

Democrats' bid to win control of state legislatures collapses

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The 2020 US election has seen the biggest voter turnout in 120 years, driven by mass popular hatred for Donald Trump. Former Vice President Joe Biden has defeated the incumbent by more than four million votes and is certain to reach the threshold of 270 Electoral College votes needed to become president.

But the inability and refusal of Biden and the Democratic Party to advance any program to address the catastrophic public health impact of the coronavirus pandemic or the Depression-era social crisis it has triggered have actually strengthened the position of the Republican Party in the US Congress and in statehouses across the United States.

In the US Senate, the Democrats have to date netted only one additional seat, leaving Trump's GOP in control, while in the House, their anti-Russia impeachment debacle and complicity in denying unemployment benefits to tens of millions impacted by the pandemic have resulted in a loss of seats.

Perhaps the sharpest expression in the elections of the bankruptcy of the Democratic Party is its failure to make any inroads into Republican control of state legislatures across the country. These state bodies largely determine the rules for elections, the exercise of reproductive rights, spending for education and the availability of health care.

As of Tuesday's election, the Republicans controlled some three-fifths of legislative chambers, having won two dozen in the 2010 election cycle. States with Republican-controlled legislatures include Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Texas, North Carolina and Florida.

In Tuesday's vote, despite an unprecedented public health, economic, social and political crisis, the lowest number of state chambers changed hands in more than 70 years. According to the National Conference of

State Legislatures (NCSL), there were changes or potential shifts of control in just four bodies. The Republicans took back the New Hampshire House and Senate from the Democrats, and the Democrats may have captured the House and Senate in Arizona, although the contests for the Arizona chambers are still too close to call.

"This is crazy in that almost nothing changed," said Tim Storey, an expert with the NCSL. "It really jumps off the page."

The Democrats' failure came despite having poured millions of dollars into campaign ads aimed at gaining control of the state legislatures in Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Michigan and other key states. David Abrams of the Republican State Leadership Committee gloated, "Democrats spent hundreds of millions of dollars to flip state chambers. So far, they don't have a damn thing to show for it."

Republican-led state houses have spearheaded the attack on abortion rights and voting rights, imposing ever more onerous restrictions on access to abortion and measures such as voter IDs to make it more difficult for working and poor people to vote. The Democrats have put up no serious resistance to these attacks on democratic rights.

Control of state legislatures is particularly important in this election because the incoming state bodies will carry out redistricting next year on the basis of the just completed decennial census. They will redraw congressional districts for the next 10 years, gerrymandering them to suit partisan aims and further entrench the interests of the corporate elite.

In Texas, the second most populous state in the US, where the GOP controls both legislative chambers and the governorship, the Republicans are considering redrawing state maps based on "citizen voting-age

population” instead of counting the total population. This will exclude all non-citizens, disproportionately Hispanic, and lower representation from Democratic strongholds in south Texas and fast-growing parts of Dallas and Houston.

As for gubernatorial races, the Democrats failed to pick up any Republican governorships and lost an open seat in Montana that had been vacated by Democrat Steve Bullock, who ran unsuccessfully for the US Senate. Republican Greg Gianforte won against Lieutenant Governor Mike Cooney, ending more than 16 years of Democratic leadership in a state that usually votes Republican in presidential contests.



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