Forecasting the Future: What Will Happen During the 2018 Midterm Elections?

[00:00:00] The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are in a listen only mode.

[00:00:07] Thank you for listening in today. Tuesday October 3rd we have to our faculty LeBon our Welcome to today's topic forecasting the future: what will happen during the 2018 mid-term elections with Emory's own Professor Alan I. Abramowitz

My name is Marifel Vehlohr and I'm the director of global alumni engagement.

[00:00:29] It is my pleasure to introduce our featured speaker Dr. Alan I. Abramowitz is the Alben W. Barkley Professor of Political Science at Emory University in Atlanta Georgia.

[00:00:43] He received his B.A. from the University of Rochester in 1969 and his Ph.D. from Stanford University in 1976.

[00:00:53] Abramowitz has authored or coauthored six books, dozens of contributions to edited volumes, and more than 60 articles in political science journals dealing with political parties, elections, and voting behavior in the United States.

[00:01:11] He is also one of the nation's leading election forecasters. His time for change model currently correctly predicted the winner of the popular vote in every presidential election between 1992 and 2012. Abramowitz newest book The Great alignment race party transformation and the rise of Donald Trump was published by Yale University Press in 2018. If you have any questions throughout the presentation please feel free to chime in. We want this session to be an open dialogue between all attendees. We appreciate your understanding if we can get to all of them at the end of the program.

[00:02:03] We'll share Dr. Abramowitz's e-mail address with you. He loves to hear from alumni.

[00:02:20] Joining us. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom with us.

[00:02:26] Dr. Abramowitz Well thank you very much for inviting me to talk about the upcoming midterm elections. And thank you all very much for joining with the webinar today. I think we're having some technical difficulties right now and just getting started. Now I think. OK. Now we're
Working so.

[00:02:54] OK. So today has been to talk about the outlook for this year's midterm elections. As

[00:03:02] And of course we are only one week. There's a great interest right now. I know in what is going on and what might happen next Tuesday. And the question that I want to focus on today is how large is this democratic wave likely to be in the upcoming midterm elections. There's a very general expectation I think among people who study American politics journalists as well as political scientists that Democrats are likely to make significant gains in the midterm elections. But there's a good deal of uncertainty about just how large those gains are likely to be in the House elections the Senate elections as well as the elections for various state offices such as governors. So that's all will today and some of that background. We'll be talking about today is can be found in my new book The Great alignment that was just mentioned. That was published by Yale University Press couple months ago in which I can look at some of the longer term trends that kind of led us to this point in American politics so if you're interested in learning more you might want to pick up a copy it's available at Amazon dot com. And I know it's when the Emory bookstore if you're if you're nearby and. You know it's not that much time left until Christmas so if you're looking for a gift for that someone on your shopping list who has everything they probably don't have my book. So you might think about that. There is clearly a great deal at stake in the midterm elections this year even though the president is not up for election this year we'll be electing the entire U.S. House of Representatives.

[00:05:08] Thirty five U.S. senators 36 of our 50 governors and over 80 percent of the state legislators around the country in this midterm election. And in addition to the sheer numbers of elected offices another thing that makes this year's midterm election especially important is that we are now only three years away from the next round of redistricting which will take place after the 2020 census.

[00:05:34] And that is when state legislatures around the country will be redrawing the district lines for not only their own districts but for the congressional districts. And so the legislators and governors who are elected this year will be involved for the most part and most of them will be involved in this process of redistricting that will shape American politics for the next decade.
And so that's why I think party leaders are especially concerned about the results of the midterm elections. It says one of the reasons they're especially concerned about results this year. It's also the case that the outcome of this election is going to have a profound impact on the next two years of the Trump presidency.

Even though Donald Trump will still be in the White House of course at least two more years. Which party controls the House and Senate are going to have a major impact on how those next two years will unfold. It may not have a big impact on legislation because even if Democrats control Congress the president of course will be able to veto legislation that he disagrees with where it will clearly have a big impact though is in terms of the ability and the willingness of Congress to engage in oversight of the White House and the executive branch. It makes a great deal of distance a difference for example whether the next chair of the House Intelligence Committee is the gentleman on the left here Democrat Adam Schiff or a gentleman on the right Republican at Devin Núñez who is currently the chair of that committee. If Democrats were to take over the chairmanship a Democrat takes over the chairmanship of the House Intelligence Committee there's no question that you're going to see a much more aggressive oversight and an attempt to receive obtain documents and interrogate members of the administration about issues such as Russian influence on the 2016 presidential election.

