

# A Half Glass



Let's give it another go, shall we?

My last missive was, shall we say, a tad down in the mouth. Things could not possibly be so dire. As one critic would have it, it sounded as though my dog had died.

Well, she did, in fact. The day before the election. And there is an enormous Maggie shaped hole in my heart.



Here Lies Maggie: She Had a Wonderful Life

But moving along. The initial results of our national exercise

of the franchise – an exercise that far too many still feel is not worth turning off Duck Kardashian and going to the fucking polls – were not especially comforting to those who favor science, inclusion, education, access to health care, gun control, social justice, &c. You know. Sane people.

And truly, the trend by 10 p.m. Election Night – alongside the punditry's thigh-rubbing enthusiasm for yet another Dems in Disarray narrative – was utterly dispiriting. But despite a desire that results arrive tidy and timely, ballots do not bend to a tidy timeline.

So here's why I'm feeling optimistic on this brisk and sunny Sunday morn.

*(ed note: Optimistic? Who are you and what have you done with The Writer? Security!)*

What was looking to be a pretty solid denial of the Blue Wave has actually turned out to be a very convincing argument that this is a nation that is tiring of the end game degradation of GOP politics as embodied by the Mar-a-Lago Hapsburgs. Despite the best attempts of GOP apparatchiks to gerrymander and vote suppress their way to victory, the results are clear: The nation is ready for a drastic course correction.

Yes and sure. We remain a starkly divided nation. The middle has not held, and while that may be some cause for worry among the terribly and deeply concerned civility fetishists<fn>I'm looking at you Senators Collins, Flake, Corker, et al</fn>, the middle has been dragged so far right over the past 40 years that it has become damn near synonymous with what used to be called Conservatism.

(There is no middle. Get over it. Consider the "great" centrists of our day; there have been ample opportunities for them to demonstrate independence from Trump, yet their opposition has extended only as far as handwringing twitter agonistes just before they fall in and vote the party line.

One-time pseudo centrists like Graham have become enthusiastic attack dogs for the likes of Kavanaugh.<fn>And spare me, please; John McCain was no fucking better.</fn>)

But let's take some comfort in the outcomes where we can.

In the House, a place where Dems consistently win the raw national vote total by several millions while still falling prey to the clever gerrymanders of the state-level GOP, the Dems were striving to pick up 23 seats. This was bare minimum to flip control and, most importantly, place subpoena power in the hands of Democrats who would presumably be less quisling in their approach to Trump's depredations than the current crop of Vichy chairmen.

(And yes, all men they were. In a delightful turn of events, Rep. Maxine Waters will hold the gavel in the House Financial Services Committee, where she has made clear a thorough inquiry into the Trump Family business practices are top priority. Pass the popcorn.)

As of today, the Dem pickup total is 37 seats. This is fairly huge, comparable to Democratic gains during the Watergate midterms. Also huge: the first Native Americans (both women) and first women Muslims have been elected to the House. Also huger: 35 new women House members (bringing the total to 135, still proportionally low, but an alltime high) and 5 new women governors. The number of successful Moms Demand candidates, running almost solely on the need for sensible gun control and the defenestration of the NRA, was another heartening trend.

The battle for the Senate was severely aligned against Democratic gains. Of the 33 seats under contest, 23 were D-held. Dems needed to gain two seats to flip control of the Senate. Flipping an incumbent is never easy. The three GOP retirements were in solid red states: Arizona, Tennessee, Utah. And Dems were defending seats in some fairly red spots: North Dakota, West Virginia, Montana, Missouri, Indiana. And

one of the big hopes lay in unseating Ted Cruz in uber-Red Texas.

By end of election eve, it looked as though the GOP would increase their Senate majority. But wait a few days: by the time all the provisionals and absentee ballots are counted, we may (BIG 'may') see the Republican advantage actually reduced by one. And damn if the Dems didn't flip Arizona.<fn>Maybe. Recount underway, but not even GOPer candidate McSally seems to doubt the outcome at this point.</fn>

But that "may" is big, and it seems to have a Florida shape to it.

The contest between incumbent Bill Nelson (D-Cosmetic Surgery Clinic) and current Governor Rick Scott (R-Sulfuric Pit of Corruption) is in recount territory. Manual recount, to be precise, wherein we may experience the shudder of deja vu of the Bush/Gore nightmare. One key difference: the Dems have learned their lesson about knife fighting. There will be no Gore-esque capitulation in the hopes of bringing our fractured polity together. Nelson's team is fighting for every vote. Naturally, that means the Republicans are calling the recount "illegal" and accusing the Dems of trying to "steal" the election and Nelson of "embracing fraud." No less a genius than our Toddler-in-Chief has taken to the Twitter to declare this so.

