on adult education?

Election day is on November 2, 2010. Learn about the candidates and the referenda on the ballot. Share what you learn with others. Vote!

Find out where you vote at <www.whereivote.com>.



Glossary

APPROPRIATIONS: The process for deciding how federal money should be spent on government agencies and departments.

BIPARTISAN SUPPORT: Legislation has bipartisan support when both major parties support the bill.

CAPITOL HILL: Refers to the area that includes the U.S. Capitol, the House and Senate office buildings, and the surrounding residential area of townhouses and apartment buildings.



CHAMBER: Congress is divided into two groups—the Senate and the House of Representatives, which govern from two different rooms (or chambers) in the Capitol building.

COMMITTEES: Committees are small groups of senators or representatives that review proposed legislation and decide which measures should be sent to the House or Senate. The committees are assigned various issue categories to handle, known as **JURISDICTION**. Every representative is assigned to work on about two committees; senators are assigned to four. Members are expected to become specialists in the subject matter under their committee’s jurisdiction.

CONSTITUENTS: A group of residents represented by an elected official.



DISTRICT: The geographical area in a state represented by a House member. Within a state, congressional districts are drawn so that each has an average of about 650,000 residents.

INCUMBENT: An official who is currently in office and is running for re-election.

LAW: Legislation passed by the House and Senate and signed by the president. If the president vetoes the law, it can still be passed if it receives a two-thirds majority in the House and the Senate.

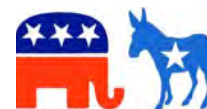
LEGISLATOR: An elected person who represents citizens in Congress and helps make laws.

MAJORITY (MINORITY) party: the political party that has the most (or the least) seats in the Senate or the House.

MAJORITY LEADER/MINORITY LEADER: The member elected by the majority or minority party to be the party’s main spokesperson and legislative strategist.

MIDTERM ELECTION: A national election that takes place halfway into the president’s 4-year term.

PARTISAN: Identifying with and showing support of a particular political party.



REFERENDUM: When a law or decision is submitted to a popular vote.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: The presiding officer who is responsible for the day-to-day functions of the U.S. House of Representatives. The current Speaker of the House is Nancy Pelosi, pictured at right.



WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT: This is the federal law that allocates money for adult education, literacy, and job training programs. Congress first authorized WIA in 1998. It has not been reauthorized since 2003.

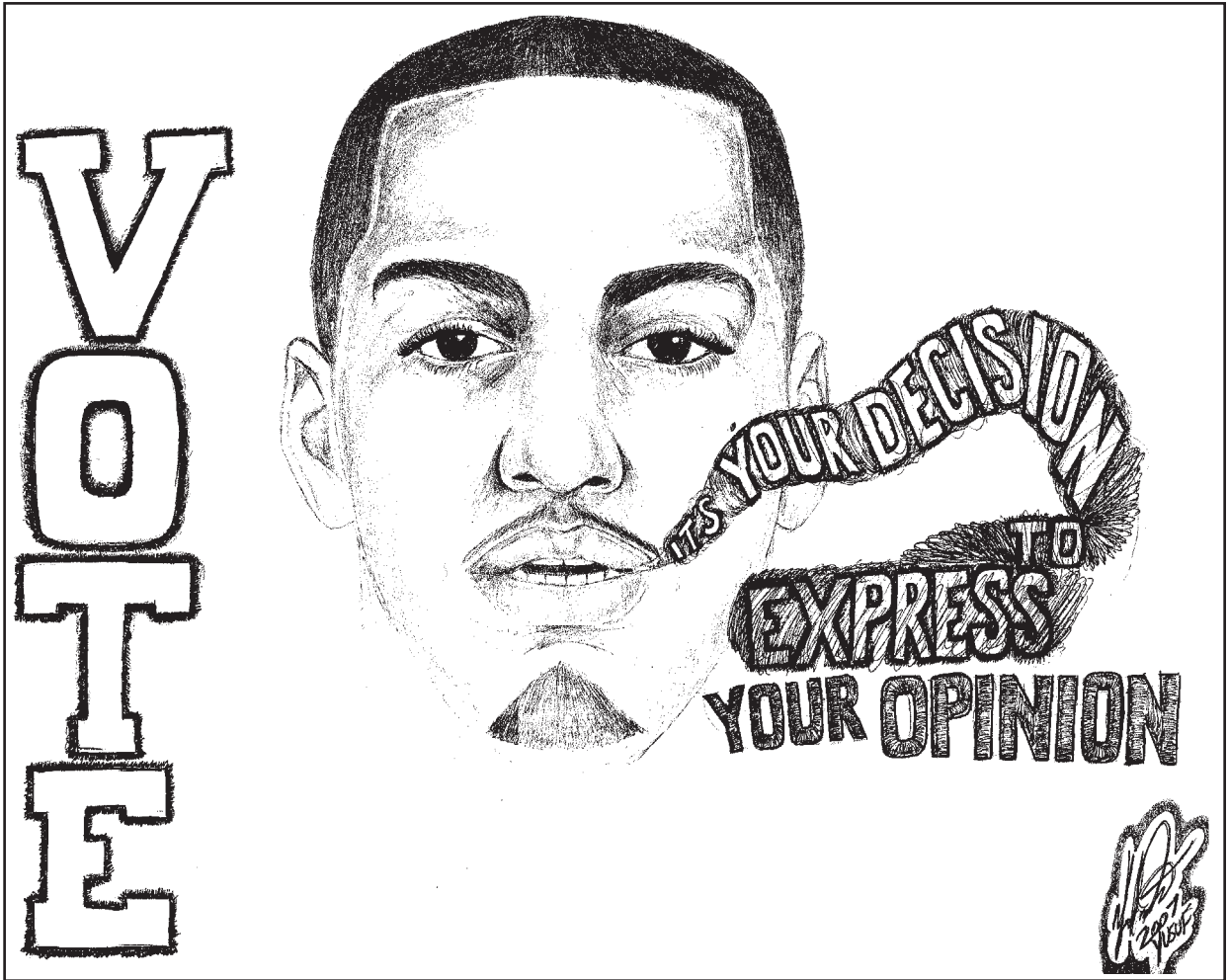


Illustration by Yusuf Stroud, GED student in St. Louis, MO. This image was originally published on p. 51 of the elections issue (#26) of *The Change Agent*.



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