

Future of the GOP

Can Republicans gain more minority support?

The immediate future appears promising for the Republican Party: It is in strong shape to reclaim the majority in the Senate in November, gaining control of both chambers of Congress, and it commands many state governments. But political observers say the GOP should be concerned about the longer term, developing policies that can entice greater numbers of women, minorities and young people. Analysts also say the party must resolve its internal battles between the moderate Republican establishment and more conservative tea party wing. At the same time, nonpartisan scholars say, Republicans must shed the identity they have acquired as the uncompromising and confrontational “party of no.” The party’s growing conservative bent has driven away many independent voters, who are crucial to winning presidential elections. The 2016 contest for the White House is seen as critical in determining whether Republicans can assemble a diverse coalition beyond their traditional base of older whites.



Rep. Rand Paul, R-Ky., a potential 2016 GOP presidential candidate, has courted black voters in an attempt to expand the party's appeal. He criticizes Republicans who support voting restrictions that affect minority voters. At left is tea party advocate Rep. Michelle Bachmann, R-Minn., who unsuccessfully sought the 2012 GOP presidential nomination.

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MANAGING EDITOR: Thomas J. Billitteri
 tjbill@sqagepub.com

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITORS: Maryann Haggerty, maryann.haggerty@sqagepub.com,
 Kathy Koch, kathy.koch@sqagepub.com,
 Scott Rohrer, scott.rohrer@sqagepub.com

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR:
 Thomas J. Colin
 tom.colin@sqagepub.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS: Brian Beary,
 Marcia Clemmitt, Sarah Glazer, Kenneth Jost,
 Reed Karaim, Peter Katel, Robert Kiener,
 Barbara Mantel, Tom Price, Jennifer Weeks

SENIOR PROJECT EDITOR: Olu B. Davis

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Ethan McLeod

FACT CHECKERS: Eva P. Dasher,
 Michelle Harris, Nancie Majkowski



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Future of the GOP

BY CHUCK MCCUTCHEON

THE ISSUES

Experts say the Republicans are likely to regain the majority in the Senate in November, giving them control of both houses of Congress.

But conservative pundit David Frum is still worried. He urges the GOP (for Grand Old Party) to focus on the future beyond the upcoming midterm elections.

A former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, Frum wrote in *Foreign Affairs* about problems he felt were “weakening [the Republican Party’s] ability to win presidential elections and gravely inhibiting its ability to govern effectively.” The party can overcome the obstacles, he said, but “the ominous question for Republicans is, how much time will the overcoming take?”¹

Frum is not the only political analyst warning about the Republicans’ long-term health. To thrive in a more diverse country weary of polarizing rhetoric and government shutdowns, he and others argue, the party must resolve battles between its establishment and tea party wings and develop policies that attract more women, minorities and young people. Meanwhile, they say, Republicans must shed their image as the uncompromising and confrontational “party of no.”

The future of the GOP is important to both Democrats and Republicans because the two-party system is at the root of American democracy. A healthy party serves as a credible check on the opposition, promoting ideas and candidates different from the other party in order to reach unaligned voters.



Getty Images/D. Dipasupil

Prominent Republicans such as Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan say the GOP has to revive the “big tent” concept of welcoming both genders and all races. The party’s 2012 vice presidential nominee and a possible 2016 presidential candidate, Ryan says, “We have to be a party for everybody.”

With the rise of the tea party movement and its adherence to tax cuts and limited government, none of President Obama’s most prominent legislative initiatives has received more than a handful of GOP votes. In a stalemate with the president last fall, ardent House conservatives helped force a federal government shutdown that was unpopular with the public. And tea party Republicans have publicly called for Obama’s impeachment.²

“The outside influence of hard-line elements in the party base is doing to the GOP what supporters of [presidential candidates] Gene McCarthy and George McGovern did to the Democratic Party in the late 1960s and early

’70s: radicalizing its image and standing in the way of revitalization,” said Andrew Kohut, founding director and former president of the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, who is now director of Pew’s Global Attitudes Project.³

But many conservatives say the GOP has been too prone to compromise and that it hasn’t moved far enough to the right. “What it takes is backbone, the willingness to stand and fight for [one’s] principles in the face of opposition and derision,” said Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a potential 2016 presidential candidate.⁴

Kohut and other analysts say the growing influence of anti-compromise Republicans exemplifies how ideological the GOP has become. According to a June Pew poll, the typical Republican voter today is more conservative than 94 percent of Democrats, compared with 70 percent 20 years ago.⁵

The Pew study also found that Democrats have become more ideological as well. But

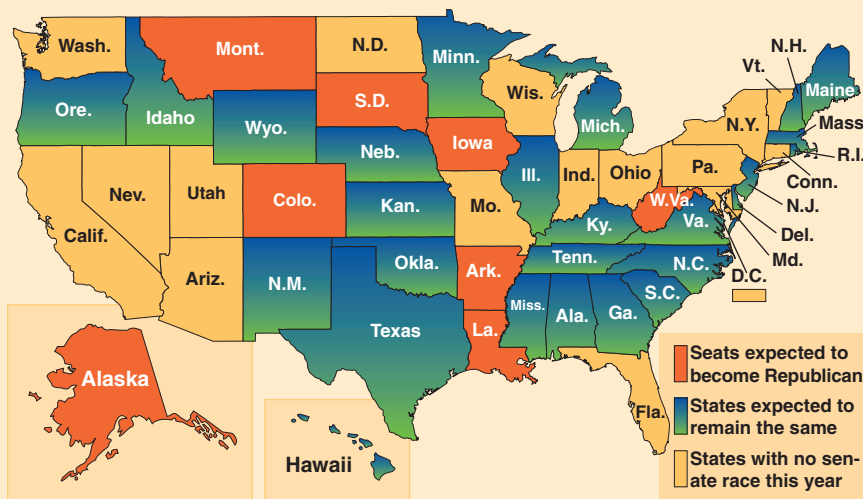
scholars Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute and Thomas Mann at the Brookings Institution think tank blame Washington’s political gridlock squarely on the Republican Party. The GOP, they said, has become “contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime; scornful of compromise; unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition.”⁶

Republicans say that critique overlooks Democratic partisanship, citing Obama’s refusal to embrace the 2011 recommendations of the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles commission on reducing the budget deficit.⁷ And they cite

Republicans Expected to Take Control of Senate

Election forecasters expect eight states to switch from Democratic to Republican control in the Nov. 4 elections, giving control of the U.S. Senate to the Republicans. In 26 other states with pending Senate elections, party control will likely remain unchanged.

Projected U.S. Senate Party Control After 2014 Elections, by State



Sources: John Sides, Ben Highton and Eric McGhee, “2014 Midterm Elections Forecast: Election Lab,” *The Washington Post*, updated Oct. 16, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/lwbe6br>; for similar predictions by other election forecasters see <http://tinyurl.com/ovdza2o> and <http://tinyurl.com/ogoxmx4>

the GOP’s burgeoning movement of reform conservatives, or “reformicons,” who are proposing anti-poverty efforts, in part to shift the perception that Republicans are interested only in the wealthy.

However, the Republicans have lost the popular vote in five of the last six contests, largely due to demographics. Hispanics, who generally vote Democratic, make up a growing share of the electorate, leading once strongly Republican or extremely competitive states — such as New Mexico, Colorado and Florida — to turn more Democratic. “The demographics of the country are shifting, and the politicians are trying to catch up to the demographics,” says former Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairman Michael Steele.

The likelihood of Republican gains in November — the GOP is favored to pick up the six Senate seats needed to regain the majority for the first time

since 2006 — follows an entrenched pattern. For more than a century, every two-term presidential administration has seen the president’s party lose seats in the Senate during the sixth year of his administration, except in 1998.⁸

That perennial pattern appears likely to repeat itself this year, in part because Republicans’ ratings have been improving. An October *Washington Post*/ABC News poll found that 56 percent of registered voters viewed the Republican Party unfavorably, down from 60 percent in August. Meanwhile, the Democrats’ unfavorable rating rose — from 46 percent in August to 51 percent in October.⁹ In addition, many of the Democratic seats open in this election — 21, compared to 15 for the GOP — are in favorable GOP terrain.

Regardless of what happens this fall, analysts say the Republican Party must confront other concerns if it wants to

remain vibrant. For instance, the party increasingly relies on the votes of the elderly, the group most dependent on Medicare, Social Security and other government services. That is “a serious complication for a party committed to reducing government,” Frum said.¹⁰ Seniors are unlikely to be won over by Republicans who criticize Social Security — Texas Gov. Rick Perry compared it to a “Ponzi scheme” — and call for substantially revamping Medicare.¹¹

Moreover, at the state level several governors have jeopardized their re-election chances by taking strongly conservative stands, such as refusing to expand Medicaid coverage, angering moderates and independents.¹²

In Illinois, the races of moderates Bruce Rauner (for governor) and Tom Cross (for state treasurer) are regarded as barometers for the state’s Republican Party.

