Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. Greg and I decided to do a special episode, a special podcast episode covering some of our reflections from the election as we're recording this and hoping to have it out in the next couple of days. It is Wednesday, November 7th and we have survived the election and also earlier today had a nice conversation with Professor Jessica Gottlieb and we learned a little bit about democracy and democracy erosion and how some of those things may or may not and the ways that they do raise questions for the US.

But in thinking about democracy we had a nice example of it yesterday. And these were the 2018 midterm elections and leading up to it people were really interested to see how the pollsters did as one kind of piece of this. Because there's some famous examples from the 2016 of people thinking the pollsters were way off which I think in retrospect that's not really that true or exactly how the probabilities work. But, what the pollsters and folks at for example, 538 and other people that were suggesting would happen is what we got, I think.

You had a House of Representatives that is now controlled by the Democrats which was widely predicted. The Senate, there was conversations around whether it would stay in Republican power or not. Republicans actually picked up two seats projected I think in the Senate.

Oh, I think perhaps more than two.

Perhaps more, so maybe two that have been called so far.

Two that have been called but Florida hasn't been called as of 3:30 Central Standard Time. Florida hasn't been called but it doesn't look good for the incumbent Bill Nelson. It looks like the Governor Rick Scott will win that seat.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

So the Republicans flipped Indiana, Missouri, and North Dakota.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

And they might flip Florida. Whereas the Republicans lost, the Democrats flipped one state, Nevada. But I think 538 and the pollsters didn't do badly I think in total. But they did, I think they underestimated how strong the Republican vote was in some of these Senate races.

So for example, Joe Donnelly, the incumbent Democrat in Indiana, seemed to be in pretty good shape if you looked at 538 or The Upshot, or some of the polling. And he lost pretty bad. I think he lost by eight points or something.

Likewise, Claire McCaskill in Missouri lost worse I think than predicted.

John Tester seems to have held on in Montana which looked for a while like it might flip but there the prognostications seemed to have turned out right.

So one thing that might be, I wanna focus on a couple of races that I thought were interesting and that we have different levels of personal connection to. But I'm from Georgia and so I was following the governor's race in Georgia which as of the time of recording, I think Brian Kemp has 50.3 or .4 percent and needs 50% to stave off a runoff. That election was a really weird one I thought in the way that it was administered. You had the current Secretary of State who's ultimately in charge of the elections on the ballot and then there were these accusations, several of them of voter suppression and purging voter rolls and-

Right, we should make clear for listeners that Brian Kemp, the Republican candidate for governor is the Secretary of State [crosstalk 00:04:12] of Georgia and thus was overseeing an election in which he was running.

And which he is now winning or staving off a run off by .4 percentage points. And so, there were accusations of voter suppression, and cleaning voter rolls, and then a couple days before which we were talking about in our podcast conversation this morning, was that it was-

There was a federal judge-

There was a federal judge that came in, thank you. There was a federal judge that came in on I think Sunday and said this process had to stop.

Right.

And then the actual election is being decided by fewer votes than the accusations of voter suppression.

Right, so there was ... My read of the media on that was that there was 70,000 potential voters scrubbed from the voting rolls by Mr. Kemp's office claiming that they weren't perfect matches for names, or for other reasons. And that at least some of the reporting indicated that there seemed to be an over representation of minorities in the names that were scrubbed.

Now that's 70,000. Those 70,000 people, I don't know how closely they follow the news, did they think that they were eligible, ineligible, did they show up, did they not show up, did they show up and then were made to cast a provisional ballot? In any event, that's a lot more theoretically than the margin by which the Secretary of State, Mr. Kemp avoided a run off.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

One wonders what the result of that will be. I saw Stacey Abrams, the Democratic candidate said she was willing to go to court to try to adjudicate this.

Yeah, she's not-

She's not conceding.

She's not conceding. So that was one of the interesting ones just because it also has some of the other things that we've talked about going on with the accusations of voter suppression and the exact matches I think was-

Was one of the issues.

And then this idea of should the official running the election also be able to be on the ballot and so I think it just, it has some interesting democracy norm issues. So I thought that one was interesting.

And of course right here in Texas we had a nationally focused on election and we mentioned in the last conversation we had not with Professor Gottlieb but with Professor Taylor two weeks ago that there wasn't a lot of conversation around our state offices. So around the governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general which are the big state level offices with a lot of executive power. And those didn't turn out to even be particularly close.

Closer than they have been in the past. Governor Abbott won a pretty convincing victory but the lieutenant governor Dan Patrick only got 51%. Roughly 51%.

Yeah so it was only a few points.

