

Blue wave or red?

Key factors which might decide US midterms



Rashida **Ilhan Omar**
2 Muslim women set for Congress
US voters are poised to elect two Muslim women to Congress, marking a historic first even as anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric has been on the rise. Ilhan Omar, a Somali refugee, is all but certain to be elected to the US House of Representatives in a heavily-Democratic district in the Midwestern state of Minnesota. Rashida Tlaib, a social worker born in Detroit to Palestinian immigrant parents, will win a House seat in a district where she is running unopposed.

AFP, Washington
Immigration, health care, jobs.
The extraordinary US midterm election has been a tug of war over key issues, but none has had a more dramatic impact on voters than Donald Trump, the man who isn't even on the ballot. The Republican president is the omnipresent figure as Americans render their verdict Tuesday on the past 21 months of Trumpism.
Democrats hope voter dissatisfaction with the contentious commander in chief will lead to a blue wave that flips control of the US House out of Republican hands. Trump's minions are counting on enthusiasm about core issues to trigger strong conservative voter turnout that preserves their majorities in Congress.
Here are the key factors in the battle:
Violence: The campaign's final weeks were marred by the worst anti-Semitic attack in modern US history, which left 11 dead in a Pittsburgh synagogue. Days earlier, a frantic manhunt led to the arrest of a fanatical Trump supporter on charges of mailing pipe bombs to prominent Trump opponents, including former president Barack Obama. This spasm of violence fueled a debate about the president's caustic rhetoric, and whether it has played a role in deepening American divisions.
Women: Following the outbreak of the #MeToo movement denouncing sexual assault, and the massive women's protests against Trump, women voters and candidates will play critical roles in the first major election since Trump took power. And they appear particularly motivated to vote. Female college graduates in well-off suburbs are in the spotlight because many are voicing disgust with Trump's aggressive rhetoric, and their votes could decide tight races in Democrats' favor. Also a record number of women -- 200

Democrats and 60 Republicans -- are candidates for Congress, where they currently hold only about 20 percent of the seats.
Immigration: Sending thousands of troops to the US-Mexico border to counter a migrant "invasion," questioning the validity of birthright citizenship, and spreading stories of scandalous murders by undocumented immigrants: Trump and his Republicans are making immigration a closing argument of the campaign. It may be a logical move. Immigration is a top concern among Republican voters, and driving those issue-focused Trump supporters to the polls is key.
Health care: For months, Democrats have drilled their central message into the minds of voters: if Republicans strengthen their grip on Congress, they will destroy your health care.
It is an arresting theme in a country that does not have a universal health coverage system. The reforms signed into law by Democratic president Barack Obama have helped millions of Americans gain insurance.
Despite their big 2016 campaign pledge, Trump and Republicans have so far failed to outright repeal Obamacare.
The economy: Between Trump's "trade war," his renegotiation of international treaties, robust US growth and full employment, the economy is at the heart of this election.
In mining territory and industrial zones, Trump's protectionist policies are welcomed. But farmers themselves have suffered from retaliatory measures imposed by America's trading partners. Even with the US economy largely humming along, and Republican candidates desperate for Trump to highlight the gains, the president himself often prefers to rile up a crowd over immigration.
"Sometimes it's not as exciting to talk about the economy, right?" he told voters Friday in West Virginia.

US MIDTERM ELECTIONS			
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES		SENATE	
ALL 435 SEATS ARE UP FOR ELECTION			
CURRENT	MAJORITY: 218 SEATS	CURRENT	MAJORITY: 51 SEATS
193 DEMOCRATS	7 VACANT	47 DEMOCRATS	2 INDEPENDENTS
203 DEMOCRATS	38 TOSSE UPS	43 DEMOCRATS	8 TOSSE UPS
235 REPUBLICANS	194 REPUBLICANS	51 REPUBLICANS	49 REPUBLICANS