“A win by both Republicans . . . would be a crushing blow to the far-right wing of the Illinois GOP” and would likely “reinvigorate moderates at the grassroots level,” said Rich Miller, publisher of a nonpartisan newsletter on Illinois politics.¹³

After former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney’s 2012 loss to Obama, the RNC, the GOP’s main organizational arm, created the Growth and Opportunity Project to study how to prevent future GOP losses. Its central focus was to convene party officials to make recommendations about the GOP’s future. Those included:

- Putting out a positive message,
- Creating a diverse, nationwide field operation of local activists,
- Overcoming the Democratic Party’s substantial advantages in technology, and
- Streamlining the presidential primary, debate and convention processes.

A year after the project’s report, the RNC had made “tremendous progress,” its authors said.¹⁴ Among other things, the 2016 primary calendar has been compressed, from early February to April or May.¹⁵ In the current protracted

presidential primary process, candidates take strongly conservative stands to please the party's devoted "base" of voters, who vote in primaries, experts say. Then, when the candidate shifts back to the political center after getting nominated, he or she is often charged with flip-flopping.

RNC Chairman Reince Priebus has predicted the party will be fine if it can implement more of those recommendations. He and other Republicans are enthusiastic about continued control of the House of Representatives and state government, where the party holds 29 governorships and controls the upper legislative chambers in 30 states and the lower chambers in 28. This advantage has helped the GOP redraw congressional districts to protect vulnerable candidates by shifting Democratic voters elsewhere.

But others note the party's lack of support among women and minorities. The August *Washington Post*/ABC News poll found that 62 percent of female respondents saw the party as unfavorable, as did 70 percent of non-whites.¹⁶

Two Republican groups also conducted focus groups with women voters and found that they are "barely receptive" to Republican policies and saw the party as "intolerant" and "stuck in the past."¹⁷

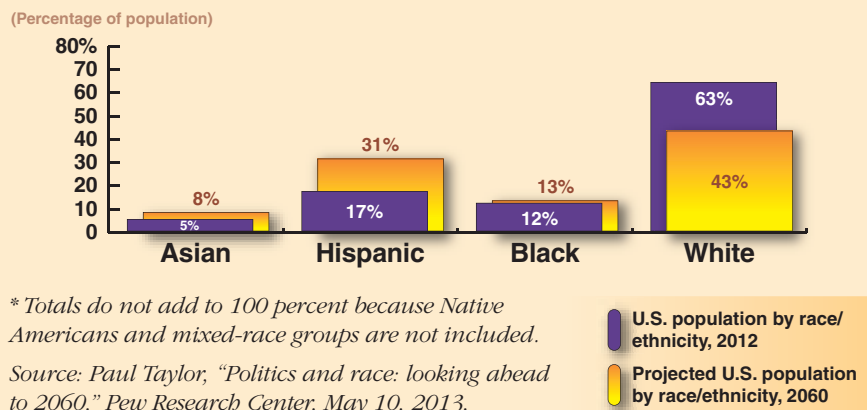
Gay and lesbian voters also vote overwhelmingly Democratic. In 2012, those voters — who made up 5 percent of the electorate — supported Obama by more than 3 to 1, enough to provide him with a decisive overall advantage, according to one study.¹⁸

The GOP faces geographic limitations as well. Its appeal has declined in the urban northeast and California, the country's most populous state. (*See sidebar, p. 900.*)

"The Republican Party faces a number of challenges to remain a viable national political party, as opposed to a regional party," says David McLennan, a political scientist at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C.

Rise of Minorities Could Hurt Republicans

America's racial and ethnic composition will shift heavily toward minorities over the next 50 years, posing potential challenges for Republicans, according to the Pew Research Center. The Hispanic population is expected to grow the fastest, from 17 percent of the total population in 2012 to 31 percent in 2060. Meanwhile, the share of whites — Republicans' primary voting bloc — is projected to shrink from 63 to 43 percent by 2060.



Many of the fastest-growing states, such as Texas, are traditionally Republican. But as the baby boomers retire, Democrats increasingly are moving to other fast-growing southern states that were once firmly in the GOP column, such as Georgia and Virginia. Of the 20 million people alive today born in New York state, a Democratic bastion, nearly one-sixth now live in the South.¹⁹

Some analysts argue that the GOP can remain competitive if it retains its current base of committed white voters. Historically, white voters have favored the Republican Party by a small margin, one that has grown in recent years.²⁰

But prominent Republicans say the party needs to revive the "big tent" concept of welcoming both genders and all races. For instance, Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the party's 2012 vice presidential nominee and a potential 2016 presidential candidate, said, "We have to be a party for everybody."²¹

As politicians, political scientists and others debate the Republican Party's

future, here are some of the questions under discussion:

Will the tea party and other conservative groups take control of the Republican Party?

Many Democrats firmly believe that the tea party movement and other conservative organizations such as The Club for Growth and Charles and David Koch's Americans for Prosperity want to take over the GOP and make it conform to far-right orthodoxy.

"The tea party casts a huge shadow over the GOP," said Earl Ofari Hutchinson, a liberal author and political analyst. "Their fervent backers touch a deep, dark and throbbing pulse among legions of ultra-conservatives who think that President Obama and many Democrats are communists, gays are immoral and that the health care reform law is a massive government intrusion into their personal affairs."²²

The tea party — not an actual party but a loosely organized movement of groups — espouses balancing the bud-

get through steep spending cuts and corresponding tax cuts, extremely limited regulation of the private sector and increased government accountability.

“These principles should not be anathema to a Republican Party that has the intention of being the party of principled constitutional conservatism — not merely ‘Democrat lite’ . . .,” said Niger Innis,

moved into the White House,” said Harvard University government and sociology professor Theda Skocpol.²⁵

However, the tea party movement is causing “fundamental problems in fundraising” among some moderate Republican businessmen, says Meredith College’s McLennan. “In North Carolina, the business community, long support-

The Koch brothers, billionaire businessmen from Wichita, Kan., are libertarian-leaning activists leading a network that has spent more than \$400 million in the 2012 election cycle to support Republicans and defeat Democrats. “They are set on taking over the GOP,” said University of Minnesota political scientist Lawrence Jacobs.²⁸

Many liberals say one of the brothers’ goals is to loosen or eliminate regulations affecting their energy-related companies. In response to such allegations, Koch spokesman Robert Tappan said the brothers oppose “all mandates and subsidies, even when they exist for businesses in which we operate. We have been consistent in this position for over 40 years.” By opposing energy-industry subsidies, he added, it sometimes can mean that “we act against our self-interest.”²⁹

However, the tea party and far-right groups have thus far failed to place an adherent in the top levels of congressional leadership. In the House, Speaker John Boehner, who has rebuked tea party followers for being inflexible, is nonetheless seen as safe in his position.³⁰ Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., also decisively beat a tea party challenger in a May primary election.³¹ And in other Senate primaries this year, far-right groups had little success electing candidates to replace lawmakers they deemed too moderate. Every incumbent Republican senator who encountered a challenge from tea party groups won, including South Carolina’s Lindsey Graham and Mississippi’s Thad Cochran.

Only four of the 15 GOP congressional candidates endorsed by tea party standard-bearer Sarah Palin won their 2014 primaries — a dramatic reversal from 2010 and 2012, when the ex-Alaska governor was highly influential.³²

Meanwhile, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce — whose pro-business stance diverges from tea party and libertarian philosophies in calling for less-severe budget cuts and greater overall compromise — has urged the Repub-



Getty Images/Alex Wong

Rep. Eric Cantor, R-Va., stepped down in July as House majority leader after losing his Virginia primary to tea party challenger Dave Brat. The powerful congressman’s defeat was attributed as much to his perceived inattention to his district as to his failure to toe the tea party line.

executive director of TheTeaParty.net, the movement’s largest organization. “If the Republican Party wishes to survive, they must learn that the tea party is not their adversary, but the future.”²³

The tea party already has moved the GOP away from the political center. In its annual vote rankings for 2013, *National Journal* found that only two of the 234 House Republicans received a more liberal score than the most conservative Democratic member of the chamber. At the same time, no Senate Republican was more liberal than any of the chamber’s Democrats. It was the most polarized Congress since the publication began calculating votes in 1982.²⁴

“Tea party forces have done and are still doing remarkably well in pushing the GOP even further to the hard right than it was before Barack Obama

ive of the Republican Party, has pulled back on its monetary support for the Republican Party and candidates, in part due to the tea party influence and tea party-influenced donors,” he says.

