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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 128 · Number 1 · Spring 2013

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How the Economy and Partisanship Shaped the 2012 Presidential and Congressional Elections

GARY C. JACOBSON

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, Mitt Romney and his closest campaign advisers were surprised and shocked by Romney's loss to Barack Obama in the 2012 election.¹ The flawed internal polling in battleground states² that projected a decisive Romney victory seemed credible to the Romney camp—despite contrary reports from numerous public surveys—because it confirmed what they had believed all along: the economy would ultimately make Obama a one-term president, just as it had Jimmy Carter in 1980 and G.H.W. Bush in 1992. This was a reasonable belief. The U.S. economy had been growing since the Great Recession ended in the summer of 2009, but too slowly to produce robust growth in jobs or family incomes. Unemployment stayed above 8 percent until September of the election year; poverty rates were

¹Jan Crawford, "Advisor: Romney Shellshocked by Loss," CBS News, 8 November 2012, accessed at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-250_162-57547239/adviser-romney-shellshocked-by-loss, 9 November 2012; Romney had prepared a victory speech but not a concession speech, and his campaign had scheduled a fireworks show in Boston harbor to celebrate their victory; see Glen Johnson, "Romney Had Fireworks Display Set for Election Night," *The Boston Globe*, accessed at <http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2012/11/08/mitt-romney-planned-boston-harbor-fireworks-show-that-was-scotched-election-loss/GylkiHhYln63NSzNdQo6LJ/story.html>, 12 November 2012.

²Noam Scheiber, "Exclusive: The Internal Polls That Made Romney Think He'd Win," *The New Republic*, accessed at <http://www.tnr.com/blog/plank/110597/exclusive-the-polls-made-mitt-romney-think-hed-win#>, 4 December 2012.

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stuck at their highest levels in two decades; millions of Americans remained underwater on their home mortgages. The public's view of the economy was overwhelmingly negative: at the start of the election year, 79 percent of Americans had rated the economy as "fairly bad" or "very bad," and 68 percent continued to do so in October.³ And throughout the year, large majorities identified the weak economy as the most important national problem and top election issue.⁴

The public also doubted the efficacy of Obama's policies for dealing with economic challenges. His stimulus package (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) continued to get at best tepid reviews, although not as bad as in 2010; the results of an October 2012 Pew survey were typical: just 33 percent of respondents believed that it improved the economy, with 35 percent saying it made it worse and 27 percent saying it made no difference.⁵ The financial bailout of Chrysler and General Motors also received mixed reviews even as these companies survived and prospered.⁶ On average, during 2012, only 43 percent of Americans approved of Obama's economic management, only marginally above the 2011 average of 39 percent.⁷

In light of such data, it is little wonder that the Romney campaign thought it had a winning theme: Obama's economic policies had failed and he ought to be replaced, particularly by a man whose successful business career proved he knew how to create jobs. Voters had treated the 2010 election as a referendum on Obama's early presidency,⁸ and the Romney campaign anticipated the same for 2012. And if the election could be framed as a referendum on Obama's economic management, Romney's prospects were bright. As Romney's chief campaign strategist, Stuart Stevens, put it a year before the election, "The economy is overwhelmingly the issue. Our whole campaign is premised on the idea that this is a referendum on Obama, the economy is a disaster and Obama is uniquely

³CBS/*New York Times* surveys of 12–17 January and 25–28 October 2012.

⁴About two-thirds of voters identified an economic problem (the general economy or unemployment most frequently) as the most important problem in Gallup surveys taken during the election year; see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1675/Most-Important-Problem.aspx>, accessed 20 November 2012.

⁵Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Political Survey, 4–7 October 2012, from the Roper Center iPOLL Archive, University of Connecticut; for the 2010 data, see Gary C. Jacobson, "The Republican Resurgence in 2010," *Political Science Quarterly* 126 (Spring 2011), 44.

⁶A Gallup survey taken 20–21 February 2012, found 44 percent approving and 51 percent disapproving of the bailout; a Pew survey taken 8–12 February 2012 found 56 percent saying the bailout had been mostly good for the economy and 38 percent saying it was mostly bad for the economy, from the Roper Center iPOLL archive, University of Connecticut.

⁷Computed from data supplied by [Pollingreport.com](http://www.pollingreport.com), accessed at http://www.pollingreport.com/obama_ad.htm, 20 November 2012.

⁸Jacobson, "Republican Resurgence," 34–37.

blocked from being able to talk about jobs.”⁹ Presidential candidates with economic conditions on their side (a good economy for the in-party candidate, or a bad economy for the out-party candidate) have a strong track record; according to Lynn Vavreck’s analysis, they won 11 of the 15 elections held from 1952 through 2008.¹⁰ Among the 15 or so diverse forecasting models published by a symposium of political scientists in October 2012, the 6 relying primarily on objective economic indicators (especially unemployment) or retrospective evaluations of the economy predicted a Romney victory.¹¹

Based on the historical record, economic conditions were clearly a major threat to Obama’s reelection. How was he able to survive the threat? Other contributions to the symposium suggest some explanations: models depending more heavily on public opinion (presidential approval, early straw polls), prospective economic expectations, Obama’s easier road to nomination, and the fact that Obama had served only one term after replacing a Republican president gave him the edge for 2012.¹² John Sides and Lynn Vavreck’s analysis identified the main source of this pattern: compared to earlier presidents, Obama’s overall approval ratings remained significantly higher than predicted by current economic conditions.¹³ The economy did less damage to his public standing than expected, and models adding subjective opinion (presidential approval, straw poll preferences, economic expectations) to objective economic indicators picked up on this fact.

What protected Obama from the full force of economic discontent? In a word, partisanship. A number of other factors were involved, but they contributed to the outcome of the election largely through their interaction with party. Obama won because, despite the weak economy, he received overwhelming approval and electoral support from ordinary Democrats

⁹Robert Draper, “Building a Better Romney Bot,” *New York Times Magazine*, 30 November 2011, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/magazine/mitt-romney-bot.html?pagewanted=all>, 4 November 2012.

¹⁰Lynn Vavreck, *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 39.

¹¹These included models proposed by Douglas Hibbs, Alfred Cuzán, Michael J. Berry, and Kenneth N. Bickers, Thomas M. Holbrook, and Michael Lewis-Beck, and Charles Tien (their “jobs model”), and Robert S. Erikson and Christopher Wlezien (their model using income growth as a predictor); see their contributions in “Symposium: Forecasting the 2012 American National Election,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45 (October 2012): 610–674.

¹²Included are models proposed by Helmut Norpoth and Michael Bednarczuk, Alan Abramowitz, James E. Campbell, Brad Lockerbie, Carl Klarner, Bruno Jérôme and Véronique Jérôme-Speziari, and alternative models by Erikson and Wlezien and Lewis-Beck and Tien using subjective economic variables, in *Ibid.*

¹³John Sides and Lynn Vavreck, *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), chapter entitled “The Hand You’re Dealt,” available in advance on line at http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s2_9920.pdf, accessed 22 November 2012.

and because they substantially outnumbered Republicans in the electorate. Partisanship also dominated the House and Senate elections, and the linkages between electoral behavior and outcomes across federal offices were the strongest in at least 60 years. The result was that despite widespread popular unhappiness with the direction of national politics and a Congress with the lowest approval ratings on record, the highly partisan and deeply polarized American electorate opted collectively for the political status quo in 2012, albeit with a slight Democratic tilt: A second term for Obama (by 51.0 percent to 47.3 for Romney in the popular vote, 332–206 in the electoral vote), a Senate still controlled by Democrats (55–45, a two-seat Democratic gain),¹⁴ and a House of Representatives still controlled by Republicans, 234–201 (with a majority six seats smaller than just before the election, eight seats smaller than after the 2010 election). How and why this happened, and what the election portends for the new Congress, is the subject of this article.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: OBAMA, ROMNEY, AND THE VOTE

Factors that Worked in Obama's Favor

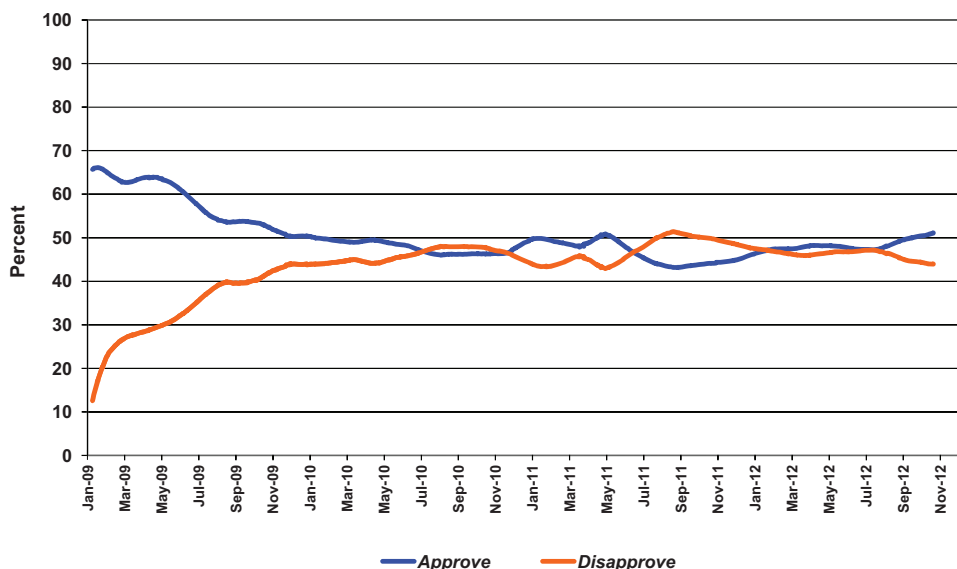
A first-term president's standing with the public—measured by the proportion who approve of his performance in office—is always an important predictor of his reelection prospects. Job approval ratings of 45 percent or lower in the final Gallup Poll taken before the election preceded the defeats of Jimmy Carter, G.H.W. Bush, and Gerald Ford; every president whose ratings exceeded 51 percent has been reelected.¹⁵ As Figure 1 shows, Obama's ratings fell into the danger zone below 45 percent during the first half of 2012 and remained in the equivocal range—between 45 percent and 50 percent—from the summer of 2011 until just before the 2012 election, finishing up at 52 percent in the final Gallup Poll (and 51 percent on average in all the major polls).

The closely divided and generally stable popular evaluations of Obama that prevailed after the beginning of his second year in the White House are compounded of starkly divergent assessments by Republicans and Democrats (Figure 2). Partisan differences in presidential approval have trended steeply upward since the 1970s, and Obama's immediate predecessor, George W. Bush, had received the most divergent

¹⁴The Democratic majority includes two independents, Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Angus King of Maine, who vote to organize with the Democrats.

¹⁵Harry Truman is the sole exception to this pattern; his final Gallup approval rating was only 39 percent, but it was from a poll taken in June 1948, thus missing his historic comeback.

