

Tea Party Set to Win Enough Races for Wide Influence

By [KATE ZERNIKE](#)

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Enough [Tea Party](#)-supported candidates are running strongly in competitive and Republican-leaning Congressional races that the movement stands a good chance of establishing a sizable caucus to push its agenda in the House and the Senate, according to a New York Times analysis.

With a little more than two weeks till Election Day, 33 Tea Party-backed candidates are in tossup races or running in House districts that are solidly or leaning Republican, and 8 stand a good or better chance of winning Senate seats.

While the numbers are relatively small, they could exert outsized influence, putting pressure on Republican leaders to carry out promises to significantly cut spending and taxes, to repeal health care legislation and financial regulations passed this year, and to phase out [Social Security](#) and [Medicare](#) in favor of personal savings accounts.

Still, the bulk of the Tea Party candidates are running in districts that are solidly Democratic, meaning that most Tea Party efforts — no matter how energetic — are likely to register as basically a protest vote.

An analysis of each House and Senate race found 138 Tea Party candidates, all Republicans, running for nearly half the Democratic or open seats in the House and a third of those in the Senate — or, in the case of two Republican House incumbents, defending seats won with Tea Party backing in special elections earlier this year.

Tea Party nominees have performed better than expected in many cases, including races in which the establishment candidates they defeated in the primaries were considered the stronger general election contenders. This includes well-known nominees like [Rand Paul](#), running for the Senate in Kentucky, as well as lesser-known candidates like Dan Benishek, running to replace a retiring House Democrat in Michigan.

But as establishment Republicans feared, the Tea Party has also handed opportunities to the Democrats by nominating candidates who have struggled.

This includes not just [Christine O'Donnell](#), the Senate nominee in Delaware, but also candidates like Joe Walsh, running in a House district outside Chicago. In May, top campaign staff members quit after revelations that Mr. Walsh had lost a home to foreclosure, and accused him of bouncing checks, lying about fund-raising, failing to pay taxes and driving with a suspended license. In a district that has historically favored Republicans, his Democratic opponent is leading.

Still, it suggests the stubbornness of voter anger toward the establishment that several candidates, most first-time contenders, have remained viable despite revelations of extensive financial problems, domestic disputes or other apparent improprieties.

Of 129 Tea Party candidates for the House, 7 are running in solidly Republican districts — all but one of those seats is now held by a Republican. Another 7 are running for seats currently held by Democrats but in districts leaning toward the Tea Party Republican.

Nineteen are in tossup races, for seats that are held, with the exception of two, by Democrats. And 29 are running for seats in districts that are leaning Democratic — of those, only one is currently held by a Republican. Sixty-seven are challenging Democrats who are expected to win — though this is a year when the unexpected has been more rule than exception.

In the Senate, there are 9 Tea Party candidates running for a potential of 27 seats — not including those where the incumbent is the Republican nominee.

For purposes of the list, Tea Party candidates were those who had entered politics through the movement or who are receiving significant support from local Tea Party groups and who share the ideology of the movement. Many have been endorsed by groups like FreedomWorks or the Tea Party Express, or by conservative kingmakers like [Sarah Palin](#) and Senator [Jim DeMint](#) of South Carolina, but those endorsements alone were not enough to qualify as a Tea Party candidate.

The states with the highest concentration of Tea Party candidates are South Carolina, Massachusetts and Arizona. In South Carolina, this reflects the energy of the movement; in Massachusetts, where almost none of the candidates are expected to win, it reflects a historically weak Republican farm team.

Election handicappers have said for months that the test of the Tea Party would be whether its energy ended up hurting Republicans more than it helped, by leading to the selection of less viable candidates in the primaries.

Polls suggest that in the Senate, the hurt may outweigh the help. The four seats that are leaning or solidly Republican and feature Tea Party candidates were in Republican hands to begin with. Ms. O'Donnell's surprise upset of the establishment candidate in Delaware dashed Republican hopes for a seat that even Democrats had expected to lose. The Tea Party candidate in Nevada, [Sharron Angle](#), has improved the odds that Senator [Harry Reid](#), the leader of Democratic majority, hangs onto his seat. And having Rand Paul as their nominee has made the fight in Kentucky tougher than Republicans anticipated.

On the other hand, [Ron Johnson](#), a plastics magnate with a libertarian bent and strong Tea Party support, has made Wisconsin an unexpected tossup. And [Ken Buck](#), who was thought to be the weaker of two Republican primary candidates in Colorado, has kept that race competitive.

In the House, Tea Party candidates are allowing Democrats to poll well in a few districts where demographics and voting history suggest that Republicans should win — the district that includes Tucson, the one north and west of Pittsburgh, and one in suburban Chicago.

For the most part, Tea Party candidates are doing well in areas where any Republican would be expected to do well. There does not appear to be any case where a Tea Party candidate has helped make a Democratic-leaning district more competitive for Republicans.

While there is no official Tea Party platform, candidates share a determination to repeal the health care legislation passed in March. They vow not only to permanently extend the tax cuts passed under President [George W. Bush](#) and to eliminate the [estate tax](#), but also to replace the progressive income tax with a flat tax or a national sales tax. Several candidates advocate abolishing the [Internal Revenue Service](#) entirely.

Many have called for a balanced budget amendment. They oppose newly passed financial regulation, and oppose [cap-and-trade](#) of carbon emissions.

The candidates also promise to carry into office the Tea Party's strict interpretation of the Constitution.

Paul Gosar, a dentist who defeated several other candidates, including the 2008 nominee, to win the primary in a Republican-leaning district in Arizona, told an interviewer that “adhering to the words of the founding fathers means putting the government role in the health care, the [Department of Education](#), and yes, entitlements, all on the table for a constitutional examination.”

In a questionnaire for a Tea Party group, Steve Stivers, running for Congress in Ohio, said that only four departments — Defense, Justice, State and Treasury — perform “constitutional roles,” meaning “you could eliminate the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Interior, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy and others to return to a constitutionally pure government.”

Many candidates — Mr. Paul, in Kentucky, as well as many in the House races — have embraced a pledge to require Congress to indicate how any new legislation is authorized in the Constitution, and contend that the Constitution does not authorize many of the things the federal government does now. Republicans picked up this idea in their Pledge to America agenda.

