



## 2010 Midterm Elections: An Overview and What It All Means

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### Overview:

Last Tuesday's midterm election was historic by many standards. Effectively tapping into the frustration many American currently feel with a sluggish economy, government debt, and spending, Republicans were able to sweep most levels of government. Republicans captured a majority in the United States House of Representatives, made historic gains in state government by capturing a majority of governorships and state legislative seats nationwide, and increased their membership in the United States Senate.

Representative John Boehner from Ohio will be the next Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Senator Harry Reid and Democrats will retain control of the U.S. Senate. A majority of the governorships will be controlled by Republicans. And in 2012, President Barack Obama will face a very red map when he seeks reelection.

### The Mood of Tuesday's Electorate:

Exit polls showed an electorate that was engaged and concerned about the economy. 62 percent of voters on Tuesday said that the economy was the most important issue facing the country today, and 54 percent of them voted Republican. A plurality of voters, 39 percent, said the highest priority for the next Congress should be deficit reduction, and 64 percent of these voters voted Republican. Overall, a strong majority of voters, 58 percent, voted because they want Congress to focus on cutting taxes and deficit reduction. These voters overwhelmingly voted for the GOP. And when asked who was to blame for the economic problems America is currently facing, 35 percent blamed Wall Street, 29 percent blamed former President George W. Bush, and 23 percent blamed President Obama<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout much of the campaign season, polls showed Republicans were more enthusiastic to vote<sup>2</sup>. On Election Day, the electorate consisted of 36 percent Democrats, 36 percent Republicans, and 28 percent

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<sup>1</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>2</sup> Frank Newport and Jeffrey M. Jones, "[Republicans Appear Poised to Win Big on Tuesday](#)," Gallup, 10/31/2010

independents. Each party enjoyed near unanimous support from their base; however, independents clearly provided the enthusiasm gap the GOP enjoyed, with 56 percent of independents voting Republican<sup>3</sup>.

Democratic voters were mostly minorities and women from urban areas. Republican voters were white with a Catholic or Protestant background and were from rural and suburban areas. Democrats won a majority of voters between the ages of 18-29 by 17 percentage points; however, they only made up 11 percent of the electorate. A majority of voters 30 and older strongly supported the GOP. Nearly 60 percent of seniors voted Republican<sup>4</sup>. In 2008, a majority of voters 30 or older and seniors voted Democratic.<sup>5</sup>

President Barack Obama and Congressional Democrats consistently said their agenda focused on helping the middle class, however, middle-class voters preferred a GOP candidate last Tuesday. 37 percent of the electorate consisted of voters making between \$50,000 and \$100,000; of these, only 44 percent voted Democratic and 54 percent voted Republican. Democrats enjoyed the support of voters making \$50,000 or less and Republicans enjoyed the support of voters making \$100,000 or more. Overall, 63 percent of the electorate consisted of voters who earned \$50,000 or more, and they overwhelmingly voted Republican<sup>6</sup>.

One of the most pressing legislative challenges Republicans and Democrats will face is whether or not to extend the Bush Tax Cuts from 2001 and 2003. 39 percent of voters said the Bush Tax Cuts from 2001 and 2003 should be extended to all Americans, 37 percent said only to families making under \$250,000, and 15 percent said they should be extended to no one<sup>7</sup>.

On key legislative accomplishments passed by the Democratic Congress in the past two years and signed into law by President Obama, 65 percent said the economic stimulus package has hurt the economy or made no difference. On the health care reform bill signed into law earlier this year, 48 percent supported a repeal, 31 percent believe it should be expanded, and 16 percent preferred to leave it as is. Not necessarily a mandate for repeal as Republicans have advocated for<sup>8</sup>.

Democrats performed best in the Northeast and Republicans performed best in the Midwest and the South. Voters from the West were split between Republicans and Democrats. Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Nevada will play a pivotal role in the 2012 election<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>4</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>5</sup> Web Site, New York Times House Exit Polls, <http://elections.nytimes.com/2010/results/house/exit-polls>, Accessed 11/8/2010

<sup>6</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>7</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>8</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>9</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

## **The House Massacre**

In January 2009, most experts, pundits, and prognosticators had written off the GOP as a whole. Charlie Cook in a June 2009 op-ed said “these numbers would suggest that absent any national tide or trend, Democrats might be expected to lose a dozen or so seats in the House and pick up a seat or two, possible three in the Senate.” The national tide hit America on Tuesday night, and it was a massacre for House Democrats. Republicans won 61 seats in the House of Representatives.