WHAT'S AT STAKE
A voter casts his ballot in the midterm election at the East Midwood Jewish Center polling station in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Midterm elections are often seen as a referendum on president. Turnout for midterm elections is traditionally lower than in presidential years, but the results could have dramatic implications for the United States, and in particular for Trump's legislative agenda. Republicans are bracing for a likely loss of seats in the House of Representatives but are favored to hold on to the Senate.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
The House has 435 members with states represented on the basis of population. There are currently 236 Republicans, 193 Democrats and six vacancies. All seats are contested every two years. The new congressional term begins in January 2019. Republicans have controlled the House since the conservative Tea Party movement propelled the GOP to a wave election in November 2010. Democrats need a net gain of 23 seats to take control of the House. **Likely House outcome: Democrats take control.**

SENATE
The Senate consists of 100 members, two from each state. It is currently made up of 51 Republicans and 49 Democrats. With terms of six years, about a third of the Senate is up for election every two years. Thirty-five seats are in play in Tuesday's election. Of the 35 seats up for grabs, 26 are held by Democrats and nine by Republicans. **Likely Senate outcome: Republicans hold on to the Senate.**

GOVERNOR RACES
Thirty-six of the 50 US states elect governors this year, including about 10 considered toss-ups. Republicans currently control 29 governorships to 21 for the Democrats. Two races which are of particular interest are Georgia, where Democrat Stacey Abrams is seeking to become the first black woman to become governor of a US state, and Florida, where Democrat Andrew Gillum is locked in a bitter battle with Republican and Trump acolyte Ron DeSantis.

BALLOT MEASURES
In addition to electing their lawmakers, Americans in several states will vote on ballot measures. Among the notable initiatives:
● Five states are considering the legalization of medical or recreational marijuana.
● Minimum wage increases are on the ballot in two states.
● Access to abortion and abortion funding is on the ballot in three states.

TRUMP INVESTIGATIONS
Besides stymieing the Trump agenda, a Democratic victory in the House could allow Democrats to launch multiple committee investigations of the Trump administration and possibly even impeachment proceedings.

VOTER TURNOUT
Around 37 percent of eligible voters took part in the 2014 midterm elections, down from 42 percent in 2010. More than 60 percent of eligible voters took part in the 2016 vote, when the presidential race was on the ballot.



First black female governor?
In Georgia, Stacey Abrams, 44, the former minority leader of the state House of Representatives, is running for governor against Republican Brian Kemp, the 55-year-old Georgia secretary of state. Abrams, who has received the support of Oprah Winfrey and other celebrities, would be the first black woman to become governor of a US state if she wins. The race has seen allegations that Kemp has attempted to prevent tens of thousands of mainly black voters from taking part in the election.

ALLEGED INTERFERENCE

Facebook blocks 115 accounts

AFP, San Francisco

Facebook said it blocked some 30 accounts on its platform and 85 more on Instagram after police warned they may be linked to "foreign entities" trying to interfere in the US midterm election.
The announcement came shortly after US law enforcement and intelligence agencies said that Americans should be wary of Russian attempts to spread fake news.
A study published last week found that misinformation on social media was spreading at a greater rate than during the run-up to the 2016 presidential vote, which Russia is accused of manipulating through a vast propaganda campaign in favor of Donald Trump, the eventual winner.
"On Sunday evening, US law enforcement contacted us about online activity that they

recently discovered and which they believe may be linked to foreign entities," Facebook head of cybersecurity policy Nathaniel Gleicher said in a blog post.
"We blocked these accounts and are now investigating them in more detail."
He added that all the Facebook pages associated with the accounts appeared to be in French or Russian.
Twitter said Saturday it deleted a "series of accounts" that attempted to share disinformation. It gave no number.
Facebook last month said it took down accounts linked to an Iranian effort to influence US and British politics with messages about charged topics such as immigration and race relations. The social network identified 82 pages, groups and accounts that originated in Iran and violated policy on coordinated "inauthentic" behavior.

Millions barred from casting ballots

AFP, Washington

Millions of Americans were barred from casting ballots in yesterday's crucial midterm elections due to criminal records, which effectively exclude many minority voters to the detriment of Democrats.
Nearly six million Americans are excluded from voting because they are imprisoned, on parole or awaiting sentencing. African-Americans, who are overrepresented in the US penal system, are four times more likely to be unable to vote than the rest of the population, according to The Sentencing Project, a nonprofit organization.
Rules vary widely by state, with some like Maine and New Hampshire allowing inmates to vote. But in places such as Kentucky, Iowa, Virginia and Florida, any conviction -- even for a minor offense like possession of marijuana -- results in lifelong disenfranchisement. In Florida, where Donald Trump won by just 112,000 votes in 2016, nearly 1.5 million people are cannot vote because of a criminal record.