Kitty Bennett and Archie Tse contributed research.

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Op-Ed Columnist

The Grand Old Plot Against the Tea Party

By [FRANK RICH](#)

Published: October 30, 2010

ONE dirty little secret of the 2010 election is that it won't be a political tragedy for Democrats if a Tea Party icon like Sharron Angle or Joe Miller ends up in the United States Senate. Angle, now synonymous with [racist ads](#) sliming Hispanics, and Miller, already on record [threatening a government shutdown](#), are fired up and ready to go as symbols of G.O.P. extremism for 2012 and beyond. What's not so secret is that some Republicans will be just as happy if some of these characters lose, and for the same reason.

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Barry Blitt

But whatever Tuesday's results, this much is certain: The Tea Party's hopes for actually affecting change in Washington will start being dashed the morning after. The ordinary Americans in this movement lack the numbers and financial clout to muscle their way into the back rooms of Republican power no matter how well their candidates perform.

Trent Lott, the former Senate leader and current top-dog lobbyist, gave away the game in July. "We don't need a lot of Jim DeMint disciples," [he said](#), referring to the South Carolina senator who is the Tea Party's Capitol Hill patron saint. "As soon as they get here, we need to co-opt them." It's the players who wrote the checks for the G.O.P. surge, not those earnest folk in tri-corner hats, who plan to run the table in the next corporate takeover of Washington. Though [Tom DeLay may now be on trial](#) for corruption in Texas, the spirit of his K Street lives on in [a Lott client list](#) that includes Northrop Grumman and Goldman Sachs.

Karl Rove outed the Republican elites' contempt for Tea Partiers in the campaign's final stretch. Much as Barack Obama thought he was safe soliloquizing about angry white Middle Americans clinging to "guns or religion" [at a San Francisco fund-raiser in 2008](#), so Rove now parades his disdain for the same constituency when speaking to the European press. This month [he told Der Spiegel](#) that Tea Partiers are "not sophisticated," and then scoffed, "It's not like these people have read the economist Friedrich August von Hayek." Given that Glenn Beck has made a cause of putting Hayek's dense 1944 antigovernment treatise "The Road to Serfdom" [on the best-seller list](#) and Tea Partiers widely claim to have read it, Rove could hardly have been more condescending to "these people." Last week, for added insult, he mocked Sarah Palin's imminent Discovery Channel reality show [to London's Daily Telegraph](#).

This animus has not gone unnoticed among those supposedly less sophisticated conservatives back home. Mike Huckabee, still steamed about Rove's previous put-down of Christine O'Donnell, [publicly lamented](#) the Republican establishment's "elitism" and "country club attitude." This country club elite, he said, is happy for Tea Partiers to put up signs, work the phones and make "those pesky little trips" door-to-door that it finds a frightful inconvenience. But the members won't let the hoi polloi dine with them in the club's "main dining room" — any more than David H. Koch, the billionaire sugar daddy of the Republican right, will invite O'Donnell into his box at [the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center](#) to take in "The Nutcracker."

The main dining room remains reserved for Koch's fellow oil barons, Lott's clients, the corporate contributors (known and anonymous) to groups like Rove's American Crossroads, and, of course, [the large coterie of special interests underwriting John Boehner](#), the presumptive next speaker of the House. Boehner is the largest House recipient of Wall Street money this year — much of it [from financial institutions bailed out by TARP](#).

His Senate counterpart, Mitch McConnell, will be certain to stop any Tea Party hillbillies from disrupting his chapter of the club (as [he tried to stop Rand Paul](#) in his own state's G.O.P. primary). McConnell's pets in his chamber's freshman G.O.P. class will instead be old-school conservatives like Dan Coats (of Indiana), Rob Portman (of Ohio) and, if he squeaks in, Pat Toomey (of Pennsylvania). The first two are [former lobbyists](#); Toomey ran [the corporate interest group](#), the Club for Growth. They can be counted on to execute an efficient distribution of corporate favors and pork after they make their latest swing through Capitol Hill's revolving door.

What the Tea Party ostensibly wants most — less government spending and smaller federal deficits — is not remotely happening on the country club G.O.P.'s watch. The elites have no serious plans to cut anything except taxes and regulation of their favored industries. The party's principal 2010 campaign document, its "Pledge to America," [doesn't vow to cut even earmarks](#) — which barely amount to a rounding error in the federal budget anyway. Boehner has also proposed a return to pre-crash 2008 levels in "nonsecurity" discretionary spending — another mere bagatelle ([\\$105 billion](#)) next to [the current \\$1.3 trillion deficit](#). And that won't be happening either, once the actual cuts in departments like Education, Transportation and Interior are specified to their constituencies.

Perhaps the campaign's most telling exchange took place on Fox News two weeks ago, when the Tea Party-embracing Senate candidate in California, Carly Fiorina, was asked seven times by Chris Wallace to name "one single entitlement expenditure you're willing to cut" in order "to extend all the Bush tax cuts, which would add 4 trillion to the deficit." [She never did](#). At least Angle and Paul have been honest about what they'd slash if in power — respectively Social Security and defense, where the big government spending actually resides.

That's not happening either. McConnell has explained his only real priority for the new Congress with admirable candor. "The single most important thing we want to achieve," [he said](#), "is for President Obama to be a one-term president." Any assault on Social Security would defeat that goal, and a serious shake-up of the Pentagon budget would alienate the neoconservative ideologues and military contractors who are far more important to the G.O.P. establishment than the "don't tread on me" crowd.

For sure, the Republican elites found the Tea Party invaluable on the way to this Election Day. And not merely, as Huckabee has it, because they wanted its foot soldiers. What made the Tea Party most useful was that its loud populist message gave the G.O.P. just the cover it needed both to camouflage its corporate patrons and to rebrand itself as a party miraculously antithetical to the despised G.O.P. that gave us George W. Bush and record deficits only yesterday.