FIGURE 1
Barack Obama's First-term Job Approval Ratings



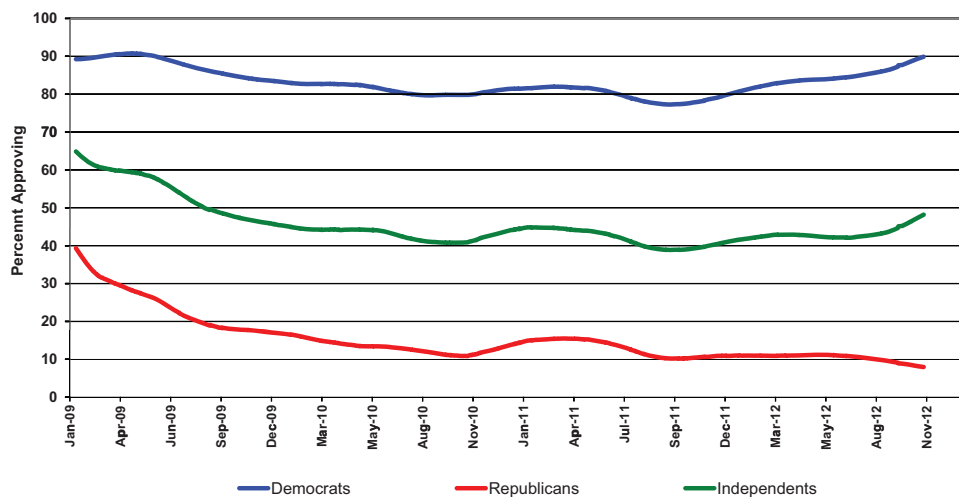
Source: Lowess-smoothed trends from 564 ABC News/*Washington Post*, CBS News/*New York Times*, CNN, CNBC, NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, AP-GfK, *Newsweek*, Gallup, Ipsos, *Los Angeles Times*, *Time*, Bloomberg, Marist, and Pew surveys.

evaluations since surveys began asking about presidential approval in the 1930s.¹⁶ Obama has been at least as divisive, and during the fall of 2012, partisan differences in his approval ratings exceeded Bush's previous all-time high for both an individual Gallup survey and for a quarterly average of Gallup surveys. In the individual survey, 92 percent of Democrats but only 6 percent of Republicans approved of Obama's performance, a difference of 86 points; the maximum for Bush was 83 points (94 percent approval among Republicans, 11 percent among Democrats). In the quarterly average of Gallup surveys, the comparable partisan gap was 81 points for Obama, 79 points for Bush.¹⁷ Party differences in evaluations of presidents always peak during the quarter in which they are on the ballot, presumably because the campaigns stir up partisan sentiments. In this instance, partisan polarization clearly served the President, for the main source of the improved ratings that finally put Obama above 50 percent was his growing approval among Democrats, which rose from a low of about 77 percent in September 2011 to about 90

¹⁶Gary C. Jacobson, *A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2011), 4–6.

¹⁷For Bush, the quarterly average approval rating was 94 percent among Republicans, 11 percent among Democrats; for Obama, it was 90 percent among Democrats, 9 percent among Republicans.

FIGURE 2
Approval of Barack Obama's Job Performance, 2009–2012



Source: Lowess-smoothed trends from 468 ABC News/Washington Post, CBS News/New York Times, CNN, NBC News/Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Gallup, Ipsos, Los Angeles Times, Time, and Pew surveys.

percent by the election. He also enjoyed a smaller increase in approval among independents (from 39 percent to 48 percent), while his standing among Republicans dropped from 10 percent to 8 percent.

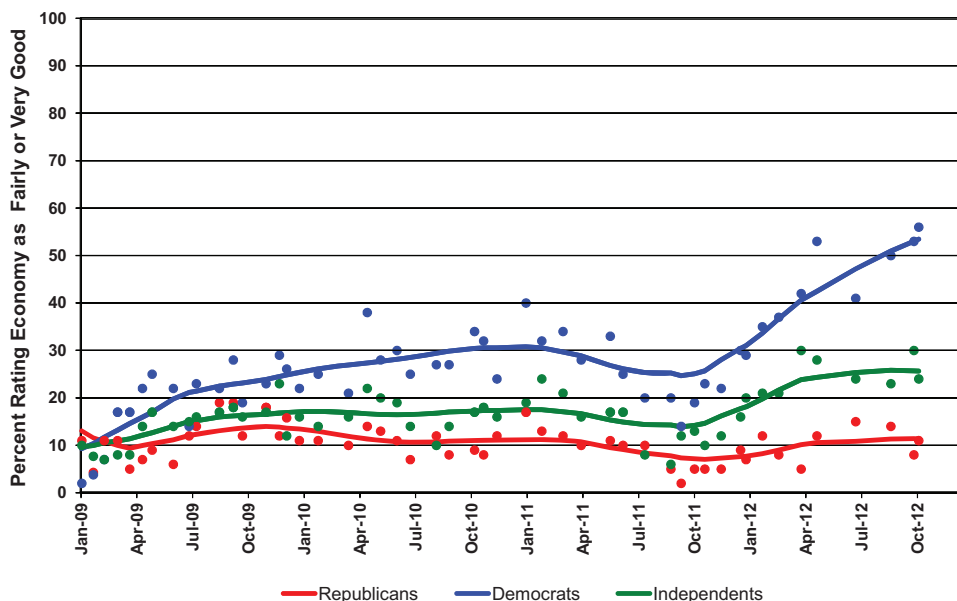
Obama's high approval ratings among Democrats clearly helped to minimize Democratic defections in 2012. According to the national exit poll, only 6.7 percent of Democrats voted for Romney, the lowest defection rate among Democrats in any exit poll going back to their origin in 1972. Comparable data from the post-war presidents denied reelection—Gerald Ford, Carter, and G.H.W. Bush—are instructive. Their election-quarter approval ratings among their own party's identifiers were 80 percent, 50 percent, and 66 percent, respectively; the defection rates of their partisans (according to exit polls) were 9.4 percent for Ford, 25.5 percent for Carter, and 27.2 percent for Bush.¹⁸

The rise in Obama's standing among ordinary Democrats coincided with their increasingly positive views of the economy. Obama benefited from the timely arrival of some good economic news, particularly the continuing decline in unemployment, which finally dipped below 8 percent in September 2012 for the first time since his inauguration. Real per capita income was also up by about 1 percent for the election year and by about 4 percent from its recessionary low in 2009. Subjective

¹⁸Of the defectors, 10.1 percent voted for Bill Clinton, 17.1 percent for Ross Perot.

economic indicators, such as consumer sentiment indices, improved as well, but these trends were driven mainly by changing sentiments among Democrats. There was, for example, a steep increase in the proportion of Democrats rating the economy as “fairly good” or “very good” in the CBS News/*New York Times* polls taken during the election year (Figure 3). Independents showed a much smaller increase, while Republicans remained as negative about the economy as ever. Gallup’s Economic Confidence Index underwent an even greater partisan divergence during the election year. The score among Democrats rose 30 points (from -3 in January to $+27$ in October); among independents, it was up 10 points (from -30 to -20), while the Republican score fell 13 points (from -46 to -59).¹⁹ Thus the partisan gap doubled from 43 to 86 points over these months. A Pew survey taken in September highlighted the remarkable difference between what Democrats and Republicans absorbed from news reports about the economy: 60 percent of Republicans, but only 15 percent of Democrats, said the news they were hearing was mostly bad, by far the largest partisan difference in the

FIGURE 3
Partisan Ratings of the Economy 2009–2012



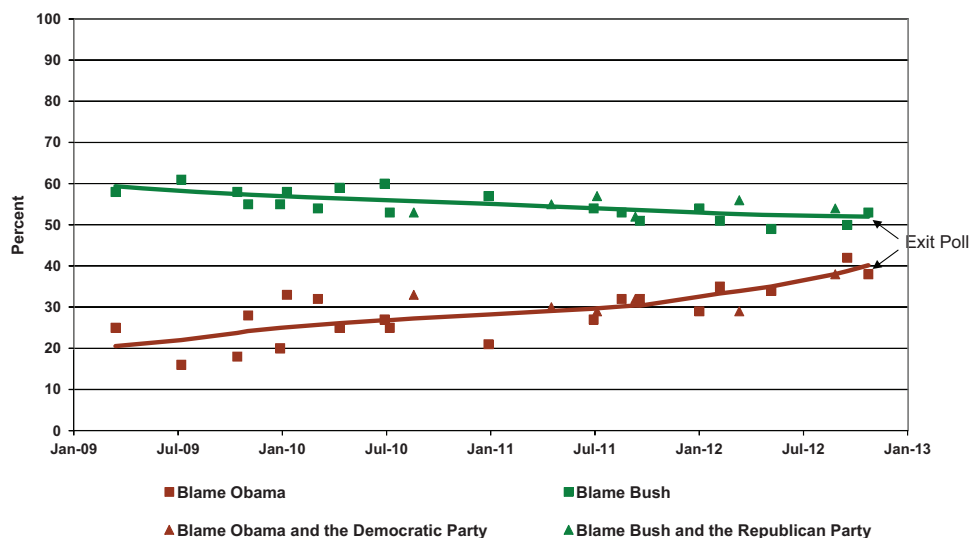
Source: 50 CBS News/*New York Times* polls.

¹⁹Alyssa Brown, “Democrats, Independents, Boost Economic Confidence,” 6 November 2012, accessed at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158528/democrats-independents-boost-economic-confidence.aspx>, 10 November 2012.

more than 40 Pew surveys taken since 2008 asking the question; a year earlier, the respective figures had been 71 percent and 62 percent.²⁰

Ordinary Democrats were evidently predisposed to absorb and respond positively to even modest signs of economic progress. Their approval ratings of Obama's handling of the economy rose 21 points between September 2011 and October 2012, from 64 percent to 85 percent (again, independents showed a more-modest increase, 8 points, from 31 percent to 39 percent, while Republicans did not move at all, remaining at around 8 percent approving). Thus if the Romney campaign counted on economic troubles to turn Democrats away from Obama—again not unreasonably, for economic distress was more common among lower income voters, who are disproportionately Democratic—it did so in vain. A good part of the reason is that Democrats could and did blame someone other than Obama for economic problems: George W. Bush. As Figure 4 shows, a majority of Americans continued to blame Bush more than Obama for economic conditions throughout Obama's first term, although by a steadily

FIGURE 4
Responsibility for the Current Economy



Sources: ABC News/*Washington Post*, Fox News, Quinnipiac University, Democracy Corps, NPR, and CNN polls and the national exit poll.

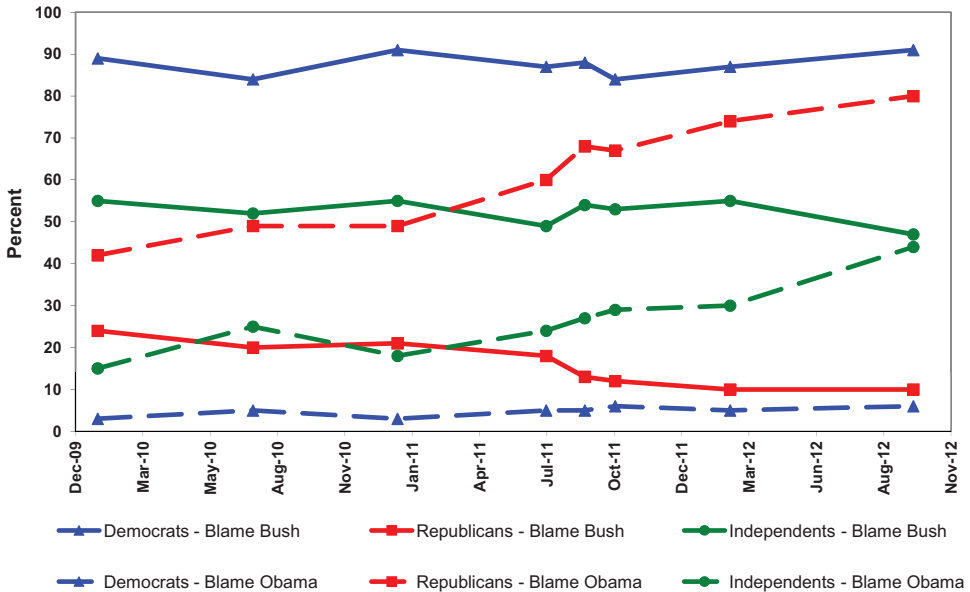
²⁰“Record Partisan Gap in Views of Economic News,” Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 11 September 2012, accessed at <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/11/record-partisan-gap-in-views-of-economic-news>, 5 December 2012; for an analysis of how party shapes responses to economic conditions across and within presidential administrations, see Peter K. Enns and Gregory E. McAvoy, “The Role of Partisanship in Aggregate Opinion,” *Political Behavior* 34 (December 2012): 627–651.

diminishing margin.²¹ Among Democrats, however, the margin did not diminish at all, and in September 2012, 91 percent still blamed Bush, only 6 percent, Obama (Figure 5). Among Republicans, in contrast, the percentage blaming Obama rose from 42 percent to 80 percent, and the percentage blaming Bush fell from 24 percent to 10 percent over the same period. Independents also increasingly blamed Obama, but a slight plurality continued to think Bush was the more culpable. Voters who still blamed Bush had no cause to punish Obama for economic woes. The idea that a first-term president following a change in party control can avoid full responsibility for national problems is the reason some election forecasters incorporate a variable representing this circumstance in their models; those that did so for their 2012 forecasts predicted an Obama victory.²²

Factors that Worked against Romney

The economy gave the Romney campaign little leverage among Democrats (and limited leverage among independents) not only because they blamed

FIGURE 5
Blame for the Economy, by Party ID (Quinnipiac Polls)



²¹The CNN question is, "Do you think the policies of Barack Obama and the Democrats or George W. Bush and the Republicans are more responsible for the country's current economic problems?" The other surveys ask about Bush and Obama but do not mention the parties. It is clear from Figure 4 that the distribution of responses is not affected by these differences in question wording.