The president's finances his tax returns. All of these things will come under much closer scrutiny if there is democratic control of one or both chambers of Congress. So the president has a big stake in these midterm elections. When we think about midterm elections in the United States it's important to keep in mind that there's a very clear pattern here to the outcomes of these elections and that is that the president's party almost always suffers losses in the midterm elections. That has been the case in 16 of the 18 House midterm elections since World War II and 14 the 18 Senate midterm elections. On average the president's party across these 18 midterm elections has lost almost 26 seats in the House of Representatives and four seats in the Senate. And the pattern extends beyond that to elections for governor and state legislative elections as well. So so in general midterm elections tend to have a negative impact on the president's party. Voters almost always turn against the president's party in these midterm elections.

Now this raises the question of course of why we see this pattern as this typical freshman student at Emory University is obviously concerned about. I've observed many people
but the freshmen seem to be getting younger and younger every year here at Emory. So this is an as you know a very natural question that arises about this pattern.

[00:09:45] And there are two kinds of explanations that are offered by political scientists for the tendency of the president's party to suffer losses in midterm elections. One is a theory called surge and decline that explains what happens in the midterm elections in relation to what happened in the preceding presidential election. The bigger the gains for the president's party in the preceding presidential election the greater the losses to the president's party tend to be in the midterm election. There is a tendency for those gains to reflect whatever the issues were that they were the president and his party in the presidential election year to then can't go away and in the subsequent midterm election year and things kind of return to a normal pattern of partisan voting. However in that the 2016 presidential election there really wasn't a surge toward the Republican Party. The president himself did not win the popular vote and Republicans actually lost seats in the House and Senate small number in in the presidential election. So there's not much reason to expect an offsetting decline in the 2018 midterm elections. What we do see happening in this midterm election as in other recent midterm elections however is the phenomenon that I call negative voting. That's a tendency for opposition party voters to be motivated to go out and turn out and take out their anger or frustration on the president's party. They don't have an opportunity to vote against the president but they do have the opportunity to vote against candidates from the president's party for Senate, for House, Governor and so on down the ballot and that's what we've been seeing in recent midterm elections it seems like anger and frustration on the part of our party voters often outweighs any sense of satisfaction or desire to assist the President and the president's party on the part of those who support him.

[00:11:56] So for example as the son of cartoonist suggests in the 2014 midterm elections four years ago it seemed to be Republican voters who were more motivated to get out and take out their anger and frustration at President Obama and the Democrats in Congress by voting for Republican candidates whereas Democratic voters just didn't seem to be all that excited about voting again. However there's some reason to think that things are a little bit different in 2018 with Republican in the White House. Now it seems that Democrats are the ones who may be more energized and more motivated as you get out to take out their anger and frustration with President Trump and Republicans in Congress as our own Mike Luckovich the cartoonist for The Atlanta Journal Constitution suggests in this in this cartoon.
So it is normally the case that the president's party suffers losses in midterm elections. However the magnitude of those losses varies considerably all the way from very small losses or even very occasionally gains in House and Senate to very large losses. And we can see both of these types of midterm elections if you look back and into the midterms that occurred during the presidency of George W. Bush I'm sure some of you remember this guy. I know some of my Democratic friends or friends are now looking back longingly at the presidency of George W. Bush thinking maybe now the good old days. But if we look at the two midterms elections that occurred during Bush's presidency we can see that in the first one in 2002 the president had an approval rating of 63 percent and that was in the aftermath of 9/11 which occurred only within a year before the midterm elections. And Republicans actually gained seats in the House and Senate something that very rarely happens. They gained eight seats in the House and two seats in the Senate. So a very good midterm election for Republicans four years after that.

However in the 2006 midterm election President Bush's approval rating was only 38 percent. At that point voters were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the ongoing war in Iraq. For one thing.

And so Republicans actually lost 30 House seats and six Senate seats in that midterm election and Democrats actually regained control of both the House and Senate in the 2006 midterm elections. So that just shows you one example of the range of outcomes that is possible in the midterm elections. So we can see when we look at the average year depending on whether a president's approval rating is in positive or negative territory that is above 50 percent below 50 percent. If a president is in positive territory in the nine midterm elections where that was the case the average seat losses were only 14 seats in the House and two seats in the Senate. Whereas when the president's approval ratings fell underwater as we say and where the approval rate of disapproval is higher than the approval the average seat losses were 37 seats in the House and six seats in the Senate. So it makes a big difference whether the president is popular or unpopular whether his approval rating is as they say above water or underwater. So what can we say about President Trump heading into the 2018 midterm elections? As he has been going around the country campaigning for Republican candidates for House and Senate. Well the president's approval rating has been underwater for his entire presidency from almost the moment that he took office and his initial approval rating in the Gallup Poll was 45 percent and his disapproval
rating was also 45 percent. That was the lowest approval and highest disapproval rating for a newly elected president that we've ever seen at least in the history of the Gallup poll going back to the 1940s. So in the most recent average of many polls that ask this presidential approval question we see that the president's approval rating has been averaging around 43 percent his disapproval rating around 52 percent so that's a slight improvement from where he was a few weeks ago. It's still well below where Republicans would like to see the president's approval rating heading into the midterm elections. Something else that is important this year is that these midterm elections and congressional elections in general are becoming increasingly nationalized meaning that national issues including evaluations of the president's performance are playing a larger role in shaping voters decisions than they did in the past.