Rupert Murdoch's Fox News and Wall Street Journal have been arduous in promoting and inflating Tea Party events and celebrities to this propagandistic end. The more the Tea Party looks as if it's calling the shots in the G.O.P., the easier it is to distract attention from those who are actually calling them — namely, those who've cashed in and cashed out as ordinary Americans lost their jobs, homes and 401(k)'s. Typical of this smokescreen is a new book titled "Mad as Hell," published this fall by a Murdoch imprint. In it, the pollsters Scott Rasmussen and Douglas Schoen make the case, [as they recently put it in Politico](#), that the Tea Party is "the most powerful and potent force in America."

They are expert at producing poll numbers to bear that out. By counting those with friends and family in the movement, [Rasmussen has calculated](#) that 29 percent of Americans are "tied to" the Tea Party. (If you factor in six degrees of Kevin Bacon, the number would surely double.) But cooler empirical data reveal the truth known by the G.O.P. establishment: [An August CNN poll](#) found that 2 percent of Americans consider themselves active members of the Tea Party.

That result was confirmed [last weekend by The Washington Post](#), which published the fruits of its months-long effort to contact every Tea Party group in the country. To this end, it enlisted the help of Tea Party Patriots, the only Tea Party umbrella group that actually can claim to be a spontaneous, bottom-up, grass roots organization rather than a front for the same old fat cats of the Republican right, from the Koch brothers to Dick Armey's FreedomWorks. Tea Party Patriots has claimed anywhere from 2,300 to nearly 3,000 local affiliates, but even with its assistance, The Post could verify a total of only 647 Tea Party groups nationwide. Most had fewer than 50 members. The median amount of money each group had raised in 2010 was \$800, nowhere near the entry fee for the country club.

But those Americans, like all the others on the short end of the 2008 crash, have reason to be mad as hell. And their numbers will surely grow once the Republican establishment's panacea of tax cuts proves as ineffectual at creating jobs, saving homes and cutting deficits as the half-measures of the Obama White House and the Democratic Congress. The tempest, however, will not be contained within the tiny Tea Party but will instead overrun the Republican Party itself, where Palin, with Murdoch and Beck at her back, waits in the wings to "take back America" not just from Obama but from the G.O.P. country club elites now mocking her. By then — after another two years of political gridlock and economic sclerosis — the equally disillusioned right and left may have a showdown that makes this election year look as benign as Woodstock.

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Independents Fueled G.O.P Gains

By [JACKIE CALMES](#) and [MEGAN THEE-BRENAN](#)

Published: November 2, 2010

Democrats lost significant support Tuesday among nearly all demographic groups in a midterm election that was a referendum on [President Obama](#) and a Democratic-controlled Congress in a stubbornly weak economy.

Independent voters, who in 2006 mostly voted for Democrats and helped end the Republicans' 12-year majorities in the House and Senate, this time turned just as strongly against Democrats, according to surveys of voters who were leaving polling places. Two other groups who recently supported Democrats — suburban residents and college graduates — also gave Republican Congressional candidates more votes this year.

That support was in addition to the Republicans' traditional strong backing from men; white voters; those making more than \$100,000 a year; conservatives; white Protestants; evangelicals; frequent churchgoers; and Southerners. Roman Catholic voters, a swing group, favored Republicans after supporting Democrats in the last two elections.

Democrats drew support from their traditional base — younger voters; blacks and Hispanics; those without high school diplomas and those with post-graduate education; less affluent voters; black women; union members; and Easterners.

Women have been among the Democrats' most loyal supporters, giving them a majority of their votes in all but one of the past 14 election years. But the size of that traditional advantage appears to have narrowed this year. Since 1982, when exit polls first measured support, Republicans only once received the same share of women's votes as Democrats — in 2002 — and Democrats lost their narrow Senate majority that year.

Democrats suffered from defections as the electorate tilted conservative in a year when Republicans were enthusiastic about voting against President Obama and the Democratic-controlled Congress. A majority of voters told interviewers they believed that government was doing too much.

Voters who described themselves as moderates preferred Democrats by a significant margin, and liberals preferred them overwhelmingly. But the two groups were outnumbered by conservatives. Moderates were a smaller share of the electorate on Tuesday than they were in 2006.

Moderates' strong preference for Democrats reflected their estrangement from the [Republican Party](#) as it came to be dominated by conservatives who were scornful of moderates in the ranks. Republicans' embrace of the [Tea Party movement](#) underscored that rupture.

While the survey results were good news for Republicans after two devastating election cycles, there were warning signs for the party's long-term prospects.

The few demographic groups that preferred Democrats included some that are considered significant in the composition of the future electorate. One was voters under age 30. The others were Hispanics and Asian-Americans; both groups, which have objected to the Republicans' tough stands against illegal [immigration](#), are among the fastest-growing constituencies in the country.

The voter surveys confirmed what even the White House had acknowledged before Election Day: Like many Congressional midterm elections, this one was a referendum on the president but at a time when unemployment hovered around 10 percent.

A majority said they disapproved of President Obama's job performance, and nearly 9 out of 10 of them voted for Republicans. About 4 in 10 said one reason for supporting a Republican for Congress was "to express opposition to [Barack Obama](#)." About half of voters said the president's policies would hurt the country.

An even bigger share of voters — nearly three-quarters — said they disapproved of how Congress had done its job. Those voters chose Republicans by about a two-to-one ratio.

A strong majority agreed with the statement that "government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals," and by a nearly a four-to-one ratio they voted for Republicans.

Six of 10 white voters aligned with Republicans.

The youngest voters (18 to 29) and the oldest (65 and older) were mirror images: 6 of 10 young voters chose Democrats, and the same share of older voters picked Republicans. Voters 65 and older, who have been the least supportive age group of Mr. Obama, are more likely than younger voters to turn out in midterm elections, and this year they made up about a quarter of the electorate, up from 19 percent in 2006.

The economy was by far the most crucial issue. Nearly 9 in 10 said they were worried about the direction of the economy in the coming year, and a majority said the country was seriously on the wrong track. Those voters chose Republicans by large margins. About a quarter of voters said health care or the war in Afghanistan were the biggest concerns facing the country, and majorities of them favored Democrats.

In selecting a Congress that will debate Mr. Obama over deficit reduction and additional stimulus measures, about 4 in 10 voters said reducing deficits should be the first priority, and they favored Republicans. About 4 in 10 said job creation should be a priority, and they favored Democrats. A much smaller share said cutting taxes should be a priority, which Congressional Republicans also favor.