And Ken Paxton, the attorney general who's under indictment, and thus could not vote for himself, 'cause if you're under indictment in Texas, you lose the franchise. He also won with I think less than 51%. He got over 50% but I think less than 51 or if he got over 51 it was just over.

So those were probably the two most controversial candidates, but it demonstrated how red Texas is that Dan Patrick, the lieutenant governor who is famous for supporting the bathroom bill down here, much like the bathroom bill in North Carolina that lost them all that business and eventually got repealed. He won reelection and our attorney general under indictment won reelection.

And the one that everyone was paying attention to was-

Beto mania.

Was the Beto mania. And Ted Cruz.

I'm sorry, Beto mania.

Beto mania, yeah, yeah, yeah. This one was really covered by Late Night and-

Oh yeah. [crosstalk 00:08:19] That was our national race.

And as it was coming in, my wife and I were watching the returns last night and that one was interesting to watch because the areas that were reporting were kind of skewed in the beginning so you had it one way and then you had it another, it was reporting as watching, it was interesting to watch that one play out.

But I think it is noteworthy or at least kind of abstracting from to think about, what does this mean for President Trump and core support? So you have two states like Georgia and Texas where Republicans have been dominating the Senate races, and have been dominating the statewide races for 20 years.

Since 1994, there's been no statewide Democrat elected in Texas since 1994 and I think that was Ann Richards.

Okay. And in Georgia I can't remember, I'd have to think for a bit, it's been a while since, I guess Zell Miller was probably the last Demo-

I got that wrong, it wasn't Ann Richards. It was Bob Bullock as lieutenant governor I'm pretty sure. I'm pretty sure. 'Cause 1994 is when George W. Bush was elected Governor of Texas and he had a Democratic lieutenant governor.

No relation by the way.

No, no relation [crosstalk 00:09:40]

That I'm aware of.

He's from the Georgia Bullocks, not the Texas Bullocks.

And so, the margins of the victory for those statewide offices across both states narrowed in this election, but Republicans fended off challengers and maintained power. So I think there are two things that I was wanting to get your thoughts on, that I've been thinking about is how to interpret this election.

So there's not a red wave, there's not a blue wave. At the federal level, the houses aren't unified any more. And so that's likely to have some governing consequences at least in normal administrations. It'll be interesting to see, just today Jeff Sessions has resigned, there's a new attorney general, acting attorney general has been appointed. Is already publishing policy statements about the Mueller investigation. President Trump had a press [crosstalk 00:10:45] conference.

Conference, full on press conference.

Full on press conference.

East Room of the White House. Called Jim Acosta a horrible human being.

So called Jim Acosta a horrible human being, very combative, very like-

I won.

Yeah, I won and if you're thinking about doing any investigations or pursuing these things further, I'm gonna take, I think the quote was "A war like posture."

Yes, yeah.

And so, it's gonna be really interesting to see how this is playing out. You have the state pieces which is where we focused on first, that I think are interesting and very important. And then you have the national narrative that's gonna come out of this which will dominate the political cycle for a little bit. And it sets the terms of engagement I think between the two political parties moving forward.

And so I was reading some stuff before we chatted today and there's discussion about how people think the President will respond. Although I think we have some initial evidence.

But really some conversation about what should the Democrats' strategy be with the House? And I was just chatting with some friends and other political science folks today and there seems to be a real disagreement about whether Democrats now that they have the House should use this opportunity to play ball with the President and try to get some things passed with respect to immigration or infrastructure and the President at least alluded initially that he was open to those conversations.

Or whether the Democrats should kinda double down on this anti-Trump strategy and on the strategy of pursuing further investigations, trying to get to the bottom of the degree to which there's Russian collusion. Trying to get to the bottom of some of the other charges against the President and people close to him that the Mueller investigation has been, we now have several indictments of people who were at the very-

Several, more than 20 I think.

And often very, very close to the President's inner circle and architects of the campaign. And so do you have any guesses or any-

This is my hot take on this.

Yeah, so what's your hot take on what's next?

Yeah, yeah. I think that both sides are gonna say that they want to cooperate and there's not going to be any cooperation. I can't see how there's gonna be. Because if you're a Democrat in the House and you're a committee chair, you're gonna want to see. You're gonna be using subpoena power to call people from the administration up. You're gonna get the President's tax returns. You can't not do that. You've been saying you're gonna do that the whole time, that's why your base elected you.

And sure, Nancy Pelosi says I want to work with the President. And the President says I want to work with Nancy Pelosi. But let's look at these issues. There's no common ground on immigration. Between this President and a Democratic Congress. Even on an infrastructure bill, the President's gonna insist on money for the wall, and I just don't think a Democratic House of Representatives is gonna go for that.

