In midterm elections on November 2, the American people spoke. “We are not happy,” they said, “and we want new leadership.”

Midterm elections are considered an important test of how well the president is doing his job. They are also a means of judging the party in power. In this election, the voters essentially gave low grades to President Barack Obama and the Democratic Party and turned to Republicans for a change. In the House of Representatives, Democrats lost their majority, which had been 257 seats to 178 seats for Republicans. The new numbers stand at 185 Democratic seats and 239 Republican. The last time this many seats changed midterm was in 1948.

In January 2011, U.S. Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio) will most likely become the new House majority leader, replacing Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat. “This is not a time for celebration,” Boehner said in his victory speech on election night. “Not when one out of 10 of our fellow citizens is out of work, not when we buried our children under a mountain of debt.”

Voters were mainly concerned about the state of the economy. High unemployment and financial problems have left many people worried about the future.

One influence on the election outcome was the Tea Party movement. The Tea Party wants to scale back the size and influence of government. As a result, many incumbents were toppled by new and inexperienced candidates.

However, the Democrats held on to power in the U.S. Senate. Nevada Democrat Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader, won a tight race against Republican challenger Sharron Angle.

Republicans say they want to cut taxes and government spending and say the Democrats have supported expensive, ineffective programs. Democrats accuse Republicans of doing anything they can to prevent Obama from being successful.

The new Congress begins work in January 2011.
BACKGROUND: ELECTION 2010

- Though most people pay closer attention to presidential elections, midterm elections are important. During midterm elections, all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and about a third of the 100 seats in the Senate are up for grabs. Typically, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party run one candidate for each position. Candidates of the major parties may be challenged by independent or third-party candidates.
- Incumbents are people who are already in office. They often have an advantage during elections because they have proven track records and are well-known to voters. When an incumbent is challenged by someone from the same party, a primary election is held before the general election to determine who will run as that party’s candidate.
- Our nation’s founders established a system of government that gives each branch some control over the other two branches. For example, Congress can check the power of the president by refusing to approve a treaty the president has signed. The president needs cooperation from Congress to push through his or her agenda. Both the president and Congress propose budgets, policies, and laws, but they must be in agreement for any action to pass.
- Agreement between Congress and the president is more likely when the president and the majority of members of Congress belong to the same political party.

BY THE NUMBERS

18 is the minimum voting age in the United States.
435 representatives serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. The number of representatives for a state is based on that state’s population.
37 U.S. Senate seats were at stake in 2010. Each state is represented by two senators.
56.8 percent of eligible voters turned out to vote in 2008, the most recent presidential election year.

ACTIVITY PROMPTS

Discuss it. Ask: What do you know about the candidates for office in your area? How did you find out about the candidates and their positions? Whom would you have voted for? Why?

Debate it. Divide the class into groups to consider the ways in which people learn about political candidates: media reports on the radio, on TV, in print, and on the Internet; family and friends; political campaign ads; in-person visits from candidates or campaign workers. Ask: Which source of information would you trust to present the most accurate information about political candidates? Why?

Monitor the media. Choose one race (either local or state), and review media coverage of the candidates that preceded the election. Did each candidate receive equal coverage? Did the candidates receive endorsements from newspapers or other media? Was the reporting fair and accurate? What effect do you think media coverage had on the outcome of the election?

FAQs

Who can vote?
A U.S. citizen who is 18 or older on Election Day has the right to vote in local, state, and federal elections. In most states, one must register to vote before Election Day. Voters cast ballots at polling stations in their voting districts. (Voting districts are based on the population of a particular area.) In many states, citizens must have lived in their voting districts for at least 30 days to vote in local elections. People who cannot get to their local polling stations can vote by mail using absentee ballots.

When are federal elections held?
Presidential elections are held every four years. (The last presidential election took place in 2008.) Midterm elections are held between presidential elections. In midterm elections, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives are in play. Senators serve six-year terms, but Senate elections are staggered. About one-third of Senate seats are in play during each national election (midterm or presidential).

What about local elections?
At the state level, people vote for governors and state legislators (senators and representatives). This year, elections for governor were held in 37 states. Local elections for mayors, city council members, and other political officials may also have been held.

STUDENT SKILLS


Want to know more? Go to www.weeklyreader.com.
Look at the House

A. Read the chart below. Then fill in the circle next to the correct answer.

House of Representatives, 1993–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President</th>
<th>House Democratic voting share</th>
<th>House Republican voting share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinton (Democrat)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103rd Congress</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104th Congress</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush (Republican)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105th Congress</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106th Congress</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama (Democrat)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111th Congress</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Which party controlled the House during President Bill Clinton’s second term?
   - A. Democratic  
   - B. Republican

2. Which Congress had the greatest disparity in voting share?
   - A. 103rd  
   - B. 110th

3. Which party has most often controlled the House since 1993?
   - A. Democratic  
   - B. Republican

4. Which party controlled the House before the midterm election on November 2?
   - A. Democratic  
   - B. Republican

5. From 1993 to 2011, how many times has the controlling party in the House been a different party than the president’s?
   - A. four  
   - B. eight

Note: Independents are not included on the chart. Therefore, percentages do not add up to 100 percent.

B. In the chart below, write the number of Democrats and Republicans elected to serve in the 112th Congress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President Barack Obama (Democrat) elected 2008</th>
<th>DEMOCRATS</th>
<th>REPUBLICANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>112th Congress (2011–2013): House of Representatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. In the following chart, write the names and parties of the winners of local and state races in your area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party (Democrat, Republican, or other)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. senator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. representative</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
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<tr>
<td>State senator</td>
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<tr>
<td>State representative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>