About half of voters said Congress should repeal the health care overhaul; the other half said it should be expanded or left alone. Those who wanted the law repealed voted for Republicans, and the others supported Democrats.

The nationwide surveys of voters were conducted by Edison Research for a media consortium of television networks and The Associated Press.

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G.O.P. Captures House, but Not Senate



Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

John A. Boehner, the House Republican leader, in an emotional moment during a victory gathering for the National Republican Congressional Committee in Washington. [More Photos »](#)

By [JEFF ZELENY](#)

Published: November 2, 2010

Republicans captured control of the House of Representatives on Tuesday and expanded their voice in the Senate, riding a wave of voter discontent as they dealt a setback to [President Obama](#) just two years after his triumphal victory.

A Republican resurgence, propelled by deep economic worries and a forceful opposition to the Democratic agenda of health care and government spending, delivered defeats to House Democrats from the Northeast to the South and across the Midwest. The tide swept aside dozens of lawmakers, regardless of their seniority or their voting records, upending the balance of power for the second half of Mr. Obama's term.

But Senator [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the Democratic leader, narrowly prevailed and his party hung onto control by winning hard-fought contests in California, Delaware, Connecticut and West Virginia. Republicans picked up at least six Democratic seats, including the one formerly held by Mr. Obama, and the party will welcome [Marco Rubio](#) of Florida and [Rand Paul](#) of Kentucky to their ranks, two candidates who were initially shunned by the establishment but beloved by the [Tea Party movement](#).

“The American people’s voice was heard at the ballot box,” said Representative [John A. Boehner](#) of Ohio, who is positioned to become the next speaker of the House. “We have real work to do, and this is not the time for celebration.”

The president, who watched the election returns with a small set of advisers at the White House, called Mr. Boehner shortly after midnight to offer his congratulations and to talk about the way forward as Washington prepares for divided government. Republicans won at least 58 seats, not including those from some Western states where ballots were still being counted, surpassing the 52 seats the party won in the sweep of 1994.

The most expensive midterm election campaign in the nation’s history, fueled by a raft of contributions from outside interest groups and millions in donations to candidates in both parties, played out across a wide battleground that stretched from Alaska to Maine. The Republican tide swept into statehouse races, too, with Democrats poised to lose the majority of governorships, particularly those in key presidential swing states, like Ohio, where Gov. [Ted Strickland](#) was defeated.

One after another, once-unassailable Democrats like Senator [Russ Feingold](#) of Wisconsin, Representatives Ike Skelton of Missouri, John Spratt of South Carolina, Rick Boucher of Virginia and Chet Edwards of Texas fell to little-known Republican challengers.

“Voters sent a message that change has not happened fast enough,” said [Tim Kaine](#), chairman of the [Democratic National Committee](#).

Republicans did not achieve a perfect evening, losing races in several states they had once hoped to win, including the Senate contests in Delaware and Connecticut, because some candidates supported by the Tea Party movement knocked out establishment candidates to win their nominations. But they did score notable victories in some tight races, like [Pat Toomey](#)’s Senate run in Pennsylvania.

Senator Reid said in a speech that he was “more determined than ever” after his victory. “I know what it’s like to get back on your feet.”

The outcome on Tuesday was nothing short of a remarkable comeback for Republicans two years after they suffered a crushing defeat in the White House and four years after Democrats swept control of the House and Senate. It places the party back in the driver’s seat in terms of policy, posing new challenges to Mr. Obama as he faces a tough two years in his term, but also for Republicans — led by Mr. Boehner — as he suddenly finds himself in a position of responsibility, rather than being simply the outsider.

In the House, Republicans found victories in most corners of the country, including five seats in Pennsylvania, five in Ohio, at least three in Florida, Illinois and Virginia and two in Georgia. Democrats braced for the prospect of historic defeats, more than the 39 seats the Republicans needed to win control. Republicans reached their majority by taking seats east of the Mississippi even before late results flowed in from farther West.

Throughout the evening, in race after race, Republican challengers defeated Democratic incumbents, despite being at significant fund-raising disadvantages. Republican-oriented independent groups invariably came to the rescue, helping level of the playing field, including in Florida's 24th Congressional District, in which Sandy Adams defeated Representative Suzanne Kosmas; Virginia's 9th Congressional District, where Mr. Boucher, a 14-term incumbent, lost to Morgan Griffith; and Texas's 17th Congressional District, in which Mr. Edwards, who was seeking his 11th term, succumbed to Bill Flores.

Democrats argued that the Republican triumph was far from complete, particularly in the Senate, pointing to the preservation of Mr. Reid and other races. In Delaware, [Chris Coons](#) defeated [Christine O'Donnell](#), whose candidacy became a symbol of the unorthodox political candidates swept onto the ballot in Republican primary contests. In West Virginia, Gov. [Joe Manchin III](#), a Democrat, triumphed over an insurgent Republican rival to fill the seat held for a half-century by Senator [Robert C. Byrd](#). And in California, Senator [Barbara Boxer](#) overcame a vigorous challenge from [Carly Fiorina](#), a Republican.

But Democrats conceded that their plans to increase voter turnout did not meet expectations, party strategists said, and extraordinary efforts that Mr. Obama made in the final days of the campaign appeared to have borne little fruit.

The president flew to Charlottesville, Va., on Friday evening, for instance, in hopes of rallying Democrats to support Representative Tom Perriello, a freshman who supported every piece of the administration's agenda, but he was defeated despite the president's appeals to Democrats in a state that he carried two years ago.

In governors' races, Republicans won several contests in the nation's middle. They held onto governorships in Texas, Nebraska and South Dakota, and had seized seats now occupied by Democrats in Tennessee, Michigan and Kansas. [Sam Brownback](#), a United States Senator and Republican, easily took the Kansas post that Mark Parkinson, a former Republican turned Democrat, is leaving behind.