THREATS FROM US, RUSSIA

Macron pushes for real European army

AFP, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday called for a "real European army" as the continent marks a century since the divisions of World War I, to better defend itself against Russia and even the United States.
Macron, who has pushed for a joint European Union military force since his arrival in power, said Europe needed to reduce its dependence on American might, not least after Trump announced he was pulling out of a Cold War-era nuclear treaty.
"We have to protect ourselves with respect to China, Russia and even the United States of America," Macron told Europe 1 in his first radio interview since becoming president in May 2017.
"When I see President Trump announcing that he's quitting a major disarmament treaty which was formed after the 1980s Euromissile crisis that hit Europe, who is the main victim? Europe and its security," he said.
The Euromissile crisis -- a mini-arms race within the Cold War that saw the US roll ballistic missiles into Europe -- was a major factor spurring the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.
"We will not protect the Europeans unless we decide to have a true European army," Macron said in the interview, recorded Monday night in Verdun, northeast France, as he tours the former Western Front during World War I centenary commemorations.
"We need a Europe which defends itself better alone, without just depending on the United States," he said.



Families and colleagues of passengers and crew of Lion Air flight JT610 throw flowers and petals from the deck of Indonesia Navy ship KRI Banjarmasin as they visit the site of the crash to pay their tribute, at the north coast of Karawang, Indonesia, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

India's Faizabad will now be called Ayodhya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

In yet another name change, the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh yesterday announced that Faizabad district in the state will be henceforth known as Ayodhya. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath made the announcement at a function to mark the Deepavali function in Ayodhya in the afternoon.

IS left behind 200 mass graves in Iraq: UN

AFP, Baghdad

More than 200 mass graves containing up to 12,000 victims have been found so far in Iraq that could hold vital evidence of war crimes by the IS, the UN said yesterday. The UNAMI said they documented the mass graves in parts of western and northern Iraq held by IS between 2014 and 2017.

Most Britons back staying in EU: poll

AFP, London

Britons would vote to remain in the European Union by a 54-46 percent margin in a second referendum, a survey said Monday. The apparent boost in remain support will be seized by campaigners who want a binding second vote taken on the terms London and Brussels reach before Britain splits from the bloc on March 29.

BITS OF HISTORY (NOVEMBER 6)

- 1928 - Hebert Hoover becomes US President.
- 1995 - Israel buried Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.
- 1996 - More than 2,000 people were killed or lost at sea when a cyclone struck India's Andhra Pradesh.
- 1998 - The first talks between India and Pakistan since 1992 ended when Pakistan rejected an Indian proposal for a ceasefire.

435 Afghans killed or hurt in polls violence

AFP, Kabul

More than 400 Afghans were killed or wounded in poll-related violence during three days of voting last month, the UN said yesterday, making the parliamentary ballot the deadliest on record. The vast majority of the 435 casualties happened on the first day of voting on October 20.

US, China to hold top-level security talks

AFP, Washington

US and China will hold top-level security talks on Friday, the State Department announced, in a sign of easing tensions after months of escalation over trade and regional disputes. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis will host Chinese officials in Washington for the second US-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue.

13 migrants killed, 80 rescued at sea: Spain

AFP, Madrid

Thirteen sub-Saharan African migrants died and another 80 were rescued at sea after they tried to reach Spain in two boats from the North African coast, Spanish authorities said on Monday. The two vessels were recovered 20 miles off the coast of Melilla, they said, without giving details on the state of the vessels.

Ex-SS guard, 94, goes on trial in Germany

AFP, Berlin

A former SS guard, aged 94, yesterday went on trial in Germany charged with complicity in mass murders at a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, in a case bearing symbolic and moral weight. He was not named by prosecutors, but Die Welt daily identified him as Johann R, a landscape architect who once worked for North Rhine-Westphalia state authorities.

