

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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DEMOCRATS WIN THE HOUSE. NOW WHAT?

One thought should be foremost in their minds: How do they avoid screwing things up? For starters, pick policy battles wisely.

With the House of Representatives in Democrats' control, the next two years will give them the opportunity to show that there's a better model of legislating, that Congress is capable of doing more for Americans than cutting taxes for the wealthy and menacing everyone else's health care. Now and again Democratic leaders may need to play constitutional hardball — and they'll have a chance to do it in a more constructive fashion than Mitch McConnell and his team, who have dominated Congress since 2014.

Even as Democratic House members are picking the confetti from their hair, one thought should be foremost in their minds: How do they avoid screwing things up?

FIRST UP: PICK POLICY BATTLES WISELY.

For the midterms, Democrats adopted a trio of policy goals: lowering health care costs, creating jobs by investing in infrastructure, and cleaning up politics via a comprehensive reform package that would tighten ethics laws and shore up the integrity of our electoral system. These are popular causes with bipartisan appeal.

They are also causes for which the president has explicitly expressed his own enthusiasm, whether real or feigned. This gives Democrats the chance to press President Trump about whether he is interested in making progress on his stated goals or is a hypocrite intent on waging partisan trench warfare for the remainder of his term.

First up on the Democrats' agenda is expected to be the reform package. But they also plan to move quickly to address the plight of the Dreamers, some 700,000 immigrants brought to the United States illegally as children and granted protection from deportation by President Barack Obama. Huge majorities of Americans support letting the Dreamers stay. Finding a compromise path with Mr. Trump would be good policy and good politics.

AVOID THE "I" WORD FOR NOW.

Impeachment is neither a sensible nor a winning issue to open with. Even many Americans who dislike Mr. Trump will, absent overwhelming evidence of impeachable offenses, balk at efforts to remove a sitting president. Democrats would do well to wait and see if the investigation by the special counsel, Robert Mueller, turns up high crimes and misdemeanors before deciding whether to pursue the painful and divisive path of impeachment. If so, they'll want to bring along at least some of their Republican colleagues.

DON'T GO CRAZY WITH THE SUBPOENAS.

It has been a long two years for Democrats, watching Republicans fail to check Trumpian excesses. Which means the new majority might be tempted to overreach and, like Mr. Gingrich's self-styled revolutionaries, wind up coming across as more partisan and prurient than public-spirited. Investigations should be strategic and methodical and clearly in the public interest — for instance, looking into corruption among cabinet officials or waste of taxpayer dollars, rather than targeting more lascivious matters, like hush-money payments to former mistresses.

The trick will be finding the right balance in both tone and topic. Many Trump-hating Democrats might be in the mood for payback, but most Americans could easily be turned off by overt political games. And, let's not forget, this is ultimately not about scoring points — Americans deserve better from their government.

GROOM THE PARTY'S NEXT LEADERS.

The widespread assumption in Democratic circles is that Nancy Pelosi will reclaim the speaker's gavel. Practically speaking, this may be for the best, but even Ms. Pelosi has begun referring to herself as a "transitional" leader.

After 16 years as the House Democratic leader, Ms. Pelosi comes with a truckload of baggage, and a growing contingent within her own party feels it is time for a generational overhaul. But the reality is that she has no obvious successor. Her two deputies, Steny Hoyer and Jim Clyburn, offer no fresher blood. Her presumed heir, Joseph Crowley, is on his way out the door, having lost his seat in the primary election.

Love her or hate her, nobody herds the cats better than Ms. Pelosi.

That said, the Democratic leadership is staler than week-old toast. And while victory tends to cool intracaucus griping, if Ms. Pelosi becomes speaker, she owes it to the institution and her colleagues to set about raising a new generation of leaders, helping prepare such up-and-comers as Cheri Bustos, Hakeem Jeffries, Linda Sánchez, Ruben Gallego, Joseph Kennedy III, Ben Ray Lujan, Eric Swalwell and Seth Moulton, among others.

Given the dismal example set so far by President Trump, Democratic leaders now have a political opportunity, and also a heavy responsibility. Winning the House is one thing. Restoring some sanity to American politics and a sense of higher, common purpose to American governance is yet another.