The Club for Growth bills itself as an organization of “pro-growth, limited government Americans who share in the belief that prosperity and opportunity come from economic freedom.”²⁶ Its practice of backing primary opponents of GOP incumbents it considers too moderate has irked some establishment Republicans. “The Club for Growth is homogenizing the Republican Party,” said former Maine GOP Sen. Olympia Snowe, just after retiring from the Senate. She added that she deplored the “atmosphere of polarization [that] has become pervasive in campaigns and in our governing institutions.”²⁷

lican establishment to contribute to vulnerable senators and vows to continue such efforts.³³

Far-right groups did achieve one high-profile success in 2014 — the unexpected defeat of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., in a June primary. But the powerful congressman's loss was attributed as much to his perceived inattention to his district as to his failure to toe the tea party line.³⁴

Tea party leaders say they are compelling Republicans — including those they could not defeat in 2014 — to be less oriented toward compromise and fall more in line with the movement's beliefs. "We may have been beaten in the battle," Adam Brandon, executive vice president of FreedomWorks, a leading tea party group, said of the 2014 primary outcomes. "But we're winning the war."³⁵

Immigration is a prominent issue in which the far right has gained the political upper hand. The Senate passed a bipartisan immigration reform bill in 2013, but House conservatives objected to providing any path to citizenship for those in the country illegally, a concept they derisively call "amnesty." The House adjourned without taking up the measure.

Anthony Brunello, a political scientist at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Fla., predicts that several other looming issues likely will "open a lot of new fissures" within the GOP, such as the decriminalization of marijuana, same-sex marriage and climate change.

Can Republicans shed their image as the "party of no"?

The unwavering unity Republicans have shown in opposing Obama's agenda has led Democratic critics to describe the GOP as "the party of no" — incapable of devising a broader agenda.

"Republicans greeted Obama's inauguration with an active plan of maximal obstruction of everything he did," wrote liberal *Mother Jones* columnist Kevin Drum.³⁶

The House voted more than 50 times to repeal the Affordable Care Act, even though the repeal stood no chance of passing the Democratic-controlled Senate or being signed by the president.³⁷ And in July, the president contended that Republicans' main focus was not passing legislation but filing a lawsuit over the health-care law. "Their big idea has been to sue me," Obama said.³⁸

United GOP opposition to Obama has extended to other issues. In the Senate, a bipartisan effort to tighten gun safety laws after the 2012 mass shooting at an elementary school in Newtown, Conn., collapsed in 2013, partly because Republicans were unwilling to hand the president an accomplishment, according to Sen. Patrick Toomey, R-Pa., who worked with Democrats on the issue. "There were some on my side who did not want to be seen helping the president do something he wanted to get done, just because the president wanted to do it," Toomey said.³⁹

On economic matters, Frum, the former Bush speechwriter, said Republicans' opposition is grounded in fears that taxes will be raised in the future to pay for current budget deficits. That is leading the party even to oppose initiatives it once backed, such as economic-stimulus bills and emergency disaster-relief aid to states, he said.⁴⁰

The Wall Street Journal's editorial page, normally a staunch supporter of Republicans, complained in a September editorial: "The lack of any common GOP agenda is leading to the perception of a policy vacuum that plays into Mr. Obama's critique that Republicans are opposed to everything."⁴¹

Some observers expect little to change in the remaining two years of Obama's term, especially if the party gains control of the Senate in November. "We're not going to learn any lessons in this midterm," says former GOP Rep. Tom Davis, who represented Northern Virginia in the House from 1995 to 2008. "It is going to give us a false sense of security."

The GOP's tendency to reject Democratic proposals could persist past Obama's presidency, some political observers say. Michigan State University political scientist Matt Grossman said Republicans in general have become more ideological than Democrats. In addition, Grossman said, conservatives' limited-government ideology complicates their efforts to enact legislation. "That's why there have been few examples over the years of active, conservative governance," Grossman said.⁴²

But some observers say the GOP's stance is largely a function of not having a Republican in the White House, noting that Democrats were pinned with the "party of no" label when George W. Bush was president.

"Whenever you have a president of the other party, it's hard to be anything different; he's the one setting the agenda," says Sean Trende, senior analyst for the political website Real Clear Politics.

At the same time, however, some prominent Republicans are clamoring for the party to embrace a more positive and less reactive approach to governing while Obama is still in office. "We can't be a party of no," said Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, a potential 2016 presidential candidate who also has rebuked the GOP for being "the stupid party."⁴³

Former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, who sought the White House in 2012, echoed that sentiment: "I think the Republican Party has a huge opportunity to take the high ground if it were to focus on problem-solving and solutions and practical approaches. And we're completely divorced from that basic approach and ethos these days."⁴⁴

Other Republicans say opposition to Obama overshadows a burgeoning movement within the party that has developed a comprehensive slate of new policy proposals. It is led by "reformicons," or reform conservatives, who say the GOP should put more emphasis on reaching middle-class and low-income voters.

Wisconsin's Ryan, who recently put forward a comprehensive proposal to

address poverty, is one of the reformicons. Ryan proposes a new “Opportunity Grant” program, which would consolidate several federal public-assistance programs into a single Opportunity Grant for each state, giving state governments authority to propose their own customized anti-poverty strategies.⁴⁵ The program would start as a pilot project in select states.

“What I am trying to show is that with the right application of the right governing philosophy, by reapplication of our critical, timeless founding principles, we can come up with solutions to fix our country’s great problems,” Ryan said.⁴⁶

Ryan is not alone in seeking a new vision. Florida GOP Sen. Marco Rubio also has discussed similar proposals to consolidate federal anti-poverty programs into a single fund to be paid out to state governments. In addition, he has called for replacing the earned income tax credit — a refundable tax credit for low-income families, particularly those with children — with a federal wage enhancement for those working in low-paying jobs.⁴⁷

Utah Republican Sen. Mike Lee has developed a “Conservative Reform Agenda” that includes using tax credits to help children and working families and giving cities and states more autonomy to design and build transportation projects without relying on the federal gasoline tax.⁴⁸

Their views are drawing more attention of late. The left-leaning *The New Republic* said liberals “should take reform conservatism seriously” because it includes “valid conservative ideas.”⁴⁹

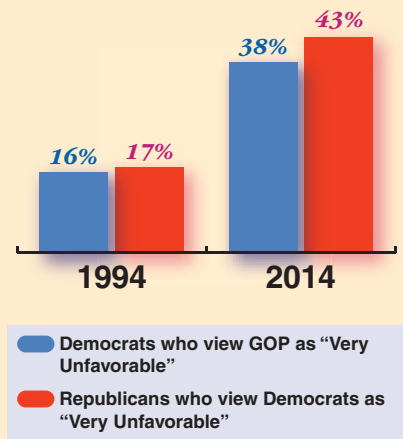
Can the Republican Party gain more support among minority groups and young people?

In its post-2012 election self-analysis, the RNC said the GOP must do a far better job of connecting with young voters and minority groups — two demographics that went decisively for Obama in 2008 and 2012.

The Growth and Opportunity Project’s report noted that in the 1980 presidential election, the electorate was

Mutual Dislike Grows

The percentage of Democrats and Republicans who view the other party as “very unfavorable” has more than doubled in the past two decades. This year, slightly more Republicans than Democrats harbor negative attitudes toward the other party.



Source: Michael Dimock, Jocelyn Kiley, Scott Keeter and Carroll Doberty, “Political Polarization in the American Public,” *Pew Research Center*, June 12, 2014, p. 31, <http://tinyurl.com/m8lswml>

88 percent white; in 2012, that figure fell to 72 percent. Although Bush drew 44 percent of both the Hispanic vote and Asian vote in 2004, Romney drew just 27 percent and 26 percent from those groups in 2012.⁵⁰

Black voters, meanwhile, have gone overwhelmingly for Obama, the nation’s first African-American president, giving him 95 percent of the vote in 2008 and 93 percent in 2012. But even in 2004 African-Americans had voted 88 percent for Democratic nominee John Kerry, indicating they will remain difficult for Republicans to entice.⁵¹

A June 2013 report from the College Republican National Committee, the nation’s largest political youth group, warned of a “dismal present situation” with young people because of the party’s sharp

rhetoric and positions on social issues such as same-sex marriage.⁵² Obama took 66 percent of the vote from voters under 30 in 2008 and 60 percent four years later.⁵³

Republicans contend they are making progress with those groups. The GOP has hired hundreds of new campaign workers and other staffers in minority communities to help promote the Republican message.

“I think we are making positive strides,” said Glenn McCall, a national RNC member from South Carolina who was one of the Growth and Opportunity Project report’s authors.⁵⁴

Several Republicans who represent or hope to represent communities with diverse populations are focusing on engaging with those voters. In Virginia, Barbara Comstock, who is running for an open House seat, has attended numerous Indian-, Pakistani- and Korean-American gatherings in the area.⁵⁵ And in Colorado, GOP Rep. Mike Coffman abandoned his hard-line stance on immigration and began learning Spanish in preparation for debates against his Democratic opponent this fall.⁵⁶

A national Gallup Poll in September showed that Hispanics still identify as Democrats by a greater than 2 to 1 margin, but that their support for Obama has plummeted.⁵⁷ Some analysts say the drop reflects Hispanics’ frustration with the president for being unable to work with Congress to enact immigration reform.