[00:17:16] the polling data here from the Pew Research Center show the percentage of registered voters who are saying that their vote for Congress will reflect their opinion of the president's job performance whether it be for the president to support the present or opposed the president is much higher than it has been was in the past. Sixty percent of voters now say their their vote will be based on their opinion of the president whereas 10 or 20 years ago it was in the 40's and so.

[00:17:54] So that's what I mean by saying these elections are becoming increasingly nationalized. Voters are choosing candidates for House and Senate based on their opinion of the president and which party they want to control Congress and not so much on just what they think about the candidates running in their own state or their own districts. There is a very very strong relationship now between the opinions of the president and voting intentions in the midterm elections as you can see in this CNN poll from February. Voters who approve of the president's performance at that time plan to vote Republican by a margin of 81 to 10 percent. The as those who disapprove of the president's plan to vote for Democrats by a margin 88 to 7 percent. And results in other polls are very similar to that very very close relationship between opinions of the president and voting intentions for House and Senate. Another development that is shaping the outcome of the outlook for the midterm elections this year is something we don't usually see in between the redistricting our post census redistricting periods and that is the redistricting that occurred in the state of Pennsylvania where the state Supreme Court ruled a couple of years ago that the congressional districts in that state violated the Pennsylvania Constitution and therefore required that those districts be redrawn. The districts were drawn by a Republican legislature in 2011 in a way that strongly favor Republican candidates. And a classic example of gerrymandering which is something
both parties of course have engaged in in the past. But in this case it was a republican
gerrymander. So the court actually ended up bringing in an outside expert to draw new lines and
that has given Democrats a number of opportunities to pick up seats in that state. These were the
old house districts in Pennsylvania. It's a very important state because a number of House districts
that have their 18 House districts in one state. Those are the old districts as you can see. You know
some of them were had rather peculiar shapes for example the 7th District of Pennsylvania. This
was again on the old map. A district that's been described as looking like goofy kicking Donald
Duck. This was going to be a Republican district by taking in Republican leaning areas in the
Philadelphia suburbs. These are the new districts however. You can see I think it's pretty obvious
that the shapes of these districts are much more regular. We don't see all those weird looking
branches and Arnson things. And this has given Democrats an opportunity actually to pick up three
or four or possibly five seats just in the state of Pennsylvania. The map is very important when it
comes to the Senate as well. Because of course only 35 Senate seats are being chosen this year.

[00:21:07] And it happens that the group of Senate seats in states that are having Senate elections
this year is overwhelmingly these are overwhelmingly states that where there are Democrats
holding those seats. Actually there are 26. So this is a little out of date. It doesn't show two special
elections and one in Mississippi and one in Minnesota. But the two independents are also really
Democrats. And in Vermont and Maine caucus with the Democrats Bernie Sanders and Angus King
to get 26 Democratic seats up this year. Only nine Republican seats. And that makes it very
difficult of course for Democrats to pick up seats in the Senate. It gives Republicans a lot of pickup
opportunities especially when you look at the fact that of those 26 Democratic seats 10 are in
states that Donald Trump carried two years ago and five are in states that Trump won by a double
digit margin including North Dakota and Missouri Indiana Montana and West Virginia.

