The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · aps@psqonline.org · http://www.psqonline.org

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 127 · Number 1 · Spring 2011

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Political Science Quarterly
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The Republican Resurgence in 2010

GARY C. JACOBSON

The 2010 midterm elections produced a stunning reversal of partisan fortunes. Back-to-back surges in 2006 and 2008 had raised the Democrats' share of seats in the House of Representatives from 202 to 257 and in the Senate from 45 to 59.[1] The 2010 election erased all of their House gains and more, with Republicans gaining a net 64 seats to win a 242-193 majority, their best showing since 1946 (Table 1). Republicans also picked up 6 Senate seats, leaving them with 47 and within striking distance of a majority in 2012, when 23 of the 33 seats at stake will be defended by Democrats. The election was also a major setback for President Barack Obama and his administration. The Republican ascendancy in Congress not only promises to block progress on his remaining agenda but also puts his signal legislative achievements, notably health care reform and financial regulation, at risk. The election also virtually guarantees bitter partisan trench warfare and record levels of polarization during the remaining two years of Obama's term.

The dramatic electoral swing to the Republicans was, I argue in this article, the product of four interrelated factors. First, it reflected the fundamentals that always shape midterm election results: the president's party's exposure (the surplus of House and Senate seats it holds above its "normal" level), the state of the economy, and the public's assessment of the president's job performance. That is, the election took the form of a referendum on the current administration, a typical, if not invariable, midterm pattern. Second, the Republican tide was augmented by an extraordinary level of animosity and anger among the President's opponents that, combined with tepid support from his base, left Republicans with the lion's share of highly motivated voters. Third, the referendum component was extraordinarily strong in 2010; Republicans succeeded in nationalizing the election, taking full advantage of

[1] Including the two independents who organize with the Democrats.

GARY C. JACOBSON is Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of California, San Diego, and has published extensively on U.S. elections and public opinion. His most recent book is *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*, 2nd Edition.

TABLE 1

Membership Changes in the House and Senate 2004–2010

	Republicans	*Democrats*	*Independents*
House of Representatives			
Elected in 2004	232	202	1[a]
Elected in 2006	202	233	
Elected in 2008	178	257	
Elected in 2010	242	193	
Incumbents reelected	154	184	
Incumbents defeated	2	53	
Open seats retained	22	6	
Open seats lost	1	14	
Senate			
After the 2004 election	55	44	1[a]
After the 2006 election	49	49	2[a]
After the 2008 election	41	57	2[a]
After the 2010 election	47	51	2[a]
Incumbents reelected	11	10	
Incumbents defeated	0	2	
Open seats retained	7	3	
Open seats lost	0	4	

Source: Compiled by author.
[a]The independents caucus with the Democrats.

fundamentals favorable to their cause. And fourth, the results reflected the failure of Obama and his allies to persuade most Americans—most importantly, political independents—that his policies, including his landmark legislative victories, were to their or the nation's benefit. That is, Obama's legislative successes were, on the whole, political failures. I take up each of these explanations in turn and then conclude by speculating about what the elections portend for politics in the 112th Congress and 2012.

The Fundamentals of Midterm Elections

According to the widely accepted referendum model of midterm elections, aggregate vote and seat swings are basically a function of how many seats the president's party already holds, how well the economy is doing, and how the public rates the president's job performance.[2] Statistical models estimating these relationships vary in details and interpretations, but they usually predict results with reasonably accuracy, although for 2010, they tended to underestimate Republican gains. For example, an unadorned model using conventional measures of the three fundamental variables predicted that Republicans would

[2] For a review of the extensive literature on the development of these models, see Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 7th ed. (New York: Longman, 2000), 155–174.

TABLE 2

District Party Leanings and the Partisan Distribution of House Seats, 2004–2008

	>3% Below National Vote	*±3% of National Vote*	*>3% Above National Vote*	*Total*
Number of Seats	211	59	165	435
After 2004				
Democrats	25	22	156	203
Republicans	186	37	9	232
After 2006				
Democrats	40	31	162	233
Republicans	171	28	3	202
After 2008				
Democrats	52	43	162	257
Republicans	159	16	3	178
After 2010				
Democrats	11	23	159	193
Republicans	200	36	6	242
Change, 2004–2008	+27	+21	+6	+54
Change, 2008–2010	−41	−20	−3	−64
Change, 2004–2010	−14	+1	+3	−10

Source: Compiled by author.

Note: District partisan leanings are measured by difference between the major-party vote cast for John Kerry in 2004 and his national vote; districts in which Kerry's vote was 3 or more percentage points below his national average are considered Republican leaning districts; those in which Kerry's vote was 3 or more points higher than his national vote are considered Democratic-leaning districts; those falling in between are considered balanced districts.

gain a net 56 House seats.[3] Other models' forecasts of Republican gains were even further to the low side.[4] Estimates from all such models have substantial error terms, so imprecision is to be expected, but the consistency with which they underestimated Republican success in the House races suggests that more than the usual fundamentals were involved.

In any case, the fundamentals were clearly a problem for the Democrats. The more seats the president's party holds, the more it is likely to lose. Victories in 2006 and 2008 had left House Democrats with 40 more seats than their average since 1994; thus, even if national conditions had been more favorable, they could anticipate losses simply from the ebbing of the strong tides favoring them in 2006 and 2008. Their exposure was compounded by the fact that so many of their pickups in those elections had come in Republican-leaning districts. As Table 2 shows, since 2004, Democrats had gained 27 seats in

[3] The model is in Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 160. With Democrats holding 40 more seats than their eight-election average, real income growth at a feeble .015 percent, and Obama's approval rating at 45 percent in the final Gallup Poll taken before the election, the model's parameters predict the Republicans to gain 56 seats.

[4] The midterm forecasts of Republican gains reported in the October 2010 issue of *PS* ranged from 22 to 51 seats; see James E. Campbell, ed., "Symposium: Forecasts for the 2010 Midterm Elections," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 43 (October 2010): 625–641.

unfriendly territory (defined as districts in which John Kerry's 2004 vote in the district was three or more percentage points below his national vote share[5]), and another 21 pickups had been in districts in which party strength was relatively balanced. Not coincidentally, nearly two-thirds of their 2010 losses came in the Republican-leaning districts, wiping out their previous gains and adding an additional 14 seats to the Republican total. Their losses in competitive and Democratic-leaning districts were smaller, leaving them slightly ahead of where they had been in 2004.

The economy was also a severe problem for Obama's party. Although it had emerged from the worst recession since the Great Depression, growth was too weak to cut unemployment, which stood at 9.6 percent in October 2010, or to provide any growth in median family income. Americans viewed the economy as by far the most important national problem,[6] and more than 80 percent rated it "fairly bad" or "very bad" in the months leading up to the election.[7] Americans continued to blame Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, more than Obama for the current economic conditions,[8] but they did fault him for not turning it around more quickly. Most Americans believed his economic policies had not been effective (evidence is presented below), and continuing economic distress eroded his standing with the public. His overall and economic performance ratings declined in parallel, with the economic ratings averaging about 5 points lower (Figure 1). In the final Gallup Poll taken before election day, 45 percent of Americans approved of how Obama was handling his job, below average for post-war presidents at midterm (52 percent) but comparable to the ratings of Ronald Reagan in 1982 (42 percent) and Bill Clinton in 1994 (48 percent) and somewhat better than those of Bush in 2006 (38 percent).

