

Special Report

2010 Midterm Elections

A Snapshot Of The November Elections

June 2010

Expect Americans' dissatisfaction with government and fears about the future to play out at the polls this fall.

Recent surveys show Americans remain highly concerned about the economy, unemployment and the government's response to the Gulf oil spill, as well as healthcare and the caliber of the nation's leadership.

Declining approval ratings for President Obama and Congress are strong indications that November's midterm elections will usher in a sea change in Washington's leadership. Increasing numbers of analysts expect Republicans to make big gains in the House, Senate and in many of the 37 gubernatorial races being decided this year.

Our Nation's Past Bears Out The Anticipated Change.

Historically, the President's party loses seats in the midterm elections. Over the last century, the average loss since 1910 for both parties is very similar. For Democrats, the average loss has been 32.1 seats in the House and 1.4 seats in the Senate. The average Republican loss has been strikingly similar—an average loss of 29.5 House seats and 3.5 Senate seats.

Since World War II, the President's party has lost an average of 24 House seats in the interim elections, gaining ground on just two of 16 occasions.

Many think these losses occur when the economy is bad, but the most telling sign is a President's approval rating. When a President's approval numbers go below 50%, his party is going to be clobbered in the midterm elections.

Another factor is partly due to a huge drop-off in voters from the presidential election. In the 2004 elections, President Bush received 62,040,610 votes, and John Kerry received 59,028,439. In 2006, Republican Congressional candidates received 35,674,808 and Democratic candidates for Congress received 42,082,311.

Voters across America are very unhappy and extremely concerned about the future. They rate the Congress as poorly as any Congress in modern times. A recent CBS news poll states that only 9% of the public thinks most members of Congress have done a good enough job to deserve re-election; 82% think we should give new people a chance. The Pew Research Center/National Journal poll has 13% saying Congress is doing an excellent or good job, and 44% rate Congress's job performance as poor.

President Obama isn't doing much better. Gallup's daily tracking polls had him below 50% the entire month of June with a low mark of 44%. Gallup also says U.S. registered voters are largely split on whether President Obama deserves to be re-elected in 2012, with 46% saying he does and 51% saying he does not.

When a President's approval rating drops below 50%, it is a very strong indicator that his party will suffer in the midterms. And the public rates him poorly on his handling of the Gulf oil crisis, disapproving of his performance, according to a CNN poll, by 59%.

According to Gallup, disaster response now trails only the economy and unemployment as the nation's most important problem. Dissatisfaction with government and healthcare are also cited by at least 10% of Americans in the June 11-13 Gallup poll.

Each passing week makes the possibility of the Republicans making huge gains in the House and the Senate much more realistic. Many neutral analysts are now predicting Republicans winning a majority of seats in the House and an outside chance of taking back the Senate.

They must win 40 House seats for a majority in the House, and 10 Senate seats to be the majority party in the Senate. The political environment is very similar to 1994 when Republicans won 54 seats. No matter what, Congress is going to be a different place come next January and President Obama will have to develop a bi-partisan agenda, or he won't have any legislative successes.

The battleground seats are many of the 31 House seats won by Democrats in 2006 and the 21 seats they picked up in the Presidential election year of President Obama. In the same two cycles, Democrats won six Senate seats in 2006 and defeated five Republicans and picked up three Republican open seats for a gain of eight in 2008. For the second election in a row, no Democratic seats were lost.

This election will be all about Democratic seats. In the House, there are at least 70 of their seats in play, and very few Republicans are in trouble. In the Senate, both parties have 18 seats up. There is no Republican incumbent running for re-election in danger of losing his or her seat. There are six open seats. Five of those are competitive but none is a certain loss.

The Democrats have four incumbents in serious trouble, led by Majority Leader Harry Reid. The others are Sen. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas, Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, and Sen. Michael Bennet of Colorado. Sen. Barbara Boxer of California could also fall into this category. Sen. Arlen Specter has already lost a primary and his seat is very competitive. Four of their open seats—North Dakota, Delaware, Illinois and Indiana are likely Republican pickups.

Gallup has Republicans leading 49 to 44 in the generic ballot. This is the best Republicans have ever done in this poll. More bad news for the Democrats comes from a new National Public Radio survey conducted by Stan Greenberg (President Clinton's pollster) and one of the best Republican pollsters, Glen Bolger, in the 60 most vulnerable Democratic districts and the 10 most competitive Republican ones. Greenberg says it's the worst poll he's seen for Democrats since 1994.

In the 70 districts, Republicans led the generic ballot by eight points, 49/41, and in the most vulnerable districts, Republicans led by even more. In the 60 Democratic districts, only 37% of Democrats say that they are very enthusiastic about voting in this year's election, versus 62% for Republicans.

And this poll has more bad news for the President. He has only a 40% approval rating in these Democratic districts, so he is unable to assist in turning around these endangered districts.

There are 37 gubernatorial races, 18 Republican and 19 Democratic, and 18 of these races are rated as tossups. Republicans can easily pick up seven more than they have now.

“2010 Midterm Elections: A Snapshot of the November Elections” is the latest in a series of reports produced by The Dilenschneider Group. We intend our Reports to examine critical issues in a concise, readable, and insightful manner.

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