

# Biden has won the election, but the Democrats are divided—and Trumpism is here to stay.



*Although Joe Biden has been declared the winner in the 2020 presidential election, the Democratic Party failed to retake the Senate and lost seats in the US House of Representatives. In this Q&A, [Thomas Gift](#) looks at some of the election's potential lessons for the Democratic and Republican parties and what President Trump's refusal to concede means for US democracy.*

## **What's your main take-away from the 2020 election?**

What strikes me the most is that, not unlike 2016, Trump again managed to exceed the expectations of pollsters. Despite a White House abounding with scandals and wrongdoing, Trump netted roughly 8.5 million more votes than he did four years ago. However one interprets the results, it's hard to call that a massive rejection of an unpopular incumbent. Although it's true that many pollsters predicted a close race in the swing states—and Biden will defeat Trump by about 5 million votes nationally—the race was still much more competitive than forecasts indicated. Had COVID-19 not happened, and the US economy was going as strong as it was pre-pandemic, it's not a stretch to imagine an alternative version of the election in which Trump pulled off an upset.

## **What will Republicans take away from the election outcome?**

Trump may be leaving the Oval Office this coming January, but “Trumpism” doesn't seem to be going anywhere anytime soon. The Republican Party will evolve, and new leaders will take up its mantle, but the party will almost certainly retain Trumpian elements. That's true both because so many conservative voters cast their ballot for Trump in 2020, but also because so many Republicans in the Senate and House won re-election by running on unapologetically Trumpian platforms. Although Trump may be unique in terms of his persona, the qualities that define his iconoclasm—railing against elites, saying things most politicians won't say, and blurring the line between truth and fiction—will likely continue to hold sway well beyond the current election cycle.

## **What will Democrats take away from the election's outcome?**

Democrats need to grapple with why—in the face of a mismanaged pandemic, an economy on the ropes, and many analysts predicting a “blue wave”—their party actually lost seats in the House of Representatives and is unlikely to retake the Senate. Despite Biden's victory, Democrats can't be ecstatic about their showings in down-ballot races. The question now is what lessons the party will draw from 2020. Many moderate Democrats have spent much of the last week accusing the flank of the party as being culpable for dragging the party too hard to the left. Progressives, by contrast, have accused centrists of being too preoccupied with courting well-off suburbanites. However the debate turns out, it's clear is that the Democratic Party is deeply divided.

## **What does Trump's refusal to concede to this point mean for US democracy?**

The short answer is that it's not just damaging—it's dangerous. Yet the fact that Trump has been telegraphing this response for months means that we shouldn't be surprised. Ultimately, Trump's veiled suggestions that he won't leave the Oval Office are just words. They're more a political tactic designed to fire up his base than a credible threat. That doesn't make Trump's rhetoric any more excusable. But the concern that Trump will refuse to step down and throw America into a full-blown constitutional crisis is—and always has been—exaggerated. The United States has a long history of free and fair elections, as well as popular deference to their outcomes. Trump may not want to leave, but America's institutions, fortunately, are stronger than any one leader.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor the London School of Economics.*

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