[00:22:13] So we have Democratic incumbents who are trying to defend those seats this year
there are only nine Republican seats up this year and only one of those is in a state that Hillary
Clinton actually carried. So not very many pick up opportunities for Democrats. On the other hand
the governor the gubernatorial elections this year are almost the opposite. Of the 36 governors
will be elected this year, the larger majority actually 26 of them are currently held by Republicans
many of whom are term limited and therefore Democrats have many pickup opportunities there.
And Republicans don't have very many pick up opportunities
These are the 10 Democratic seats that are up this year. Only one state won by Donald Trump in Pennsylvania and they’re the Democratic incumbent is a strong favorite to hold that seat. Eight are states won by Hillary Clinton. So Democrats do have a number of very good pickup opportunities there when it comes to governorships which are of course very important when it comes to what goes on in state government and politics and also when it comes to redistricting that will take place in 2031. So we can look at some early indicators of how things are likely to go on November 6th. We can look at the results a special lock your elections in 2017 at 18. We can look at what's called the generic ballot polling and polls that ask voters how they plan to vote without providing the names of the candidates running in their state or district. And then we're going to look at candidate recruitment and fundraising is another leading indicator of what's likely to happen in the election when we look at the special elections for Congress that have taken place in the last two years. In general what they show is that Democrats have been doing very well compared with the way those districts voted in 2016. One example this was the special election that took place in what was then Pennsylvania House District 18 which has subsequently been redrawn. But this is a district that Donald Trump carried by a very big margin about 20 percentage points. Nevertheless the Democrat candidate there Connor Lamb actually won the special election and a very close race over the Republican candidate. So that was an indication of just a very strong Democratic tide in in the US in that particular election. A big Democratic swing at least in that election and in general we look at all of the special elections the Congress.

We've seen that both the House and both House and Senate that in on average in most of them there's been a pretty significant Democratic swing compared with the way those states or districts voted in the 2016 election. We can also look as I mentioned at the generic ballot and that's again a polling question to ask voters how they plan to vote for a house or senate without getting the names of the candidates just Would you vote for a Democrat or Republican? Which party do you want to control the House the Senate? And we can see that over the last few weeks of polling in fact over the last several months Democrats have held a pretty consistent advantage of around eight or nine percentage points. And this was as of five days ago and so that's a pretty solid margin that would suggest that. If it translates into votes actual votes on Election Day. Democrats have a very good chance of winning a majority of seats. And in fact there is a very close relationship between generic ballot polling and the actual popular vote for the House of Representatives across the country. So that generic ballot is a is usually considered a very good, accurate, leading indicator. And we can also look at the behavior what we call strategic politicians
because candidates for office and current officeholders anticipate what's going to happen in the
election and their behavior whether it comes to whether to run for office whether to retire for office. Also the behavior of donors whether to give money to candidates is going to reflect the
national political climate heading into an election when we look at those decisions this year we see that first of all the number of Republican retirements in the house is much higher than usual. In fact it's the highest it's been this was with 225 days left before the election. By which time most of those retirements taking place. You can see far more Republicans leaving the house voluntarily than Democrats leaving the house suggesting that they're anticipating a perhaps difficult election for Republicans down in the Senate.

Likewise for Republicans. Four of the nine Republican seats have seen their incumbents retiring. A lot of those are time instead of Jeff Flake in Arizona is giving Democrats perhaps their best opportunity in this election to pick up a Republican seat. Only one Democratic senator is not running. One former incumbent Al Franken was forced out because of a sexual harassment sexual harassment accusations. There is however a Democratic incumbent running for that seat. So Republicans have four open seats that Democrats have actually technically no open seats in the Senate. When we look at fundraising likewise we can see that Democrats have been doing extremely well when it comes to fundraising going into the midterm elections. In the House of Representatives this if you look at the year before the election. Look at how much money candidates were raising were planning to run for the House. Democrats had 190 challengers who were raised at least 100000 dollars whereas Republicans had only 43. It's almost a reversal of what happened in 2009 the year before Republicans made big gains in the 2010 midterm elections when far more Republicans had raised 100000 or more so fundraising and patterns in general. And that's continued until 2018 Democratic candidates have been raising extraordinary amounts of money heading into the midterm election so money doesn't guarantee victory but it's certainly considered a necessary condition for having a strong campaign and a realistic chance especially when it comes to unseating an incumbent. So turnout is going to be crucial in this year's midterm elections. One thing we know about midterm elections is that turnout tends to be low as Mike Luckovich is suggesting here. I do want to point out that Election Day this year is actually on November 6th not November 4th.

This is heartening from earlier election year.
So don't be confused about that. When we look at the overall patterns added over time trends over time in turnout. You can see that on average turnout in presidential elections is substantially greater than in midterm elections. Presidential elections in recent years we've seen around 60 percent of eligible voters turning out whereas in midterm elections we've been lucky to get to 40 percent and in 2014 only about 36 percent of eligible voters turned out. This is especially a big problem for Democrats because of declining turnout in midterm elections is greatest among the youngest age group. Younger people consistently turn out at a lower rate in all types of elections than older voters. However the drop in turnout in midterm elections is much greater or has been at least much greater for young people than for older voters who tend to be more consistent in their turnout. And Democratic candidates nowadays depend more on the votes of young people than in the past. So this has been a big problem for them. And that's going to be an important factor in 2018 midterm elections as well. So what do we see when we look at the expected turnout in the 2018 midterm elections. One thing we see is that a heightened interest this year.

