# A Night of Pure Trumpenfreude

*Finally, the president's actions had consequences.*

By Helen Lewis

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Last night was a great one for anyone who believes that actions should have consequences. Should a president campaign on ending foreign wars, and then get talked into a military misadventure in the Middle East when Benjamin Netanyahu turns up at the White House Situation with a compelling PowerPoint? Should a president impose tariffs that all serious economists suggest are dumb simply because he's always wanted to try them? Should a president go well beyond advocating for strong borders and into a cruel and violent deportation regime that alienates Latino voters? Should his lieutenants attempt to run up the score by gerrymandering themselves more congressional seats, carving up majority-Black districts with obvious relish? Should that president then spend the election campaign dismissing affordability as a "hoax" and rambling endlessly about buttocks instead? Finally, we have our answer.

World-weary Democrats refer to their usual election-night emotions as hopium (maybe this is a polling error?) and copium (maybe we just didn't explain the premise of land acknowledgments well enough?). Today's emotion is Trumpenfreude. There is a simple joy in seeing someone who has broken their promises not getting away with it.

But why stop with Trump's unforced errors? The midterm elections were also marked by a series of grotesqueries by his Mini-Mes, who had misread their idol's victory two years ago as a license to be as unpleasant and venal as they wanted. No result fills me with more schadenfreude than James Talarico's thumping win in Texas. The MAGA machine threw the kitchen sink at the Democratic Senate candidate: Talarico was secretly gay; no, he was a vegan; no, he had left the campaign trail to check into a mental hospital in Ohio. None of it worked. Trump tried his most reliable tactic for destroying political careers—a mean nickname—and got nothing. Instead, fans of the Democrat took to wearing T-shirts with the legend TALAFREAKO.

And yes, the incumbent Republican senator, John Cornyn, might well have succumbed to the blue tsunami too. But the sheer scale of Talarico's victory has everything to do with Trump's handpicking of Ken Paxton as his candidate. Even Paxton's own side hates him: As attorney general, he was impeached by Texas Republicans for corruption. He also avoided debates, looked like a schlub—a frequent theme of Trump's speeches, where he was unfavorably compared with hotties like Husted—and had previously been filmed pocketing a $1,000 pen left in a security tray. The perfect spineless MAGA foot soldier! Paxton got crushed. A moment here to appreciate that not even Elon Musk's multimillions could drag this clunker over the line.

Okay, okay. We've also got time for a minute to dwell on the Democratic victory in South Carolina. After all, why have a proper Republican candidate when you could insult voters by attempting to bequeath the Senate seat, like an emperor's boon, to Lindsey Graham's sister—even though she obviously knows nothing about politics and cares even less?

But no time to meditate on that, because we must forge onward—to Ohio. Vivek Ramaswamy, the Republican nominee for governor there, is a charisma void who would have gotten nowhere without hitching his wagon to Trumpism, a movement where loyalty matters more than competence or charm. Some candidates lose with their dignity intact. Ramaswamy instead tried to win in the dirtiest way possible, by hauling out his opponent's estranged mother—who has at times been living in her car, surrounded by cats—to make an attack ad calling her own daughter a liar. (The real reason for the estrangement was that Amy Acton, the Democrat, was sexually abused by her mother's husband when she was a child.)

And what's the matter with Kansas? Nothing! For once, the Democrats had an outbreak of sanity and nominated a megachurch pastor—which is to say, someone with proven communication skills and social views that were broadly in tune with a conservative state's electorate. The Republican incumbent was Senator Roger Marshall, who ducked out of a town hall last year when constituents asked him why Musk's

Department of Government Efficiency was firing veterans. (“We’re going to vote you out,” shouted one woman, presciently, to his departing back.) He then reduced his public appearances out of fear of his own voters. Marshall was clearly not prepared for the harsh realities of running in a competitive election. He went rogue in the last days of the campaign and made an ad about how it was completely fine actually that he had sued his patients over their medical debt. His team tried to stop him, and he did it anyway. “I don’t have any answers,” Marshall said in his concession speech last night.