Florida’s Rubio has talked about economic mobility and the middle class, a theme he says resonates among Hispanics.⁵⁸ And Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., another possible 2016 presidential candidate, has gone to great lengths to court black voters. Paul — who came under fire for questioning the Civil Rights Act of 1964 — spoke to the Urban League’s national conference in July and has worked with two prominent African-Americans on criminal-justice and drug-sentencing issues: Attorney General Eric Holder and New Jersey Democratic Sen. Cory Booker.

But J. C. Watts, a black former GOP congressman from Oklahoma, said few other members of his party are following Paul's lead. "They talk about outreach, but I see very little," Watts said.⁵⁹

As for attracting Hispanics, some leading Republicans say the party's refusal to legislatively address comprehensive immigration reform is damaging the GOP.

"If we don't adjust on this issue, our chances for survival as a party are very bleak, and the country needs a vibrant Republican Party," said South Carolina's Sen. Graham.⁶⁰

Controversies involving outspoken conservatives also are regarded as hurtful to the party's image. In recent months, Iowa Rep. Steve King — who has been highly critical of immigration reform — was filmed getting into an argument on the subject with two activists, while Alabama Rep. Mo Brooks described efforts to pass the bill as part of a larger Democratic "war on whites."

Such incidents are "further evidence that we're departing further and further into the wilderness," said Republican strategist John Weaver, a former adviser to Arizona Sen. John McCain.⁶¹

Former RNC Chairman Steele, who is African-American, called the party's current minority-outreach effort "stupid," because it doesn't let state parties develop their own plans. "I don't need someone who is tethered to the Republican National Committee," he said.⁶²

Republicans say the problems faced by young people in the present economy inevitably will draw that group toward their party. Recent figures show "millennials" under 30 made up a higher percentage of those unemployed nationally than their older counterparts.⁶³ Republicans also say Democrats are unlikely to field a presidential candidate in 2016 who was as charismatic to that group as Obama was in 2008.

They cite a growing GOP desire to de-emphasize divisive social issues such as same-sex marriage, something that polls show has turned off many young voters. Increasing numbers of prominent

Republicans, such as Ohio Republican Sen. Rob Portman, now support the right of gays and lesbians to wed.⁶⁴

But Trey Grayson, director of the Harvard Institute of Politics, said Republicans "still aren't faring as well with younger voters, despite the decline in support for the president. To date, it's been a missed opportunity."⁶⁵

The RNC in March began running a series of ads featuring Scott Greenberg, a young voter who said he is "ticked off" at politicians who "vote for regulations that make it impossible to hire anyone."⁶⁶

Republicans, however, say they still must look to better harness technology and social media, areas in which they acknowledge Democrats hold a wide advantage. Young people are the most technology-savvy demographic and the heaviest users of social media.

Obama's 2012 victory was attributed in part to his campaign's ability to use sophisticated means of identifying likely voters and motivating them to cast ballots. Republican digital strategist Vincent Harris said the party has had a "fundamental cultural problem" dealing with technology in recent elections.⁶⁷

GOP pollster Jim Hobart pointed to Obama's appearance on comedian Zach Galifianakis' fake Internet talk show "Between Two Ferns" to tout the Affordable Care Act, which was credited with triggering a surge in sign-ups under the health care law.

"We as a party can certainly be doing more" young-voter outreach, Hobart said. "We can't hesitate to go in 'Between Two Ferns.'" ⁶⁸ ■

BACKGROUND

Extremism "Is No Vice"

As counterintuitive as it sounds, the philosophical groundwork for

today's Republican Party was laid half a century ago with the resounding defeat of Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater, its 1964 presidential nominee.

Incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson took 44 states against Goldwater, who energized the political right by running as an uncompromising conservative with the declaration: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."⁶⁹ His campaign received more than 1 million contributions — about 25 times the number Richard Nixon received in his ill-fated 1960 presidential bid.⁷⁰

"Basically, that was the beginning of the movement, when conservatives took control of the party," Vic Gold, a former Goldwater aide, said earlier this year.⁷¹

The party's base began shifting away from the Northeast and toward the rapidly growing South and West, enabling Nixon to win in 1968 and even more decisively in 1972. In his 1969 book *The Emerging Republican Majority*, Nixon strategist Kevin Phillips urged Nixon to pursue a so-called "Southern strategy" playing on whites' negative reaction to the Civil Rights Act.⁷²

Nixon followed his advice and also capitalized on backlash to the counterculture's anti-Vietnam War movement, calling on "the great silent majority of my fellow Americans" to support his policies.⁷³

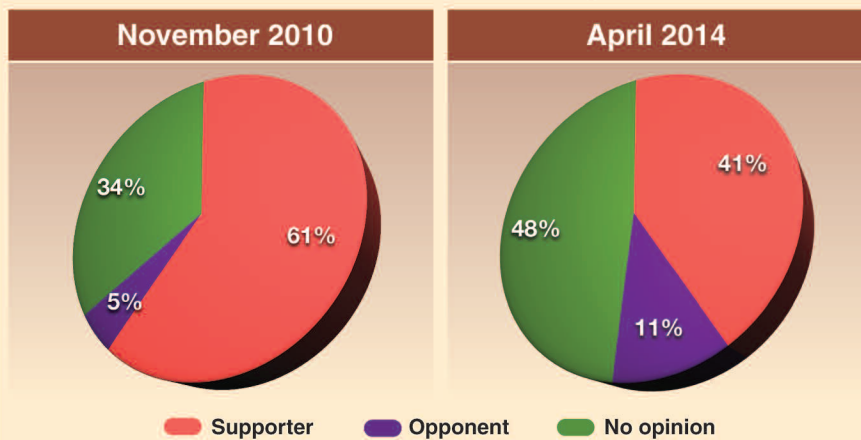
Then the GOP's fortunes declined temporarily as a result of the Watergate scandal, which led to Nixon's resignation in 1974. That year's election of 75 House Democrats and only 17 new Republican members helped Democrats maintain control of the House for 20 additional years.

But Ronald Reagan reinvigorated the party with his landslide 1980 win against Democrat Jimmy Carter, which also ended 26 years of Democratic control of the Senate. Reagan's message of lower taxes, smaller government and a strong defense resonated with voters, and he became the party's leading modern hero as he was able to tap

GOP Support for Tea Party Plummeted

The percentage of Republican or Republican-leaning Americans affiliated with the tea party movement has dropped by one-third in the past three and a half years, from a peak of 61 percent in 2010 to 41 percent this year.

Percentage of GOP or GOP-Leaning Americans Affiliated with Tea Party



Source: Frank Newport, "Four Years in, GOP Support for Tea Party Down to 41%," Gallup, May 8, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/mw5vdtu>

the support of white working-class voters, so-called "Reagan Democrats."

Reagan's popularity also was due to his success in mobilizing conservative Christians. A year after the founding of the Moral Majority, an organization started in 1979 to mobilize evangelical Christians for political causes, Reagan appealed for their support, praising their efforts and questioning the theory of evolution. The Moral Majority and some other conservative Christian groups subsequently became powerful forces in pushing for tighter restrictions on abortion and other social issues.

Although Reagan is held up as the conservative GOP standard-bearer, many political analysts note that he would be considered a moderate by today's tea party standards. As governor, Reagan crafted compromises with his political opponents and signed into law the largest tax increase in California's history (up to that point) and supported measures to liberalize abor-

tion laws and help 3 million illegal immigrants gain citizenship. As president, he approved five tax increases during his eight years in office. (See sidebar, p. 902.)

After Reagan left office in 1989, President George H. W. Bush enjoyed sky-high popularity for organizing an international coalition to drive Iraq's Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, only to infuriate conservatives by later negotiating a tax increase. In 1992, Bill Clinton became the first Democrat since Jimmy Carter to occupy the White House, partly by prodding his party toward the ideological center.

But in 1994, Republican Rep. Newt Gingrich of Georgia emerged with a new, sharply partisan approach. His strategy was "to so intensify public hatred of Congress that voters would buy into the notion of the need for sweeping change and throw the majority bums out," according to scholars Ornstein and Mann.⁷⁴ Gingrich unveiled a "Con-

tract With America" that called for tax cuts, an overhaul of the welfare system and a balanced budget.

Clinton's ambitious health-care overhaul plan collapsed and was widely portrayed as big-government overreach, and in the 1994 midterm elections Republicans captured the Senate after an eight-year hiatus and broke the Democrats' 40-year hold on the House. Gingrich became House speaker, inaugurating a series of fights against Clinton over how much to cut federal spending. Republicans found themselves on the defensive in those battles, especially after an unpopular shutdown of the federal government in 1995 that was triggered by strong disagreements over spending cuts.

A politically resuscitated Clinton was re-elected in 1996, and Democrats made a net gain of nine House seats. Gingrich eventually stepped down as speaker, but another strong partisan — Rep. Tom DeLay of Texas — helped engineer Clinton's impeachment over charges that he had lied under oath about an affair with a White House intern. Democrats picked up another five House seats in the 1998 midterm elections, and the impeachment effort fizzled as it failed to pick up support from moderate Republicans and independents.