The percentage of registered voters who claim that they are absolutely certain to vote is up substantially from 4 years ago. And among all types of voters is up among all types of voters especially and this is from the watched more recent Washington Post ABC News poll among Democrats and among young people as well as among nonwhites. So those voters Democrats young people nonwhites are the ones who seem to be much more energized much more interested in voting this year. Republicans older voters white voters they are also more interested than they were four years ago more engaged.

But the increase there is much smaller. So the disparity there between older and younger voters between Democrats and Republicans is much more in fact Democrats are actually more likely than say that decision to vote and Republicans which is rather unusual. We can see the same thing we look at actual votes in primaries. If you go back and look at the number of votes actually cast in this year's congressional primaries. And these numbers are in millions. You can see that there was a huge increase in the vote. It was a big increase overall but especially in Democratic primaries. Sixty four percent increase in the number of votes in Democratic congressional primaries. A 24 percent increase in the number of votes in Republican primaries. So Democrats in 2014 47 percent of the votes in primaries were in Democratic primaries. This year it was 54 percent. So again we're seeing heightened interest across the board but especially among
Democratic voters. So I'm going to give you my tentative predictions here and my forecasting models are very simple. It predicts the aggregate seats swing the overall seats swing in the House and Senate. I don't try to predict what's going to happen in individual competence I'm simply trying to predict how many seats the party will gain or lose overall as based on three factors the party of the president which of course now we have a Republican president which means Democrats have an advantage because in midterm elections the president's party loses seats and generally loses seats regardless of what else is going on. The number of seats that the president's party is defending this year 240 in the house is a pretty big number. So that gives Democrats the number pickup opportunities for only nine Republican seats in the sense of very few pickup opportunities for Democrats there. And then the generic ballot margin for the president’s party. Which is a measure of kind of the national political environment or climate at the time of the or in the in the weeks preceding the midterm election. So putting those three factors together. My model predicts that, it didn't line up, like this isn't lined up the way it's supposed to but you can still kind of see what's going on. Given where the generic ballot margin is right now which is around between eight and nine percentage points. What my model predicts is that Democrats should be able to gain Republicans elected or lose that's a negative number they are negative 30 34 means Republicans are expected by my model to lose between 30 and 34 seats in the house. But to gain between four and five seats in the Senate. That's a very unusual situation to have the same party predicted to lose a large number of seats in the House to actually gain seats in the Senate. It’s something we just don’t see very often. But it reflects the fact that the Senate map is so difficult for Democrats this year because there are so few pickup opportunities for them. So basically what my model saying that Democrats are very likely to control the House vote but rather unlikely to be able to gain seats in the Senate. They need two to take control there. In this case I think my model is probably overestimating however the number of seats Republicans are likely to gain in the Senate. In the last three midterm elections combined, all 38 incumbents from the out party in this because the Democrats are the out party. But in the last three midterms all 38 incumbents from the out party were reelected. Not one incumbent from the out party lost. All of the seats that flipped in the Senate went from the president's party to the out party none of them went the other way.

[00:35:11] So that just tells us that when there is a tide in these elections that's running in one direction it tends it tends to kind of carry all of these races to enforce all these races across the board. That doesn't mean that no Democrat can lose this year. In fact there are there are two or
three Democratic incumbents who could very well lose their seats this year. When we look at the latest ratings of the Senate contests this year so far. As of a few days ago it leaves only one Democratic incumbent right now is an underdog and that's in North Dakota where Heidi Heitkamp the Democratic incumbent there is trailing in the polls her Republican challenger.

[00:36:00] So that's the Republicans appear to be likely to gain. The other races involving Democratic incumbents.