As with Bush and Clinton, the public has become deeply divided along party lines in their evaluations of Obama's job performance (Figure 2). Although the partisan divide has yet to reach the record levels inspired by Bush, by the midterm election it had grown wider than for any president prior

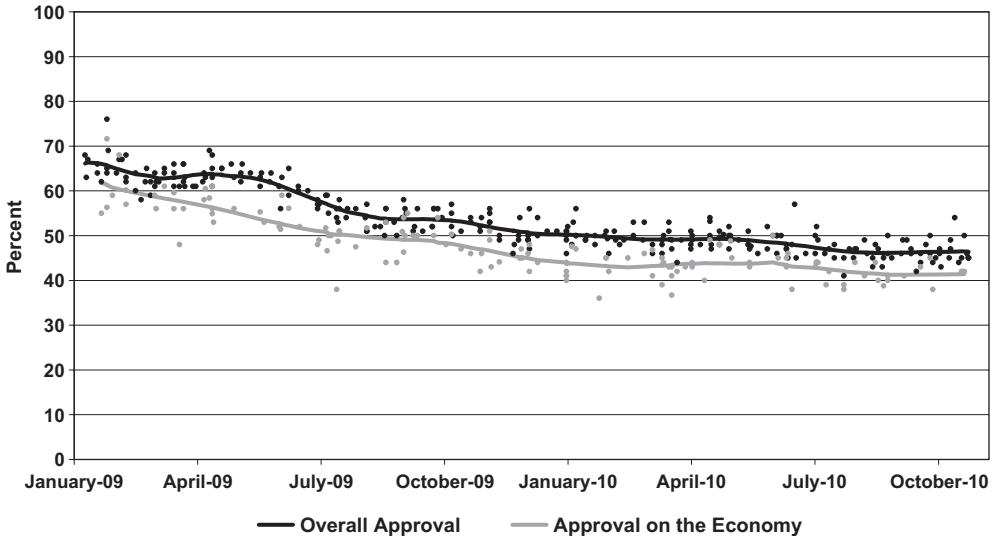
[5] The categorization is somewhat arbitrary, but the same substantive results appear if a ±2 percent range defines the categories or if the Obama-McCain vote in 2008 is used instead of the Kerry vote. I chose the Kerry vote because it replicates previous work; see Gary C. Jacobson, "The 2008 Presidential and Congressional Elections: Anti-Bush Referendum and Prospects for the Democratic Majority," *Political Science Quarterly* 124 (Spring 2009): 1–30.

[6] See Gallup Poll results from September, October, and November surveys, accessed at http://www.gallup.com/poll/1675/Most-Important-Problem.aspx, 22 November 2010.

[7] CBS News/*New York Times* polls of August, September, and October, accessed at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/10/12/politics/main3362530.shtml?tag=featuredPostArea, 22 November 2010.

[8] In the CBS News/*New York Times* survey taken 21–26 October 2010, 30 percent blamed the Bush administration for the current state of the economy, 8 percent blamed Obama, 22 percent blamed Wall Street, 13 percent blamed Congress, and 18 percent blamed some combination of them. In the 2010 national exit poll, 29 percent blamed Bush, 24 percent, Obama, and 35 percent, Wall Street, accessed at http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#val=USH00p3, 22 November 2010.

FIGURE 1
Approval of Obama's Job Performance Through Election Day 2010



Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News/*New York Times*, CNN, CNBC, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, AP-Ipsos, *Newsweek*, Gallup, *Los Angeles Times*, *Time*, Bloomberg, Marist, and Pew surveys, reported at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster, http://www.pollingreport.com, and the sponsors websites.

to Bush.[9] Large majorities of Democrats continued to approve of Obama's performance, but his ratings among Republicans were approaching single digits and, more ominously, were down to only about 40 percent among independents.

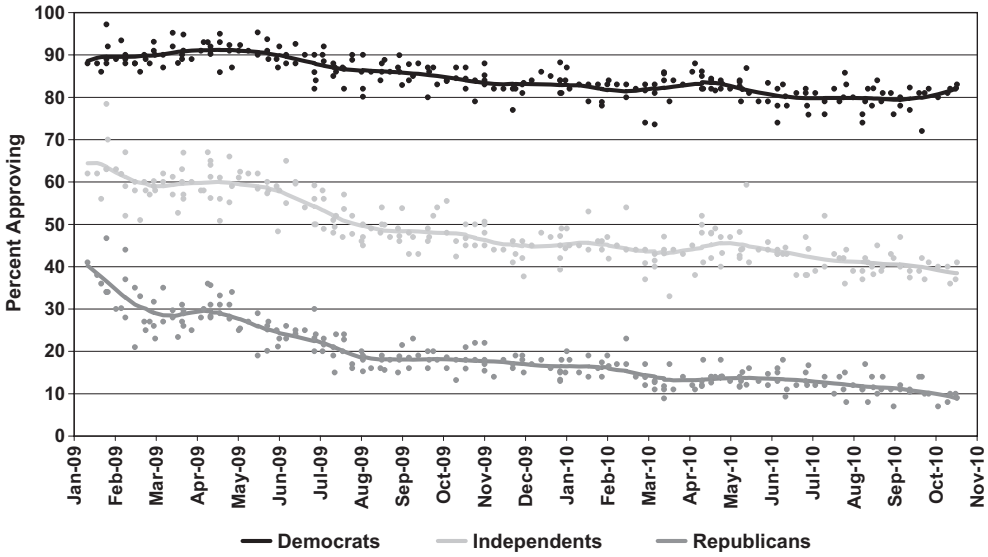
Intense Opposition to Obama

Although Obama's approval ratings were mediocre rather than dismal, his detractors tended to be considerably more adamant in their opinions than his supporters.[10] The most-intense hostility toward Obama was expressed by members of the Tea Party movement, an assortment of populist conservatives and libertarians whose anger and energy made them a major force in the 2010 elections. Even before Obama was elected, characteristic Tea Party sentiments

[9] Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 2011), 4–6.

[10] For example, in the nine ABC News/*Washington Post* polls taken in the first 10 months of 2010, 80 percent of the disapprovers disapproved of Obama's performance strongly, compared with 56 percent of the approvers who approved strongly; accessed at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/postpoll_10302010.html?sid=ST2010103100110, 15 November 2010.

FIGURE 2
Approval of Obama's Performance, by Party



Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News/*New York Times*, CNN, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, Gallup, *Time*, and Pew surveys, reported at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster, http://www.pollingreport.com, and the sponsors websites.

had been on full display at campaign rallies for John McCain and Sarah Palin.[11] Their campaign to paint Obama as a '60s-style radical plotting to turn the United States into a socialist country failed to win the election but succeeded in shaping Obama's image among people who did not vote for him.[12] By the campaign's end, a large proportion of voters on the losing side in 2008 had come to regard Obama as an untrustworthy leftist with a socialist agenda.[13]

Obama's economic stimulus and health care reform initiatives were taken as confirmation of such fears, inspiring the Tea Party movement. Echoing conservative voices on talk radio, Fox News, and the Internet, not a few Tea

[11] Ed Henry and Ed Hornick, "Rage Rising on the McCain Campaign Trial," CNN, 11 October 2008, accessed at http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/10/mccain.crowd/, 8 July 2010; Jake Tapper, "Another Man Yells 'Kill Him!' About Obama at Palin Rally," ABC News, 14 October, 2008, accessed at http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2008/10/another-man-yel.html, 8 July 2010.

[12] Kate Kenski, Bruce W. Hardy, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *The Obama Victory: How Media, Money, and Message Shaped the 2008 Election* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 226–230; Scott Conroy, "Palin: Obama's Plan is 'Experiment With Socialism,'" CBS News, 19 October 2008, accessed at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503443_162-4532388.html, 21 June 2010; Bob Drogan and Mark Barabak, "McCain Says Obama Wants Socialism," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 2008.

[13] Gary C. Jacobson, "Obama and the Polarized Public," in James A. Thurber, ed., *Obama in Office: The First Two Years* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, forthcoming).

Partiers came to see him not merely as an objectionable liberal Democrat, but a tyrant (of the Nazi, fascist, communist, socialist, monarchist, or racist variety, depending on the critic[14]) intent on subjecting Americans to, variously, socialism, communism, fascism, concentration camps; or control by the United Nations, Interpol, international bankers, the Council on Foreign Relations, or the Trilateral Commission.[15] Not all Tea Party adherents (12–18 percent of the public) or sympathizers (about a third of the public[16]) entertained such bizarre notions, but they were nearly unanimous in their antipathy toward Obama and in their belief that his policies were moving the country toward socialism.[17]

That antipathy was manifest in the remarkable proportion of Tea Party sympathizers and other Republicans who refused to believe that Obama was born in the United States (and thus was even eligible to be president) and who thought that he was a secret Muslim. An April 2010 CBS News/*New York Times* poll found 32 percent of Republicans and 30 percent of Tea Party activists saying that Obama was foreign-born, with only 41 percent saying he was born in the United States.[18] A similar proportion of Republicans (31 percent in an August 2010 Pew survey) also thought Obama was a Muslim, more than believed he was a Christian (27 percent).[19] A *Time* survey taken the same month found an even more remarkable 46 percent of Republicans expressing this misconception; among the 60 percent of Republicans calling themselves

[14] Google "Obama" in conjunction with any of these labels to see how routinely they are used—and defended—on the Internet.

[15] David Barstow, "Tea Party Lights Fuse for Rebellion on Right," *The New York Times*, 16 February 2010.