With the GOP in search of someone who could unite the party, Texas Gov. George W. Bush campaigned in 2000 as a "compassionate conservative" and a "uniter, not a divider." He lost the popular vote to Vice President Al Gore but carried every Southern state while drawing 83 percent of the evangelical Christian vote, or 9 percentage points above what former Kansas Sen. Bob Dole received four years earlier.⁷⁵

Hardening Party Lines

Throughout this period, other changes in the South led to a dwindling in the number of conservative Democrats

Continued on p. 900

Chronology

1960s-1980s

Republicans make inroads into Democrats' Southern stronghold.

1964

President Lyndon B. Johnson wins by a landslide, but five Deep South states oppose him.

1966

In response to Johnson's Great Society and civil rights laws, GOP gains 47 House seats, three Senate seats and eight governorships.

1968

Richard M. Nixon wins presidency — the first of five Republicans to win the White House in six elections. An era of divided federal government begins that lasts, with few interruptions, until 2002.

1973

Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizes abortion, spurring evangelicals to greater political involvement, mostly supporting GOP.

1974

Nixon resigns amid Watergate scandal; 75 new Democrats are elected to House versus 17 Republicans.

1980

Ronald Reagan is elected president by attracting white working-class voters and Southerners by touting low taxes and strong defense.

1984

Reagan is re-elected in 49-state landslide, tapping Democratic strength among union members.

1990s **GOP gains control of Congress for the first time in decades.**

1992

Democrat Bill Clinton wins the White House by appealing to working-class voters on economic issues.

1994

Republicans take House for first time in 40 years, along with the Senate, in reaction to Clinton policies on taxes, health insurance.

1998

The president's party gains seats in a midterm election for first time since 1934, largely in reaction to GOP probe of Clinton's sex life.

2000s **Former Texas Gov. George W. Bush wins presidency, ushers in Republican domination of U.S. politics, but GOP monopoly soon fades.**

2000

Bush declared president after Supreme Court ends 36-day recount in Florida. . . . GOP gains control of White House and Congress for first time since 1954.

2001

Sen. James Jeffords, R-Vt., abandons GOP, giving Democrats control of the previously tied Senate.

2004

Record 44 percent of Latinos vote for Bush's re-election.

2005

House Republicans alienate Hispanics by passing immigration bill to reclassify illegal immigrants as felons.

2006

Democrats regain control of Congress with support from blacks, Hispanics and Asians.

2008

Democrat Barack Obama wins largest percentage of votes of any Democrat since Johnson, becoming nation's first African-American president. Democrats also gain in House, Senate, governorships and state legislatures.

2009

Tea party movement forms as a reaction to Obama policies on health care, spending and other issues, some of which — including a \$787 billion economic-stimulus program — were responding to a deep recession and housing slump that began in 2007.

2010

Republicans gain 63 seats, regaining control of House, and seven governorships.

2011

Congressional Republicans engage Obama in tense showdowns over federal spending.

2012

Obama is re-elected. . . . Republicans fail to reclaim Senate majority after several candidates make widely condemned remarks on rape and abortion.

2013

GOP's Growth and Opportunity Project calls for electoral changes, greater engagement with young and minority voters. . . . A 16-day shutdown of the federal government leads angry voters to largely blame GOP, but Obama administration's flawed rollout of the Affordable Care Act soon takes the heat off Republicans.

2014

Republicans are positioned to regain control of the Senate, add to their House majority.

Republicans Struggle to Revitalize California Party

“We are not the masters of our own destiny.”

California is the nation’s most populous state — and the source of many Republicans’ biggest frustrations about the future.

Since Golden State voters supported Republicans in all but one presidential election between 1952 and 1988, they have been solidly in the Democratic camp.¹ Not only is popular Democrat Jerry Brown expected to easily win re-election as governor in November, but his party occupies all statewide offices and has strong majorities in both chambers of the legislature.

The percentage of the state’s voters who are registered as Republicans has fallen from 36 percent a decade ago to about 29 percent. By comparison, 43.5 percent of voters are Democrats, and none of the state’s counties has a Republican majority.² Perhaps most important, because California holds 55 of the 270 Electoral College votes needed to win the presidency — the most of any state — it has become extremely pivotal for Democrats.

Minorities outnumber whites in California, and minority voters in recent elections have overwhelmingly voted Democratic. Of the state’s 38.3 million residents, 38 percent are Hispanic, while 14 percent are Asian and more than 6 percent are African-American.³

Republicans have seen how those minority groups can mobilize. In 1994, Californians approved Proposition 187, a ballot initiative prominently backed by GOP Gov. Pete Wilson to deny public services such as education and health care to illegal immigrants. Before most of its provisions were struck

down in court, Hispanics rejected GOP candidates while encouraging greater numbers of minorities to run for office.

On other issues, Californian Republicans are more moderate than their fellow party members elsewhere. State Republicans say one of their biggest obstacles is how closely voters associate state and local politicians with the national party.

“We are not the masters of our own destiny,” says Duf Sundheim, who chaired California’s GOP from 2003 to 2007. “The perception of the national party just overwhelms the perceptions of the state party.”

Sundheim and other Republicans had hoped that Arnold Schwarzenegger — a moderate on social issues — could boost the party during his two terms as governor (2003-2011). But he was widely criticized for his handling of the state’s economy. By Schwarzenegger’s last summer in office, his approval rating had sunk to 22 percent, tying his predecessor, Democrat Gray Davis, for the lowest recorded rating in state history.⁴

National Republicans have sought to make inroads in Silicon Valley, where many technology industry employees hold a libertarian perspective. Some of the region’s companies have worked to overcome the Democratic Party’s advantages in using technology to mobilize voters, and presidential candidates have traveled there to extol the area’s entrepreneurial culture.

“I have nothing but optimism when I’m out here because I see amazing potential for growth away from the disaster that is Washington,” Kentucky GOP Sen. Rand Paul told a conference

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serving in Congress and a corresponding increase in the number of conservative Republicans. At the state level, the GOP began using the congressional redistricting process to redraw districts to move Democrats into urban areas, making the Republican Party more competitive in suburban areas. Meanwhile, Northeastern states became less Republican as greater numbers of people migrated to the Sun Belt, and the mostly moderate and liberal Republicans who remained were ostracized in what had become a Southern-centric party.⁷⁶

Bush initially cooperated with Democrats on issues, most notably education reform. But the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks caused partisan lines to harden, particularly after the president’s decision to invade Iraq. Bush won re-election in

2004, and Republicans began wondering if his victory marked the start of an entrenched GOP majority.⁷⁷

But Bush’s second term was dominated by questions about the Iraq war and his administration’s botched response to Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast. His average Gallup Poll approval rating during his first term was 62 percent; in his second term, it sank to 37 percent, and on several occasions was as low as 25 percent.⁷⁸

Congressional Republicans fared little better. Ethics scandals involving veteran lawmakers — including Texas Rep. DeLay — helped Democrats portray their rivals as incapable of governing effectively, and in 2006 the GOP lost control of the House and Senate. The new speaker, Democrat Nancy Pelosi of California, vowed to “drain the

swamp” of what she characterized as widespread GOP corruption.⁷⁹

Republicans widely castigated Pelosi, portraying her as a “San Francisco liberal.” Also by that time, Republicans had several conservative mass-media networks that transmitted and amplified their anti-government messages. In addition to popular talk radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, the GOP had Fox News, operated by former Nixon aide Roger Ailes and whose opinion commentators, such as Bill O’Reilly and Glenn Beck, skewed to the political right.

In 2008, Republicans hoped Arizona’s McCain could muster enthusiasm among voters with his national-security credentials and heroic story of survival as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. But the election centered on the economy, and Obama inspired many voters with

in Silicon Valley in July.⁵ Paul later opened an office in the area, and business leaders said they expect other GOP candidates to follow suit.⁶

But the national Republican Party's anti-government rhetoric has hurt the GOP brand in the area, said Republican Tom Campbell, who represented the area as a U.S. House member from 1995 to 2001. At one time, "economic issues united Republicans in Silicon Valley," Campbell said. "Mistrust of government was never a dominant strain."⁷

Republicans are taking other steps to try to rebuild the state party, including naming Harmeet Dhillon as vice chair in 2013. A civil rights attorney from San Francisco, Dhillon is a Sikh who has emphasized recruiting more minorities to run for office.

"Is a Latino going to do a better job representing Latinos than a white guy?" she said. "Not necessarily. Is a Latino more likely to get the vote than a white man? Yes. That's not identity politics. That is human nature."⁸

Brown's GOP opponent in November is Neel Kashkari, a former Treasury Department official and banker of Indian descent. A supporter of same-sex marriage and abortion rights, he won the June primary over Tim Donnelly, a state assemblyman backed by the tea party movement. Although Brown has held a commanding lead in the polls, Republicans hope Kashkari will do well enough to get a toehold in state politics.

