

The dimensions of the Democratic Party collapse in 2010 election

By Patrick Martin
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With nearly complete results now available for Tuesday's federal and state elections in the United States, both the scale and the contradictions of the Republican Party victory have become clear.

The Republican Party gained about 60 seats in the House of Representatives, the largest increase for either of the two big business parties since 1966, when the Democrats lost 66 seats with the Johnson administration mired in Vietnam. The sweep exceeded the 54 seats gained by the Republicans when they took control of Congress in 1994, during the Clinton administration.

Republican challengers defeated at least 49 incumbent Democratic congressmen, and captured another 12 seats left open by retirement or resignation. Eight more seats held by Democratic incumbents remain too close to call. Democrats won only two seats previously held by Republicans, in Delaware and New Orleans, Louisiana.

In regional terms, half the Republican gains came in the industrial Northeast and Midwest, including gains of five seats apiece in New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio, three seats in Illinois, and two each in New Hampshire, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin.

The Republicans gained 22 seats in the South, including four in Florida and three each in Virginia and Tennessee, and 10 seats in the Great Plains and Mountain West, including two each in Colorado and Arizona.

In the US Senate, where only 36 of 100 seats were at stake, Republicans won 23 seats, for a net gain of six, cutting the Democratic margin by more than half. No Republican senator was defeated for re-election and the Republicans held all of their seats vacated by retirement.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid held his seat in Nevada, one of four closely contested seats in Western states, along with Colorado, California, and Washington, which the Democrats appear to have held, giving them a 53-47 margin in the new Senate that convenes in January.

Incumbent Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski of

Alaska, defeated in the Republican primary, waged a successful write-in campaign for reelection. Write-in votes appeared on 40 percent of ballots, compared to 36 percent for the Republican nominee Joe Miller and 24 percent for Democrat Scott McAdams. Alaska does not verify write-in votes officially until November 18.

Despite the celebratory publicity about the Tea Party boosting the Republicans, the three Senate candidates most closely identified with the ultra-right movement, Miller in Alaska, Sharron Angle in Nevada and Christine O'Donnell in Delaware, all lost their bids for office.

While Tea Party-backed candidates did win in Kentucky, Utah and Wisconsin, most of the victorious Republican Senate candidates were longtime pillars of the Republican establishment, including newly elected senators from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, North Dakota, Arkansas and Florida.

The Republican Party made wide gains in state governorships and in the control of state legislatures, ensuring a further shift to the right in government policy on education and other services mainly run by state governments.

The Republicans captured previously Democratic-held statehouses in Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Wisconsin and Wyoming. They also retained control in Texas and Florida, the second and fourth largest states. Millionaire health care boss Rick Scott won in Florida despite his company's conviction on Medicare fraud.

Democrats captured Republican-held statehouses in California—where the Democrats swept all statewide offices—Hawaii, Vermont and Minnesota, and kept control of New York's governorship, as well as Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire. The Democratic candidate had a narrow lead in Illinois, while Republicans led in Connecticut and Oregon, both traditionally Democratic states.

A total of 19 state legislative houses changed hands, giving the Republican Party full control of both houses in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Carolina and Alabama, as well as New Hampshire. The Republicans gained an estimated 700 state legislative seats, more than double the average gain for the party out of power in a midterm election. The Democratic Party retained control of the Illinois and California legislatures, and the New York state assembly, but the result for the New York state senate was a tie.

Despite the breadth of the Republican electoral victory, its vote was essentially a negative one, a product of the collapse of support for the Democratic Party rather than any popular enthusiasm for the Republicans. Given the peculiar and antidemocratic character of the US two-party system, which channels all official political life into two parties equally devoted to the interests of the wealthy, the only visible alternatives for those disillusioned with the Obama administration were to abstain or vote for the Republicans.

Far more disillusioned voters stayed home than switched their votes from Democratic to Republican candidates, as can be seen from a careful examination of aggregate vote totals, exit polls and key individual races.

Despite the claims of a popular mandate for the Republicans, the total vote cast for all House Republican candidates actually fell by 11 million compared to 2008. But the total vote for the Democrats fell by much more, nearly 30 million, to barely half the votes cast in 2008.

The aggregate figures for the last three elections show the trend clearly. In 2006, when the Democrats won control of both houses of Congress from the Republicans, the total House Democratic vote was 42,255,280 compared to 35,657,353 for the Republicans, an overall margin of more than 6.5 million votes.

In 2008, the Democrats increased their House and Senate majorities significantly, and the illusions promoted in the campaign for Barack Obama swelled the vote for candidates for other offices as well. The total Democratic vote for the House in 2008 swelled to 65,241,408, compared to 52,184,380 for the Republicans, for a margin of more than 13 million.

In 2010, with all but a handful of districts and precincts reporting, the total vote cast for Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives was 35,377,756 to 41,128,504 for the Republicans, for a Republican margin of about 5.7 million votes, less than the Democratic margin in 2006 and less than half the margin of 2008.

The total two-party vote in 2010 declined by 1.5 million

compared to the previous midterm election in 2006. It was down a gargantuan 41 million compared to 2008, a presidential election year.

This pattern can be illustrated in selected individual races, including several where the same Democrat and Republican ran against each other in consecutive elections, with opposite results. In each case, the Republican received more votes as a losing candidate in 2008 than as a winning candidate in 2010.

In Arizona's Fifth Congressional District, Democrat Harry Mitchell defeated Republican David Schweikert in 2008, by 149,033 to 122,165. In 2010, Mitchell's vote plunged to 66,063, and Schweikert's to 82,391, giving the Republican the victory.

In Ohio's First Congressional District, Democrat Steve Driehaus defeated incumbent Republican Steve Chabot in 2008 by 155,089 to 140,069. In 2010, Chabot won his seat back although his vote dropped to 101,691, because the vote for the Democrat dropped even more, to 87,394.

And in Florida's 22nd Congressional District, Democrat Ron Klein won the election in 2008, receiving 169,041 votes to 140,104 for Republican Allen West. In 2010, West defeated Klein, with 113,921 votes to 96,004.

There are many similar examples, demonstrating in detail that the collapse of the Democratic Party vote is the driving force of the 2010 election.

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