[16] In 19 surveys taken between January and October 2010, between 18 and 41 percent said they had a favorable view of the Tea Party movement (average, 32 percent), and from 12 to 50 percent had an unfavorable view of it (average, also 32 percent); the rest were uncertain or did not know enough about it to have an opinion; from NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, CBS News/*New York Times*, Quinnipiac, Fox News, AP-GfK, and ABC News/*Washington Post* polls, accessed at http://www.pollingreport.com/politics.htm, 7 November 2010.

[17] Only 7 percent of Tea Party supporters in the April 5–12 CBS News/*New York Times* Poll approved of Obama's performance, 88 percent disapproved, and 92 percent said his policies were leading the country toward socialism; see "Tea Party Movement: What they Think," accessed at http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/poll_tea_party_041410.pdf, 15 April 2010.

[18] "Polls: 'Birther' Myth Persists Among Tea Partiers, All Americans," accessed at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20002539-503544.html?tag=contentMain;contentBody, 15 April 2020; the February ABC News/*Washington Post* Poll found 31 percent of Republicans and a like proportion of Tea Party sympathizers believing Obama was not United States-born; accessed at http://abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/poll-half-birthers-call-suspicion-approve-obama/story?id=10576748&page=2, 10 October 2010; asked in a July 2010 survey if Obama was born in the United States, only 23 percent of CNN's Republican Respondents said "definitely," 34 percent said "probably," 27 percent said "probably not," and 14 percent said "definitely not." The respective percentages for Democrats were 64, 21, 7, and 8; results accessed at http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2010/images/08/04/rel10k1a.pdf, 4 August 2010.

[19] "Growing Number of Americans Say Obama Is Muslim," Pew Survey Report, 19 August 2010, accessed at http://people-press.org/report/645/, 23 August 2010.

conservatives, 57 percent said Obama was a Muslim, with only 14 percent saying he was a Christian. Ninety-five percent of Republicans who thought Obama was a Muslim disapproved of his job performance.[20]

The misconceptions regarding Obama's nativity and religion were comparable to those held by Republicans during the Bush administration regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein's complicity in September 11, and they stemmed from the same psychological process: motivated reasoning.[21] People adopt modes of motivated reasoning when "it is important not just to get the right outcome, but also to get a certain preferred outcome, regardless of correctness."[22] The consequence is biased information processing: people holding strongly negative opinions of Obama were open to uncritical acceptance of notions, however dubious, consistent with these views and tended to ignore or reject information setting the record straight. Hence, as Obama's popularity had fallen, the proportion of Americans saying that he was a Muslim had risen.[23]

A Highly Nationalized Election

Republicans and allied interests made effective use of favorable national conditions in 2010 by nationalizing the election to an unusual degree—focusing electoral attention on the president and his policies, recruiting and financing challengers capable of exploiting national issues locally, and mobilizing huge sums of money to finance "independent" campaigns targeting vulnerable Democrats.

The Referendum

With the fundamentals on their side, and buoyed by the anger and enthusiasm of their Tea Party faction, Republicans sought to persuade voters to treat the election as a referendum on Obama and the unified Democratic government to the exclusion of other considerations. They largely succeeded. As Figure 3 indicates, an average of 56 percent of respondents said their vote for Congress would be a vote either for or against the President, the highest average for any

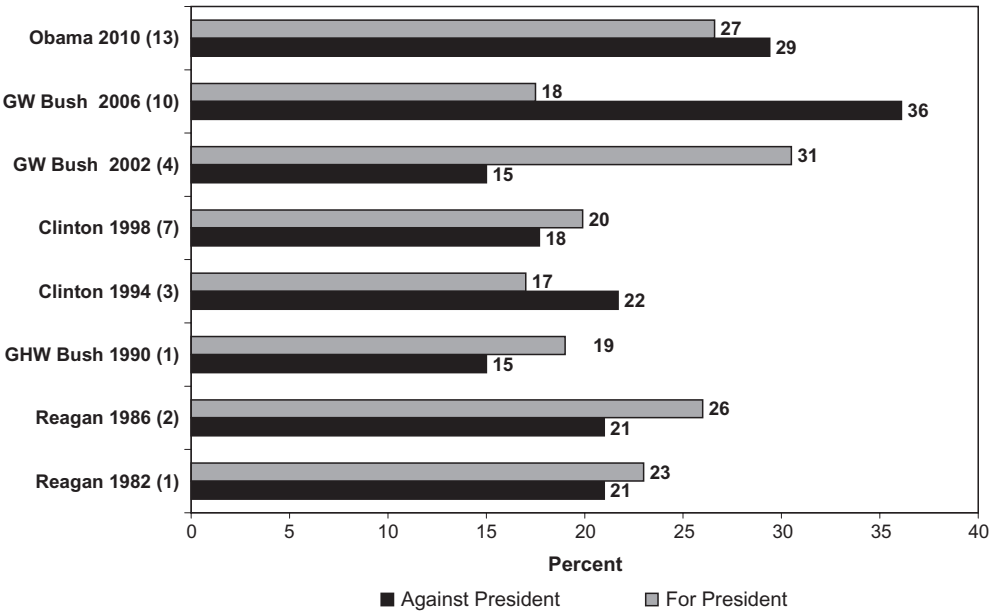
[20] Eleven percent of Democrats and 17 percent of independents also thought he was a Muslim; *Time Magazine*/Abt SRBI Poll: Religion, 16–17 August 2010, available from the Roper Center, University of Connecticut; secondary analysis by the author.

[21] Gary C. Jacobson, "Perception, Memory, and Partisan Polarization on the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly* 125 (Spring 2010): 31–56.

[22] Matthew J. Lebo and Daniel Cassino, "The Aggregated Consequences of Motivated Reasoning and the Dynamics of Partisan Presidential Approval," *Political Psychology* 28 (December 2007): 719–746.

[23] Gary C. Jacobson, "Legislative Success and Political Failure: The Public's Reaction to Barack Obama's Early Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41 (Spring 2011): 219–242.

FIGURE 3
Is Your Vote For Congress a Vote For or Against the President?



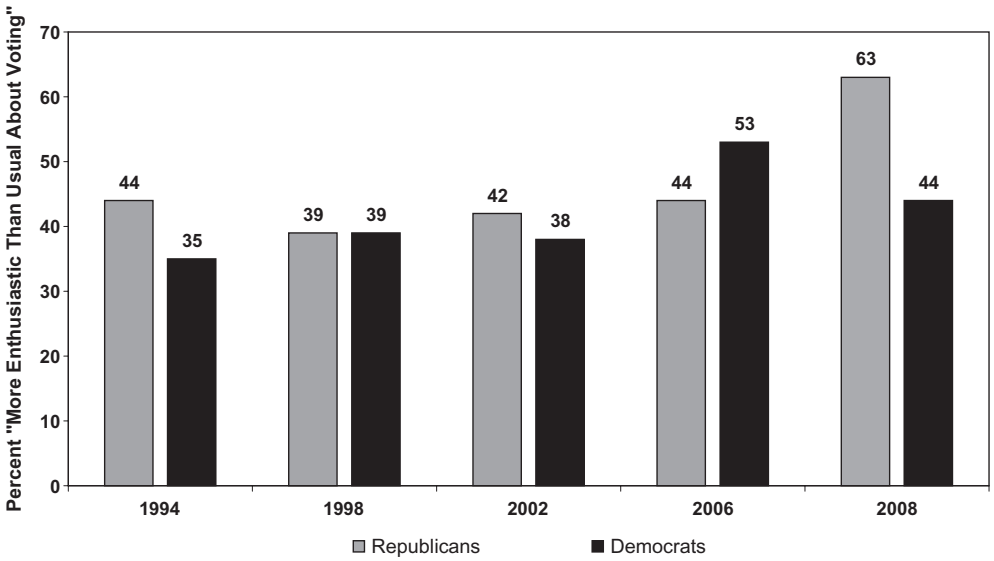
Note: The number of surveys averaged is in parentheses.
Source: Pew, Gallup, CBS News/*New York Times*, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, AP-GfK, and ABC News/*Washington Post* polls.

of the midterms for which data are available.[24] In contrast to the two midterms during the George W. Bush administration, the balance of support and opposition was quite even in 2010. The Republicans' advantage lay in the greater enthusiasm of their voters (Figure 4), where they enjoyed a notably wider lead than had Democrats in 2006 or Republicans in 1994.

Aggregate election results also suggest that the 2010 midterm was nationalized to an unusual degree and that the President was the primary focus. First, the House and Senate election results bore an uncommonly strong relationship to district- and state-level presidential voting two years earlier. Figure 5 displays correlations between the Democratic presidential candidate's share of the prior presidential vote in the district or state and the Democratic candidate's

[24] The data for 2010 are from ABC News/*Washington Post*, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, CBS News/*New York Times*, Pew, Gallup and AP-GfK surveys; for the sources of earlier data, see Gary C. Jacobson, "Referendum: The 2006 Midterm Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly* 122 (Spring 2007): 1–24.