"You're not going to beat [Brown], so the expectation is to run a strong, respectable race and position yourself for 2018,"

said Bill Whalen, a fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and former speechwriter for Wilson.⁹

To Sundheim, having a Republican in the governor's office is essential to the party's revitalization. He says that even if the national party "is going far to the right," a strong GOP governor would embolden state Republicans to take more moderate stances.

— *Chuck McCutcheon*

¹ Lincoln Mitchell, "California and the Republican Party," *The Huffington Post*, April 17, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/lozjzhq>.

² Philip Reeves, "See Where Republican Party Is Shrinking Fastest in California," *The Sacramento Bee*, May 29, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/m4rh3gp>.

³ "State & County Quick Facts: California," U.S. Census Bureau, <http://tinyurl.com/ovuh>.

⁴ Ed Leibowitz, "The Rise and Fall of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger," *Los Angeles*, Jan. 1, 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/ls3sxec>.

⁵ Seema Mehta, "Republicans Look to Improve Brand, Tech Skills in Silicon Valley," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/n9wurgy>.

⁶ Emma Roller, "Why Is Rand Paul Opening an Office in Silicon Valley?" *National Journal*, Sept. 23, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/nqdejqy>.

⁷ Josh Richman, "Archconservative Jim DeMint's Visit Highlights Divisions Among Bay Area Republicans," *San Jose Mercury News*, Nov. 10, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/m4g25h8>.

⁸ John Buntin, "California Republicans Try to Reenergize the GOP," *Governing*, September 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/maevpqa>.

⁹ Norimitsu Onishi, "GOP Nominee for Governor Faces an Uphill Climb in California," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/nmcf5e>.

his talk of hope and change in government. McCain's choice of Alaska Gov. Palin as a running mate did not help his cause: Though Palin sparked great enthusiasm among the Republican base, news articles depicted her as lacking knowledge about a range of issues and her rambling interviews and verbal gaffes provided fodder for late-night comics. Obama took 53 percent of the popular vote, the best Democratic percentage since 1964.⁸⁰

Although Obama inherited the crisis sparked by the catastrophic bursting of the housing bubble during the final months of Bush's presidency, the recession deepened to the nation's worst since the Great Depression during his first year as president. Unemployment topped off at 10 percent in October 2009, nine months after he was sworn

into office, and remained high for many months thereafter.

Obama pushed several measures to stem the downturn, including hundreds of billions of dollars in federal stimulus spending and extensions of federal bailouts of the banking, investment and automobile industries initiated under Bush. But these actions provoked a political backlash, amplified by the rapid rise of the tea party movement.

The tea party was an outgrowth of Republicans' increasing shift rightward and the corresponding move among Democrats away from the political center. Despite the movement's animosity toward Obama, it was not hostile to all government programs. A Harvard University study said resistance to health care reform "coexists with considerable acceptance, even warmth, toward long-

standing federal social programs like Social Security and Medicare, to which tea partiers feel legitimately entitled. Opposition is concentrated on resentment of perceived federal government 'hand-outs' to 'undeserving' groups, the definition of which seems heavily influenced by racial and ethnic stereotypes."⁸¹

The tea party was perceived as helping Republicans seize control of the House from Democrats in the 2010 midterm elections, picking up 63 seats to erase Democrats' gains in 2006 and 2008. Conservative columnist Peggy Noonan declared the movement "saved the Republican Party in this [election] cycle by not going third-party. . . . [It] not only freed the Washington establishment, it woke it up."⁸²

But a study by political scientists at three universities said traditional factors

Ronald Reagan Remains GOP Icon

“Anybody who did those things today would be pilloried by conservatives.”

Ten years after his death, Ronald Reagan is the Republican Party's most iconic modern figure, deeply admired for his conservative stances and sunny personality. But some Republicans say the party's ardor for the 40th president is clouding its efforts to move forward.

Those Republicans say the mythologizing of Reagan fails to take into account just how much has changed since he occupied the White House from 1981 to 1989. And they say too many members of their party reflexively invoke his name in challenging new ideas.

“We are still waiting for our beloved head coach, Ronald Reagan, to come out of the locker room and lead us to another victory,” said Ford O’Connell, a GOP strategist. “Anyone who tries a different approach is questioned and doubted: ‘That’s not how Ronald Reagan would have done it.’”¹

But some historians say the party forgets that Reagan took pragmatic positions, often compromising with Democrats — an approach that today's ardent conservatives abhor. As governor of California (1967-75), Reagan signed into law the largest tax increase in the state's history up to that point, as well as a measure to liberalize abortion laws. As president, he approved multiple tax increases and signed into law a bill that helped 3 million illegal immigrants gain citizenship.²

“Anybody who did those things today would be pilloried by conservatives,” says James H. Broussard, a history professor at Pennsylvania's Lebanon Valley College and author of a new biography of Reagan.

“If you look at Reagan's rhetoric, which is what true conservatives are looking at, he's anti-big government, a tax cutter, strong on

national defense,” Broussard adds. “But when he governed, he was much more pragmatic. It's kind of ironic that the people on the right today are looking at what Reagan says, while a lot of the establishment people in the party are trying to do what Reagan actually did. The question is, which do you want to follow?”

Conservative commentator Jennifer Rubin said: “The Republican Party can remain a Ronald Reagan historical society, or it can try to endure as a force in national politics. But it can't do both.”³

As president, Reagan helped fashion a winning coalition of defense hawks and social and fiscal conservatives, bringing into the GOP millions of evangelicals and Democrats alarmed by their party's liberal tilt. A December 2010 Gallup Poll found that among former presidents of the last half-century, Reagan's approval rating was 74 percent, second only to Democrat John F. Kennedy's 85 percent.⁴

Potential and actual GOP presidential candidates and their supporters regularly invoke Reagan. In an August 2014 speech, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham praised his Florida colleague, Marco Rubio, as “the son of Ronald Reagan when it comes to national security” for advocating an aggressive approach to using military force.⁵ But Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, who has taken a more cautious view of U.S. intervention overseas, said in an opinion column: “Reagan hated war, particularly the specter of nuclear war.”⁶

Cutting taxes in the early 1980s is another of Reagan's most often-cited accomplishments, and it remains at the forefront of the Republican agenda. In 2013, conservative commentator Ramesh Ponnuru noted that the top income tax rate in the 1980s was

such as high unemployment and favorably drawn districts were more responsible for the GOP's victories. “We failed to find any credible evidence that the tea party was responsible for the Republican success in 2010,” they wrote.⁸³

Tea Party Movement

In the months following the 2010 election, the tea party's reputation sustained considerable public damage. A protracted stalemate over the fiscal 2011 budget, followed by an even tenser showdown over raising the federal debt ceiling, led Democrats to brand tea party followers as stubborn obstructionists. The percentage of voters in a CBS News/*New York Times* poll who iden-

tified themselves as tea party supporters, which had peaked at 31 percent during the November 2010 election, plummeted to 18 percent nine months later.⁸⁴

The weakened economy, with an unemployment rate stuck at around 8 percent, continued to give Republicans hope they could recapture the White House in 2012. The Supreme Court's landmark 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* also was seen as helping the GOP. It held that corporate funding of independent political ads could not be limited due to the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech, paving the way for corporations and other wealthy interests to make unlimited contributions on a candidate's behalf.

But Republicans did not coalesce quick-

ly around a presidential candidate as they had around Bush in 2000. Romney had been considered the frontrunner from the race's earliest days, owing to his experience running in 2008, his sizeable campaign organization and his solid support among most of the party establishment.

Nevertheless, he had to endure a drawn-out primary process. His rivals took brief turns surging in the polls: Texas' Perry, former pizza company executive Herman Cain and — most prominently — Gingrich and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum. Each had political weaknesses that eventually revealed themselves. Yet, they benefited from the enduring suspicion among staunchly conservative voters that Romney did not stand as far to the right as he had positioned himself.

70 percent and was the largest tax most people paid. But during much of the last decade, the top rate has been 35 percent, and the payroll tax — covering Social Security and Medicare — has eclipsed the income tax for many payers.

“A Republican Party attentive to today’s problems rather than yesterday’s would work to lighten the burden of the payroll tax, not just the income tax,” he wrote in an op-ed column.

Ponnuru also argued that under Reagan, Republicans sought to decontrol energy prices, but that the party should now focus on other emerging economic concerns, such as computer software patents that become bogged down in litigation and stifle the creativity of large companies.⁷

Some political observers predict that while Reagan will remain an admired figure, his influence over current policies gradually will diminish as increasing numbers of younger voters with no memory of his presidency enter the party.

“Demographically, it’s washing its way through,” says Duf Sundheim, a former chairman of California’s Republican Party.

— *Chuck McCutcheon*

¹ Ford O’Connell, “Ronald Reagan Is Not Coming Back, Republicans. Accept It,” *FoxNews.com*, Nov. 29, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/putlvp9>.