²²See the models presented by Abramowitz, Campbell, Klarner, and Lockerbie in "Forecasting the 2012 American Elections."

Bush rather than Obama for its deficiencies, but also because Romney failed to make a persuasive case that he actually cared about people in their situation and that his proposals for fixing the economy were not stacked in favor of the rich.²³ This failure is attributable to Romney himself, to the party he led, and to the process through which he won its nomination. That process also opened the way for Obama to change the subject, an essential move for a candidate handicapped by adverse economic conditions.²⁴

The Republican popular base—the people who identify with or lean toward the party—has grown steadily more conservative over the past several decades.²⁵ The Party's strongest adherents share an intense antipathy toward Obama, manifest in, among other things, the surprisingly persistent belief that Obama is foreign born (and thus ineligible to be president), a Muslim, or both.²⁶ Hard-line conservatives of the Tea Party, economic, and social variety (extensively overlapping categories) are more involved and active in politics than other Republicans and dominate Republican primary electorates in most states. Thus, to win the nomination, Romney found it necessary to repudiate his political past as a moderate (pro-choice, pro-gay) governor of the very blue state of Massachusetts—just the kind of record that might have lent him some cross-party appeal in the general election. Rather than extolling his signal political achievement—instituting nearly universal health care coverage for Massachusetts citizens—he had to disown it, at least as a model for the nation, for it was virtually indistinguishable from Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that was so universally reviled by Republican conservatives.

Romney won the nomination only after fighting off a series of more-conservative rivals with greater intrinsic appeal to the Republican

²³For example, the 25–30 September 2012 Quinnipiac poll reported that only 11 percent of Democrats thought Romney cared about “the needs and problems of people like [them]” and that 93 percent said his economic policies would favor the rich. In contrast, 94 percent of Democrats thought Obama cared, and 87 percent said his policies would favor the middle class (48 percent) or treat everyone equally (39 percent). Republicans of course expressed contrary positions, but independents gave Obama the edge on these questions; accessed at <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/institutes-centers/polling-institute/national/release-detail?ReleaseID=1801>, 6 December 2012.

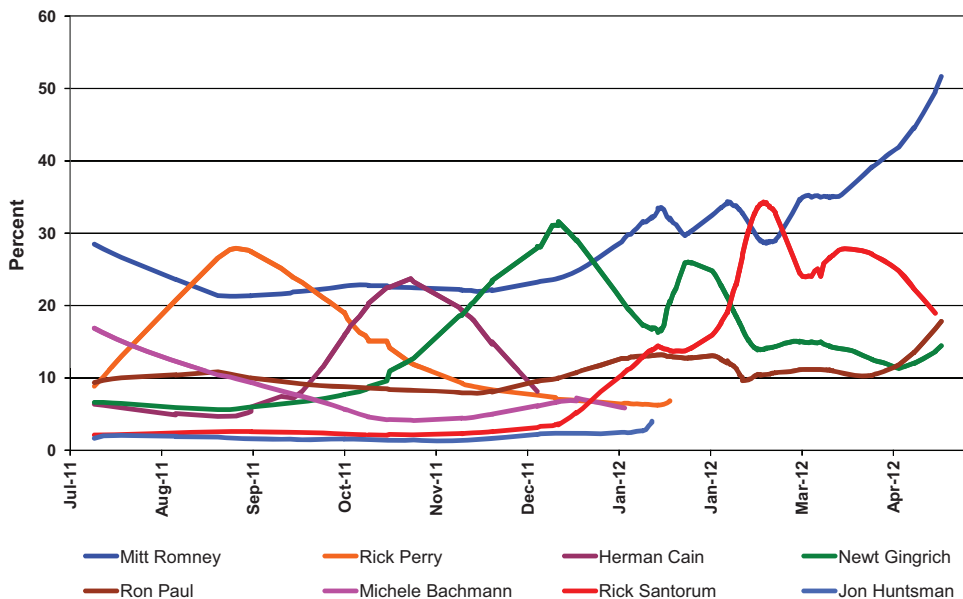
²⁴Vavreck, *The Message Matters*, 32–35.

²⁵Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, and Thad Kousser, *The Logic of American Politics*, 5th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2012), 577.

²⁶For example, a July 2012 Pew survey found 30 percent of Republicans, and 34 percent of conservative Republicans, saying Obama was a Muslim; accessed at <http://www.pewforum.org/politics-and-elections/2012-romney-mormonism-obamas-religion.aspx>, 12 November 2012. On average, a similar proportion of Republicans have said in response to surveys that Obama was not born in the United States (CNN, Pew, Gallup, CBS News/*New York Times*, Fox News, and Public Policy Polling) that asked the question at various times in 2011 and 2012.

electorate. In succession, Texas governor Rick Perry, then businessman Herman Cain, then former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, and, finally, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum surged ahead of Romney in surveys of Republican voters (the smoothed trends are displayed in Figure 6).²⁷ Not until late March did support for Romney surpass 40 percent, and only when his nomination was assured did it exceed 50 percent. Most Republican voters were clearly in the market for a more conservative alternative to Romney, but none of his variously flawed rivals ultimately measured up. Romney had the resources to expose their diverse shortcomings in campaign ads, and he ultimately won the support of most conservative Republicans, if only as someone infinitely preferable to Obama. In his march through the primaries, however, Romney had to present himself as “severe conservative” (his words), taking a series of resolutely conservative positions on fiscal, social, and defense issues. On immigration, he staked out a position to the right of his rivals by advocating policies that would make life so difficult for undocumented immigrants that they would “self-deport.” Tacking sharply to the right may have been

FIGURE 6
Republican Voters' Primary Preferences, 2012



Source: See note 25.

²⁷Data are from 188 surveys taken by 16 commercial polling firms and reported at <http://www.pollingreport.com/wh12rep.htm>, accessed 20 September 2012; Romney even ran behind Donald Trump in some early polls.

necessary to secure the nomination, but it led Romney to adopt positions that had little appeal outside the Republican primary electorate.

The Republican primaries also hurt Romney by making him the prime target of the other candidates, who attacked not only Romney the Massachusetts moderate, but also Romney the successful businessman. Downplaying his political career, Romney sought to highlight his success as a private equity manager and investor at Bain Capital, the main source of his estimated \$250 million fortune.²⁸ His demonstrated financial acumen, the argument went, made him the ideal turn-around specialist to get the nation's economy growing and creating jobs. Zeroing in on Romney's presumed strong point, Newt Gingrich and his "super-PAC" allies used Romney's Bain record to portray him as a heartless capitalist, indifferent to the jobs lost and lives ruined by the corporate restructurings that made him so rich.²⁹ Gingrich and others also denounced Romney's Swiss and Cayman Islands bank accounts, and Perry beat up on him for refusing to release more than a couple of years of his tax returns.³⁰

In portraying Romney as a callous, out-of-touch plutocrat, his Republican rivals were doing Obama's work. Romney himself reinforced this image with some ill-considered comments. Well-publicized examples include a reference to his wife's two Cadillacs, calling his \$370,000 in annual speaking fees "not very much," saying that he was "not concerned about the very poor," and proposing a \$10,000 bet in a debate with Perry.³¹ Such comments played into the Democrats' common stereotype of the fat-cat Republican, reminding them why they were Democrats. Pro-Obama ads reiterated this portrait of Romney during the summer between the primaries and the conventions, and by the end of the campaign, very few Democrats viewed him positively. In the four Quinnipiac polls taken in 2011, prior to the first caucus or primary, an average of 18 percent of Democrats expressed a favorable opinion of Romney, 46 percent, an unfavorable opinion. In February 2012, during the primary season, the comparable percentages were 16 and 63. By late April, only 8 percent of

²⁸Michael Luo and Mike McIntyre, "Offshore Tactics Helped Increase Romney's Wealth," *The New York Times*, 1 October 2012, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/02/us/politics/bains-offshore-strategies-grew-romneys-wealth.html?pagewanted=all>, 12 October 2012.

²⁹Julian Zelizer, "Gingrich's Attacks Now Could Help Obama Later," CNN, 16 January 2012, accessed at <http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/16/opinion/zelizer-romney-weakness/index.html>, 6 December 2012.

³⁰Tom Benning, "Democratic Groups Revive Rick Perry's Old Attacks to Demand that Mitt Romney Release his Tax Returns," *Dallas Morning News*, 13 July 2012, accessed at <http://trailblazersblog.dallasnews.com/2012/07/democratic-groups-revive-rick-perrys-old-attacks-to-demand-that-mitt-romney-release-his-tax-returns.html>, 6 December 2012.

³¹Robert Frank, "Romney's Top Ten Wealth Gaffes," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2012, accessed at <http://blogs.wsj.com/wealth/2012/02/28/romneys-top-10-wealth-gaffes>, 6 December 2012.

Democrats still viewed Romney favorably. A final self-inflicted wound came with the release on 17 September of a surreptitious video of Romney telling an audience of wealthy contributors that the 47 percent of Americans who he said would support Obama no matter what were essentially whining, irresponsible freeloaders.³² By the end of September, only 6 percent of Democrats were expressing a favorable opinion of Romney, with 88 percent viewing him unfavorably.³³ Among the public more generally, Romney's net favorability ratings dipped into negative territory during the primary season, and not until the campaign's final weeks did polls find more people viewing him favorably than unfavorably.³⁴

The Republican primaries, the subsequent Republican convention and the platform it adopted, and the selection of Paul Ryan as Romney's running mate, also brought to the fore social issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion rights, and women's access to contraception. Romney took more-moderate positions on some of these issues than the platform or Ryan—for example, allowing for abortion in cases of rape or incest—but he did not effectively separate himself from his party's social conservatism, pledging, for example, to defund Planned Parenthood. He was not helped when a couple of Republican Senate candidates made headlines by offering bizarre (to most Americans) reasons for forbidding women who become pregnant through rape to have abortions.³⁵ The Obama campaign seized the opportunity to attack the Republican Party and, by association, Romney for their “war on women,” shifting the focus away from the economy and onto issue domains more favorable to Obama.

³²The secretly taped video was released by *Mother Jones*; the text reads, “There are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it... . These are people who pay no income tax... . So our message of low taxes doesn't connect... . And so my job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.” Reported at <https://historymusings.wordpress.com/2012/09/19/full-text-campaign-buzz-september-19-2012-mitt-romneys-47-percent-victim-voters-speech-at-may-private-fundraiser-mother-jones-video-transcript/>, accessed 7 December 2012.

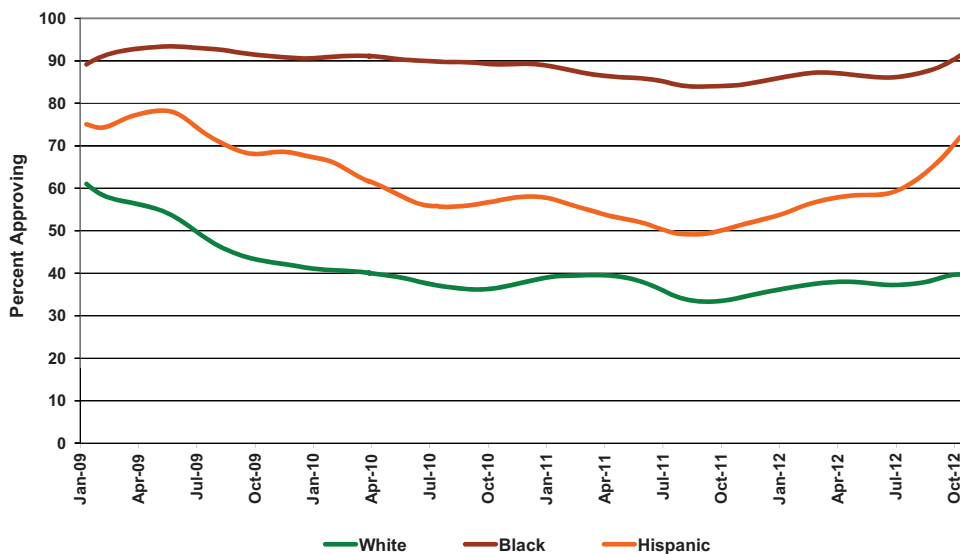
³³Quinnipiac poll reports dated 31 August, 5 October, 2 November, and 22 November 2011, and 22 February, 19 April, 11 July, and 2 October 2012, accessed at <http://www.quinnipiac.edu/institutes-centers/polling-institute/national>, 6 December 2012.