Yeah.

Where else do the cooperate? They're on fundamentally different pages about tax policy. I think the President is just going to use executive orders on trade and on immigration, which I think are the only two issues he really cares about to do what he wants and he's gonna tell the Congress to go fishing so to speak.

Go fishing.

And he will run against the do nothing Democrats in Congress. Now I think the Democrats, if they're smart, are gonna do two things. Well I don't know if they're smart. I'm a college professor, not a political operative, so maybe my take on this is wrong.

But it seems to me they're gonna do two things. And whether this is smart or not, we'll find out in 2020. They're gonna do investigations of this administration. And they're gonna try to protect Robert Mueller. And I'll say something about Mueller in a minute. And they're going to I think try to adopt a bunch of legislation that they know is never gonna become law. Kick it over to the Senate and be able to say, be able to go to the country and say look, we tried to initiate things on immigration, on health care, on you name the issue, right? And we sent it to the Senate, and it died. Because the President wouldn't push the Republicans in the Senate, and he can make 'em do anything he wants to cooperate.

I think that's gonna be the, there's gonna be some issues. The US/Mexico/Canada trade agreement which we talked about in our first podcast with Raymond Robertson, that's gonna have to go to Congress, the new Congress. My guess is that it probably has enough support across the aisles. There's Democrats, there's Republicans on the right and Democrats on the left who would vote against anything I think on trade. Trump can probably bring most of those Republicans on the right around. A lot of Democrats will oppose this just because it's Trump and because they're suspicious of trade. The Bernie Sanders, Sherrod Brown, Elizabeth Warren types.

But in general, I think we're not gonna see anything get done and I think it's entirely possible we'll have at least one government shutdown. President Trump talks about government shutdowns as if he likes them. This is guy who said trade wars are easy to win. I think that it fits into his personality of combativeness and confrontation and I think he thinks he might be able to win a government shutdown. We'll see.

The past evidence of government shutdowns is that they usually don't redound to the benefit of the party who is seen as causing them. Right? Bill Clinton most famously and the Republicans in the late 90s.

So I got a couple other hot takes though I wanna give ya before we run out of time. The conventional wisdom in the mainstream media, NPR, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the kind of things that I read is that this was a good day for the Democrats. I'm not so sure.

The fact that Florida elected a Republican governor who threw himself into President Trump's arms, who ran ads saying that he put his kids to bed at night by reading them The Art of the Deal. Rick DeSantis. He won the Governorship of Florida. And the fact that an incumbent Democratic senator was defeated in Florida, I think doesn't bode well for Democrats going forward.

The narratives, well Trump only could bring candidates across the line in states that were already pretty deeply red. That's not Florida. Florida is as purple as you get. President Obama carried Florida twice. Florida had an incumbent Democratic senator in Bill Nelson, who I don't think was elected in the last wave six years ago if I could do my math, 2012. When a lot of Democrats squeaked by in seats.

If I remember correctly, Bill Nelson was a two term Democratic senator. So that doesn't bode well for the Democrats and the fact that in Ohio although Sherrod Brown, the incumbent Democratic senator won relatively easily, a Republican governor was elected in Ohio.

So I think what you're talking about, if you're a Democrat and you're looking at 2020, is that you are gonna have to take Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The states that President Trump took to get him over 270. That people thought were part of the blue wall for Hilary Clinton. Well we found out they weren't the blue wall in 2016. The good thing for Democrats is that all three of those states elected Democratic governors. And Pennsylvania reelected a Democratic governor. In Wisconsin, ousted Scott Walker, and in Michigan elected a Democratic governor.

But we used to talk about the fact that Republicans in order to win the Presidency had to draw to an inside strait. It might be that we're getting to a point at least in the short term, before these demographic changes that the close votes in Georgia and Texas and all, perhaps per sage but before that gets realized, Democrats are gonna have to draw to an inside strait to win the Presidency.

The other thing that I think should be disturbing for Democrats, is that conventional wisdom was always high turnout elections favor Democrats. Well this was, although we haven't seen final figures, everybody says this was a high turnout election. So where was the blue tsunami? Right?

When the Republicans switched Congress in 1994, they got 60 seats. They picked up 60 seats. When the Republicans shifted Congress in 2010, the Tea Party revolt, they got 54 seats. What are Democrats gonna get? Somewhere in the low 30s of the flip.

So if your sympathies lie with the Democrats as mine do these days, you're happy that the Democrats took the House to put some restraints on this President. If I were a Democratic political operative, I wouldn't be dancing in the streets right now.