Though Democrats, who before the election held 26 governors' seats compared to 24 for the Republicans, were expected to face losses, there were also bright spots. In New York, Attorney General [Andrew M. Cuomo](#) easily defeated the Republican, [Carl P. Paladino](#), even as Republicans were expected to pick up seats in the state legislature and the congressional delegation. In Massachusetts, Gov. [Deval Patrick](#) won a second term.

As the election results rolled in, with Republicans picking up victories shortly after polls closed in states across the South, East and the Midwest, the House speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#), and other party leaders made urgent appeals through television interviews that there was still time for voters in other states to cast their ballots.

But the mood in Democratic quarters was glum, with few early signs of optimism in House or Senate races that were called early in the evening. Surveys that were conducted with voters across the country also provided little sense of hope for Democrats, with Republicans gaining a

majority of independents, college-educated people and suburbanites — all groups that were part of the coalition of voters who supported Mr. Obama two years ago.

“We’ve come to take our government back,” Mr. Paul told cheering supporters who gathered in Bowling Green, Ky. “They say that the [U.S. Senate](#) is the world’s most deliberative body. I’m going to ask them to deliberate on this: The American people are unhappy with what’s going on in Washington.”

The election was a referendum on President Obama and the Democratic agenda, according to interviews with voters that were conducted for the National Election Pool, a consortium of television networks and The Associated Press, with a wide majority of the electorate saying that the country was seriously off track. Nearly nine in 10 voters said they were worried about the economy and about 4 in 10 said their family’s situation had worsened in the last two years.

The surveys found that voters were even more dissatisfied with Congress now than they were in 2006, when Democrats reclaimed control from the Republicans. Preliminary results also indicated an electorate far more conservative than four years ago, a sign of stronger turnout by people leaning toward Republicans.

Most voters said they believed Mr. Obama’s policies would hurt the country in the long run, rather than help it, and a large share of voters said they supported the Tea Party movement, which has backed insurgent candidates all across the country.

The Republican winds began blowing back in January when Democrats lost the seat long held by Senator [Edward M. Kennedy](#) of Massachusetts, with the victory of [Scott P. Brown](#) serving as a motivating force for the budding Tea Party movement and a burst of inspiration for Republican candidates across the country to step forward and challenge Democrats everywhere.

On Tuesday, the president did not leave the grounds of the White House, taking a respite from days of campaigning across the country, so he could meet with a circle of top advisers to plot a way forward for his administration and his own looming re-election campaign. The White House said Mr. Obama would hold a news conference on Wednesday to address the governing challenges that await the new Congress.

“My hope is that I can cooperate with Republicans,” Mr. Obama said in a radio interview on Tuesday. “But obviously, the kinds of compromises that will be made depends on what Capitol Hill looks like — who’s in charge.”

But even as the president was poised to offer a fresh commitment to bipartisanship, he spent the final hours of the midterm campaign trying to persuade Democrats in key states to take time to vote. From the Oval Office, Mr. Obama conducted one radio interview after another, urging black voters in particular to help preserve the party’s majority and his agenda.

“How well I’m able to move my agenda forward over the next couple of years is going to depend on folks back home having my back,” Mr. Obama said in an interview with the Chicago radio

station WGCI, in which he made an unsuccessful appeal for voters to keep his former Senate seat in Democratic hands.

There was little Democratic terrain across the country that seemed immune to Republican encroachment, with many of the most competitive races being waged in states that Mr. Obama carried strongly only two years ago. From the president's home state of Illinois to neighboring Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana and Ohio — all places that were kind to the Democratic ticket in 2008 — Republicans worked aggressively to find new opportunities.

For all the drama surrounding the final day of the midterm campaign, more than 19 million Americans had voted before Tuesday, a trend that has grown with each election cycle over the last decade, as 32 states now offer a way for voters to practice democracy in far more convenient ways than simply waiting in line on Election Day.

Megan Thee-Brenan, David M. Herszenhorn and Michael Luo contributed reporting.

Democrats Outrun by a 2-Year G.O.P. Comeback Plan



Clockwise from top left: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters; Alex Brandon/Associated Press; Molly Riley/Reuters; Cliff Owen/Associated Press; Sam Morris/Las Vegas Sun, via Associated Press; Chris Usher/CBS, via Getty Images

Clockwise from top left: John A. Boehner, Nancy Pelosi, Chris Van Hollen, Pete Sessions, Steven Law and Karl Rove.

By [JIM RUTENBERG](#) and [JEFF ZELENY](#)

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The PowerPoint slides presented to House Republicans in January 2009 seemed incongruously optimistic at a time when the very word “hope” belonged to the newly ascendant Democrats and their incoming president, [Barack Obama](#).

“If the goal of the majority is to govern, what is the purpose of the minority?” one slide asked.

“The purpose of the minority,” came the answer, “is to become the majority.”

The presentation was the product of a strategy session held 11 days before Mr. Obama’s inauguration, when top Republican leaders in the House of Representatives began devising an early blueprint for what they would accomplish in Tuesday’s election: their comeback.

How they did it is the story of one of the most remarkable Congressional campaigns in more than a half-century, characterized by careful plotting by Republicans, miscalculations by Democrats and a new political dynamic with forces out of both parties' control. The unpredictable [Tea Party movement](#), the torrent of corporate money from outside interests and an electorate with deep discontent helped shift the balance of power in Washington.

The White House struggled to keep Democrats in line, with a misplaced confidence in the power of the coalition that propelled Mr. Obama into office. Republicans capitalized on backlash to the ambitious agenda Mr. Obama and his party pursued, which fueled unrestricted and often anonymous contributions to conservative groups, some advised by a nemesis Democrats thought they had shaken, [Karl Rove](#). That money so strengthened the Republican assault across the country that an exasperated Democratic party strategist likened it to “nuclear Whac-a-Mole.”

Most of all, Republican leaders had the foresight to imagine the possibility of winning again. Even now, they believe they could have taken back the Senate if they had just managed to block at least two Tea Party candidates who proved unelectable.

At that Republican retreat in January 2009, gathering inside a historic inn in Annapolis, Md., the group — led by Representatives [John A. Boehner](#) of Ohio, the Republican leader, and [Eric Cantor](#) of Virginia, the whip — did not tolerate the hand-wringing that consumed so many Republicans that dark winter.