² Alex Seitz-Wald, “10 Things Conservatives Don’t Want You To Know About Ronald Reagan,” *ThinkProgress.org*, Feb. 7, 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/44tpzn7>.

³ Jennifer Rubin, “Tear Down This Icon: Why the GOP Has to Get Over Ronald Reagan,” *The Washington Post*, April 25, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/cwvn7oe>.

⁴ Lydia Saad, “Kennedy Still Highest-Rated Modern President, Nixon Lowest,” *Gallup.com*, Dec. 6, 2010, <http://tinyurl.com/4gn897t>.



Getty Images/David Hume Kennerly

Former President Ronald Reagan is the GOP’s most iconic modern figure, but some Republicans say many of his positions would be criticized today by conservatives.

⁵ David Catanese, “Lindsey Graham Calls Marco Rubio ‘Son of Ronald Reagan,’” *U.S. News.com*, Aug. 26, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/kwvr9vk>.

⁶ Rand Paul, “Rick Perry Is Dead Wrong,” *Politico*, July 14, 2014, <http://tinyurl.com/k9q99u3>.

⁷ Ramesh Ponnuru, “Reaganism After Reagan,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 17, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/aoenjh>.

Republicans sought to make the general election a referendum on the president’s handling of the economy, which Romney and his running mate, Wisconsin’s Ryan, argued was recovering too sluggishly because of the president’s incompetence. But Democrats portrayed Romney as a wealthy corporate executive who could not understand average Americans. Obama won both the popular vote and the Electoral College tally, despite Americans’ lingering dissatisfaction with the economy’s performance.

Democrats also retained their majority status in the Senate. Republicans lost their opportunity to pick up several Democratic-held seats by nominating conservative candidates popular with their like-minded base but who could

not sway more independent-minded voters — and who, in two cases (Missouri’s Todd Akin and Indiana’s Richard Mourdock), made highly controversial remarks on abortion and rape.

The Democrats’ good fortune extended to the statehouses. Republicans spent tens of millions of dollars trying to gain control of more governors’ offices but managed to wrest only North Carolina from the Democrats. Even states that voted heavily Republican in the presidential race, such as Montana, Missouri and West Virginia, elected Democratic governors.

Obama expressed hope that his reelection would spur some Republicans toward cooperation, but the GOP continued to block his efforts. Kentucky’s Paul in March 2013 drew substantial attention by staging a filibuster for more

than 12 hours over his concerns that the administration would use unmanned “drone” aircraft to spy on Americans. Texas’ Cruz, the tea party movement’s newest champion, spoke for more than 21 hours on the Senate floor about the need to defund the Affordable Care Act.

After a shutdown of the federal government in October 2013, the GOP received most of the blame. A *USA Today*/Princeton Survey Research poll found respondents held Republicans responsible over Democrats by a 2 to 1 margin, with 36 percent blaming both parties equally.⁸⁵ However, subsequent technical glitches and other problems with the launch of the Affordable Care Act erased any lasting political damage to Republicans and put Democrats back on the defensive. ■



Getty Images/Alex Wong

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, is among the conservatives who say the GOP has been too prone to compromise and hasn't moved far enough to the right. A tea party stalwart and possible 2016 GOP presidential candidate, Cruz spoke for 21 hours on the Senate floor about the need to defund President Obama's Affordable Care Act. He is flanked by Republican Sens. Mike Lee of Utah, right, and Marco Rubio of Florida.

CURRENT SITUATION

Congressional Contests

With the House expected to remain firmly under Republican control, all eyes are on the Senate, where the GOP is considered to have a better-than-average shot at picking up the six seats it needs to regain the majority.

The 21 seats that the Democrats are defending this year are in hostile territory. Four are in states that Romney carried by 15 percentage points or more in 2012, two are in states he won by 14 percentage points, and another is in a state that he took by 2 percentage points.⁸⁶

Unlike 2010 and 2012, when several of the far-right GOP candidates lost what were seen as winnable races, the party this time around has fielded contenders for Democratic-held seats with proven political appeal, such as Reps. Tom Cotton in Arkansas, Shelley Moore

Capito in West Virginia and Cory Gardner in Colorado. In other races, the party's establishment-backed candidates surmounted tea party primary challengers, including David Perdue in Georgia, Dan Sullivan in Alaska and Thom Tillis in North Carolina.

But as of early October, pro-Democratic groups were outspending pro-Republican ones in several states that were key to determining Senate control, including Iowa, North Carolina, Colorado and Arkansas.⁸⁷ Democrats also were outspending their rivals in those states on voter-turnout efforts.⁸⁸

To parry Democratic claims that Republicans are hostile to women, some GOP candidates are repudiating their support for so-called "personhood" amendments that would give constitutional protection to fertilized eggs and could eventually lead to a ban on abortion. They also are backing the use of over-the-counter contraceptive pills, which enables the party to support birth control without involving insurers and employers under the Affordable Care Act.⁸⁹

Republicans began 2014 by highlighting the numerous technical problems

plaguing the rollout of the health care law. If they gain control of the Senate, they are expected to try to repeal some of the law's provisions in 2015, including the individual mandate to purchase health insurance and the requirement that larger employers offer health insurance as an employee benefit.⁹⁰

Republicans have brought up other issues they say will resonate beyond the elections and into 2016. One is the Obama administration's handling of the September 2012 attacks at the U.S. Embassy in Benghazi, Libya, in which Islamic militants killed two U.S. diplomats and two CIA contractors. Many conservatives say the attacks represented the administration — including then-Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, a possible 2016 presidential contender — at its absolute worst, with officials seeking to cover up wrongdoing before the election.

In May, House Republicans formed a special committee to investigate what went wrong in Benghazi. Democrats said the GOP was guilty of overreaching on an issue that already had been settled in Obama's favor, but agreed to cooperate with the panel.⁹¹

Republicans also think the Keystone XL project can generate popular enthusiasm. Keystone is a proposed oil pipeline system running from Alberta, Canada, to refineries in several U.S. Gulf states that most environmental groups strongly oppose. Though the administration had planned a decision on the pipeline in early 2014, it announced in April that it needed more time to review the plan. Republicans have depicted the delay as a capitulation to the political left.⁹²

Kentucky's McConnell, who seeks to become Senate majority leader in 2015, has promised to attach numerous provisions to spending bills funding government agencies, aimed at curtailing or eliminating administration policies, including Environmental Protection Agency attempts to regulate coal-driven power plants to reduce emissions blamed for contributing to climate

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At Issue:

Do tea party groups have too much influence over the GOP?



JOHN FEEHERY
*DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS,
QUINN GILLESPIE AND ASSOCIATES*

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CNBC correspondent Rick Santelli sparked the tea party revolt when he asked a simple and profound question: Why do people who play by the rules have to bail out people who broke the rules? It was a good question, and it still is.

When the tea party movement started, it was a national expression of good people worried about the country's future.

I want to distinguish between tea party sentiment — the idea that Washington is broken, both political parties are not listening to the voters and the government is fundamentally irresponsible — and actual tea party groups that have formed around the country with the help of Washington special interests.

I am all for the tea party sentiment. But when it comes to the tea party groups, I have a starkly different view: It is time to get rid of them.

These groups have been a fifth column within the Republican Party, blowing up bridges, sabotaging supply lines, creating false controversies, wasting valuable party resources and generally making it easier for Senate Democrats and Barack Obama to stay in power.

Today's tea party has morphed from a respectable citizen's movement into a collection of wing nuts, hucksters and extremists, con men and front men. They collaborate with Hollywood and left-wing organizations to plot the demise of Republicans in good standing, such as Mitch McConnell, probably the most conservative leader of either party in the history of the Senate.

Republicans have had to spend millions of dollars in primaries defending conservative members of the House and the Senate, members who have spotless pro-life and pro-gun records, against challenges from less-than-adequate replacements.

One challenger to a longtime Republican House member made his money as a trial lawyer and a repo man. A challenger to a sitting senator had a history of making inflammatory comments as a talk radio host. One tea party-funded candidate posted X-rays of his patients on his Facebook page and then joked about them.

I am all for competition in politics. There should be no free ride for any politician. But many of the candidates put up by the tea party would have met the same fate as Sharron Angle in Nevada, Christine O'Donnell in Delaware and Joe Miller in Alaska. They would have lost, and Republicans would have squandered another chance to seize the Senate and become a real check on the power of President Obama.



SEAN TRENDE
*SENIOR ELECTIONS ANALYST, REAL CLEAR
POLITICS; AUTHOR, THE LOST MAJORITY:
WHY THE FUTURE OF GOVERNMENT IS
UP FOR GRABS AND WHO WILL TAKE IT*

WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, OCTOBER 2014

if the question is whether tea party influence, on balance, has hurt the Republican Party's electoral chances, the answer is no. Three reasons: First, the damage done by the tea party is overstated. While it's tempting to lump together every controversial candidate who loses as a tea party candidate, this oversimplifies things badly. For example, Missouri's Todd Akin, who lost his congressional seat after making intemperate remarks about "legitimate rape," wasn't really a tea partier, but more of a candidate of the religious right; his primary opponents more readily fit the tea party mold.