I think that's right. If you're a Republican strategist, I think you gotta be happy with what you picked up. This is showing a national strategy.

Right.

Our electoral college is how we decide the Presidential election.

And those House races are not a model of what the Presidential races. Governorships and Senatorial races are because you take Florida by three votes and you get all of its electoral votes. And that was the genius of Steve Bannon to concentrate the Trump electoral strategy at the end on the squeak through the popular vote in enough states to get your electoral college majority. Democrats can run up as big a margin in California and New York as they want, we found out in 2016, that doesn't get you elected.

What's interesting I think, is I remember when Trump was announcing a candidacy. And I remember going round and round with political scientists. I'm a public administration scholar, not gonna claim political science today.

Hey I study the Middle East. American politics is my hobby.

And I remember everyone saying this man has a ceiling and it is 15% of Republican Primary voters. And then it was 20% of Republican Primary voters. All the way right up into the election when he wins. And then once Trump won, I would talk with Republicans and Democrats, Republicans were clearly excited, clearly wanted to change things up. We're excited how he was changing things up, and Democrats were over here saying but his approval rating is just gonna fall. He's gonna be so terrible and look he's the least liked President after an election, and his approval ratings are just gonna sink. And none of this has happened.

And Trump's approval ratings leading up to the election were 41, 42%.

You know they varied obviously but they were in the low 40s.

The low 40s. And that's a lot different ballgame than what a lot of people thought would be low 30s.

Exactly.

For the ceiling, and so-

President Obama's approvals when he went into the 2010 election were in the low 40s.

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Not that different.

And so what I'm troubled by today isn't really even the differences of the power dynamics within the US Federal Government, it's not even as much about the wins or losses at the state level. None of this concerns me like this does. And what really concerns me is the strategy that at least won or kept a red stronghold. And the strategy leading up to the election was really clearly based in fear tactics and in large part fears of immigrants and fears of immigrants that are walking their way to the US border to seek political asylum.

This isn't an invasion, this isn't an attack. This is a somewhat sizable group of people coming to the US border-

Not even that sizable.

It's like half of what a crossing is in a week anyways as someone was pointing out to me earlier. And so what I'm really concerned about isn't the actual outcomes of this particular election, I think that there are some positive things for Republicans and positive things for Democrats. But the part that's really frightening to me as we start moving forward to 2020 is the strategy that worked arguably to the party that was using it was the strategy of fear of the other.

And this is what we're seeing play out in populist politics and far right wing stuff in Europe. And this is something that's really hard to back down from as a strategy particularly when you see it working.

Well that's the thing. Consider people like Beto O'Rourke and the Florida gubernatorial candidate Mr. Gillum. Who ran very kind of sunshine, positive, progressive campaigns. And they were defeated by people who played a very negative campaign strategy particularly on immigration. And it was enough for DeSantis and Cruz to defeat them. Not by huge margins, but to defeat them. And a loss is a loss. I think the President will take from this that that strategy works. He considers that he won the midterms.

And that as delusional sometimes as the President can be about reality, he's not wrong about that.

True.

He's not wrong about that. Losing the house was something but he did historically well in increasing his party's Senate representation in the first midterm of his Presidency. And he can claim it seems to me some amount of credit for that and knowing Mr. Trump, he'll claim more than his share of the credit.

And that will I think lead him to say my strategy worked. And all you Paul Ryan types who said I should be talking about the marvelous economy, why don't you shut up? Paul Ryan will shut up because he's leaving. Jeff Flake is leaving. Bob Corker's leaving. People who were willing to speak out against the President are leaving. And I think that it's his Republican party now to an even greater extent than it was in 2016.

I think that's true. And it's gonna be really interesting to see how that shapes the dialogue and the rhetoric moving forward.

And how it shapes the Democratic-

Response.

Response and the Democratic Primaries.

Yeah. And what it means for all kinds of policy things. Particularly with Congress is going to be in deadlock almost guaranteed, I think.

I think so too.

They might find some things to work on but it seems highly unlikely in the environment. And so it'll be again these executive orders changing policies on trade and immigration and seeing the militarization or potential militarization of the Southern border of the US. All these things is just a different type of game than I've seen. So it should be interesting.

Any other, I think you had some nice final words there, but anything else you'd like to toss in?

No, if people like the hot takes, we'll keep doing the hot takes. We'll see if people listen but we'll be back in your feed with more substantive discussions of public policy issues with our colleagues from the Bush School down the road.

Yep. Thank you for taking the time to listen. Hope you enjoy.