Despite the tantrum, the Governor's race is also headed to machine recount. If that recount reduces the margin to less than .25%, it will then undergo manual recount.

GOP outrage is one source of my optimism.<fn>Hit dog gonna holler.</fn> The gap in both races has diminished steadily as final ballots are counted. As of this morning, Nelson is down by 12,500 out of 8 million votes cast. Gillum is down by around 33,000. And in the Agriculture Commissioner's race, the outcome flipped since Tuesday with Nikki Fried set to become

the first Democratic cabinet official in nearly ten years. Her thin lead of around 4000 votes could very well survive the recount.

But let's get real.

Rick Scott is still odds-on likely to become a U.S. Senator. And the odious Ron DeSantis is almost certainly going to be our Governor. The raw numbers are not promising. If these outcomes persist, it will represent a crushing disappointment for those yearning for a self-enlightened electorate in Florida. But.

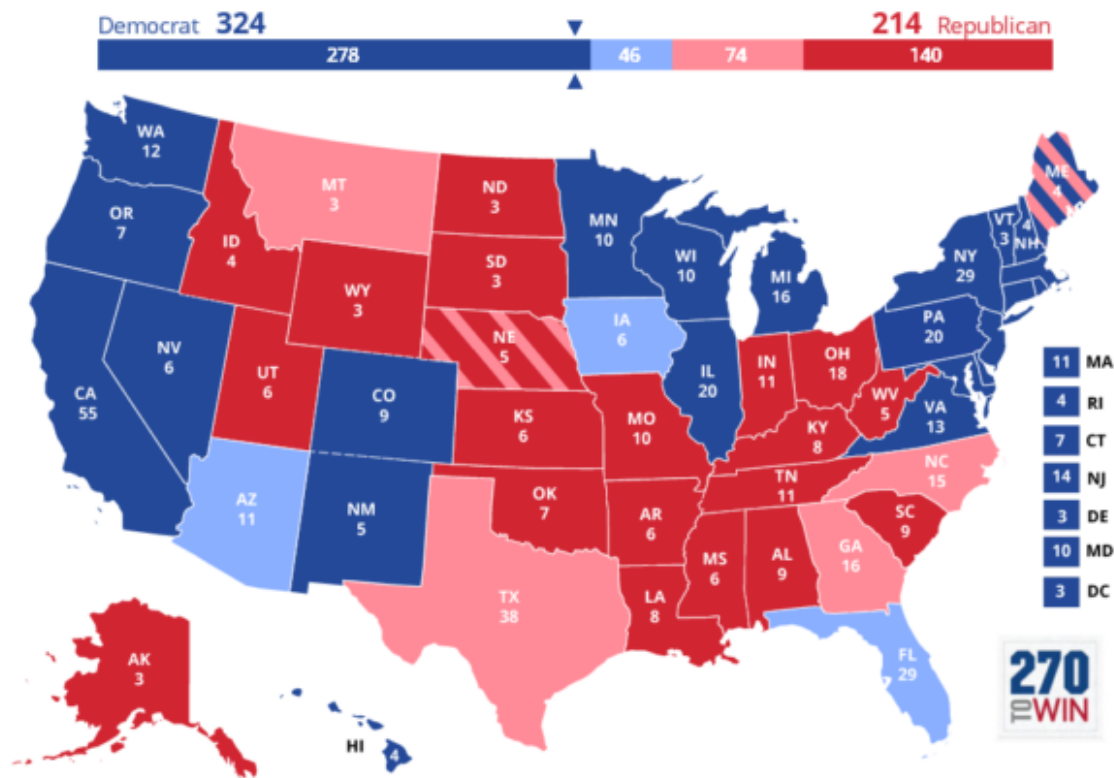
Just as with the almost-but-not-quite Beto O'Rourke in Texas, Gillum is now a bona fide progressive star. He is young and he is no quitter. If some miracle rolls along, he will make a fine governor, and even after two terms would still be only 48 years old, plenty of time for a run at the national stage.

And if he falls short, there is a big, fat Empty Suit of a target looming in Marco Rubio for the 2022 Senate race. He would also be an attractive running mate for the 2020 challenger to Trump. We have not seen the last of Andrew Gillum.

Other bright lights. The national percentage of Democratic votes for Senate was just north of 57%. In House races, it came to around 52%. Combined gubernatorial numbers point to a full percent advantage for Dems. On the one hand, these numbers are meaningless in terms of outcomes. On the other, they are a fair indicator of national sentiment towards GOP governance. It remains to be seen if Democrats can maintain their energy and convert this into an electoral college triumph in 2020 (a big if given the disproportionate advantage the EC provides rural states).