Republicans chalked up their biggest wins in Florida (+ 4 seats), Illinois (+3 seats, 1 too close to call), Indiana (+2 seats), Michigan (+3 seats), New York (+ 4 seats, 1 too close to call), Ohio (+ 5 seats), Pennsylvania (+5 seats), Virginia (+ 3 seats, 1 too close to call), and Wisconsin (+2 seats). President Obama won each of these states in 2008<sup>10</sup>.

In 2011, 183 Democrats will represent districts won by President Obama in 2008 and 182 Republicans will represent districts won by Senator McCain in 2008. Additionally, 12 Democrats will represent districts won by Senator McCain and 63 Republicans will represent districts won by President Obama.

## **The State Government Bloodbath**

Republicans’ most significant gains occurred at the state level. Next year, state legislatures will redraw congressional districts based on reapportionment projections, and Republicans will be in the driver’s seat for most of the key battles.

Republicans won a net gain of 6 governorships. They picked up important governorships from Democrats in the swing states of Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Additionally, they held on to important governorships in Florida, Georgia, and Texas. Democrats scored big wins in California and New York. Overall, the GOP controls 29 governorships and Democrats control 19. An independent controls the governorship in Rhode Island, and the race for governor in Minnesota remains too close to call.

Additionally, Republicans picked up 680 state legislative seats nationwide – more than 1994 (472). The previous record was 1974 when Democrats captured 628 seats in the Watergate election<sup>11</sup>.

Republicans won a majority in both chambers in Alabama, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Wisconsin<sup>12</sup>.

Additionally, they won a majority of House seats in Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Montana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The Oregon House went from Democratic control to a tie. Control for the Senate in Iowa, New York, Oregon, and Washington remains uncertain<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Web Site, Real Clear Politics, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com>, Accessed 11/8/2010

<sup>11</sup> Review & Outlook, [Revolution in the States](#), *The Wall Street Journal*, 11/5/2010

<sup>12</sup> Louis Jacobson, “[2010 State Legislatures: GOP Chalks Up Historic Gains](#),” *Governing.com*, 11/3/2010

<sup>13</sup> Louis Jacobson, “[2010 State Legislatures: GOP Chalks Up Historic Gains](#),” *Governing.com*, 11/3/2010

In North Carolina, the GOP won control of both chambers for the first time since 1870. Oklahoma will see the GOP control the state legislature and the governor's mansion for the first time ever. Tennessee elected a Republican governor on Tuesday and solidified their majorities in the state legislature, giving them control of all levels of the government for the first time since Reconstruction. Maine and Wisconsin went from complete Democratic control to complete Republican control. Alabama will see the GOP control both legislative chambers for the first time since Reconstruction. And the pivotal swing states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Indiana will see the GOP control both bodies in the state legislature and the governorships of these states<sup>14</sup>.

In 2011, Democrats will control just 38 percent of the state legislative seats nationwide – its lowest amount since 1956.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Senate Scare**

Republicans were successful in increasing their membership in the U.S. Senate, but fell short of capturing a majority. Republicans picked up six seats from Democrats in Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. They successfully defended Republican open seats that were contested in Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, New Hampshire, and Ohio<sup>16</sup>.

However, by historical standards, they underperformed. Since World War II, control of the House Representatives has changed six times (1946, 1948, 1952, 1994 and 2006), and each time the Senate changed, too<sup>17</sup>. With an environment favored so heavily towards Republicans, it is easy to assume they could have done better.

Heading into Election Day, the Senate races in California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Washington were all considered “toss up” races. And while Pennsylvania was on this list, former Representative Pat Toomey led in the polls the entire summer. Democrats won five of these “toss up” races and Republicans won two. Illinois was the only race that was truly a “toss up” throughout this election cycle<sup>18</sup>.

Additionally, the significance of Republicans winning the Illinois Senate seats should not be overlooked. This seat was held by President Obama prior to being elected President.

In nearly every competitive Senate race, a majority of independents favored the Republican candidate – even races Democrats won. Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, New Hampshire,

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<sup>14</sup> Josh Goodman, “[Republicans wins most legislative seats in generations](#),” Stateline.Org, 11/3/2010

<sup>15</sup> Charlie Cook, “[2010's Surprise Developments](#),” National Journal, 11/9/2010

<sup>16</sup> Web Site, Real Clear Politics, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com>, Accessed 11/8/2010

<sup>17</sup> Larry J. Sabato, “[Sixty days to go](#),” Sabato's Crystal Ball, 9/2/2010

<sup>18</sup> Web Site, Real Clear Politics, <http://www.realclearpolitics.com>, Accessed 11/8/2010

Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin saw independents overwhelmingly swing in favor of the GOP candidate. Democratic candidates won in Colorado, Connecticut, and Washington<sup>19</sup>.

