

The US Mid-terms are good news, with lessons for the UK

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This quote comes from Heather Cox's '[Letters from an American](#)' this morning:

Yesterday was a good day for democracy. Americans turned out to defend our principles from those who denied our right to choose our own leaders. There was little violence, the election appears to have gone smoothly, and there are few claims of "fraud." As I write tonight, control of the House and Senate is still not clear, but some outlines are now visible.

Usually, the party in power loses a significant number of congressional seats and state seats in the first midterm after it takes the presidency. Today, President Joe Biden spoke to reporters and noted that the Democrats had the best midterm elections for governors since 1986 and lost fewer House seats than they have in any Democratic president's first midterm in 40 years.

I think this is extraordinary, and incredibly welcome. The evidence is very clear that an ageing and not very popular President can win despite the economic downturn in the US precisely because the far-right alternative is so bad.

Let me also be clear: the fact that the Republicans can still gain seats is still worrying. But there are three obvious trends that are not helping them.

One is that early voting by the young is boosting the Democrat vote. You can see why the Tories are making it so hard for the young to vote here.

Second, the attack on abortion rights is galvanising some to vote against their Republican inclinations: it is possible for a party to go too far against human rights. Labour and Tories should take note: both are actively denying rights here in the UK.

Third, Trump is a liability. Is there an equivalent here? Of course there is: it is Brexit and all that went with it. The straightforward lies that underpinned Trump's appeal were seen here in the Brexit campaign.

Why does all this matter? I would suggest that it is because unless we can maintain

functioning democracies little else is possible in the US, the UK, and way beyond, and everywhere functioning democracies are at risk. I do not see the issues as separate: I think that they are intimately related.

The mid-terms in the US are an indication that people are not willing to tolerate the far-right in the numbers conventional polling forecasts suggest likely. I take that as a sign of hope.

However, and this is a big condition, those rejecting the right must have a viable alternative to vote for. And that is why I am so concerned about the rightward movement of Labour and its refusal to embrace PR, which with other issues denies so many a viable electoral choice in what remains a two-party system, whether we like it or not.