Congress beats BJP in Karnataka by-polls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party yesterday suffered a jolt when it failed to retain a parliamentary seat which has been its long-held bastion in the southern state of Karnataka as ruling Congress and its alliance partner Janata Dal (Secular) won two other parliamentary constituencies and won both the assembly seats that went to by-polls last weekend.
Out of the three parliamentary and two assembly seats, the BJP could win only one and the rest four were bagged by the Congress and Janata Dal (S) to make it a 4-1 verdict in favour of the state's ruling coalition.
The by-elections are seen as an indicator of the popular mood not only about the Congress-Janata Dal(S) coalition in Karnataka but also the Indian parliamentary elections next year.
The Congress-Janata Dal (S) alliance in Karnataka was cobbled after the assembly polls that threw up a fractured verdict that saw the two parties outsmarting the BJP, which had emerged as the single largest party in the poll, to form the state government.
The BJP and the Congress-Janata Dal(S) combine mounted an all out offensive to breach each other's bastions before 2019 Lok Sabha polls.
Of the three Lok Sabha seats that went to the by-polls, BJP had held Shivamogga and Ballari seats while Janata Dal (S) held Mandya seat.

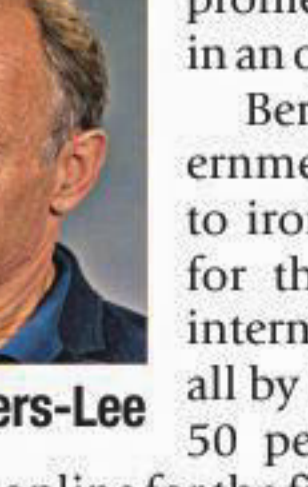
Web inventor wants new 'contract' to make net safe

Expresses concerns over fake news, data privacy

AFP, Lisbon

The inventor of the World Wide Web on Monday called for a "contract" to make internet safe and accessible for everyone as Europe's largest tech event began in Lisbon amid a backlash over its role in spreading "fake news".
Some 70,000 people are expected to take part in the four-day Web Summit, dubbed "the Davos for geeks", including speakers from leading global tech companies, politicians and start-ups hoping to attract attention from the over 1,500 investors who are scheduled to attend.
Tech firms now find themselves on the defensive, with critics accusing them of not doing enough to curb the spread of "fake news" which has helped polarise election campaigns around the world and of maximising profits by harvesting data on consumers' browsing habits.

British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee, who in 1989 invented the World Wide Web as a way to exchange information, said the internet had deviated from the goals its founders had envisaged.
"All kinds of things have things have gone wrong. We have fake news, we have problems with privacy, we have people being profiled and manipulated," he said in an opening address.
Berners-Lee, 63, called on governments, companies and citizens to iron out a "complete contract" for the web that will make the internet "safe and accessible" for all by May 2019, the date by which 50 percent of the world will be online for the first time.
He has just launched Inrupt, a start-up which is building an open source platform called "Solid" which will decentralise the web and allow users to choose where their data is kept, along with who can see and access it.



Tim Berners-Lee

KHASHOGGI MURDER

Saudis tampered with CCTV: report

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Turkish media have reported that staff at Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul tried to dismantle security cameras to help cover up the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.
The pro-government Sabah newspaper reported yesterday that the Saudis tried to rip out the camera inside the consulate on October 2, the day Khashoggi was murdered.
They also tried to tamper with cameras at the police security booth outside the building.
Khashoggi, a former Washington Post columnist and critic of the powerful Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, also known as MBS, was killed in the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul on October 2. His body remains missing.
According to the report, on October 6, at 1:00am local time, a consulate member staff went into the police security post outside the Saudi consulate to access the video system.
Sabah reported that the staff member put in a digital lock code into the system, which did not dismantle any cameras, rather the code was to prevent access to any videos showing movement at the entrance, including Khashoggi's arrival at the consulate. "All of this demonstrates, according to Turkish officials, in terms of the ... whole set of procedures, that there was an effort by the Saudi Arabian consulate to once again tamper with evidence," Al Jazeera's Andrew Simmons said.