The end for Poland's populists?

Sławomir Sierakowski

WARSAW Last weekend a coalition of opposition parties in Poland solidified the results of a stunning mayoral election season: In several major cities, including Warsaw, the opposition defeated the ruling Law and Justice party, a populist, anti-immigrant party led by Jarosław Kaczyński.

Mr. Kaczyński's party remains in control, for now, and it has touted its tightened hold on many of the country's rural districts. But in all but the smallest cities, it is in free-fall.

During the first round of voting, on Oct. 21, Law and Justice lost the mayoral races in Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Wrocław, Lublin and some two-thirds of Poland's other urban districts. Things got worse in the Nov. 4 runoffs, when the opposition won in Gdansk, Kraków, Szczecin, Kielce and Radom.

Even the prime minister's sister, Anna Morawiecka, who ran for mayor of the provincial town of Oborniki Śląskie, lost to an opposition candidate who defeated her with 70 percent of the vote. In total, of the 107 cities where voters choose "presidents" — more or less the country's largest cities — Law and Justice won just six, and small ones at that.

Although Mr. Kaczyński's Law and Justice party obtained the highest level of support — 34 percent — in the elections to Poland's 16 provincial assemblies, the second-place Citizens' Coalition was only seven points behind, at 28 percent. The third- and fourth-strongest showings were also by opposition parties — the Polish People's Party, with 13 percent, and the Democratic Left Alliance, with 6.6 percent.

As a result, the majority of the provincial assemblies (nine or ten of the 16) will be controlled by the opposition. Local elections in Poland are highly significant, as provincial assemblies control the disbursement of European Union funds (of which Poland is the largest beneficiary, receiving some 14 billion euro annually) and perform other key functions. Tellingly, they closely resemble parliamentary elections — which Poland will hold next fall.

The results show that Law and Justice can count on only roughly a third of the vote in Poland. If next year's parliamentary election were held today, the party would be pushed out of power. Whether it can come back over the next 12 months depends on how well the opposition can take advantage of the situation.

In recent years Law and Justice has taken a series of antidemocratic moves to solidify its hold on power, and it was counting on a victory in these local elections to establish complete control over Poland.

That is why the ruling party threw all its efforts into the campaign. Publicly supported news media, which has been completely subordinated to Law and Justice, brutally attacked the opposition throughout the campaign. It especially targeted the agrarian Polish People's Party, calling for its "elimination from the political scene."

This attack on the Polish People's Party proved to be a grave political error. It precludes the possibility of cooperation between the two parties — effectively depriving Mr. Kaczyński of his only potential coalition partner and uniting the opposition.

The entire ministerial cabinet was out on the campaign trail. The candidates promised new metro lines, or new residential developments, seemingly from thin air. Law and Justice also issued threats, even suggesting that Warsaw, the capital, would be cut off from subsidies from the national government if the city failed to elect the ruling party's candidate for mayor. At the end it resorted to the strategy that had proved successful in Hungary: raising the specter of a flood of refugees who would rape, attack and plunder Poland. But this backfired as



A woman casting her vote in the second round of local elections, in Krakow, Poland, on Sunday.

well, boosting turnout for opposition candidates.

Indeed, the opposition owes its strong showing to an exceptionally mobilized electorate. There were long lines outside of polling places for the first time since 1989. Voter turnout broke the post-1989 record, reaching 55 percent (as opposed to 47 percent four years ago).

Law and Justice committed several fundamental errors. It turns out that even populism can be overdone. The ruling party's propaganda evolved into ostentatious lies. To add insult to injury, Zbigniew Ziobro, the minister of justice, ordered the Constitutional Tribunal to examine the constitutionality of European Union agreements, which many voters saw as a first step toward a potential "Polexit."

That might be a move from the populist playbook, but it's a mistake: Support for European integration in Poland exceeds 80 percent, the highest in Europe.

It was also a mistake to designate Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki as the leader of the campaign. A former banker, he proved ineffective in connecting to voters in villages and small towns.

