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Democrats' success in the US midterm elections

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The US midterm elections on 3 November delivered a decisive victory for the Democratic Party. The Democrats gained control of both chambers of Congress and won races in states and districts that had previously been Republican strongholds. The results are widely seen as a sign of voter dissatisfaction with the Trump administration, particularly over tariffs, the war in Iran, high food and fuel prices and the growing wealth of people close to the president. Trump himself blamed the defeat on weak Republican candidates and the fact that his name was not on the ballot. However, he also acknowledged that the war in Iran had played a role in the outcome.

The results will weaken Trump's political standing, both nationally and within the Republican Party. The Democrats will seek to constrain his administration by using their leverage over the federal budget and launching investigations into its activities. Meanwhile, Republican politicians will face a difficult choice over whether continuing to back Trump almost unconditionally is in their own political interests.

Commentary

- **The election result represents a personal defeat for Trump.** The president's unpopularity contributed to the Republicans' poor performance by eroding support for the party and weakening mobilisation among its voters. His low approval ratings reflect public dissatisfaction with decisions such as the war in Iran and the imposition of tariffs, as well as perceptions of corruption among those close to him. Neither substantial campaign spending nor Trump's direct involvement in the campaign was enough to overcome these negative perceptions. The president's responsibility for the defeat will also have repercussions within the Republican Party. In the coming months, Republican politicians will have to assess whether maintaining close ties with Trump remains in their political interests. This could create opportunities for cross-party cooperation with the Democrats on specific issues. The election result also raises questions about who will emerge as the Republican frontrunner in the next presidential primaries. Politicians such as J.D. Vance could see their prospects weakened by their association with, and shared responsibility for, the administration's record.
- **The Republicans' defeat is unlikely to curb Trump's foreign policy ambitions. With his room for manoeuvre on the domestic front narrowing, he may increasingly seek successes abroad to round off his presidency.** The election results do not necessarily imply that Trump will reconsider his approach to the war in Iran or US support for Ukraine, an issue that did not feature in the recent campaign. He may become even less inclined

than before to take voters' preferences into account, while opposition from the Democrats could prompt him to act more erratically. At the same time, administration officials may become more cautious about carrying out his wishes, fearing investigations that the new Democratic majority could launch in Congress.

- **The next two years could prove difficult for the Democrats if they fail to translate their midterm victory into tangible political achievements.** Their congressional majority will give them influence over the budget and administration appointments, as well as the power to investigate potential misconduct through congressional committees. However, Trump will retain the initiative in setting the political agenda, having already relied extensively on executive orders to implement his policies. He has also made clear that he intends to veto any Democratic legislation that runs counter to his wishes. The party will therefore face the challenge of maintaining voter support without securing major legislative victories. This will be particularly challenging given the Democratic Party's continued unpopularity and the fact that its electoral success was driven largely by opposition to the president's policies.