FIGURE 4
Enthusiasm for Voting in Midterm Elections, 1994-2010



Source: Final Gallup Poll prior to each election.

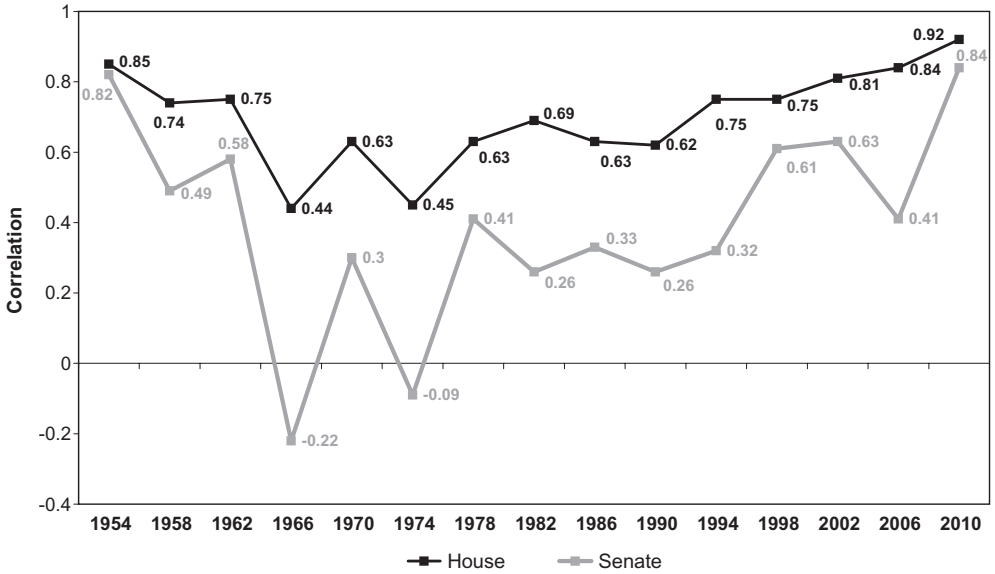
vote in midterm elections since 1954.[25] The correlations for 2010 House (.92) and Senate (.84) races are the highest in the series, extending the long-term trend toward greater electoral coherence across federal offices. How well the Democrats ran in 2010 was thus strongly conditioned by how well Obama ran in 2010 in the state or district.[26] It is also noteworthy that the relationship was tighter in districts and states defended by Democrats (.92 and .79, respectively) than in those defended by Republicans (.77 and .50). Second, the inter-election vote swing between 2008 and 2010 across House districts was more uniform than usual, with a standard deviation (5.7 percentage points) more typical of the 1950s and early 1960s (average, 5.5) than of more-recent elections (average, 7.2). And third, the vote value of House incumbency status, measured either by the Gelman-King index (5.2 percentage points) or the "slurge," a combination of the sophomore surge and retirement slump (3.4 percentage points), was also the lowest since the 1960s.[27]

[25] Both are measured as the percentage of the major party vote, excluding third-party and independent candidates.

[26] Regression of the Democrats' vote share on Obama's 2008 vote share produces nearly identical results for the House and Senate. Democratic House candidates are estimated to get 109 percent of Obama's vote, minus 10.7 percentage points; Democratic Senate candidates are estimated to win 110 percent of Obama's vote, minus 11.3 percentage points.

[27] Andrew Gelman and Gary King, "Measuring the Incumbency Advantage without Bias," *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (November 1990): 1142–1164; John Alford and David R.

FIGURE 5
Correlation between the Prior Presidential Vote and the Midterm Vote Across House Districts and States



Source: Compiled by author.

High Quality Republican Challengers

These findings suggest that idiosyncratic local factors played a smaller role in 2010 than has been the norm for the past several decades. The fate of experienced Republican challengers provides additional evidence for this conclusion. Because the most promising candidates act strategically, choosing to run when the prospects for winning are greatest, the quality of a party's challengers depends in good part on electoral expectations.[28] Reviewing the fundamentals, ambitious Republicans certainly had reason to think 2010 would be a great year to try to move up to Congress, and by the measure of office-holding experience—a simple but serviceable indicator of a high-quality candidate—the Republican challengers in 2010 were the strongest since 1968 (22.5 percent

Brady, *Partisan and Incumbent Advantages in U.S. House Elections, 1846–1986* (working paper no. 11, Center for the Study of Institutions and Values, Rice University, 1988). The "sophomore surge" is the additional vote share won by candidates running as incumbents for the first time; the "retirement slump" is the loss of vote share a party suffers when its incumbent retires and the seat becomes open.

[28] Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, *Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 19–34.

were current or former office holders), and their party had its widest advantage over the Democrats by this measure (8.5 percentage points) for any postwar election. As always, experienced challengers also chose their targets carefully; 25 of the 46 Democratic incumbents defending Republican-leaning seats (as defined for Table 2) and half of the 24 defending competitive seats faced experienced Republican challengers, whereas only 16 of 150 defending Democratic-leaning seats attracted high-quality opponents.[29]

As always, high-quality challengers were more likely to prevail, although the difference was unusually large in 2010; 58.5 percent of the experienced Republican challengers won, the highest success rate for such candidates in the entire postwar period. But the success rate of inexperienced Republican challengers, 11.5 percent, was also unusually high, second only to 1946 (14.3 percent). The question is whether the high-quality Republican challengers merely rode the pro-Republican tide or actually contributed to it. Normally, high-quality challengers do add to their party's seats and vote shares.[30] For 2010, however the evidence suggests that they did not. Once district characteristics—namely, the district-level presidential vote and the incumbent Democrat's vote in 2008—are taken into account, office-holding experience had no significant effect on the Republican challenger's vote share or probability of winning.[31] That is, high-quality Republican challengers chose the right contests to enter but did no better than inexperienced challengers competing in comparable districts. Again, this suggests that national rather than local factors dominated the 2010 House elections.

Tea Party Challengers

Contrary to their image as insurgent outsiders, Republican challengers linked to the Tea Party movement were no less likely to have held elective office than other Republican challengers. According to a list compiled by *The New York Times*, 109 Republican House challengers were associated in some way with the Tea Party.[32] Although these challengers had a higher success rate—27.5 percent,

[29] As always, experienced candidates found open seats to be attractive targets; 58 percent of Republicans and 42 percent of Democrats running for open seats in 2010 had held elective public office. Only 16 of Republican incumbents faced quality Democratic opponents, but experienced Democrats were also much more likely to show up in contests for the few Democratic-leaning seats held by Republicans (3 of 6) or in the competitive range (9 of 15) than to challenge Republican incumbents holding districts favorable to their party (16 of 135).

[30] Gary C. Jacobson, "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of House Elections, 1946–1986," *American Political Science Review* 83 (September 1989): 773–793.

[31] Based on regression and probit equations reported in Table 7 with a categorical variable for prior political experience added.

[32] "Where the Tea Party Candidates are Running," *The New York Times*, 14 October 2010, accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/10/15/us/politics/tea-party-graphic.html, 21 October 2010; "Tea Party Candidates of the 2010 Midterm Election," Fox News, 31 October 2010, accessed at http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2010/10/31/tea-party-candidates-midterm-election, 15 November 2010.

compared to 17.9 percent for the rest—once other district variables are taken into account (as in the equations in Table 7), neither their vote share nor probability of victory differed significantly from that of other Republican challengers. As individuals, then, House candidates associated with the Tea Party movement also rode the Republican tide but did not augment it.

Tea Party candidates were especially prominent in the Senate campaigns, with mixed consequences for the Republican cause. Two Tea Party favorites denied Republican incumbents renomination: Mike Lee defeated Robert F. Bennett in Utah, and Joe Miller defeated Lisa Murkowksi in Alaska, although Murkowski managed to win the general election as a write-in candidate. Four others—Rand Paul (Kentucky), Marco Rubio (Florida), Sharron Angle (Nevada), and Christine O'Donnell (Delaware)—won nominations over more-conventional Republicans.[33] Lee, Paul, and Rubio won open Republican seats in the general election, and two of the five Tea Party candidates running for seats held by Democrats also won (Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania, and Ron Johnson in Wisconsin). The other three, however, were so extreme that they cost their party winnable seats. This is certainly true of Angle and O'Donnell and probably true of Ken Buck in Colorado.[34] The success rate of Tea Party candidates running in states defended by Democrats was above that of other Republican candidates (40 percent compared to 29 percent), but the difference falls far short of statistical significance. Of the 13 newly elected Republican senators, then, 5 have strong Tea Party ties, but they remain outnumbered by more-conventional Republican freshmen, including 6 who have served in the House, a former governor, and former state attorney general.[35]

Campaign Finances in 2010

Shrewd politicians factor into their candidacy decisions an estimate of how much money they will be able to raise—or will be spent by party and non-party entities on their behalf—for the campaign. Like potential high-quality candidates, the people who control campaign resources consider electoral prospects in making allocation decisions. With national conditions favoring Republicans so strongly in 2010, ambitious Republican candidates targeting vulnerable

[33] Rubio's strength forced moderate Republican Charlie Crist out of the party and into an independent campaign.

