

UMB News

Liasson, Goldberg Dissect Midterms, Look Ahead to 2024

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[University of Maryland, Baltimore](#) (UMB) President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, opened the President's Panel on Politics and Policy on Nov. 17 by reciting that tally — the midterm election results for the House of Representatives as of that morning, with Republicans taking control of the House by a slimmer-than-expected margin.



UMB President Bruce Jarrell and national political commentators Mara Liasson and Jonah Goldberg discussed the midterm election results during the President's Panel on Politics and Policy, which was held in person for the first time since March 2020.

Over the next 95 minutes, Jarrell engaged in a wide-ranging conversation at the SMC Campus Center Elm Ballrooms with guests Mara Liasson, National Public Radio political correspondent, and Jonah Goldberg, conservative syndicated columnist, political analyst, and commentator. The topics during the discussion, which also was livestreamed, included the 2024 presidential campaign and the midterms, which did not produce the red wave that many

expected as Democrats appear poised to retain control of the Senate.

(Watch a video of the event [at this link.](#))

The simplest take on the midterm results, according to Liasson: “Voters just voted against crazy.”

“If you took the exit polls without knowing who won, and you looked at them, and then you were asked from these exit polls who won this election? The exit polls showed people thought Republicans were better on the economy, immigration, inflation, crime. President Joe Biden was very unpopular, and Democrats still won. People who thought all those things still went into the booth and voted for Democrats,” she said.

Goldberg said in races where voters thought election deniers would have an impact on law, such as abortion legislation, those candidates were punished. An endorsement from former President Donald Trump was a “penalty” that cost candidates five percentage points, he added.

“It was a great night for what we in the Trump skeptical conservative community call Republican normies,” Goldberg said. “For someone like me who has stayed out of the pro-Trump stuff for seven years and paid quite a price for it, this was a great election because everyone who I thought was ruining the Republican Party took it on the chin. Election deniers conceded defeat, which was great for the country.”

Will Parties Learn Their Lessons?

Goldberg said weak parties create strong partisanship.

“If you had well-run parties that took care to protect their brand and their long-term institutional interests, you would see a total cleaning house of the whack jobs after this election, and it would be, ‘Let’s put up the normal, boring Republicans, because they did really well.’ ” he said. “Voters moved toward normal, ordinary Republicans in large numbers. And then given two nights ago, we had the Mar-a-Lago announcement [Trump announcing his 2024 candidacy], it’s not necessarily obvious that we’re going to go that way. But this does give the forces of boring normalcy in the Republican Party a lot of amp.”

Liasson and Goldberg shared their takes on whether the parties will learn from the midterms and act.

“It’s easier right now for Republicans to say, ‘Let’s just go with the normies.’ For Democrats, it’s a little harder, because they dodged a bullet, they did not win,” Liasson said. “This is what’s so confusing. The same thing happened in 2020 when Joe Biden won decisively at the top of the ticket, but Democrats lost seats in Congress. They both lost and won, and they totally misinterpreted their mandate. But I am not hearing Democrats saying this shows that we should be more progressive and move to the left. They have breathing room to fix their problems on immigration, crime, and all sorts of left-wing cultural excesses. They have an opportunity. And let’s see if they take it.”

Goldberg agreed for the most part.

“The great news out of the midterms is that Republicans are going to learn a lot of lessons that they need to learn. The bad news is that the Democrats aren’t going to learn a lot of lessons,” he said, later clarifying when Liasson questioned him that he believes it’s “more possible” that Republicans will learn lessons.

“And this has been a problem the last 20 years,” Goldberg said. “Every party whenever they win, they wildly overinterpret their mandate. Biden had a mandate to do two things when he was elected: not be Donald Trump and return things to normalcy. He accomplished the first one really quickly. But the return to normalcy, I don’t think he quite delivered on, and some of it’s not his fault.”

Presidential Possibilities

They also discussed potential 2024 presidential candidates including Biden, Trump, and Florida Gov. Rick DeSantis, a Republican who was re-elected by a large margin.

On Biden running for re-election, Goldberg said he thought that the president would be a “disastrous or at least extremely risky candidate in 2024.”

“If you look at the exit polls, vast majorities of Democratic voters do not want him to run again. He’s not popular,” Goldberg said.

Liasson talked about how a large Republican field could benefit Trump.

“The way Donald Trump can win the nomination in 2024 is the same way he won it the first time in 2016: against a crowded field,” Liasson said. “The Republican Party couldn’t get its act together to coalesce around one non-Trump alternative, and he won with 30 to 40 percent of the vote. I think back then there was a real failure of imagination among Republicans. They thought if they took two aspirin and lay down, when they got up, he’d be gone. He wasn’t.

“Will [former Secretary of State] Mike Pompeo, [former Vice President] Mike Pence, and all those people step aside for Ron DeSantis? We’re also going to find out how firm Trump’s grip is on the base of the Republican Party.”

Regarding DeSantis, Goldberg said voters are wrong to compare the Florida governor to Trump.

“People who say DeSantis is no different than Trump just do an incredible disservice. I think Trump is a unique threat to our institutions, a uniquely narcissistic, sociopathic guy when it comes to norms. DeSantis isn’t that,” he said. “You can think he’s a bad Republican, that he’s a bad person, that he’s too right wing. That’s all fair game in a democracy. But he’s a fairly conventional Republican politician compared to Donald Trump. And when you say he’s no different than Trump, what you’re really saying is that Trump is no different than a conventional Republican, which undermines the anti-Trump argument.”

The panel discussion touched on many other topics, such as the future of polling, voter turnout, and the House leadership, and ended with several questions from the audience including what federal research funding could look like with a split Congress.

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