³⁴See the data at <http://www.pollingreport.com/r2.htm>, accessed 10 November 2012.

³⁵Missouri candidate Todd Akin said that “if it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down,” a piece of medical nonsense (*The Fix*, *The Washington Post*, 19 August 2012, accessed at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/08/19/todd-akin-gop-senate-candidate-legitimate-rape-rarely-causes-pregnancy/>), 6 December 2012; Indiana candidate Richard Mourdock expressed the view that “even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen,” accessed at <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/richard-mourdock-rape-comment-puts-romney-defense/story?id=17552263#.UKIak--cglD>, 21 November, 2012.

Obama’s campaign also capitalized on Romney’s call for “self-deportation” by Latino immigrants and his embrace by hard-line anti-immigrant politicians such as Arizona governor Jan Brewer and Phoenix sheriff Joe Arpaio, both Republican Convention attendees. Obama highlighted his support of the “Dream Act,” which, if passed, would open a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants brought in as children, and issued an administrative order stopping the deportation of young people who met the criteria proposed in the Act. This no doubt contributed to the substantial improvement in Obama’s standing observed among Hispanics (Figure 7), which rose 23 points, from 49 percent to 72 percent, over the year preceding the election. Obama’s rating approval among both blacks and non-Hispanic whites also rose 7 points during this period, to 91 percent and 40 percent, albeit from very different starting points. Obama came out in favor of same-sex marriage and instituted changes in the student loan programs that would ease the financial burden on many graduates, steps that appealed to younger voters, and his ratings improved more steeply among the youngest age cohort (18–29) than among other age groups, up 13 points from its low in September 2011 to reach 62 percent in October 2012.³⁶

FIGURE 7
Approval of Obama’s Performance, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Lowess-smoothed trends from 202 Gallup polls, accessed at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122465/Obama-Weekly-Job-Approval.aspx>, 14 November 2012.

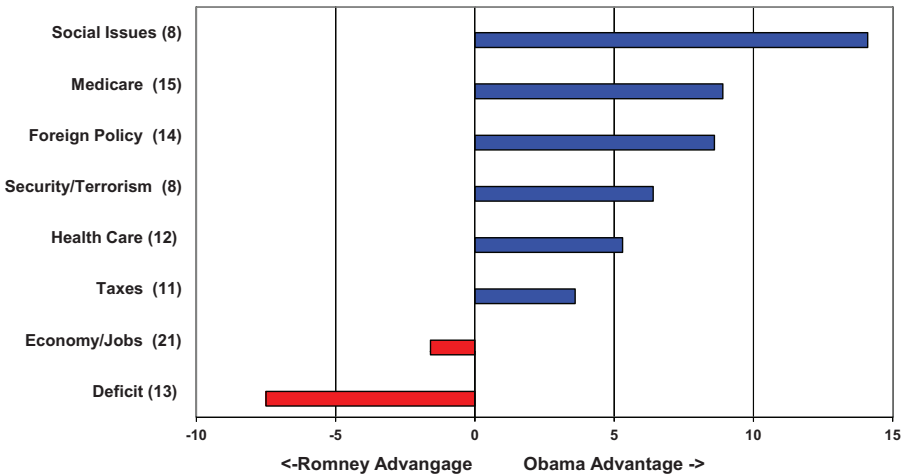
³⁶Among the second youngest cohort (30–44) his ratings rose 11 points (from 41 to 52 percent), for the next (45–64), 7 points (from 40 to 47, and for the oldest, 6 points (from 36 to 42 percent).

The General Election

The economy, and particularly the shortage of jobs, remained Romney’s best and most-frequent argument for replacing Obama, and he did convince a small majority of the overall electorate that he would handle it better than the President. But voters typically gave Obama the nod in every other issue domain except the budget deficit, so any shift in focus away from the economy worked to his advantage. This is the message of Figure 8, which displays the share of respondents saying Obama would do the better job in each issue domain minus the share saying Romney would do the better job, averaged across surveys taken during the last eight weeks of the campaign. Most voters thought Romney would manage the economy and jobs better than Obama, and the economy was the most-important issue to about 60 percent of them. But Romney’s edge on the economy and jobs was small and was offset by disadvantages, some of them quite large, on taxes and all non-economic issues. Obama enjoyed a particularly large advantage on social issues (the questions were about women’s health care, abortion, and same-sex marriage).

Obama was also favored on foreign policy, terrorism, and national security issues. Unlike in 2004 and 2008, these issues were not salient in 2012, but Obama had kept his word regarding Iraq and Afghanistan and could celebrate Osama bin Laden’s death, so this potential minefield remained a plus despite heavy Republican criticism of the administration’s

FIGURE 8
Advantage on Issues, September–October, 2012

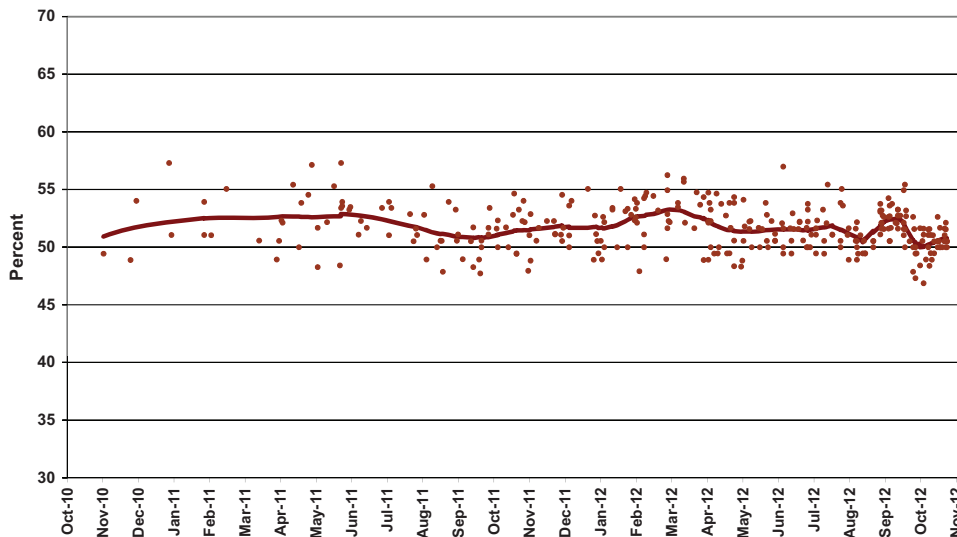


Source: Data are from ABC News/Washington Post, CBS News/New York Times, NBC News/Wall Street Journal, Gallup, Fox News, CNN, ApGfk, Bloomberg, Quinnipiac, Marist-McClatchy, and Kaiser Family Foundation polls taken during September and October 2012 and reported at Pollingreport.com. Note: The entries are average percentages of respondents saying Obama would handle the issue better minus the average percentages saying Romney would handle the issue better; the number of surveys averaged is in parentheses.

handling of a fatal September terrorist attack on American officials in Libya. Health care was also a plus for Obama even though the public remained thoroughly divided on “Obamacare,” for Romney never articulated an alternative that most people found more attractive. Beyond such issues, voters consistently found Obama more likeable, sympathetic, and consistent in his positions than Romney.

The vote. Like Romney, Obama had very little cross-party appeal. His approval ratings among Republicans in September and October, averaging 8.6 percent, were the lowest a president seeking reelection has ever received from the other party’s identifiers, and the exit poll confirmed what every pre-election survey had found, that very few Republicans would cast a vote for Obama (only 6 percent reported doing so in the exit poll). With partisan divisions so firmly drawn, the 2012 presidential contest was close from beginning to end, with an unusually small proportion of voters saying they were undecided³⁷ and relatively little movement in the polls. When the data are smoothed, Obama held a lead throughout, though many individual surveys had him behind (Figure 9). Obama’s lead widened briefly after the

FIGURE 9
Support for Obama among Respondents Expressing a Preference



Source: 325 Surveys by 22 national survey organizations reported at Pollingreport.com and the HuffingtonPost websites during the campaigns.

³⁷Reid J. Epstein, “The Disappearing Undecided Voter,” *Politico*, 9 August 2012, accessed at <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0812/79504.html>, 9 December 2012.

conventions and the “47 percent” video, but Romney came back by outperforming Obama in the first debate, presenting himself as the moderate governor, kept under wraps during the primaries, who had worked effectively with Democrats in Massachusetts and who would not actually reduce the tax burden on the rich or give Wall Street uncontrolled license. Romney’s forceful showing contrasted with Obama’s lackluster performance and gave him a bounce in the polls, but mainly by exciting Republicans, who suddenly began appearing more frequently in the surveys.³⁸ Obama did better in the next two debates, and Romney’s momentum, if it had ever existed, vanished.

Most of the final week’s polls put Obama ahead but only slightly; his final margin of 3.7 points was larger than nearly all of them projected. The surveys that significantly underestimated Obama’s vote and predicted a Romney win, feeding the Romney campaign’s optimism, did so because they miscalculated the electorate. All surveys projected very high levels of party line voting. The breakdown among independents was more volatile, but on average they tilted toward Romney by a few points. The outcome thus depended on who turned out to vote. Romney’s pollsters and some public polls, notably Gallup, assumed the electorate would look demographically like 2008, with a distribution of partisans like 2004. They were wrong. Table 1, for example, compares Gallup’s projected electorate and the electorate measured by the exit poll. Gallup anticipated an electorate substantially whiter, older, and more Republican than the one detected by the exit poll, because its “likely voter” formula screened out too many younger, minority, and therefore more-Democratic respondents. Gallup’s tracking poll during the final month of the campaign reported a wide difference between presidential preferences reported by registered

³⁸For example, the high-quality Pew survey showed a dramatic 6.4-point shift in Romney’s favor after the first debate, but this was entirely the result of a 7.3 point shift in the distribution of party identifiers (including partisan learners) in favor of the Republicans. The proportion of Democrats saying they would vote for Obama actually went up between these two surveys—from 92 percent to 94 percent; Republicans were unchanged (91 percent for Romney in both), independents moved 2 points in Romney’s direction. The following table shows how presidential preferences and the distribution of partisans moved in lock step in the last four Pew surveys. In the final survey, Obama received 51.6 percent of the two-party vote, very close to the actual result, 51.9 percent.

<i>Final Day of Survey</i>	<i>Percent Democratic of Partisans (Leaners Included)</i>	<i>Percent Preferring Obama (Undecided/Other Excluded)</i>
9/16/2012	54.7	54.2
10/7/2012	47.4	47.8
10/28/2012	50.5	50.0
11/3/2012	51.9	51.6

TABLE 1
Projected and Actual Electorates, 2012

	<i>Gallup Electorate (Projected)</i>	<i>Exit Poll Electorate</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Male	48	47	-1
Female	52	53	1
Non-Hispanic White	78	72	-6
Nonwhite	20	26	6
Black	11	13	2
Hispanic	7	10	3
18-29 Years	13	19	6
30-49 Years	34	37	3
50-64 Years	31	28	-3
65+ Years	22	16	-6
Democrat	35	38	+3
Independent	29	29	0
Republican	36	32	-4

Source: Gallup data are from Jeffrey Jones, "2012 Electorate Looks Like 2008," 26 October 2012, accessed at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158399/2012-electorate-looks-like-2008.aspx>, 6 December 2012; exit poll data accessed at <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/race/president>, 6 December 2012.

voters, who on average gave Obama a 4.8-point lead, and likely voters, who gave Romney a 3.7-point lead, a difference of 8.5 points. The actual vote was much closer to figure for unscreened registered voters than for likely voters.