[34] Angle lost to majority leader Harry Reid, whose unpopularity in Nevada would have doomed him against a challenger with less-extreme views; an eccentric perpetual candidate, O'Donnell took the nomination from Mike Castle, a moderate who had won Delaware's at-large House seat with 62 percent of the vote in 2008. Buck was not quite as extreme (although he did, for example, propose to privatize the Veteran's Administration) and came much closer to victory.

[35] Toomey also once served in the House, and Rubio was majority leader of the Florida House; the other three Tea Party winners were political newcomers.

Democrats could expect considerable financial help. They were not disappointed. The intensity of Republican opposition to Obama and the Democratic congressional leadership not only made individual fundraising easier but also inspired the formation and generous funding of non-party organizations that ended up spending more than $185 million on independent campaigns aimed at electing Republicans, an increase of 186 percent over 2008.[36] Two of the top three groups, whose total spending exceeded $96 million, were essentially adjuncts of the Republican Party; the third was the United States Chamber of Commerce.[37] Democrats, on the defensive, also received more help than ever from non-party groups, $87 million, up 59 percent over 2008. They retained their advantage in party-independent spending, $104 million to $77 million, but it was smaller than it had been in 2008 ($158 million to $70 million). Fundraising by individual House and Senate candidates also set new records, exceeding a total of $1 billion for the first time.[38]

The net result of all this financial activity was that campaigns for both candidates in virtually every potentially competitive race were more than adequately financed. Analyzing data available through 4 November 2010 for the 103 most competitive House races (defined as those lost by incumbents or in which the winner received less than 55 percent of the vote), the Campaign Finance Institute found that the average Democrat was supported by $2.83 million, and the average Republican by $2.35 million, well above the sums needed to finance full-scale campaigns. Democrats (most of them incumbents) received a larger share via donations directly to their campaigns (68 percent, compared to 54 percent for Republicans). Independent party spending accounted for about the same share for both parties' candidates (20 percent for Democrats, 19 percent for Republicans), but non-party independent spending was a much larger part of the Republican effort (28 percent compared to 13 percent for Democrats).[39] Like the Democrats in 2008,[40] Republicans were able to keep

[36] Outside groups were also empowered by recent Supreme Court decisions in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 130 Sup. Ct. 876 (2010) and *SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission*, 599 F. 3d 686 (D.C. Cir. 2010), although how much this added to their total effort in 2010 is not yet clear.

[37] The top spending group, American Crossroads ($387 million), was organized by veteran Republican operatives Karl Rove and Ed Gillespie; the Chamber was second ($32.9 million); the American Action Network, whose board was composed largely of current and former Republican elected officials, was third ($23.9 million). Data are through 4 November 2010, and the final numbers will be higher; data are from http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/PostElec2010_Table2_.pdf, accessed 28 November 2010.

[38] Based on figures reported at http://www.opensecrets.org/overview/index.php, accessed 28 November 2010.

[39] "Non-Party Spending Doubled in 2010 But Did Not Dictate the Results," Campaign Finance Institute, 5 November 2010, accessed at http://www.cfinst.org/Press/PReleases/10-11-05/Non-Party_Spending_Doubled_But_Did_Not_Dictate_Results.aspx, 28 November 2010.

[40] Gary C. Jacobson, "A Collective Dilemma Solved: The Distribution of Party Campaign Resources in the 2006 and 2008 Congressional Elections," *Election Law Journal* 9 (December 2010): 381–397.

TABLE 3

Senate Races in Which Independent Expenditures Exceeded $3 Million

	Net Receipts Through October 13 ($ Millions)	*Party Independent Expenditures ($ Millions)*	*Non-party Independent Expenditures ($ Millions)*	*Percent Non-candidate Spending*
Michael Bennet (D-CO)	11.4	7.9	7.3	57
Kenneth Buck (R-CO)	3.8	5.1	10.9	81
Joe Sestak (D-PA)	11.8	8.7	2.8	49
Pat Toomey (R-PA)	14.8	4.9	9.2	49
Patty Murray (D-WA)	10.9	3.9	4.7	44
Dino Rossi (R-WA)	7.4	3.6	7.3	60
Al Giannoulias (D-IL)	8.4	5.9	1.0	45
Mark Kirk (R-IL)	12.8	2.3	8.8	46
Harry Reid (D-NV)	17.2	2	4.2	27
Sharron Angle (R-NV)	21.5	0.8	8.2	30
Robin Carnahan (D-MO)	9.6	2.3	2.6	34
Roy Blount (R-MO)	10.9		7.0	39
Barbara Boxer (D-CA)	20.3		1.9	9
Carly Fiorina (R-CA)	17.9	2.8	6.3	34
Joe Manchin III (D-WV)	3.4	3.9	0.8	58
John Raese (R-WV)	3.1	4	1.7	65
John Conway (D-KY)	5	1.6	0.9	33
Rand Paul (R-KY)	6.7	1.8	4.5	49
Kendrick Meek (D-FL)	8.6		0.1	1
Marco Rubio (R-FL)	18.3		5.9	24
Charlie Crist (I-FL)	13.4			0

Source: Campaign Finance Institute at http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/PostElec2010_Table8_.pdf, accessed 28 November 2010.

Note: Winner is italicized.

up with expanding opportunities in 2010; only three successful Republican challengers were backed by less than $1 million, and no more than a couple of Republican candidates who came close but lost could plausibly blame their defeats on inadequate finances. The outcomes, then, depended much more on the persuasiveness of the campaigns than on the balance of resources.

The same holds for the Senate elections: the potentially competitive races were generously funded, and therefore the balance of spending was not decisive. Independent campaign spending played a conspicuous role in a number of high-profile races (Table 3). A remarkable two-thirds of campaign money spent in the Colorado race was not legally under the candidates' control; in six other Senate contests, outside spending accounted for between 37 and 61 percent of the total. Typically, Democratic candidates got more party assistance, but Republican candidates enjoyed a greater share of non-party spending. Not surprisingly, Tea Party favorites (Buck, Toomey, Angle, Paul, and Rubio)

tended to receive extensive outside help, but so did several more mainstream Republicans. As always, personal wealth was no guarantor of victory; only one of the six Senate candidates who bankrolled their own primary or general election campaigns with more than $4 million won (Ron Johnson in Wisconsin). Among the losers was Republican Linda McMahon, who spent $46.6 million to win her 498,341 votes, 43 percent of the total vote cast.[41]

The explosive growth of independent House and Senate campaign spending both reflects and reinforces the increasing nationalization of electoral politics. Since 1994, control of one or both chambers has been up for grabs in almost every election. The stakes have grown in parallel with the increasing partisan and ideological polarization of national politics, and the intense antipathy of conservatives in the business community and elsewhere toward Democratic leaders and policies raised the ante yet again in 2010. The effect of the recent Supreme Court decision permitting unlimited campaign expenditures from corporate and union treasuries (as well as by organizations financed by undisclosed donors) has yet to be fully felt, so the advent of independent campaigns spending as much as or more than the candidates' campaigns in the most hotly contested races is probably a harbinger of the future.[42]

Obama's Policies: Legislative Success, Political Failure

The highly nationalized midterm election, its prominent Tea Party component, and the sharp increase in independent campaign spending reflect, in part, the peculiarities of popular reactions to the Obama administration's policies, especially its response to the recession and its signature health care reform initiative. The recession was the legacy of the financial crisis that followed a collapse in housing prices during Bush's second term. By the summer of 2008, large financial institutions that had invested heavily in mortgage-backed bonds were on the verge of collapse. Credit markets froze, stock values plummeted, the economy shrank, and millions of Americans lost their homes and jobs.