[00:36:09] The Democrats are favored in all of them except three where races are rated as tossups in Missouri Indiana and Florida. And there are two Republican seats in Nevada and Arizona that are rated as toss ups where Democrats could potentially pick up Republican seats so when you put it all together it looks like in the end we're going to be close to a standoff or Republicans could potentially pick up one or two seats. It is certainly possible that Republicans to pick up three or four seats. It's also possible the Democrats could pick up two or three and take control of the Senate. But I think those outcomes are less likely than something closer to a standoff where we end up very close to where we are right now in terms of control of the Senate. So the bottom line here is I'm expecting substantial Democratic gains in the U.S. House as well as in governorships and state legislatures. My model gives Democrats about a 70 percent chance of gaining a majority of seats in the house. Other forecasters including Nate Silver and 538 are giving Democrats an even better chance. Right now 538 has Democrats at about an 85 percent chance of winning a majority. My state Senate map however makes Democratic gains or take over unlikely. Unless the Democratic wave this year is really really large. So as of right now it looks more likely to me that as I said Republicans will retain control of the Senate with a narrow majority. So I'd like to say thank you very much for sitting in on the webinar. And I also would like to say I have no idea how this last slide got into my presentation just a mystery.

[00:37:58] Someone's been hacking my files.

[00:38:02] Well thank you so much Dr. Abramovitz for that fascinating and informative presentation. I'd like to remind our listeners that we are open to questions and that you can take your questions and I can read them out loud to you doctor.

[00:38:17] So I'm going to start with a question from Mike Thompson.
He says You mentioned the Presidents Bush approval and midterm election results. Right. What were they like for President Obama’s two midterm elections. And what are the differences.

Well in President Obama’s first midterm election was in 2010 of course the president’s approval rating in the weeks preceding that midterm election about the stage where we are right now in relation to the 2010 midterms was around 45 percent as I recall maybe a little bit lower than that. So he was not it was not that different from where President Trump is right now maybe slightly higher. Now Democrats lost over 60 seats in the house in that midterm election Republicans took control of the House Republicans also gained a few seats in the Senate but not enough to take control of the Senate. So a lot of what happened in that midterm election reflected not just the president’s approval rating but also the fact that the Democrats had gained a lot of seats in the two previous elections in the 2006 midterm elections and then again in the 2008 presidential election year. Democrats had made substantial gains in the House and therefore they were going into the 2010 midterm election having to defend a lot of seats in the house that were in districts that normally tended to vote Republican. And if you look at where the Democrats took their losses in the 2010 midterm election it was very disproportionately in those districts that had traditionally been Republican leaning districts in terms of their presidential voting patterns. So it was a combination of voters being somewhat unhappy with physical Obama’s performance back the economy for example was still fairly weak was just really struggling to recover from the from the very deep recession that he inherited. But also just the fact that so many of the districts held by Democrats were in Republican were in places that normally voted Republican in the Senate. The Democrats held the Senate but the Republicans did make some gains there. So again you have to look not just at the national political climate also where the seats are being contested. What states are holding Senate elections and how many districts the president’s party is defending going into the election especially how many districts that are in an unfriendly territory you might say.

2014 was a different story. There are Republicans already control the House and they gained a few seats. Not not very big game but they solidified their majority there. And Democrats lost control of the Senate in that election. And and again a lot of that has to do with the fact that Democrats are trying to defend Senate seats in a number of Republican leaning states they said today that they normally vote for Republicans.
I know the president's approval rating going into that midterm election was also somewhere in the low to mid 40s. So again if you were from the president's party to your candidate or an incumbent from the president's party you would like to see that approval rating above 50 percent. He would like to see as far above 50 percent as possible to minimize those losses. But in both of those midterm elections President Obama's approval rating was a below 50 percent signaling a danger especially when you consider how many difficult districts the president’s party has to defend in that 2010 House election.

While we have a question from Kevin Or: to what extent will this strength the economy impact how will vote? I am curious if people say to themselves. I can't stand Trump but the economy is so good and I don't want that To get messed up due to a shift in congressional control.

Right. Well certainly that the to have a strong economy is better for the president's party than having a weak economy or being in a recession. But historically it does not necessarily guarantee that the president's party won't lose seats in the House of Representatives or the Senate for that matter. In midterm elections,

It seems that a bad economy almost always leads to big seat losses a good economy doesn’t necessarily however lead to a very good outcome. It depends on other factors and how voters are feeling in general about the job that the president is doing. So once we take into account opinions of the president's performance and particularly the generic ballot which is actually the best leading indicator of all. Economic conditions are measures of economic conditions such as unemployment or real GDP growth, don’t play much of a role in midterm elections.

We can look back and see that for example in the 2006 midterm elections Republicans took big losses even though the economy still at that point was in pretty good shape. We had not yet entered the recession. Go back for example to the 1966 midterm elections when Democrats with Lyndon Johnson in the White House lost large numbers of seats in the House and Senate.

Despite the fact that the economy was booming. And what that reflected was largely discontent with President Johnson's performance and especially with the war in Vietnam. Growing
frustration with the American casualties in Vietnam. So when there are other issues on voters minds and other concerns those can outweigh the economy in a midterm election. When we get to the presidential election two years from now there we know that economic conditions have a more direct impact on the outcome of the election.