Instead, they walked through a by-the-numbers picture of Democratic vulnerability that had been lost in the excitement over Mr. Obama's election. Some 83 Democrats held seats in districts that once supported President [George W. Bush](#); more than two dozen won their last elections by wafer-thin margins, according to a Republican document provided to The New York Times.

In their quest to reach a majority, the Republican leaders imposed tough party discipline, warning incumbents that the party would no longer act as a “welfare state” for those who were lax fund-raisers. They began an aggressive recruiting effort for top-flight candidates in districts that seemed to be virtually owned by some of the longest-serving Democrats in the House. And they were keenly aware of the anti-establishment mood, rarely engaging with Tea Party challengers, as Senate leaders did, fearful that any efforts to influence primary races could backfire.

They also tried to push Democrats into retirement, using what was described in the presentation as “guerilla tactics” like chasing Democratic members down with video cameras and pressing them to explain votes or positions. (One target, Representative Bob Etheridge of North Carolina, had to apologize for manhandling one of his inquisitors in a clip memorialized on YouTube. Only this week did Republican strategists acknowledge they were behind the episode.)

Improbably, Mr. Boehner's team turned the notion that Republicans could not afford to be the “Party of No” — or, in his words, the party of “Hell no” — on its ear, successfully portraying it as a virtue in the face of Mr. Obama's legislative priorities. But even that team never predicted the sort of victory they experienced Tuesday night.

“I remember people laughing at me back when they thought Republicans were a lot like dinosaurs,” Representative Pete Sessions, the Texan who leads the National Republican Congressional Committee, said in an interview. “Our mission statement was to retire [Nancy Pelosi](#). That was the whole mission statement.”

Borrowed Playbook

They may not have liked [Rahm Emanuel](#)'s policies, but they envied his tactics.

The Republican leaders had watched and studied Mr. Emanuel, the former White House chief of staff and congressman who engineered the Democratic takeover of Congress in 2006, and they had his playbook in mind as they plotted a course to win back their own majority.

The first step was recruiting candidates, a task that fell to Representative Kevin McCarthy of California, one of three self-titled Young Guns of the House.

Mr. McCarthy, who often saw Mr. Emanuel during workouts at the House gymnasium, admired his aggressive political style and adopted his approach by persuading Republicans to challenge Democrats who seemed far less vulnerable at the time.

A top recruit came in the Northwoods of Wisconsin, where Sean Duffy, a county prosecutor and former reality show star on [MTV](#)'s “Real World,” agreed to take on Representative [David R. Obey](#), who had won 21 straight races and was elected two years before Mr. Duffy was born.

Over the last two election cycles, Democrats had gained 55 seats in the House, many in districts deep into Republican territory. And that is where the Republican leaders began, hoping to cut that daunting number by forcing out longtime Democratic incumbents.

They ran advertisements in their districts, hoping to scare them into retirement, given that even Democrats knew that the Congressional campaign of 2010 would be difficult. Only twice in the last 75 years has a president's party not lost seats in an off-year election.

Several Democrats did retire. And many of those who did not — including Representative John M. Spratt Jr. of South Carolina, the chairman of the Budget Committee, who received a personal appeal from the president to run for a 15th term — ended up losing on Tuesday.

Comfort and Confidence

Democrats were no less aware of their vulnerabilities.

But they had succeeded in beating back challenges in a string of special elections earlier in the year that gave them a false sense of confidence. “We are going to maintain our majority,” Representative [Steny H. Hoyer](#) of Maryland, the House majority leader, declared when Mark Critz, a Democrat, beat his Republican opponent in the May race for the seat vacated by the death of Representative [John P. Murtha](#), Democrat of Pennsylvania.

Democrats had also taken comfort that their Congressional candidates had raised more money than their Republican challengers, believing it would help them withstand the hostile political atmosphere in the country.

Mr. Emanuel, before stepping down from his White House post to run for mayor in Chicago, often produced a spreadsheet when reporters asked if Democrats were ready for the final push of the campaign. The document, which circulated between the White House and Capitol Hill, included a candidate-by-candidate list pointing to Democratic strength.

And while the White House was keenly aware that Mr. Rove and others were out looking for unlimited corporate cash to help them take on Democrats, a report by one of the main groups he helped start, American Crossroads provided more false reassurance. Filed in June, it showed a paltry monthly fund-raising total of \$200.

At the time, it seemed the group had collected far less than the \$52 million it vowed to raise. That figure, officials with the group now say, was something of a confident bluff — they hoped they could hit the mark, but were by no means certain. The number was the invention of Jim Dyke, a former [Republican Party](#) strategist who was on the American Crossroads board and believed the group needed to send a signal that it intended to have a major impact.

“We needed to raise a good bit of money to be credible,” Mr. Dyke said. “So when I thought about ‘credible,’ I figured raising and spending what at the time would have been the same amount of money as the unions was credible.” (Labor unions ultimately spent much more than that on behalf of Democrats.)

In truth, the group had early commitments of \$30 million, but its chief executive overseeing day-to-day operations, Steven Law, said in an interview that he was not initially sure all of those would materialize.

On a fund-raising trip with Mr. Rove through Tennessee and Texas, Mr. Law found donors expressing hesitation, telling him, “Other groups have a track record, you don’t.”

Crossroads had yet to get involved in a race and now needed an opportunity to show it could have an impact.

It found one, he said, in [Sharron Angle](#), the Tea Party candidate in Nevada who unexpectedly won the Republican primary for the seat held by Senator [Harry Reid](#), the majority leader. Ms. Angle had emerged as the nominee virtually broke, and the rest of the Republican establishment was shunning her, worried that some of her extreme statements — suggesting, for example, that rape victims should make “lemonade” out of unwanted pregnancies — made her a weak candidate.

Within days, American Crossroads flooded the state with anti-Reid ads. Donors noticed. “It was like turning on a light switch,” Mr. Law said.

And so began what became the largest financial involvement from outside groups in American midterm elections. American Crossroads and a sister organization, Crossroads GPS, went on to raise more than \$70 million.

Rush of Advertising

Making the groups all the more potent was that they were coordinating with each other and several more, all with an eye on dumping money into seats where the party committees were not helping financially struggling Republican candidates who might have a shot.