TARP

The Bush administration's response to the financial crisis was a bipartisan plan, adopted in September 2008, to shore up the financial system (and eventually Chrysler and General Motors) with a $700 billion rescue package, the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), to be deployed under tight government supervision. TARP was never popular—propping up the very institutions whose greed and recklessness had created the crisis proved a tough sell—and its evident success did not make it any more so. It stabilized the financial sector, saved Chrysler

[41] Data posted by the Center for Responsive Politics at http://www.opensecrets.org/news/selfcandidates1103.xls, accessed 28 November 2010.

[42] *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 50 (2010).

TABLE 4

Opinions on the Troubled Assets Relief Program, Enacted during the Bush Administration

	All (%)	*Republican (%)*	*Independent (%)*	*Democrat (%)*
TARP helped to prevent a more severe crisis[a]	42	35	37	54
TARP did not help	49	56	58	37
Bailout was good for the country[b]	26	13	26	39
Bailout was bad for the country	63	79	64	48
Government should have helped banks[c]	27	20	23	37
Should have let them succeed or fail on their own.	67	75	70	56
Government should have helped auto companies[c]	33	21	20	50
Should have let them succeed or fail on their own.	61	77	63	45
TARP was enacted under Barack Obama[d]	47	50	47	46
TARP was enacted under George W. Bush	34	36	35	34

[a]Pew Research Center for the People and Press Poll, 21–26 April 2010.
[b]*Newsweek* Poll, 20–21 October 2010.
[c]CBS News/*New York Times* Poll, 20–24 May 2010.
[d]Pew Research Center for the People and Press Poll, 15–18 July 2010.

and GM, and is projected to end up costing taxpayers a small fraction of the $700 billion authorized.[43] The stock market also rebounded, and by the end of October 2010, the S&P 500 was up 75 percent from its March 2009 low. But with unemployment stuck at high levels and millions of homeowners still under water on their mortgages, the revival of the banks and Wall Street was not universally celebrated. Notwithstanding a broad consensus among economists that failure to rescue the banks would have been much more devastating for jobs, housing, and small businesses, to much of the public, the costs appeared to outweigh the benefits. People who had lost their jobs, homes, and businesses did not see the bailout as benefiting them; people who had kept them because the economic contraction had not been even more severe evidently did not credit TARP.

As the survey data reported in Table 4 make clear, only a minority of Americans believe that TARP prevented a worse crisis, and large majorities have come to think it was bad for the country and that the banks and auto companies should have been left to sink or swim on their own. Partisan differences on these questions are relatively small; even Democrats have been hard to convince that TARP worked. TARP may have succeeded as policy, but it certainly failed as politics. Notice also that by the summer of 2010, more people believed that TARP was Obama's program than remembered it had been Bush's idea.

[43] The most recent estimate is that TARP's final cost to the treasury will be about $25 billion—a modest price if it helped avoid a replay of the 1930s; see Ben Rooney, "TARP Cost Estimate Cut to $25 Billion, Says CBO," CNN, accessed at http://money.cnn.com/2010/11/30/news/economy/GAO_TARP_report, 30 November 2010.

TABLE 5

Opinions on the Effects of the Economic Stimulus Legislation, Enacted during the Obama Administration

	All (%)	*Republican (%)*	*Independent (%)*	*Democrat (%)*
Stimulus has helped the job situation[a]	33	15	34	53
Stimulus has not helped the job situation	60	88	59	40
Stimulus was good for the country[b]	33	15	34	53
Stimulus was bad for the country	60	88	59	40
Taxes have risen under Obama[c]	33	55	31	19
Taxes have decreased under Obama	8	3	7	13

[a]Pew Research Center for the People and Press Poll, 17–20 June 2010.
[b]*Newsweek* Poll, 20–21 October 2010.
[c]CBS News/*New York Times* Poll, 10–24 September 2010.

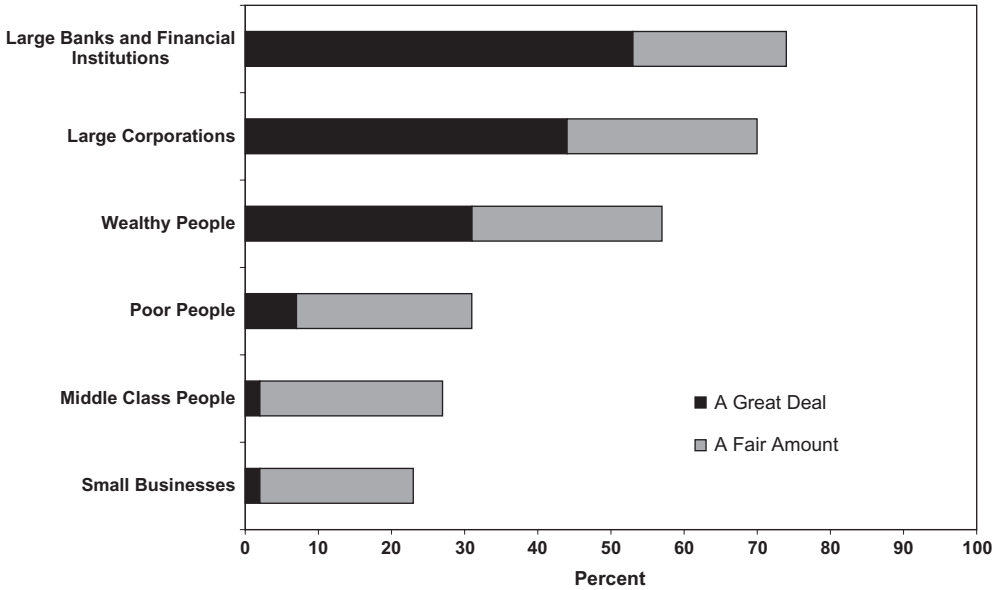
The Stimulus Bill

Obama's own initiative for addressing the recession was the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, a $787 billion package (later grown to $814 billion) combining tax cuts and incentives, expanded unemployment and other social welfare benefits, and spending on infrastructure, energy development, education, and health care. The bill passed in February, 2009, with no Republican votes in the House and only three in the Senate. As with the bank bailout, the benefits of the stimulus package for ordinary Americans were at best ambiguous. It may have increased economic growth by as much as 4.5 percent and saved as many as 3.3 million jobs, as the Congressional Budget Office concluded,[44] but the unemployment rate was higher in November 2010 (9.6 percent) than it had been when the bill was passed (8.2 percent). Partisan divisions on the efficacy of the stimulus reflected its partisan origins (Table 5), but majorities of independents joined Republicans in deeming it ineffective. The Obama administration not only failed to persuade most Americans that the stimulus had helped, but also failed to get across the point that it had given 94 percent of working Americans a tax cut and that taxes had thus gone down—by about $240 billion[45]—rather than up, during Obama's tenure.

[44] The CBO estimated that the stimulus bill increased the number of full-time-equivalent jobs by between 1.7 million to 3.3 million and the GDP by from 1.7 to 4.5 percent compared to what would have occurred without the stimulus; Congressional Budget Office, "Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output From April 2010 Through June 2010," August 2010, accessed at http://www.cbo.gov/publications/collections/collections.cfm?collect=12, 15 November 2010.

[45] Heidi Przybyla and John McCormick, "Poll Shows Voters Don't Know GDP Grew With Tax Cuts," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 29 October 2010, accessed at http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-10-29/poll-shows-voters-don-t-know-gdp-grew-with-tax-cuts.html, 15 November 2010.

FIGURE 6
The Public's View of Who Has Benefitted from Government Economic Policies, 2010



Source: Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, July 15–18, 2010.

Among Republicans, the prevailing view of Obama as tax-and-spend liberal (if not worse) was further evidence of motivated reasoning; they assumed that he must have raised taxes, missing, ignoring, or disbelieving truthful information to the contrary.

A Pew survey taken in July 2010 helps to explain why policies aimed at reviving the economy have been so unpopular (Figure 6). Americans share a strong consensus that the government's actions have benefited large banks and financial institutions, corporations, and the wealthy, but less than a third believe they have helped the poor, the middle class, and small businesses. Considering the sharp rise in stock prices and corporate profits amid continuing high rates of unemployment, foreclosure, and bankruptcy, these views are understandable. And they were obviously a serious political liability to the party in control.