This morning, Nate Silver at 538 released an analysis that overlays the 2018 House vote on the Electoral college map. Just counting Dem victories of 5% or greater, it would amount

to 278 EC votes for the Dems. The number jumps to 324 by including margins of less than 5%.



Nate Silver's House Vote / Electoral College overlay

So yes indeed, I am brimming with optimism, a shiny happy people happy happy.

*(ed note: The authorities have been notified.)*

Poet Ilya Kaminsky posted this on Twitter this morning, a fine thought from historian Howard Zinn to carry us through the coming week, month, years...

*To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It's based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.*

I'm gonna go dance among the daffodils now.

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# Letter from Tallahassee: Election Day Hangover



I woke up today feeling wretched and I didn't even bother to drink too much last night.

For the first time since 1972, I went to bed early on Election Night. The statewide results in Florida were too painful to bear, and the chirpy happy talk from the MSNBC/CNN yapping heads was doing nothing to make it go down easier. Yeah, flip the house, lots of ponies in that stable full of dung, but dammit, if I go to sleep and never wake up, I will never have to face a world in which the idea of Senator Rick Scott and Governor Ron DeSantis is a real thing.

Alas, I woke up, and it's all I can do not to go back to bed and stay there.

Florida is, in a word, fucked. Our governor elect is a man of few ideas beyond sycophantic devotion to Trump and simmering resentment at liberals who, evidently, wish to turn Florida into Venezuela. Naturally, he makes no sense beyond the fevered imaginations of Fox News inmates, which is DeSantis' prime and only true base. He is a pure bred Fox hothouse flower, anointed by Trump and carried to victory by his partisans. He ran a terrible, inept campaign. He appealed to the ingrained racism and resentment that may be this state's

number one cash crop, painting a decent and good man as a crazed, soft on crime socialist who wants to destroy "our" jobs and economy. You know, the black guy, nudge wink say no more amirite?

And he won.

The man DeSantis will replace is widely known for shady ethics, crony favoritism, a "blind trust" with surprisingly good eyesight, and a multi-billion dollar Medicare swindle. Rick Scott plunked down \$51M of his own money to buy a U.S. Senate seat, much as he bought the Governor's office. Keep in mind that he walked away from the Medicare scam with around \$350M in severance. That means that Rick Scott has bought his political career with your money. Nice work if you can get it.

Scott will represent Florida alongside the Emptiest Suit in Florida Politics, Marco Rubio, a man notable for his earnest conversion from Trump critic to Trump taint licker. Scott's addition to the absurdly labeled "world's greatest deliberative body" provides him a broad range of platforms upon which to ply his habitual grift and graft.

Other depressing news? The Agriculture Commissioner, Chief Financial Officer, and Attorney General are all dyed in the wool Trump-fondlers. The A.G. outcome is especially dispiriting, her campaign largely financed by outfits like GEO and Core Civic, private prison corporations who make money hand over fist based on the policies of people like AG-elect Ashley Moody. Anyone hoping for a glimmer of criminal justice reform in this aggressively carceral state has got another thing coming.

The Florida electorate also engaged in an orgy of Constitutional amendment passage. Among the bright spots: the gradual elimination of Greyhound racing in the state, a barbaric holdover from yesteryear. Amendment 9, which bans offshore drilling in state waters, also bans vaping in most

workplaces. It's a bizarre conflation of unrelated issues.

Among the lesser lights: passage of several measures that require super-majorities to raise taxes and educational fees, exactly the kinds of policies that all but crippled California in the decades following Proposition 13. Along with a couple of mandated caps on property tax valuations, these GOP-pushed policies are designed to ensure that funding levels for government programs, specifically education, continue to wither. As Grover Norquist has long advocated, the GOP is intent on shrinking government to the size where they can "drown it in the bathtub."

Then there is passage of Amendment 6, aka Marsy's Law. This pander-heavy "victim's rights" measure received massive national backing from law and order groups. In short, it attempts to circumvent defendant rights in favor of emotional appeals to stricter "justice" for victims. It remains unclear how this might differ from good old fashioned vengeance aside from the fact that victims will not be allowed to administer corporal or capital punishments themselves. For now.

Expect this one to face legal challenges for its overreach, though hopes for winning those challenges is diminished by the ongoing right wing takeover of the Federal and State judiciary under Trump and DeSantis, whose first official action will be appointment of three State Supreme Court Justices on his first day in office. This is in fact the one and only specific policy DeSantis articulated during the campaign. One wonders what he will do to occupy himself for the remaining 3 years and 364 days.