[00:44:40] So whether we still have a strong economy or whether the economy weakens between now and the 2012 presidential election will be very important. However we have no way of predicting that.

[00:44:53] While we have somebody who really wants you to look into the future.

[00:44:57] Ross Reynolds says What are your predictions for Congress in 2020? Some analysts are saying the shift to Democrats maybe even stronger then with any of the new voter ID laws offset votes enough to even impact it.

[00:45:12] Or is it more likely just to motivate impacted voters more.

[00:45:16] Well it really are two different questions there. So one questions about the impact of laws that have been passed by a number of states mainly states under Republican control that have made it somewhat more difficult for people to register to vote or to vote on Election Day. Things like voter ID laws for example or voter purges. And there's of course been a great deal of controversy about that this year and specifically here in Georgia.

[00:45:51] And so you know what we can say in general I think is that those kinds of laws and regulations certainly do have an impact. However they also can serve as a motivator.

[00:46:06] They also can't stimulate a greater efforts on the part of the opposing party.

[00:46:11] In this case the Democrats to motivate their voters to register and get the vote out on Election Day and that can motivate voters. And voters don't like

[00:46:23] To have to see someone trying to stop them from voting and so you know we're already seeing here in Georgia a big surge in turnout in the early voting periods for example. So we
have to wait and see what the final turnout numbers look like. My guess is we're going to see a very high turnout for a midterm election.

Despite these sorts of laws that make it more difficult to register or vote. As far as the outlook for the 2020 congressional elections it's way too early to really make any kind of informed speculation about that.

We don't know how voters will be viewing the president, assuming President Trump is still in office. You know what their opinions will be of him. We don't know what the economy will look like in 2020.

We don't know who the Democratic candidate for president will be in the 2020 election and so a lot of things that could impact the House and Senate elections. The one thing we do know already is that in 2020 there are a lot more Republican Senate seats up.

So I believe the number something like 22 of the 34 Senate seats that are up in 2020 are currently held by Republicans so that means that there will be more pickup opportunities for Democrats and more seats are Republicans will have to defend.

And so if Republicans are going into that election with a very narrow majority in the Senate it certainly would give Democrats an opportunity to take back control of the Senate in the midterm elections. But again that will depend on the national political environment which at this point is we really can't predict.

Well I think that's a really good segue to for Gareth's question. With a constant reports especially in Georgia of voter suppression, voting machine swapping votes, potential foreign interference. What is your confidence in the integrity of our elections and how do you reconcile this in predictive models?

Well I am very concerned about some of these things.

Certainly that here in Georgia I think there are good reasons to be concerned about some of the reports of difficulty people experiencing difficulty in obtaining absentee ballots for
example or absentee ballots being held or disappearing. About people experiencing difficulty and
having their registrations being accepted. I think there are reasons to be concerned about the
voting machines that we use here in Georgia. They've been used since 2002. There's no paper trail.
Many experts believe that they are potentially open to hacking even though Secretary of State and
those who are running the election out of his office deny that.

[00:49:30] So you know every election year we hear these sorts of reports about votes being
changed on the machines and you know all we can say is that the research has been done on this
suggests that that's pretty rare.

[00:49:45] Not to say it doesn't never happen.

[00:49:48] If you're a voter and you believe that has happened it's something you should
immediately report without casting your ballot and before you even cast your ballot.

[00:49:56] Advice people are given is if you look over the votes before you cast your ballot and you
should. And you have any questions about it and think something's not right.

[00:50:10] That's a time to report the problem to the polling officials. Don't cast your ballot
because after you do that it's too late. there's No paper trail here in Georgia. So that's that's a big
problem I think. I'm sure Georgia is going to change its voting equipment in the next two years
before the presidential election should have done it years ago in my opinion. Despite all of this I'm
still hopeful that the results will

[00:50:38] Accurately reflect the preferences of the voters. Can I say that there's no chance if it's a
very close election that the outcome could be swayed by voter suppression efforts or by problems
with the voting equipment?

[00:50:54] No I can't say that. But you're right.

[00:51:00] There are problems with every billing system. Nothing's perfect. You know. So I would
just encourage everyone to get out and vote.
Well Francis Chen wants to know given the prediction mistakes made by the media in 2016 presidential elections. Do you think this time the media will have better odds of predicting in the right direction.