Many analysts, especially in the Republican camp, believed that the enthusiasm for Obama that had sent young people and minorities flocking to the polls in 2008 had subsided, depressed by economic problems that fell disproportionately on these groups. This did not happen, for several reasons. First, as we have seen, Democrats' regard for Obama's performance grew across the board during the election year, particularly among young and minority voters (recall the trends in Figures 2 and 7); their commitment to Obama turned out to be considerably stronger than anticipated. Second, the Romney candidacy added a mobilizing push (from social issues and immigration) to Obama's pull with Democratic-leaning groups. And third, the Obama campaign's "ground game" for identifying and mobilizing supporters, an effort that focused on battleground states, was evidently very effective and much superior to Romney's.³⁹ Of the nine states considered to be in play in late 2012 (Colorado, Florida, New Hampshire, Virginia, North Carolina, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nevada, and Ohio), Obama lost only North Carolina; North Carolina and Indiana were the only states Obama won in 2008 but lost in 2012. The number of voters

³⁹Rebecca Sinderbrand, "Analysis: Obama Won With a Better Ground Game," CNN Politics, 7 November 2012, accessed at <http://www.cnn.com/2012/11/07/politics/analysis-why-obama-won/index.html>, 9 December 2012.

participating in 2012 was lower than in 2008 nationwide, but slightly higher in the battleground states.⁴⁰

Both Obama and Romney were supported by more than \$1.1 billion in campaign spending, more than enough money for saturation campaigning where it might matter. Obama had the advantage of controlling more of his resources directly via his campaign committee (67 percent) and national party (26 percent), with only 9 percent controlled by outside groups that are forbidden, in theory, to coordinate with the campaign. In contrast, 24 percent of Romney's financial help came from outside groups, with only 42 percent controlled by his campaign and another 34 percent by his party.⁴¹ The volume of outside money raised and spent by party allies was much higher than in any previous election, especially on the Republican side, where just three "Super PACs," two run by veteran Republican operatives Karl Rove and Ed Gillespie and a third by former Romney staffers, accounted for more than \$270 million of the total spent to defeat Obama. Romney did not lose for lack of financial support, but some observers believe Obama's money was better spent, particularly in the summer ads attacking Romney's Bain record and on the campaign's highly sophisticated ground game.⁴² The vast majority of outside spending went for attack ads, many of extremely dubious accuracy, but there is little evidence that they change the minds of many voters; their most likely effect was a hardening of party lines.

The demographics of the vote. Party lines were unquestionably hardened in 2012. The trends in presidential approval noted earlier foreshadowed the shape of Obama's electoral coalition as documented in the exit polls quite precisely (Table 2). Obama's winning margin came from women, minorities, and young people, as well as people at the opposite ends of

⁴⁰According to data collected by David Wasserman of the Cook Report, the raw number of voters in the battleground states was up 0.3 percent, and in the other states was down 3.2 percent; overall, vote totals were 2.0 percent lower than in 2008; accessed at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/1v?key=0AjYj9mXEL0_QdHpla01oWE1jOFZRBnhJZkZpVFNKeVE&toomany=true#gid=19, 17 December 2012.

⁴¹Gregory Giroux, "Bloomberg by the Numbers: \$2.23 bln," 12 December 2012, accessed at <http://go.bloomberg.com/political-capital/2012-12-12/bloomberg-by-the-numbers-2-23-bln>, 12 December 2012; on the advantage of controlling your own spending, see Jeremy W. Peters, Nicholas Confessore, and Sarah Cohen, "Obama is Even in TV AD Race Despite PACS," *The New York Times*, 28 October 2012, accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/29/us/politics/obama-is-even-in-tv-ad-race-despite-pacs.html>, 10 December 2012.

⁴²Sara Murray and Patrick O'Connor, "How Race Slipped Away From Romney," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 November 2012, accessed at online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142412788-7324073504578105340729306074.html, 11 December 2012; Tom Hamburger, "Romney Spent More on TV Ads, Got Less," *The Washington Post*, 12 December 2012, accessed at http://www.washingtonpost.com/?nid=top_news&reload=true, 12 December 2012.

TABLE 2

The Electoral Coalitions of the Presidential and House Candidates, 2012

	Obama Approval Ratings ^a	Percent Voting for			
		Barack Obama	House Democrat	Mitt Romney	House Republican
Democrat (38)	91	92	94	7	6
Republican (32)	8	6	5	93	94
Independent (29)	49	45	44	50	51
Men (47)	46	45	45	55	53
Women (53)	54	55	55	44	44
Married (31)	—	46	46	53	53
Unmarried (22)	—	67	68	31	31
White (72)	39	39	39	59	59
Black (13)	90	93	91	6	8
Hispanic/Latino (10)	70	71	68	27	30
Asian (3)	—	73	73	26	25
18–29 (19)	62	60	60	37	38
30–44 (27)	51	52	51	45	46
45–64 (38)	47	47	47	51	51
65 or over (16)	42	44	44	56	55
High school (21)	53	51	53	48	45
Some college (29)	48	49	48	48	50
College graduate (29)	45	47	46	51	52
Post-graduate (18)	55	55	55	42	43

Source: Gallup data accessed at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122465/Obama-Weekly-Job-Approval.aspx>, 10 December 2012; the 2012 national exit poll, accessed at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-exit-poll>, 18 November 2012.

Note: The percentage of respondents in each category is in parentheses.

^aAverage of Gallup polls taken between 1 October and 4 November 2012.

the education spectrum, all of whose ratings of Obama improved significantly over the election year, ending up at percentages that were closely matched by Obama's estimated share of votes from each group. But these patterns are largely a consequence of the partisan trends depicted in Figure 2. Obama's very high standing among his own partisans was matched by their very high levels of party loyalty. Romney also won overwhelming support from his own partisans both in pre-election polls and in the exit poll, and he was also favored by independents in both. But the Democratic turnout advantage made Obama the winner.

The exit poll also found that Romney retained a slight advantage on the economy among voters, although not enough to win. People reported voting overwhelmingly for the candidate they thought would do a better job on the economy, but the few deviants benefited Obama. Romney was favored on this question, 49 percent to 48 percent, but 4 percent of those who favored Romney voted for Obama, whereas only 1 percent who favored

Obama voted for Romney. Voters who thought the economy was the most-important problem (59 percent) opted for Romney, but by a fairly narrow margin, 51–47. Respondents were also asked about the biggest economic problem facing people like themselves; a plurality (38 percent) answered “unemployment,” and those who did gave Obama a 10-point margin, 54–44. Romney was, not surprisingly, the big winner among those who said “taxes” (14 percent), 66–32. In short, Romney did benefit from Obama’s primary liability, the economy, but too little to offset Obama’s appeal to mobilized Democrats. The Obama campaign succeeded in expanding the issue agenda beyond the economy, reframing the choice for many voters in terms more favorable to Obama’s candidacy by focusing on social issues, immigration, and Romney’s record as a corporate raider. Indeed, it executed exactly the kind of strategy that, according to Vavreck’s analysis, offers the only hope to a candidate burdened by a poor economy.⁴³ By making this strategy work, the Obama campaign altered the weights on the “fundamentals” that Robert Erikson and Christopher Wlezien identify as primary drivers of election results, reducing the importance of the objective economy and increasing the impact of partisanship on voters’ decisions.⁴⁴

THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS: REDISTRICTING, POLARIZATION, AND PARTISANSHIP

The powerful partisan forces that shaped the presidential contest also dominated the congressional races. Obama’s victory was helpful to his party’s congressional candidates, but its relative narrowness, and the conditions that produced it, precluded the sort of strongly pro-Democratic national tide that had given Democrats control of both chambers in 2006 and 2008. Democratic candidates won a majority of major-party national votes cast for House candidates, their share rising from 46.6 percent in 2010 to 50.5 percent in 2012.⁴⁵ But their seat share grew only from 44.4 percent to 46.2 percent, in part because Republican-controlled state governments⁴⁶ were able to enhance their Party’s already-formidable structural advantage in the redistricting that followed the 2010 census. Combined with a remarkably high level of consistency between underlying district partisanship and House election results, the partisan configuration

⁴³Vavreck, *The Message Matters*, 33–35 and 164–166.

⁴⁴Robert S. Erikson and Christopher Wlezien, *The Timeline of Presidential Campaigns: How Campaigns Do (and Do Not) Matter* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), chap. 6.

⁴⁵The 2012 figure could be revised slightly when final vote tallies are published.

⁴⁶Defined as those states with the state house and both legislative chambers in Republican hands and in which the legislature and governor have jurisdiction over redistricting.

of House districts served to insulate the Republican House majority from the effects of the Democratic national victory.

Senate elections were also determined largely by partisanship, even though Democrats managed to win in five states Obama lost decisively, for despite these victories, the consistency between Senate and presidential results across states reached its highest level in 2012 in at least 60 years. The two sets of elections reproduced a Congress divided between the parties, not because voters deliberately opted for such an outcome, but because of the way in which the electoral system aggregated their votes. The results also left the congressional parties at least as polarized as they had been before the election.

The House Elections

The decennial reallocation and redrawing of House districts is always destabilizing, and 2012 was no exception. As is common in a year ending in “2,” more incumbents than usual left voluntarily (43) or lost primaries (13, 8 to other incumbents they faced because of redistricting). Five other pairs of incumbents squared off in the general election; these cases aside, incumbents were about as successful as usual in the general election, with 94 percent defeating their challengers. Turnover was slightly higher than normal for a redistricting year, with a total of 83 new members taking office in 2013.

More important than the normal shake-up occasioned by the shuffling of district lines was the way in which redistricting enhanced the Republican Party’s already impressive structural advantage in House elections. The advantage has existed for decades and lies in the fact that the Party’s regular voters are distributed more efficiently across House districts than are regular Democratic voters. Although previous Republican gerrymanders had contributed to the advantage,⁴⁷ it exists mainly because minority, single, young, gay, and highly educated people who routinely vote Democratic are concentrated in urban districts that produce lopsided Democratic majorities and hence many “wasted” votes. Republican voters are spread more evenly across suburbs, smaller cities, and rural areas, so that fewer Republican votes are wasted in highly skewed districts. This advantage has grown more consequential over time with the increase in electoral partisanship, a trend that accelerated sharply in 2012.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Gary C. Jacobson, “Terror, Terrain, and Turnout: Explaining the 2002 Midterm Elections,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (Spring 2003): 9–10.

⁴⁸Gary C. Jacobson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 8th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2013), 17–19.

The Republicans' sweeping national victory in 2010 gave them an opportunity to strengthen their advantage by giving them control of the redistricting process in 18 states, with a total of 202 House seats; Democrats controlled the process in only 6 states, with a total of 47 seats.⁴⁹ Republicans used this gerrymandering opportunity to shore up some of their marginal districts, adding Republican voters where their seats were most vulnerable. This is clear from an analysis of Cook Political Report's partisan voting index, computed as the difference between the average district-level presidential vote in 2004 and 2008 and the national presidential vote averages for these elections.⁵⁰ For example, with the national average of the Democratic presidential vote in these two elections at 51.2 percent, a district in which the two-election average was 54.2 percent would have a partisan voting index of +3, whereas a district in which the average was 48.2 percent would have an index of -3.

Republicans already enjoyed a substantial advantage by this measure before the 2012 redistricting (Table 3), with 210 Republican-leaning districts (defined here as having a partisan voting index less than -2), compared with 175 Democratic-leaning districts (index greater than 2); the remaining 50 districts were balanced, with indexes between -2 and +2. After redistricting, there were 11 more Republican-leaning districts, 5 fewer Democratic-leaning districts, and 6 fewer balanced districts. This result was obviously intended; where Republicans controlled redistricting, the party gained 16 favorable districts while the Democrats lost 1 and balanced districts were reduced by 11. Where Republicans did not control the process, both parties lost a few favorable districts and the number of balanced districts increased by 5.

Democrats were able to overcome the Republicans' (then smaller) structural advantage in 2006 and 2008 to pick up enough Republican-leaning seats to reach a majority; after 2008, they held 52 districts where the partisan voting index was -3 or less. But this required two strong successive pro-Democratic national tides, and they lost 41 of these seats in 2010 (plus another 18 in balanced districts and 5 in Democratic-leaning districts) when national conditions shifted strongly in favor of the Republicans. After the 2012 redistricting, Republicans could win the 218 seats required for a majority by winning only Republican-leaning seats, whereas Democrats could win all of the Democratic-leaning districts and all

⁴⁹In 12 of the remaining states, the parties shared control; 7 were redistricted by commissions, 7 were single-district states.