More important, we don't really know that the establishment alternatives would have won their races. The litany of establishment candidates who lost winnable races is long: Dennis Rehberg, Tommy Thompson, Dino Rossi, Connie Mack, Heather Wilson and Rick Berg, to name a few. Would Jane Norton have won in Colorado, or Sue Lowden in Nevada? We might assume so, but it's hardly an airtight assumption. Even Indiana's venerable senior senator, Richard Lugar, just looked tired; I suspect he would have won, but it was hardly a slam dunk.

Second, focusing on tea party losses is not a complete review of the ledger. The tea party taketh away, but it also giveth. Let's concede momentarily that establishment candidates would have won the above races. On the flip side of the ledger, without the tea party, the GOP would not have Sen. Marco Rubio in Florida but Charlie Crist, who switched to become a Democrat. The GOP would not have Pennsylvania Sen. Pat Toomey, but Arlen Specter, who also made that switch. The GOP would not have Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson, but Russ Feingold, one of the most liberal Democrats in Congress.

No doubt, there were excesses from the tea party. But it was instrumental in helping the GOP gain the most House seats in a midterm election since 1938, and it flipped multiple state legislatures, giving the GOP control of redistricting.

Finally, evidence of collateral tea party damage is limited. Public opinion data from political scientist John Sides show that the Republican Party is not viewed as appreciably more conservative than in the past, and that Mitt Romney actually was viewed as more moderate than President Obama.

This isn't to endorse a tea party agenda. But the evidence doesn't support the idea that the tea party has inflicted substantial damage on the Republican Party.

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change. McConnell and other Republicans, many from coal-producing states, contend the EPA has greatly overstepped its authority in that area.⁹³

State Races

For the nation's 29 Republican governors, the future is less certain than it is with Congress. The Republicans are seen as unlikely to pick up more than one or two governorships in November and could even lose several.

Upon taking office in 2011, many of the nation's governors were faced with steep budget deficits. Forced to cut spending, they often singled out education, which proved unpopular with voters. Several governors also cut taxes, with varying degrees of fiscal success.⁹⁴

Of concern to Republicans is that three of the party's highest-profile governors are locked in extremely tight re-election races. They are Sam Brownback of Kansas, who has angered moderates with his staunchly conservative agenda; Scott Walker of Wisconsin, who became a hero to the party when he survived a Democratic-engineered 2012 recall election over his perceived anti-labor union stands but who has faced subsequent ethics questions; and Rick Scott of Florida, who faces a challenge from popular former GOP governor Charlie Crist, who switched parties to become a Democrat.

Other Republican governors from populous states are seen as vulnerable, including Pennsylvania's Tom Corbett and Michigan's Rick Snyder, both of whom have presided over uncertain economies. But Republicans also are waging hard-fought races against Democratic incumbents in Colorado, Connecticut and Illinois.⁹⁵

As for state legislatures, *Governing* magazine found that Democrats have more chambers at risk than Republicans. Of the 17 most at-risk chambers this

year, Democrats have majorities in 11 and Republicans just six.

The result, the magazine said, could give Republicans control of up to seven or eight new chambers. Republicans' chances look strongest in the New Hampshire, New Mexico and West Virginia houses and the Colorado, Iowa and Nevada senates.⁹⁶

Judicial Shifts

Under President George W. Bush, Republicans were able to shift the federal judiciary to the right by confirming judges who shared their philosophy. But as Obama continues in office, the GOP is losing the ground it had gained.

When Obama took office in 2009, nearly 39 percent of federal circuit court judges were Democrats. By this June, according to the liberal Alliance for Justice, that figure exceeded 53 percent. Similarly, more than 53 percent of district court judges are Democratic, up from about 41 percent at the start of Obama's first term.

Senate Democrats gave the president a substantial boost on confirming his choices for the bench in 2013 when they abolished the 60-vote threshold for a judicial confirmation vote, a move that enraged Republicans. But the GOP has been able to thwart judicial nominations using other moves, most notably the "blue-slip process," an internal Senate procedure in which a senator can object to a nominee from his or her state without bringing the matter to a vote. As a result, said the Alliance for Justice, nine out of every 10 judicial vacancies without a nominee are in states with at least one Republican senator.⁹⁷

Being able to fill Supreme Court vacancies is a major incentive for Republicans wanting to recapture the White House in 2016. In fact, given the current justices' advanced ages, some observers say, if the next president wins two terms it could give his or her party the biggest ideological monopoly on the court since

the end of World War II.⁹⁸

The most likely candidates for retirement include liberal Ruth Bader Ginsburg and moderate Stephen Breyer.⁹⁹ ■

OUTLOOK

Crucial Election

The 2016 presidential election is seen as critical in determining the future of the Republican Party. It will demonstrate whether a White House aspirant can put together a diverse coalition of moderates and others of varying ideologies, races and ages while appealing to the conservative base.

The GOP "clearly needs a presidential candidate this time who can articulate some sort of vision and some sort of conservative principles in an inclusive way," says Harry Wilson, a public affairs professor at Roanoke College in Salem, Va.

Accomplishing that could hinge on voters' priorities. Many observers say, given the public's disenchantment with Washington, a governor with a record of economic problem-solving could appeal to a wide swath of the electorate. Several of the party's current or former state chief executives are reportedly considering a run: Texas' Perry, New Jersey's Chris Christie, Florida's Jeb Bush, Wisconsin's Walker and Louisiana's Jindal. Romney, a former Massachusetts governor, also is being urged to make another bid for the White House.¹⁰⁰

Another current governor weighing a decision to run is Ohio's John Kasich, who says he is trying to redefine the GOP by trying to do more for the economically disadvantaged. "You've got to help people that are downtrodden and poor, and I just think that that's part of our culture," he said.¹⁰¹

But if national security becomes a major focus, the GOP could be at a disadvantage. With the exception of Flori-

da's Rubio, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, none of the current crop of potential candidates has developed extensive expertise in that area, especially compared to Hillary Clinton. Kentucky's Paul, in particular, has drawn criticism for what many perceive as his non-interventionist stance, prompting him to try to clarify himself on his views on overseas military entanglements.¹⁰²

Republicans also face a tougher landscape in Congress in 2016. In the Senate, the party will have to defend 23 seats, compared to 10 for Democrats. And, like the Democrats this year, several of the GOP-held seats will be in traditionally Democratic states — Illinois, New Hampshire, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — which are expected to see higher turnout when a presidential candidate is also on the ballot.¹⁰³

Many political observers also are interested to see whether the Republican Party severs or at least loosens its close ties with big business and Wall Street. The Growth and Opportunity Project's report urged the party to "blow the whistle at corporate malfeasance and attack corporate welfare."¹⁰⁴

"We need to make Democrats the party of Goldman Sachs," says Florida Republican political strategist Rick Wilson, referring to the financial services firm that has sparked controversy over its allegedly improper practices.

Meredith College's McLennan says the growing importance of suburban female voters, who often are moderates, will require Republicans to soften their anti-government rhetoric and "develop policy options that don't always involve the private sector instead of the public sector. Similarly, Republicans need to sell their policy positions better by talking about how their policies better the community, not just criticizing Democratic policies as hurting the nation."

Moderate Republicans, meanwhile, are trying to build internal organizations and movements with as much clout as those of their conservative counterparts. Davis, the former Virginia congressman,

is organizing one.¹⁰⁵ He says moderates have to overcome the "instant coalitions" of numerous supporters that conservatives acquire when they align themselves with the tea party or sign formal pledges never to raise income taxes.

"We're trying to get some backup for people who think for themselves," Davis says. "You can't be ideological on every level and be successful." ■

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About the Author



Chuck McCutcheon is a freelance writer in Washington, D.C. He has been a reporter and editor for *Congressional Quarterly* and Newhouse News Service and is co-author of the 2012 and 2014 editions of *The Almanac of American Politics* and *Dog Whistles, Walk-Backs and Washington Handshakes: Decoding the Jargon, Slang and Bluster of American Political Speech*. He also has written books on climate change and nuclear waste.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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American Enterprise Institute, 1150 17th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036; 202-862-5800; www.aei.org. Conservative think tank focusing on government, politics, economics and social welfare.

Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001; 202-842-0200; www.cato.org. Think tank promoting principles of limited government and free markets.

Heritage Foundation, 214 Massachusetts Ave., N.E., Washington, DC 20002; 202-546-4400; www.heritage.org. Conservative think tank supporting public policies based on free enterprise, limited government and a strong national defense.

Pew Research Center, 1615 L St., N.W., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20036; 202-419-4300; www.pewresearch.org. A nonpartisan think tank and arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts that researches issues, attitudes and trends shaping U.S. policy.

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The Next Step:

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