“We had the intention of expanding the field all along,” Mr. Rove said in an interview. “The idea was to keep broadening the field and to make them fight in more places.”

Around Labor Day, Democratic leaders in the Senate worried that their candidates were overwhelmed by the outside money, and asked the White House to publicly raise it as an issue.

It was not until Mr. Obama began mentioning the name of Mr. Rove that loyal Democratic voters took notice. So the president began singling him out again and again, which may have energized those liberal voters with a particular ire for Mr. Rove, but did not stop the ads.

Frustrated Democratic candidates complained that the White House was spending more time talking about the outside money, an issue they did not believe was as important to voters as job creation and spurring the economy.

While Republican officials say they now believe they would have won control of the House without the groups, they do not believe they would have won by the same margins — or that they would have had the same gains in the Senate.

“We’ve had cavalry showing up on hilltops that have never shown up before to help us,” said Representative Greg Walden of Oregon, a vice chairman of the Republican Congressional committee.

Bill Miller, the national political director of the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#), recalled how his team ran an advertisement against Representative [Joe Sestak](#), running for the Senate in Pennsylvania, claiming that he voted with Ms. Pelosi 100 percent of the time — knowing it might be a slight exaggeration.

He said his team was thrilled when Mr. Sestak raised a public objection, arguing that, in fact, he voted with Ms. Pelosi 97 percent of the time. In a climate where Ms. Pelosi was toxic, “I was like, ‘Jackpot,’ ” Mr. Miller said. (Mr. Sestak lost in a close race.)

Democrats had a different reaction to the rush of advertisements, at times bordering on panic.

In early October, Chuck Wolfe, the chief executive of the Victory Fund and Leadership Institute, a group that supports gay candidates, offered some startling news to the campaign of

Representative [Barney Frank](#) of Massachusetts, who represented what had for years been considered a reliably safe district.

Mr. Wolfe had been at a Capitol Hill restaurant the evening before and overheard a Republican advertising strategist discussing his new assignment, to attack Mr. Frank with an expected budget of \$1 million and a strategy to “piss him off, because you know how Barney gets.” Mr. Wolfe said afterward, “That anybody thought Barney could be vulnerable in his district seemed surprising.” Mr. Frank survived.

Others were not so lucky.

Representative [Alan Grayson](#), Democrat of Florida, stood outside his home in Orlando two weeks before the election and marveled at the scope of the attacks and the candidates they were backing. “They think they can elect a ham sandwich,” he said.

He expressed relief that the barrage against him had come to an end, noting that his attackers appeared to have concluded that their work with him was done and moved on to another member.

They were correct. He was one of the 60 Democrats who lost their seats on Tuesday.

Outside Groups on the Right Flexed Muscles



Sam Dean/The Roanoke Times, via Associated Press

Morgan Griffith, with supporters Tuesday in Bristol, Va., after beating Representative Rick Boucher, a 14-term Democrat. [More Photos »](#)

By [MICHAEL LUO](#) and [GRIFF PALMER](#)

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On the way to winning back the majority in the House on Tuesday, Republican challenger after Republican challenger overcame significant fund-raising gaps to beat their opponents, bolstered by a deluge of spending by independent groups.

Mr. Boucher, in Abingdon, Va., after his defeat. Republican-leaning groups spent more than \$850,000 on his rival's behalf. [More Photos »](#)

They are arguably the most clear-cut examples of the impact that these Republican-oriented outside groups had on the midterm elections, spending record sums on dozens of races in the wake of a landmark [Supreme Court](#) ruling in January that eased restrictions on corporate political spending.

Most of these groups, which are able to take in contributions of unlimited size from individuals and corporations, do not have to disclose their donors. While it is hard to sort out the exact difference they made, their success rate, particularly in races in which Republican challengers would have otherwise been badly outgunned, raises the prospect that a relatively small number of deep-pocketed donors exerted an outsize influence on Tuesday's results.

Democratic incumbents raised more than twice as much as their Republican opponents over all in three dozen House races The New York Times classified as competitive, yet Republicans won about half of those contests on Tuesday, according to a Times analysis. In all but a handful of those races in which fund-raising was lopsided, Republican outside groups significantly outspent Democratic ones.

They included races like Pennsylvania's 10th Congressional District, in which Representative Christopher Carney raised \$1.5 million through mid-October, compared with just \$550,000 by his opponent, Tom Marino. But Republican-oriented independent groups, led by the [60 Plus Association](#), which bills itself as a conservative alternative to [AARP](#), and the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#), spent more than \$1 million on his behalf, compared with just \$50,000 by Democratic-leaning organizations backing Mr. Carney. Mr. Marino, a former United States attorney, handily defeated Mr. Carney.

Representative Rick Boucher, a 14-term Democratic incumbent who lost his seat on Tuesday in Virginia's Ninth Congressional District, brought in nearly three times as much in donations as his opponent, Morgan Griffith. But a number of Republican-oriented independent groups went on the offensive against Mr. Boucher. Together, Republican-leaning groups spent more than \$850,000 on Mr. Griffith's behalf, compared with about \$200,000 by Democratic-leaning ones supporting Mr. Boucher.

In many cases, the Republican-oriented groups got involved in the races early on, battering Democratic candidates with negative advertisements, helping to set the tone in those districts, even if Democratic candidates and their allies were eventually able to outspend them.

"They went in early, and that helped them build momentum and shape the playing field," said Cristina Uribe, a strategist for America's Families First Action Fund, a Democratic-oriented group that became a major player in House races in the last few weeks. "Early money is like yeast. It makes the dough rise."

Ms. Uribe also pointed to how the Republican groups, flush with cash, were able to spend across a vast range of races, forcing Democrats to make difficult choices about where to use limited resources.

Carl Forti, who helped orchestrate spending decisions for [American Crossroads](#) and [Crossroads GPS](#), two groups linked to [Karl Rove](#), said the goal all along was to expand the political map, putting Democrats on the defensive. Even if Democratic candidates ultimately won some of those races, he said, the spending by Republican-leaning groups was still useful.

"All of those things impact the whole playing field," Mr. Forti said. "It's not just wins and losses."