How about Georgia? There, the Democrats had Jon Ossoff—the closest a white person will ever get to being Barack Obama—while the Republicans fielded Mike Collins, a blowhard whose son-in-law, according to CNN, is a white-nationalist influencer. (Sample quotation: “All we’re told is, ‘Germany bad, Hitler evil, don’t ask questions, Holocaust, Holocaust, Holocaust, here’s 50 movies every year about the Holocaust and why it’s so bad.’”) Ossoff relentlessly contrasted Trump’s self-enrichment with the economic gloom experienced by regular Americans and cruised to reelection as a result.

Or what about Mississippi? The clear disdain for the Voting Rights Act shown by the Trump administration and the Supreme Court’s conservative majority likely energized Black voters there, putting a Senate seat within reach for Democrats for the first time since the 1980s. If Scott Colom wins, revenge will be sweet: In 2023, his appointment as a federal judge received bipartisan support across the state, but was blocked by Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, a Republican. She was his opponent in the election. “It is fair to say that I would not have resigned from the federal bench to run for Senate,” Colom has previously said.

The lesson that Trump took from his popular-vote win in 2024 was that he could do whatever he liked—that what voters wanted was Maximum Trump, the full-fat version of the pallid Diet Trump he was forced to be in term one. This was a huge strategic error, a piece of hubris so epic that it should have its own monument. (A new use for the planned Arc de Trump, perhaps.) The Democrats, by contrast, took the right lessons from 2024: The economy matters more than anything. Voters don’t like foreign wars. Middle Americans are more socially conservative than the Democratic establishment, but they are not cruel. Some of the Democrats to be elected this time will have their own scandals—some of these races have been only lightly reported, and their candidates under-scrutinized. But at least people in those districts will know they can swing back the other way next time and vote them out.

This is how democracy is supposed to work: The people speak and politicians listen. This was a good night for democracy. Also, did I mention that Elon Musk wasted $500 million? Good. Actions should have consequences.

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## Triple A Reading

*In the credit world, a Triple A rating is the highest score given. Likewise, when reading an article, an essay or any text, apply our Triple A Reading when assessing, appraising and acting on what you have learned.*

Assess/Appraise/Action

1. **Assess** = Demonstrate your understanding of this text by stating its main idea or thesis. Cite at least three (3) of the author’s arguments that support the main idea.

2. **Appraise** = Using examples from the text or from outside sources, consider three (3) agreeable and three (3) disagreeable arguments made in the text. Which side do you fall on?

3. **Action** = Prompted from reading this text, what is a relevant response government can make? Your community can make? You can make? (Application is always an excellent place to start)

# EXAMPLE
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   *Actions have consequences. In particular, the actions of President Trump swung voters against the Republican Party candidates in the 2026 midterm election.*

   (1) Perceived cruel and violent deportation policies swung Latino voters against Republicans; (2) Trump tariff policies and the war in Iran negatively impacted affordability; (3) Punitive gerrymandering in Republican states alienated Black voters. So too did Trump's advocacy of overturning the Voting Rights Act and Diversity and Equity programs.

2. **Appraise** = Using examples from the text or from outside sources, consider three (3) agreeable and three (3) disagreeable arguments made in the text. Which side do you fall on?

   Agreeable: (1) According to the available demographic data following the recent midterm election Latino voters swung 21 points back to the Democratic Party; (2) According to the available demographic data following the recent midterm election 2/3s of voters believed Trump policies had made the economy worse; According to the available demographic data following the recent midterm election Black voters swung 9 points back to the Democratic Party; among Black men under 45 that swing was 25 points; additionally there was a sizable increase in Black turnout.

   Disagreeable: (1) Trump argued that he was not on the ballot and therefore not to blame; (2) a popular adage in politics is that "all politics is local," the midterms were a result of unpopular local candidates and not national policies; (3) in 2024 155 million votes were cast (64% turnout); in the 2026 midterm election 123 million votes were cast (49% turnout). Midterm election results often go against incumbents.

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   Reminders. Messaging appears to matter. Character is destiny. As citizens it is important to hold our political class accountable to their actions. It is also important to build news literacy in order to sort out true versus false political claims.