The problems in 2016 mainly involved some of the state level polling in the swing states like Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The national polls were actually fairly accurate if you look at the Final polling average. In 2016, it had Hillary Clinton leading Donald Trump by about four percentage points. Her actual popular vote margin was about 2 percentage points. So that’s actually pretty close. You’re not going to do that much better than that. The problem is that in a number of states the of the key swing states. I mentioned Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The polls show Hillary Clinton with at least a modestly 3 4 5 6 percent for us. In the end she lost all three of those states by very narrow margins. So clearly there were problems with the polling there have been some attempts to try to evaluate what went wrong. Some of the problem probably had to do with late voter decision making with undecided and third party voters making up their minds or changing their preference at the end in ways that they were not picked up by the polls.

Some of them may have had to do with the fact that the likely voter models did not accurately pick up a surge in turnout by non college educated white voters in those swing states or overestimated turnout by minority voters in those states.

So there are a lot of things that can go wrong. In fact it’s kind of remarkable that the polls do as well as they do. So can we be absolutely confident that the polls are correct this year? No, I think it’s certainly possible that in some of these closely contested races the polls may end up missing the mark by a few percentage points but we don't know which direction in advance.

You just don’t know. In 2012 for example the polls actually underestimated Obama's margin nationally and in a number of states in quite the states he actually won by a bigger margin. So that year the polls actually

Underestimated the Democratic share of the vote. In 2016 however the polls especially in some of the Swing States underestimated the Republican share of the vote. Which way will the errors go. This year we got. Now all we can say is in general when there is a swing toward a party
the polls often underestimate the size of that swing. So if there is a big Democratic surge this year there really is a big wave, it's possible that the polls are actually underestimating the magnitude of that way. I will just have to wait until the evening of November 6th or possibly November 7th or November 8th or sometime after that to see just how big the miss was.

[00:54:32] There will be undoubtedly a number of races that will not be decided until very late in the evening or even the next day or two later this year. There are a lot of races that appear to be very close going into the election.

[00:54:48] Well our last question is from Kevin KiOR from Geneva Switzerland.

[00:54:54] Thank you so much for joining us. Kevin says first Thanks for the webina. Second, have You ever loved data on batteries aren't I. I left out of the country I'm registered in California, my last state of residence, I always vote. I'm curious if there is any data on the indicators from voters abroad as our information on the political landscape is not as readily available.

[00:55:20] Yeah that's a good question. We know there are hundreds of thousands of votes cast by Americans abroad and by members of the armed services as well.

[00:55:32] We really don't know very much about the preferences of those voters in the presidential nomination process.

[00:55:44] There is what we do get an indication of that at least on the Democratic side. I know they have a separate primary for Americans abroad. And I believe in 2016 Americans abroad Democratic and Democrats strongly supported Bernie Sanders in the presidential primaries. My sense is that Americans living abroad on average tend to be a pretty Democratic voting group. But I don't really have specific data on that I'm looking more based on demographics they're all pretty pretty highly educated group.

[00:56:21] And nowadays voters have college degrees and especially with a post college education tend to lean pretty strongly Democratic in their preferences that was not always the case of course. But we really don't know their votes just get counted over that you know voting absentee. The votes just kind of with all the other absentee ballots and the large majority of absentee ballots
of course are not from Americans overseas they're from Americans who are just voting that absentee ballots here. It's become much easier in recent years to cast an absentee ballot we have a lot of states now that have no excuses absentee voting. You don't need to be out of the country to you. You don't need any special reason to vote by absentee ballot. But we don't even really know except from some polling. Absentee voters vote. And are they are there votes different from those of others who those who vote no on Election Day those people early.

[00:57:21] And what we've seen suggests that the early voters absentee voters in some years differ somewhat in their preferences from those who vote on Election Day. But the direction of those differences can change from election to election. So again it's something that is not easy to predict in advance. Well Dr Abramovitz

[00:57:42] Thank you so much again for joining us today and for your continued leadership at Emory University before we end the program. Let me remind our listeners that office of alumni engagement webinar programs are posted on our website site at W W Dot alumni Dot Emory Dot edu slash calendar. You can also find podcasts of all of our faculty lectures on iTunes U at W W W Dot alumni not Emory DOD edu slash faculty on iTunes. Please join us for our next faculty webinar which will be held on Friday December 7 with Dr. Philippe lobolo associate professor of global health. LaBella will talk about exercise is medicine. This is a great topic during the holidays when you're trying to decide whether to eat that extra piece of pumpkin pie.

[00:58:40] Can you walk it off. Join us and find out on Friday December 7. Thank you all again for joining Emery's office of alumni engagement. Have a good day or a good evening wherever you live in the world. Thank you.