⁵⁰David Wasserman, "Introducing the 2012 Cook Political Report Partisan Vote Index," *The Cook Political Report*, 11 October 2012, accessed at <http://cookpolitical.com/house/pvi>, 15 October 2012.

TABLE 3
Control of Redistricting and Changes in District Partisanship, 2010–2012

<i>Control of Redistricting</i>	<i>District Partisan Advantage</i>		
	<i>Democrat >2</i>	<i>Balanced</i>	<i>Republican >2</i>
<i>All Districts</i>			
2010	175	50	210
2012	170	44	221
Change	-5	-6	+11
<i>Republican control</i>			
2010	51	24	123
2012	50	13	139
Change	-1	-11	+16
<i>Other control</i>			
2010	124	26	87
2012	120	31	82
Change	-4	+5	-5

Note: District partisan advantage is based on the Cook partisan voting index; see the text for a description of the index.

balanced districts and still fall four seats short of a majority. The Democrats' only hope lay in a powerfully favorable national tide, and none was on the horizon in 2012. By the usual measures used to gauge partisan prospects in House elections—the state of the economy and the president's approval ratings—neither party enjoyed a significant advantage, and standard models predicted that the Democrats would pick up a few House seats, as they indeed did, but nothing like the 25 they needed to reach a majority.⁵¹

Partisan consistency

Once the votes were counted, House election results matched district leanings as measured by the partisan voting index with astonishing consistency (Table 4). Only 10 Democrats won Republican-leaning districts in 2012, and not a single Republican won in a Democratic-leaning district. The balanced districts were divided almost perfectly in half. For comparison, consider that in 2008, 14.8 percent of the results went against the partisan grain; in 2010, the proportion fell to 5.4 percent; in 2012, it was down to 2.5 percent. Among the 426 districts with any partisan

⁵¹A model including as independent variables real income change, presidential approval, and the “exposure” of the president's party—the percentage of seats it held above or below an eight-election moving average—predicted Democrats would pick up three seats in 2012; a model based on the relative quality of each party's challengers—assumed to be both an indication of and contributor to the fulfillment of electoral expectations, predicted a thirteen-seat Democratic gain. The models are in Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 167 and 181.

TABLE 4
District Partisanship and House Election Results, 2012

<i>Cook Partisan Voting Index Advantage</i>	<i>Won by Democrat</i>	<i>Won by Republican</i>	<i>Number of Districts</i>
Democrat >2	170	0	170
Republican >2	10	211	221
Balanced	21	23	44
Total	201	234	435

Note: The Cook partisan voting index advantage is described in the text.

leanings at all (those with partisan voting indexes other than zero), 95.5 percent produced outcomes that were consistent with that underlying district partisanship in 2012.

The district's partisan composition as measured by the index predicted not only winners but also vote shares very accurately. The correlation between the index and the major-party House vote share was .95, and a regression equation estimating the vote purely as a function of the index thus explains 90 percent of the vote's variance.⁵² When incumbency status is included as a second predictor variable, incumbency is estimated to be worth an additional 4.8 percent of the vote and the equation explains 93 percent of the total variance. Details are in the Appendix. Comparable data from previous elections underline just how extraordinary these results are. For this comparison, I use the single-election presidential vote rather than the composite partisan voting index as the measure of district partisanship to allow for comparability with earlier election years for which the index is not available.⁵³ Table 5 shows the results from elections going back to 1980.⁵⁴ The connection between presidential and House elections has been growing since the early 1990s but jumped to a new high during Obama's presidency. The 2012 presidential vote in the district by itself correctly predicts the winner of 94.6 percent of the 2012 House contests. Also notice that as partisan coherence in voting patterns has risen, the value of incumbency (calculated as described in the Appendix) has fallen. Estimates of the incumbency advantage using the district presidential vote as the baseline are about a third higher than estimates for the same years

⁵²In this case, the percentage of variance explained is simply the square of the correlation coefficient, turned into a percentage; .95 squared is .90 or 90 percent.

⁵³The Pearson correlation between the partisan voting index and Obama's 2008 vote, which is one of its two components, is .99, so this is in no way problematic.

⁵⁴For midterm elections, the presidential vote is from the immediately preceding presidential election; this relationship is, as often as not, stronger at the midterm than it was two years earlier.

TABLE 5

The District-Level Presidential Vote and House Results, 2000–2012

<i>House Election Year</i>	<i>Presidential Vote Year</i>	<i>House/Presidential Vote Correlation</i>	<i>% Winners Correctly Predicted</i>	<i>Value of Incumbency</i>
1980	1980	0.67	70.8	13.1
1982	1980	0.69	76.3	11.5
1984	1984	0.71	76.8	13.1
1986	1984	0.63	74.7	15.4
1988	1988	0.65	74.3	15.4
1990	1988	0.62	73.8	11.6
1992	1992	0.70	69.8	9.9
1994	1992	0.75	80.0	10.6
1996	1996	0.83	79.3	9.4
1998	1996	0.82	80.8	10.9
2000	2000	0.80	80.4	12.1
2002	2000	0.81	86.2	12.6
2004	2004	0.84	86.4	11.3
2006	2004	0.84	83.5	9.9
2008	2008	0.85	80.7	9.6
2010	2008	0.92	91.3	6.8
2012	2012	0.95	94.6	4.8

Source: 2012 presidential vote data are from David Nir and reported at <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/11/19/1163009/-Daily-Kos-Elections-presidential-results-by-congressional-district-for-the-2012-2008-elections?detail=hide>; the other data were compiled by the author.

Note: The percent of winners correctly predicted is derived from logit equations for each year comparable to the equation in the first column of Table A1 in the Appendix; the value of incumbency is derived from estimates of regression equations comparable to the equation in the fourth column of Table A1 in the Appendix.

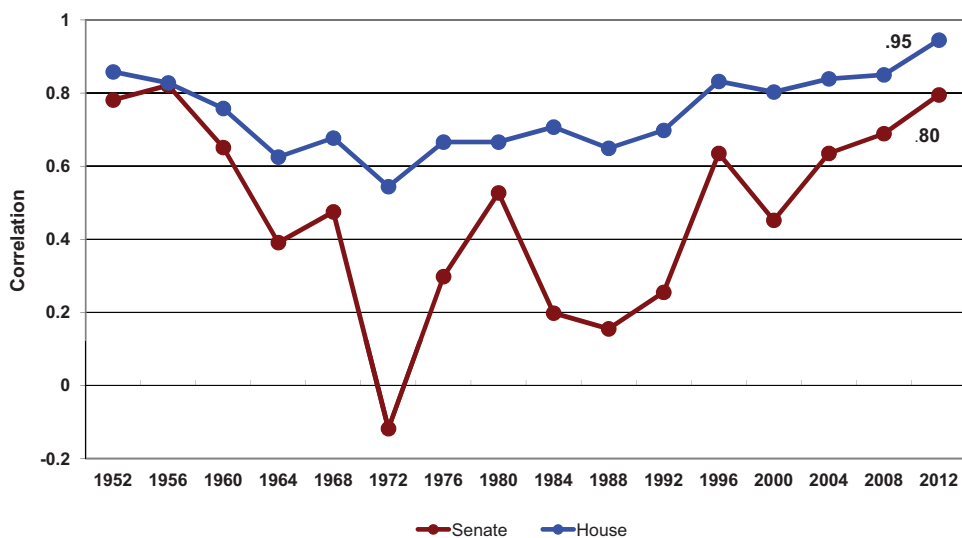
produced by more elaborate methods. Those methods are not applicable to years ending in “2,” however, because they require inter-election comparisons across stable districts, and a large majority of districts have their boundaries altered after the census.⁵⁵ When the approach used here is applied to all 33 congressional election years going back to 1952, the estimated incumbency advantage for 2012 of 4.8 percentage points is the smallest in the entire series. Figure 10 displays the trend in correlations between the state and district level presidential and House and Senate votes over this time period.

The obvious implication of these results—that the 2012 House elections were highly nationalized, partisan, and president-centered events—is strongly supported by findings from the national exit poll. First, voters in

⁵⁵The two most widely used approaches are the “Slurge” (a combination of the “sophomore surge” and “retirement slump” and the Gelman–King regression model; both approaches rely on measures that explicitly or implicitly compare the current to the previous vote share won by the party’s candidate in the identical district; for a description of these models and the estimates they generate, see Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 32–35.

FIGURE 10

Correlations Between the Presidential Congressional Vote at the District and State Levels, 1952–2012



Source: Compiled by author.

the House elections as well as the presidential election exhibited the highest level of party loyalty ever recorded in an exit poll, with 94 percent of both Democrats and Republicans voting for their party's candidate (see Table 2). Second, the parties' respective House electoral coalitions matched their presidential candidates' electoral coalitions almost perfectly. In particular, the coalition that produced Obama's majority—women, minorities, and younger voters—reappeared largely intact in the House electorate. Third, the 2012 exit poll reports the lowest incidence of ticket splitting—voting for a Democrat for president and a Republican for U.S. representative, or vice versa—since exit polling began. Only 6.5 percent of the voters interviewed said they split their tickets in 2012; the previous low was 10.0 percent (in both 2004 and 2008); the 1976–2008 average was 14.6 percent. Current (nearly complete) data suggest that the proportion of split districts—those that supported different parties' candidates in the presidential and House elections—will reach its lowest level since the requisite data first became available in 1952 no more than 6 percent; the previous low was 14 percent in 2004.⁵⁶ Finally, the consistency between opinions of the presidential and the House vote—approving of Obama and voting Democratic, or

⁵⁶Estimates of the district presidential winner are from David Wasserman, "2012 U.S. House Popular Vote Tracker," accessed at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/cc?key=0AjYj9mXEL0_QdHZCbzJocGtxYkR6OTdZbzZwRUFvS3c#gid=0, 10 December 2012.

disapproving and voting Republican—at 90 percent, was the highest on record.⁵⁷ In sum, both survey and aggregate electoral data identify the 2012 House elections as the most partisan, nationalized, president-centered elections in at least 60 years.

Money in the house elections. The House campaigns that preceded these overwhelmingly party-driven results cost at least \$1.35 billion, including \$871 million spent by the candidates' campaigns, \$116 million spent independently by national party committees, and \$148 million spent independently by non-party organizations.⁵⁸ As usual, campaign spending, especially independent spending by parties and groups, was heavily concentrated in the most-competitive districts. Candidates in the 63 contests won with 55 percent or less of the vote were supported by an average of about \$4 million in spending, nearly half from outside-party and PAC sources. As in other recent elections, nearly every potentially viable candidate was amply funded, and no more than a couple of districts could be considered missed opportunities for the losing party.⁵⁹

The huge investments by candidates and outside entities in the competitive districts basically produced a standoff. In the 33 closest races (those won with less than 53 percent of the major-party vote), the winner outspent the loser in about half, 17, to be precise. The 10 Democrats who won Republican-leaning districts were amply financed, with an average of \$3.9 million in support, 43 percent of it from outside sources, and most of them probably would have lost without such heavy investments. Still, in 6 of the 10 races, the losing Republican opponent was the better-funded candidate; these 10 contests were not determined by the balance of finances. How were these Democrats able to win against the partisan grain? Four were challengers who defeated Republican incumbents in Democratic-trending districts, where, despite partisan voting indexes of -3 or -4 , Obama had won between 50 and 53 percent of the vote in 2008.⁶⁰ Five were veteran incumbents with strong local ties and moderate voting

⁵⁷Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 227.

⁵⁸These are estimates; data on final campaign finance are not yet available; see “2012 Election Will Reach \$6 Billion, Center for Responsive Politics Predicts,” accessed at <http://www.opensecrets.org/news/2012/10/2012-election-spending-will-reach-6.html>, 20 November, 2011; and Campaign Finance Institute, “Early Post-Election Look at Money in the House and Senate Elections of 2012,” accessed at http://www.cfinst.org/Press/PReleases/12-11-09/Early_Post-Election_Look_at_Money_in_the_House_and_Senate_Election-s_of_2012.aspx, 20 November 2011.

⁵⁹Gary C. Jacobson, “The Congress: Partisanship and Polarization,” in Michael Nelson, ed., *The Elections of 2012* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2013), 154–160.