Health Care Reform

The signal legislative achievement of the united Democratic regime under Obama's leadership was the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed into law on 22 March 2010. The passage of a landmark health care reform bill fulfilled a central promise of Obama's 2008 campaign, but both

the process and the product proved controversial and divisive. The legislation's effects on the health care system are yet to be realized, and it will be at least several more years before they can be fully gauged. Its political effects, however, were immediate and profound. The public was and remains fairly evenly divided over the extraordinarily complicated package; more people offer unfavorable than favorable reviews (by about 5 percentage points on average), but some do so because it promises too little rather than too much government involvement. Some of the legislation's elements are quite popular, some not; predictably, majorities tend to like the benefits and to dislike paying the costs needed to produce them.[46]

A basic political problem with the legislation is that most people say they are satisfied with their current health care arrangements and do not expect the changes to improve them, even if they believe it will improve the health care delivery system more generally. Support for extending a helping hand to the minority of uninsured Americans is also undermined by the weak economy. However, a more crucial political problem for Obama and the Democrats is that a solid majority of independents sided with Republican identifiers opposing the bill as too intrusive and too expensive.[47] Even before Republican leaders adopted a strategy of all-out opposition to Obama's proposals on the grounds that, as Republican Senator Jim DeMint put it, "If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo,"[48] partisans were strongly at odds on the legislation. Its enactment did nothing to change this, and in polls taken between its passage and the election, on average, 80 percent of Democrats expressing an opinion favored the reforms, while 87 percent of Republicans opposed them. But crucially, majorities of independents (58 percent, on average) also disliked the legislation, and opinions on it became tightly linked to evaluations of Obama's performance (with the causal arrow no doubt running in both directions). On average during 2010, 89 percent of respondents (including 90 percent of Republicans, 89 percent of Democrats, and 82 percent of independents) offered consistent opinions on Obama and his health care reforms, approving

[46] Typically, most people favor requiring insurance companies to cover pre-existing conditions, to continue to cover people who become sick, to provide subsidies so that poor families can buy insurance; and requiring employers to provide health insurance to workers. The idea of universal coverage also generally wins majority support. But majorities also tended to oppose the components necessary to pay for these features: taxing the most-generous health care policies, limiting some Medicare reimbursements, and requiring everyone to buy health insurance (so that the risk pool is large enough) and enforcing this requirement through fines; see the extensive compilation of survey questions and responses at http://www.pollingreport.com/health.htm, accessed 10 November 2010.

[47] "Obama Gets Small Bounce from Health Care Win, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; Net Disapproval Drops 9 Points," accessed at http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x1295.xml?ReleaseID=1437, 27 March 2010.

[48] Katherine Q. Seelye, "Fighting Heath Care Overhaul, and Proud of It," *The New York Times*, 30 August 2009.

TABLE 6

House Vote by Party Identification 2004–2010

	2004	*2006*	*2008*	*2010*
Democrats (%)				
Voted for Democrat	90	93	91	92
Voted for Republican	9	7	7	7
Independents (%)				
Voted for Democrat	49	57	51	37
Voted for Republican	46	39	43	56
Republicans (%)				
Voted for Democrat	7	8	9	5
Voted for Republican	93	91	89	94

Source: National exit polls.
Note: Exit poll data for 2002 are unavailable.

of both or disapproving of both.[49] The health care debate thus contributed to a more general loss of support for Obama among independents (Figure 2).

The electoral costs of independent disaffection with Obama and his policies are clear from exit poll data (Table 6). Party line voting continued to be very high in 2010, with Democratic partisans as loyal to their candidates as they had been in 2004, 2006, and 2008, and Republican partisans a bit more loyal than usual. Independents, however, shifted strongly to the Republican side in 2010, with a 20-point drop from 2006, and a 14-point drop from 2008, in the proportion supporting Democratic House candidates. A comparable shift was also evident in Senate elections. According to the 2008 exit polls, for example, seven of the eight Democrats who took Senate seats from Republicans had outpolled their opponents among independents; in 2010, all of the Republicans who won Democratic seats were supported by majorities of independents.[50]

Financial Regulation

The Democratic regime's other landmark legislative achievement was the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act that became

[49] From averages of nine Gallup, CNN, and NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* Polls taken in 2010 and available for secondary analysis. Remarkably, opinions of Obama and his health care proposals were even more tightly linked than were opinions of George W. Bush and the Iraq War (with an average consistency of about 85 percent); see Gary C. Jacobson, "George W. Bush, Polarization, and the War in Iraq," in Colin Campbell, Bert A. Rockman, and Andrew Rudalevige, eds., *The George W. Bush Legacy* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008), 81.

[50] The 2008 results are at http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls.main, accessed 26 November 2010; the 2010 results are at http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls.main, accessed 26 November 2010. There was no exit poll covering one of the Republican pickups (North Dakota), but John Hoeven won 76 percent of the vote overall, so it is safe to assume he also took a majority of independents.

law on 21 July 2010. The law was intended to prevent a recurrence of the financial meltdown, avoid future bailouts, and protect consumers from predatory banking and credit practices. Unlike health care reform, this legislation was supported by a clear majority of Americans, including a substantial share (although still a minority) of Republicans. Even so, it failed to pay political dividends and may actually have hurt Democratic candidates in 2010, for it fed perceptions in the financial sector and elsewhere in the corporate world that the Democratic leadership was, at best, unsympathetic to business interests, and these perceptions swelled the torrent of donations to independent campaigns aimed at ending Democratic control of Congress.

The Price of Loyalty

Obama's controversial agenda, and the efforts of Democratic congressional leaders to act on it, often left House Democrats representing Republican-leaning districts with the unhappy choice of pleasing their party or their constituency. The stimulus, health care, and financial reform bills would have failed passage without at least some support from such cross-pressured Democrats. Some of them, acting on principle or survival instinct, did bolt the party; among the 45 Democrats seeking reelection in Republican-leaning districts (defined as in Table 2), 6 voted against the stimulus bill, 21 voted against health care reform, and 11 voted against the banking bill; in each case, however, a majority of them sided with the party.[51] As the coefficients in the regression and logit equations given in Table 7 demonstrate, defection was the better reelection strategy for this set of Democrats. Voting for any of the three bills hurt, and the effects were cumulative. Controlling for the district presidential and congressional votes in 2008, Democrats representing Republican-leaning districts who voted for any of these bills received a significantly lower share of votes in 2010 than those who did not (although the estimated coefficient for the stimulus vote is only significant at the $p<.10$ level). Voting for the health care bill made the most difference, costing an estimated 4.9 percentage points, and it also significantly decreased the incumbent's chances of winning. But voting against health care reform or the other pieces of legislation hardly guaranteed reelection; for example, 86 percent who voted for the health bill lost, but so did 62 percent of those who voted against it. Democrats representing Republican turf in 2010 were at high risk of defeat no matter how they voted.[52]

[51] Among the remaining 191 Democrats who sought reelection, the respective number of defectors was 2, 5, and 7 on these three bills.

[52] Comparable equations for the remaining Democrats defending more-favorable partisan turf suggest that voting for health care was also a negative, again reducing the vote share by about 5 percentage points, but it had no significant effect on the probability of winning; none of the other votes had any significant effect in either equation, but as the previous note indicates, there was little variance in these votes.

TABLE 7

Electoral Fates of Democratic House Incumbents in Republican-leaning Districts

	Dependent Variables			
	Democrat's Share of Votes (OLS Regression)		*Democrat Won/Lost (Logit)*	
Independent Variables:	*Coefficient*	*Standard Error*	*Coefficient*	*Standard Error*
District presidential vote, 2008	.60***	.13	.29*	.13
Democrat's share of votes, 2008	.40***	.08	.20*	.09
Voted for health care reform	−4.89***	1.31	−3.59**	1.36
Voted for financial regulation	−3.68*	1.58	−2.50	1.64
Voted for stimulus	−3.03†	1.71	.90	2.27
Constant	3.57	7.08	−24.44**	8.39
Adjusted R^2/pseudo R^2	.48		.38	
Percent correctly predicted (Null=75.0)			88.6	
Number of Cases	44		44	

Source: Compiled by author.

Note: District presidential vote and Democrat's share of votes is the percentage of the major party vote going to the Democratic candidate; the roll call votes take the value of 1 if the Democrat voted for the legislation, 0 otherwise. OLS regression is ordinary least square regression; logit is logistic regression, as appropriate for a categorical dependent variable.