Moreover, the electoral calendar is highly favorable to the opposition. The elections to the European Parliament, in May 2019, will be a de facto plebiscite on the European Union. Given the E.U.'s popularity, the opposition can expect to defeat Law and Justice, assuming it can present a united front. A win in those elections will give the opposition even more momentum as Poland heads toward the parliamentary elections in the fall, followed by the

presidential election in 2020. The opposition politicians would like to see Donald Tusk, a former prime minister and a co-founder of Civic Platform, as their presidential candidate. He might agree — Mr. Tusk, who serves as the president of the European Council, has already announced that upon his return to Poland he "does not intend to merely observe politics in the media."

The opposition, largely composed of liberal and center-left groups, has already succeeded in neutralizing the two issues that had given Law and Justice so much power over the past decade: boosting expensive social programs and stoking the fear of refugees. After the mayoral elections, it seems voters no longer find these issues compelling. Socialism and nationalism can lose to liberalism.

The European Union has been watching the Polish elections carefully, and it is likely to throw even more support behind the pro-Europe opposition. With its large population and geographically central location, Poland is a kind of swing state that can turn the tide across Eastern Europe. If populism is defeated in Poland, maybe it can be defeated elsewhere.

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Iran & Saudi Arabia, Thelma & Louise

FRIEDMAN, FROM PAGE 12

prime minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri. But Iran's Hezbollah murdered the former prime minister of Lebanon, Saad's father, Rafik Hariri, to make sure he did not return to power. Meanwhile, Denmark just accused Iran of sending intelligence agents to assassinate an Iranian Arab opposition leader living in exile in Denmark, and France just expelled an Iranian diplomat after a failed plot to carry out a bomb attack at the Paris rally of an Iranian opposition group.

I note this not to distract from the Saudi murder and unspeakable dismemberment of Khashoggi. Saudi Arabia, and whoever was involved there, must be punished for that. (This was no rogue operation. There has never been such a rogue operation in the history of Saudi Arabia.)

I note this simply to point out that this whole region is in the grip of an

incredibly self-destructive cycle of tribal, political and sectarian madness — Persians versus Arabs, Shiites versus Sunnis, Egyptian government versus democracy activists, Saudis versus Qataris, Alawites versus Sunnis, Islamists versus Christians, Israelis versus Palestinians, Yemeni Houthis versus Yemeni Sunnis, Turks versus Kurds and Libyan tribes versus Libyan tribes. So much hate, in so many directions.

"People talk as if America's choices in the Middle East are between 'good allies,' like Saudi Arabia, and 'bad adversaries,' like Iran, but our actual choices are between bad allies and bad adversaries," observed Karim Sadjadpour, Middle East expert at the Carnegie Endowment.

I have been arguing since December — with wasted breath — that M.B.S. should have been competing with the Iranians by trying to "out-reform"

them. When M.B.S. permitted Saudi women to attend sporting events, like soccer games, with men, Iran's ayatollahs still had not done so for their women, and Iranian women were loudly complaining that Saudi women had rights that they didn't.

The last thing the Saudis should have been trying to do was compete with Iran in projecting power in the region through underground networks. The Iranians have 40 years of experience coercing neighbors and killing adversaries through proxies like Hezbollah — always expertly, with plausible deniability. The Saudis, by contrast, have 40 years of experience co-opting neighbors and dissidents by writing checks. That was their core competency.

What happened under M.B.S. was that he wanted to play like the big boys in the neighborhood. He, and some of the young, testosterone-filled tough

guys around him, wanted to project power like Iran, intimidate Lebanese prime ministers like the Revolutionary Guards and send hit teams to wipe out opponents like the Israeli Mossad.

But it was all far beyond the competency of the Saudi Air Force, Saudi diplomats and Saudi intelligence services, and it all ended up in the crazy, vile, incredibly stupid murder of Khashoggi in the Saudis' own consulate in Istanbul, with only implausible deniability.

An American president's job is to understand that all the key players out there have multiple agendas. Some agendas align with our interests — did we forget that Iran helped us defeat the Taliban after 9/11? — but many conflict with them. We need to extract the best we can from them, curb and offset their worst impulses — and get off oil as fast as we can to reduce our exposure to this madness.