⁶⁰They are Ami Bera (CA-7), over Dan Lundgren, Raul Ruiz (CA-36), over Mary Bono Mack, Joe Garcia (FL-26), over David Rivera, and Pete Gallego (TX-23), over Quico Canseco.

records; for example, all five had identical 92 percent ratings from the National Rifle Association, and four had its endorsement.⁶¹ Another was a former member of Congress, also with a moderate voting record, who won an open seat in 2012 after having lost to a Tea Party favorite in 2010.⁶²

The most-remarkable thing about these victories, however, is their rarity. At one time, centrist Democrats with moderate-to-conservative views on economic and social issues regularly won Republican-leaning districts. Not any more. As the parties have become more polarized and citizens have sorted themselves into the party with the best ideological fit, candidates have found it increasingly difficult to build electoral coalitions across party lines. The massive influx of outside spending by national party organizations and PACs also serves to nationalize campaigns, heighten partisanship, and undermine election strategies based on independence and soliciting the “personal vote.” These effects are not invariably registered at the polls, however. In addition to the handful of House races, several of the 2012 Senate elections showed that, under certain circumstances, local ties still trump partisanship and nationalization, even with huge infusions of outside money.

The Senate Elections

At the beginning of the election year, the Democrats’ grip on the Senate seemed tenuous. Twenty-three of the seats that comprised their 53–47 majority were on the ballot in 2012; Republicans had to defend only 10 seats. Working in the Democrats’ favor, however, was that 18 of their contested seats were in states won by Obama in 2008, as were 4 of the Republicans seats. In the end, Democrats held onto 20 of the 21 seats in states Obama won in 2008 and 2012, losing only in Nevada. They also won seats in 5 of the 12 states holding Senate elections whose electoral votes went to Mitt Romney.

Outside spending played an even larger financial role in competitive Senate contests than in comparable House contests. Democratic Senate candidates were helped by \$51 and \$88 million, respectively, in party and non-party outside spending; the total was more than double the outside spending for Democratic candidates in 2010. The comparable figures for Republican candidates, \$32 million and \$137 million, amounted to a 60 percent increase over 2010. According to the financial data available to date, for 17 candidates individually, and for both candidates combined in

⁶¹The five are John Barrow (GA-12), Collin Peterson (MN-7), Mike McIntyre (NC-7) Jim Matheson (UT-4), and Nick Rahall (WV-2); only Matheson not win the NRA’s endorsement.

⁶²Ann Kirkpatrick (AZ-1).

nine states, spending by outside groups exceeded spending by the candidates' campaigns (up from five candidates and three states in 2010). Virginia led the way, with an astonishing \$51 million spent by outsiders along with the \$30 million spent by the candidates, but on a per-voting-age-resident basis, the most-extravagant races were the low-population states of Montana (\$24 million in outside spending, \$43 million total) and North Dakota (\$16 million in outside spending, \$26 million total). Eighty-two percent of the outside money was spent in the 11 races won with less than 55 percent of the vote; nearly half the spending in these races came from outside sources. As usual, more than 80 percent of the outside money was spent attacking the opponent rather than extolling the favored candidate.

Did these lavish investments by the parties and their auxiliaries tip the scales? Not noticeably. The candidate supported by the larger share of outside spending won only about half the time (15 winners, 14 losers), but only because most Democrats won regardless of who receive more outside support. Democrats won 11 of the 13 contests with the balance of outside spending on their side, but they also won 12 of 16 contests where the balance favored the Republicans. Looking only at the 11 contests won with less than 55 percent, Democrats won three of four where they had an outside spending edge and six of seven where they did not.⁶³ The resources devoted to these races were sufficiently balanced—and abundant—that their effect was a wash, and the outcomes were determined by other factors.

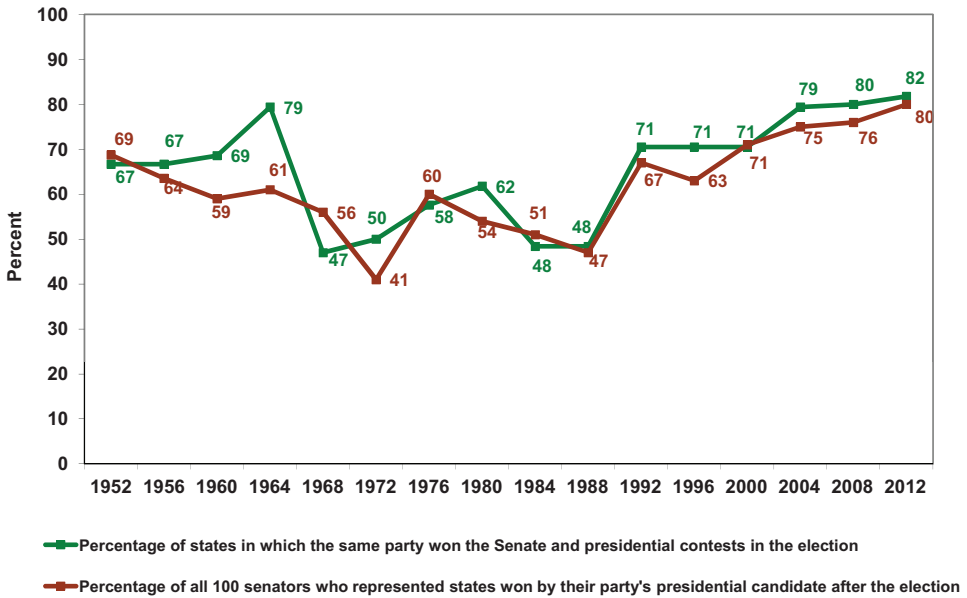
The most important of these factors was, as in the House races, local partisanship. Despite the five Democratic victories in states won by Romney, the 2012 Senate elections, like their House counterparts, were, on the whole, highly partisan affairs. Notice that in Figure 10, the correlation between the state-level vote for president and senator was .80, the highest since the 1950s. Moreover, as Figure 11 shows, in 2012, the share of Senate seats won by the party of the state's presidential winner reached its highest level in at least 60 years, as did the total share of seats held after the election by the party of the state's presidential winner.⁶⁴

Winning against the partisan grain. The coincidence of state-level president and Senate outcomes would have been even greater had two

⁶³If candidate as well as outside spending is included, the story is almost identical: Democrats won four of five races where they held an overall financial advantage and five of six where Republicans held the advantage.

⁶⁴Angus King, who won election from Maine as an independent but enjoyed wide Democratic support and organizes with the Senate Democrats, is treated as a Democrat in this analysis. If Maine is dropped, the percentage of consistent results drops from 81.8 to 81.2, still the highest for the period covered.

FIGURE 11
Consistency of Presidential and Senate Elections Results, 1952–2012



candidates backed by the Republicans' Tea Party faction and other far-right groups not won nominations over more-conventional conservatives favored by the Party establishment. Richard Mourdock defeated veteran Republican incumbent Richard Lugar, a strong favorite for reelection, by attacking him from the right in the Indiana primary. Todd Akin, a member of the House's Tea Party Caucus, won the Missouri primary against a more-mainstream Republican and another Tea Party favorite for the nomination to challenge Claire McCaskill, widely considered the most vulnerable Democrat running in 2012. Both Akin's and Mourdock's extreme views—exemplified but by no means exhausted by their ideas about rape⁶⁵—and their other shortcomings as candidates gave the Democrats two seats that would otherwise have gone to Republicans. Had these nominations been won by Lugar and Akin's mainstream rival, the match between Senate and presidential outcomes would have been 88 percent.

The other three Democrats who won in Romney states did so without (inadvertent) Tea Party help. As noted earlier, two of these races, in

⁶⁵See note 35.

Montana and North Dakota, generated by far the highest per-voter spending. Yet despite saturation advertising campaigns by national Republicans and allied “super PACs” devoted to tying them to Obama, who lost Montana by 13 points and North Dakota by 20, the Democratic candidates, Jon Tester and Heidi Heitkamp, prevailed. One reason is that they, too, were supported by gushers of outside money. More important, however, was that they were effective campaigners competing in states ideally suited to personal politicking. Both states are lightly populated and accustomed to face-to-face, friends-and-neighbors politics. Moreover, both Democratic candidates had long political careers in their states (Heitkamp as North Dakota’s attorney general, Tester as the president of the Montana senate and then a U.S. Senator) and were already thoroughly familiar to their electorates. As known quantities, they could credibly stake out positions separating themselves from the President and national Democratic Party. Joe Manchin, the other Democrat who won a state that went to Romney, was a popular former governor of West Virginia elected to the Senate in 2010. He, too, had been careful to distance himself from the Obama administration and won easy reelection in a state that gave Obama only 35.5 percent of its vote.

The lone Republican victory in a state won by Obama belonged to Dean Heller, appointed in May 2011 to replace Nevada Senator John Ensign, who had resigned under pressure after involvement in a sex scandal. Heller won by a margin of 1.2 points over Shelley Berkeley, a U.S. Representative who was hurt by ethics charges sufficiently credible to be taken up by the House Ethics Committee. The Obama campaign’s highly effective voter-mobilization operation, while delivering the President a solid majority in Nevada, was unable to bring her along. In several other closely contested states, however, Obama’s campaign effort and popularity probably helped the Democrat to victory. Tim Kaine’s margin over George Allen in Virginia’s \$81 million extravaganza, 5 percentage points, coincided with Obama’s 4-point victory, and Kaine certainly benefited from the Obama campaign’s superior mobilization drive.⁶⁶ In Ohio, another battleground state featuring a major Obama turnout effort, incumbent Democrat Sherrod Brown won about the same share of votes (50.3 percent) as Obama (50.1 percent), although his margin in major party votes was larger (5 points

⁶⁶Molly Ball, “Obama’s Edge: The Ground Game That Could Put Him Over the Top,” *The Atlantic*, 12 October 2012, accessed at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/10/obamas-edge-the-ground-game-that-could-put-him-over-the-top/264031/>, 23 November 2012; Dana Davidson, “McDonnell: ‘They Beat Us on the Ground,’” CNN Politicalicker, accessed at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/10/obamas-edge-the-ground-game-that-could-put-him-over-the-top/264031/>, 23 November 2012 (McDonnell is the Republican governor of Virginia).

compared to Obama's 2 points) because a far-right independent took 4.6 percent of the Ohio Senate vote. The only incumbent who lost in the general election was Republican Scott Brown of Massachusetts, winner of the special election in January 2010 to replace Ted Kennedy, who was unable to survive with Obama on the ticket. Scott ran far ahead of Romney but still lost to Elizabeth Warren by 7 points in a state Obama won by 23 points.

LOOKING AHEAD

A Continuation of Polarized Politics

The voters' endorsement of the status quo in the 2012 election represented a modest victory for the Democrats, but it left in place the partisan configuration in Washington that made the final two years of Obama's first term so bitterly contentious and unproductive. Obama entered his second term with the widest partisan gap in approval of any newly reelected president ever, 78 points (90–12; G.W. Bush was the previous record holder at 76 points).⁶⁷ The election did nothing to mitigate the ideological differences between the congressional parties. The ranks of House moderates dwindled further, but some Tea Party zealots also lost, and so Keith Poole's prediction for the 113th Congress (2013–2014) is that the ideological gap between the House party coalitions will be about the same as in the 112th Congress, when it reached its all-time high.⁶⁸

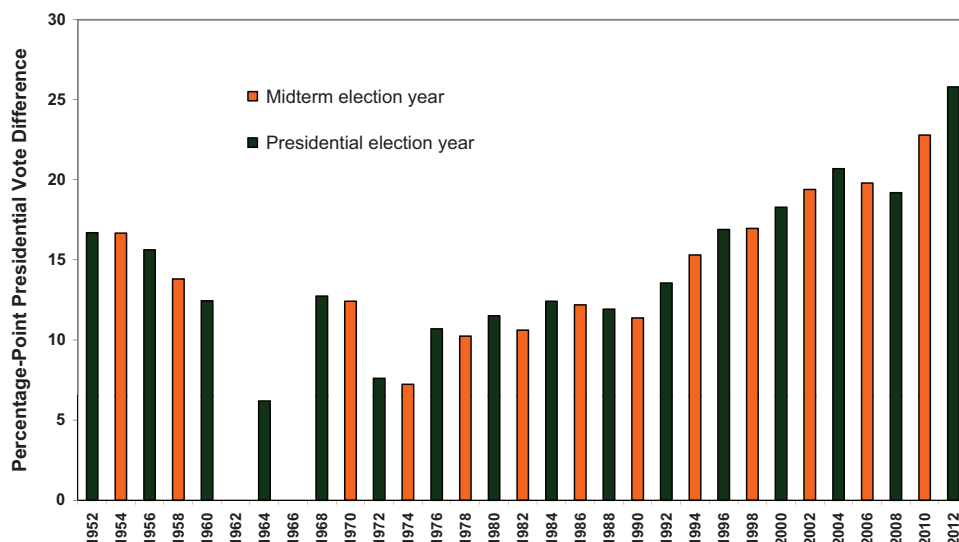
The incoming House party cohorts will be representing the most-divergent sets of districts in at least 60 years. As Figure 12 shows, the 26-point difference in the average presidential vote between districts won by Republicans and Democrats in 2012 exceeded the previous high reached in 2010. Party differences in presidential support and roll call ideology strongly reflect party differences in electoral bases, so these data also predict a House at least as polarized along party lines in the 113th Congress as it was in the 112th.⁶⁹ Most importantly, the electoral constituencies of the House Republicans—defined as those constituents who actually voted for them—contain relatively few Obama supporters and thus provide very little electoral incentive for them to cooperate with the President. Although

⁶⁷For previous presidents, see Jacobson, *Divider*, 151; the figure for Obama is from the Gallup tracking poll covering 12–18 November 2012.