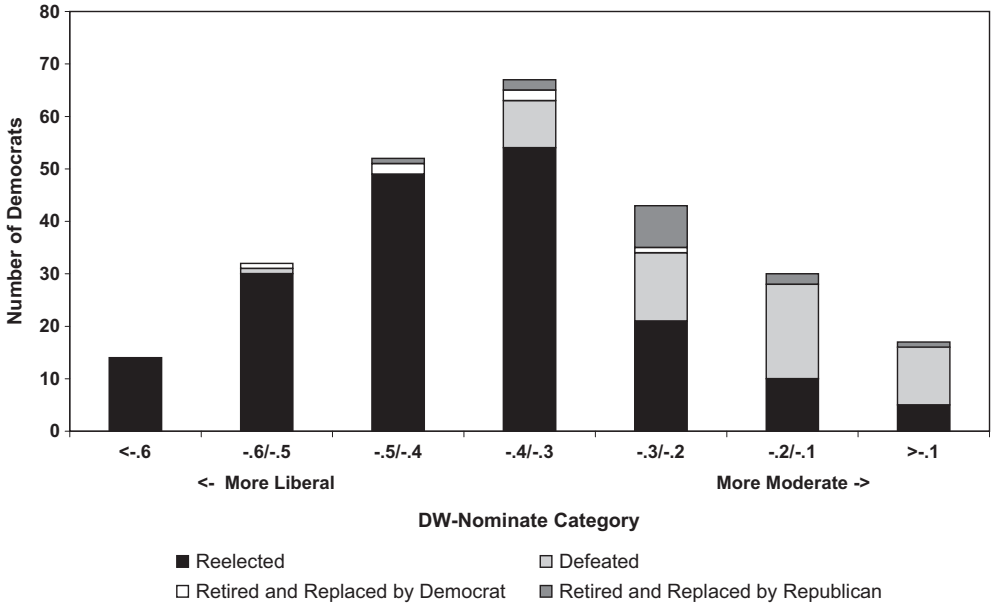
†$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .001$; ***$p < .001$.

More generally, moderation did not protect Democratic incumbents in 2010. There was, in fact, a strong *negative* relationship between greater ideological moderation and probability of winning reelection, because, not coincidentally, the most moderate Democrats represented the most Republican-leaning districts. Figure 7 locates all House Democrats according to their 2009 scores on Poole and Rosenthal's DW Nominate Scale, a standard measure of a member's ideology. The scale is based on all non-unanimous roll call votes and theoretically ranges from −1 (most liberal) to +1 (most conservative).[53] Clearly, the election took a major toll on the moderates; 54 percent of the incumbent Democrats located to the right of the Party's ideological center were defeated, compared with 1 percent of Democrats to the left of center and 14 percent at the Party center. Republicans did even better in open seats that had been held by moderate Democrats, taking 11 of 12 (92 percent); they also took 3 of 8 other open seats. Altogether, 80 percent of the seats Republicans took from Democrats in 2010 had been represented by Democrats whose roll call votes put them to the right of their Party's center, and the further to the right, the greater the toll.

For this reason, the House in the 112th Congress is almost certain to be even more polarized along partisan and ideological lines than it was before

[53] For an account of the methodology for DW-Nominate, see Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3–57. The data for the first year of the 111th Congress (2009) are available at the Keith T. Poole website, Votevew.com, accessed 15 November 2010.

FIGURE 7
Roll Call Ideology of Remaining and Departing Democratic House Incumbents, 2010



the election. The exit of so many moderate Democrats moves the Party's center of gravity to the left. The mean DW-Nominate score for all Democrats in the first year of the 111th House was −.35; the departing Democrats' averaged −.20 on the scale, leaving the remaining Democrats with a mean of −.40. The Republicans replacing Democrats, coming from somewhat more-balanced districts than the average Republican, might be expected to moderate their Party a bit; if they were to act like similarly situated Republicans in the 111th Congress, their expected DW-Nominate score would be .60, below the Party's 2009 average of .63.[54] But more than half of them (36 of 66) claim Tea Party support, and voters with Tea Party sympathies tend to hold opinions placing them well to the right of the average Republican.[55] Insofar as they keep faith with their backers in the Tea Party movement, Republicans in the class of 2010 will be considerably more conservative than their districts would otherwise predict.

[54] Based on estimates from the regression of DW-Nominate scores on the district presidential vote for the first year of the 111th Congress.

[55] Gary C. Jacobson, "The Obama and Anti-Obama Coalitions," in Bert A. Rockman and Andrew Rudalevige, eds., *The Barack Obama Presidency: First Appraisals* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, forthcoming).

The five new Republican senators with Tea Party links will also bolster the Party's conservative wing. The Republican senators who retired in 2010 were more moderate than average, compiling a mean DW Nominate score for 2009 of .38, compared to .48 for the remaining Republican senators. The seven Republican newcomers who had served in the House had average DW Nominate scores of .58 during their final terms in that chamber. All of these changes point toward a more conservative Republican Party in the new Senate. Changes on the Democratic side, in contrast, should have little effect on the Party's center of ideological gravity. The two losing incumbents were the most liberal (Russ Feingold, Wisconsin) and moderate (Blanche Lincoln, Arkansas) of the 12 Democrats seeking reelection; there was not much difference in the mean ideological locations of the remaining (−.42) and departing (−.45) Democrats.

Looking Forward to 2012

Beyond the influx of conservative Republicans, partisan divisions in the 112th Congress will be exacerbated by the Republicans' agenda and plans for 2012. Their main objective over the next two years, according to Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, is to make Obama a one-term president.[56] They evidently contemplate using "Obamacare" as a primary target once again, rejecting any attempts to improve the health care reforms and knowing that Democrats will block their promised attempts at complete repeal. A focus on taking control of the White House and Senate in 2012 leaves them with little incentive to cooperate on any matter that might give Obama and his Party a popular legislative victory. It also gives them no stake in a robust economic rebound; their proposals to cut spending and attack the deficit fit the public mood,[57] and if cutbacks happen to reduce aggregate demand, slowing gross domestic product and job growth, Obama will be the one to suffer the most politically.

Republican prospects for adding the four additional seats they will need to retake the Senate in 2012 are enhanced by the fact that 23 of the 33 seats at stake are currently held by Democrats or independents who vote with Democrats on organizational matters. On the other hand, Obama won 17 of these states, and at least one Republican, Scott Brown of Massachusetts, could face a tough reelection. The only certainty for 2012 is a surfeit of enormously expensive and bitterly contested Senate races.

Regardless of what happens in the Senate, Republicans will have an excellent chance of keeping their House majority. As documented in Table 2, most of the Republican pickups in 2010 came in Republican-leaning districts. The

[56] "First Thoughts: McConnell Doubles Down," accessed at http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2010/11/04/5407324-first-thoughts-mcconnell-doubles-down, 11 November 2010.

[57] Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans Prioritize Deficit Reduction as an Economic Strategy," Gallup Report, 30 November 2010, accessed at http://www.gallup.com/poll/144956/Americans-Prioritize-Deficit-Reduction-Economic-Strategy.aspx, 30 November 2010.

table also shows that such districts outnumber Democratic-leaning districts, 211 to 165. The Republican advantage in this regard has existed for decades and remains, no matter how district partisan leanings are measured (for example, using the 2000 or 2008 presidential vote or wider or narrower definitions of the competitive range).[58] It arises because regular Republican voters are distributed across House districts more efficiently than are regular Democratic voters. The Democratic coalition includes a large contingent of minority, single, young, gay, and liberal voters who tend to congregate in large cities, producing lopsided Democratic majorities in urban House districts. Republican voters are spread out more evenly across suburbs and rural areas, and the Party therefore tends to win seats by narrower margins and thus to "waste" fewer votes. This structural advantage has grown more consequential over time with the increase in partisan coherence and consistency among voters. Democrats can overcome it when backed by strong national tides, as they proved in 2006 and 2008, but it leaves them vulnerable when the tide recedes or runs against them.

The 2010 elections will only deepen the Democrats' structural disadvantage. Republican gains extended to state governors and legislators, leaving the party in full control of 20 states, including 10 of the 18 states projected to gain or lose seats through reapportionment. Wherever they monopolize the process, Republicans will have an opportunity to draw new districts for 2012 that build on their existing structural advantage, and the currently highly polarized political climate will encourage uninhibited partisan gerrymandering. Contemplating the state election returns, one senior Republican operative predicted that Republicans would gain from 15 to 25 seats via redistricting.[59] Long-term demographic trends may favor the Democrats[60]—in ways perhaps foreshadowed by California, where the Republican tide scarcely registered in 2010. But with redistricting in the offing, the prospects of Democrats for returning to power in the House in 2012 are bleak regardless of what happens in the Senate or presidential elections.

[58] Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 15.

[59] Nathan Gonzales, "The Right Rises at a Ripe Time," *CQ Weekly*, 8 November 2010, 2577.

[60] Rue Teixeira, "Demographic Change and the Future of the Parties" (working paper, June 2010), at http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2010/06/pdf/voter_demographics.pdf, 30 November 2010.