#### Winners and Losers:

- ◆ **Winner: Representative and soon-to-be Speaker John Boehner.** In January 2009, after crushing defeats in back-to-back elections, most pundits had written off the GOP as a whole. However, Representative Boehner worked tirelessly on behalf of his Republican colleagues, helping recruit candidates and fundraising for the party. In October, Representative Boehner gave \$3 million to the National Republican Congressional Committee to keep the GOP on offense in the final stretch of the campaign.
- ◆ **Loser: Senator John Cornyn and the National Senatorial Campaign Committee.** While the GOP picked up six seats in the Senate, by many standards, they underperformed. NRSC-endorsed candidates in Colorado, Delaware, and Nevada lost their party's nomination. Another left the Republican Party to run as an independent (Charlie Crist). Democrats won five of the final seven toss up races.
- ◆ **Winner: Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.** If Republicans can't defeat Senator Reid in a terrible environment for Democrats with upside down approval/disapproval ratings, they never will.
- ◆ **Loser: Democrats who voted "no" on health care reform.** Only 12 of the 39 House Democrats who voted against health care reform in November 2009 were re-elected. Between November of 2009 and March of 2010 when the final vote on health care reform occurred, eight Democrats switched their votes from "no" to "yes" – five lost, one won, and two retired. Five Democrats switched their votes from "yes" to "no" – two won, two lost, and one retired<sup>20</sup>.
- ◆ **Winner: The Tea Party.** The Tea Party energized Republicans and fueled much of the Republican enthusiasm this cycle.
- ◆ **Loser: The Tea Party.** Tea Party-backed candidates lost Senate races in Colorado, Delaware, and Nevada.
- ◆ **Winner: Former Members of Congress.** Charlie Bass (NH), Tim Walberg (MI), Steve Pearce (NM), Steve Chabot (OH), and Mike Fitzpatrick (PA) are former Members of Congress who won back seats they once held.
- ◆ **Loser: Committee Chairmen:** Three House Committee Chairmen lost their bids for re-election on Tuesday: Representative Ike Skelton (Armed Services), Representative John Spratt (Budget), and Representative Jim Oberstar (Transportation and Infrastructure).

#### 10-Point Flash Analysis:

1. **Anxiety over the economy was the narrative of this election.** Voters are extremely anxious over the high unemployment rate, government spending and taxing, and the government debt.

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<sup>19</sup> Web Site, CNN Election Center Exit Polls, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>, Accessed 11/5/2010

<sup>20</sup> Ben Smith, "[No shelter in health care opposition](#)," *POLITICO*, 11/3/2010

2. **Expect government to continue to be divided.** With Republicans empowered with majorities in the House and increased membership in the Senate, expect few legislative accomplishments. Additionally, look for the administration to focus more on regulation implementation with a gridlocked Congress.
3. **The GOP swept the crucial swing states of Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida – states won by President Obama in 2008.** However, the outcomes of these elections are not indicative of what might happen in 2012.
4. **This election was a train wreck for Democrats at the state level.** Republicans will have a significant impact on Congressional redistricting which could change the balance of power towards the GOP for the next ten years. **Republicans will have unilateral control in drawing new congressional boundaries for 190 House seats, as compared to Democrats, who will control about 75<sup>21</sup>.** The outcomes of several races remain unclear.
5. **Republicans will hold their largest majority in the U.S. House since the 1920's.** The agenda put forth by House Republicans will impact GOP candidates seeking the nomination in 2012. It's too soon to know if that impact will be positive or negative.
6. **Republicans over performed in the Midwest and the South, underperformed in the Northeast, and broke even in the West.** California was the Democratic bright spot of the 2010 midterm election, and continues to be a Democratic stronghold. Heading into 2012, Republicans will need to perform better in the West to keep and expand their majorities and to have a shot at winning the White House.
7. **Expect the Tea Party to be a force in American politics for the foreseeable future.** However, their record is mixed. They provided energy for the GOP, but also cost them some victories. Heading into 2012, the Tea Party will need to find a balance between being electable and being conservative. Being electable doesn't mean a candidate isn't conservative.
8. **Minorities continue to favor Democrats,** which is a positive for President Obama heading into 2012. However, **independent voters heavily favored the GOP** after favoring the Democrats the two previous elections. This presents significant challenges for President Obama's as he begins to look at what might be a winning coalition for him in 2012.
9. **Middle class and wealthy voters overwhelmingly voted for the GOP.** Look for President Obama to move towards the GOP's position on extending the tax cuts from 2001 and 2003. Other legislative initiatives are dead, like cap and trade and immigration reform.
10. With three wave elections in a row, **expect the political environment to remain extremely volatile for the foreseeable future.**

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<sup>21</sup> Charlie Cook, "[2010's Surprise Developments](#)," National Journal, 11/9/2010