Summary

The Democrats won a sweeping victory in Tuesday's elections. The new Congress will be in a position to hinder Trump's anti-environmental initiatives. The Democrats have also gained a lot of power in state governments, which will result in friendlier policies for renewable energy and climate action.

I've rewritten this post several times as the scope of the election results has become more clear. At first, I thought this was a strong midterm for the Democrats. Then, a remarkable one. But now I think the election goes beyond that. It is remarkable enough that Democrats won a Senate race in Texas (not to mention South Carolina!). It's beyond remarkable that they also won races for the Texas Governor, Lieutenant Governor (a powerful position in Texas), and Attorney General. But what's really extraordinary is that they also flipped the Texas House — defeating Republicans who had nothing to do with Iran or gas prices — showing just how deep the desire for political change ran.

How did the election come out?

Let's start with the House. Prior to the election, there was generally agreement that Democrats would take the House. Forecasts suggested a likely Democratic majority in there 225-230 range. There are still many undecided races, but it looks the Democrats may snag close to 250 votes.

To flip the Senate, Democrats needed to hold on to all their existing seats, which forecasters were predicting before the election, and then win three or four toss-up races. The Democrats swept nearly all of those races except possibly Alaska, while also picking up South Carolina. Mississippi is still neck-and-neck. That's where you start talking about a wave election.

What can we expect going forward?

Investigations. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, Interior Secretary Doug Bergam, and Energy Secretary Chris Wright are going to be spending a lot of their time testifying in front if congressional committees. Or rather, they're going to spend some time testifying and more time being harangued by angry legislators. Since corruption has been a major theme of the Democrats, I suspect that a lot of the questioning will be about conflicts of interest, industry influence, and partisan

decisionmaking.

Funding. Democrats will also take advantage of their greater leverage with policy riders and funding restrictions. Some of these will get bargained away, but Trump will probably have to agree to others in order to get things he wants funded. Unless the GOP is able to get the debt ceiling extended in the lame duck session, the need for an extension will give Democrats their strongest bargaining chip. Thus, they may be able to extract important concessions on energy and environmental issues.

Litigation. The House may authorize the Speaker to file suit against the Administration for refusing to spend appropriated funds or diverting funds to unauthorized uses. This was something the Republicans tried against Obama, and it wouldn't be surprising if Democrats took the opportunity to turn the tables. Since Trump and his budget director Russell Vought have felt free to ignore spending laws, there would be plenty of ripe directors for these lawsuits.

Fourth, if they are smart, Democrats may look for opportunities for bipartisan legislation. That's their best chance of making a permanent imprint on the law in the next two years. The other measures that I've discussed are likely to have only temporary effects. Especially in the House, the next two years also offer Democrats the opportunity to coalesce around legislation that they may be able to pursue more seriously if they get lucky in 2028.

What about state governments?

Downballot races are still being counted. We know that Democrats flipped the governorships in Georgia, Iowa, Nevada, Ohio, and Texas. They also picked up the state attorney general positions in Georgia and Texas, while other races are still being counted, It will be awhile before we know the full scope of the Democratic surge at the state level. Democrats have trifectas in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Nevada, Democrats also picked up at least 500 state legislative seats, and flipped at least 11 chambers, including the state Houses in Georgia, North Carolina and Texas. The upshot, however, is that state governments in at least ten states have become friendlier to renewables and climate action. We can expect to see some policy shifts accordingly.

States will also continue to play a key role as litigants against the Trump Administration. The Texas AG's office, in particular, will bring a lot of new troops to these battles, troops who had previously fought on behalf of the fossil fuel industry.

We might even see some climate-friendly legislation coming out of Texas. That's how strange the political situation has become.

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Altogether, Tuesday was a day of momentous change. It was also the beginning of a new political cycle. Because Tuesday's close to the 2026 campaign, Wednesday became the unofficial opening of the 2028 Presidential campaign. Two years is a long time in politics, and midterm elections are different than presidential years. The 2028 elections will give us a better read on how durable the shift in American politics this year will be.