The brightest spot on the statewide ballot was the overwhelming approval for Amendment 4, which restores voting rights to most formerly incarcerated felons who have served their sentences, roughly a million voters, predominantly minorities. This is a huge progressive win, though anybody who thinks a DeSantis administration will not go out of its way to

undermine this initiative has not been paying attention to the GOP's near-religious devotion to voter disenfranchisement over the past four decades.

But here's a real puzzler. Amendment 4 took about 64% of the vote. DeSantis and Scott each took closer to 50%. Who are the 13-14% who voted yes on reinstating the vote for returning felons while simultaneously voting for two guys (and their party) who are staunchly opposed to that outcome?

Bright spots? Sure, there are a few. Democrats managed to flip a couple of U.S. House seats and a handful of state house slots. But despite its popular image as a purple or swing state, the political leverage in Florida remains firmly in the hands of the Tea Party GOP. The vote margins might be thin, but their grip on power is decidedly strong.

The next four years are not going to be pretty for progressives in Florida. The enthusiasm behind Andrew Gillum's race has been huge, especially among the traditionally underserved communities across the state. Can that energy form the basis for an ongoing progressive movement in Florida? Can Beto's almost victory in Texas do the same there? These are two superb and charismatic campaigners. How might their personal appeal translate to support for a progressive movement writ large? Is it dependent upon a savior figure? Or will scores of first-time political enthusiasts now sink back into their non-participatory torpor, proven right once again that political engagement just isn't worth the candle?

It's a tough call. The Trump base craves a movement that feeds its sense of resentment, and in that they are more than served by the current regime. Their prevailing desire is to somehow "stick it to the libs", even if that means undermining their own interests. The progressive base craves policy change, an often dull and incremental process that is far less emotionally satisfying than laser-focused rage.

But not even I can miss the bright spots. The fact that Gillum and O'Rourke came as close as they did in traditional hotbeds of reactionary and racist attitudes is indeed a sign of hope. The slim reed of Stacy Abrams's campaign in Georgia, still alive as of this writing, is another enormously encouraging sign of a populace (perhaps) awakening from complacency.

Victories and activism by dozens of progressive women, people of color, and LGBTQ figures were essential to the Democrats taking control of the U.S. House and a big handful of governor's races. We are rid of such perennially toxic figures as Scott Walker and Dana Rohrabacher. (Alas, Tennessee has delivered upon us the latest version of Michele Bachmann in the guise of Senator Blackburn, yet another in a tragically long line of "godly" Stepford candidates who reliably view the world through an "I got mine" lens.)

The brightest spot? A Democratic majority in Congress poses a legitimate barrier to Trump's rampaging authoritarianism and violation of law. A number of superbly qualified Democrats will take up the gavel across the House committees, bodies that will be empowered to investigate and subpoena the Trump administration in ways that quisling toadies like Devin Nunes and Jim "Gym" Jordan would never allow. This is a huge improvement over the current condition, no question.

Nancy Pelosi will once again be Speaker of the House. I have little patience with the 'dump Pelosi' faction among the Dems. She has been the most effective legislative leader over the past 30-40 years. Granted, I also have little patience with some of her statements, such as this one in the hours after last night's results became known.

*"We will have accountability and strive for bipartisanship. We must try. We have a bipartisan marketplace of ideas that makes our democracy strong. We have all had enough with division."*

Well excuse me and all, but, fuck, no. There is no hope for bipartisanship in this political moment. The GOP leadership has made that clear since Obama nominated Merrick Garland for the Supreme Court. I can only hope that Pelosi is playing the formal game here and that she has no intention of looking for points of compromise in the coming fight.

And make no mistake. This is the fight of our political lives. Two years of Trump, and the GOP's slavish submission to his toddler whims, have degraded our civic society to a low level not seen in 160 years. The sick irony is that it is fueled by the same questions of power and racial animus that powered the drive to secession.

What would civil war look like in America today? There is no neat geographic division between North and South to demarcate who would remove themselves from the larger whole, to delineate where hostilities might be generally contained. Civil war would be more a Beirut or Belfast model, bitter foes living next door to one another with the norm looking like recent spasms of violence in Kentucky or Pittsburgh or Charleston, or even the recent yoga studio shooting here in Tallahassee.

We may have already arrived. Did Fort Sumter happen and we just didn't notice?

For now, the civil war is asymmetric, one side predominant in the hostilities. There remains a hope that our fabled democratic norms and institutions will offer a path away from complete social disintegration. It is my hope, and the reason I will continue to pursue – and even believe in – the imperfect ideal of creating an enlightened self-governing republic. I admit that I find the prospect bleak.

And yet, we persist. To do otherwise is even bleaker.