Together, the Crossroads groups reported spending about \$36 million on 40 House or Senate races, according to [Federal Election Commission](#) records. Republican candidates won 23 of them, or about 58 percent.

The Crossroads groups initially focused on Senate races, before turning to House contests. But some of their late investments in the House seem to have made a difference, like in Minnesota, where they went after Representative [James L. Oberstar](#) in a television advertisement last week, and in California, where they attacked Representative Jim Costa. Both are veteran lawmakers who raised far more than their challengers. Both men lost.

Meanwhile, the Chamber spent about \$26 million in 51 different races supporting Republican candidates (it also spent a small amount backing Democrats in a handful of races), winning about 63 percent of them.

In Senate contests, where the Chamber spent the bulk of its money, independent groups seemed to have more mixed results on Tuesday.

The Chamber, for example, reported spending \$4.7 million attacking Senator [Barbara Boxer](#) in California, only to see her win. Similarly, the Crossroads groups together spent about \$4 million on the Nevada Senate race, first going on the air with advertisements attacking Senator [Harry Reid](#), the Democratic majority leader, back in June, but he still managed to pull out a victory.

Nevertheless, Mr. Forti said the Crossroads groups' investment was hardly wasted, because it diverted Democratic attention and resources from other races.

“In Nevada, we made a difference,” he said. “We didn’t win, no. But we definitely made a difference.”

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The Caucus

The Politics and Government Blog of The Times

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President, Rebounding, Gives Opponents Pause

By [JOHN HARWOOD](#)

Suddenly, Republicans face an unanticipated problem: less than three months after their midterm triumphs, [President Obama](#) has regained political momentum.

As Mr. Obama approaches the [State of the Union address](#) on Tuesday, various polls show him rising toward or beyond 50 percent approval of his job performance. Before his first 2011 clash with Republican adversaries who now share governing responsibility, those surveys also show that Americans credit Mr. Obama with greater commitment to finding common ground.

Analysts in both parties agree on the elements of Mr. Obama's rebound. Most Americans never turned on him personally, even as they shouted their disappointment in the November elections.

Postelection compromises with Republicans on tax cuts showed the White House breaking Washington gridlock on the economic issues Americans care about most. That, along with signs of accelerating growth, increased confidence.

Then Mr. Obama delivered a well-received message of unity after the Tucson shootings two weeks ago. By demonstrating "efficacy and empathy," as the Democratic pollster Peter Hart put it, the president complicated the task for Republicans in extending the last election's gains.

"People can only sustain anger for so long," said Vin Weber, a former Republican House member from Minnesota who is now a Washington lobbyist. "Republicans have to be very careful that they don't simply refight the election of 2010."

A Fast Rebound

Mr. Obama's recovery is not dramatic in magnitude, and may not last. What is notable is its rapidity.

After his 1982 midterm setbacks, President [Ronald Reagan](#) did not return to 50 percent approval in the Gallup poll until November 1983. Celebrating "Morning in America" for the economy, Mr. Reagan remained above that level through his landslide 1984 re-election.

After his 1994 drubbing, President [Bill Clinton](#) did not cross the 50 percent mark until late April 1995, after his widely praised response to the Oklahoma City bombing. But his popularity sagged soon thereafter.

Only after besting Congressional Republicans in the subsequent winter government shutdown fight did Mr. Clinton cross the 50 percent mark to stay. He, too, won a second term comfortably.

Republicans consider the Clinton example instructive. Once applause for Mr. Obama's Tucson remarks fades, he will face the familiar scourges of slow recovery and high unemployment.

"The structural elements, he hasn't changed," said a Republican pollster, David Winston. Congressional Republicans also insist they have learned not to overreach.

They can still compete in the jobs debate. In last week's New York Times/CBS News Poll, Americans split 44 percent to 44 percent on whether they trust Republicans or Mr. Obama more on that issue.

Yet the survey showed a clear Obama advantage on another source of public frustration: relentless partisan bickering.

Fully 77 percent predicted the president would seek to work with Republicans to get things done, compared with 46 percent who think Republicans will work with him. Approaching Tuesday's address, Mr. Obama has tried to burnish that reputation by reaching out to business leaders on taxes, trade and regulation.

Americans "see him as someone who is pushing the hardest to work with others," said Joel Benenson, an Obama pollster. Barring unexpected crises, added the White House adviser [David Axelrod](#), "I can't imagine we're going to go backwards."

The G.O.P's Challenge

Most cognizant of Mr. Obama's advantages are Republicans who might challenge his re-election. If Mr. Obama lacks Mr. Clinton's raw one-on-one appeal, polls reflect high regard for his demeanor and values.

"He's more likable in many ways than Clinton, though less charming," observed [Newt Gingrich](#), the former House speaker, who is considering a 2012 presidential bid.

As a result, Mr. Gingrich said, Republicans' success now turns on demonstrating that their different approach to government's role will make America more prosperous. House Republicans call it a "cut and grow" approach to reducing spending and fostering private sector growth.

Mr. Weber worries that, in pushing to cut federal programs and roll back Mr. Obama's health policy, Republicans risk ceding the high ground for future-oriented optimism that conservatives

like Mr. Reagan and [Jack Kemp](#) once commanded. Mr. Obama sounded that note over the weekend by declaring, “We can outcompete any other nation.”

A second challenge, for a party fueled by energy from the right, is fashioning a coherent appeal to hold the political center. The Republican ad-maker Kim Alfano, who advises Gov. [Mitch Daniels](#) of Indiana, a potential 2012 presidential candidate, said the key was “reasonable, rational” voices, rather than more boisterous conservatives who strike mainstream voters as “kooky.”

Republican leaders heeded such advice in selecting their chairman of the House Budget Committee, Representative [Paul D. Ryan](#) of Wisconsin, to respond to the State of the Union. But Representative [Michele Bachmann](#) of Minnesota, a [Tea Party](#) favorite, plans to deliver her own response as well.

A final challenge is overcoming an incumbent’s power to thrive simply by performing competently. There is little reason to expect Mr. Obama to stumble in Tuesday’s spotlight, especially after he met the moment in Tucson.

“He didn’t blow it,” Mr. Gingrich said. “That’s why presidents are hard to beat.”