⁶⁸Keith Pool estimates that the ideological differences between the House parties, measured by DW Nominat scores, which take values from –1 to 1, will increase from .909 to .911 in the new Congress; see his blog dated 13 November 2012, accessed at <http://voteview.com/blog/>, 25 November 2012.

⁶⁹Gary C. Jacobson, "Partisan Polarization in Presidential Support: The Electoral Connection," *Congress and the Presidency* 30 (Spring 2003): 8–11.

FIGURE 12
The Polarization of U.S. House Districts, 1952–2012



Source: Compiled by author.

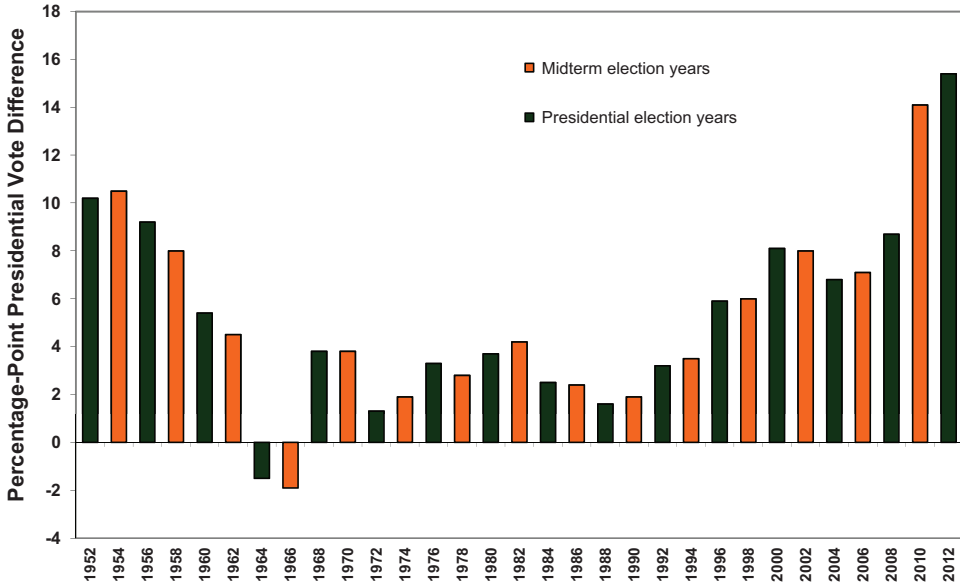
Note: Entries are the percentage point differences in the average presidential vote between districts won by Democrats and districts won by Republicans; data for 1962 and 1966 are unavailable because of redistricting; entries for midterm elections are calculated from the previous presidential election; the entry for 2012 is calculated from the 423 districts for which data are currently available.

speaker John Boehner's claim that his Republican House majority won a mandate as compelling as Obama's⁷⁰ is dubious—Democrats won a majority of the national House vote, after all—he is in a practical sense correct, because the voters responsible for his Republican majority are far more likely to support a Republican agenda than Obama's.

States tend to be more diverse politically and less lopsided in their partisanship than House districts, so the gap between the Senate parties' electoral constituencies (as measured by their presidential voting patterns) is not as wide as for the House, but it reached a record level of more than 15 percentage points in 2012 (Figure 13). The Senate did gain some likely moderate Democrats (Heitkamp, Joe Donnelly, winner over Mourdock, and Angus King, Maine independent who will organize with the Democrats) but lost an equal number through retirements (Kent Conrad, Ben Nelson, and James Webb). Republican departures included three of the Party's more-moderate members (Scott Brown, Olympia Snowe, and Richard Lugar), and all three of its newcomers, Deb Fischer (Nebraska), Ted Cruz (Texas), and

⁷⁰Jonathan Weisman, "Boehner Digs In on Opposition to Tax Hikes for the Wealthy," *The New York Times*, 9 November 2012, accessed at <http://theaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/09/boehner-digs-in-on-opposition-to-tax-hikes-for-wealthy/>, 10 November 2012.

FIGURE 13
The Polarization of State Constituencies, 1952–2012



Source: Compiled by author.

Note: Entries are the percentage point differences in the average presidential vote between states won by Democrats and states won by Republicans in the Senate elections; entries for midterm election years are calculated from the presidential election two years earlier.

Jeff Flake (Arizona), belong to the Tea Party faction. In all, seven of the incoming Senators are likely to be more extreme than the incumbents they replaced, and none of the remaining four are likely to be significantly more moderate than their predecessors. Thus the Senate is projected to be even more ideologically polarized that it was in the 112th Congress.⁷¹

In sum, the electoral underpinnings of the 113th Congress portend, if anything, even greater party polarization and greater difficulty for Obama in finding Republican votes for his initiatives than he experienced in the last Congress. It remains doubtful that the political credit Obama acquired by winning a modest but surprisingly decisive victory over Mitt Romney will do anything to offset these electoral fundamentals.

Continuation of Divided Government

The 2012 election also portends, for the near future at least, a stable pattern of divided government, with the House in Republican hands and the

⁷¹Keith Poole estimates that the ideological differences between the Senate parties, measured by DW Nominat scores, will increase from .773 to .826 in the new Congress; blog dated 13 November 2012, accessed at <http://voteview.com/blog/>, 25 November 2012.

presidency (and most likely Senate) in Democratic hands. The initial explanations of Obama's reelection derived from the national exit poll results (Table 2) have given great weight to the votes he won from growing segments of the electorate: young people, singles (especially single women), social liberals, the non-churched, and ethnic minorities. Romney's coalition, in contrast, was overwhelmingly white as well as older, married, religiously observant, and socially conservative, all shrinking demographic categories. The white share of the electorate, 88 percent when Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, and 83 percent when George W. Bush won in 2000, was only 72 percent in 2012 and is projected to decline to less than two-thirds in a few more elections.⁷² The implication is that unless the Republican Party broadens its appeal to young, minority, secular, and women voters, it will have a hard time competing for the presidency.

The Democrats, however, face an even greater barrier in trying to retake control of the House. As noted earlier, they won 50.5 percent of the vote in 2012 but only 46.2 percent of the seats. The Republican's enhanced structural advantage means that Democrats will need a favorable national tide at least as powerful as the ones they rode to victory in 2006 and 2008 to pick up enough seats to win a majority during the rest of the decade. Midterm elections rarely feature a national tide favoring the president's party, and it would be completely unprecedented for Democrats to gain the 17 seats they currently need to reach a majority in 2014. Normally, the president's party loses House seats at the midterm; in the three historic exceptions, (1934, 1998, and 2002), the most it gained was nine. It is also unusual for a party to make significant gains after holding the White House for at least two terms, so the Democrats' prospects for 2016 are also doubtful.

The Senate is no lock for either party, and the lineup for 2014 once again favors the Republicans. Democrats must defend 20 of the 33 seats up for election, 7 from states won by Romney; Obama took only 1 of the 13 states that will have Republican seats on the ballot. But the Republicans' chances of picking up the six seats they would need for a majority depends on keeping their Tea Party faction in check, at least in states that are not deeply red. The Mourdock and Akin nominations cost them two entirely winnable seats in 2012 after similarly flawed Tea Party candidates had cost them three Senate seats in 2010.⁷³ Had Republicans not forfeited these five seats by fielding candidates too extreme (and, in some cases, too weird) for the

⁷²Albert Hunt, "Republicans' Hispanic Problem Is With Party Base," *Bloomberg News*, 18 November 2012, accessed at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/print/2012-11-18/republican-hispanic-problem-is-with-party-base>, 19 November 2012.

⁷³Jacobson, "Republican Resurgence," 39.

states' electorates, the Senate partisan balance would be 50–50 for the 113th Congress, and Vice President Joe Biden would be spending a lot of his time on Capitol Hill waiting to break ties.

It may not be easy for the Republican Party to avoid such nominations—or to produce presidential nominees whose appeal extends beyond its conservative base—because staunch conservatives—Tea Party sympathizers and others—comprise a majority of the Republican primary electorate in most states. Their views on such issues as immigration, abortion, same-sex marriage, global warming, and taxation make them resistant to changes in the Party's message that might expand its appeal to the growing segments of the electorate.⁷⁴ The right's demonstrated capacity to punish incumbent Republicans in primaries discourages straying from conservative orthodoxy. Unless national leaders find a way to avoid fielding candidates whose appeal is limited to the Party's most-conservative voters, Republicans will continue to lose winnable Senate seats as well as the presidency.

APPENDIX

The first two equations in Table A1 are logit equations that estimate, respectively, the effect of the district's partisan composition (as estimated by the partisan voting index) and that of partisan composition plus incumbency status, on the probability that the Democratic candidate would win the election. According to the first equation, underlying partisanship by itself correctly predicts 94.3 percent of the outcomes, compared to the null prediction of 53.8 percent, which is the minimum level of accuracy achievable simply by predicting that the Republican Party's candidate would win every seat. Adding a measure of incumbency status, in recognition of the well-documented incumbency advantage in House elections,⁷⁵ increases the equation's predictive accuracy to 95.8 percent. The second two are regression equations estimating the Democrat's vote share as a function of the same two independent variables. The district's partisan composition alone accounts for 90 percent of the variance in the House vote; with incumbency status included, the equation accounts for 93 percent of the variance and incumbency is estimated to be worth, on average, an additional 4.8 percent of the vote.

⁷⁴Gary C. Jacobson, "The President, the Tea Party, and the Voting Behavior in 2010: Insights From the Cooperative Congressional Election Study," presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, Washington, 1–4 September 2011; Gary C. Jacobson, "Polarization, Public Opinion and the Presidency: The Obama and Anti-Obama Coalitions," in Bert A. Rockman, Andrew Rudalevige, and Colin Campbell, eds., *The Obama Presidency: Appraisals and Prospects* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2012), 105.

⁷⁵Jacobson, *Politics of Congressional Elections*, 30–35.

TABLE A1

The Effect of District Partisanship and Incumbency on the House Vote in 2012

	<i>Logit (Win/Lose)</i>		<i>Regression (Vote Share)</i>	
PVI	0.51*	0.47*	1.20*	0.97*
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Incumbency		2.14 [†]		4.77 [†]
		(0.40)		(0.36)
Constant	0.43	1.31 [†]	51.57 [†]	52.16 [†]
	(0.24)	(0.39)	(0.28)	(0.23)
Pseudo- R^2 /adjusted R^2	0.78	0.85	0.90	0.93
% Correctly predicted (null = 53.8)	94.3	95.8		
Number of cases	435	435	387	387

Note: Win/lose takes the value of 1 if a Democratic won, 0 if a Republican won; vote share is the Democrat's share of the major party vote recorded as of 19 November 2012 (candidates without major party opposition are excluded from these equations); incumbency takes the value of 1 for a Democratic incumbent, -1 for a Republican incumbent, and 0 for all other candidates, including incumbents facing incumbents; PVI is explained in the text on p. 23; standard errors are in parentheses.

[†] $p < .001$.